

## More recent memories from a current member...

August 2017

Earliest memory (probably about 3 years old) is of sitting in pushchair outside the kitchen door of the old schoolroom; would have been sitting on the kitchen hatch counter now, being offered half a rich tea biscuit by (old it seemed) Miss Ann Ellis. Ann and Edie Ellis lived with Florie Balls in the white house opposite the church slightly up the hill (The Laurels). They would be at the women's Tuesday meeting every week, as would my mother, having pushed us (my twin brother and me) several miles in a pushchair (and home again) to get there. She would do the same on Sundays.

In the fifties the lay pastor was Arthur Blundell, a teacher. Services were held at 11am and 6.30pm. Sunday school was 2pm in the afternoon each Sunday. This meant when walking the miles from home you needed to be at junction of Mutton Hill and Hollow Lane for the 1<sup>st</sup> bell from St. Johns which sounded at 10.25 and at the Twitten in Hollow Lane for the 2<sup>nd</sup> at 10.45 or we would be late and that would never do. On Sunday afternoon Mr Blundell would occasionally meet us half way (Old Surrey Hall) in his old Austen 7 (I think). Quite an experience at times because if it wouldn't start again it had to be pushed and the 'collected' children would then jump in. In later years Miss Inskip was one of many who also provided this valuable service. I was most grateful, as the thought of going to church on Sunday afternoon was bad enough without having to walk miles there and back! Mrs Blundell would on special occasions sing arias and other stuff that no doubt was quite brilliant but somewhat difficult on young ears being made to sit quiet and still through the services. The 'Sunday School Superintendent' at this time was a Mr Money who lived down the footpath to the station. They emigrated to New Zealand but returned in the early seventies. Mrs Money would play the pipe organ the first three Sundays and Miss Inskip would play on the fourth.

Late fifties, possibly early sixties (would need to look that up if the minute books still existed) saw the arrival of W.D. Back as our lay pastor, another teacher who stayed for a few years. Services would be quite formal. Communion was a separate part, including an additional offering, after the main service. It was just about 'closed' as you had to be a member, therefore

baptised, to take the bread and wine. I don't know what the procedure was for visitors but this custom remained certainly until after I became a member (after baptism) in 1967. For a short while a Rev D. Bryan-Jones looked after us before the arrival of the first student pastors from Spurgeon's. In the sixties it was a great step of faith for such a small congregation to aim for a full time pastor. It would mean we would need to purchase a manse. A manse fund was started and a group of ladies, including the Misses Ellis and Balls, Miss Hobbs, Miss Inskip, my mother and several others started offering teas to visiting coach parties. From this fund we were able to purchase a small bungalow in West Street around 1970/1. Later sold to buy Swallowfield. Between ministries the pulpit was filled by visiting speakers, usually coming at around the same time of year and not unusually giving the same sermon or children's talk as their last visit.

Back to the pastors! The first student was John Tattersal in 1966. During his time the youngsters converted the old derelict stable into a coffee bar. This was despite the suggestion from some in the church that they should be making lampshades etc while reading the bible. Some in the fellowship still held some sincere but quite strict Baptist principles. The coffee bar opened in 1967 and ran for 3 years, 20 teenagers on a closed membership (I was running it with a couple of helpers) every weekday evening with an open evening on Saturday (senior person on site) and semi open on Sunday evening but you had to have attended the evening service. The local policeman, (remember them?) thought that some individuals had moved away as certain 'problems' he encountered disappeared.

Other student pastors were Mike Elcombe, whose parents and uncle and aunt moved to the area and joined the fellowship, Martin Thorner, and Mike Nicholls who went on to lecture at Spurgeon's himself. During Mike Elcombe's time my brother and I bought a minibus and ran what we called The Pension Run on a Sunday Morning to collect 'the old folk' and get them to church. The Methodist church and the Mission Hall (Plymouth Brethren) had both closed in Lingfield. We also used the bus, with Mike Elcombe, to take 15 teenagers to Scotland and camp on The Black Isle. Mad? Not long after, Brian Andrews was appointed part time pastor, teaching for part of the week until funds were available to move to full time...the answer to much prayer and hard work.

In the seventies in-house works included stripping the plaster off the chapel wall and taking down the unsafe ceiling. Heating had been provided by 4 'boat gas heaters' (the reason for the large downlighters in the ceiling which were turned on every Saturday morning (for years by a Mr Carpenter) and heated the gallery to a suffocating level while your feet froze downstairs. There was an additional round one over the pulpit which efficiently roasted the top of the preachers head but did little else. When it was suggested that we start 'stockpiling' materials so as to be ready, when we could afford it, to install a modern heating system, there was vigorous opposition from some as 'stockpiling' was not a Christian characteristic when things were in short supply (copper pipe at the time).

The early eighties saw another leap of faith when it was decided that the old schoolroom with all its history, leaking roof, rotten floor and outside loo's- had to go. We had no money but were confident that God would provide. We were reminded that unless the Lord builds this place the labourers work in vain. It developed into a time of real hard physical work for those who were able with great prayer support and fund raising by those who were not so able. A time of great fellowship and encouragement and one or two poems acknowledging the efforts. We were aware, as we found remains of earlier building works, that we were just custodians for a while of this building and privileged to play a small part in God's great plan. It was also at this time that we demolished the last remains of the old 'Chapel Cottage' as it was known, where documents tell us the poor man opened his home for prayer and started the work we strive to carry on today. There is a time capsule under the floor for others to find in the future. There is also a bottle in the ridge of the roof. £20000 was raised in 2006 to replace the roof. The content is below.

When Brian Andrews moved on, Gordon Steer and his family arrived and served for the next 15 years. Gordon was followed by David McLachlan and now Judy MacKenzie Dunn.

The rest, as they say, is history.

Stuart Hellier