

ROMFORD BAPTIST CHURCH



FROM 2009 to 2024

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Updated by the Ministry team to mark
the 90th Anniversary

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AS WE WERE IN 1984

Around the world

The earlier volume charting the first 50 years of the of history of RBC took us into the beginning of 1984, a year not quite so pretentious as George Orwell may have expected, but none the less a memorable year. It was a year in which an Olympic Games took place. The Winter games were in Sarajevo in February, and the Summer games were held in Los Angeles during July and August where they were boycotted by the Soviet Union, Bulgaria and East Germany.

For India 1984 was a difficult year. In early June Indian troops stormed the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the Sikhs' holiest shrine, killing about 300 people.

On the last day of October the Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by two Sikh security guards. Riots broke out all over New Delhi during which some 2,700 innocent Sikhs were killed. In December methyl isocyanate leaked from a Union Carbide plant in Bhopal killing some 2000 people immediately. Some 6000 died their injuries. It is estimated that about a further half million were injured in one of the worst industrial disasters in history.

In Britain

Back in Britain, we had our share of disasters. It was in July that lightning set fire to York Minster, and in October that the Provisional IRA tried to assassinate the British Cabinet in the Brighton Hotel bombing. In April WPC Yvonne Fletcher was shot and killed during siege outside the Libyan Embassy in London.

Those who were still at school at the time may remember that in June the abolition of O-level and CSE examinations was announced. They were to be replaced by a new exam, the GCSE.

Locally

Nearer to home, much new construction was starting to change the face of Romford. The ring road was being built, but completion was delayed due to problems encountered at the last stage, linking Oldchurch Road with Mercury Gardens. The initial plans for an Ice Rink were being discussed. Another item of news revealed that the plans for enclosure of the Liberty were nearing completion. Remember when Sainsbury's was still in the Liberty? It was still there in 1984.

The Hospice (St Francis') opened its doors in 1984, and the first two patients were admitted in July, something that many in Romford Baptist Church had been very involved in either through raising money, in the planning stages or acting as volunteers or staff once patients had arrived.

Many column inches of the Romford Recorder were given over to reports concerning drugs. It was during this year that 'Crack', a smokeable form of cocaine was introduced into the USA and soon spread to this country. Local retailers were being advised by manufacturers not to sell solvents to youngsters, and later in the year a major purge on heroin abuse was launched in Havering. Towards the end of the year there were very many stories of drug connected crime, and of the plans being made to fight this 'epidemic'.

It was during this year that Luis Palau held a Mission in London at the QPR stadium. Coaches were regularly run from this borough and the Mission was extended by two weeks. Many from RBC went. It was later in the year that the 'Jesus' Film was shown in Romford.

At RBC

The first fifty years of RBC's history, written by Kenneth Duffin finished early in the year of 1984. Our Minister at that time was Rev. Norman P. Wright, and a recently appointed assistant Minister, Rev. Simon Chevill who was just finding his feet. David East was Church Secretary and Jim Hooper was Treasurer.

Early in the year a social committee was formed. Two of those original members, Ken and Pauline Yates were still serving over twenty years later when it came to an end! In the first few months three functions were organised, a barn dance and a visit to Wisley in May and to Blenheim in August.

Inevitably more mundane things were causes of concern. It was announced at the AGM in March that Percy Jiggins was retiring as Sunday School Superintendent after 19 years. In addition, the Boys Brigade (BB) were without a Captain since Brian Little had given up in 1983. All records for 1984 show the concern there was for the Youth Work

It was during April 1984 that we learned that at the BU AGM our minister, Rev. Norman Wright, had been elected vice-president of the BU and due to become President in 1985.

In the middle of all the exciting planning the life of the Church went on. Michael Bastable was appointed temporary Acting Captain of the BB and three other men would train as officers including Tony Ketley and Brian Loveard.

Home groups were starting. It was announced in September that 5 groups would be running.

Meantime we heard that the Mawney's Church was having problems. They now had no Minister and their membership was very small, but they wanted to continue. They were asking for help from other churches.

During the summer, notice was given that the Choir was disbanding due to loss of members and the subsequent imbalance of parts, meaning that the quality of their performance suffered.

In this respect, they were unable to tackle much of their previous repertoire. The final date for disbanding was October 30th 1984, the Anniversary. A small music group had started to sing at some services earlier in the year.

CELEBRATIONS AT RBC

In 1984 the Church was poised for its 50th Anniversary Year and plans for the celebrations during the year and especially in the Autumn, were in the air.

A committee was formed to plan for the occasion. This comprised the minister at the time, the Rev. Norman Wright, the Church Secretary, David East and a number of Church members from the fellowship, Brenda Beaver, Tim Howson, John Phillips, Arthur Poultney and Jean Read. Ken Duffin was also part of the team but he subsequently moved away and others have died or no longer attend by the time of this publication.

The Church meeting was told early in that year that a limited number of commemorative Wedgewood plates were to be produced for sale, as well as a book recording the first fifty years of the Church, which Ken Duffin was writing. Car stickers and bookmarks would also be available. The celebrations were to begin at Easter (April 22nd.) when a thanksgiving service was held. A Holiday Club for the children was held during the following week. April 28th was booked for a special visit from the London Emmanuel Choir. A full programme of old favourites and newer songs was performed. In honour of the Jubilee year the Church was asked to host the Spring assembly of the Essex Baptist Association on May 19th. The Family Church Festival on the weekend of June 23rd/24th would include a Family Fun Day and the guest speaker was Mr Colin Clark. As well as plans being made for the celebration of the actual 50th Anniversary weekend, October 27th/28th members were told the finale to the celebrations would happen in the spring of 1985 as the Christian Ministries team had been booked for March. Further plans were unfolded as the year progressed. A Flower and Craft Festival to be organised by Brenda Beaver and John Phillips was held over the August Bank Holiday weekend (31/8/84 – 2/9/84) and later on, at the end of September the Harvest Festival Supper was held as part of an evangelistic outreach. Dick Saunders was the speaker and members were asked to invite others to come. Almost at the conclusion of the Golden Year an old friend of the Church came to preach at the services on December 16th. the Rev. Ray Brown

The actual weekend of celebration took the form of a Service followed by a Reunion Tea. The preacher at the service was the Rev. Frank Cooke (current BU president). and an old member, Peter Brown, by now boasting a doctorate in music, played the organ. 300 invitations were sent to previous members of the Church, inviting them to the reunion and about 200 accepted. Greetings and good wishes were given to the Church by old friends and a representative from the Essex Baptist Association.

A well displayed collection of memorabilia was assembled for the occasion weekend which coincided with the anniversary weekend.

Towards the end of 1984 the activities of the Golden Anniversary celebrations were being talked about. The Flower and Craft Festival had been very successful. About 200 previous members attended the reunion weekend. Our spacious premises were in full use, and every room, even the small ones, contained groups chatting and reminiscing while they ate. Up to date news was exchanged, and old friendships were renewed. The first Church meeting in 1985 voted the whole occasion a huge success.

It was reported at the same Meeting that there had been 21 baptisms during the Anniversary year.

In March 1985 the Jubilee year concluded with Mission '85. During the week, March 2-10th the Christian Ministries team consisting of Peter Anderson, John Blanchard and Derek Cleave visited and spoke (between them) at 43 meetings and to about 700 folk from outside the church, who had been invited to the venues. Many and varied were the meetings held and included a meal on church premises for the parents of youngsters in the brigades, a Pizza supper for young people, a dinner at Parkside for couples, and a supper for Magistrates in a home. The Mission culminated in a guest service which took the form of a 'Songs of Praise' on the last Sunday of the Mission.

The 60th Anniversary was also a time of celebration, although much more limited than those of a decade earlier. The last weekend of October was the anniversary. weekend. The Church had changed in ten years. The Rev. Norman Wright had retired to Frinton-on-Sea Essex.

The Rev. David Bird had succeeded Norman, after a 2 year period of interregnum, and by then he also had moved on. So this anniversary would be celebrated in an interregnum. The Rev David Harper was our Moderator and Gordon Barnes was the Church Secretary at the time. Both Saturday, October 29th and Sunday October 30th were full of activity. Saturday afternoon provided an opportunity for folk to come and view displays of many kinds put on by many of the organisations in the Church, to demonstrate their activities. Afternoon teas were served. Starting at 7.30pm. 'an evening of music, nostalgia and fun for all ages' together with light refreshments, kept everyone entertained. On the Sunday, after the morning service, a Sunday Roast Dinner was provided for those who had previously booked tickets. Both the services on this occasion were led by the Rev. Keith Clements.

The 70th anniversary was celebrated in more style in 2004, over the weekend of October 23rd/24th. Once again it was a time of reunion, and there was a full programme of events on the Saturday. It commenced at 10am.

As part of it our local MP, Andrew Rosindell opened some fine new extensions to our premises. Two of the original members of the Church, Gladys Stevens and Florrie Pattison, by then approaching their nineties, joined Andrew in cutting the tape. The celebrations were also attended by the President of the Baptist Union, the Essex Baptist Association Regional Minister, and the Building Contractors. The rest of the morning provided time to look round the new buildings.

The needlework Club, 'A Stitch in Time' had been working hard in the earlier part of the year preparing items for sale, and light refreshments were also available, all proceeds were sent to St. Francis' Hospice.

A somewhat noisy time of reunion followed as faces, not seen for many years were recognised, and news exchanged. A really good tea was served to all in the larger rooms as well as in a marquee beside the Church. By 5.30pm, everyone had adjourned into the Church to help celebrate 70 years. Two of our former ministers took part, with Rev. Norman Wright giving his reflections on the life of RBC, followed by Rev. Norman Tharby who reflected on the same theme. There was also a video presentation. In the sanctuary a new banner was

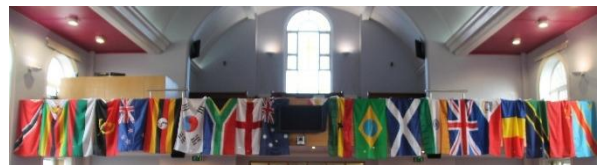
displayed depicting 'Jesus Light of the World. It had been made by members of 'A stitch in time' needlework club.

The Services on the Sunday were led by the Minister, the Rev. Ian Bell and the preacher for the day was Rev. Peter Manson. Both of these were fairly standard services with a celebratory theme.

The 80th anniversary fell once again during a pastoral vacancy and although it was marked, it was very different to previous milestone anniversaries so a new approach was adopted to mark the 90th anniversary, this time with a number of different events taking place throughout the 90th year.

However, before that could take, in 2016 a different kind of celebration was held, this time to recognise and rejoice at the way RBC was now represented. By then it was evident that small changes that had been happening from 2004 onwards had begun to grow with an increasing representation of people from many different cultures and countries including Africa, Asia and Europe, amongst others, beginning to not only attend but to stay and become members at RBC. They brought with them a vibrance of worship, an enrichment to the culture of the church and insight about what being part of a church was all about from this myriad of backgrounds.

To coincide with the 2016 Olympics, the multi-cultural and multi-national nature of RBC was celebrated and recognised through the presence of each countries flag being displayed throughout the church. It was to the surprise of many to discover that there were now forty-seven different nationalities regularly worshipping and being part of the RBC family week by week. As well as the visual nature of this being evidenced through the colourful flags, national attire and the many faces that attended each week, it was wonderful to recognise the many different ways that people from all backgrounds and upbringing were contributing to the life of the church and were now calling RBC their worship home.



The plans for the 90th Anniversary were first muted in 2023. Rather than just one weekend or long week of events it was agreed that the celebrations would take place throughout 2024 and they covered a variety of different events. These included a lookback at the history of Parkside along with a cream tea enjoyed by a number from both the church and some of the current staff now working at Parkside, organised and presented by the Revd Vikki Bunce. An excellent quiz and barn dance were organised by Mrs Sarah Jenkin enjoyed by many in the church who were able to show off their dancing skills or knowledge to a greater or lesser extent. What was now the annual Holiday at Home for those aged 65+ also celebrated events and activities around the last 90 years including the daily thought for the day looking at how God has been at work in the church over that time. Sadly the idea to read through the Bible from cover to cover in the days running up to the anniversary fell through due to a lack of volunteers wanting to get involved. The year concluded with a Christmas tree festival in the church that ran for a week with contributions of decorated trees from many groups within the

church. The decorations were hand-crafted to a carol theme and those visiting had the option to vote for their favourite tree depending on how well it was decorated according to theme, age and overall effect. Visitors to the Meeting Place, church and Parkside were among those who came.



The weekend either side of the actual date of the anniversary were marked by visiting preachers, the Revd Stephen Finamore, President of BUGB on the first weekend and the Revd Lyn Green, General Secretary of BUGB for the second weekend that coincided with a wonderful barbeque provided by some of the staff from Parkside. Unfortunately, Lyn went down poorly during the week and was unable to attend in person but did manage to send a video file containing her sermon. Memorabilia was once again in evidence, this time also in the form of a rolling slideshow of photographs over the years as well as some physical items capturing some of the moments over the years. 'Stitch in time' once again got to work and a wonderful banner depicting church life over the 90 years was produced and hung as part of the celebrations along with a topper for a post box showing the church in 3D.

BUILDINGS

It was during 1981 that the Church buildings had been previously extended. At the front a vestibule, known as the "Welcome Area" was added to the front of the premises which was formally opened on November 7th 1981.

By the time the Church was nearing 70 years old in 2004, the buildings were looking very tired. New Health and Safety regulations meant that urgent modernisation of the kitchen facilities was called for. This had last been updated in 1958 and was typical of its period. In the interim only very minor alterations had been made, such as the laying of a Formica surface on the old wooden table top!

The kitchen was closed for a period and completely gutted as the work began at the beginning of September 2003. The work took only about a month and left us with first class facilities. A commercial dishwasher, taking only minutes to complete its cycle (after it has been filled and heated!), was one of the new installations, making possible large-scale catering events which became a feature of the use of the new premises.

Also installed at this time were large new freezers and refrigerators. The gleaming new work surfaces and stainless-steel sinks contributed to this hygienic area, whilst modern cupboards for storage of crockery etc made the kitchen a pleasure to use.



Morning Service 17 October 2004



The major building of 2004 was known as the Link building. Prior to this date the church and the main hall were separate entities. Between the two was an open area, which made it very unpleasant to pass between one and the other in inclement weather. The initial plan was to link the two buildings together.

As plans were drawn up, other ideas developed to make more use of our buildings. The link was to be a two-storey extension, the second storey being built over part of the main hall. Other rooms were to change their form and use, whilst others would just be refurbished and redecorated.

The work eventually started on April 26th 2004. For a couple of weeks, nothing very much was obvious but by the third week the toilets adjacent to the hall were closed and the process of stripping them out had begun. By the fourth week a hoarding had appeared over the north wall towards the front of the hall. This covered the area which had housed the men's toilets. A week later the size and shape of the now Oak room could be seen. By the end of the sixth week the wall between it and the hall had been broken through, although still hidden behind the hoarding.

As usual at the start of a building programme snags had emerged, particularly with regard to the heating and electrical systems. By this time solutions to these problems were also beginning to emerge. At the end of week seven the walls of the actual link had gone up and the shell of the building could be seen. By the end of the following week, almost halfway through the contract, the walls had reached roof level with the framework of the roof well on the way. It was at this stage we learned that the hall was to be completely rewired and would be out of use for ten days or so.

Two weeks later, by the end of the tenth week of work the roof was almost completed and the wiring in the hall was progressing, and a week later it was done, with the lighting fitted. By the beginning of August all the new rooms were made and access had been created all through the first floor. All the electrical wiring, heating pipes, and many cupboards had been installed. At the end of the first week of the month plastering had commenced on the first floor. New windows and doors were in place, and Ken Yates was offering to take anyone who was interested on a conducted tour. Two brick pillars had appeared outside the kitchen door which would later support a canopy making a covered way between the door which led into the hall and the new door to the whole link area, at the side. On the first floor work proceeded apace and by the end of the first week of September power sockets, cables and data cables were all in place, the fire alarms were being installed, and the decoration was finished. Only carpets remained to be laid.

The ground floor had been progressing more slowly. The toilets had been plastered, and were being fitted. Much of the decoration had been completed and the hoarding in the hall had come down by the middle of the month, revealing a 'wall' of 'piano-hinged' doors intercommunicating the Oak room with the hall. Before the end of September the new, very luxurious toilets were ready for use. A male speaker, having been directed there before a meeting, was heard to say 'These are the best in any church I have ever been to', and, also by the end of the month our Youth Pastor, Patrick Croash was installed in his first-floor office. At the beginning of October, with all the work nearing completion, it was decided that the stage in the hall, the parlour and the stairs leading to it and to the new rooms looked shabby and they too were redecorated before the opening ceremony. In the two weeks that remained before the official opening, furniture was being moved in, with much tidying and cleaning being done.

At the end of all this we had five new rooms of varying sizes. As well as the Oak room on the ground floor, a fairly large well-lit room, the Cedar room, occupies the centre of the first floor. On either side of it are offices for two ministers. A tiny room, originally suggested as a counselling room, but rarely used, has since been incorporated into the adjacent office.

RBC Celebrated the 70th Anniversary on 23rd and 24th October 2004, with Peter Mansen President of the Baptist Union, Andrew Rosindell MP for Romford, Eastern Baptist Association Regional Minister, Meadows Contractors and present and past members of RBC.

Finding Your way Round

Below of is a plan which will help you to find your way round the new extension at the rear of the church. We hope you will take this opportunity to have a look round. Incidentally, the rooms are all named after trees which are found in the Bible.

Plan Ground floor Rear

Plan First floor Rear

Romford Baptist Church, Main Road

A week-end
of events celebrating the

70th Anniversary

of the opening of
the Main Road
Buildings

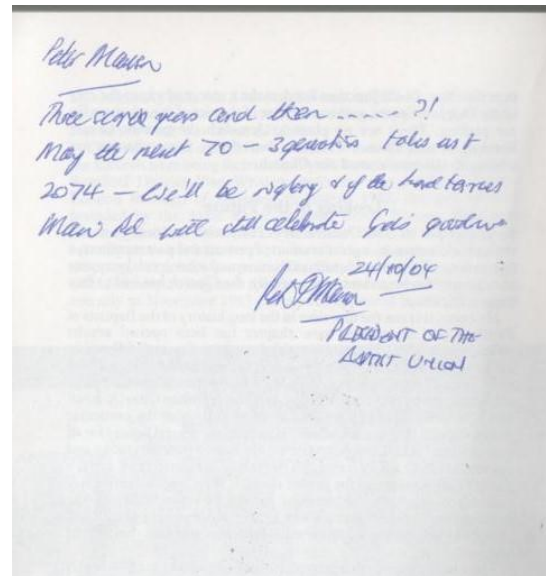
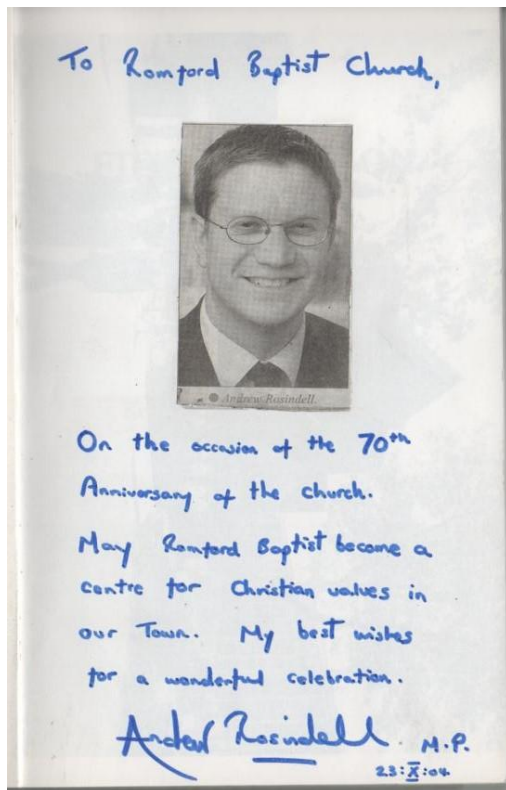
October 23rd-24th, 2004

'Jesus himself drew near
and went with them'
Luke 24:15



Rodney Eborn with Meadows Contractors staff

Some of the Greetings:



As we neared the seventy fifth anniversary further building work was also undertaken. It was on the 27th September 2006 that completion of the sale of the Church properties at 8 and 10 Junction Road, together with adjoining owner's property at No 12 Junction Road to Hallmark, (Rose Court Retirement Development) for £1.2m, (£100k had to be paid to the LB of Havering for the ransom strip" so that access could be obtained from Dolphin Approach). Rodney Eborn was both Church Treasurer and on the Buildings committee at the time.

This also involved a land swap to create 40 much needed RBC car parking spaces at the rear of the church, with 5 further RBC car parking spaces in the Rose Court parking area.

A 125-year lease negotiated with owners of Liberty to create enough room for a single width roadway to access the rear carpark.

By the spring of 2007 a small committee had been formed to consider using some of our assets to thoroughly refurbish the Church building. This had been little changed since it was built, some 73 years before. By the October Church meeting several ideas about refurbishment were shared with the Church meeting, and these were due for detailed discussion and decisions at a Special Church meeting in November. Suggestion at this stage concerned:-

- Enlargement and raising the platform area and raising the baptistry
- Relocation of the doors to the central corridor
- Carpeting the floor and replacing the pews with chairs
- Creating a new entrance to the foyer with central doors

- Revamping the sound and vision system
- Creating a copy room and flower room
- Updating the separate building including adding a toilet

New technology was to play an important role in the future vision for RBC.

At the Special Church meeting in November plans were shown. When the vote was taken it was overwhelmingly in favour of proceeding with the plans. There was only one vote against.

The proceeds of sale funded all the new and proposed development and left over £300k for future development.

By January 2008 Tim Howson had been asked to head up this project, (as Rev Ian Bell was on sabbatical) henceforward known as R2BC. He said that we were still (just) on course for the work to be started in June. At the meeting in April, he reported that planning permissions had been granted. During the work the Church would be closed and plans were being made for services to be held in the Willow Hall. There would be two morning services (identical) with Sunday school during the later service and refreshments served between the two.

Tim Howson announced to the Church Members July meeting that work would finally start on July 14th 2008 with completion due in November 2008 – just in time for our 75th Anniversary!

RBC Sanctuary after the refurbishment :



The Church buildings had changed internally, almost out of recognition, from the way they looked in 1984. The church, from the brown and pastel format of 1984, now vibrated in shades of red, pinks and purple. This change inevitably, was disliked by some, but people soon became used to it, causes little comment other than by visitors who voice delight at the colour scheme, and it does look welcoming. During this period the hall has also been redecorated, with a new, modern kitchen, both in equipment and decoration. Now that the link has been made between the church and hall we wondered how we had ever run the gauntlet of rain,

snow, and cold winds! In addition the building work had left us with a large and well-surfaced car park, making attendance at services much easier and pleasanter for all, especially the elderly and infirm.

However, as wonderful as the new work had improved the facilities, due to costs spiralling during the work on the main buildings, the Youth Lounge, although updated, did not get the hoped for toilet included. It wasn't until 2023 that this work was finally completed, some 15 years after the idea was originally muted.

It was in 2017 further building work was initiated when the church agreed to create a coffee shop for the church to meet new people, increase the footfall in the church and create events and mission opportunities through this new ministry. This was building on an earlier venture called Fishers that had been run on a voluntary basis by Liz Harvey and Maureen Stewart 2 days a week. Although it was popular and supported by people in the church it became unsustainable as Liz and Maureen spent so much time at home making soup and baking cakes. After it closed and a couple of other smaller ventures were tried, this time to support those who were homeless, the leadership continued to have a vision for a full-time community coffee shop but many years were spent deliberating what it could look like. It was following an away day in 2016 that the idea reared its head once again and this time a great deal of work was done to move this decision into reality, with much attention being given to the business plan and also to ensure that we did not fall foul of any planning regulations for the building. So was birthed 'The Meeting Place' with the thinking behind it that for the church it was to be:

- a place of meeting and fellowship
- a space to meet with people beyond the church walls
- somewhere that we want to be welcoming and not just see people but truly meet people and their needs

For those coming in however:

- It was to be a place of meeting, either people they knew or new people
- It is for those who are in need, lonely or just needing space
- A place to meet with Jesus and his followers
- A safe space for prayer and reflection.

By March/April 2018 a job description and job advert was sent out for a Meeting Place and Outreach Leader with interviews scheduled for the end of May. It was intended that whoever was appointed would be seen as part of the ministry team and attend Leadership Team meetings, such was seen to be the crucial nature of this new role. Alison Savine was appointed who had felt God calling her to a new challenge after 25 years of teaching and she began her new role just a few weeks later, initially on a part-time basis. It was Alison who project managed the design, building work, opening up of the side vestibules for seating, refurbishment of the rest of the foyer, purchase of equipment, planning the menu, appointing staff and encouraging and building a team of volunteers. The Meeting Place (TMP) opened November 2018 with the shorter mission statement of a place where RBC meets the community and the community in turn meet the love of Jesus. The vision/aim was for it to be a friendly and welcoming place that had a different feel to a high street coffee shop.



This was largely achieved through the hard work of the first staff and volunteers who worked hard to build relationships with customers, learning names, remembering situations they had told them about such as illness or family worries and to then invite them to other things at RBC eg Christmas services, events, groups relevant

to them. It was clear that TMP was not a place to ‘bible bash’ – but a place to show Jesus’ love through treating everyone with respect, listening, encouraging, offering to pray with/for people, sharing their own testimonies/faith through the conversations the staff and volunteers have with our customers, caring in whatever way is needed for each individual.

Within the first few months of its opening lots of people were being helped by signposting on how to access Foodbank vouchers, homelessness, where to get language classes, as well as suggesting a parent spoke to their child’s home school worker for support, alongside praying with people for a variety of reasons and supporting many with mental health issues coming in. It became a place for those that were lonely, a place for 5 minutes peace, a place where people could offload without judgement.

Sadly, with the arrival of Covid [see next section] and the enforced closing of much of society, TMP also shut its doors until it was allowed to re-open on 31 August 2021. Alison and the team worked hard to re-establish relationship, build new ones and engage with the wider community. Monthly community events took off with many being fully booked each time with the majority of people coming being from the community. Within just a few months the majority of people coming through the doors were from the community rather than the church including some of the volunteers who had gained confidence, got experience to go on and get jobs, made friendships, given them a purpose to get up and go out, feel valued and enjoyed serving God as part of a team. TMP is now a venue for craft groups, somewhere to chat for those who are lonely all meeting at different times as well as it being a good base for Age UK, Di’s Diamonds, craft group, chat group and an excellent base for the many hospice bereavement support groups which has gone from strength to strength over the years. It’s also a place where church groups meet, whether after the prayer meeting or Parent and Toddlers, for some who attend Treasure Times to come and lunch together or the support group for parents/carers of children with special needs which met until early 2024. It’s common that the 62 seats available for customer’s are full and the staff and volunteers have to work hard to keep the tables cleared and be ready for the new faces coming through the doors. The annual Carols in the Café event sees groups reserving tables in advance in order to ensure they can attend such a popular and enjoyable event.

All of these things reinforce the vision that this is not just a coffee shop but a place where the ministry is such a central part of the church. It's been lovely to see some people who originally came for something to eat or drink have now started attending Sunday services, some have joined Parent and Toddlers, others Treasure Times or Holiday at Home whilst others have joined existing activities that take place during the week such as the craft group. New friendships have been formed and many have found it to be a safe friendly place to go which eases their loneliness or depression or through which they have accessed the Community Money Advice debt centre [see later section under church life] and, in 2 cases, became debt free. We trust that this amazing ministry will continue to flourish and grow in the coming years.

COVID AND ITS IMPACT

Who would have known that an event that took place on 17 November 2019 on the opposite side of the world would soon see the world affected in a way it never has been before. That event was the diagnosis of the first human case of COVID-19 which occurred in Wuhan, People's Republic of China. Just over two months later the first confirmed human case in the United States was declared and, by the end of January 2020, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). Just a few weeks later, COVID-19 was first referred to being a world-wide pandemic on 11 March 2020 and the world, as we knew it, changed. Countries closed their borders, governments closed schools, businesses, shops and leisure facilities etc and the impact of the lockdown across the world was felt by all either because they could no longer see family/friends, they were suddenly restricted to their homes and unable to travel or go to work and those in hospitals, care homes and other institutions were prevented from seeing loved ones. The death toll across the world escalated and it became a time of worry and fear for the majority of the population.

Following the government requirements to 'lock down,' all activities in the church halted and the Meeting Place and caretaking staff were placed on furlough along with Jan Loveard. Ian and Vikki Bunce, Steve Street in his role at Parkside, Ruth Lu the PA to the Team Leader and Hannah Griffiths as youth and families worker continued to serve, working largely from home, at Parkside or on their own in their office at the church. Thankfully, unlike many churches who struggled in the early days of lockdown, RBC had been used to broadcasting its services online and so Ian and Vikki continued to undertake two services each week, the morning one from within the church building and the evening one being pre-recorded during the week and then streamed live at 6pm with Hannah running activities for the children via Zoom. Ruth supported them in this as well as overseeing a special RBC Helpline that was set up to ensure people were able to receive their groceries, prescriptions and other practical needs that were needed. Sam Sosina who had been heading up the AV team served faithfully each week facilitated the streaming of the online morning service and, once restrictions allowed, Hayley Ayris the church secretary also came each week for the Sunday morning service to support them.

There isn't time or space to talk about the impact on individuals over the following weeks and months but to say it was hard was an understatement. For those who lost loved ones they had to attend funeral services whilst being accompanied by only 1 or 2 others and unable to have physical contact with them. Nearly everyone was impacted by being isolated from other people and those serving on the front line were exhausted. These are just a few insights into life over the weeks and months that followed the national lockdown being imposed. Support through the giving of wooden crosses to everyone working in the emergency services or dropping off cards or gifts to those really struggling were some practical ways that we were able to evidence God's presence among us.



Parkside too suffered with no visitors being able to come in and staff being hit hard by COVID itself. Unlike so many care homes we give thanks to God for His protection on the home and for the prayers of many who cried out to God during the many months it took of the COVID restrictions and we are able to declare that God's hand was there as, even though residents too fell ill, not a single one was taken through



COVID. A visiting pod was erected to enable family members to chat through the window to their visitors through the use of an intercom and, although this wasn't ideal, it did provide the ability to see one another even if not touch or hug.

Those watching online engaged each week through the Sunday School activities or sending in photos and words to a chosen theme and Ian rapidly became excellent at learning the many new skills needed for video editing and production. Vikki oversaw pastoral support with the help of the deacons and was a regular visitor at Parkside also during this time to support and encourage both residents and staff as well as leading the weekly service.

It wasn't until summer 2021 that things began to return to something that resembled a new normal which involved queuing up for church services and remaining at social distance and services occurring without singing being the beginning of returning to in-person services. You will notice that there are a number of references made to the impact of COVID and even 4 years later at the time of writing this, the consequences of such a pandemic continue to be felt and seen.

MINISTERIAL MATTERS

Rev. Norman P. Wright

In 1984, when this history commences, there were two full-time ministers at Main Road. The Rev. Norman Wright had been in office since January 1967 and was still very active. The Rev. Simon Chevill had been appointed during 1983 as Assistant Minister with responsibility for youth. It seems impossible, looking back, to realise that there was no regular secretarial help and no Church office, although an old friend of the Wrights, Miss Doreen Flavell, acted as Norman Wright's secretary in an unofficial capacity.

Early in this history, i.e. Spring, 1984, Norman Wright was elected vice-President of the Baptist Union, and expected to take office as President in the spring of 1985. Immediately the Church had to plan, although Norman Wright had promised to spend at least one Sunday a month in Romford. Fortunately, the previous year had seen the arrival of Simon Chevill, and during the Presidential year he covered a number of services as well as much of the pastoral work previously done by Norman Wright. We were also well served by the many who took the pulpit during his presidency.

Before the Presidential year started there was a particularly busy year in the Church as 1984 was the 50th Anniversary of the opening of Romford Baptist church on the present Main Road site. It was a year of celebration in which both the Ministers played a large part. Details of the celebrations are described elsewhere in this story, but the culmination in the March of 1985 with the visit of the Christian Ministries Team involved everyone. Preparation for the Presidential year could only have been completed in the strength of God. For a young man it would have been a huge undertaking, but Norman Wright was around 60. During 1984 the Wrights (for Norman's wife, Barbara, almost always accompanied him) travelled over 19,000 miles, mainly by road and rail, but including one air journey as he tried to visit as many Baptist Churches as possible. His diary for the year shows that he took part in over sixty Church functions as well as special rallies and Local Association meetings. At each of these, speeches, talks and/or Bible studies were required from him. As some of these functions were spread over two or three days, and on most Sundays two sermons were preached: the preparation needed was substantial. However, Norman also managed to spend twenty three and one half Sundays in his pulpit at Main Road – almost half the Sundays!

It was with some relief all round when the Presidency ended in April 1986. For another year, Minister and Church settled together again. In the spring of 1987 Simon Chevill told us that he had been called to serve at the church at Four Oaks, in the Midlands. He left soon afterwards. In the spring of 1987 as well, it became apparent that Norman was not as well settled as we thought. Although the Deacons knew early in the year that he felt the call to relinquish his ministry at Main Road, members were unaware until each received a letter from Norman himself, early in July. He said it was "the most difficult letter he had ever had to write in his life". In it he said that he felt the Church had reached a plateau – a high one, but in church life a plateau is only a base for further advance. He felt that a younger person with fresh ideas would be better able to do that. His ministry would finish at the end of September, almost twenty-one years after its commencement.

With all this going on behind the scenes, the fellowship at Main Road enjoyed time together at High Leigh in the spring. The guests leading this Church weekend were Rev. Derek Moon with his daughter Hilary who stimulated us, both spiritually and musically.

Norman's Ministry concluded on the final Sunday of September 1987. It was combined with the Harvest Festival Service and friends from far and near joined with us to bid farewell to the Wrights. The family moved to Frinton. Norman remained active in the organisation of Parkside for some time, and both Norman and Barbara came to speak annually at the Women's fellowship for some time.

Rev. Simon Chevall

He had joined the church as an assistant minister in 1983, having special responsibility for youth work. However, he did far more than that. Very soon he, together with his wife, Katherine, had endeared himself to the fellowship. The four years he was with us saw a lot of changes in the areas of youth work. Prior to his arrival the numbers of young people attending activities at the church had declined and it was becoming increasingly difficult to find leaders for the various organisations. During Simon's period the Bible classes merged, but the non-uniformed organisations attracted many from outside the Church. However these tended to be 'drifters' who came and went on the whim.

During the time the Chevills were with us Katherine was a loyal member of the Women's meeting, becoming assistant leader. The youngest member was their new daughter, Esther! Almost immediately Norman Wright announced his departure Simon told us of the call he had had from Four Oaks Baptist Church. Both went at almost the same time.

Interregnum

After the end of September 1987, the Church had to learn how to cope with an interregnum. Few even remembered the previous one, let alone having been in the position of having to do any of the organisation. For the Deacons, especially, it was a steep learning curve. The Rev. David Harper was appointed as Moderator. At the first Church meeting of the interregnum, at the end of October, he outlined the next steps needed before proceeding to think of a new Minister. In January 1988 he proposed pruning the Church register to make it realistic. At that time folk were on the register, having permanent addresses in Devonshire, Cambridge, Northolt, Hythe, Dorset and Stourbridge – and that is only the first page of the 1988 Year Book! He also advised us on the compilation of a Church Profile.

It was in August 1988 that real movement started. At the Church meeting on the 3rd. August we were told that the first possible new Minister would be 'preaching with a view' at the end of the month. This was Rev. Neil Walker. At the same meeting it was proposed the the Manse in Heath Drive be sold and a house in Gilbert Road be purchased. This was a larger property, nearer the Church, cheaper than Heath Drive and in better condition. At the same meeting a Music committee was set up to encourage folk to use their musical talents. During August, the choir, now seriously unbalanced with regard to available voices, was closed.

At the next church meeting in October the Deacons recommended that we invite Neil Walker to the Ministry. The vote showed a majority in favour, but at the November meeting we were told that Neil Walker had declined the invitation.

At a special church meeting at the end of May 1989 the name of Rev. David Bird was first brought to the church. He was invited to 'preach with a view' on August 18th. At the end of June, a special church meeting invited Rev. David Bird to the ministry by a large majority. He accepted, and after moving, with his wife and five children into the newly decorated manse in Gilbert Road at the end of September, was inducted to the ministry on October 28th 1989.

Rev. David Bird



As David Bird took up the ministry a newly refurbished Church Office was established in the old choir vestry. Mavis Poultney was office secretary (part time), and a little later, the age of computers arrived!

It was not until June of the following year that David Bird told members present at the church meeting on June 21st. of his pastoral plans for the Church building on his excellent expounding of the Scriptures week by week. Home Groups were to be expanded on a geographical basis. The leaders of the groups should be pastorally concerned with the group members. The groups should encourage participation and sharing and should take the form of Bible-based discussion on themes, issues and scripture passages. Although some modifications have taken place since, this format still forms the basis of our small group organisation to the present day, over twenty years later.

It was in June 1990 that the Church magazine became 'Cross Purposes'. The newly named magazine sought to bring a wider variety of topics including theological discussion, book, tape and video reviews, and a children's page.

David Bird wrote an article each month for this and today they still make very interesting reading. He was a gifted writer, and notes he prepared for Bible studies, as well as other articles he wrote are well worth reading. It was during his ministry that more freedom in worship was encouraged as well as music gifting.

David Bird concluded his ministry at the end of 1993.

Another Interregnum

Once again Rev. David Harper was appointed as the Moderator at the Church meeting at the beginning of February 1994. By the meeting in March a new church Profile was already being discussed as the Diaconate was far more aware of what is involved in an interregnum. The Rev. Stuart Woodward was appointed to visit the Church and make an appraisal which could be used in the decision making concerning the appointment of a new Minister. Comments from this appraisal which had relevance at this time referred to the drop in membership. This

had happened in the preceding four or so years. He judged that this was due to several causes. It had started in the period at the end of Norman Wright's Ministry when a fairly large group left the Church, preferring a freer form of worship.

After Norman Wright left, the register had been drastically pruned to reflect those who were still active Church members. Over several years a number had moved away but had never cancelled their membership.

Stuart Woodward in his RBC appraisal summarised the reason for this as "the minister needed to inspire his Vision rather than enforce it".

There were many applications from prospective ministers sent via the Settlement process.

Interviews were held to identify a Minister, who had a Vision with leadership, preaching and teaching qualities, who could encourage and unify the Church.

The Lord sent a man who did much to remedy the situation, and on October 7th. 1995 the Rev. Norman Tharby was inducted as Minister.

Rev. Norman Tharby



Immediately on becoming Pastor, Norman announced that his first priority was to get to know everyone. To accomplish this, he planned to visit every household in their homes during his first year, a mission he almost completely fulfilled. By the following June he was able to tell a Church meeting of his pastoral plans. These were based on the already functioning 'small groups. Many people, especially older ones, could not or did not attend small groups. So that they were not left without care they were drafted into 'non-meeting groups. Each of the small groups had a leader who was now responsible for day-to-day pastoral care. He called this set-up the 'Jethro' ministry, and by November 1996 it was fully working. Six new members had also joined the Church.

By June 1996, eight small groups were meeting twice a month and plans were in hand to divide other members into small pastoral groups, mainly geographically. At the June meeting also the first ideas were mooted regarding possible changes or redevelopment of the Church buildings. In November we were told that architects had started studying plans. At the November Church 1996 meeting, members were also told of future developments, many of which were dictated by outside requirements, such as the implementation of a 'child protection policy'. A computer had been installed in the Church Office; our old Baptist Church hymnbooks were now on their way to Jamaica. The vandalised Mawneys church, of which RBC were Trustees, was the subject of an offer to buy by John Groom's (originally a foundation called John Groom's Crippleage, who cared for the disabled). They wished to build a dwelling for disabled people. The sale was eventually completed in September 1997.

At the same meeting the Church was told of a proposal to run an Alpha course at the Church. After much discussion, concerning especially doctrinal issues, a vote was taken and the church agreed to run an experimental course. It continued to be used in the following years including with the youth and those with special needs. By the first meeting in January 1997, we were told that in a move away from the previous custom of not permitting 'outsiders' to use the

church, the Havering College of Adult Education had held their carol service in the Sanctuary. They were so impressed with the welcome they received that they were already asking to do the same next Christmas. Over the following couple of months a new and much needed P. A. system had been installed and by the middle of January only the fine adjustments were still to be made. At the end of 1996 Teddy and Didi Oprenov who were based at Main Road while they studied at Spurgeon's College, had returned to Sophia in Bulgaria after their Ordinations and by March it was reported that the Church had sent money to support the work there. This was to become a regular feature. An interesting snippet from the May 1997 meeting tells us that a number from the Mother and Toddler group were attending Sunday Services. Norman Tharby had commenced his teaching visit to a Bible school near Belgrade which would become an annual feature for many years.

At several meetings in the first half of 1998, the members were presented with the initial plans for the redevelopment of the Church premises. After several meetings where they were comprehensively discussed, the bulk of the proposals were accepted at a special Church meeting in September. By November the work was out to tender. By the end of March 2000 all tenders had been received and all were in excess of our agreed ceiling so a Special Church Meeting heard of a more modest scheme which the Building sub-committee had formulated. The work advised as urgent, consisted of considerably upgrading toilet facilities. This would be executed as a part of their course, (with Rodney Eborn liaising directly with Ardleigh Green's Head of Construction and the Principal), by students from the construction course at Havering College. It was accepted by the meeting, and by the end of July the first phase, the Welcome area, had been completed.

During 2001, we began actively seeking to appoint an Associate Pastor. The Secretary had prepared a Church profile which was sent to prospective candidates. In October 2001, Rev. Norman Tharby announced that he was being appointed as a Baptist Regional Minister for the Southern Area, a position which he took up early in 2002, leaving a growing and united Church.

For many years the Church was without any assistant minister. David Bird had been without an assistant and Norman Tharby had already been with us for about two years before another assistant was appointed.

Mr Patrick Croash

A Special Church meeting, convened in September 1998, was asked to ratify the proposition from the Diaconate that we call Patrick Croash to be the Youth Pastor at RBC. We had had a chance to meet with Patrick and his wife Kathryn as they had spent a Sunday with us earlier in the month. The vote was overwhelmingly in favour of inviting him to this ministry. They came to us almost immediately and by December a property had been purchased for their use, in Linden Street.

He was in post as Youth Minister by the autumn of 1998 and seemed to settle in very rapidly. One of his first tasks was to establish contacts with local schools, visiting regularly, and taking assemblies. He was also organising training sessions for potential and actual leaders, as well as times away with the young people. In the summer of 1999, he acted as Chaplain to the GB camp and several of the girls committed their lives to the Lord. Gospels were distributed in

many schools. By the end of 1999 the highly successful holiday club 'Whizz Kids' was holding bi-monthly parties. 90 had attended an autumn party and there were over 200 at a fireworks party. By the end of that year it was estimated that about 170 'new' children had been contacted and doors had been opened for Pat to teach RE lessons in some local schools. During 2000 these aspects of the work continued and Pat reported to the church meeting in March 2001 that several young people had made a profession of faith. He encouraged the youngsters to attend other Christian activities and told us in September 2001 the three more youngsters had committed themselves at a Scripture Union Camp. Several of these were baptised towards the end of 2001. Unfortunately, during 2002-3, Pat had intermittent periods of ill-health culminating in an operation during 2003. In the summer of 2004 the Brigades closed, and Crusaders took their places, with forty youngsters initially signed up. This soon grew to fifty+. At the Church meeting in September 2005, Patrick tendered his resignation as Youth Pastor, having been with us for seven years. His pastorate finished at the end of November 2005.

Yet Another Interregnum

Following the departure of the Revd Norman Tharby, the Rev. David Grainger was appointed as Moderator. By the January Church meeting John Stannard had sent the Church profile to Rev. Paul Hills (Regional minister). We heard at the church meeting in March that the deacons would be meeting with an applicant for the pastorate in mid-March.

After reviewing several applications. The Diaconate agreed to recommend the Rev Ian Bell as having the qualities and gifting to take the Church forward.

At a Special Church meeting in April a recommendation from the Deacons proposed that we invite Rev. Ian Bell to become our Pastor. A vote overwhelmingly endorsed this proposal.

Rev Ian Bell



Ian had been ordained as a Baptist Minister in July 1993, having studied as a mature student. Previously he had pursued a career as a chemical engineer. He was inducted into the pastorate of RBC on September 14th 2002, and less than three months later held his first baptismal service. He had already described to a Church meeting his planning and vision for the church. Because, with his professional eye he saw the need for folk to feel comfortable in church, one of his early projects concerned ensuring that every member of the congregation could see and hear, wherever they were sitting, and, if the church was full. He also wanted to make the building more welcoming and comfortable. How he accomplished this is described in the chapter on 'Buildings', but immediately papers were circulated so that all might know of his ideas.

A couple of months after this paper went out a more ambitious one was presented, entitled 'Developing the future vision of the church'. In this Ian reminded us of the church's mission statement '*Our purpose is to take the life-changing message of Jesus Christ to all, with the goal that they become loyal disciples*'. With this in mind he further considered the Sanctuary, and the need for the changes he earlier outlined, as well as giving it a facelift, since it had not even been decorated for decades. He also wanted us to think about the need for more staff. There was an urgent and recent need for more training and Bible teaching for those coming to us

with no previous Bible knowledge. Social needs were also considered, as well as the need to reach out to others in the community. Other ideas were also suggested for discussion and consideration by members. In February 2006 a more detailed paper enlarged many of the original ideas, and again in May 2007 he further developed his ideas, mainly in relation to the Worship areas. To date many of his thoughts have been acted upon, especially those concerning the buildings.

During his ministry Ian had produced several of these papers for information and discussion. They included his thoughts on the role of women in the church', as well as his proposals for using his sabbatical leave (Dec 2007 – February 2008). He worked during this time in two areas: -

- a) the place of cohabiting couples in church life
- b) looking at areas of evangelism and mission presented by the 2012 Olympic games, as we are close to the main site.

To study the latter, he visited Australia (combining it with family get-togethers). Since then, he published papers on these topics. As well as keeping mentally active during his time with us he did not neglect the physical aspect of life. As well as playing golf, he investigated the merits of the new heating system and in a paper produced in November 2005 the church learned the results of the research he had done (as a scientist) on how quickly the church heated up with the new system!

We knew that he had expended a lot of emotional, mental, physical and spiritual energy as he supported his members and congregation and he resigned in February 2012 to start a new ministry with Revelation TV in Spain which he took up in July of that year.

During his ministry Rev Ian Bell had overseen a period of church building and refurbishment development. He was assisted in his work by a succession of appointees [see later section], Rev Ron Smy, Rev Marilyn Webb, Rev Jan Loveard, Rev Michael McKenzie, Rev Peter Timothy, Minister in training and the Rev Richard Shorter heading up the Harold Hill ministry.

Rev. Ron Smy

At the beginning of 2004 the search for another Assistant Pastor to help the general work of the Church has been actively commenced. At first it was hoped that a student from Spurgeon's College could be found to serve on a part-time basis. It was reported to the Church in July that no suitable student has been identified but a recommendation was brought to the Church Meeting that one of it's members, a retired Baptist minister, the Rev Ron Smy be appointed as non-stipendiary assistant minister for eighteen months. This was agreed and Ron took up his position immediately ie in the summer of 2004, and by the beginning of 2005 had already announced the launch of 'Rendezvous', a monthly meeting catering for the over 55's. This would meet on Sunday afternoons and would provide tea and entertainment. He had also become Leader of the Tuesday Fellowship on the retirement of Marge Fuller. Ron was due to stand down as Assistant Pastor at the end of 2005, but in spite of continuing to search, no replacement had been found and he agreed to continue as Team Pastor until a replacement could be found. By July 2006 a new member of the team had been appointed

Rev Marilyn Webb

She came to us straight after completing her training at Spurgeon's College, and joined us in August 2006. The first task she identified was to review and build up the Small Group system. At the November Church meeting she was able to outline her hopes for the groups, that they would be more outwardly focussed, and she wanted them to be used to develop relationships within the Church. Not only were they to be the basis of Bible Studies and social events, but they should be the first port of call for pastoral care. As well as the long-established groups there would be those that ran for short periods only, to fulfil particular needs. To accomplish all this more groups would be needed as well as more leaders.

By January 2007 Marilyn had gained regular access to the Asda store next door to offer 'pastoral' care to any staff who wanted to discuss anything with her.

During 2007 Marilyn's vision for the Small groups began to become reality. All groups now studied the same topics, using as a basis a wide variety of study booklets. Alpha courses started to run as regular events, and were well attended, resulting in the establishment of a continuing small group.

Her work continued until, in the spring of 2009 Marilyn felt the call to a church of her own, having completed her probationary period in the ministry. She left in the early summer.

Before Marilyn even joined the church the need for a Youth Pastor had become urgent and the search for one had begun. Coinciding with Marilyn's arrival, the Church was approached by the Oasis Trust with a view to providing a placement with a youth worker for two years, as part of her training with them. This was agreed and Emma Ellis started with us in September 2006. However, by April 2007 the Oasis Trust had terminated her placement with us. At the Church Meeting held at the in September 2006 the name of Janet Loveard was brought to the meeting. She was aware of the paucity of applications for the post, and of the fact that not one of those who had expressed interest was deemed suitable. Her training at Moorlands Bible College, her experience on the Mission field and her passion for young people all equipped her for the job. At that time, she still had nearly a year to go to complete her Occupational Therapy training.

Jan Loveard (later Rev. Jan Loveard)



Jan started as part time Youth Pastor in September 2006 and immediately introduced new activities to the young people including Bible Studies, times away together and sleepovers. In February 2007 the church asked Jan to consider becoming the full time Youth Pastor and, after prayer and seeking God's direction, Jan accepted. The Church appointed her to the full-time position when her Occupational therapy training finished. In the summer, she started as full time Youth Pastor on July 1st 2007. By November of the same year Jan had applied to become an accredited Baptist Minister. She already had the theological and academic training and 11 years of previous full-time Christian ministry experience. She was accepted, providing she completed some further study which her previous course had not covered specific to youth ministry. This she did and she was ordained on July 19th 2009.

Throughout this period, she continued to build up the children, Youth and student work. The work of the Sunday school grew, and it was obvious to those who had nothing to do with the youth work that the youngsters were bonding in friendship, as well as spiritually. During 2008 more outreach for those of primary school age were started and they were able to participate in more activities for their age group. Part of Jan's work initially involved her in organising Training for leaders. She was responsible for updating the 'Child Protection' policy and implementing the Safeguarding policy across all the groups in the church.

Jan went on Adoption Leave from until July 2014 to July 2015 and by early 2016 was continued in her role part-time, grateful to the team of volunteers who covered her time away. Following the departure of the Revd Michael McKenzie and the subsequent reorganisation in 2017, Jan changed her role to that of a focus on community and social action, particularly working with those with additional needs and adopters [see later section]. This ministry flourished in the intervening years and she resigned in June 2024 to become a full time Foster Carer.

The Revd Peter Timothy

Pete was a member of the church having grown up with his family and enjoying all aspects of what was on offer. When he sensed a call to ministry in 2010 to 2011 he carried out an internship at RBC through the following year and, when he sought to become a minister in training, he was overwhelmingly supported in this by the church and RBC became his placement church for his training which commenced in 2011.

Alongside his studies at Regents Park College, Oxford he was involved in church life as a Minister in training and was deeply appreciated by all those to whom he ministered. Alongside Jan Loveard, he continued to support the church during the pastoral vacancy after the departure of Ian Bell until he was called to a church in Great Yarmouth at the conclusion of his studies in 2014.

The Revd Michael McKenzie



Michael was appointed in 2009 to complement his role at a local hospital working 2 days a week overseeing the pastoral care in the church as well as undertaking Sunday ministry. His background in working with people suffering with their mental health alongside his ministerial skills benefitted the church particularly during the time following Ian Bell's departure. His role concluded at the beginning of 2016.

Yet Another Interregnum

Following the departure of Senior Minister, the Revd Ian Bell, in July 2012, the Rev. Richard Owen, Senior Pastor at Ashurst Drive Baptist Church was appointed as Moderator in the search for another minister to work alongside Jan Loveard, Michael McKenzie and Pete

Timothy, a Minister in training based at the church. Margaret Coles and then Debbie Seymour had sent the Church profile to Richard Lewis (Regional Minister).

In February 2014, Margaret Coles ended her nine-year service as Church Secretary and moved to the Midlands being succeeded by Debbie.

In July 2014, Rev. Pete Timothy, having completed his studies as a Minister in Training, was called to a Great Yarmouth Baptist Church, as an ordained minister.

In September 2014, Rev Stephen Henwood, a church Member, (former Minister of Hornchurch Baptist Church and St Francis Hospice) helped as temporary minister with emphasis on Pastoral Work.

After reviewing several applications the Diaconate agreed that there were none currently suitable. However Richard Owen was contacted by Richard Lewis, who advised that there might be a suitable candidate, but he would not come through the usual Settlement process.

It transpired that Rev Ian Bunce, who was the National Networker for Mission and Media, formerly Head of Mission, with the Baptist Union in Didcot was the candidate that the Regional Ministry Team had in mind. The Leadership were also advised that his wife Vikki was also a minister and they had begun their ministry together in 1990 in the first Baptist Church to meet in a pub. Rev Ian Bunce advised that he was not looking to move on but he and Vikki would pray about this and for God's guidance. The Leadership forwarded the Church profile and 50 Years on Book to Ian and they met with the Leadership soon after. It was agreed to appoint both Ian and Vikki after they had preached with a view at RBC. Samuel Tunde met with Ian and Vikki to discuss terms of appointment with Ian as Team Leader and Vikki as Team Minister alongside the Revds Jan Loveard and Michael McKenzie.

Rev Ian Bunce



Rev Ian Bunce joined RBC with his wife Rev. Vikki Bunce on 18th July 2015. With his experience of working for the European Baptist Federation heading up Mission and Evangelism and with his experience in church planting, a local pastor and former Regional Minister for the Eastern Baptist Association with a mission brief it was evident that he had a heart for mission and reaching out with the message of the Gospel. It was also evident from Regional Ministers etc that Ian would bring about change and he had been encouraged by the Church Profile and the opportunities that RBC presented.

Within a year of his ministry the church was celebrating its diversified and multi-cultural nature when it was recognised over 40 different nationalities were represented in the weekly congregation. With a change of organisation of the ministry team following the departure of Rev Michael McKenzie in 2016 the church ministry team took a new direction focusing on the Older Generation, those with Additional needs and families who adopted children alongside the ongoing life of the church. Mrs Sandra O'Neal, one of the members of the church, took up the responsibility for the youth, children and families in a part-time capacity alongside her passion for evangelism for a twelve-month period.

Soon afterwards the long-held dream to have a coffee shop ministry reaching out to the community was also birthed with the introduction of The Meeting Place with Alison Savine as Manager and then later, Community Money Advice, a debt centre to help those in the area. Paid staff and volunteers enable this vital and busy ministry to continue Monday-Friday and the building regularly buzzed with people most days of the week. In 2023 following a plea from another church, the town foodbank, which had been operating in the church one day a week, was incorporated into the life of RBC and a new Charitable Incorporated Organisation was established as Romford Baptist Church Community Care with the hope that other ministries would spring from it over time.

Ian is a team player and keen to encourage others in their own ministries and during his ministry Pastors Jide Fawunmi and Andy Stannard were appointed as Ministers of Training on a part-time basis as well as Mrs Sandra O'Neale who was also encouraged to undertake studies at Spurgeon's College. Claudiu Nitisor too was encouraged and supported to become Minister in Romford Baptist Church's mother Church, Salem Baptist Church.

In addition, Ian restructured the church office and worked much closer with Parkside Residential Home with his new appointment of CEO following the departure of Andy Palmer who had been holding that role. Mrs Diane Mfunne was appointed the new Registered Parkside Manager and Steve Street, the new Operations Manager working across both Parkside and RBC. This saw a much closer working together of both organisations with a few other staff working across both sites.

Logistically it made sense for RBC to connect more in with London Baptist Churches so, in 2018, it moved from the Eastern Baptist Association to join the London Baptists. Ian is one of the Safeguarding trainers for the Association as well as serving the wider Baptist family as Chair of Baptist Building CIO, a charity that facilitates building and extensions of Baptist Churches through grants and interest free loans.

There is good networking with other town churches with outreach opportunities at Easter and Christmas particularly, alongside links with the local hospital, (where Ian became a sessional hospital chaplain in 2024) and, with other connections Ian has made, RBC continues to shine a light for Jesus.

Rev Vikki Bunce



Rev. Vikki Bunce was appointed initially as Minister for the church and community alongside supporting the wider ministry team with particular input through small groups and the worship team as well as at Parkside. Much of her week saw her spending time in the groups that ran in the church such as Focus, Parents and toddlers, Stitch in time, developing relationships and building links with those who do not come on a Sunday as well as investing roughly a day a week at Parkside.

However, when the ministry team was reshaped in 2017 her focus changed to that of working with the older generation. Alongside introducing new activities during the week, Vikki also continued to spend time with the residents at Parkside each week, heading up the bi-weekly services with others and being a listening ear to both staff and relatives as appropriate. It is

good to see residents coming down once again to join in the new activities and building on the relationships that had fallen away over the previous years. Her involvement at Parkside increased during Covid due to the visiting restrictions for family members and this impacted the activities there for many more months than the rest of society due to the strict restrictions placed on those living in residential care.

With Vikki's focus on the older generation more of the pastoral care was also undertaken by her alongside overseeing and supporting the prayer ministry of the church both on Sundays, Tuesdays and with prayer labyrinths/spaces, although the latter again was impacted by the arrival of Covid.

It was during her sabbatical studies, taken in short blocks over 2023 and 2024 that she built on her practice and knowledge of working with those suffering from dementia and, at the end of the year, she began to share some of that she'd learnt through training and study.

Her willingness to support other team members alongside her organisational ability has also had a positive impact in a variety of ways during her time serving at the church.

Mrs Hannah Griffiths



Hannah Griffiths was appointed Children, Youth and Families worker in 2018 and left in 2021. She had been a member of Citygates Church Ilford and had worked in a variety of different settings as a youth worker. It was her experience in those roles that equipped her to work alongside the multicultural and ethnically diverse group of young people now coming to RBC. She had good pastoral gifting especially for the young people and her mentoring of them was appreciated.

Hannah had the challenge of keeping the youth work going during 2020/2021 Covid period, by using Zoom Meetings, rather than in person. Her role came to an end in July 2022 when she moved to live closer to her parents.

Andy Stannard



During RBC's 75th year, Andy, who wanted to explore whether his calling was in Youth work, was appointed as Youth Intern, helping Jan in the work at the Church, but also spending time with Richard Shaw, the S.U. schools' worker. His appointment was for a year.

Andy was called and endorsed by RBC to serve on short term Mission in Moldova with Operation Mobilisation where he learnt the language. On returning to the UK he continued to be involved in the life of the church, especially in the worship team. Soon after he married another church member from within RBC, Rianna Veares, they followed a call from God to serve overseas, this time going together on longer term mission with Operation Mobilisation to Moldova.

They were based there during Covid returning to the UK when the situation in Moldova worsened. This coincided with the birth of their son Caleb.

With things still uncertain following the outbreak of war between Russia and the Ukraine, Andy and Rianna sought God for their future. That earlier prompting from God regarding a sense of calling to youth work coincided with the departure of Hannah Griffiths and it felt an appropriate way forward for Andy to further test his calling amongst the children, young people and families.

It was clear that God had his hand on Andy but he was also sensing a further challenge. In 2023 the church agreed that Andy should be appointed as Minister in Training (Youth). Andy is currently studying part time at Spurgeon's College, South Norwood to become a Minister alongside ministering in the church among the children and young people.

Pastor Adekunle Babajide (Jide) Oluwasina Fawunmi



Jide and his family had started attending RBC around 2014. He was a Finance Manager, (then a Finance Director) from Nigeria, with preaching and musical gifts. He is also a football referee.

In 2018 he began to sense a call to ministry and two deacons, Jumoke Giwa-Majekodunmi and Rodney Eborn initially interviewed and recommended him on behalf of the RBC Leadership in September/October 2018 to begin to serve at RBC as an unpaid Pastor, (general duties), whilst still working in Finance and studying at Spurgeon's College.

These studies furthered his sense of calling and after being nationally recognised as a pastor on completion of his Equipped to Serve course, he sought further training to become a Minister in Training in 2022 at Spurgeon's College. His application was confirmed by the RBC Membership and the Eastern Region Baptist Association Ministerial Recognition Committee.

As well as studying part-time and continuing to work in finance, Jide has undertaken a number of preaching engagements in RBC and other Baptist Churches and has taken a lead on Mission/Baptisms. Jide and Rodney Eborn have also run an Alpha Course.

ADMINISTRATION

During the period that Norman Wright was with us, there was no Church office, nor any official clerical/administrative staff. However Norman did have the help of an old friend of the family - Miss Doreen Flavell, who was a Church member. In an unofficial capacity she acted as his personal assistant. It was clear few realised how much she did until, on the Wright's retirement to Frinton, she went as well.

It was at the first church meeting over which David Bird presided that the question of a Church office was first raised. The Diaconate recommended that a part time secretary be appointed. The name of Mrs. Mavis Poultney was recommended to the meeting. By the A.G.M. held in March 1990 Mavis was working 4 days a week and the old choir vestry had been turned into a Church office. The Church had planned to install a computer. At first, David Bird's own computer had been used, but in the autumn of 1990 one was purchased by the Church. Mavis remained as the Church office secretary for about ten years, retiring in March 2000. Her going left a very large hole, and we recognised how much was done in the office.

Mrs. Jo McPherson was appointed as her replacement. Her term of service only lasted until the end of the year. It was decided that, before a replacement was sought, consideration should be given as to whether the job needed re-defining. During 2001 Margaret Coles, the Church Secretary, with a little help, struggled to keep the office going. In spite of advertisements, no applications were received to replace Mavis. In May 2002 the Church meeting was told that Brian Loveard had agreed to work in the office for two days a week. He managed to hold things together until well into 2003. In November 2003 it was decided to appoint an Administrator, who would also add a measure of management to the office duties. Ken Yates was appointed to the new position as from March 1st2004.

The office itself was updated over the years Ken held office and became comparable with other small departments anywhere else. Ken showed himself to be a man of many talents. Whilst the different building projects were in progress he was the primary liaison between the Church and the various personnel on the site. It was largely due to him that all the activities were able to continue with little disruption, whilst the whole area was a sea of mud and chaos. His tact, kindness, and indeed, friendship, with all of those he dealt with oiled the wheels considerably. Within the life of the Church we found, probably for the first time, that *one* person knew all (well most) of what was going on. It was wonderful to have someone to liaise with. The job continued to grow with the production of the beautifully prepared weekly news sheets. The Church Magazine, now called 'Grapevine' and now a bi-monthly production was prepared in house, and sermon notes were also provided.

At various times others have come in to help with specific jobs in the office, mainly secretarial, and Ken's son Simon, an expert with computers, gave us a lot of help, both with the computers themselves, keeping them working, and with modern electronic security.

On Rev Ian Bunce's appointment in 2015 the Administration and IT was reviewed as new initiatives and opportunities were introduced. The role of office administrator was changed which coincided with Ken approaching retirement age and so changes in personnel and role were implemented with Ruth Wiggins being appointed as a PA to the Team Leader in summer 2017.

Rather than there being a sole administrative member of staff, Ruth brought new skills into the changed role and, although primarily supporting Ian, managing his diary, emails and undertaking PA work for him, she remained the friendly face for all those seeking answers to questions. She celebrated her wedding to Andy during the following years and, at the time of the 90th anniversary, was on maternity leave for her firstborn son Samuel.

After the decision of the Church Meeting in June 2016 to apply for CIO status, a change to the Church Constitution was needed. It was proposed to adopt a new constitution following the model offered by the Baptist Union of GB which reflects the Baptist ethos and meets the requirements of the charity act. It would also incorporate much of the wording of the current RBC constitution. Vikki Bunce and Michael Baah were thanked for their work on this.

PARKSIDE AND HEATHSIDE



Some of the Parkside staff 2024

The first Home for the Elderly, Parkside, had opened in October 1971 and the second one, Heathside, joined it in 1979, so already by 1984 over fifty residents were being cared for at any one time. As the current chapter opened the Rev. Norman Wright was still the chairman of the housing Association. His enthusiasm undimmed, the energy with which he founded the Homes still provided the motivating force. The original Secretary, Dr Bernard Hogben and the original Matron, Miss Winnie Doughty also still retained their posts. The original Wardens of Heathside were still in post at the beginning of 1984, but later in the year Mr. and Mrs. John Humphries retired. For a brief period their places were taken by Mr and Mrs Keith Fielden, but they were shortly replaced by our own members Anne and Graham Gant, bringing with them their family of three boys.

From the start the Homes were fully occupied, and by 1984 there was still a waiting list of folk waiting to come in. Residents were and are encouraged to treat the Homes as their own, being encouraged to come and go as they please, as well as entertaining their own visitors. Two Minibuses were available in the early years to take residents to Church on Sundays and to other meetings at the Church. In the intervening years these have been replaced and at the time of writing there is one modern, comfortable bus which also takes residents for outings. During the history of the Homes many residents celebrated their 100th Birthdays, the second being in 1985, and 90th birthdays are quite a regular event.

1987 saw the retirement of Winnie Doughty who had been Matron for over sixteen years, having taken up the position well before Parkside opened, and had given loving care and unstinting service to all those in her charge. Prayers were answered regarding her successor and Miss Christine Brown was appointed in her place. Christine was the daughter of the Rev. JJ Brown, a Baptist Minister well known to all in the Church. Later in her appointment she was able to care for her father in Parkside, where he was a real asset amongst the residents. It was during Christine's time as Matron that the homes faced an unprecedented level of change and it was with her firm but wise and gentle hands at the helm that things were able to continue. Grateful thanks were expressed to her when she retired in 2006.

In 1987, the Rev. Norman Wright completed his ministry at RBC. He stood down as Chairman of the Housing Association, but retained his connection with the Homes as he was appointed Chaplain/Administrator. Paul Henson was appointed Chairman in his place.

It was also in 1987 that Bureaucracy began to influence the running of the Homes, a trend that continues to this day. New legislation required the Homes to be registered with the Local Authority. They demanded modifications be made to the Homes, but the Housing Association was unable to meet their strict requirements for the Ward Unit. It had to be closed as a ward, but the accommodation was incorporated into the general running of Parkside, with sick residents being nursed in their own rooms. Also, because of the new Local Authority demands extra members of staff were required. At the end of that year there were still some problems with staffing, but prayer had overcome most of them.

In 1988/9 Mrs. Georgina Mackenzie-Ikamba was appointed Assistant Matron, with responsibility for Heathside.

In 1992 the 21st birthday of Parkside was celebrated. The Homes were still full and still witnessing God's love to residents, staff and visitors alike. There had been many changes throughout the years, but the essentials were still in place.

In 1993 there were more staff changes than the Homes had ever seen in a short time. Mrs. Georgina Ikamba and family moved from the area. Her place was taken by Mrs. Jenny Lees who had been on the Staff for some time. Wendy Rundell (nee Coles) who had been on the staff for 21 years, and her husband, David, the site handyman, moved down to the West Country.

1996 saw the Silver Jubilee celebrations at Parkside. There was a special Service at the Church, as well as family parties at Parkside. During the 25 years it had been open, 206 residents had spent their twilight years in the Homes, 41 men and 165 women.

During 1997 the original Secretary, Bernard Hogben, died, still in office, and after 30 years service. During the same year Norman Wright felt the time was right for him to step down as Chaplain/Administrator. Paul Henson was appointed Secretary/Administrator.

In 2000, after 20 years of dedicated service, Heathside closed due to the finances being stretched, as increasing demands were made by new rules and regulations. £70,000 had to be spent at Parkside alone on radiator covers and a lift. Similar expenditure at Heathside was out of the question.

When Heathside closed and was sold, some of the residents joined the Parkside home. The integration proceeded very smoothly. Shortly afterwards, Paul Henson, the not long appointed Secretary/ Administrator died. Don Evans from South Woodham Ferrers was appointed Administrator. By the middle of 2002 Norman Wright was forced, through illness, to relinquish his last link with Parkside, as Chaplain. The Minister of RBC at the time, the Rev. Ian Bell was appointed Chaplain in his place, but while he was able to drive the distance Norman Wright continued to visit. It was during this period that activities for residents increased. Quizzes, poetry, musical mornings and table games were introduced, and especially in the summer months, outings were introduced.

In 2003 Peter Crane became Chairman of Parkside. He had been Treasurer of the Housing Association for very many years. By this time Parkside had been open for over 30 years and a major programme of refurbishment on bedrooms and communal areas proceeded apace. Conservatories had been built for residents use and were opened early in 2004. They are much enjoyed, and birdwatching has been added to the list of residents' activities. Refurbishments continued for some time under the supervision of William Cuthbert, the Maintenance Manager at the time and also nephew to the previous matron, Winnie Doughty.

2005/6 saw further major staff changes. In the Autumn of 2005 Leasby Crouch retired as deputy matron and in January 2006, after 19 years of faithful caring, Christine Brown retired. The hierarchy was changing! Replacements appointed were Mrs Gillian Littleboy as Manager, with Mumbi Keinamma as her deputy. Both were qualified nurses. The latter only remained in post for a short time, and her place was taken by Barbara Foreman, previously a senior carer. It was also in 2006 that the founder of the Homes, the Rev. Norman Wright died.

More refurbishment continued as new kitchen and boiler rooms were completed. 3 new ensuite rooms were added as an extension of the Annexe, (subsequently known as the Rose wing with its 5 rooms) - and much work was done in the garden.

2007 saw yet more staff changes as Peter Crane retired from the chairmanship, his place being taken by John Stannard, a previous Church Secretary. Don Evans also retired after 5 years as administrator. His place was taken by Mrs. Gill Feinson, whose association with Parkside began as a schoolgirl helping with the teas!

In 2005 Samuel Tunde was appointed as the Treasurer taking over from David Argent who was managing the finance. However there followed some difficult years and, in 2009, Samuel Tunde brought to the notice of the Trustee Board the dire state of the financial situation in Parkside. The 2009 Accounts had shown a deficit of over £38k.

In 2010 Samuel Tunde also became the Treasurer of Romford Baptist Church the post he held for the next few years but, due to the demand of these two entities, with the blessing of Rev Ian Bell, Samuel resigned as the Treasurer of Parkside.

Rev Ian Bell and John Stannard, Chair, approached Rodney Eborn, who was a previous RBC Church Treasurer, if he would consider taking over from Samuel Tunde, and he accepted this on a short-term basis, given the threat of Parkside's closure in a similar way to that of Heathside's some years earlier.

It was evident that the whole of the Parkside operation needed to be reviewed, so that there was clarity and fairness in salaries, terms and conditions etc. Pinnacle HR Consultants were appointed to review the whole staffing structure. Gillian Littleboy's post, as manager, was made redundant and a new post of General Manager was advertised. Interviews held and Mike Armstrong, already a Parkside trustee, was considered the most suitable person for the position.

The General Manager's post was renamed with the same salary to Chief Executive Officer, after consideration and discussion with Mike Armstrong and the Parkside Board.

The review was an outstanding success and under the Board and Mike Armstrong's management, the £38,000 deficit was turned into a modest surplus, which increased year on year.

Rodney Eborn resigned as Treasurer in 2011 and Samuel Tunde agreed to come back as the Treasurer and also as the Treasurer of Romford Baptist Church. Mike Armstrong resigned to become a local private Nursery Director in 2015.

After his resignation Parkside Trustee Board appointed Andy Palmer as Parkside CEO in 2015 after interviewing 3 candidates. It was felt that Andy's long experience in the charity and care sector, leading organisations far larger than Parkside was a good appointment. He had chaired a board of Trustees for a respite care charity and prior to that he was Head of Support for a charity for homeless young people. He was also head of services for a unit with Older people with Mental Health and learning disabilities.

Andy Palmer stood down at the beginning of 2018 and it was agreed that Rev. Ian Bunce would become the new CEO of Parkside as well as RBC Team Leader, to bring stability to the Home and bringing the links closer back to the church which had been a little lost amidst all the changes in recent years. Ian recognised that Parkside had something special to offer over other homes in the area and a new recognition of what it meant to be a Christian care home was introduced picking back up on its early roots and heritage. This was also complemented by the role of the Rev. Vikki Bunce as the Chaplain to the home and with her focus on the Older Generation.

A closer working relationship between the church and the home meant that there began to be a cross-over of working with other members of staff and an agreed sharing and payment of services provided between RBC and Parkside was introduced, benefitting all parties in the process.

Things began to flourish until the worldwide pandemic hit and as the restrictions of Covid bit in March 2020, the home was forced to close to everyone other than staff. This was a new and dark chapter for all but thanks were given to God for the way that Parkside remained one of the few homes in the country where no resident died from Covid during a terrible time experienced in the care sector. Although many staff were poorly over the following months and some residents became ill too, the prayers of many kept the home as safe as was possible during the intervening months where the government restrictions bit down hard.

Vikki Bunce continued to visit as a member of staff, offering a listening ear to all who needed it during this time as well as enabling the Monday services to keep going each week. As this

period covered the celebrations of 50 years of Parkside, she, alongside the Registered Manager, Diana Mfune, and a small number of residents and staff, began to plan a year of



activities to mark the event. Vikki gave a number of light-hearted but informed presentations over the year, ably supported by Mrs Sue Sharp, one of the trustees who helped provide some quizzes as part of the celebrations which were presented by Vikki as non-staff were still unable to visit. Vikki also led those attending the Monday morning services over the history of the home and God's faithfulness week by week, using past texts and history as part of the story. The Golden Jubilee was able to be celebrated in style, albeit outside on the front drive as relatives and visitors

were still not allowed into the home at the time of celebration in October 2021.

We continue to thank God for the way that Parkside Home has continued to give loving care to all residents, and we remain grateful for the way it has always been helped by an army of volunteers who have provided mini-bus drivers, decorators, entertainers, organisers of services and speakers at them, as well as a host of less regular activities. By the time of this history being written we recognise the 53 years of care that has been given to the many residents who have found a home within its walls and heard the love of God being shared with them.

WORK AMONGST ADULTS

As 1984, and our Golden Anniversary year started five meetings were running for the benefit of adults.

FOCUS

This grew out of the Young Wives group that had met fortnightly on a Thursday morning, and on the first Thursday evening of the month. A crèche was provided at the morning meeting, giving the children their own activities. This meeting attracted more of the younger women, many of them coming from outside the Church. Various talks, mainly of a secular nature, provided the entertainment, as well as outings and fund raising events. This group nominated a charity to support each year.

The evening meeting provided for those who worked, as well as mothers who appreciated time to meet friends and enjoy more peace and quiet, as well as an interesting programme. By 1987 the morning meeting had a majority of non-Church members whereas the evening meeting consisted largely of Church folk. The joint fundraising auction seemed to have become an annual event.

By 1990 numbers had stabilised at about 20 per meeting. The morning meeting continued with a varied programme and on four evenings a year the ladies met for fellowship and fun. By 1992 the average attendance at meetings had doubled to about 40, and the charity giving had more than doubled.

In 1997 Pauline Yates, who had led the meeting for ten years had to give up as she returned to work, but another excellent leader replaced her, Margaret Crighton, who married a couple of years later. The work continued with other leaders, and for the next few years went from strength to strength. In 2007 the circle came right round as Susan Young resumed the leadership role she had last held in the 70s!

Glynis Brown then took up the mantle as leader and the meetings continued to flourish until it became clear that no-one wanted to succeed Glynis in her role at the point at which she wished to retire. It was decided, with sadness, that it would eventually close and for a number of months some of those who used to attend continued to meet for coffee and a chat but, with the arrival of Covid this too came to an end.

THE WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP - LATER THE TUESDAY FELLOWSHIP

In 1984 this meeting had a considerably larger membership than it had 25+ years later but those attending regularly in the earlier days were fewer proportionally than in the later years. Meetings were very formal with everybody being addressed as Mrs. or Miss, and Christian names never entered the minutes. The meeting was still affiliated to the Baptist Women's Movement and joined with various rallies in the Essex area. Barbara Wright was the President and led the meetings. Each of the meetings were devotional, annual outings were the norm, as were donations to many causes. By 1985 change was in the air. In September, due to ill-health Doris Grove resigned as secretary after 28 years, leaving a very large gap in the meeting. Cynthia Hogben, who had never been to a meeting, but had recently semi-retired, was invited to do the job. One of her first major tasks was to organise the Golden Anniversary for the meeting in 1986. In that year as well, two of our members were baptised. Because a high proportion of the membership is already Church members, this is a relatively rare event, but over the next few years was to occur regularly.

A year later the President/leader, Barbara Wright moved. At short notice Audrey Jarvis became leader, a post she was to retain until her death in 1998. When Norman Tharby became our Minister in 1996, his wife Ruth became the President, and later the leader. Further changes took place in 2000. The meeting was opened to men, and for the following years five or six men attended regularly. This meant a name change, and the Women's Fellowship became The Tuesday Fellowship. The next major change was in 2004 when a man, Ron Smy became leader. Throughout the times of change the format of the meeting changed little, nor did the friendliness of the members. Until the very early 90's the Fellowship had a choir which regularly sang at meetings. Membership remained somewhat transient as most of the members were well beyond retirement age, but the meeting was always well attended. By the time 2010 and onwards came the meetings had changed subtly with the third Tuesday in each month being given over to talks of general interest. Change then followed with a light lunch being provided three or four times a year before the main meeting commences.

Unfortunately by 2015, the age profile of those attending and leading the group saw a reduction in numbers and although keen to continue, it was recognised that perhaps the time had come to conclude this gathering. This coincided with the change of the focus within the ministry team and so the time slot once taken by the Tuesday Fellowship was taken up by the new initiative of Treasure Times that was begun in November 2017 headed up by the Revd Vikki Bunce.

STITCH IN TIME- NEEDLECRAFT GROUP

The group started meeting on the Church premises in April 2002. It arose from a group of ladies who met at a needlecraft shop in town. When this had to close and the group was threatened with disbanding, Mavis Poultney and Hilary Salisbury, two of the members, arranged that the group could meet in the Welcome area. Most of the ladies from the original group came and they enjoyed the light and warmth as well as the tea or coffee available as much chatting is done as is craft work. The group is now a very happy unit. Some of the original members have gone, and two or three have now died. The group rallied round the sick friends in a way that those from outside the Church had not experienced before and were appreciative of and this sense of care continues.

At each session there is a prayer and Bible reading. At first there was some grumbling about this but now it is an accepted part of the meeting. There have been new members both from outside and within the Church. Each year until Covid impacted on so much of church life, there were outings and other social activities. The group is now thoroughly integrated in the life of the Church. The ladies contribute by making use of their talents to make gifts to raise money for charity or for church activities, Parkside or other initiatives benefitting the wider community. Most of those who attend have now been to church at least for the odd special service, and at least one has started to attend a small group. The Sewing Group still meets.

MEN'S FELLOWSHIP

In 1984, a meeting for men had been running for several years, albeit only attracting a small attendance. It was affiliated to the Baptist Men's Movement and encouraged men to meet together for friendship, discussion, service and outreach. At the AGM in May 1985 a decision was taken to disband the meeting – disappointing, after 27 years but it really was not fulfilling its purpose.

Some 22 years later it was decided to again have a meeting for men, so in January 2007 a new MEN'S GROUP started, with some afternoon meetings and some evening ones. Numbers varied, the evening meetings being the better attended and the activities at both were mainly social.

Sadly this too came to an end mainly due to a reduction in numbers and circumstances affecting those who had been leading the group to mean that they were no longer able to do so as once they had. There were a few Men's socials arranged but nothing on a regular basis.

It has been superseded by monthly Saturday Socials for all ages run by John Harding for playing games/board games etc.

GARDENING CLUB

In the March of 1998 a Gardening Club was started. The aim was to bring together those with similar interests from both within and outside the church. The early membership was encouraging and a varied programme of talks and outings was arranged. To the surprise of the founder, Doug Cresswell and other committee members, ladies made up most of the membership. The club became affiliated to the Royal Horticultural Society and enjoyed outings to Wisley and Hyde Hall. Flower shows were held at different times of the year, but the number of exhibitors was always disappointing. As several of the members became too frail to come out in the evenings, numbers dwindled. Good speakers could no longer be afforded and after about ten years the club closed.

NEWER GROUPS

Not all the meetings for adults attracted all those at whom they are aimed. Some of them met at times which were inconvenient for others, some seem to attract only those in particular age groups, and yet others appealed only to those with particular interests. With all this in mind, coupled with a desire to bring in others from outside the Church, various other groups have been started in recent years.

NU LNX AND JOURNEYS

One of the first of these was NU LNX. This is a social group aimed at those in their 20's and 30's. The aim of the group was to enable people to get to know one another better in a relaxed atmosphere, and to try to integrate newcomers to the church. The meetings were on the second Saturday of the month. This varied occasionally, but infrequently, so that babysitting arrangements could be made. At first many of the meetings were held in homes, but later branched out into outings, even family days out. Activities were inexpensive so that no-one was excluded. Food and conversation was central to all their activities. At the end of 2006 Alex and Alison Savine, the founders and first leaders, stood down, but remained part of the group. Heather Young and Hayley Ayriss then took it on but with family life and jobs become busier this came to an end.

A new initiative began in 2017 called Journeys, again aimed at the same age group and this time social activities were inter-linked with Bible based or discussion topics. This met for some time but shift work, job commitments and other life pressures saw this too come to an end although the friendships built during this time continue to remain.

In 2024 a new singles group was established by Jide Fawunmi.

OVER 40's GROUP

This group did not meet on a regular basis but Ian and Hilary Salisbury arranged activities for who were more independent of children. Under this banner interesting outings started in 2005. They took part in London walks and ventured through Channel tunnel to visit Bruges and the Christmas market in Lille. Although it is no longer running conversations and memories about their outings continue to be remembered with fondness.

RENDEZVOUS

This group first appeared on the Church's programme in 2005. Ron Smy, at the time an assistant Minister at the Church, saw the need of those alone at home. He started Rendezvous on a Sunday afternoon to meet the need of these, mainly older folk. The roughly over 55's gather for tea and a social activity. The social part may consist of entertainment, music, DVD, a quiz or a talk and over tea there is plenty of conversation. They met once a month, on the second Sunday. With the departure of Ron and Muriel Smy in the summer of 2008, Rendezvous closed.

TREASURE TIMES

This new activity began in November 2017 as part of Vikki's new role and it soon became a firm feature for the Older Generation, taking the timeslot that had previously been used by Tuesday Fellowship that had come to an end earlier in the summer, largely as those running it felt that they, and those who attended, had reached an age that it was unviable to continue. Treasure Times became a 90 minute slot of enjoying chocolates, cakes, conversation and a half hour of either quizzing, learning about a different topic or reminiscing and sharing memories. Initially those who came were from the church but, over time, they brought friends with them or others made their way through from activities in the Meeting Place and once that had opened, a small group would meet for lunch first, building on friendships and enjoying eating together, before coming through to the afternoon programme.

HOLIDAY AT HOME

Vikki also introduced a second new initiative to the church of a wider programme of Holiday at Home in 2017 with support from others in the church, hosting a 4-day event in the summer for those aged 65+ for fun, fellowship and excellent food headed up by Jan Walden, Susan Young and others over time. Due to its success it became a regular feature in the church for many years alongside themed days picking up the seasons of Easter, Harvest, Christmas and a 'brighten up' winter spot. The only time it didn't run was during Covid [see earlier section under church life].

AMAZE

The Amaze Ministries were established by Jan Loveard when her role changed in 2017 to have a focus on children, adults and their families who have additional needs. Why the name Amaze? Firstly, because we believe everyone is amazing! God created us all and delights in each person, we want to celebrate the worth, uniqueness and individuality of each amazing person. Secondly, the Amaze name came about because it can be a complete maze for a parent, carer or guardian to get the needs met, support provided and understanding received. Also, for adults with additional needs, life can seem a complex maze. We seek to support all these groups of people with the mazes they face.

Every Tuesday, we have a group of adults meeting together for Tuesday Amaze. It's the equivalent of one of our small groups but specifically for adults with additional needs or struggling with mental health. The group initially started many years ago when, as a church, we ran an Alpha group for people with additional needs. It was such a success that the group continued to meet so that together they could enjoy an interactive time of worship, study, snacks, peer support and a LOT of fun. The group has been a huge blessing to everyone who attends including the leaders who are equally encouraged by being part of the group, and it's provided a place of belonging for those who would otherwise find access to Gospel truths and general church life almost impossible. It's a true celebration of the importance of every person being part of the body of Christ.

Amaze Causeway meets monthly for a time of worship, snacks and fun. The group is for adults and children with additional needs and their parents/carers. It is a group established many years ago and run by a team of people from across the local churches. Members of RBC have been involved from the very beginning to help run and lead it, but it was after Covid that the group came to RBC as the base for meeting together. As such, it continues each month to be a service of celebration, of worship, of sharing and of support where Christ is at the centre and where everyone is equally special and cared for.

For a few years we also ran Amaze Kids on a Sunday which was a Sunday school for children with additional needs as we had a number of children, who at that time, were unable to fully engage with the traditional groups due to their needs. It was a really special time when we saw these beautiful children enjoy learning about Jesus in a way which they could understand and engage with. Our team were inspirational and the only reason it ceased was due to need as post Covid things had changed and people had moved away. However, it was a truly special time with this group of God's children.

Amaze Kids and Amaze Support Group were also run from 2016-2024 with the support group meeting monthly providing an opportunity for parents and carers of children with additional needs to come together and over a coffee to offer peer support. Additionally we would run a number of special events during the year for their families at Christmas, Easter and in the summer. An opportunity to share the Gospel message through play, friendship, Bible stories, craft and food. The pain that was shared in those times of togetherness and the support and love which would then surround was a privilege and provided a unique blessing to our community in Havering. We were grateful to be able to pass this group on to The Church of the Good Shepherd when Jan Loveard moved on, and to know that it continues to be a blessing to people through their ministry is encouraging.

ADOPTION SUPPORT

A unique opportunity was provided to RBC by our Lord to minister to adoptive families as God raised up a team of people headed up by Jan Loveard with lived experiences of adoption from all different angles. So, in 2019 we began a monthly group for adopters and their families, meeting together with a variety of activities on offer from craft, games, snacks, peer support for all ages, and everyone greeted with a smile, acceptance, and the offer of a cuppa. It was immediately a place of support and we averaged between 20-40 people each session. Our team was initially from a number of churches but gradually it has been mainly led by people with a heart for the ministry from within RBC. Those who attend are from a variety of faiths and backgrounds but with each individual we seek to provide a place where they know they aren't alone in the complex journey they are walking, and we pray that God would use us to bring His blessing, His love and His hope into our times together.

Within a short space of time we were also able to join with the local authority, and now we work together in partnership with them to deliver special events once a term. These events are normally attended by over 100 people, all adoptive families, and provide a great opportunity to invite them to our monthly group as well as strengthening our working relationship with the council.

Adoption has many ups and downs for both the parents and the children involved, as a church we have been blessed with this exceptional opportunity to bless and support those walking this path. The group has had a significant impact on the lives of many, and it's been a particular delight to see a number of the children, as they have grown up, attending the youth work and youth weekends away at RBC. We pray that this ministry would continue to be a blessing to all those who attend and that it would result in an eternal impact on their lives.

COMMUNITY MONEY ADVICE

RBC, with the recent opening of The Meeting Place, began to run Community Money Advice (CMA), rather than CAP, Christian Against Poverty Debt Advisors.

This was headed up by Alison Savine and a volunteer team of trained Debt Advisers and Volunteers.

CMA is a national charity committed to supporting churches and community groups who have a passion to help people overcome their money problems. CMA provides all the resources, training and support needed to establish and maintain local, free, face to face money advice services.

The RBC Centre helped people, from all walks of life, escape from the blight of indebtedness by providing free, unconditional, fully confidential advice and practical support in order to help the client become debt free, whilst working towards financial stability.

During the advice process, clients will also be taught budgeting and money management skills, to ensure they have control over their finances, enabling them to remain debt free in

the future. Sadly, due to a lack of volunteers, the centre closed its doors to its last client in 2024.

ROMFORD BAPTIST CHURCH COMMUNITY CARE

This was taken over in 2023 by RBC as a separate Foodbank charity, with its own appointed manager, Rachel Chemnjor.

The demand for the foodbank service is ever increasing and is providing a strong witness in the community. It continues to operate out of RBC, Ascension Church and St Edwards Parish Church 3 times a week and a huge team of volunteers are involved in both running the sessions but also moving the food around from one unit to another week by week.

It is hope that RBCCC will springboard new initiatives in the years ahead.

OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

By the early 2010's, following the refurbishment of the buildings, external bookings were taken to allow groups to hire the rooms for their own activities on the understanding that any church group took priority over the available space. Income from such bookings enhanced the giving of the church community year on year and those attending on a regular basis included blood donors, a group of retired people who used to work for Marks and Spencer, the local council and many others. Following Covid and under the auspices of the Operation Manager's role, Steve worked hard to promote the rooms available and by 2024 regular bookings worked around existing church activities with some groups choosing to relocate to RBC due to the facilities and welcome they received.

YOUTH AT RBC

At the beginning of this story in 1984 the story of the Youth during the last 25+ years saw a variety of groups for young people meeting regularly. At the start of this history, as well as the Girls' Brigade (GB) and Boys' Brigade (BB), various groups met on a Sunday, no longer referred to as the Sunday School, but as the Junior Fellowship, and divided into smaller groups. The Carey and Knibb departments were for the very young. The Spurgeon department catered for the 7 – 11 year olds. There were boys' and girls' Bible classes attended by those from 11-14, and a group called Talkabout for those of 14+. Various weekday activities also operated.

Simon Chevill had been appointed Assistant Minister during 1983 with special responsibility for Youth work. For nearly four years, he undertook the oversight of the non-uniformed activities which took place on week nights. He also kept his finger on the pulse of other Youth work, as well as much else going on in the Church. Indeed, during Norman Wright's Presidential year he was kept extremely busy.

At the time of Simon's arrival the Youth work was at a low ebb, but by the Spring of 1984 things had settled down and the Youth work was showing signs of growth. At that time, a group of 11-14 year olds met on a Monday evening, and were known as the Monday Club. Apart from Simon, the other leaders then, were Barbara and Deryck Levick. During 1984 the club grew numerically and the range of activities widened. A Thursday evening club for 15+ had been meeting, but early in 1984 this was abandoned as attendance was low and those outgrowing the Monday Club were not moving across to meet on Thursday. So, in the Autumn, Monday night became Youth night, and the clubs for the two different age groups met one after the other, but the ages tended to overlap somewhat. Within both groups a mixture of secular and spiritual was maintained. By 1986, arising out of discussions amongst the youngsters, especially, though not only, from the older group, a Bible study and discussion group was held informally in different homes. By 1987, with Simon having left to go to Four Oaks, David East headed the team leading the older age group on Monday, whilst Barbara and Deryck continued to lead the junior group.

By 1990 the thinking had again changed, as well as the age ranges catered for. The clubs had been re-named Streetlight. The younger age range was 11-12 and that of the older group 13-15. Chris James headed a team of 15 leaders. A year later the two groups had reverted to catering for the original age groups, with Andy Poultney leading the younger group, as well as running a Bible Study for them on a Tuesday. By 1993 the older group had disbanded and Chris James had joined the leadership of the younger group which now catered mainly for the children of Church families and their friends. 1994 saw big changes in the Youth work. Firstly there was a change of leadership, with the departure of Andy, Chris and another leader, Kate, for various reasons. The new leaders were Dug and Debbie Benn. The whole format of the evening changed. At the beginning of the evening all ages met together for half an hour of social activity and a quiz with spiritual input. An hour and a half of Special interest groups consisting of Crafts, Sport and Drama followed and the evening concluded with time for notices, food and chat. Soon the two original leaders were joined by John and Glynis Brown, Ian Salisbury and Julie Delve.

In 1998 Patrick and Kathryn Croash became part of the Youth Ministry at the Church, and helped with these activities. By 1999 Patrick and Kathryn were beginning to make their

presence felt within the youth activities. The content of the meetings changed slowly and subtly. The spiritual content became deeper, as young Christians grew in their faith. Over the next few years, the youngsters were encouraged to join inter-church and inter-denominational activities as well as going away for holidays and long weekends together. It was in 1999 that it became necessary to think about implementing the new Government Child Protection Policy. It took two years of hard work to draw up a suitable policy and for it to be approved by the Church Meeting. Training of all leaders of all youth groups took place at the end of 2002 and into 2003. During this period there were changes amongst the younger leaders, but stability was maintained by the senior leaders until 2005 when Patrick and Kathryn moved on to Bishops Stortford. At the end of the same year Dug and Debbie Benn felt that they should retire after eleven years of leadership. Janet Loveard stepped into their shoes. Over the next few years she gathered round her some experienced leaders and activities continued to thrive and numbers increase.

Other groups for young people have started, run for some time and then closed, often having fulfilled their purpose. Basics started in the autumn of 1987 to give an opportunity for Bible Study and discussion but within two years they had disappeared from the records. In 1992 a similar group began that called itself Blackhead (the reason for which has been forgotten), but even one year on there was no record of it. When Patrick arrived he revived two activities. One was an after-evening service get-together which was called 'The Gap'. This persisted for several years. He also infused new life into the holiday clubs which had functioned for many years. Renaming the event 'Whizz Kids', he injected vibrancy into it, following it with bi-monthly parties, which kept the group together. By 2001 the younger Sunday school had been renamed Sunday Whizz Kids and some of those who had come to the premises for the parties began to attend. The name however was soon dropped.

After the Brigades closed in the summer of 2004, a new group was formed to cater for those youngsters with no weeknight activity. Crusaders met on Friday evenings and soon needed to break into three groups to cater for the different ages. In 2007 the name was changed to Urban Saints (not one of our decisions, but emanating from Crusade headquarters).

After Rev Jan Loveard, Hannah Griffiths and then Andy Stannard took over responsibility for running Youth events. Friday Night Youth Club for all, playing 5 a side football, video games with a tuck shop also experienced various ups and downs over the years but is flourishing once again under the leadership of Andy Stannard who himself grew up through its activities. It's great to see that many of them join the church youth for their away weekends each year.

Youth on Sunday

In 1984 the main classes for youngsters combined under the banner of The Junior Fellowship. The youngest group (2½ - 5 years) were designated the Carey department. The 5-7 years olds comprised the Knibb dept. The 8-11 years formed the Spurgeon dept. 11-15 year old went into the Boys and Girls Bible classes. There was a Senior Bible for those over 15 – later renamed Talkabout.

Early in 1984 there was talk of the Boys' and Girls' Bible classes merging. For some time the boys' class had seen their numbers falling. The girls' class was well attended. During the first

half of the year talks continued between the leaders of both classes regarding a merger, but by the summer talks stalled due to the need for a male leader. It was strongly felt that lack of male staff would make a merger unworkable, although still desirable. In October 1984 Les Waelend became leader of the boys' class. In March 1985 talks between Les Waelend and Cynthia Hogben (leader of the girls' class) recommenced and the classes finally merged on Promotion Sunday in September 1985. It took nearly 9 months for true integration to occur, but by June 1986 the leaders were able to report to the Youth Work Forum that they were now 'one class'.

In 1991 all these departments were renamed. The Carey dept became Arklight, The Knibb dept. became Foglight, and the Spurgeon dept. was henceforth known as Searchlight. Whilst the senior Bible Class was renamed Talkabout, the Bible Class was not renamed at that stage although later it became Pathlight. Talkabout had disappeared from the records by 1994. In 1997 a class for 15+ had re-formed as Streetlight Too, ie the Sunday extension of Streetlight. It was during Hannah's time that the Sunday groups were renamed as Kingdom Kids, all with their own title to denote their age group, ranging from Kingdom Kids tots to Kingdom Kids Youth and they have healthy numbers of respective Kingdom Kids for all ages.

Sadly, one consequence of COVID has been a reduction of volunteers across all sections of church life including that of serving in the Sunday School. One way this was managed was to reduce the times the Sunday groups met each month, dropping to the second, fourth and fifth weeks each month. This resulted in a new activity running for Primary School ages on the first Sunday called Creative Church and all age services taking place on the third Sunday each month.

The Uniformed Organisations

In 1984 the Boys' Brigade was a really strong company, with over 100 boys attending their meetings. During late 1985 the Company lost their Captain, Michael Bastable, due to pressure of work. The Company managed to keep going for almost a year as the junior officers worked extra hard, before Brian Loveard was appointed Captain in the autumn of 1986. He held the company together until he had to give up in the summer of 1990. For the next two years, the other officers carried the BB through poor times into good ones. One of the officers who bore the brunt of the responsibility during this time was Jonathan Wright. During 1992 Tony Ketley was appointed Captain. At almost the same time Jonathan and his family moved to Frinton, so, in his own words, Tony was thrown in at the deep end. It was during that two-year period that the Anchor boys, the most junior section, went from three lads to three dozen under the leadership of Peter Ronald, helped by Church members and two older lads from the Company section.

During 1992 all sections of the BB were heavily involved in Battalion events, winning several of the competitions. For the next three or four years, the company continued much as before, but, especially in the more junior sections, increasing emphasis was placed on the Spiritual aspect of the meetings. Numbers fluctuated wildly in all sections, but by 1996 the problem was not amongst the boys, but due to lack of staff, and a plea went out to the Church for helpers. In 1997 the junior and company sections met together due to low numbers both of

boys and staff. During 1999 Brian Loveard once again took over the Captaincy and 2000 saw steady progress in all sections with numbers increasing and this continued into 2001 and 2002. Sadly with all its problems, particularly with staffing, the BB finally closed during 2003.

The GB (Girls' Brigade) started the period covered by this book with much encouragement, as several of their members were baptised during 1984. One officer left during the year, but two others moved into the area and their commissions were transferred to the 3rd. Romford company. Over the next two or three years the company continued to run smoothly under Iris Hooper's Captaincy. Officers changed but adequate staff numbers were maintained. The number of girls attending began to be influenced by homework commitments, and although the Explorer section increased in number, the older sections declined. Various outings and camps figure largely in reports from the GB – accompanied every time by accounts of food consumed. However the Spiritual side of the work was never forgotten. In 1989 a contingent attended Billy Graham's LIFE Crusade at the West Ham stadium.

Early in 1991 the 2nd Romford GB company, captained by Joyce Pack from RBC came to meet on RBC premises as their previous venue, Mawneys Baptist Church had closed. At first they met as a completely independent company, just using our hall, but by the end of the year the two companies were combining for some functions, mainly social. During May 1992 the 3rd Romford company celebrated their Golden Anniversary. Saturday, May 9th/Sunday, May 10th was a real Reunion Weekend and many 'Old Girls' returned to Romford for the occasion. At the Display on the Saturday many celebratory activities took place, including a résumé (by the Senior Section) of all the changes that had taken place in the world during the years the company had been running. The evening was devoted to the reunion, and included entertainment, greetings, devotional time and the inevitable meal as well as plenty of time for chatting. During June the Company planted golden rose bushes at Parkside and Heathside.

1993 was the Centenary of the Girls' Brigade movement, and so our Company was again involved in celebrations. By the end of the year numbers were considerably reduced, especially in the junior sections which had previously been healthy. A programme to recruit new members was initiated.

In 1994 the 2nd. Romford and 3rd. Romford companies merged, under the captaincy of Iris Hooper, becoming the 4th. Romford Company. The whole Company continued meeting regularly for the next few years, continuing with similar activities, but with fluctuating numbers, both of girls and leaders, so that by the end of 1998 leadership was becoming a major problem with Iris Hooper's impending retirement in the middle of 1999. In the Autumn her place was filled by Victoria Curtis, when some new girls joined the company.

During 2000 the leaders were encouraged to see an increase in numbers again but, as time went on, it became harder to keep running and there are no uniform groups that meet now.

The Very Little Ones

The only real work with the very young in 1984 was the Playgroup. By 1984 it was well established, meeting on four mornings a week, and catering for thirty children on each occasion, with a waiting list. Not all the children attended on each meeting, so at least 50%

more children were in contact with the church, as well as their parents. By 1985 thirty two children attended each session with fifty two coming altogether. The activities were varied. Cooperation with the library saw the children being taken there to hear the librarian telling stories, and then they were able to look and find books for themselves. Sometimes the librarian came to the Playgroup and told stories there. Opportunities were given for older schoolchildren who were considering working with children to gain experience with young children.

1991 was a difficult year as the Authorities reduced the permitted number of children in a Playgroup as well as putting increasing requirements for proper qualification.

The librarian no longer came in for storytime, and soon a rota of Church folk willing to come and tell stories was established. The group continued flourishing until its 25th year, in 1996. At that time St. Edward's school opened a nursery class and some sessions had vacancies. By 2000 the group had closed.

In the very early 1990s Sarah Wright saw the need for a group to which mothers could bring their very young children, meet other young mums, share their problems, and know the children were being cared for, as well as learning to socialise. From this the Parent and Toddler group was born. At first they only met once a week. Within the first year there was a long waiting list, one family being added each week, and the need for another group became obvious. In 1992 a second group was started and soon had a long waiting list. After Easter 1993 a third Parent and Toddler group was established. The three groups continued to be well attended and in 1993 families were introduced to the Church with a monthly Pram service in the Church. Gradually over the next year or so some began to come to Church on Sunday too. By 1999 several had accepted Christ as their Saviour and been baptised. A daytime Small group with a crèche had been established. For many years an outreach lunch had been held. By 2002, the number of parents identifying themselves with the Church had grown considerably and many in the Fellowship saw the Parent and Toddler groups as the major outreach group in the Church.

During his time as Youth Minister Patrick Croash gave a lot of his time to Parent and Toddlers and it was his teaching in little groups that consolidated the faith of many of these young Christians. In 2004 Petrina Edwards took over as the leader of Parents and Toddlers. She made a point of really getting to know the Mums. With additional time slots added the work was expanded and about 200 children were attending each week meeting Monday afternoon headed up by Julie Kelly or Wednesday morning led by Petrina. More of the families began to come regularly on a Sunday and there remained a waiting list to attend the Toddler sessions.

Sadly, with the closure as a result of Covid and circumstances changing for many by the time activities were able to be opened once again, the Monday afternoon session remained permanently closed and, to start with, the numbers able to start again on a Wednesday due to ongoing Covid restrictions saw numbers remaining low. Thankfully, by the time of publication, the Wednesday group is thriving once again with Petrina continuing in charge.

AS WE WERE AT OUR 90th ANNIVERSARY

Such a lot seems to have happened over these years. A visitor to the Church in 1984 would have seen, as they would have expected, an almost entirely white, middle class congregation. By 2009 the congregation was decidedly multi-racial, and two black deacons had joined the leadership team. The age-profile of the church had also come down by 15 years by the time of the arrival of Ian Bell! Membership generally has increased, as have the number of families attending services although, due to the transient nature of those moving in and out of the borough, numbers do rise and fall and those attending each week does change over time. The membership register is now far more realistic, reflecting regular attendees and those who are active in the church, and attending frequently.

By 2009 we owned three manses for the personnel. History had been made with the appointment of women ministers. Giving has increased, as has our missionary giving, both at home and abroad. We have had two missionaries in training, Debbie and Dug. Benn, who departed for service overseas in Uganda and then China, as well as Andy Stannard who was seeking guidance regarding service overseas and Jane and Neil McDonald who served in Asia.

The form of worship has also changed over time and this always is a cause of a variety of views. However the new format does seem to attract others into the Church, which is desirable. Worshippers from 1984 would not be totally surprised, as the changes had started around that time, but what they might find different is the generally positive atmosphere in the church. It has taken time, but all the external changes seem to have drawn people together.

During the week many groups meet. Some, such as the Tuesday Fellowship which were meeting twenty-five years ago, are no longer running but others, such as the Needlework Club which was formed since the commencement of this history are still thriving. Wednesday evening meetings, although still meeting, would not bear very much resemblance to the formal, service type of meeting which was existent then. Many of the small groups meet in homes, a couple during the day and a couple still continue at the Church.

In 2009, we had recently joined the 21st century by joining the internet. The church then had its own Website, which has been developed considerably over the last few years and is now managed by Bernd Schulte. There is information introducing the Church itself, and all the programme of regular activities. The site makes viewers acquainted with the team of Ministers. There are pages directed at youth, students and special interests, and those who are in charge of the organisation of the various activities are listed. There are notices of forthcoming events, as well as those drawing attention to other interests within church life such as Parkside, the Meeting Place and the several links we maintain with other organisations such as the BMS, BU, Evangelical Alliance, the Alpha course, etc. There is a section, where church members, only, can log in to access the Church Directory, and also a site where frequently asked prayer requests can be held. It is also through the website that people can access the Sunday services that are streamed online and which proved such a lifeline to so many during Covid with people watching each week from all over the world and this still continues today.

As we celebrate 90 years the Church has had changed into a more integrated and diversity group of Christians and Seekers, represented by peoples from most of the countries in the world. This is demonstrated by the various Countries flags in the Church and there are strong representations of worshippers from African and Asian Countries.

However, anyone coming into a service in 2024 will find the worship just as sincere, the Biblical teaching as faithful, and the singing even more enthusiastic as it has been throughout the history of the church.

As we approach RBC's centenary celebrations, we look forward to what God can do to bless our Romford community, as confirmed in Ephesians 3 verses 20 to 21 of the church text for 2024 as we look towards our 100-year anniversary:

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more that all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory”.