



I started attending Paddock Road Free Church (latterly known as Oxhey Village Baptist) in the early 1950's. I must have been around 12 years old and lived in Oxhey Hall at that time but was introduced to the Church Youth Club and Sunday School by some friends.

The Sunday School, held on Sunday afternoons, was always well attended. I suspect that many children were sent by their parents to get them out of the way on a Sunday afternoon - no TV then! It was led by the Superintendent, Mr Claude Ibbott, who was later to become my father-in-law. The chairs were arranged in groups for classes with a couple of rows of small chairs in front for the toddlers who would be led out to the Memorial Hall at the back after the first hymn was sung. There they would have bible stories and draw and colour pictures etc.

The remainder of the school sang hymns, also choruses which were painstakingly printed by single letter rubber stamps onto a sheet to be hung on a blackboard on the platform for us all to see - nowadays we have computer operated projectors! The chorus sheets were rolled up and stored in the vestry cupboard and you can imagine that over time they became rather curled and yellowed with age! But we sang those choruses heartily and all had our own favourites. We would have a talk followed by our individual class lessons, then join together for one final hymn at the end. Of course there was misbehaviour, especially by the oldest boys' class which was led by Mrs Nellie Raspin. She adored her boys and they loved her but they did play up sometimes, while we girls in Miss Kathleen Brown's class would giggle helplessly.

The members of those two classes came to be called "The Young People" by the church and every third Sunday in the month we attended what was called the Young People's Evening Service and it was for the teenagers in the Sunday School, to sort of wean us on to the adult worship and fellowship. At first Nellie Raspin and Kathleen Brown invited us to their homes for tea, but later when the Services grew more popular we were all invited to a most delicious tea which was served up in the Memorial Hall at the back of the church, after which we would all troop in to the church and sit in various groups according to our friends, then certain preachers who were thought to appeal were invited to speak especially to the Young People. We had our favourites among these preachers, Ernest Williams for one, Jack Fudge, L C Johnson, and Claude Ibbott our own Church Superintendent. Sometimes the Young People themselves would take part in leading the service.

After the service, if it was summer, we would go for an evening walk over the 3 fields or 5 fields via Attenboroughs and Merry Hill Road. In winter we would congregate for a spot of hymn singing in Etty and Harold Ibbott's home in Sherwoods Road, or discuss the sermon, or listen to records at the Superintendent's home. I don't think teenagers today would be amused by such simple pastimes and yet I travelled from Oxhey Hall to attend, and I would gladly walk through fog and snow so as not to miss those Sunday evenings.

Another thing I wouldn't miss was the Friday Night Discussion Group, which was held in the vestry and was initiated by Ralph Ibbott, Harold and Etty's son. He was an excellent leader who taught us so much and we all looked up to him. We were so sad when he left to go to Southern Rhodesia, as it was then, but were proud to call him our mentor. He guided our thoughts over a whole range of subjects and we learned to have the confidence to voice our opinions and to argue the case, and we also learned to take part in some public speaking for which I have always been grateful.

As self-centred teenagers we learned

through the discussion group that there were others in the world who had far greater problems than ours, that our own problems could be shared, and that there was a loving community surrounding us that really cared.

With hindsight life was very simple then, although of course we had the usual teenage angst and my early diaries record that our problems were much the same as the ones they face today, although the temptations were not all the same. Because our social life was centred round the church and its activities we were not tempted by the things that a lot of teenagers faced then and increasingly today i.e. drink, drugs and all the behavioural problems that come with that package. After Discussion Group we would congregate at the Fish & Chip shop in Villiers Road (the Mezza Pizza now). It was run by the Linley brothers and we would often carry on our discussions there and put the world to rights.

There was a large group of teenagers in the Church at this time, and as we got older there were the usual problems of relationships, who was going out with whom, who had broken up, etc. and Claude Ibbott used to say that he always viewed our entry into Evening Service with some amusement, it was rather like the Ark, two by two, only he never knew from month to month how the twos would be made up! Yes, it was definitely mix and match and yet the amazing thing was that many of us found our partners within the Church.

On a summer evening the Church would be particularly lovely with the sun streaming in through the tinted windows and making patterns on the wall and the scent of the fresh flowers lovingly arranged by the ladies in the Church. We had our favourite hymns and would sing our hearts out, and one gentleman who was deaf but had a very loud voice would be a bar or two behind everyone else. Joe Clewlow with his lovely tenor voice would do his best to keep the congregation on track but it was often a losing battle. I can remember everyone by recalling where they used to sit - always in the same places, the men in their Sunday suits and the ladies in their best hats.