

In winter I recall the early days of the coke fires, when certain mature ladies in the Church had their seats "reserved" close by and woe betide anyone else who sat there! Later the coke fires were replaced with electric heaters. The church organ had bellows that had to be hand pumped; Bernard Cooper and my future husband Don took their turn at that. Later on they were to play the organ for the evening service themselves but by that time it was electrically pumped. Once the church had to be fumigated because we had been given a piano infested with woodworm. An expensive gift!

There were other activities in the Young People's calendar. The Youth Club which I mentioned earlier was run by Joe and Florrie Clewlow on a weekday evening. We had beetle drives and other sorts of indoor games in winter, and Joe and Florrie worked very hard to think up new games for us to play; in summer we went outdoors, weather permitting, for crocker (a version of baseball), cricket, walks and wide games.

The Sunday School Outings: young and old alike congregated outside the Church once a year on a Saturday in July, enough to fill 3 or 4 coaches, and off we went for the day to Clacton, Southend, Littlehampton or Hayling Island. What fun they were and a rare treat in those days for the many families who did not own a car. Those who could not afford the fare were subsidised by Church Funds.

At Easter, Whitsun and August Bank holidays we would set off armed with drinks and sandwiches (and a waterproof!) to Ivinghoe Beacon, Bricket Wood, Chipperfield, Commonwood, or Sarratt for the Discussion Group Bank Holiday Hike. Being Bank Holiday, of course, more often than not it rained and we would come home tired and often soaked to the skin, but we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves.

Sunday School Entertainments and Prizgivings were held at Easter. For regular attendance at Sunday School



Discussion Group Hike
14th May 1951.

Back Row L to R: Bernard Cooper, Don Ibbott, John Rawlings, Diane Pomfret, Jill Ibbott.

Front Row: Bernard Cooper, Joan Barker, Etta Kelly, Doreen Hatton, Ralph Ibbott, Valerie Harper, Moya Harper, Margaret Bass.

we collected stamps with religious pictures which we stuck into a book and, at the end of the church year, we would be awarded a book prize if we had filled the stamp books to the required amount. We would have the usual famous Paddock Road Tea in the Memorial Hall and then each class would put on sketches and individual items, which they had prepared for the entertainment of members, family and friends. I remember one very small girl shyly reciting a poem in a whisper, and when her mother called out to her to speak up, Susan suddenly shouted in such a loud voice we nearly fell off our chairs. One year we had our own skiffle group to entertain us. I vividly recall one year when I was in charge of organising the whole entertainment and got the scene shifters to set the stage of the next item only to find it was a ballet dance which needed a clear stage! I

had to do some impromptu chatting to the audience in front of the curtain while they took everything off the stage again. Horror!

Then there was the annual Church Social to which members and young people were invited. A committee would be formed to organise the many team and party games, in which everyone participated with great enthusiasm, and the prizes treasured. And, of course, there were the usual "refreshments". The ladies of the church were kept very busy with all these social functions! And they did us proud with sandwiches and plenty of delicious homemade cakes.

As we young people grew older and went off to university or followed a career in another town, got married and generally scattered far and wide, many a life in Christian service was inspired by those happy days spent at Paddock Road. Names come to mind: Ralph Ibbott as I mentioned earlier, went to serve as a agricultural missionary in Africa, Moya Harper also went to Africa to serve as a nurse, John Evans became a Youth Leader in the Inner London Fellowship, Michael and Julie Chapman who, after spending some time at Croxley Green Baptist, served as Pastor and wife in Wales, Bernard Cooper, who married Margaret Bass, went to teach in Wiltshire and also served as a Lay Preacher, others also served in various ways in churches where they lived. And we must not forget those who stayed and served the church here under sometimes very difficult conditions, with very few resources.

It is sad to see the Church for sale now; it struggled on for many years but finally had to close in October 2003. But how much is owed to the good people of Paddock Road Free Church who lavished Christian care and concern on its young people cannot be measured. We owe a special debt to Oxhey Village Baptist Church.