

Recollections of Bethany by Peter McCullagh.

It would be towards the end of 1946 that I joined the Bethany Sunday school and my brother William and I walked from home at the top of Staplers Road each Sunday afternoon, I well remember Kate Woodford, who taught me, and Herbert Croucher, who used to beat time during hymns on the rail at the front of the pulpit and people said it would one day give way! Another person I recall was Norman Thompson, who to me was a towering man and he used to wink whenever he looked at me. The hymn book was Golden Bells or Golden Hymnal, a very good book.

A memorable day was the Sunday school outing to Sandown, I believe in 1948. The teachers and children met at Newport railway station, and the train passed almost over the old Bethany Hall on the way. I remember Kate Woodford's words of reassurance that the points would be set correctly. The Signaller would see to that. We had a model railway at home and a derailment would often occur through the points being wrong.

Attached is a copy of a photograph on the beach at Sandown possibly taken by Maisie Mundell. Kate (our Sunday school teacher) is on her hands and knees and those on her back from the left are believed to be June Burt, William and Peter McCullagh and Derek Morris, son of Cyril and Winnie.

All things must come to an end and in April 1949 the family moved to Freshwater. However, we kept in touch and I well remember a garden party at the home of Mrs and Miss Thorne in the Staplers road area. This would be about 1953. A further association with the assembly came in 1968 when Dick Saunders spoke at the Queen's Hall (behind Harvey's) at 8:00 p.m. on a Sunday and a contingent arrived late from Colwell Baptist Church. There were also several meetings at Bethany Hall as part of the Dick Saunders campaign.

In 1972 Don Summers led a campaign at the seafront Pavilion at Ryde and his song leader, Joe Fudge, was looking to get a choir together. Margaret Dawson, who had just taken over the Bethany Ladies Choir from Miss Thorne, was opening it to men and asked me to join in. This led to my joining the Bethany Gospel singers, as the choir later became known, I was a member for some 20 years. Margaret was keen on the London Emmanuel choir and she arranged trips to the Royal Albert Hall every three years to sing with that choir and a number of other evangelical choirs.

It was about 1972 when a move from Coppins Bridge was mooted and a house with a large front garden in Union Street was acquired, a building to be constructed on the front garden. A motley crew assembled first on Tuesday evenings and later on Saturday mornings to build a new Hall themselves. I started to lend a hand when the footings had been laid and the walls were one foot in height. The team would meet for elevenses in the house (the Homestead) and Elsie Lines and Pat Harris (then Groves) would bring us a large cake.

In 1973 Dr Frederick Tatford was invited to speak at Bethany hall and he admitted that he had changed his message at the last minute as the Yom Kippur war had broken out. There was fervent interest in his talk about the nearness of our Lord's return in view of the events in the Middle East.

Another notable speaker during that era was the Reverend Ralph Ashmore, the author of Bible News Review, who spoke at length one Sunday evening. It was at the end of a hot summer's day and the double doors of the old hall were open and the noise of the traffic on the roundabout made it very difficult to hear his message. Clearly traffic had increased dramatically since the opening of the premises I believe in 1930.