

R & J Budenberg
13 Melrose Crescent
Hale, Altrincham
Cheshire, WA15 8NN
Tel: 0161 980 6142



THE GROWTH OF A CHURCH



*Hale United
Reformed Church
1899 - 1999*



THE GROWTH OF A CHURCH

*Being a record of 100 years of work
and witness of*

HALE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
Formerly
ASHLEY ROAD CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH

Page 1

(Reprinted from The Golden Jubilee)

(First published in 1949)

by

Rev. T.J. LANDER, M.A., B.D.

and

JOHN A. SUGDEN, B.A.

THE CONTINUING WITNESS

Page 26

by

RUTH I. ABBOTT, M.A.

THE CHURCH IN 1999

Page 60

by

Representatives of the Church Organisations

(edited by Ruth I. Abbott)

Word processed by Roger E. Budenberg



1899 - 1999

First published in 1999 by
The Centenary Committee
Hale United Reformed Church
Cecil Road
Hale
Cheshire

Printed by Deanprint Ltd.
Stockport Road, Cheadle Heath, Stockport, Cheshire.

Copyright reserved. No part of this publication can be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the publishers.

FOREWORD

The past hundred years have been a time of rapid change. It is said that the world has witnessed more change in this century than in the previous twenty centuries. The history of the United Reformed Church in Hale spans that period almost exactly. The fact that the church is still here, still large and flourishing, is a sign that it has been able to live with and address itself to the changes that have been taking place in the world around, adapt itself to them and remain able to offer throughout this period relevant and effective witness to the unchanging Christ.

It has been my privilege to become involved in the life of this church at a number of stages during the past twenty years. In the late seventies, while I was Christian Education Secretary for the United Reformed Church, I led a training consultation for Children's Workers and preached at a Sunday morning service. In 1989, when I was Moderator of General Assembly, I preached at the 90th Anniversary and enjoyed a celebratory meal. In 1992 I led a Church Weekend at Nantwich and subsequently was instrumental in the Call and Induction of the Revd David Batchelor. I was involved in the "Hale Awake" enterprise and also in the more recent Festival of Talents. Each contact has shown me the strength of the church and convinced me of its adaptability and readiness to move forward in mission. Hale United Reformed Church is a very fine example of all that is good in the Reformed Tradition.

These pages carefully and interestingly record the church's unfinished story. I am pleased that they also look forward into the next century. May the Spirit who has carried the church into many a new and challenging opportunity during the last hundred years continue to do so as the future unfolds. A verse of T.H. Gill's hymn comes to mind:

"Spirit who makest all things new,
Thou leadeth onward, we pursue
The heavenly march sublime.
'Neath Thy renewing fire we glow,
And still from strength to strength we go.
From height to height we climb."

God go with you!

C. KEITH FORECAST

Moderator, North Western Synod, United Reformed Church.

THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH 1899 - 1949

THE Ashley Road Congregational Church (as it was first called) was the outcome of a movement by certain members of the Bowdon Downs Congregational Church, to whom it had for some time been apparent that the rapid growth of population in the Hale District urgently demanded that provision should be made for Congregational worship.

The first practical steps were taken at a meeting held at the house of Mr. J. Herbert Harrison, Warwick Road, Hale, on May 31st, 1897, at which the following gentlemen were present: Mr. J. C. Needham, Mr. J. H. Harrison, Mr. J. H. Boydell, Mr. W. Dean, Mr. G. Daniels, Mr. D. Humphreys, Mr. H. R. Boydell, Mr. Vickery, Mr. Sydney O'Hanlon, Mr. R. D. Maclaren and Mr. A. Coward. A resolution was passed affirming the desirability of securing a plot of land immediately, with a view to erecting a Congregational School Church; and appointing all the above-named gentlemen, with the exception of Messrs. Maclaren and Coward, a committee to carry out the resolution.

This committee was subsequently strengthened by additions from the Downs Church, and Dr. Mackennal (then minister of Bowdon Downs) was elected chairman; Mr. Herbert Harrison, vice-chairman; Mr. J. H. Boydell, treasurer; and Mr. Sydney O'Hanlon, secretary.

An eligible plot of land was secured on the main Ashley Road, containing 4220 square yards, giving ample room for the School Church and a main building in front. The Foundation Stone of the School Church was laid on May 21st, 1898 by Dr. Mackennal, and there were present on the occasion, besides members of the committee, Dr. Goodrich (minister of Chorlton Road), Rev. Samuel Pearson, M.A., Mr. Abraham Howarth, and many others.

The School Church was built by Messrs. William Lambert & Son, from the designs and under the superintendence of the architects, Messrs. William Waddington & Son. The total cost of the School Church, including furnishing, heating, lighting and laying-out of the grounds, amounted to £3,868 16s. 11d., and purchase of chief rent down to £5 per annum £641 5s. 0d., a total of £4,510 1s. 11d., against which at the time of opening £3,593 18s. 7d. had been promised, including £500 from the Lancashire and Cheshire Congregational Chapel Building Society.

The School Church was opened for public worship on May 4th, 1899, when a Service of Dedication was held, presided over by Dr. Mackennal, and in the evening a sermon was preached by Rev. Arnold Thomas, M.A., Chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales.

On Thursday evening June 1st, twenty-eight persons, most of them having been members of Bowdon Downs Church, constituted themselves a Congregational Church, and gave each other the right hand of fellowship in token thereof. Several neighbouring Congregational ministers then gave these members the right hand of fellowship in token of their recognition as a sister church. The members then all partook of the Communion.

The first business meeting of the Church was held on June 7th, 1899, when the following members were elected a committee of management: Messrs. James Boyd, Jesse Boydell, G. Daniels, W. Dean, H. Warburton, J. H. Boydell, J. L. Tattersall, J.H. Harrison.

Mr. J.H. Boydell was elected treasurer, Mr. J. Herbert Harrison, secretary, and Mr. J. L. Tattersall, assistant secretary.

CALL TO THE FIRST MINISTER

Rev. A. T. S. James, B.A., B.Sc., of Huddersfield, preached here for the first time on July 16th, 1899, and again on September 27th. On October 10th, a special Church meeting was held, notice of the same having been given on the two previous Sundays, at which meeting it was unanimously resolved that a cordial invitation be given to Mr. James to become pastor of the Church. The invitation read as follows:-

“We, the undersigned, members of the Ashley Road Congregational Church, Hale, Cheshire, after much thought and earnest prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, at a Special Meeting, called according to the Trust Deed, by public notice from the pulpit on the two previous Sundays, and held on Tuesday, October the 10th, 1899, have passed the following resolution—‘That this Church cordially invites, by unanimous vote, the Rev. Alfred T. S. James, B.A., B.Sc., to become its pastor at a salary of £200 for the first year and £250 for the second year.’ We trust that the Holy Spirit may guide Mr. James to a favourable answer to our invitation, and pledge ourselves to help him in the work of extending Christ’s Kingdom in our midst.”

It was signed by every member of the Church except two, who were absent from home but had signified their assent, and it was also signed by forty members of the congregation. The signatures included those of James Boyd, Sarah Ellen Boyd, Elsie Boyd, E. Mabel Boyd, Constance W. Boyd, Edith Mary Boyd, Jesse Boydell, Mary Boydell, J. Howarth Boydell, Emily Boydell, Annie Blamey, Geo. Daniels, Kate Daniels, William Dean, Mary Jane Dean, J. Herbert Harrison, Alice Harrison, Ellen P. Harrison, Joseph Hayes Smith, Ellen Nowell, Charlotte C. Taylor, Lizzie Tattersall, J. L. Tattersall, Alfred Knight, E. J. Whitaker, Harry F. Thompson, Amy Thompson, Mary Nelson, Sarah Knight, Sarah Killer, Alice Smith, Herbert W. Warburton, Bessie Warburton and J.F. Tattersall (the original members); and, among the signatures of the congregation, were those of Mr. J. Gordon Boyd, A. F. Harrison, H. M. Boydell, Frank Arnold, Sarah A. Arnold, E. A. Arnold.

On October 28th, 1899, Mr. James’s acceptance of the call was received by the Church and he commenced his ministry on the first Sunday in 1900. His Recognition Service was held on January 19th, when Dr. Forsyth, Dr. Bruce, Dr. Mackennal, the Rev. Samuel Pearson, Rev. A. James (Leicester) and a number of other ministerial and lay friends were present.

THE MINISTRY OF THE REV. A. T. S. JAMES, B.A., B.Sc.

In March 1900, soon after Mr. James became the first pastor, the committee which had conducted the affairs of the Church from the opening in June 1899 came to an end and it became necessary to appoint the first Deacons to carry on the work of the Church. The election of deacons is always a delicate business and the Church was greatly indebted to Mr. James for the help and guidance he was able to give in a special sermon which he preached at the time, indicating the principles which should guide Church members in the selection of deacons. As a result of the election six deacons were appointed—Mr. Alfred L. Arnold, Mr. James Boyd, Mr. Jesse Boydell, Mr. J. Herbert Harrison, Mr. J. L. Tattersall and Mr. H. F. Thompson.

Several new societies were started during this first year of the pastorate—the Dorcas Society; a Cycling Club; a Sunday afternoon Bible Class; and a Week-evening Bible Class, conducted by Mr. James. A Literary Society had been formed in November 1899 and received the

generous and increasing support of the congregation. Also formed in 1899 was a Ladies' Missionary Working Party which met on alternate Thursday afternoons to prepare work for the Annual Sale on behalf of the London Missionary Society.

The number of Church members increased during the first year of Mr. James's pastorate from 40 to 75. In the concluding months of the year, the energies of the Church were largely devoted to clearing off the debt of £914 which still remained on the building and, when this was successfully accomplished, the Church, freed from the burden of debt, was able to devote itself more fully to the work of extension.

PEPPER STREET, MOBBERLEY

In March 1901, at the request of the Bowdon Downs Church, the Church undertook the management of the Pepper Street Mission at Mobberley, for which hitherto the Downs Church had taken the financial responsibility. Messrs. Thompson and Tattersall were appointed as superintendents of the Mobberley Sunday School and, together with other of the Ashley Road members, gave valued assistance.

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

For the first year or two in the life of our Church, work among the children took the form of a special Children's Service held in the Church every Sunday afternoon from 3 to 4, with Mr. James Boyd as Superintendent. From the beginning two special services became annual events - the Flower Service in July (the flowers from which were afterwards distributed among the poor of Salford and Ancoats) - and the Toy Service in December, to which the scholars brought gifts of toys, which were sent to the crippled children at the Bethesda Home and to various Children's Hospitals. The latter annual event has been maintained right up to the present day. The Flower Service later became known as the "Children's Sunday" and was the forerunner of our present annual "Sunday School Anniversary".

On the first Sunday of the year 1903 this Sunday Children's Service gave place to the Sunday School, the first Superintendent being Mr. H. F. Thompson, with Mr. Alfred Arnold as secretary, Mr. Brookfield, organist and the following teachers: Miss Robertson, the Misses Boyd, Miss France, Miss Read, Miss Jessie Ostler and Miss Daniels.

Mention must also be made of the Young People's Union, which was a development of the Minister's Bible Class and was open to young people above sixteen years of age.

In addition to this, a Sunday afternoon Bible Class for Young People met weekly under the leadership of Mr. H. F. Thompson.

After a ministry of nearly four years, during which time he gave ample evidence of his teaching and preaching gifts and brought to the Church that spiritual leadership which it needed during this time of growth and development, the Rev. A. T. S. James resigned the pastorate in August 1903.

THE MINISTRY OF THE REV. THOMAS WILKINSON

After a short interregnum, it was decided in February, 1904 to invite Rev. Thomas Wilkinson of Taunton, who had preached twice at the Church, to become the new pastor. The invitation was accepted and Mr. Wilkinson began his ministry on Sunday June 5th - a ministry which was to last until January 31st 1908. At the Induction Services held on Thursday evening June 9th, the following ministers were present in addition to many ministers of local churches of all denominations-Rev. John Holden, M.A. (Bowdon Downs) in the chair; Rev. A. Goodrich, D.D. (Chairman of Congregational Union of England and Wales), Rev. W. F. Adeney, M.A., D.D. (Principal of Lancashire Independent College), Rev. Samuel Pearson (Broughton Park). The late Rev. Dr. Mackennel had promised to preside but, through serious illness from which he never recovered, was prevented from doing so.

This ministry, though short, was notable for the steady increase, year by year, during its period, of the membership of the Church and Congregation and also of the Sunday School. Mr. Wilkinson was soon regarded not only as a respected pastor and leader but as a personal friend of every adherent of the Church and his faithfulness in pastoral visitation and realisation of the largeness of opportunity and also of the great spiritual need that existed in Hale for such a Church as Ashley Road were among the outstanding characteristics of his pastorate.

CHILDREN'S WORK

A Band of Hope had been started during the last year of Mr. James's pastorate and this continued to thrive and increase in numbers attending fortnightly during the new ministry. With the minister as president;

Messrs. Alfred Arnold, J. H. Morgan, H. F. Thompson as superintendents; and Mr. J. L. Tattersall, secretary, it attracted to its meetings not only members of the Sunday School but also a considerable number of other children from the neighbourhood. The meetings were bright and interesting, consisting alternately of a Lantern Lecture and an evening of Songs, Piano Selections and Recitations given by the children themselves. An Annual Picnic was held in the summer. It is recorded in the Manual for 1906 that since the previous October 36 boys and girls had signed the pledge and that there were on the Register 109 girls and 136 boys.

The numbers in the Sunday School had so increased that the senior girls and the infant classes had quite outgrown their room accommodation and it was realised that one of the questions which must soon be faced was the provision of extra class-rooms and teachers. The generous support of the Children's Hospital Cots fund continued and the Toy Service and Missionary Sale of Work held annually provided further opportunities for service.

MEN'S BIBLE CLASS

In February 1905 a Men's Bible Class was formed and made steady progress under the guidance of the leader, Mr. H. F. Thompson. Several of the members later joined the Church. Meetings for study of the Bible and discussion were held every Sunday at 2-30 in the Church lecture room and at the close of the year 1906 the number of enrolled members was 26. Regular Social evenings for members and their friends were held on week-nights in addition to the Sunday gatherings.

MOTHERS' MEETING

It was during Mr. Wilkinson's pastorate, too, that the ladies of the Church decided to start a Mothers' Meeting, which met regularly on Monday afternoons from February 1906 onwards. This was the forerunner of our present Women's Social Hour, and Mrs. James Boyd was most zealous in the starting of it. A Clothing Club was started as one branch of the activities of this meeting and sewing was done at many of the meetings as well as addresses being given on various subjects and it was soon felt that the influence for Jesus Christ was being more felt in the homes of the mothers attending through this weekly devotional gathering.

THE MOBBERLEY MISSION

The work at Pepper Street, Mobberley, continued to progress under the oversight of a special Mobberley Committee, consisting of a number of deacons and members of the Hale Church, including the minister, together with some of the Bowdon Downs members and Mr. William Dawson, of Lindow Common, near Wilmslow, who, for eight and a half years, from 1900 to October 1908 acted as Voluntary Missioner and Pastor. During this period, the congregations at Mobberley (especially at the evening services) and also the attendance of children at both the morning service and at Sunday School in the afternoon showed a marked increase. Particularly gratifying was the manifest interest taken in the services by young people, especially by the young men of the district, who were always in the majority. A special weekly meeting for young men was held and later on a Young Men's Club was started, which met on the Chapel premises every evening of the week, excepting Saturdays. The Pepper Street premises were entirely redecorated and some necessary alterations, especially to the heating arrangements, were carried out in 1905 and financial contributions towards this were made both by members of our own Church and also by members of Bowdon Downs.

LADIES' MISSIONARY WORKING PARTY

The Ladies' Missionary Working Party, formed some years before, continued to meet regularly, under the presidency of the minister's wife, for sewing and preparing articles for the Annual Sale of Work. Much good work was also done at home by the members.

RESIGNATION OF MR. WILKINSON

It was with great regret that the members of the Church and congregation heard Mr. Wilkinson announce his resignation from the pulpit on the last Sunday in December, 1907, after an active and well-loved ministry of three and a half years. An illuminated address with the names of the deacons and 87 other contributors appended, together with a cheque for £187 was presented to Mr. and Mrs. Wilkinson on Thursday evening February 20th as a token of the affection and esteem in which they were held by the Church. Mr. Wilkinson, while pastor, had done all in his power to extend the work of Home and Foreign Missions in our Church and had taken every opportunity possible to enlist the sympathy of the whole congregation in this work.

THE MINISTRY OF THE REV. C. H. HEDGMAN, M.A., B.D.

The Rev. C. H. Hedgman of Sevenoaks, Kent preached at the Church for the first time on Sunday March 29th, 1908 and created a most favourable impression among the members of the Church and congregation. He was asked to take a second service in July, 1908, at which the favourable impression made on his former visit was intensified and confirmed, with the result that, at a special Church meeting held on Wednesday evening September 2nd (notice of which had been given from the pulpit on the two previous Sundays) a resolution was passed that Mr. Hedgman be asked to become the pastor of Ashley Road Congregational Church. The invitation was duly conveyed and accepted by Mr. Hedgman, who began on Sunday, October 25th (at the Harvest Thanksgiving Services) a ministry that was to last until July 31st, 1919—a period of nearly eleven years. The Recognition Meeting was held on the following Wednesday evening, October 28th, with Dr. Goodrich in the chair. Testimony was borne by several representatives of the Sevenoaks Congregational Church to the faithful and efficient way in which both Mr. and Mrs. Hedgman had carried on Christ's work during the pastorate there.

EXTENSION OF PREMISES

The continual growth of the Church and the expansion of its work in the neighbourhood had made more and more obvious for some time the need for an extension of the premises and this need was most pressingly felt in the case of the Sunday School which, with its large increase in the number of scholars, was terribly handicapped for want of proper accommodation. A committee was appointed at the Church meeting of December 2nd, 1908 to take into consideration this question and they reported to a specially-convened meeting of members and subscribers to the Church on Monday 18th January, 1909 when the advisability of proceeding with an entire scheme for the erection of a new church on the available land in front of the temporary School-Church, in addition to the provision of classroom accommodation for the Sunday School at the back, was discussed. To bring the matter to a definite issue, Mr. W. A. Arnold, pointing out the urgent need for better premises for the Sunday School work and also indicating the favourable position occupied by the Church for the erection of a new Church building, suggested that the Extension Committee be asked to find two friends who would contribute £1,000 each and four others who would contribute £500 each and if

these promises were forthcoming, he agreed to contribute £1,000 to a complete scheme, the cost of which he estimated would be about £7,000 or £8,000.

Failing the fulfilment of these conditions, he suggested that only the provision of classroom accommodation could be proceeded with. The conditions were not fulfilled but a second £1,000 offer was made and also promises were secured from eleven people amounting to about £1,300. This state of things was reported to Messrs. Arnold and Tattersall, who offered the £2,000 and they agreed to accept revised conditions, including the condition that the congregation should complete the £5,000 during the month of February. A sub-committee was later appointed to consult architects and secure plans and estimates for adapting and extending the School-Church and providing a new Church. Wednesday, March 10th, 1910 was a red-letter day in the history of our Church, for it witnessed a definite decision of the Church, at a special Church meeting, to undertake a complete scheme for the extension and adaptation of the school premises, and for the erection of a new Church. After a competition in which five selected firms of architects took part and advice was obtained from a consultant architect, plans prepared by Messrs. France and Laycock of Manchester were submitted for the consideration of the members - plans providing a complete scheme for erecting a new Church on the vacant plot of land in front of the old Church and for erecting in the rear of the old building a set of schools adapted for primary, junior and intermediate work on the lines of the modern reformed Sunday School methods. A resolution, accepting the plans of Messrs. France & Laycock and adopting the entire scheme for providing a complete set of premises for Church and School work, the work of building the schools to be immediately proceeded with, but the Church not proceeded with until funds were guaranteed providing for two-thirds of the cost of the new Church over and above the entire cost of the Schools, was carried unanimously.

Arrangements were completed for purchasing a small piece of extra land, the plans for the new school buildings approved by the Hale Urban District Council and by the trustees, and the work was commenced.

A goodly company assembled on Saturday afternoon, October 15th, 1910 for the Ceremony of the Laying of the Memorial Stone of the new

Sunday School premises. There were a number of visitors from Bowdon Downs Church and from the Manchester area generally. Mr. Arthur A. Haworth, M.P., after being presented by Mr. Harold France, the architect (brother of Miss J. Ethel France) with a trowel, laid the stone.

The building was rapidly proceeded with and the Opening Ceremony took place on Friday, April 28th, 1911. A brief preliminary service conducted by Mr. Hedgman, Rev. W. D. Thomas (Broadheath) and Rev. H. W. Turner (Wilmslow) was first held in the Church and then the congregation proceeded to the new school premises in the rear. The door was formally opened by Mrs. W. A. Arnold, a presentation key having been handed to her. Assembled in the new schools, the friends wandered about the different classrooms and corridors revelling in the novel sense of spaciousness.

On all hands expressions of pleasure, satisfaction and congratulation were to be heard. Addresses were later given by Mr. G. Hamilton Archibald (of Bourneville) - a pioneer of the modern Graded School system of Sunday School work - and by Rev. W. Melville Harris, M.A. (of the Young People's Department of the Congregational Union of England and Wales).

On Saturday, April 29th a scholars' tea and re-union was held in the new buildings, tea being served in the Primary room and the subsequent meeting held in the Intermediate Schoolroom upstairs. On Sunday, April 30th the Special Opening Services were continued when Rev. Dr. Adeney preached, also addressing the scholars in the afternoon.

The graded system was now introduced into the Hale Church, with a Cradle Roll for the enrolment of babies as soon as possible after birth, a Primary Department, and also separate Junior and Intermediate Departments, each now able to meet separately in their own rooms.

THE NEW CHURCH

For some time past the Building Fund had been steadily increasing, the total having risen from about £5,400 in January 1911 to about £6,200 at the end of May. Also Messrs. W. A. and Alfred L. Arnold had generously undertaken to defray the cost of furnishing the new schools. Good as the progress had been, however, the amount thus reached fell short by some £600 of the sum indicated in the old resolution of the Church, requiring about two-thirds of the estimated cost of the new Church - after meeting

all liabilities in regard to the Schools - to be guaranteed before commencing the new Church.

Mr. Alfred L. Arnold threw out a challenge-offer of a further £100 to be paid on condition that the remaining £500 was reached by June 30th. This matter was referred to a special meeting of the Church and congregation held on Wednesday, May 31st. Just before June closed, the full £500 necessary to comply with Mr. Arnold's condition had been secured and the work of building the new Church was put in hand after a Church meeting on July 5th, 1911. Revised plans for the Church building were completed by Messrs. France and Laycock; tenders were received from eight selected building firms and the lowest tender, that of Messrs. Martin Stone & Sons of Altrincham accepted. The contract price for the new building was £4,700. The Church was designed on Romanesque lines and built of Ruabon facing bricks and Alderley stone dressings, the interior being partly faced with Leicestershire hand-made bricks and Alderley stone, and a limited amount of plaster. The roof, externally, was covered with hand-made tiles, and internally was carried out in pitch-pine; all the doors and flooring being in oak. The Church was designed to seat 500 but this accommodation could be increased later to 650 if required. The Church was designed on modern lines, providing ample cloak-room accommodation in connection with the main entrances. The square tower of somewhat massive proportions on the Ashley Road frontage—in which were the main entrances—was one of its most striking features.

The stone-laying of the new Church took place in glorious autumn weather on Saturday, October 5th, 1912. The School-Church was almost filled, Mr. Hedgman presiding, supported on the platform by Revs. Dr. Adeney, John Holden and a number of others. Mr. W. A. Arnold and Mr. J. L. Tattersall had been asked by the Committee to lay the stone, as they had taken the lead in setting the building scheme on foot. Mr. Arnold addressed the gathering in the School-Church before the stone-laying and Mr. Tattersall on the site afterwards. A hymn was sung by children from the Sunday School.

OPENING OF THE NEW CHURCH

This event, so long anticipated, took place on Saturday, October 11th, 1913. First came a brief service in the old Church, Rev. C. H. Hedgman presiding. After hymn and prayer, the Chairman handed to Mrs. J.

Goodier Haworth a key with which to unlock the new building. The congregation then proceeded to the new Church - our present building - which Mrs. Haworth opened. After a few minutes the service commenced. Rev. Sidney M. Berry, M.A. (then of Birmingham) took the first part, and the sermon was preached by Rev. J. D. Jones, M.A., B.D. of Bournemouth on the text "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean?" which was used as an analogy of the inquiry of the man of the world as to the necessity of the work of the Church.

After the service, those present adjourned to the Schools for tea and social fellowship and then came the public meeting at which the joy and thankfulness of the congregation at the completion of the building scheme were voiced by Mr. Hedgman.

The first Sunday's services in the new Church (on October 12th, 1913) conducted by Dr. Horton of Hampstead, were very stimulating. A special temperance meeting, addressed by Dr. Chapple, M.P. and by Mrs. Philip Snowden, was held on the following Friday and on Thursday, October 23rd, the last of the special gatherings—a young people's meeting - was addressed by Rev. A. Norman Rowland, M.A. of Broughton Park on "As poor yet making many rich", and by Rev. Carey Bonner, of the National Sunday School Union, who spoke specially to the boys and girls.

MOBBERLEY

In June 1909, the Rev. E. E. Ingham of Manchester, who had previously held pastorates at Rhyl and in Herefordshire, was appointed to the oversight of the two Congregational Chapels in Mobberley, at Pepper Street and Knolls Green. In the first place, he undertook the work for six months only, but he remained as joint pastor of the two churches until September 30th, 1917, when he accepted a position in the Presbyterian Church as Missioner in charge of a Church at Openshaw. During his pastorate of more than eight years at Mobberley, he did a splendid work. As he had to conduct Sunday evening service alternately at the two Mobberley Chapels, it fell to our Church to supply the Pepper Street pulpit every other Sunday from our own members. Mr. Ingham commenced his pastorate at Pepper Street on Sunday, July 4th, 1909 at the Church Anniversary Services, when he preached in the afternoon and evening. At the special meeting held on Monday, July 5th to welcome

Mr. Ingham, thirty friends connected with Ashley Road Church were present, including, with one exception, the whole of the deacons.

The most cordial relations existed between the Ashley Road Church and Pepper Street. A number of helpers from Ashley Road continued to go out to Mobberley every Sunday afternoon to assist in the work of the Sunday School there and Mr. Bashford, of the Ashley Road Men's Bible Class conducted a special week-night class at Mobberley among the children to teach them the art of making nets, etc. On May 9th, 1912 Mrs. J. Herbert Harrison began a week-night scholars' class for Missionary teaching and this class was carried on most successfully for some considerable time.

The attendance of children at the Sunday School increased steadily and the congregations at the Sunday services were well maintained.

NAME OF CHURCH

At a meeting of Church members held on Wednesday, July 16th, 1913, two important decisions were unanimously made. It was decided to change the name of the Church from the "Ashley Road Congregational Church" (as it had been known ever since the opening) to "Hale Congregational Church" and we find the new name appearing for the first time at the head of the Church Magazine in the issue of February 1914. The other decision was to adopt for the first time individual communion cups at the communion services of the Church.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR (1914-1918)

In common with churches of all denominations, the work of our Church and School was carried on under great difficulties during the period of the first World War. The number of menfolk serving in the forces rapidly increased. In the Church Magazine of March 1917 the number was given as 56 but this number was, of course, greatly increased before the end of the war. Of these, some made the supreme sacrifice and many were wounded, shell-shocked or suffered ill-effects in other ways as a result of their war service.

In addition many men and women of the Church, Sunday School and congregation took up voluntary service of various kinds, such as nursing and Red Cross work. Several of the most active workers in the Church and School were thus compelled by the call of other arduous duties to give up, for the time being at any rate, their valued service to the Church.

The Church and Sunday School took an active part in working and providing comforts for our servicemen during the course of the war. In the Senior School, garments, scarves, etc., were made and the boys took their part in this as well as the girls. The children in the Junior Department brought books, magazines, stationery, stamps, etc., and these went to the hospitals for wounded soldiers, to help to while away the difficult and trying hours of convalescence. The primary children brought each Sunday something for the Belgian Refugees in the neighbourhood - flowers, toys, toffee, pictures, etc. Considerable time was devoted by the ladies, both in the meetings of the Dorcas Society and in the sewing meetings, to making gifts and comforts for the men in France.

At the beginning of November 1914, arrangements were made for the old school-church and the primary schoolroom, together with other smaller rooms, to be handed over to the British Red Cross Society for use as a military hospital. The work of equipment was soon carried out. The old church was turned into a ward with accommodation for twenty-two patients. The primary room was portioned off, about half being used as a recreation room for the patients, and the remainder for Red Cross needlework and for secretarial and other work. The arrangement necessarily involved a considerable amount of discomfort and inconvenience for the work of the Church and Sunday School-the officers of the School had to work in a draughty passage - but there was a general sense of satisfaction that the buildings could be put to so useful a purpose and the consequent drawbacks were cheerfully accepted. Mr. Hedgman was appointed as one of the chaplains to the hospital and a short service was held in the ward each Sunday afternoon.

The members of Mr. Fasham's Youth Class in the Sunday School found opportunity for useful service to the Red Cross Hospital. Two members of the class attended every evening and placed their services at the disposal of the authorities, willingly carrying out any tasks assigned to them. The rota was fixed up each week, and the youths took great pride and pleasure in their work. During the war period a number of the convalescent soldiers from the hospital were entertained at the Annual Sunday School Parties and several of them took part in the Concerts arranged.

By May 1915 the Red Cross Hospital on our premises had been extended by the conversion of the old Lecture Room (so far used as a recreation

room for the patients) into a second ward. This provided for the accommodation of twelve more patients, making a total of forty in our block of buildings. For a recreation room the Junior Schoolroom was now taken over. A limited use of the downstairs rooms was arranged for Sunday afternoons for the Sunday School and Men's Bible Class. But, except for this and the use of the actual Church itself, our people had to be content, for the time being, with the upstairs premises and the Church vestries for all their own meetings and services.

Later on, in May 1918, application was made to the authorities of our Church for the use of the Upper Schoolroom for the extension of the Red Cross Hospital. It was natural that the deacons should have some hesitation in consenting to this further handicap to the work of the Church but some abatement of the inconvenience was promised in the fact that some departments of the work of Church and School could be carried on at "Edgedale" (the house next to the Church) which was about to be vacated. Under the strong and pressing urgency of the case presented by the hospital authorities, the deacons felt that the right course was to grant the use of the Upper Schoolroom. From then onwards for the remainder of the war period the Upper-School met at "Edgedale" and the Junior Department in the back of the Church, in the space formerly occupied by the Upper School. The Primary Department was still in its old quarters by arrangement with the hospital authorities. The Mothers' Meeting met in one of the rooms at "Edgedale", which was also used for Church Meetings, Socials and other functions. The regular Wednesday evening service was held in the large double vestry. The Literary Society, which had steadily increased in its number of adherents and the scope of its work during the years since its inception, found temporary accommodation in the hall of the County High School for Boys, Marlborough Road (now the Grammar School).

There was throughout the war period a determination on the part of all engaged in the work of Church and School that, in spite of all difficulties, the work of all the Church activities should be maintained and a general disposition to accept cheerfully the ever-increasing difficulties of the situation created by ever-growing encroachments on our accommodation.

SUMMARY

When Mr. Hedgman resigned the pastorate in July 1919, soon after the end of the war period, he had been the minister of Hale Congregational

Church for 10¾ years - some of the most difficult years in the history of the Church. He was largely instrumental in guiding the Church to make the best use of the new premises which were built during his pastorate and week-night activities flourished under his guidance and with his support during his ministry in a way unsurpassed during the history of the Church. During the difficult period of the war years he was a true shepherd of his flock, guiding, strengthening and supporting and sharing with them in their personal trials and sorrows. In the hardships and inconveniences that came with the temporary loss of a large part of the premises, he inspired in others that cheeriness and courage, coupled with a firm determination that no aspect of the Church's work or of its many organisations should suffer which he himself so clearly showed and which was so largely responsible for the maintenance of an effective witness during such troubled times. Conscientious and earnest in visitation and in opening his home to the members of his congregation, he revealed as well in the pulpit fine preaching gifts and a strong faith and consciousness of his mission which impelled him to speak fearlessly and courageously the message he had from God.

THE MINISTRY OF THE REV. J. C. ORMEROD, M.A.

About five months after the departure of the Rev. C. H. Hedgman, a special Church meeting was called on January 21st, 1920, when it was decided to invite the Rev. J. C. Ormerod, M.A., of Aberdeen to the pastorate of the Church. This invitation was accepted by Mr. Ormerod. He commenced his ministry on March 28th, and was inducted on the previous Thursday. He had been trained for the Ministry at Mansfield College, Oxford, and previous to his pastorate at Aberdeen, he had been minister from 1911 to 1915 at Airdrie. Mr. Ormerod brought to his ministry the gifts of a distinguished teacher. A feature of his 13 years' pastorate was the number of groups of Bible Studies which he conducted, some at the Sunday services, and others at week-night meetings arranged for the purpose. When in 1933, Mr. Ormerod resigned the pastorate in order to become a Professor at Yorkshire United College, Bradford, it was felt that the new appointment offered wider scope for his teaching gifts.

When the minister and his family came to Hale, they took up residence at "Coniston" Warwick Road. After a few months, the Church decided to take over the house and it is called "The Manse" in the Minister's letters from November 1920 onwards, and it has been the Church Manse ever since.

THE HOLIDAY HOME

In the summer before the commencement of Mr. Ormerod's ministry, the work of the Children's Holiday Home was begun. As it was such a notable feature of Mr. Ormerod's ministry, it may be mentioned here. The "Altrincham Guardian" of May 30th, 1919 says "An interesting experiment is to be made by the members of the Hale Congregational Church on behalf of children who live in the crowded streets of the city. It has been suggested by the fact that in the summer months the School Chapel is not required, and it is thought that it could be put to good purpose as headquarters of a summer camp. Every week, therefore, some 25 or 30 children from the City Missions of the Manchester Congregational Board will be invited to spend a week at the camp as the guests of the Church." The first secretary was Mr. C. E. Fasham and the first treasurer was Mr. A. L. Arnold, and other Officers named in the same newspaper cutting are Miss Shelmerdine, Mrs. Simpson, Miss M. R. Boyd and Miss E. M. Boyd. The first batch of children came on Monday, June 23rd, 1919. In the following years the Home was open from the beginning of May until the end of July. The children slept in the Church Hall and had meals in the "Round Room". The day was taken up with organised games, walks, visits to gardens and similar activities. Two or three paid helpers were secured each year, and the rest of the service which the Holiday Home scheme entailed was generously given by ladies of the Church and congregation. The work of the Holiday Home was continued each summer until 1938. By this time it had become impossible to obtain the large amount of voluntary help which was needed, because of changes in the domestic circumstances of many who had given service. In addition to this, it was no longer true, as it had been in 1919, that the Children's Holiday Home provided the only holiday which the city children enjoyed in the course of the year. The Holiday Home was therefore disbanded, though with considerable reluctance on the part of many who regarded this as our distinctive contribution to social service.

THE DIACONATE

Just prior to the commencement of Mr. Ormerod's ministry, a decision had been taken at a Church meeting that women should be eligible for election to the Diaconate. In the election which followed, Miss France and Miss Mabel Boyd were elected. These friends have served in this office continuously ever since, though in November 1947 Miss Boyd was elected an honorary deacon when she felt obliged to withdraw from active participation in the meetings of the Diaconate.

SPECIAL CELEBRATIONS

In the early years of Mr. Ormerod's ministry, special note was taken of the 21st Anniversary of the Church in May 1920 and the Silver Jubilee in May 1924. The Minister conducted special services on Sunday, May 2nd, 1920, and there was a re-union of Past and Present Members on May 4th. The Church Magazine of May 1920 says "The 21st Anniversary marks the close of an epoch in the Church's life. The period of childhood and adolescence is past. We enter upon full manhood, and with the vigour of youth tempered by a 21 years' experience should be well fitted for the great work that is before us."

Great celebrations marked the 25th Anniversary of the Church. The Rev. Sidney M. Berry, M.A., secretary of the Congregational Union of England and Wales conducted special services on April 6th, 1924. The celebrations were continued on the following Sunday, when the Minister conducted Thanksgiving Services, and during the week between there was a Re-union, and a Gift Day in aid of the Thanksgiving Fund. This Fund was brought into being in order to repay the debt on the Manse and to enable the interior decoration of the Church to be carried out, and it realised the sum of over £1,100. The series of gatherings brought great encouragement, and the Church entered upon the future with great hope and confidence.

RECREATIONAL SOCIETIES

Two of our Church recreational societies had their origin in this period. In the summer of 1920, a plot of land in Cecil Road at the back of the Church premises was presented to the Church by Mr. A. L. Arnold. In the following autumn and winter two hard surface tennis courts were made, and the Tennis Club was inaugurated at a meeting held on February 25th, 1921. The new club had Mr. A. Knight as its first Captain, Mr. J. G. Boyd as vice-Captain, and Miss M. G. Knight as Secretary, and over 50 members were enrolled in the first season. The courts were opened on May 7th, 1921 by Mrs. Alfred Arnold.

The Badminton Club was started in the autumn of 1920, and as early as December 1920, the Magazine announced that no more members could be accommodated.

A few years later the Dramatic Society came into being. Its formation is reported in the Magazine of August 1926. The first Chairman was Mr.

Hugh Hunter, and he has held that office ever since. In the first season, four plays were produced, the first being on September 25th, 1926.

THE CHURCH BUILDING

During Mr. Ormerod's ministry, several additions and alterations were made to the Church and its furnishings. A few months prior to the coming of the Minister, the War Memorial was unveiled and dedicated at a special service held on Sunday, December 14th, 1919. The memorial of polished alabaster was placed in the Church "in affectionate remembrance of those connected with this Church who gave their lives in the Great War 1914-19." There follow eleven names of young men who died in the war.

In November 1920, what is described as a "certificate" was presented by the Army Council, as a permanent record of their thanks to be placed in our Sunday School building which was used as a hospital for British sick and wounded during the Great War.

The embroideries which now adorn the pulpit, lectern and communion table were the gift of the women of the Church in June 1922. Miss Read, in an article in the Magazine of July 1922, explains that our Church is built in the Byzantine style, and the embroideries have been carried out in true Byzantine colouring on blue cloth. The symbolism is taken from early Christian art that was found on the walls of the catacombs of Rome, where in the days of bitter persecution the Christians met in secret for worship.

The organ was twice enlarged. Through the initiative of the organist, Mr. J. K. Howorth, a scheme was accepted in March 1925 whereby the action was made tubular pneumatic throughout, and to accommodate additional parts, the console was moved from a place behind the choir stalls to a position behind the communion table.

The pulpit now in the Church was the gift of Mr. A. L. Arnold, in memory of his father, Mr. W. A. Arnold. This was built at the same time as the alteration was done to the organ in 1925, and the new pulpit and organ were dedicated at a special Service on September 13th.

The second enlargement of the organ was carried out in May 1931 when an additional manual was added, and a supplementary organ built over the vestibule. At the same time the screen of the supplementary organ

was given to the Church in memory of Miss Minnie Boyd, who had passed away in the previous year. A further alteration was made to the organ when the console was moved from the chancel to its present position by the side of the lectern in 1932.

The vestibule table was given by Miss France in November 1929 in memory of her brother, Mr. Harold France, who had been the architect of our Church building.

SUMMARY

No recital of particular events is sufficient to describe a ministry. The work of a pastorate consists chiefly in the maintenance of the routine life of the Church. The records speak of much faithful service done in many branches of the life of the Fellowship. The work of the Sunday School, the Sewing Guild and the Dorcas Society was maintained all through the ministry of Mr. Ormerod without any spectacular progress, but was attended by much blessing to the people concerned. The Sewing Guild worked primarily for the work of the Kingdom of God overseas as done by the London Missionary Society, and the Dorcas Society worked to relieve the needs of people in Manchester and Salford which came to the Society's notice. Through the years 1920 to 1933, the population of Hale increased greatly.

They were years both of artificial prosperity which followed immediately upon the war of 1914-1918, and also of slump and industrial depression. The Church gathered together a fund whereby boys from two distressed areas were helped to find work in Altrincham and were maintained until they established themselves by their own earnings. To these varied circumstances and conditions the Church addressed itself, and at the close of the ministry in July 1933, there began an inter-regnum which was to last more than two years. During this long period when the Church was without a minister, the Fellowship was guided by a faithful Diaconate presided over by Mr. F. A. Jones, who for the greater part of Mr. Ormerod's ministry had been a deacon and a Departmental Leader in the Sunday School.

THE MINISTRY OF THE REV. T. J. LANDER, M.A., B.D.

by **MR. J. A. SUGDEN**

The inter-regnum came to an end in October 1935, when the Rev. T. J. Lander, M.A., B.D. entered upon his ministry in response to a

unanimous invitation to the pastorate. Mr. Lander had been trained at Western College, Bristol, and had held one pastorate, at Portishead, Somerset, since 1931. So there began a ministry which was to last for 13 years, which came to an end in August 1948 upon the Minister's acceptance of the pastorate of the Church at Sutton Coldfield.

THE IMPACT OF THE WAR

The war, although it did not bring to us the great perils which came to many Churches, particularly in coastal towns, affected our Church life in various ways. In common with all Churches, most of our young men and some of our young women were in the Forces. Older people were engaged in various duties laid upon them by Civil Defence, Nursing, Women's Voluntary Service and similar things. In spite of these things, all our Church activities which took place in the afternoons were maintained. Black-out restrictions considerably curtailed our evening gatherings, and for two winters, our Sunday evening service was held at some time during the afternoon. This expedient was not successful, and for the rest of the war-time winters, the evening service was maintained at 6-30 and held in the Primary Room. These services, although never largely attended, had a character all their own. The intimacy and homeliness of these gatherings compensated more than a little for the lack of the atmosphere of the Church, and on this account there were some who were reluctant to return to the Church for evening service, when the lighter nights made it possible.

Our School premises were used for various purposes. For a few weeks at the outbreak of war, all the rooms were occupied by classes of a school evacuated from Stretford. After this, the premises were liable to be commandeered for a Rest Centre for homeless people, though in fact they were never used for this purpose. Soldiers quartered in Hale who normally did their training in the roads, were allowed the use of rooms in winter for physical training. For the last five years of the war, the Hall and kitchens were taken over as a British Restaurant. Red Cross classes and Civil Defence lectures were held in our rooms, and stores and equipment of various sorts were kept under our roof.

The Minister, at a time when young masters were being called up in large numbers, became a Temporary Assistant Master at Altrincham Grammar School. This duty began in 1940 and lasted for seven years. He had already been chaplain to the Grammar School Scout Group for four years before this (as Mr. Ormerod had been before him), and the additional

link brought about by the teaching duties brought the Grammar School into very close touch with the Church.

CHILDREN'S CORNER

In July 1943 the Children's Corner was unveiled and dedicated. This was a gift to the Church from Mrs. Arnold in memory of her husband, Mr. Alfred L. Arnold. He had been in the Fellowship from its earliest days and had served the Church in many ways, but it was for his work for the Sunday School and the Children's Holiday Home that he was chiefly remembered. The Memorial gift, therefore, was most appropriate, and it has been used from time to time by various classes in the Sunday School, and children are responsible for the arrangement of the flowers which adorn the Children's Corner.

MINISTER'S BIBLE CLASS

One of the most memorable features of Mr. Lander's ministry was his special class on Sunday afternoons held in the vestry for young people of 15 and over. This class served as a useful "bridge" between the Sunday School and the Church and by means of it many young people were held and won for the Church at that most difficult age when so many, thinking themselves too old for Sunday School, tend to cut adrift from the Church altogether. From this class a number of young people became active members of the Church, some of them later taking up service as teachers in the Sunday School. Mr. Lander's magnificent teaching gifts were here used with full effect to awaken in young people a real interest in the Bible for which they will be grateful all their lives. While the main object was the study of different books of the Bible, useful lessons were given also on the different religions of the world and a new insight obtained into the meaning of Church Membership, with special reference to our own denomination. Frequently, too, at this class, young people taking Scripture for school examinations received valuable background information which served them to good purpose in examinations such as the School Certificate.

SCOUT AND GUIDE PARADES

A memorable aspect of the Church services during the pastorate of Mr. Lander was the number of special services for young people held at regular intervals throughout the year. Two special parades of the Grammar School Scout Group were held every year, when Mr. Lander gave interesting and inspiring addresses to the boys and parents. These

were very popular occasions, when the Church was filled with boys and parents, in addition to our own members. Twice a year also our own Guides held their special parades, and the Cub Pack of the Altrincham Preparatory School were present, together with officers and parents, from time to time. On all these occasions, the presentation of flags, the marching out of the young people at the end of the service and the usual inspection outside the Church were impressive and unforgettable.

SUNDAY SCHOOL

To every scholar in the Sunday School, even down to the smallest primary child, Mr. Lander was a well-known and loved friend. His vivid, well-illustrated addresses on those war-time Anniversary Sundays when he occupied the pulpit and when one never quite knew what he might next produce in the way of illustration - perhaps a telephone, perhaps a giant fountain-pen - and on those occasions such as Harvest Festival afternoon, Easter or Whit-Sunday or the Toy Service, when the school met all together in open service, were eagerly anticipated by the scholars. Here his skill as a teacher stood him in good stead. He had the happy knack of arresting and maintaining the close attention and interest of even the smallest scholar.

During the pastorate the school showed steady progress. Scholars were regular and punctual in attendance and missionary interest was well maintained. Weekly collections were (and still are) devoted to the Cots Fund, for the maintenance of the Sunday School cots in the Hospital in China. In addition for many years the children have Sunday by Sunday brought their "ship" halfpennies (in addition to their ordinary collection) towards the "John Williams" missionary ships. The only collections made for the funds of our own Sunday School are those taken once a year at the Anniversary services.

In the Sunday School Union National Scripture Examination in March 1948 (an examination which a number of our scholars sit every year) our children did so well that the school succeeded in winning the Saxon Shield of Honour, which is awarded every year by the Manchester Sunday School Union to the school getting the best results and sitting the highest proportion of scholars in the possible age groups, in the whole of the Manchester area. The shield has been hanging on the wall in our Sunday School premises since last June, when it was presented to the school and received by Miss France on our behalf from the Lady

Mayoress of Manchester at a special meeting in Manchester attended by parties of teachers and children from all schools in the Manchester area.

JOINT VISITATION OF DISTRICT

During the year 1945 an interesting and successful experiment was carried out in conjunction with the friends from St. Peter's Church when a house-to-house visitation of the whole of Hale was carried out by volunteers from the two churches, each volunteer being allotted a certain specified street or group of streets. A card was left at every house where the residents were known to be at present not attached to any church, setting out on one side the services and week-night activities of our own Church and on the other side those of St. Peter's. A hearty personal invitation was given to those not at present going to church or chapel to come to one or other of the two churches. This campaign was successful in showing the people of the district the concern of our two churches for their welfare and our interest in them and brought a number of new members to both congregations. More than this, however, the fact that it was a joint campaign of two churches of differing denominations in the same area captured the interest and attention of people as far away as the South of England and it was a striking example of what joint action and friendly collaboration can achieve. Throughout Mr. Lander's ministry, the most cordial and friendly relations were maintained not only between our pastor and the vicars of St. Peter's but between the members of our two churches, and in August 1948, just before Mr. Lander left, the members of St. Peter's presented to this Church an Ecclesiastical Chair as a mark of their gratitude for use of our rooms during the War years and after, when their own rooms were commandeered.

SUMMARY

Mr. Lander brought to his ministry at Hale the gifts of a born teacher, an earnest enthusiasm for the establishment of the Kingdom of God in the neighbourhood, a sincere faith and confidence in his mission as the messenger of God to our congregation, the ability to speak direct to the hearts of his hearers, the sympathy and understanding of a loyal friend and that cheerful youthfulness which, together with his sportsmanship and fine sense of humour, endeared him to all the young people with whom he came in contact. In the midst of the busiest part of his war-time duties - when every morning he was engaged in teaching duties at the Grammar School and when a large part of his evenings had to be devoted to preparation of lessons and marking of exercises, he never failed to be

present at the services and week-night activities of the Church nor did his pastoral duties of visitation, etc., suffer in any way. His missionary zeal found outlet as one of the Young People's secretaries for the Manchester L.M.S. auxiliary. His sermons were always well-prepared - so well that one never recalls seeing him having to refer while in the pulpit to a single note, except when occasionally referring for an illustration to a passage from a poem. At the annual Sunday School parties, he was always the life and soul of the evening and endeared himself to the boys and girls with the excellent programme of varied and rollicking games he prepared for them.

No member of the Church or congregation ever visited the manse without receiving a royal welcome from both Mr. and Mrs. Lander and, when we heard in July 1948 that Mr. Lander was to accept a call from Sutton Coldfield, we felt that we were losing not only a splendid pastor and leader but two very real and dear personal friends. So large was the attendance at the Farewell Presentation meeting in the Primary Room in July 1948, when Mr. Lander was presented with a cheque and an electric clock and Mrs. Lander with a handbag, subscribed for by nearly all the members of the Church and congregation and many other people outside our own Church who had come to know and love Mr. Lander during his 13 years in Hale as a real friend, that the room itself could not accommodate them in spite of the large number of extra chairs brought in, and a number of friends had to stand in the vestibule outside. This in itself was a worthy tribute to the respect and admiration Mr. Lander had won from the people of Hale and Mr. F. A. Jones, who presided, and Mr. A. H. Martin and Miss France, who made the presentations on behalf of the deacons and members, voiced the feelings of all present when they paid tribute to a magnificent work - a fine pastorate and a true apostleship.

And so, as we approach our fiftieth anniversary, we look forward to the future of our Church with a gratitude to God and real thankfulness in our hearts for those men and women, ministers and lay members, who have laboured in the past and into the fruit of whose labours we have entered; with a sense of our great responsibility as we strive to continue worthily the work so splendidly and sacrificially commenced by them; and with a faith and confidence that, with God's help and blessing, even greater and finer things are yet to be if we will all strive with all our might, prayerfully and sincerely, to follow in their footsteps, that God's Kingdom may ever be extended in this neighbourhood of Hale.

THE CONTINUING WITNESS 1949 - 1999

THE INTER-REGNUM

During the inter-regnum, two important events took place. The first of these in February 1949, was the first meeting which took place to consider Union with the Presbyterian Church, a matter which assumed much greater importance some 20 years later. At that point the members of the Church Meeting stated "that it finds itself unable to share in the proposed Union with the Presbyterian Church of England but expresses its complete willingness to take its full share in the closest co-operation in witness and service".

The second important event was of course the Golden Jubilee held in May.

THE GOLDEN JUBILEE took place on Sunday 1st May 1949, the services being led by Dr. Sidney M. Berry, M.A., D.D., Secretary and Minister of the International Congregational Council.

The morning service was attended by the Chairman and Councillors of the Urban District, and the County Union proposed a resolution of congratulation, which Miss France acknowledged. The Girl Guides paraded on this occasion. A Sunday School service was held in the afternoon, at which Miss France gave the address. Communion was held after the evening service, and the day served as a gift day.

On Monday 2nd May, a Supper and Social evening was held costing 4s 6d. The Golden Jubilee booklet "The Growth of the Church" written by Rev. T.J. Lander and Mr. John Sugden had been printed and this is reproduced as the first section of this Centenary book exactly as it was written in 1949. The Church Meeting of May 25th 1949 "records its profound gratitude at the response of the Fellowship for the Jubilee Celebrations on May 1st & 2nd 1949, for the great congregations that gathered to the Services on the Sunday, and for the large attendance at the Social and Supper on the Monday, for its happy atmosphere, a good augury for the ministry of the Rev. H. E. Coltman shortly to commence, and heartily thanks all those who had a part in arranging and carrying through all the many details in connection with the Jubilee and for the generous response to the Gift Day appeal amounting to something over £750".

(In March, the Rev. H.E. Coltman received the call to be pastor at Ashley Road, which he accepted. His ministry was to commence on July 3rd and his Induction to take place on June 29th. He had not therefore been able

to preside over the Jubilee Celebrations in May 1949 although he was present as a visitor.)

THE MINISTRY OF THE

REV. HEWLETT E. COLTMAN M.A. 1949-1957

Mr Coltman had been trained at Cambridge, and had had pastorates at Newmarket and Exeter. So in June began a pastorate which was to last eight years, and came to an end at Easter 1957 upon the minister accepting a call from Belgrave Congregational Church, Torquay.

JUNIOR CHURCH

Mr Coltman was extremely interested in the young people of the church. He had made a very good impression in the Sunday School at his first visit, and was very keen to establish a Junior Church, which would take place on a Sunday morning instead of the traditional Sunday School afternoon meeting. The children would remain in church for the first 15 - 20 minutes, thus introducing them to the feeling of being in the church and being welcome as part of the Church family. He felt sad that on average, nationally 75% of the children attending Sunday School were lost to the church; external causes were materialism and irreligious homes; internal causes were the lack of belonging to a worshipping fellowship and thus forming no personal ties with the Church. Other churches which had adopted the system of Junior Church were sounded out and all were in favour. The Sunday School teachers were very enthusiastic and finally all the parents of children in Sunday School were consulted and agreed to the proposal. So the first Family Church took place on 14th March, 1954. There were 25 in the Senior department, 60 in the Junior department, 35 in the Primary department and 18 in the Beginners department. Note that it is no longer a school - it is part of the Church; no longer are there teachers but leaders, and the children are in departments, not classes. Unaccompanied children sat with the leaders or other friends in the congregation; others sat with their parents, and went out part way through the service, as now. The number of the Junior Church grew to the point where some members of the adult congregation found themselves standing at the back of the church waiting until the Junior Church withdrew so that they might take their seats.

Of course the change caused some problems; the choir was non-existent once the children had gone, for many of the choir were leaders and also

the Minister was unable to attend. But the Church Meeting resolved "that the 'Family Church' affords the right approach to the task of Christian education and aimed to put this into practice, promising to welcome the children into the family of the church and make available to them their resources of Christian love, faith and friendship, in the belief that they may be able to help them to face and to accept the obligations of Christian discipleship."

Because of this change in the form of the morning service, baptisms were henceforth held at the beginning of the service, and a copy of the New Testament was to be given to every child baptised. A Youth Fellowship was started up, with 33 members, in 1949, and a special Youth Service was held. In 1950, the incomparable Miss France retired from Sunday School having served for 50 years as a much loved teacher. Mr. Coltman also proposed that young people should attend the communion service occasionally as observers, and he arranged special Nativity services with the children in mind. Outstanding among these was the Christmas Carol Pageant in which the majority of the Junior Church took part.

In 1953 a Wolf Cub pack was inaugurated, and the Brownies were registered in 1955. It seems that the earliest log book records show that a Brownie pack had existed even prior to 1933, but details seem to have been lost and no trace could be found at London Head Office nor at Preston for N.W. region. The Scouts and Guides met regularly (the former, it must be admitted, causing some problems on various occasions, culminating with the threat of expulsion if they did not behave better. Plus ça change!!!)

SOCIETIES

Recreational societies continued to flourish. The Dramatic Society, which put on an average of 3 productions per year and the Badminton and Tennis Clubs were popular (the latter asking to play on Sunday afternoons, but this was not thought suitable). It is interesting to note that a Young Wives' Group was set up, which 16 ladies between the ages of 28 and 40 attended regularly; the age of the working wife was not yet upon us. An "off-spring" of this was the crèche which the aforesaid ladies offered to supervise on a Sunday morning. The Dorcas Society continued its work and the Women's Fellowship flourished. The over 60's Club was started and, although originally independent, it was soon

absorbed and became an integral part of church life. It had a membership of 120, with a waiting list, and was a happy and prosperous club. Most of its members were content to play cards or dominoes, but it did branch out occasionally and have a speaker or demonstration. During each year there were four outings including an anniversary service in church followed by a half day outing, and a Christmas trip to a pantomime. There was also a Christmas party with entertainment. Two holidays were arranged each year, one long distance and a nearer one for less able members. Two fund raising events were held - a Spring Fair, from which they were able to give the church a generous donation, and another which raised money for a charity of their choice. Thus the club prospered until the demise of the Hale Urban District Council who had, generously, subsidised a coach to collect members from various strategic points. Trafford, being unwilling to fulfil this function, halved the membership at a stroke. The club continued for many more years until membership was reduced once again due to lack of transport, and difficulty in finding replacement officers.

THE CHURCH BUILDING

The Church building underwent various changes: a system of redecoration and refurbishment of various rooms was undertaken in the early 50s; curtains were provided in the Round Room to facilitate the showing of slides; wash-bowls were provided in the cloakrooms; there were upgrades to the kitchen, with a new sink, and oven, hot-water heater and canopy for the steam boiler. An electric polisher and new vacuum were purchased. The deprivation of the war years seemed finally over. Outside, Cecil Road was made up and the Church had a very large bill (£704) because of the large amount of frontage it owned onto the road. Other societies hired the rooms of the Church. The Society of Friends held meetings in the Round Room on a Sunday morning. The Civil Defence used the premises; it is interesting to note that the Ministry of Food was refused in view of the past experience with the British Restaurant. (one wonders what happened!).

When one reads the records of meetings years ago, one realises that many of the problems we have today were only too well known then. Throughout this period, one of the great challenges was to keep abreast of ever increasing costs. Each year, the target set for the gift day was not reached, thus leaving quite a deficit.

The business of keeping the Church going financially seemed to take precedence over the spiritual life of the church, and Mr. Coltman often spoke of this. By 1956 he took a somewhat gloomy view of the state of affairs, stating that he thought the Church was "marking time" and warned of a possibility of stagnation unless there was a progressive increase in activity. He thought groups were too fragmented and did not integrate into the Church life. The deacons took these matters very seriously and decided that more social gatherings might be the answer. The format of the Gift Day was altered several times to try to make it more effective. Membership classes were encouraged and one of the Minister's priorities was the setting up of a Bible Class for those who were leaving Junior Church. It appears that Mr. Coltman tried very hard to promote the Forward Movement in its various stages, but met with little enthusiasm, but a Prayer Fellowship was set up. Deacons visited all members of the Church and members were encouraged to bring new people to the Church.

RETIREES

Various people who had contributed greatly to the life of the Church over many years retired from their positions. Miss France, as has already been recorded, retired from teaching in the Sunday School, and also retired from the Diaconate after 35 years invaluable service; she was immediately made an Honorary Deacon; Mr. Ellison, who had been a most faithful, helpful caretaker for 25 years had to retire because of ill health in 1954. Mr A.H. Martin retired from the office of Treasurer and Mr. F.B. Jackson retired from the office of Church Secretary after 20 years service.

MUSIC

The organist, Mr. Frank Jackson, also retired and Mr George Budden became the new organist. The BBC twice broadcast services from the Church in 1954 and 1956. Mr. Budden was an enthusiast who arranged concerts of visiting choirs (the Bach Choir, the Barnby Choir) and a rendering of the Messiah. The choir was augmented and a choir outing was arranged. There was a debate as to whether the choir should be robed, but the Church Meeting voted against this. In 1952 the organ required renovation, and this was undertaken by Messrs Jardine; to celebrate the completion of this, it was suggested that Mr. Francis

Jackson, Organist of York Minster, would give a recital (cost £10.10s) but curiously it was stated that "it was doubtful if an organ recital would prove attractive to the congregation"!! The congregation was obviously thought not to be musically minded, for many of Mr. Budden's suggestions were rejected, the deacons saying that "past efforts of this nature had not provided happy memories"!! However, Francis Jackson's recital did take place on 15th October 1952 and was pronounced "a success". In December 1951, 200 copies of the new Congregational Praise Hymn Books were acquired, replacing the old Church Hymnary. When the Junior Church was created, another 100 copies were bought. During his time as organist, Mr. Budden introduced the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, a service which was greatly appreciated each Christmas. The visit of the Barnby Choir was a triumph for Mr. Budden - it made a profit of £14 to £15; however, it was decided that this should be carried forward "to set against any loss on some future musical occasion"!!

THE CORONATION

The Coronation in June 1953 was marked by a special Coronation service in the Church on the Sunday preceding the Coronation with two special anthems being sung (with the help of singers from Altrincham Choral Society). A United Coronation Day Service was also held in the gardens, Bower Rd, at 9.30 a.m. with united choirs and bands. Each child attending Junior Church was given a copy of "My Coronation Book", each copy costing 1/-.

MR COLTMAN'S RESIGNATION

In January 1957 Mr. Coltman announced that he had received a call from the Belgrave Congregational Church in Torquay and that he would leave after the Easter service. Arrangements were made for presentations to Mr. Coltman and his wife; she was to receive a bicycle and Mr. Coltman a cheque. There was a happy gathering in April at which these presentations were made. Mr. Coltman's "splendid work rendered during his ministry both in the pulpit and in his pastoral duties were recognised and particular tribute paid to his launching of the Family Church, and he was assured of the real love and affection of the children for him".

THE INTER-REGNUM lasted almost a year during which time there was noted some falling-off of numbers attending Church. Ministers at

this period were at a premium and difficult to find; demand exceeded supply and perhaps the deacons wisely decided to upgrade the Manse, redecorate it and agreed to supply a car for the Minister's use. In November, Rev. D.C. Wilkins accepted a call to the ministry at Hale and arrived in March, 1958.

THE MINISTRY OF

THE REV. DAVID C. WILKINS B.D. 1958 - 62

Mr. Wilkins came to Hale from Barnet. Sadly Mr. Wilkins' stay in Hale was to be a short one, for he was not a well man and suffered increasing strain and stress as his ministry progressed. He was a man of great intellect and his inspiring sermons were long remembered, and appreciated. He ran a very successful Bible Class, aimed particularly at the senior department of Junior Church, where, again, his learning was greatly admired.

The Diamond Jubilee was celebrated in 1959 with a Supper on 6th May at a cost of 10/6d, when Toasts were proposed to the Past, the Present and the Future.

The Diamond Jubilee provided a good opportunity for evangelism and invitations were given out personally by deacons to over 175 homes to attend a meeting on 9th May; the financial implications of Church membership were explained and a request was made for any practical help in maintaining the fabric. As a result of this "Every Person Canvass", Church membership increased and 25 offers of practical help were received. The Junior Church flourished with approximately 125 attending. It was noted that it was found necessary to fill three trays for Communion and large congregations attended services. By November 1961, the Church had over 300 members and the Gift Days now provided more than £1,000.

The Youth Fellowship flourished and was joined by St. Peter's in 1959, thus forming a large Youth Club.

A car was provided for the Minister's use and a garage was provided. (He had earlier rejected the offer of a motorised bicycle or scooter in view of the wet reputation of the area!!!)

A rota of cars was made to bring the elderly and infirm to Church. A service from the Church was broadcast by the BBC in April 1959 on the theme of 'Living with old people', which was hailed as a great success. In November 1961, the Church accepted a Television offer - a service

was broadcast on Television, for which the Minister received widespread congratulations.

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

It is interesting to note how gradually the role of women in the church was beginning to change and they were now allowed to take a more active role. For the first time women deacons were requested to serve communion; in view of this, it seems odd that women themselves did not think it suitable that they take up the offering, but were willing to act as aisle stewards. It is also recorded that Miss Wendy Williams, the only woman student at the Northern College came to take a service.

CHURCH BUILDINGS

In 1960, the boiler was changed to an oil-fired boiler at a cost of well over £1,000. The Church was partially carpeted and the curtains to cover the stained glass window were bought and made up at some considerable cost. Two pulpit Bibles were given - the American Standard Revised Version - in memory of Mr. F.B. Jackson and a New English Bible was given by Mr. Robin Hill when it was first published in 1961. Four offertory plates were given by Mr. Bolton and first mention is made of a Christmas tree in Church in 1961. A rough wooden cross was planted outside the Church during Holy Week. The deacons refused several offers of a cross for the Communion table, stating that "someone might find it a genuine hindrance to his worship". The Fabric Committee was formed in 1959 to look after the Church buildings and the Manse. It was suggested that a student from the Northern College should spend 4 weeks in the Church during his last year seeing how things worked. It was also agreed that deacons should take one year off after serving as a deacon, as re-elections were almost automatic and this led to "stagnation" of ideas.

THE COUNTRY CHURCHES

Mr. Wilkins was instrumental in the re-invigorating of the Pepper Street, Mobberley, Bucklow Hill and Lymm Churches, and in 1961, a minister was provided for these "Country Churches", the Rev. Cyril Steley.

MR. WILKINS' RESIGNATION

Mr. Wilkins resigned from Hale as with increasing strain he felt he needed a period of time outside the Ministry. He explained in a letter to the Church he needed "a short time in the world" to re-examine his faith in the context of the world: he thus resigned, not only from the pastorate in Hale but also from the Ministry, but with every intention of returning to the Ministry at some future date.

THE INTER-REGNUM

There followed an inter-regnum of about a year. The Church was very fortunate to have, as a member, the Rev. Grace R. Adams B.A., B.D. who had come to Hale from Cambridge within the previous few years; she was invited to help with the pastoral work and take services. This she did with great dedication and enthusiasm and the Church was greatly indebted to her. She ran an extremely successful Sunday evening study group for the young people and was much loved by the congregation.

NEW MANSE

During the inter-regnum, the proposal was put forward to sell the old Manse in Warwick Road, and buy a more modern, smaller Manse. This was achieved fairly rapidly, and having considered one or two properties, the decision was made to purchase 10, Arthog Road which was speedily acquired and made ready for the arrival of the new minister in June 1963.

THE MINISTRY OF

THE REV. THOMAS RUSSELL B.A. 1963 - 1983

Mr. Russell arrived in Hale in June 1963, from Lincoln. He had been trained at Manchester and had previously held pastorates at Manchester and Coventry.

ALL THINGS NEW

Mr. Russell and his wife, Kaye, occupied the new manse in Arthog Road, and the Church itself was decorated in that same year, a gift from Mrs. Noel Timpson in memory of her husband. Everything was new; a spirit of resurgence ensued and many of the activities we enjoy today date back to this era. Changes inevitably took place. The Diaconate was increased

from 12 to 15 members and the rule made that they could not be immediately re-elected after two terms in office. The Fabric and Finance Committee were both to be directly subject to the Diaconate. The Communion service was integrated into the morning service on the first Sunday in the month and into the evening service on the third Sunday; some 130 members partook of the morning Communion regularly. A Bible was to be presented to every couple married in the Church. A book stall was organised under a librarian and a Badminton Club was re-established. The Youth Fellowship on a Sunday evening was flourishing but the evening service was badly attended and discussions took place as to whether it should be continued.

MOBBERLEY CHURCH (Pepper Street)

Unfortunately the Mobberley Church was finding it difficult to continue without the "prop" of Hale, even with the help of the Rev. Grace Adams who again came to the rescue for a year. Sadly in 1967, the Mobberley Church had to close. Although no records exist, the Church did reopen and struggled on for a time before finally closing. On a brighter note, the Altrincham and District Council of Churches was set up in 1966.

LINKS WITH THE NORTHERN COLLEGE

A suggestion had been made in 1963 that a student from the Northern College should help as a Pastor for a month during the Easter vacation, but because of the inter-regnum, this had proved not practicable. However in 1964, the first student arrived - one David Batchelor. He was given hospitality by three church families of which he and they have happy memories. (Little did he or the Church know that, some 30 years later, he would return as Minister). It is obvious that he did a good job as the experiment was repeated through the 60s!

CHURCH AND SOCIETY

We all know of the violent changes wrought in society in the 60s. Many challenging issues reared their heads which are not yet solved in the 90s. The Church at Hale played its part in expressing its opinion; there was a petition against the Family Leisure Centre in Altrincham (particularly its Sunday opening), heated discussion in 1968 about the proposal for a

National Lottery and the question of the two minutes silence at Remembrance Sunday caused much unrest; a letter was sent to the Prime Minister about the supply of arms to Nigeria.

UNION OF THE CONGREGATIONAL AND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES

A huge issue of the late 60s and early 70s was the proposed Union of the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches. As early as 1967, discussions were held in House Groups, Deacons' Meetings and Church Meeting as to the viability of such a proposal. The main sticking points were the same throughout the discussions and caused great angst.

1) The Congregational Church had historically been independent of "outside" control in the sense that the place of authority for the order of the life of the local Church had been its Church meeting, the gathering of members regularly to "seek the mind of Christ, acknowledging no other headship but his, but at the same time, not ignoring their fellowship with other Churches, nor denying their interdependence for the wider work of the Churches together". In the new proposals, the authority of the Church meeting would be considerably curtailed by other higher councils - viz.: the District Council, the Synod of a Province and the General Assembly, and furthermore up to the level of Provincial Synod, only ordained ministers and elders would be eligible to take part.

2) The Congregational Church elected men and women as deacons, to serve the Churches as their spiritual leaders, acting with the minister in an advisory and consultative capacity through the Church meeting. Deacons were elected for a specified period and then obliged to go out of office for a time before becoming eligible again. In the Reformed Church, the Diaconate would be replaced by an Eldership; elders would be ordained for life. This did not mean they would always be in office, but would remain as elders and could be called on for service at any time.

3) A form of Affirmation of Faith would be required for those being received into membership; this included a "Trinitarian Confession" with the affirmation that the Apostles and Nicene Creeds bear witness to such a confirmation and the sacrament of Baptism was affirmed as the mode of entry into membership.

Mr Russell himself felt not able to support the scheme, primarily because he thought that people should be free to escape from the pattern of

uniformity in Church life; "the lesson of history is that uniformity has never worked nor will ever, and that is the fault of the Scheme of Union. Congregationalism stands for the sanctity and inviolability of the personal Conscience and Congregationalists believe themselves to be ultimately responsible only to God."

A special meeting was held after the morning service on Sunday 28th November 1971, attended by 139 members. Voting took place, the result being: 108 for the Union, 31 against, a majority of 77.69%. As the minimum majority for acceptance was 75% the Chairman assumed that the Church was willing to join the United Reformed Church.

When the Union had been established, many were unhappy with parts of what it entailed; indeed some deacons felt they could not accept ordination as elders and resigned, whilst others accepted in spite of misgivings, because they broadly agreed with the Union.

At the June Church Meeting Mr. Russell pointed out that "because of his objections to certain parts of the Scheme of Union, he felt at one stage he might have to resign his ministry; he finally weighed his conviction about the scheme against his convictions on his call to the ministry and decided the latter were heavier".

However, by September 1972, most early problems had been ironed out and the Church's official title became Hale United Reformed Church.

The Diaconate had insisted that the methods of appointing officers and district representatives remain the same, as well as the period of office of elders and the frequency of the Church meeting, which was to remain the proper place for debate on Church matters. On 5th October 1972 the U.R.C. North West Province district divisions were drawn up, placing Hale within the South West Manchester District.

FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

Perhaps inevitably, there followed a period of some "rocking" of confidence. "Death of social activities" was spoken of and a decline in attendance both at services and in Junior Church. The Stewardship Campaign (in place of the Every Person Canvass) met with poor response.

The choir had almost ceased to exist and there was a need felt to "brighten the Church's image". Unfortunately, outside influences conspired against immediate resurgence. In 1973 the huge rise in oil prices and its subsequent knock-on effect exacerbated the financial problems. Money was needed to refurbish the kitchen; the tower was in

need of repair; £3,000 was needed to overhaul the organ, the cost of heating the building rose by 97% and it seemed a change from oil-fired heating to gas or electric was imperative. So began, in the early 70s, a move to seek a solution to these problems. As early as 1972 there was mention of selling off the Tennis Club land, and in 1974 a full review of the premises took place, primarily because of the cost of heating the Church for services, (which were now taking place in the school room because of the cold).

SPIRITUAL LIFE

It might appear that financial preoccupations dominated the early 70s, in the seemingly interminable discussions on reviewing use of buildings and ideas of selling land - but this would be to misinterpret the spiritual progress of the Church. House Groups for each elder were re-allocated, first of all on a geographical basis. The Youth Fellowship provided 100 new Bibles. The Hale Neighbourhood Group of Churches came into existence and our members contributed much to its projects - the Road Warden Scheme to ensure anyone moving into the district was welcomed and contacted, the needs of the elderly were carefully considered and a Youth Club set up; ecumenical House Groups were set up. A rota for transporting old people to our Church was started, and visits to old people's homes. The Young Wives Group set up a Play Group, the Church helped with the Parks play scheme and the Cub Pack was set up. Unfortunately, the Dorcas Society which had flourished for some 80 years ceased to exist in 1979; this society had made clothes to send to churches in the inner city, but ill-health and the advancing years of its membership caused its demise. It seems this could well have been a victim of the younger women now taking full time employment. Hale Neighbourhood Council of Churches was set up for community recreation, welfare and civic pride. 700 people attended services in Hale for the week of Christian Unity. The elders decided that every alternate Elders' meeting should be a discussion on a current social problem, led by an elder, as they felt the business and financial element was becoming too important. Indeed on December 3rd 1975 the report of a Visitation to the Church declared: "The Church is in good heart and confident in both secular and Christian terms to maintain its way and its progress. This is a Church prospering in the local situation, nourishing its members in the deep things of faith and yet encouraging them all the time to be in touch with life outside the Church and always striving for a more complete embodiment of the Church of Jesus Christ in their life".

MAGAZINE

With the change of Church name, came a change with the Church Magazine. In 1971, it was becoming too costly and it was suggested that an in-house duplicated magazine could be produced and distributed free of charge to all members. It would be more in the nature of a news letter; the name was "Outlook" and there was to be a competition for the cover. Four editors were to oversee its production, but the purpose of the magazine was "to serve as an instrument of binding the fellowship together and not as an area for debate, the proper place for which was the Church meeting".

CHURCH BUILDINGS

The latter half of the 1970s was dominated by proposals and counter proposals for the selling off of the Tennis Courts land and plans to reduce the buildings to a more manageable level yet keeping sufficient accommodation for future needs. A variety of plans was considered, at very differing costs, ranging from no demolition at all to complete demolition costing £35,930 and building anew at a cost of £155,130. Other suggestions to raise capital were to sell off part of the Manse garden or to look for a smaller Manse and sell 10, Arthog Road. Planning permission to build on the tennis courts was obtained in 1978. A setback occurred when rot was found in the roof, causing further costly investigation. Loans were discussed and plans changed to deal first with the dry rot at a cost of some £6,000. This having been effected, a final plan was accepted in 1980 to sell the land for £68,000; to accept a fixed price tender for renovations and new buildings at £87,914, to commit the Church to raise the necessary finance to cover the shortfall between the proceeds of the land and overall cost of rebuilding; to apply to U.R.C. for a grant of £5,000 for a rebuilding programme and to apply for a bridging loan of up to £25,000 from the North West Province of the U.R.C. The whole scheme would provide a large hall without a permanent stage (seating capacity 160) with partitioned-off foyer at the Church end, five classrooms, a new kitchen, store room and toilets. By February the next year, costs had gone up but more money was offered for the land, so the alterations went ahead and were completed by the end of 1981 and the Church was officially "re-opened" on 2nd January 1982 with a simple ceremony, a buffet tea and a party in the evening.

A survey was then carried out of the church buildings and all premises not affected by the recent building project. It revealed that the top of the tower needed replacing and repairs were needed to the flat roofs costing some £23,000. The organ was by now 50 years old; it had been overhauled in the 1950s and cleaned in the 1970s, but in reality the action was completely worn out, and the estimated cost of rebuilding was another £23,000. This huge bill facing the elders caused many discussions. Perhaps, inevitably, it was questioned whether the Church building used for one hour service per week merited the amount of money being spent on it; one proposal was to knock down the Church, build a smaller one and sell off another piece of land; another was to divide the Church horizontally, thus making two large areas. The matter was put to the Church meeting in February 1983 and it was decided to proceed with the necessary repairs to the building and organ. The Minister did not mince his words to the congregation: "It may be that, in order to keep their Church, friends will have to make real sacrifices and that it may not be possible to continue to worship here in the foreseeable future if sufficient funds cannot be raised". The Minister's words sank home for, by December 1983, £37,850 had been raised, including a loan from the Province. This was a fitting end to the ministry of Rev. Thomas Russell, who retired in December 1983, having led the Church with great faith and commitment. Through all these changes, plans and financial worries the Church continued to thrive spiritually. Coffee was now served regularly after morning service. The evening service had to be discontinued unfortunately, but the Church was involved in an "outreach" mission to the community and Wednesday evening coffee evenings were instituted.

THE INTER-REGNUM

During the inter-regnum, the Church was greatly indebted to the Rev. Michael Whitehorn of Sale for his work as Interim Moderator for much of 1984 until he suffered a coronary illness in October. Rev. David Howell-Jones took over and saw the Church through the rest of the inter-regnum, chairing Church and Elders' Meetings. The Church continued with its plans; the tower was completed. Worship continued, sometimes led by Rev. Brian Jackson, a retired former Methodist Minister, who was accepted for the Auxiliary Ministry. The congregation continued working with faith and enthusiasm towards the total of the £58,000 needed.

THE MINISTRY OF THE REV JEFFREY T. YATES 1985 - 1992

The Inter-regnum came to an end in June 1985, when the Rev. Jeffrey T. Yates entered upon his ministry in response to a unanimous invitation from the Church elders. Mr Yates had been trained at Lancashire Independent College, in Whalley Range, Manchester. He came to Hale from Bamford Chapel, Rochdale, having previously had pastorates at Poulton-le Fylde and Morecambe.

His Induction took place on June 12th 1985, a very happy occasion, but his time at Hale was to be all too short, ending with his untimely death from cancer in 1992.

LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Mr. Yates' Ministry began with breathtaking vigour and enthusiasm. By the middle of July, he had visited many Church members and new people in the area; almost immediately he announced six christenings and two weddings were to take place and membership classes were started up. The young people were entertained at the Manse, and at the Elders' meeting, it was agreed that "a finance only appeal was needed as Mr Yates pastoral visiting was so successful".

Mr Yates firmly believed that the Church was not just a place for Sunday worship, important as this was; he believed that social responsibility was equally important and that the Church should provide facilities for the Church family for recreation and social exchange. His book, to be published two years later, "And What About the Rest of the Week?" bears ample testimony to this philosophy and illustrates clearly his commitment seven days a week. During his first year as Minister, so many things which are currently established as part of our Church calendar were instigated; the Prayer Circle at the Manse; The Church Lending Library; The Fellowship Weekend - first held at Grange-over-sands with forty two participants. Arrangements were made for the Church to be floodlit and a proposal made for a Luncheon Club, intended for the housebound (starting with 20 maximum and costing 75p per person). Coffee evenings were held for new members with an Elder and spouse present. The Banner Group was formed, providing magnificent banners for special occasions. By November 1985 Mr Yates had visited every Church member and adherent. The membership was increasing and a Social Committee to plan suitable

events for the coming year had also been set up; these included a Barn Dance; various concerts by visiting Choirs and a Garden Party at the Manse.

SPORTING ACTIVITIES

Mr. Yates was a great lover of sport; he had a never ending supply of stories about cricket or football and was himself no mean tennis player and cricketer.

The Badminton Club was quickly re-started and the Indoor Bowls set up, aided by a grant of £328 which Mr. Yates obtained from the Sports Council towards equipment. Also a snooker table and table-tennis table were bought with the aid of other grants.

MUSIC

Music was another of his great loves, and he greatly enjoyed the concerts of visiting choirs and organists and the Songs of Praise led by Mr. Geoffrey Wheeler from St. Peter's Church. At the request of the Minister 120 copies of "Mission Praise" were bought and immediately put to use. The present organist Mr. David Rickett had been appointed organist and choir master in 1978, and ever since has continued to produce music of the highest quality. The choir has maintained throughout (despite many comings and goings) about 20 members and has ably led the singing in worship Sunday by Sunday. It has also rendered a number of complete Cantatas including, "Olivet to Calvary", The "Crucifixion", "Night of Miracles", and "Celebrate Life". In 1980, it won 2nd prize in a competition for choirs at the Provincial Day at Lancaster.

A major reconstruction of the organ was undertaken by George Sixsmith and Son. During this period, while the organ was out of commission, a small orchestra was formed by Audrey and John Eggington which played for services; this was a very successful venture, and the orchestra continues to make a valuable contribution to the morning service once a month, and plays on special occasions.

Following the 1986 organ rebuild, eminent organists from Cathedrals and the BBC were invited to give recitals.

The highly successful Jazz Group deserves a special mention. In 1984, even before the formation of the orchestra, Jonathan Sayce realised there were young players in the church who could form a jazz group and it gave its inaugural performance at the Annual Christmas Crackers

entertainment, under its full and proper title of "The St. Cecil-in-the-fields United Reformatory Baroque Ensemble, by kind permission". Its one-item repertoire consisted of the traditional piece "The Preacher", which seemed appropriate during the inter-regnum between Tom Russell's retirement and Jeff Yates' appointment.

During the nine years of the band's existence it steadily expanded its repertoire and accompanied song-and-dance acts and performed at many church entertainments and Manse garden parties, at the Jeff Yates Memorial Concert in 1993 and at the street party during the Hale Awake week, also in 1993.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Christmas was a family occasion and, as well as the usual Christmas services, there were additional functions - a Christmas tea for the over 70s, a Christmas Eve Party for families followed by a service at midnight and on December 27th a sports morning for families in the Church Hall. A Christmas card had also been commissioned for the Church. In January, Mr Yates was pleased to report "a most happy Christmas with great support for everything arranged".

Mr. Yates was extremely keen on Youth work and reported "a crying need for Youth Work in the District". A Youth Council was set up and a Junior Badminton Club. The Youth Fellowship held a successful Valentine's Dance and a total of 91 people went on the Family Church outing to Newby Hall and Gardens. The Junior Church Festival took place with great success, followed by a picnic for children and parents in the Manse Gardens. A Pilots Group was set up, whose annual entertainment "Christmas Crackers" gives such pleasure to all and a scheme was set up to keep in touch with those young people who left to go to college or jobs away from Hale.

By mid 1986, congregations of well over 200 worshipped at the Sunday morning service; however, evening services (which had been restarted on Mr. Yates' initiative) were still restricted in number. Mr. Yates attended all the House Groups and suggested topics which all groups should discuss to pool ideas.

Matters of social concern were debated; a meeting took place against Sunday trading; the question of raffles and tombolas were discussed

thoroughly and an appeal (which met with success) was made to the Ashley Hotel to discontinue holding Mystic and Psychic Fayres.

One very special service took place on August 17th 1986; Mrs. Elsie Arnold, Hale URC's longest standing member (1902) celebrated her 100th birthday; her son the Right Reverend Keith Arnold (Anglican Bishop of Warwick) was invited to preach on that occasion, and both greatly appreciated this opportunity.

CHURCH ADMINISTRATION

Some changes were made in the administration of the Church and some reapportioning of responsibilities.

The number of elders was increased to 16 (plus the Secretary and two Treasurers). Mrs. Joyce Bishop was appointed official Church Historian and has kept from this time up to the present a wonderful scrap book of events in the Church life and members' achievements. The Fabric Committee was enlarged. The format of the Annual Meeting changed - reports were given at the four quarterly meetings of the Church and a summary only at the Annual Meeting. In addition a Church photograph was taken and a Manse Committee was set up. The Social Hour attempted to "change its image" and was now encouraging gentlemen to attend as well.

After one year of Mr. Yates' ministry, the Church had a renewed sense of purpose and was a-buzz with activities. This continued as Mr. Yates poured in new ideas over the next few years. A Good Friday ramble, an Easter Morning breakfast, a Mothering Sunday Luncheon when 82 ladies sat down to a meal in the Church Hall prepared, served (and washed up) by the men. A holiday club was set up and run by members of the church for a week in August; each year a different theme is chosen, for example the World Church, All Creatures Great and Small. About 60 children spend a wonderful week of companionship and learning and enjoy themselves thoroughly.

Re-furbishment of the Church went on; a new carpet was laid throughout the Church and an induction loop system for hearing aids was installed in memory of Mr. Reg Cross: overhead electric heaters were installed and the organ loft roof was repaired.

In 1989, the Church was in the happy position of being able to reintroduce the regular Evening Service, and the number of people

attending Communion was large enough to warrant another Communion tray being provided.

A student from the Northern College, Mr. Simon Thomas, joined the Church as a placement student for the academic year; he contributed much during his time at the Church, and certainly learned a lot. Later that year, an additional student came to help one day a week.

90th ANNIVERSARY

1989 brought with it the Church's 90th Anniversary, which was celebrated in style. The preacher at the Sunday services on June 18th was the Rev. Keith Forecast, Moderator of the General Assembly, and a congregation of over 400 attended the morning service, and over 300 in the evening. It was a great joy to have present three past ministers, Rev. Jim Lander, Rev. Hewlett Coltman and Rev. Tom Russell and the widow of Rev. David Wilkins, (now Mrs. Doreen Sexton). The Church was beautifully decorated with flowers for the occasion and the banners looked resplendent. An open day was held on the Monday when coffee was served and an exhibition (of Church history) and members talents were on display; many friends and members attended and made this a memorable week; about 120 people attended a splendid Anniversary Dinner held at the Cresta Court Hotel in Altrincham.

LINKS WITH U.S.A.

Also in 1989 another happy link was established. Mr. & Mrs. Yates went on a visit to the U.S.A. to the Presbyterian Church in Lancaster, Ohio. (They had originally established the link in their previous church, when they went there for three months on exchange in 1980 and were to continue the link and involve Hale U.R.C. in it). Resulting from this, a group from Ohio visited Hale in 1990.

They were welcomed in London and brought by coach to Hale where they stayed in the homes of members of the church. They happened to be here for the Church's 91st anniversary and the Church Garden Party. Many coach tours were arranged (to Haworth, York, Chester, N. Wales, the Lake District, Ironbridge and Coventry). The group travelled to Edinburgh for 2 days. After leaving Hale, they spent a few days in London.

A group from Hale visited Ohio in 1991 and many friendships still flourish from this time. The Banner Group made a special banner for the

group to take back with them, "Hands across the sea" which was very much appreciated by our friends in America. Another American connection was a visit in April 1991 by the Wartburg Choir, a group of students from the college. These young people sang magnificently and few will forget the feeling of peace and togetherness as the choir linked hands round the Church encompassing the audience as they sang "Give me Jesus".

ILLNESS AND DEATH OF REV. J. YATES

By 1990 Mr. Yates had to go into hospital for a major operation, but, on his return, his leadership and enthusiasm were undiminished and he continued his ministry under increasing bad health in a manner which was a source of inspiration to everyone. He never spared himself, and worked selflessly with great love and devotion to his congregation. New members continued to come into the Church, and by the time he had been at Hale five years, over 100 new members had been confirmed. He always looked to the needs of others and almost ignored his own. In the early 90s, the Church was redecorated and the lighting improved; plans were made for an update of the kitchen. A Church office was opened and new easily-assembled staging was provided for the Dramatic Society. "Outlook" had a new, more modern format and a new photocopier made the production of the magazine much easier. A visitation of the Avon Road, Nursery Avenue and Laburnum Lane area took place, bringing in more new members. A healing service was introduced and the 'Guardian Angel' scheme got under way. A very successful and inspiring Elders' Weekend took place.

All this time, Mr. Yates' health was causing increasing concern but the whole Church was buoyed up by his ever forward-looking optimism and joy in living. It was indeed a crushing blow when he died on June 28th 1992. His funeral service was very typically not a mournful occasion, in spite of the real sadness in the hearts of all. It was, rather, the celebration of a great man, whose humour and kindly concern had touched everyone present personally, and a thanksgiving for his inspiration in an all too brief spell at Hale. The Elders were right to express their fear that "a long inter-regnum might destroy the high plateau of enthusiasm and spiritual strength to which Jeff's seven year ministry had led the Church".

THE INTER-REGNUM

The inter-regnum did, however last some 14 months. In that time the church was once again helped by many friends; services continued led by visiting ministers, amongst whom it was good to welcome back the Rev. Tom Russell and the Rev. Brian Jackson. The evening services were led by Church Elders and the Interim Moderator, Rev. David Westhead chaired the Church and Elders' Meetings and his encouragement there was invaluable. We also had the assistance of Adam Britton a student from the Northern College who was attached to the church for the summer of 1993.

The Church did not stand still; many projects were put into operation. The Traidcraft stall started, selling goods from countries where the producers received their fair price. A pay-phone was provided in the coffee lounge and the walls enhanced by photographs of all Church members and associates, displayed alphabetically on a notice board. New hymn-book shelves were provided at the Church entrance. In June 1993 the Church welcomed visitors once again from Lancaster, Ohio.

On 6th March 1993 a Memorial Concert was held in memory of Jeff Yates. The compère was Monty Helmn, an old friend of Jeff's from his Morecambe days and the programme consisted of many differing kinds of music Jeff had enjoyed with the congregation during his ministry in Hale, and the re-telling of many of Jeff's favourite jokes. The Church was packed for one of the most memorable concerts ever held at Hale URC and over £1,000 was raised for cancer charities. Another memorial to Jeff was a trophy for the Bowling Club, and the Jeff Yates Memorial Trophy remains a much sought after prize among the bowlers.

In 1993, Hale saw the beginning of a mission to try to interest 'lapsed' local Christians in returning to a church in the village. This enterprise was entitled "Hale Awake", and it was an extremely lively, community 'experiment', initiated by St. Peter's Church as part of their Centenary Celebrations.

Pulpit exchanges took place between churches, leaflets were distributed to every house and great enthusiasm was shown for a music group, prayer group, working group, youth group and a drama group. A Good Friday procession around the village, a "Beating the Bounds" walk and a memorable "Songs of Praise", including a hymn specially written for "Hale Awake" were all part of the initial mission, (which also ended up

with a profit of £1,600). The initiative continued, with four services a year planned to take place in different churches. The Taizé services were particularly popular and a real feeling of enthusiasm was generated, and great fellowship created between the churches. The house groups continued to meet and provide very interesting discussions.

THE MINISTRY OF THE REV. DAVID BATCHELOR 1993-

Mr. Batchelor came to Hale in September 1993. He had trained at Northern College, and in his student days, as was mentioned earlier, had spent a month at the then Hale Congregational Church as a pastor during an Easter vacation, so he was not a complete stranger. He had spent three years as a missionary in Madagascar and had had pastorates in Guisborough, Southport and Eastcote. He was warmly welcomed by all, and immediately set about leading the Church onward. Mr. Batchelor and his wife Margareta entertained each Elders' Group and their spouses at the Manse in order to get to know the congregation quickly.

GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

The membership had remained faithful during the inter-regnum and in 1993 there were 201 members plus 38 associates. The "Hale Awake" anniversary provided a remarkable weekend, with a Barn Dance, a quiz and an amazing street party in Cecil Road. Introductory leaflets and cards for visitors were provided in the pews, a visitors' book was available in the porch, and special occasion cards for baptisms, marriages and bereavements were instituted.

Mr. Batchelor praised the existing Church meetings but felt that there was a need to discuss wider moral and church issues as well as internal matters. 1994 was declared "The Year of the Family" nationally. A speaker was invited to the Church Meeting to talk about the work of the Family Service Unit in Manchester. There were already links with the Unit, as a collection of dried goods was made every month for the Unit. It was decided as a result of this special meeting to buy a second-hand eight berth caravan at a cost of £1,384 which could be used by deprived families for holidays. Our own Family Service on Sunday morning was extremely important, and a new Hymn Book, "Rejoice and Sing", containing many new hymns was introduced. 182 copies were bought by individuals and choir copies were bought by the church. At the end of

1997, a New Music Group was formed to introduce even newer hymns and choruses to the congregation.

A new format for the Evening Service was suggested; one each month to remain as a Communion Service with a time for healing, two to be traditional services, and the fourth an experimental service, with more appeal to the young, and not necessarily taking place in church. Church related community workers were invited to speak at these services, and they provided interesting insights into their jobs and problems facing so many people. There were meetings to welcome newcomers, to introduce them to all aspects of Church life by meeting representatives and make them feel that whatever contribution they could make would be appreciated. House Groups were encouraged to meet on a more regular basis for devotion, discussion and socialising.

One of the questions debated at this time was whether children should take part in communion. This matter was discussed in house groups, Church Meeting and Elders' Meetings, (as was the Human Sexuality issue). It was decided by the Church Meeting - October 1996 that "it was agreed in principle to welcome children and young people as participants to the Lord's Supper, normally subject to parental agreement and careful preparation". The first occasion was in May 1997, which was a very successful, happy service, well presented and with a nice atmosphere.

In September 1996, the Church welcomed a placement student from Northern College; he would spend two years linked with the Church, working closely with the Minister, take services and gradually play a greater role in the life of the Church. Mr. Chris Parker, his wife Ruth and later baby Hannah became very quickly "at home" and established themselves as a very real asset in all aspects of Church work. Mr. Parker was a representative at the European Ecumenical Assembly in 1997 in Graz, Switzerland.

As always, the Church kept in view world problems; an appeal was held for Bosnia; a collection taken for Chernobyl. The Mite scheme continued to provide money to buy sachets for sick children in Africa. A donation was sent to a skills and training centre in South Africa and old tools were collected to send to underdeveloped countries. A letter was sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer asking him to review the Overseas Aid Act and payments, and the Church joined "Jubilee 2000", a millennium campaign by a consortium of overseas agencies for the relief of debt for the world's poorest countries; this included checking that supermarkets

were purchasing goods produced by people who got a living wage. The Traidcraft stall has much the same aim. In 1996, Hale URC took the initiative in organising a Prayer Vigil for peace in Northern Ireland for all the churches in Hale. In 1994 the church affiliated itself to "Commitment for Life", a scheme set up to provide finance and seek justice for the world's poor, working closely with Christian Aid and World Development agencies. Each Church had to choose to link with one project and Hale chose Silveira House in Zimbabwe.

THE CHURCH BUILDING

The buildings, like homes, need to be carefully looked after and upgraded. In recent years, the front of the building has been enhanced by a ramp with rails leading to the main door, and glass doors for the porch, an anonymous gift. Heaters have been provided in the vestries. The Church was registered for Church Floodlighting, funded through the Millennium project.

In 1994 the kitchen was upgraded at a cost of £750. It is a sad reflection on modern times that it was felt necessary to install security lights, and bells on the doors so that they could be kept locked when the buildings were in use. Improvements were made to the radio microphone, "Go-Pak" tables purchased for the hall and chairs for the Round Room. The Church vestibule was decorated. General maintenance and repairs were dealt with, and the financial situation was always a matter for concern. The Church has benefited from modern technology; Orange Communications paid a fair sum of money to install 6 small antennae around the Church Tower and have access for maintenance for 15 years. In the autumn of 1998 the SW Manchester District of the URC set up a Web Site on the internet with a page for each of its 16 churches. We designed the Hale entry for this and a little later set up our own Hale URC Web Site which gives details of the church and its organisations, together with the monthly message from the minister and the calendar of events.

The Spring Fair continued to make amazing sums of money and concerts, coffee mornings etc. continued to provide social contact as well as making a profit. One "institution" from this period is Gordon Crabtree's famous quizzes; these he has provided with great regularity, thus ensuring that the brains of the congregation never have time to

relax! Oh! those terrible logos, that you know you've seen, but can't think where! and those dreaded clues which should enlighten you but don't. But what fun (and frustration) has been generated! (We even believe some of the congregation have been known to CHEAT! or SWAP ANSWERS!)

SPECIAL EVENTS

In April 1995, there was another visit from the Wartburg Choir. What a splendid evening of music and singing of the highest quality from such delightful young people! We look forward eagerly to their visit this centenary year.

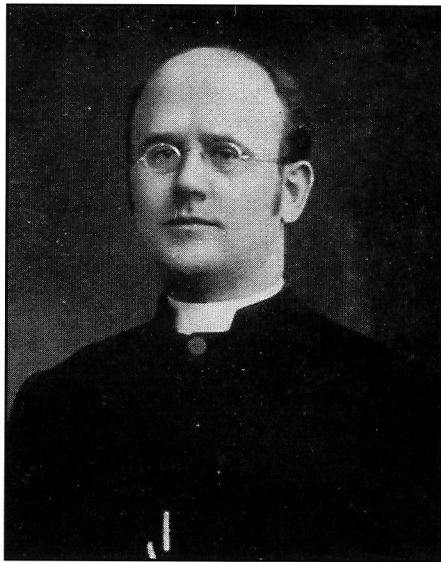
The Banner Group has made some stunning banners over the years. Their Harvest Banner was included in an exhibition celebrating Christian Aid's 50th Anniversary in 1995 held in Harrogate, Dublin and London. A coach party from our Church visited Harrogate to see the exhibition and take pride in our contribution.

In November 1996 the Festival of Talents took place. This was a weekend when we celebrated our talents (but it was surprising how many people were reticent about their amazing gifts!) Art, writing, crafts, photography, embroidery, knitting, patchwork, hymn writing, poetry, cake and dessert making, computing, all manner of indoor sports - the list was endless - were on display in the buildings, whilst in Church three mini concerts of very high quality took place. The whole area buzzed with activity all Saturday; the Luncheon Circle provided lovely food (what talents there!) for hungry participants and a huge number of visitors. On Sunday, we gave thanks for all these talents in our services.

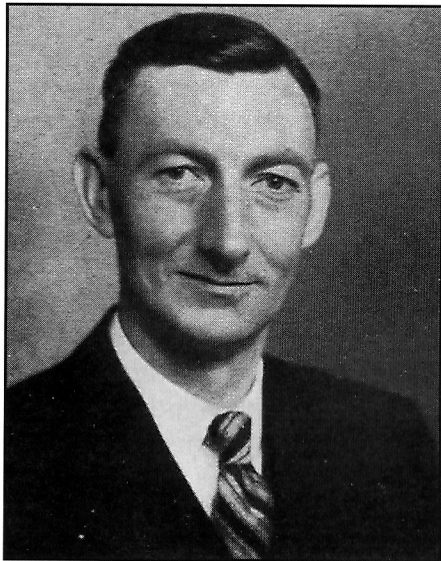
Of course the main date in our minds for the last few years has been the Centenary, which we are about to celebrate. A hard-working committee started plans as far back as 1995, and we hope that their enthusiasm and ingenuity will result in a never-to-be-forgotten celebration. Coming close on its heels will be the Millennium, of course, when the churches must ensure that the reason for the celebration does not get lost in the rejoicing. 2001 will therefore naturally be very dull in comparison, but we must go on with faith and determination to build on the rich tradition we have inherited from our predecessors at the Hale URC into our second Century and the new Millennium.



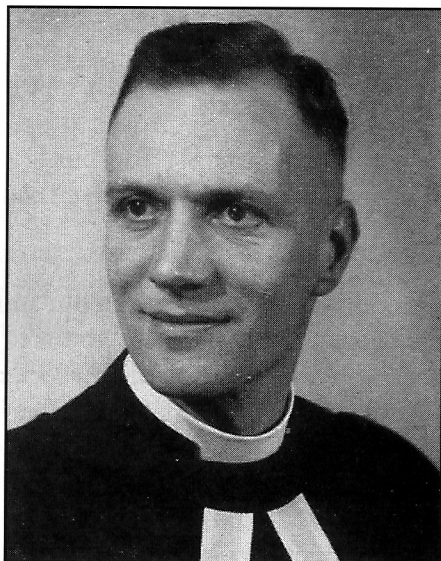
Rev. J. C. Ormerod, M.A.
1920 - 1933



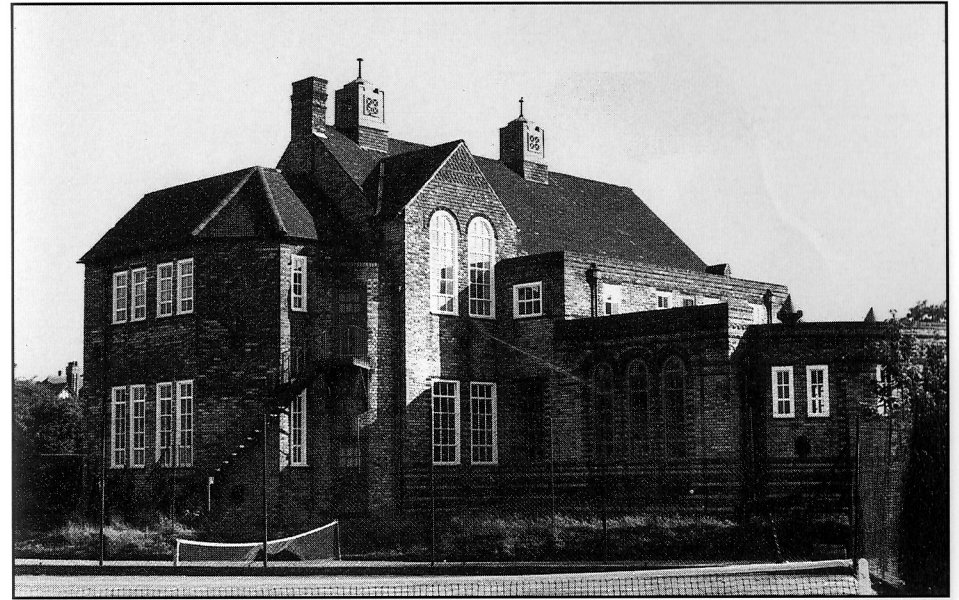
Rev. C. H. Hedgeman, M.A., B.D.
1908 - 1919



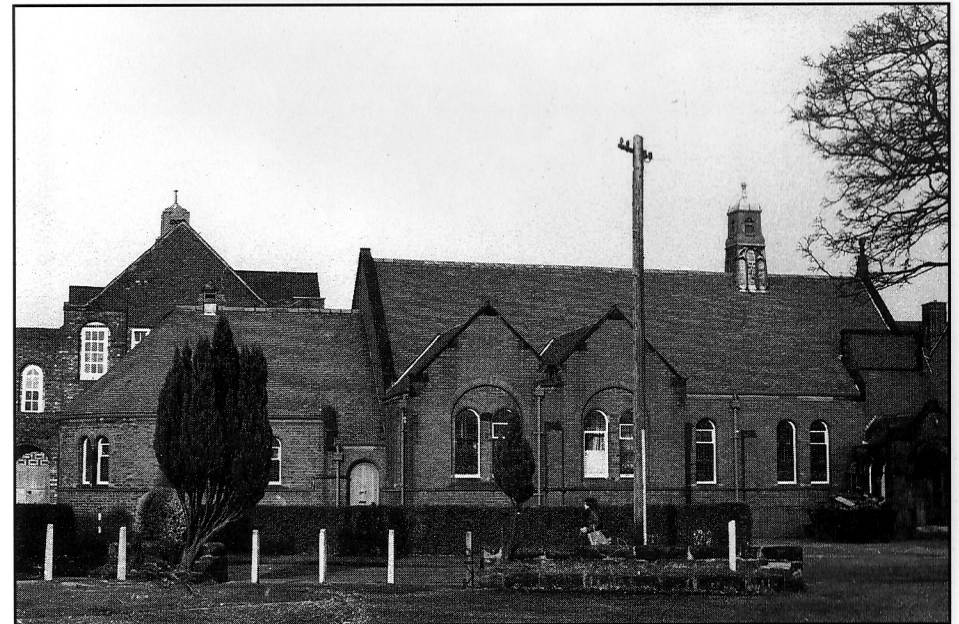
Rev. T. J. Lander, M.A., B.D.
1935 - 1948



Rev. Hewlett E. Coltman, M.A.
1949 - 1957



The original Sunday School opened 1911.



The Round Room and original Church



Entrance to Church through new doors added in 1998



Members of Junior Church with their Exploration Certificates



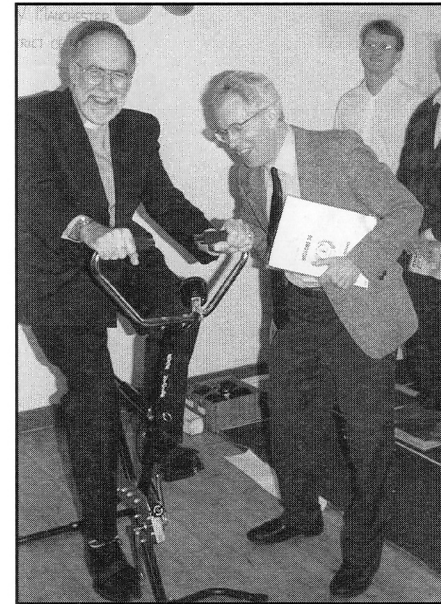
Rev. Keith Forecast, Rev. Tom Russell, Rev. Hewlett Coltman,
Rev. Stanley Sexton, Mrs. Doreen Sexton, Rev. Jeff Yates,
Mrs. Kaye Russell and Rev. Jim Lander



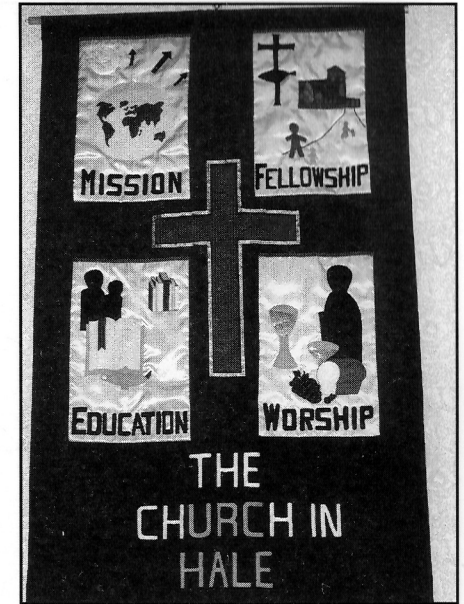
Members of Pilots



Members of the Social Hour



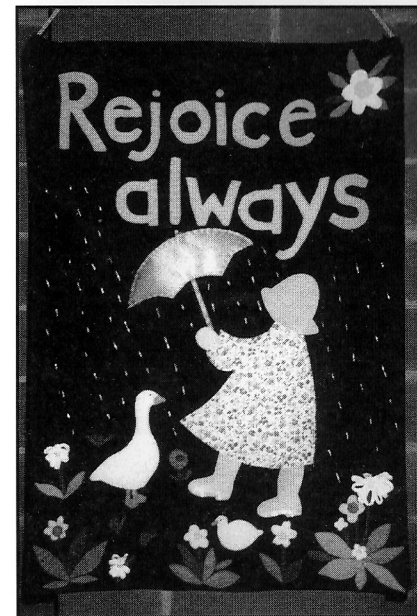
Rev. Keith Forecast at Festival of Talents, 2nd November 1996



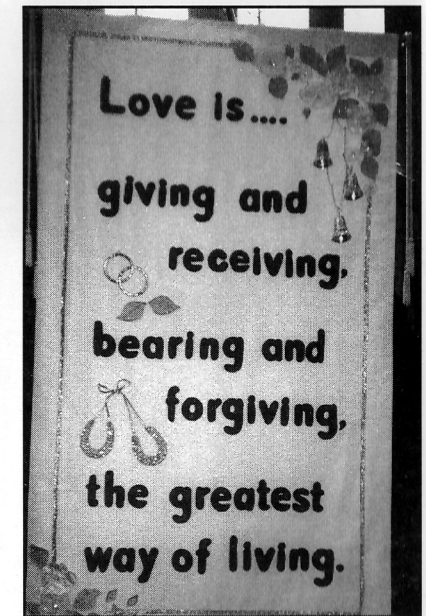
Hale URC Church Banner

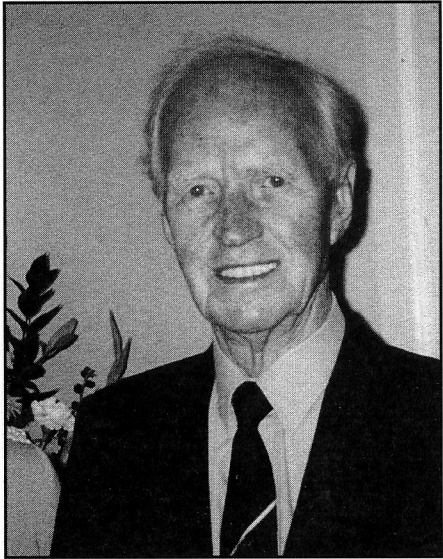


Barbecue prior to Songs of Praise 8th June 1997

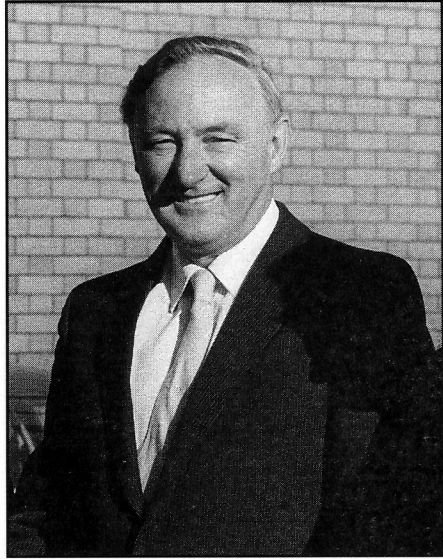


Further Church Banners





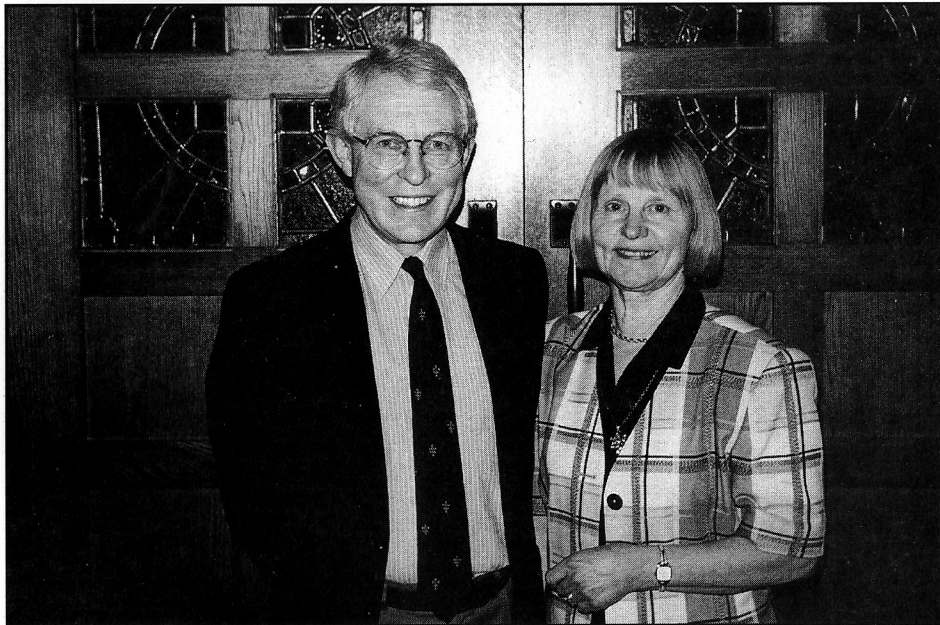
Rev. T. Russell, B.A.
1963 - 1983



Rev. J. T. Yates
1985 - 1992



The Church Elders 1999



The Minister, Rev. David Batchelor and Mrs. Margareta Batchelor
1993 -



The Church Officers 1999

THE CHURCH IN 1999

All who come into contact with Hale URC in any way know what a lively, thriving, happy Church it is. There is some activity for all ages and interests, and it is one of the most welcoming places one could ever find. These perhaps subjective feelings were borne out by replies to a questionnaire that was circulated to about 350 people in February 1998, which indicated an overwhelming belief that the church is 'Friendly', 'Welcoming' and 'Caring'. It really does have a 'family' atmosphere where people find themselves drawn in to feel very much loved and needed. The brief accounts which follow give a clear picture of the width of interests. Many provide fellowship for members every day of the week, and there is an emphasis on helping both the community in Hale and further afield, both practically and by charitable giving, but of course the whole atmosphere and ethos of the Church comes from the central purpose: worship.

CHURCH WORSHIP

The source of inspiration and power for church life springs out of worship. The church year, the lectionary and 'Partners in Learning' help to provide liturgical shape to worship, yet we enjoy a wide variety of types and styles of services. Hymns are chosen from 'Rejoice and Sing', 'Mission Praise', 'Congregational Praise' and other sources and there are plans for our own 'Hale Praise' supplement. Worship is enhanced by the organ, piano, choir, orchestra and an occasional solo or singing group. A rota of volunteers read the scripture passages. On about ten Sundays each year there is 'all-age' worship including Parade Services with Pilots, Guides and Brownies; Family Services, an annual 'musical' by Junior Church, Promotion Sunday, Harvest and Christmas Festival. Wide participation by children, young people and adults is appreciated as are a range of themes such as 'The Seasons,' 'Peter - Fisherman and Apostle', 'Signs and Signals', 'Water' and 'Teamwork'. Other highlights of the year include Lenten series with members of the congregation speaking about their faith and work, or their involvement in voluntary care organisations, the Unity Week Preaching Exchange, and the Church Anniversary Sunday which has sometimes included an afternoon barbecue followed by outdoor 'Songs of Praise.' In 1997 the

church agreed to allow children to share fully in the Communion Service provided they were properly prepared and had parental permission. Their participation once or twice each year has been widely welcomed.

Evening Service with a small but loyal congregation is usually quiet and reflective. The monthly communion at this service includes a time for healing. A good number of members make use of the bible reading notes published by the International Bible Reading Association as well as subscribing to the URC's Prayer Handbook.

BIBLE STUDY

The fortnightly Bible Study Group which has up to twelve regular members enjoys reading and discussing sections of the scriptures or biblical themes, always seeking to apply bible teaching to the practicalities of everyday life. Over the last few years the group has read John's Gospel, Genesis 1-12, Jonah, 1 Corinthians, the letters of Peter, Isaiah 40-55 and the letter of James. During 1997 the group transformed itself into a 'Developing Discipleship' group when with a few additional members there was some imaginative exploration of what it means to be a follower of Jesus today. The Bible Society 'Open Book' project currently provides a challenge to us to once again become 'the people of the book.'

PRAYER CIRCLE

The Prayer Circle meets every Tuesday at 11.00 a.m. in the Round Room, beginning with an act of worship. Each week there is a different leader; there are bible readings, members taking it in turn to read, and prayers for any members, friends and neighbours in need. The URC Prayer Fellowship Handbook is used and the meeting ends with a closing act of worship. As one member explains "As we leave, we feel that we too have received a blessing".

THE GUARDIAN ANGEL SCHEME

The Guardian Angel scheme has run successfully for a number of years at the Hale URC. In a recent survey, everyone already taking part in the scheme said they wanted to continue because they felt it was so worthwhile. The scheme affords a means for members to extend their care for each other in a loving way in their own homes by prayer. People

do not know the identity of their Guardian Angel and the 'Angels' never reveal whom they are praying for. There is a confidential register of those taking part in the scheme. If you join, you are given the name of your 'charge', someone you know either because you meet them at church and belong to the same organisation or because you have interests in common, and you give prayer support to your 'charge'. It is also possible to have a Guardian Angel without becoming one yourself. Those who participate are very enthusiastic about the benefits of the scheme; "I have heard from my Angel regularly, much to my benefit". "It upholds my belief in the power of prayer". "I am so grateful to my Angel". "Often a card drops through my letter box just at the time when I am most in need of encouragement".

BANNER GROUP - Fiona Brown

During the year various aspects of our Christian faith are marked by the banners in the worship and decoration of the church, enhancing the sanctuary. The group was formed in 1986 with six 'stitchers' producing two banners for Christmas that year which were well received and the group has continued making banners to celebrate the Christian festivals and seasons.

Much of our work has been produced by trial and error, learning which fabrics give the best results, colours to tone with the church decor and lighting, plus the lettering types to incorporate into the banners. As to the designs selected, we look for ideas in cards, book-marks and adverts for inspiration. Eleven years on, for the 'Called to be One' banner, we had permission to use the design drawn by Sister Regina at Torvey Abbey, Beds. from a Commitment for Life brochure. In the autumn of 1995 the Harvest banner was accepted for a nationwide tour of Church Banners.

We all have memories of how we acquired some of the fabrics used - eg. the cauliflower in the Harvest banner is a hand-knitted dishcloth, put to a very unlikely use and the fringe in that banner was produced from the bottom edge of a group member's settee. Many ingenious ideas have come forth to cover up mistakes which then became enhancements. In 'Rejoice and Sing' we had fun naming the instrumentalists and choir members as we stitched!

To date we have over thirty banners in various sizes and two have been taken to the United Presbyterian Church in Lancaster, Ohio when Hale members have visited there. God has used for his greater glory, in our work for the Church, the particular talent each member has brought to the group.

OUTLOOK - THE CHURCH MAGAZINE

Organisers: Kenneth Lea - Roger Budenberg - Brian Jackson - Mary Peers

The Church magazine, entitled 'OUTLOOK', is published ten times a year, at the beginning of each month except January and August. An Editorial Committee of 4 is appointed by the Church Meeting to produce the magazine. All copy is submitted to the Committee members towards the end of the month prior to publication. The Committee meets once for each issue to decide the contents and layout, and occasionally to remedy any minor lapses in grammar, spelling or punctuation made by the contributors. Typing is generally done by the Committee members on their PCs prior to the meeting, though corrections and the typing of additional material are undertaken afterwards. When finished, the 'master' copy is passed to one of the volunteer photo-copy operators, who makes a print run of about 250 copies. Another helper is responsible for collating, folding and stapling the loose sheets, and the finished copies are passed to the Distributor. Batches are given to a team of local distributors who make delivery to individual members' homes. Some copies are placed in the Church vestibule for collection, and yet other copies are wrapped, addressed and mailed.

A typical issue of 'OUTLOOK' comprises a folded A4 sheet of coloured paper serving as the cover and two similarly folded white A4 sheets placed between the cover sheet. The contents always include the Minister's Letter and 'News of the family', plus the Church Calendar for the coming weeks. Annual Reports of the different organisations of the Church appear regularly, usually one report per issue. News about Churches Together in Hale, and about the wider councils of the URC (District Council, Provincial Synod, General Assembly) is included from time to time, as are readers' letters and occasional articles by Church members on important issues of the day. 'OUTLOOK' is also used as a means of publicising events to be held on Church premises (e.g. Spring Fair, concerts and other special social occasions). The Editorial Committee has been known to allow the occasional 'small-ad' to appear, and also reprints inspirational items of verse, etc, submitted by readers, when space permits.

The Magazine is supplied free of charge, although there is an annual appeal to the readership to make donations towards the costs of production which are otherwise borne by the Church.

FLOWER GUILD - Secretary - Ann Ash

Each Sunday, the flowers in Church are funded by donations from members and friends, often to mark the anniversary of some meaningful occasion special to them. A Flower Rota is displayed in the Coffee Lounge and anyone wishing to give flowers is asked to sign the list. The flowers are bought and arranged by 5 groups of ladies, each responsible for a month's flower arranging. After the evening service, the flowers are divided, wrapped and taken to members and friends who were unable to attend the service because of illness, incapacity or other problems. At Christmas, and Harvest, all the groups join together to decorate the Church for the Festivals. The Church always looks magnificent and the decorations give immense pleasure to many people.

MUSIC - Organist and Choirmaster - David Rickett

The Church continues to be blest with an enthusiastic team of musicians to provide music for worship. The very accomplished organist leads the congregation in the singing with enthusiasm. The music before and after the services is always beautifully performed and carefully chosen. The team of assistants are always willing to stand in, and there can be few churches which can boast four talented organists.

The Choir meets regularly for practice on Friday evenings. As well as learning anthems both old and modern it has an increasing role in helping the congregation to learn new hymns and worship songs which are sung at Morning Services. The Choir usually sings at special services and they will no doubt be very busy during our Centenary year.

The Orchestra (Leader Audrey Eggington) is a great asset to the Church, and once a month it plays to accompany the hymns at the service and often a specially arranged piece of music. The personnel of the orchestra has changed as young people go off to college etc; most of the players are Church members or adherents, but a few non-members give loyal support. The Orchestra can be counted on to perform at special services; they will doubtless be an integral part of the centenary celebrations. The culmination of the year for the Orchestra is Christmas time when they play at the Carol Service accompanying the Choir in some of the carols specially arranged for choir and orchestra and perform a special piece of Christmas music. It has become an annual event for the Orchestra to play at Woodlands URC for their Christmas Carol concert, when our organist plays the organ. It is unusual for a church to have so many talented performers (the orchestra currently has 12 members) who provide such high-quality, dignified music for our services.

ORGANISATIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

4th HALE BROWNIES - Leader - Ros Scott

The Brownies meet weekly on Fridays at the Church from 5.30 -7 p.m. It seems that activities have not changed much over the years, when one looks at the log books. There are plenty of challenges to achieve, at the same time having lots of fun and games. The Brownies range in age from 7 - 10. The enrolment badge is a trefoil standing for the three parts of the promise: "to do my best to love my God, to serve the Queen and my country and to help other people and keep the Brownie Law".

The Brownie programme follows three journeys through Brownies, Footpath, Roadway and Highway, incorporating eight points: doing our best, lending a hand, keeping healthy, wide-awake, making things, helping at home, being friendly and having fun. These challenges get harder as they pass through the three journeys. There are a huge selection of hobby and interest badges which Brownies can collect, which they do avidly. Each year, the Brownies go on pack holiday, using the Brownie House at Ashley. There they all have duties to do in rotation being hostesses, orderlies, first aiders and cooks, and the stay usually has a theme to follow. In 1990, the old uniform (brown blouse, belt, tie and beret) was changed to a new more practical and versatile uniform (sweatshirts, polo shirts, culottes, leggings, sashes for badges, neckers and base-ball caps). The units are still made up of four 'sixes' with names such as gnomes, pixies, imps etc. All in all, Brownies is about learning new skills through new challenges and having fun.

4th HALE GUIDES - Guider in charge - Helen Chappell

There has been a Guide Company at Hale URC since late 1939, and then in 1990 the Guides celebrated their 50 years as a registered company. Again the emphasis is on having fun and at the same time helping others and being practical. The Guides meet at 7 p.m. on a Friday evening when a very busy programme is pursued. You might find the Guides making things, singing, dancing, cooking or even find them raising money for charities, or out helping others. They go on camps, make new friends and enjoy many outdoor pursuits, canoeing, orienteering and tackling assault courses. At present there are 15 Guides in the unit.

PILOTS - Captain - Sue Stratton - First Mate - Ann Ash

Pilots is a non-uniformed organisation for boys and girls aged 7 - 14 sponsored by the URC. It seeks to support the worship and learning on Sundays with a programme of discovery, play, organised activity and projects calculated to help children grow physically, mentally and spiritually and to foster the children's sense of belonging to the church at home and overseas. The promise made by Pilots on enrolment sums up the aims of the movement "I will learn, pray, and serve all I can in the world-wide Church of Jesus Christ".

Pilots has a nautical flavour. Back in 1936, most children in Congregational Churches then supported a missionary ship 'John Williams V' which sailed among the islands of the Pacific. It was therefore natural to build a children's organisation around the idea of a ship. Our Company is called the S.S. Enterprise, and a company meeting is referred to as an 'All Aboard'. Our Company was set up in February 1987, and is extremely popular. At present there are 60 in the Company, 40 Junior and 20 Senior Pilots, and there is a waiting-list for entry! They meet on a Tuesday evening from 6 p.m.-7.30 p.m. and amongst their most well-known activities is the annual production of 'Christmas Crackers', a medley of singing, wit and amazing talent! They also help with productions in Junior Church and of course, all 3 movements, Guides, Brownies and Pilots take part in the Parade Services with great pride.

JUNIOR CHURCH (Leaders - Crèche: Mary Peers and Helen Russell-Fisher. Beginners: Pam Barnes, Fiona Bates, and Jenny Ruff. Primary: Lucy Crabtree and Judith Sadler. Juniors: Susan Stratton and Diana Sugden. Seniors: Margareta Batchelor. Secretary: Julia Roberts.)

We are fortunate indeed that the Junior Church flourishes thanks to the dedication of the leaders. At present there are 5 children in Beginners, 10 in Primary, 20 in Junior and 11 on the Seniors roll. Children and young people usually participate in the first part of the morning service then leave for their various departments. However, there are regular 'Family Services' in which young and old play an active part. The recent involvement of Junior Church in Communion has added to the sense of children being full members of the Church family and helped to develop bonds between children and adults.

Junior Church activities through the year are divided into three terms. In January they begin with the National Christian Education Council's programme, 'Bible Exploration' which has included themes as diverse as

'Abraham', 'Shalom', 'Upside Down World' and 'Peter the Disciple of Jesus', in recent years. The course encourages bible study and the discovery of its truth and relevance for today. The results of their work clearly show that the youngsters enjoy this approach. Following Easter, all the members of Junior Church, except Beginners, join in rehearsals for the annual musical. 'Jerusalem Joy,' 'From Pharaoh to Freedom', 'Saints Alive', 'Pharisee' and 'Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat', the productions of recent years have revealed no shortage of talents among the members of the casts. The third period starts with Promotion Sunday, which is traditionally followed by an outing to Freshfields. Taking a packed lunch to eat in the pine woods, all then enjoy a happy afternoon on the sand dunes and the beach, paddling, collecting shells and playing games. The long walk along the beach is rewarded with ice cream from a van and then the fascination of the red squirrel sanctuary at Formby before the return coach journey. The autumn - winter session reaches its climax with preparations for the annual Christmas Festival service in which all the children have a part in telling the story of the nativity.

ECUMENICAL YOUTH FELLOWSHIP

As a result of 'Hale Awake' in 1993, an ecumenical Youth Fellowship was established which has met at the URC on Sunday evenings ever since. Led successively by Elizabeth Downie then Alison and Paul Hooper it developed a programme in which discussion of ethical issues, bible study and the occasional speaker has been mixed equally with games, outings and social evenings. One of its more unusual projects was washing a jumbo jet at Manchester Airport! The group, which draws members from all the main church traditions in Hale, has a regular attendance of twelve to fourteen members who are aged 16-21. In the Autumn of 1998 Paul Winnington of Hale Methodist Church and our placement student Gary Gotham offered to give some leadership to this group of lively and articulate young adults.

SENIOR BADMINTON CLUB - Leader - Elizabeth Downie

Badminton has always been a popular sport at Hale URC. The club closed briefly when the new rooms were built and the wall dividing the hall and the coffee lounge put in place (which meant that a slightly shorter court had to be made). The false roof to keep in the heat caused difficulties because of the lack of height. However, the Club continues in good heart on Thursday evenings at 7.30 p.m., with a membership of

between eight and twelve regular players, all of whom thoroughly enjoy themselves keeping fit, having fun and playing some exciting badminton with keenly contested games. The members pay £1.00 per evening which is used to pay for refreshments and new equipment. An annual donation of some £200 is given to the Church funds for the use of the premises and heating.

The Club is open to all, and keen to recruit new members (racquets are available if necessary). The season starts in September and play usually continues until the end of May, when lighter evenings tempt people out of doors instead, but some keen members continue to play right through the summer months.

JUNIOR BADMINTON CLUB - Leader - Graham Ash

The Junior Badminton Club was founded just over ten years ago, originally with members from the Youth Fellowship. Most of the current players come to Church regularly, and others are attached to the uniformed sections. During the last season, many Juniors suddenly reached the age of becoming Seniors, (and happily many stayed on to play with the Seniors). There have been some newcomers and about nine players now enjoy their Thursday evenings activity from 6.00 p.m. - 7.20 p.m. Each evening, they pay 50p and at the end of the season, they were proud to donate £100 to Church funds. There is room for 3 more players, so come and try your hand.

INDOOR BOWLING CLUB - Chairman - David McNair

The Bowling Club has been and still is a popular activity. There are two sessions weekly, Wednesday evenings and Friday afternoons. There are two mats available and currently some 28 members. The Club has played matches against other URC Clubs and in 1990, it took part in a competition at Lancaster during the N.W. Province Day and won the trophy. This is now on display in the Large Hall. Since the death of the Rev. Jeff Yates, a competition has been held annually for the 'Jeff Yates Memorial Shield' which is keenly contested. The Club also holds an annual Coffee Morning and gives annual donations to the Church.

SOCIAL HOUR - President - Margareta Batchelor Secretary - Margaret Davidson

One of Hale URC's oldest societies is the Social Hour. This has been meeting on Monday afternoons for 93 years, continuing without

interruption through two World Wars. In the early days, it was for women only, but for a number of years now, gentlemen have joined in and everyone enjoys the varied programme which the organisers provide.

The meetings start with a hymn and prayer, led by one of the six leaders. During the winter, there is a programme of interesting talks, musical afternoons, slide shows, quizzes, discussion panels, to name but a few. Sometimes, there is a Members' afternoon when a theme is chosen, and members contribute their ideas. Once a year, there is an outing to some place of interest followed by tea at a nearby church; last year (1998) we visited Skipton. The Annual Lunch, with entertainment afterwards is always eagerly anticipated. It is traditional that the Minister opens the Winter session with a devotional talk, and other clergy are invited from time to time. In the summer three Garden Parties are held by friends of the Social Hour in their gardens, with afternoon tea and a bring and buy stall. The membership at the moment stands at about forty; new members would be most welcome or visitors at any meeting - 2.15 p.m. on Mondays in the Round Room. There is a small subscription of £2.00 per year and 50p per meeting. This helps pay speakers and to contribute to the heating and lighting (and to pay for the cup of tea, always a very acceptable end to the meetings).

THE SOCIAL COMMITTEE - Chairman - Gordon Crabtree

The Committee's remit is to organise social events for Church Members and friends, including something for all age groups. The 'Flagship' event is the New Year Party, a buffet meal followed by first-class entertainment. Tickets for this are soon snapped up, not surprisingly, for inevitably the number have to be limited. In 1999, the entertainment was given by a singing group 'Quintessential' which is a professional company of great polish. Three or four other concerts are organised per year, using a variety of orchestras and soloists; this year we are particularly looking forward to the return visit of the Wartburg Choir from America. At least one coffee morning per year is featured, and many one-off events, for example, a tour of the Bridgewater Hall, a barbecue, and Provincial Quiz night are arranged. The Committee would welcome any suggestion you may have for events particularly those which would appeal to younger families in Church.

The purpose in organising these events is to provide an atmosphere of fellowship for Church Members and friends and also to raise money to help Church Funds.

THE WOMEN'S COUNCIL - Chairman - Sue Crabtree

The Women's Council deals with the domestic side of the Church's work. One of its main duties is to prepare the communion table for one morning and one evening service each month, with the occasional extra services at Christmas and Easter. Another very important duty is to serve coffee each Sunday after morning service, which is an invaluable asset; it provides an opportunity for members, friends and visitors to meet for an informal chat (and saves enormously on telephone bills) and for those who live alone, this is really a golden opportunity to feel part of a big family. As part of the Church's commitment is to Fair Trade, Café Direct coffee is used; profit from sales goes towards replacement and refurbishment and has bought items ranging from cups and saucers to curtains. It is also the task of the Women's Council to arrange catering for Church events, such as the induction of new ministers, or District Meetings. No doubt the Women's Council will be extremely busy in the Centenary Year. Their efforts are always extremely effective and much appreciated and we are spoilt by the unfailing quality of catering.

The Women's Council deals with the distribution of harvest gifts. Plants, fruit and vegetables, tinned and dried goods are sorted into parcels which are then delivered by volunteers to the sick and housebound. The remaining non-perishable items go to the Family Service Unit. The Spring Fair is the Church's major annual fund raising event, held on a Saturday morning in May. The Women's Council organises the Fair and serves coffee and lunches throughout. They are helped by a great many other people who take charge of stalls, help to set up and clear away afterwards. Proceeds have risen each year recently and in 1998 over £1,900 was raised, being £300 more than the target.

LUNCHEON CIRCLE - Leader and Organiser - Kath Napier-Hemy

The Hale URC Luncheon Circle is about to celebrate its fourteenth anniversary. It meets every Friday in the Coffee Lounge at 12 noon and provides a two course hot meal (of a very high standard) at a very modest price to between forty and fifty elderly people. All the labour is voluntary and four or five different teams take it in turn to cook and serve the meal. Apart from the meal, the Circle provides a welcome social occasion for the elderly and lonely each week. Each year there is a special Christmas Dinner, followed by entertainment when all the teams and 'clients' enjoy a superb feast. If anyone has difficulties, a team of volunteer drivers provides transport to and from Church each week. Most of the people

who attend have some connection with the Church; for many, it is the highlight of the week.

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN HALE-Representative-Margaret Jessup
The eight churches situated in Hale and Hale Barns, formerly known as the Hale Fellowship of Churches, agreed and signed a Constitution in January 1995, with its stated aims of providing a means of consultation between the churches, to facilitate common witness to Christ and to work and pray for Christian unity in association with Greater Manchester Churches Together.

Five Anglican Churches, Holy Angels Roman Catholic church, Hale Methodist Church and our own United Reformed Church are each represented by the local Minister, Clergy and two lay members who meet in the forum six times a year. A Chairman is elected to serve for 2 years, a Treasurer for 2 years and a Secretary for 3 years.

Shared ecumenical services are held on Sunday evenings in the month of August, meeting in the eight churches on a rota basis, and in addition 4 more ecumenical services take place during the year. An exchange of pulpits is arranged during the week of prayer for Christian Unity, which is celebrated in January each year, and provides an opportunity for the ministers to meet congregations other than their own. The light refreshments served after these shared acts of worship allow informal fellowship and talk across the denominations.

In October each year, One World Week is recognised with a Supper and a Speaker's Talk, the Churches taking responsibility for the event in turn. At Christmas and at Easter we rejoice together and witness to our faith in both celebration and service, through carol singing, a common Christmas card, telling all the homes in Hale the times of Christmas worship in all the churches, and a Good Friday Walk of Witness.

For a number of years, a group of Christians in Hale cooked and distributed Christmas dinners to lonely or inactive people in the area, and more recently this scheme was extended to give more of the churches the opportunity to share in this community service.

The well-organised Street Wardens Scheme ensures that most homes in Hale and Hale Barns receive information about the local churches, their clergy and times of services.

The Trafford Rent Guarantee Scheme assists homeless people to find initial accommodation by payment of the first month's rent from a fund of money raised from churches all over Trafford Metropolitan Borough.

This rent can be repaid to the scheme when the Housing Benefit has been processed, and then is available to give another homeless person the chance to find a home. This scheme was initiated by Churches Together in Hale and is now served by Christians from other parts of Trafford.

The 'Tools for Self Reliance Scheme' has been successful in collecting unwanted tools, large and small, through the churches, for renovating and repair before being sent to workers in developing countries, enabling them better to earn a living.

A successful pre-General Election meeting was arranged by C.T. in Hale, in conjunction with Altrincham Christians Together and Churches Together in Timperley in April 1997, when questions were addressed to candidates of all political parties fighting the Election in the Altrincham and Sale Constituency.

CTiH continues to seek out needs of our Community, and is presently considering ways of helping 'au pairs' working in the area to share time with others and to feel welcome here, when away from their home country. Other ways of caring for people in need are being explored through a course on bereavement.

Plans for celebrating and meeting the challenges of the new Millennium in local churches, and Altrincham, Timperley and Hale are being explored, and we look forward to continuing co-operation in worship, witness and work into the future.

MANCHESTER AND SALFORD FAMILY SERVICE UNIT

The church has supported the work of the Family Service Unit for a number of years and in a number of ways. Each year used toys, books and games that are in good condition, are given by the children at the annual 'Gift Service' on the second Sunday of Advent. These gifts ensure a happy Christmas for many families. At the monthly Communion Service, dried goods are donated which are delivered to the unit. We helped in a third way in 1996 when we raised money for the purchase of a caravan that the unit has sited in North Wales so that families can get a much needed holiday by the sea.

THE MITE SCHEME - Organiser - Rona Benson

Millions of children die each year from dehydration caused by diarrhoea. Mr. Roy Barnett of Badby, Northamptonshire heard that a very simple remedy consisting of a sachet of measured salts and sugar was available. This sachet acted quickly and almost always prevented death. It cost

about 5p. Mr. Barnett set up a scheme in his church to collect 5p pieces (mites) and called it 'The Mite Scheme'. Since then, eleven years ago many other churches have joined the scheme, including Hale United Reformed Church, and churches continue to join.

Once sufficient 5p pieces have been banked to make £100, a cheque made out to UNICEF (UK) is presented at morning service then sent to Mr. Barnett, who will forward it on. All moneys collected are used for the children. Our average contribution is £500 a year. Taking into account money donated from all churches in the scheme, over one and a quarter million lives have been saved since the scheme's inception.

Last year, Mr. Roy Barnett received an award from UNICEF for his work with The Mite Scheme.

TRAIDCRAFT - Organisers - Fiona Bates and Jenny Ruff

Traidcraft offers fair traded products from the third world to shops and churches. It aims to pay a proper return to producers and still offer good value to customers. Our own Hale URC Traidcraft stall was started by Margaret Jessup a few years ago and was taken over by the present managers in May 1998.

The best selling items have been tea, coffee and dried fruit, but the stall stocks chocolate and writing paper and has recently added a number of other non-food items such as wrapping paper, cards and small gifts. Items can also be ordered from the Traidcraft catalogue. Support for the stall is one of the ways in which members of the congregation can show concern and care for the needs of the wider world.

CHRISTIAN AID - Organiser - Rona Benson

Christian Aid is the official agency of the British Council of Churches, and operates in the field of overseas relief and development.



Its main aim is to give long-term help in deprived and disaster-ridden areas of the world, and to send relief to immediate crisis areas such as Bosnia, Rwanda and Sudan.

Hale United Reformed Church is wholeheartedly committed to raising funds for this vital work, and has an excellent record for its Christian Aid Week Collections, often being the leading money-raiser in the area.

Christian Aid Week is always the 2nd week in May, when collectors from most denominations aim to visit every dwelling in the land. Our collectors, 35 in total, cover all our designated areas, and last year raised

£1,369. This personal visiting of all households has another worthwhile facet - it ensures that Christian Aid's work is made more widely known, and it is rewarding when some people ask for more information about the organisation. Last year the overall total for Altrincham, Hale, Bowdon and Timperley Christian Aid Week Collections was £16,459.

Fund-raising is essential, providing Christian Aid with a large proportion of its income - its means to function. Another financial aspect of world poverty is being high-lighted by Christian Aid, working as one of a group of agencies called the Jubilee 2000 Coalition. This organisation is calling for the back-log of unpayable debts, owed by the world's poorest countries, to be cancelled in the year 2000. 'The biggest petition in the history of the world' has been launched, calling on the G8, a group of the world's eight most powerful nations to cancel their debts.

COMMITMENT FOR LIFE - Representative - Sheila Yates

The United Reformed Church has from the outset demonstrated an active concern for the poor of the world. 'Commitment for Life' is the world development programme of our church rooted in the mission of the church.



Two years ago, as part of our 'Commitment for Life' we took on a special partner in order to focus our attention on a particular project. We chose Silveira House, in Zimbabwe, an organisation which provides training for poor families. Established in 1964, in response to the poorest people in Zimbabwe, it has so developed that today it provides training and research in agricultural methods that are cheap and kinder to the environment, conserve water and nutrients in the soil and demonstrate to those with small plots of land how they can increase the amount of food grown and earn a small income. This past year over 120 farmers have attended the workshops. Zimbabwe is a country struggling with debt and structural adjustment policies and so this project with Silveira House is linked to Jubilee 2000, the campaign for debt relief and World Bank accountability, a pre-requisite for social development in many African countries.

At Hale, we have taken part in a supermarket receipt collection aiming to get the powerful supermarkets to adopt an ethical code of conduct in their dealings with the Third World producers. We run our Traidcraft stall, giving our support to fairly-traded goods.

Many of us have written to the government asking them to commit more

of its resources to cancelling the debts of the poorest countries. Last year (1998), our own financial appeal for Commitment for Life raised £3,770, a record amount for this church. By our actions for justice we seek to understand the causes of poverty and oppression and speak out to those who have the power to change things.

On Saturday, May 16th 1998, 70,000 people joined hands to form a human chain around the G8 summit meeting in Birmingham at that time. It was a huge demonstration, backed up by thousands of signed petitions, to 'break the chain' of debt-relief for the



poorest countries of the world. Ten people from our church went along to join the chain. Although the G8 did not take the decision which was asked of them, this summit did represent a turning point and it dominated the media and official agenda, so that the Prime Minister felt it necessary to leave his colleagues in the countryside and meet with Jubilee 2000. Rome wasn't built in a day, slavery wasn't abolished in a day and so we shall go on campaigning and continually bring the issue of debt-relief to our world leaders.

We pray that here in Hale, our work and witness through 'Commitment for Life' will ever be strengthened and supported by us all.

POSTSCRIPT - INTO THE FUTURE - By the Minister

These pages have described in outline some of the main events and activities of one hundred years of worship and witness through this local church in Hale. Behind the scenes, as it were, has been the faithful enthusiasm of probably many thousands of people. As part three has made clear, that same faith and energy sustains the church today. We are blessed with committed church officers, elders, leaders and members. We have a good system of Church committees that organise our current life efficiently. The work of the Finance, Fabric and the Manse Committee's has not figured prominently in these pages, yet without the prudence and careful stewardship of our financial advisors we would not have been able to maintain ministry and buildings that are vital for our work. The care of fabric, like the painting of the Forth Bridge, is a never-ending round of care; so, for example, in preparation for the centenary we have decorated several of our church rooms, renewed the church roof

and, thanks to a bequest and generous donations, put in new pew cushions.

Now, as we celebrate those 100 years, we should not only look back with thankfulness but forward with hope and expectation to a new century and millennium. The church, like time itself, is never static and just as we have to maintain buildings so too we need to develop new initiatives in our church life and programmes.

The 'Listening, Learning and Living' process which we have developed over the last two years and which was launched with a questionnaire going out to 350 people early in 1998, is reminding us to listen to God, to each other and to the world around us. It calls on us to learn more about our faith and how to share it with others; and to live in a way that reflects the values and truths proclaimed and lived out by Jesus Christ. The process has already produced many practical ideas about welcoming newcomers, worship, publicity, fellowship and outreach. We will be taking it further during our centenary year.

There are a variety of tools we might use in this process. These include the 'Open Book' programme from the Bible Society, which is a fresh approach to reading and understanding the bible. Then there is the United Reformed Church's own 'Developing Discipleship' course and the 'Emmaus' material from the Bible Society. These are ways into deepening understanding of the Christian faith. And there is the 'New Start' programme from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, that points to a new start with God, a new start at home and a new start with the world's poor, as the millennium approaches. Plans for a major ecumenical celebration of Pentecost 2000 are already well underway.

Used wisely these tools and plans will help to prepare us for witness in a century that will be totally different from the last one. No longer a 'power in the land' the church needs fresh ways of proclaiming its belief in Jesus Christ as 'the same yesterday, today and forever.' If we at Hale are to have any chance of doing this with success, then we need committed, articulate and faithful people to put our practical ideas into action. We need, in fact, the same faithful enthusiasm that led to the establishment of Hale Congregational Church a century ago. Our Lord is calling us to such an enterprise and promises to be with us.

Daniel Satchell.