

LOUGHTON IN HISTORY

In the Middle Ages, Loughton was a scattered rural parish: its poor people depended on Epping Forest not just for fuel, but also to provide food for both themselves and their cattle and pigs - in the time of Henry VIII, woodlands were valued according to the number of swine that could feed on the acorns and beechmast. For the landed gentry living in their grand manor houses, the forest provided recreation, such as hunting and falconry. The area had its share of celebrities staying in the manors in order to sample the pleasures of the surrounding countryside, Ben Jonson, the Jacobean dramatist, having stayed at Loughton Hall, for example. Mary Ann Clarke, the mistress of the Duke of York, lived at York Hill, hence its ironic name, and Sarah Flower Adams, author of *Nearer My God to Thee*, and her husband, the engineer, William Bridges Adams, inventor of the railway fishplate, both Unitarians, lived at Woodbury Hill. A less wholesome use had been found for the forest in the 18th century by Dick Turpin, the highwayman, who employed it as a hiding place and a base from which he and his gang could rob surrounding farms, including a poor old lady of a Traps Hill farm, who, it is said, was roasted on the fire to force her to reveal the whereabouts of her savings. Among literary and artistic residents of Loughton, mostly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were writers Rudyard Kipling, Arthur Morrison, W.W. Jacobs, and Hesba Stretton, the lexicographer, Robert Hunter, and the sculptor, Jacob Epstein.

The industrial revolution scarcely affected the community save that in 1856 the Eastern Counties Railway came to Loughton, with a station, the terminus of the line, on the site of what later became the Lopping Hall. This of course made contact with London much easier. Occasionally before then a London merchant or professional man settled, but the presence of the railway made Loughton more attractive to such people who would then be able to travel daily to London. A directory published in 1848 described Loughton as a "large, scattered village, encompassed by beautiful and picturesque scenery" with "many genteel houses". The new railway was the most important factor in the doubling of the population between 1851 and 1871. Before that a population stagnation had set in when the turnpike road was diverted away from Loughton by the construction in the 1830s of a by-pass, the Epping New Road, intended to avoid

the climbs on Buckhurst, Church, and Goldings Hills.

A revolution which had a more radical effect on a community which had seen little change in hundreds of years was the enclosing of forest waste. When during the 19th century the local landowners, led by the Rector, Mr. Maitland, proceeded to appropriate and enclose forest land for their own benefit, a schism in the community was provoked. The people of Loughton had always jealously guarded their right to lop trees in the parish for firewood, and to depasture their cattle on forest land. These rights were threatened by the rapid enclosing of a large part of the forest. Between 1851 and 1871 half the forest was enclosed, much of it illegally (but not without the connivance of the government). In a utilitarian age it was thought to be almost sinful not to turn such a comparatively vast tract of land to some useful purpose. The struggle to save the lopping rights was led in the 1860s by the Willingale family, supported by the Commons Society. In July 1874 the Master of the Rolls gave judgement in favour of the villagers against the Lords of the Manors (who happened in the case of Loughton to be the rector) on the question of enclosures. In 1878 the forest was vested in the Corporation of London on behalf of the people of London but the villagers lost their lopping rights. Subsequently they received £7,000 by way of compensation, part of which sum was used to construct the Lopping Hall which still today plays a part in the social life of the community.

The churches of Loughton in the early 1870s were the Parish Church, St. John's, which had been moved to Blind Lane thirty years previously, when the mediaeval church, St. Nicholas, was closed and demolished. Blind Lane, now Church Lane, was chosen from a number of sites as it was central to the parish. But then the railway came, and development took place in the south of the district, where the only church was the Baptist Chapel. The Anglicans thought, no doubt, they had better establish a place of worship to serve the area where most people actually lived, and St. Mary's was built in 1872 on the site of what until 1865 had partly been railway sidings.

WESLEYANISM IN LOUGHTON AND SOUTH - WEST ESSEX

The Early Days

In the mid-19th century, not only was any contact with Methodism absent from Loughton, but virtually the whole of West Essex appears to have escaped its evangelistic enterprise. In part this was due to the strength of the Congregationalists in Essex, as the main representatives of nonconformity in most of the county: in Loughton, however, the Baptists had been present and very active since 1813, and their active pastor, Samuel Brawn, had been a major force in the village - he objected loudly and strenuously to the building of the new St. John's behind his house, Meads: in 1870, he had just retired. There had been Wesleyan congregations in the locality at one time in Abridge and Woodford, but the Abridge chapel had joined the Congregationalists, and the Woodford society had transferred to the United Methodist Free Church after a schism.

Edward Pope came to Loughton from Hackney in 1871 or 1872 with his wife and lived in a house called Clynder, later numbered 9, in Albion Hill, Loughton: he was by profession an accountant and managing clerk with a firm of merchants in the City, whose business was trade with Australia. His wife, Caroline, was Australian by birth, from Melbourne, and he himself may well have spent some time there. He had been born in East Retford in Nottinghamshire, and in 1873 was 35 years of age. The couple had no children, but in 1881 a niece, Annie Ellen, lived with them, and acted as their servant. Quite why Pope came to Loughton is unknown, but there was another Australia merchant living in the York Hill area, who may have been a colleague. No portrait of Edward Pope is known to exist.

In Hackney, Pope had been a Wesleyan local preacher. Although Pope's house was no more than two miles from the large and flourishing Methodist Free Church in Woodford, and less than a quarter of a mile from the equally active Baptist Chapel in Loughton High Road, he evidently attached much importance to practice and propagation locally of the Wesleyan form of Methodism, the nearest chapel of which was at Wanstead. Of course, in the disjointed world of nineteenth-century Methodism, though he would have been

welcome as a church member, the UMFC might not have recognised him as a local preacher.

It is very unlikely Pope came to Loughton and only accidentally discovered the nearest Wesleyan Church was seven miles distant: it is indeed not beyond the bounds of possibility he chose Loughton so as specifically to establish Wesleyanism in a hitherto uncolonised area. In view of his subsequent record of chapel-building, it is hard to believe his move of residence was not an evangelistic enterprise.

Whatever his reasons for moving, Pope did indeed prove to be the spark that was needed to ignite the flames of Methodism throughout the south-west Essex district, and not merely in Loughton. Within weeks of his arrival, and after some effort he rented the small chapel in England's Lane, a mile and three-quarters from the main settlement, and near only a few cottages around Lower Road and the hamlet of Debden Green, which had been used previously by the Congregationalists. Little is known of this chapel's origins, and nothing of who built it. It evidently dated from the 1860s, but by 1873 was disused. In May 1873, the chapel reopened for services. Pope himself reckoned 1872 as the year of the start of the chapel: he may have started services in a house. It must have prospered, because in 1874 Loughton was accepted into the Hackney Circuit (which included Wanstead, itself only a school chapel). There had been some difficulty in finding a circuit that would accept Loughton in view of its distance from any existing Wesleyan circuit.

One of the first people to join Pope in these early years was John Henry Godwin, who had come with his wife to live in Loughton. Godwin was a travelling salesman in the cutlery business, born in Sheffield, aged 30, and another local preacher.

The congregation at the little Chapel began to grow, and Wesleyan Methodism became firmly established in Loughton. A schoolroom was built at the rear of the chapel. Edward Pope then founded a Temperance Society. This prompted the formation of a Church Temperance Society with the Rector as president! Instances like these were symptomatic of the rivalry which then existed between the Anglicans and nonconformists generally. St. Mary's church had been founded by the Anglicans in the new village centre in 1872.

They may have feared that if only a nonconformist church was near where most of the people lived, the nonconformists would gain the upper hand. The Anglican church had always been associated with the predominantly Conservative landed classes, whereas nonconformist churches on the whole tended more to attract the predominantly Liberal bourgeoisie or aspiring bourgeoisie: traders, artisans, businessmen, and so on. Additionally, in Loughton it was the Rector, as Lord of the Manor, who was trying to enclose and develop the Forest. Thus the obstacles before any meeting of minds between these two concepts was threefold: religious, social, and political. The Wesleyans, however, did not all see themselves as nonconformists. Many of them used the Prayer Book and virtually all Anglican usages; but Pope and his followers were not of this school, being definitely nonconformist, Liberal and evangelistic.

The spirit thus kindled in the little outpost of England's Lane by Pope began to spread further afield. In those early days open air services were held amongst the many gypsies who lived in tents in the forest nearby. At that time, there lived in Epping a grocer whose name was Hawthorn. One Sunday he came to a service at the Loughton chapel. After the service he had a lengthy conversation with Messrs. Pope and Godwin and it was arranged for a meeting of all interested parties to take place in Epping on a Saturday afternoon. As a result of this meeting a disused schoolroom in Epping was hired and the first Methodist service held there on Whit Sunday 1874.

At the same time as work started in Epping, regular preaching services were organised to take place in various cottages in North Weald Bassett. But not until 1890 was a small wooden chapel built. Some years later a brick building was constructed. The same pioneers attempted to establish a chapel at Woodford Bridge. Although work went on for some time it eventually foundered because no suitable place to worship could be found.

The Loughton chapel also turned its evangelistic attention to the surrounding villages. In High Beech a barn was used for services, all the preachers coming from the Loughton Chapel. A site worth £50 was offered by a Mr. Bennett of Walthamstow on condition that a chapel be erected on it. The Hackney circuit felt unable to accept the offer but the Loughton friends took up the challenge and in 1877,

thanks mainly to Messrs. Pope and Godwin, an iron mission room costing £111 was erected and opened free of debt. This chapel too became part of the Hackney circuit being the smallest chapel in the circuit. Unfortunately within twenty years or so, following the death or removal of many of its members, the services were discontinued and eventually the chapel was sold.

One notable place without a chapel was Buckhurst Hill. Several Wesleyans had come into the area but joined other churches. Efforts to hire a hall proved fruitless. The Loughton pioneers, Messrs. Pope and Godwin, together with two Buckhurst Hill friends, Messrs. Foskett and Franks, were anxious to make a start. At length, on their own initiative, these four secured a suitable site and had erected thereon an iron chapel and schoolroom. Half its cost was raised at the opening in November 1878. It was replaced by a permanent building in 1885.

In 1876, with the building of the present church in Derby Road, Wesleyan Methodism returned to Woodford. Stimulated by this effort on the part of their neighbours, the Wanstead society constructed their substantial Chapel in Hermon Hill. These churches, each seating four hundred people, attracted large congregations and in 1879 were made the head of a new circuit called, logically enough, the Wanstead and Woodford circuit. There were also, of course, flourishing Methodist Free Churches in Woodford, in what is now the Men's Club, and in Cambridge Park, Wanstead.

Almost immediately after Woodford appeared on the plan Chingford Hatch was added, and pioneers had earlier been to Thornwood Common in 1883 and also supplied preachers for a chapel in Threshers Bush, six miles from Epping. During the summers around the year 1880 open air services were held in other places such as Ongar, Chigwell and Lambourne. This was a Primitive, rather than a Wesleyan, Methodist tradition.

Edward Pope appears to have gone finally to Western Australia in the 1890s: he is last heard of in 1903, when he sent a donation to the fund for the permanent Loughton chapel. 125 years on, the Loughton, Epping and North Weald churches remain as a testimony to his energy and enterprise. It is said that he eventually returned

to England, but if he did, it was not to the area in which he had worked so hard. Though never more in the church hierarchy than a local preacher, he was responsible for virtually the whole Wesleyan network of south-west Essex. He was also an openly evangelistic Wesleyan; which was rather rare: the Wesleyans, of the three main branches of Methodism in the 1870s, being the least generally evangelical. In south-west Essex, the United Free and the Primitive Methodists never had a presence north of Woodford.

THE IRON CHAPEL

England's Lane Chapel had been a useful starting point. But it was remote from the bulk of the population - probably the reason why the Congregationalists had abandoned it - and ever more and more cottages and houses were being built in the Smarts Lane - High Road - Forest Road area. No doubt that was why Pope and Godwin decided to move southwards. They secured a piece of land on the north-east side of Forest Road, just up from the High Road, on which to build a new chapel.

The legal formalities were carried out by a firm of City solicitors, Walker and Battiscombe. Mr. Walker sent his bill, which came to over £16, and offered to reduce it to £15 "knowing that the Trustees' finances are not very flourishing". It seems that our founding fathers had forgotten they had bound themselves to pay not only their own legal costs (which is normal practice of course) but also the vendor's costs, a system not unusual when one party requests another to sell him land. The following item thus appears in the bill of Messrs. Walker and Battiscombe:

August 5th; Attending Mr. Pope to know whether he and Mr. Godwin understood that they were to pay the Vendor all the costs of producing his title and he said they did not

After taking into consideration the views of Loughton Chapel on the question of whether the new chapel should be brick or iron, the trustees decided on iron, and accepted the amended plans submitted by C. Kent, whose profession was "Builder of Iron Churches, Chapels, & School Rooms". Having made the decision no time was wasted, and on Wednesday 25 May 1881 the opening services were held in the new iron chapel, followed by a tea meeting in the schoolroom behind it, and a public meeting in the chapel. At the services, over £20 was collected towards the Building Fund. The cost of the building itself was £340. Additional items, including foundations, drainage, furniture and connection to gas supply in the High Road (£14-0-10) together with the cost of the land, brought the total cost to £676-13-9. The new chapel could accommodate 200 worshippers. At that time the average number of regular attendees was 40. Charles Fowler was appointed chapelkeeper at £8 per annum.

Everybody seems to have been very pleased with the new chapel. On 13 May 1881 Edward Pope wrote enthusiastically to a friend: "The chapel is finished and looks very nice. When are you coming to see it?" It must have been a marvellous feeling for those pioneers as they witnessed the opening of the chapel for which they had worked so hard. Apart from a grant of £125 from the Extension Fund towards the cost of the land practically the whole of the money required was raised by subscription. In November 1881, it was reported that the debt on the chapel still to be met amounted only to between £70 and £80 - quite an achievement for a congregation of about forty. Part of the land, which was not needed for the chapel, was sold. J. H. Godwin bought it, and on it was erected the little street called Chapel Terrace. This was not the site of the chapel itself, as many people think, but the houses looked out onto it in a sort of square.

With the benefit of the new building and the attendant enthusiasm engendered by it the society prospered. On 2 November 1881, Edward Pope wrote to Mr. W. Wilkinson, a fellow chapel trustee: We have had Rev. J. Thorpe, District Missionary, at Loughton since Sunday 23rd October and held services every evening since, and shall continue till tomorrow. We have had the Chapel full each evening, sometimes crowded. Over 20 souls have professed pardon and are ready to meet in Class. We are very thankful.

The trustees had to be mindful of expenditure and when seats were required for the schoolroom, twelve benches were purchased from the Workmen's Club. In 1882 it was resolved to charge the Temperance Society and the Band of Hope £1 per annum each for rent for use of the premises. In March 1882, the local paper reported the combined choirs of the Loughton and Buckhurst Hill Wesleyan Chapels held a service of song in Forest Road, "assisted by Mr. Bailey with his Lime Light dissolving views". In February 1883 the Temperance Society held a Gospel Temperance Mission in the Chapel.

About a year after the opening of the new chapel, Pope's co-pioneer, Godwin, seems to disappear from the scene. He attended no further trust meetings and possibly moved at that time to Bow. Certainly some years later he is described as living in Ilford.

By 1885 the membership had grown to 41, and the average congregation consisted of about 100. The average annual income was about £30, half of which was derived from seat rents. At this time, the trustees had to consider the future of the Forest Road site. Land situated opposite Trap's Hill was offered, and on 21 March, on the motion of Mr. Pope the trustees resolved "that the offer of a most commodious site on the High Road, next the smith's shop, measuring 75 feet frontage by 165 feet in depth [in fact it was 170 feet deep] for the sum of £300 be accepted". This of course is part of the site of the present church buildings. It was proposed to remove the iron chapel from Forest Road to the new site with the intention of replacing it with a permanent building within 10 years.

Quite why the decision to move was made is uncertain. Forest Road had become built up with small brick cottages and shops, though at the far end there were some quite large villas. Undoubtedly many of the congregation came from the immediate area, and most of the chapel's children attended the British - or nonconformist - school in Smart's Lane. But there was one factor which was probably important to the Wesleyans in 1885, which would seem strange to us. They sought the peace and quiet of the High Road! This was because the High Road, though a turnpike road, was really no more than a quiet lane. But Forest Road was a busy thoroughfare on summer Sundays, with thousands of noisy Cockney day-trippers making their way from Station to Forest, and vice-versa. It was also 'teapot row', where the folk of Loughton exacted their pennies and shillings from the visitors in every cottage parlour, for tea, buns, and watercress sandwiches. And there were five pubs in the vicinity, one virtually opposite the Chapel. One suspects the good Wesleyans of Loughton did not relish the quieter parts of their service being interspersed by raucous Cockney laughter, the jangling harness and drunken singing from the horse-brakes, and the cries of costermongers. For much the same reasons, the United Methodists of Woodford Green were to move their chapel a little later.

The new site was purchased on 4 June 1885 and the chapel reopened there on 26 August. Once again, the trustees found themselves paying part of the vendor's legal costs as well as their own. Including the cost of the land the total recorded expenditure involved in the transfer of sites amounted to £506-17-3. This

includes the charges of Mr. L. Trimby of Meadow Road, the nurseryman, for laying out the chapel garden with laurels and conifers. Against this must be set the proceeds - £250 - of the sale of the Forest Road site. On this plot was built the block of four shops and houses called Crown Buildings, which are still there today.

Present-day LMC members should recognise the boldness of the trustees and friends in 1885 in taking full advantage of their opportunity to acquire a site which is in fact better situated now for the work and service of God in the community than it was then. But in 1885 there were only three or four houses round the new chapel: the Drive, the Habgood Estate, and the streets to the north, did not exist. The new site was certainly not more convenient for the chapel members, as 19 out of the 36 lived in the Smart's Lane - Forest Road - Staples Road area, and only three at all near the new site!

After the exertions and excitement of these early years, there followed a period of consolidation, during which membership numbers do not appear to have increased appreciably. In 1891, Mr Sykes was appointed chapelkeeper, at £9 per annum, an increase of £1 on the old rate. Mr. R. J. Fletcher, who had been Treasurer since Forest Road days, resigned on his leaving Loughton in 1893: there was then a move-up of officers, and Mr. Joseph Hawkins Hayward, of Bath Villa, Forest Road, who had been headmaster of the British School, was asked to become a steward, but he declined. In 1894, there were 39 members, 22 men and 17 women, formed into three classes, one of which, apart from the leader, was for women only. Not all have occupations listed, but very many were artisans or servants, in contradistinction to Wanstead and Woodford Wesleyan churches, where a large proportion were professional and middle-class.

Thus Loughton was a poorer chapel than others in the Circuit, and money matters demanded constant attention. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, the annual current account showed a deficit. there was a particular financial crisis in 1894, when the usual deficit of £5 or £6 became £16-15-0 on income of £25-8-9. It was not until 1902 that the church, apparently for the first time, ended the financial year with a balance in hand (the princely sum of £2-16-0) and this feat was not to be repeated for some years.

William George Westcott had become treasurer in 1904, and in the following 4 years, with the help of his wife, bolstered the finances by meeting the current account deficit. He appears to have been a sick man and was anxious to retire from office. He died in 1909 but his widow continued to support the Church. Meetings on church matters were often held at his house, Rosebank, which was one of four which then occupied the whole of the tract of land alongside the High Road between St. Mary's church and Traps Hill. Finances were very shaky, and deficits were kept in manageable proportions only through the efforts of the Ladies' Sewing Party.

The church began celebrating its anniversary very early at the end of May (the first recorded instance in 1885) and seems to have kept it as a regular feature on the church calendar ever since. In 1887, it was decided to have a musical service on the occasion of the anniversary. Although they had to import the choir from Wanstead church that time, things musical had always had a place in the church. As early as 1883 the church contained a harmonium which was played by Miss Tillott, a schoolmistress, and Mr. Fletcher (who was also Treasurer for some time). In 1886 Mr. Fletcher loaned his American organ. When he moved out of the area in 1893, he left his organ behind as a present to the church.

Thanks to the generosity of two anonymous donors, friends of Mr. Westcott, the organ from Buckhurst Hill church was installed in Loughton church in 1908, the trustees having to bear only the cost of removal and fixing. [some creative accounting may have been used, as the Buckhurst Hill annals record Loughton paid £45!] In 1906, Miss Blows was appointed organist at a salary of four guineas per annum. In contrast the appointment of organist in 1908 was honorary. However the organ blower was to receive two guineas per annum!

Edward Pope was Secretary to the Trust until 1893. At various times he was also treasurer or a chapel steward, occasionally holding all three posts at once. In 1894 for the first time an annual trustees meeting was not attended by him and he was not elected to any post. The only clues available as to his subsequent career are firstly a statement in the trust minutes of August 1903 that he had been out of the country for more than 12 months, and secondly a short note

inserted in later years after his name in the list of trustees which simply reads Western Australia, removed. He had evidently gone to the place of his wife's birth, and one wonders whether in retirement he began a new course of Wesleyan chapel foundation in Perth. But it seems strange that either the members took no steps to mark the going of the man who had singlemindedly established their church, and many of the Wesleyan chapels in the area, or if they did, no records of it have survived.

One thing that is clear is that the void left by Mr. Pope was filled by Arthur William Leech, a young man who owned a grocer's shop in what had once been the Bag o' Nails public house in Lower Road. Later on whilst still under his proprietor-ship, the shop also became a post office. Having served his apprenticeship as a chapel steward for seven years, Mr. Leech, or "Shotty" as he was nicknamed on account his being also a gunsmith, became Treasurer when Mr. Fletcher moved away in 1893. The following year he succeeded Pope as secretary. He held all three posts until 1902. This appears to have been a very lean time. Not only were the finances very delicate but during those years there were never more than three trustees attending meetings, although Messrs. Thomas and Curnock faithfully served the church alongside Mr. Leech at this time and subsequently. In 1898, the first name still familiar today occurs in our records, when Mr. Warriner gave a street lamp for the exterior of the iron chapel.

THE 1903 CHAPEL

In 1903 the original aim of erecting a new brick chapel finally reached fruition. The iron chapel was taken apart and sold - some think part at least of it was used to make the drill hall in Forest Road, demolished only in 1995, but it has also been suggested that part may have gone to the Girls' Elementary School, then situated on what is now Ashley Grove.

In the period when demolition and rebuilding was under way, the Wesleyans held their services in the Lopping Hall. The ceremony which took place on June 18 was called the "foundation stone laying" despite the fact that the building was already almost half completed. The chapel yard was crowded with representatives of Wesleyan Methodists of many generations. A sealed bottle containing copies of the current issue of the Methodist Recorder, the circuit plan, the Loughton Gazette and other souvenirs had been buried beneath the building. The ceremony began with the hymn *These stones to thee in faith we lay*. Afterwards, 200 people sat down to tea in Lopping Hall and at seven o'clock, a public meeting, with Mr. George Dennis Curnock in the chair, was held with very good attendance. Mr. Curnock was a dentist from Epping who became interested in Loughton Chapel during the 1890s (when in 1896 a mortgage of £150 on the Chapel was called in he loaned the money necessary for repayment). At the meeting Mr. Curnock expressed the great joy the foundation stone laying had given him; it was a scheme that he had had on his heart for many years. But, he continued, they must not forget that there was a still more important work than the construction of the church building, and that was the building up of the Church that would make its home therein.

Several ministers also spoke at the meeting. The Rev. Albert Clayton, after regretting that only 1 in 5 Londoners attended church and only 1.5% of working men of London, emphasised the need of the churches to adapt to the times. The Rev. Dr. Pope (not, it is thought, any relation to Edward) said that it made his heart glad to find that the Wesleyans of Loughton, which he believed would develop into a very important place, were preparing for the people who were coming out of the town into the beautiful country. He was under the impression, however, that the chapel would soon be found

to be too small and was gratified to be reassured that ample provision had been made for extension; great were the resources of the Wesleyan church and the enterprise of its members. Dr. Pope warned against the abuse of the pew-letting system, if they wished to fill their chapels they should take pews and throw them open to outsiders.

This obviously popular sentiment prompted cheers among his audience. The idea of pew-rents seems quite foreign to us, but was commonplace in Methodist churches of all denominations and in the Church of England until Edwardian times. By it, a family paid an annual fee and thus secured the right to sit in a particular pew each Sunday. It was really a sort of early covenant scheme that assured the chapel an advance income.

In traditionally English manner the weather did its best to mar the church opening ceremony, which was performed by Mrs. Westcott of Wanstead on 8 October 1903; but despite this the new chapel was packed. Following a tea in the schoolroom an enthusiastic audience again filled the chapel for a public meeting at which a number of congratulatory and inspiring addresses were given. Everyone seems to have been satisfied with the new chapel, which was of red brick in the Gothic style. The Woodford Times reported: "The building is a fine large one, pleasant to look at both outside and in. The Wesleyans themselves are delighted with it, and the general residents of Loughton certainly have reason to be proud of this addition to the public buildings of the village." The architects of the new church were Messrs. Gordon and Josiah Gunton, of Finsbury High Street, London EC., and the builders, C. Castle and Sons, of Clapton.

The cost of the new chapel was in the region of £3,300 - perhaps a quarter of a million in modern equivalent. The whole circuit gave generously to the Building Fund. By the end of 1903 almost £1,500 had been received in subscriptions, collections, sales of work and the like. The old iron chapel was sold for £75 and a grant of £250 was eventually received from the 20th Century fund. (This fund was proposed at the 1898 Wesleyan Conference to enable "the church of the 20th Century to do noble service for Christ and humanity". The idea was to get a total of one million guineas from one million people, almost a third of this sum being allocated to building chapels,

schools and mission halls.) A total of £1,400 was borrowed from the Star Life Assurance Company, but £500 of this was repaid within a short time. The debt on the new building was finally cleared in May 1912 by means of an interest free loan of £250 repayable over 10 years from the Wesleyan Chapel Committee. The members and friends of Loughton Chapel must be praised both for their personal generosity and also for the efficient manner in which they persuaded others to part with their money. . The Westcott family contributed largely to the new building. They provided £173-3-0; a huge sum equivalent to many a person's annual salary. G. D Curnock gave £100, and gifts of more than £5 came from Edward Pope, C.O. Boardman of Shortacres, Church Hill; Sir Joseph Lowrey, of Albion Hill, and J. H. Gould, of Brooklyn, whose firm owned the Albion Granaries.

CHURCH LIFE 1903-1929

The trustees appointed in 1903 were nine in number, seven of whom lived in Loughton. One, Leech, was a grocer; Thomas Jefferson of Jesmond, Alderton Hill, was a wharf owner, Stanley Dorey of Fern Villa, Queen's Road, was a woollen warehouseman, William Wooldridge was the butcher next to the Hollybush, and John James Clarke, of Atherstone, later 117, High Road, was an estate agent. J. H. Godwin continued a Trustee, living at 42, Selborne Road, Ilford, saying that he valued the continuity with earliest times, when he had worked with Edward Pope to establish the chapel.

Until 1917, Ministers in the Wesleyan Church were appointed to stations strictly for three years only. The Rev. F. J. Howden, who came in 1907, was the first minister to reside in Loughton. The ministers lived at Isola, Queen's Road, Loughton, later no. 60, where the Rev. Harold Burdess was in residence in 1910, and then Hollycroft, Uplands Park Road, later 9 The Uplands, where the Rev. William Brown lived in 1914. These houses were evidently rented. In 1913, the Quarterly Meeting had agreed the Superintendent would live at Loughton. But after this, the ministers went to Buckhurst Hill, where a house at no. 90 Queen's Road, opposite the chapel, had been purchased; and it was not until 1935 when the manse was bought freehold in Loughton following the transfer of Rev. Llewellyn Jones that the Loughton church could again claim a resident minister. In the interim period, Loughton was overseen sometimes by the minister at Wanstead, or else from Buckhurst Hill.

In 1906, the first ecumenical effort by the Loughton Wesleyans took place - the first of many in which Loughton churches generally have had such a positive view - when "an open air service was held with our friends at the [Forest] Mission Hall". Common services with the other Free Churches (The Union Church, the Goldings Hill Mission, who had taken over the England's Lane chapel when the Wesleyans went to Forest Road, and the Forest Mission Hall) in the town also started, on 16 January 1909. And in December 1908, the Wesleyans sponsored a lecture in the Lopping Hall, when the Rev. M.G. Pearse spoke on Christian Socialism. In October 1912, Rev. Burdess started a now familiar church activity, a "young people's club, in connection with, but apart from, the Sunday School".

It is not known when the Wesley Guild first started at our church but it had been functioning some years when in 1911 it produced the first issue of "The Loughton Wesley Guild Magazine". This contained articles on such diverse subjects as "Daydreams" (by A. Bridge), "My early adventures in London" (by A. C. Neate), "The effect of climate on character" (Miss I. Langham), "A Glimpse into school life" (Miss E. Langham), "The Ideal Holiday" (Stanley Dorey), and "Early Methodism in and around Loughton, with illustrations" (A. W. Leech) to which we are still much indebted. This article includes illustrations of the chapels in High Beech and North Weald that do not seem to have survived elsewhere. In addition it held such delights as a humorous poem, perhaps some-what surprisingly written by the Rev. H. H. Burdess, called "The Philosophic Organ Blower" and sub-titled "A dirge in twenty six flats", perhaps containing thoughts the minister might himself have had, but certainly could not have expounded, such as:

There's Madam Snob, as goes and prays To save the heathen worlds:
But in her stinginess at home, She starves the servant girls.....

There was also a crayon sketch by Master Leech ironically entitled "A social debate", and a hymn and tune, "King of Love" by Sidney Dark. Over 80 years later it still makes entertaining reading. The magazine was handwritten, not printed, and passed from hand to hand, though there was also a meeting at which the authors read out their articles. It was prepared annually for a number of years but later editions do not appear to have survived.

The Great War had quite an adverse effect on what had become a reasonably stable and healthy level of membership. Mr. Leech was of course very active, remaining Treasurer and Trust Secretary. Other worshippers, however, had to go to fight, the organist, Mr. Staples, being one such. In 1915 he is referred to as being away "on active service", and in his absence one of the Misses Langham, Louie, played for the diminished congregation. The Langham family had originally been named Langendorp but changed their name in 1915, no doubt as a result of wartime prejudice against anyone with a German-sounding name. They lived at Ellorsleigh, in Church Hill, later no 48. There were five sisters, Irene, Elsa, Winnie and May (who were all in the choir), and Louie who served as a devoted organist for many years. When Louie eventually retired as organist in 1929, there was considerable difficulty in finding a new permanent organist. At last in 1932 Mr. Herbert Burrows, one of the existing

deputy organists, was appointed upon the understanding that "he placed himself under tuition". While on the subject of music, it is interesting that the hymn book in use in the chapel from 1903 was in fact the Congregational Hymn Book, not one of the Methodist productions.

Problems had arisen in 1912 as a result of the erection of a house by Mr. Diggens, the builder, on land adjoining the church with "windows overlooking". Much correspondence followed and solicitors' advice was sought as the situation was "very unsatisfactory". In 1917 a dispute about the boundary hedge almost led to legal proceedings. In fact this house caused the trustees a number of headaches over the years. In 1916 the chapel keeper who was employed by the trustees to look after the church requested an increase in salary "on account of extra work during the occupation of the school room each night by the Military".

A number of stalwarts played an important part in keeping the church going. The Ladies' Working Party continued to give their weighty and invaluable financial support with their money spinning Sales of Work; and the Curnock family also assisted financially, giving donations on several occasions, in addition to their work in other directions.

At this time there comes on to the scene one of the Chapel's most consistently generous yet un-ostentatious benefactors, who never actually held any office, and may indeed never have been a church member. Sir Joseph Lowrey, who lived at The Hermitage, Upper Park, was Director of the Salvage Association, London, and represented British insurance interests after the Tokyo earthquake of 1923. Sir Joseph encouraged the choir by paying for Mr. Joseph Riding to instruct its members for several years. He also fostered the Sunday School library comprising several hundred books, to which he added regularly. Later on he financed the establishment of the Boys' Brigade Company, in due course providing instruments for the band. His generosity was not confined to the Wesleyan Church: he furnished Staples Road school with instruments for the creation of a string orchestra.

In the twenties, as in the 1990s, members of the congregation went carol singing after the evening service on the last Sunday before

Christmas. It became the custom to end the singing outside the Hermitage, into which the Lowreys would invite the singers for coffee and something to eat. A characteristic of Sir Joseph, remembered in 1973 by Mr. Ebenezer Occomore, was his habit of walking to church in the road itself about one yard from the pavement. Mr. Occomore also remembered the occasion when, having been forbidden to approach Sir Joseph on the subject, he screwed up his courage and asked Sir Joseph if he would become a subscriber on his Juvenile Missionary card. "Certainly, my boy," was the reply, "How much did I give you last time?" Each year after that Sir Joseph gave the young Occomore £1 for his missionary card.

Immediately after the war it was not unusual for the congregation to be a mere handful; membership had fallen to less than fifty. A new trust of 17 members was established, the local members introducing another name still familiar in 1997, as Arthur Louis Wardle, laundry proprietor, of Deanholm, the Avenue was appointed. Other new names were F.C. Casey, a company secretary, and Joseph Riding, the choir leader, and a retired manufacturer, both of the Uplands, James Thomas Evans, of Forest Side, later 70, The Drive, a solicitor's clerk, Ernest William Burrows, a grocer's manager of 41 Meadow Road, Robert Goodchild, a railway clerk of Praglia Victory Way [i.e. Woodland Road] and T.E. Armsby, the Circuit Steward, draper, of Buckhurst Hill.

Changes of the post-war years included the erection of a notice board on the frontage for the Urban District Council, to serve the northern part of the High Road, the letting of the Hall to the County Council for a child welfare clinic twice a week, and the taking of a poster site by the Church at the Railway Station.

If the trustees were representative of the congregation as a whole this analysis gives us an indication of the section of the community which the church attracted. It is interesting to note that during the controversy preceding the union of the Primitive Methodists, the United Methodist Church and the Wesleyans, this group of men leading the Loughton Wesleyan church showed commendable broad-mindedness in whole-heartedly supporting the proposed Union, bearing in mind that their thinking was against the general feeling of the Wesleyans, who had initially resisted the moves for union. But then the Loughton church had always been more outgoing and

evangelical than had most Wesleyan chapels, as their willingness to hold joint services with other Free Church congregations demonstrates. Perhaps they thought they had as much in common with the less staid Primitive and United Methodists as with their own church. At any rate, the vote among the trustees was 6 to 1 in favour.

Gradually, after enduring the difficulties of World War I, the congregation began to grow again. The phenomenal expansion of London, which was to affect so many rural areas around the metropolis, was gathering momentum. In the following decade or so Alderton Hill, the top of Connaught Hill, the Crescent, Brooklyn Avenue and Spearleaze Hill were built. These areas had been fields and allotments. Despite all this development Loughton still at this time retained the atmosphere of a quiet rural village, often being referred to, but only by outsiders, as "sleepy hollow

The church benefited from continual increase in the local population, mostly through in-migrants; but at the same time, family size plummeted throughout the U.K. in the 1920s. The huge Sunday Schools of Edwardian times were to be no more. Loughton activities expanded in several directions. The musical side of the church was growing rapidly. The 1922 harvest festival incorporated a musical service. It became necessary to have a deputy organist as well as the organist, to buy 12 hymn books for the use of visitors and to appoint a choirmaster (all in 1923); and soon more hymn books (1925), special music for the choir (1927), and by 1928 a cupboard to keep it in were required!

A delicate situation arose for the trustees when they decided to appoint a choirmaster, which would have meant that the services of the trustee, Joseph Riding (who was still giving instruction at the expense of Sir Joseph Lowrey) would no longer be required. To avoid any danger of appearing ungrateful to their highly respected benefactor, two fellow trustees, Messrs. Leech and Evans, were dispatched to explain the situation diplomatically to him. The choir went from strength to strength: in the early 1930s a production of Gilbert & Sullivan's Trial by Jury was performed at a circuit garden party after having been presented at most churches in the circuit and several others as well.

Throughout the 20s, there was generally a small deficit in the accounts - about £50 was the average shortfall. This was quite often made up by the ladies running a bazaar or doing extra needlework. So it may truly be said the lady members kept the church going in those years of post-first world war austerity.

In the 20s, there was much inter-church activity in Loughton, especially following the "Loughton United Committee" of 1920 - Lent meetings and open air services were among the joint activities, in which the Free Churches, including Goldings Hill and the Forest Hall, and the Church of England, participated.

In 1923 Sir Joseph Lowrey gave some land to the church. This was situated behind the church building, and in accordance with his wishes was used by the congregation for lawn tennis; he particularly hoped the young people would use it. (Eventually the land was used for the erection of a new school Hall in 1936.) A Loughton Wesleyan Tennis Club was formed, and to increase its funds the club held dances in the winter at Lopping Hall; tickets were priced at 3s. 6d. including refreshments; evening dress was expected.

One of the young people who used the tennis courts, Leslie Hazelden, went on to become one of the founder members of the Boys' Brigade in 1926. He and his father, Harry, together with Mr. Gordon Wardle and Mr. Bill Whelan, had to start the Brigade meetings in Staples Road School Hall, which they hired for three nights a week, because the Guild was already using the school-room. They formed a very fine band. Their annual displays in the Lopping Hall used to fill the hall. At length the boys were able to use the school room; but the trustees must have been a little apprehensive about letting the boys loose on Church premises because, even though Mr. Wardle, himself a trustee, undertook to be present at the Brigade meetings, initially the permission was only for a probationary period of one month. However the trustees' fears proved unfounded and, indeed, by 1929 the Boys' Brigade must have forged for itself a good reputation, for in that year a Company of the Girls' Life Brigade was formed, with the blessing of the trustees, by Gordon Wardle's wife, Mary (still in 1997 an active church member!). About 20 to 25 girls met in the school room on Friday nights. The work was built around a four-sided programme: spiritual, physical, educational, and service.

Then, as now, changes in the church service arrangements were rare, but in 1929 two slight changes were decided upon by the trustees, viz: "that the Benediction should be pronounced at each Sunday Service with the Congregation standing and also the collections received by the Preacher at the Communion Rail at all services in future." Evidently, the bread and wine were taken at the rail, rather than being passed around, as was then common in Methodist churches. The Prayer Book, or Book of Offices, was not used at Loughton. At an anniversary about this time when the collection was taken in large baskets with big paper flower decorations on them..

The year 1929 marked the end of an era with the death of Arthur William Leech. The value of his services to our Church can hardly be overestimated. He was active in the chapel as a preacher and class leader as early as 1883: it was largely his loyalty that kept the Church going after the departure of Edward Pope and was invaluable during the war years. He had a reputation for being something of an autocrat, where the Church's finances were concerned, and had a tendency to resent any opposition in debate. Mr. Leslie Hazelden as a teenager remembered him personally with much kindness and doing his best to draw the youngster into the Church family. One of Mr. Leech's characteristics was slowness of speech accompanied by much clearing of the throat and stroking of his long white moustache. The effect of this was that his listener would probably be answering a question before Mr. Leech had finished asking it. Mr. Leech's good work was not confined to his Church; he was a very active servant of the community as a whole, being a member and then Chairman of the Loughton Urban District Council for many years and also a Justice of the Peace. As far as the Church is concerned his record takes some beating: during 44 years as a trustee he did not miss a single trustees' meeting and, according to the commemorative tablet later bought for £13-5-0 and set in the Chapel above the back row pew that he used to occupy regularly, at some point during those years he held every single Church office.

In 1931, a decision was taken to provide a car park, so evidently some of the better-off members were driving to church by then.

CHURCH LIFE 1930-1960

In 1930, the leaders complained, "much could be done to brighten up church services", but the expedient actually adopted, the substitution of a canticle for a hymn, and the singing of the amens by choir and congregation, does not seem to have gone very far to achieve that end!

In 1932 and 33, the idea of reclaiming a permanent minister for Loughton was considered: the membership was 94, and there had been some difficulty in getting preachers for all the services. In order, one suspects, to present a better case for a permanent minister, the leaders looked at the possibility of boosting the membership figures "by enrolling senior scholars and the Women's Meeting as church members". They also took the decision to contribute as much as Buckhurst Hill to circuit and connexional funds.

Another innovation of this time, which must have been a real act of faith, was a united Communion service with the other Free Churches throughout Buckhurst Hill and Loughton. This service was arranged for 23 April 1933 at the Buckhurst Hill Methodist church, and supplemented the exchange services held in Loughton at Christmas with the Union Church. At the same Leaders' meeting that the idea of a joint Lord's Supper was approved, a non-Wesleyan Methodist local preacher, who lived in Loughton, was invited to join the meeting.

The expansion of the thriving Church (which after Methodist Union in 1932 became the Loughton Methodist Church, rather than the Wesleyan Chapel) continued in the thirties to such an extent that it soon became obvious to everyone that, if the church was to continue to function as fully as it should, considerably more accommodation was an absolute necessity, particularly for the Sunday School. Accordingly in 1933 a Building Extension Fund was set up with the aim of building an annexe of some kind to the church premises. In May 1934 over a period of three days £405 was raised by the "Rainbow Bazaar" for which, as its name suggests, the school room and stalls were colourfully decorated. After clearing an overdraft, £100 from the proceeds was put into the Building Extension Fund,

which brought the total in the fund to about £200. At a lively meeting in June 1934 the ambitious decision was taken to build a new school hall on the land behind the church. It was decided in due course that the building should comprise a large hall to seat at least 250, two classrooms for 50 and 30 persons respectively, a kitchen and two lavatories. The building was to be financed by subscriptions and the "purchasing" of foundation stones (minimum £5 subscription) and bricks (minimum subscription £1 1s. 0d. or 10s. in the case of children).

In November 1935, the architect, Frederick Lawrence, reported that the tender of Messrs. A. J. Diggins & Sons was marginally the lowest at £3,540 and that furthermore, after talks with that firm "by cutting out non-essentials and alterations their contract price had been reduced to £3,195, which he described as rock bottom price". The foundation stone laying ceremony took place on 14 December 1935 and the opening on 14 May 1936. Over £2,000 was raised by subscriptions. The rest came from the following sources: a grant of £341 from London Mission and Extension Committee, over £600 from bazaars, over £40 from collections at stone laying and opening services, and a legacy of £500 to the Church from Sir Joseph Lowrey, K.B.E. which was eventually allocated by the trustees to the Extension Fund. Less than two years after the opening of the hall all liabilities had been discharged. The Hall had cost as much as five new houses locally.

The relationship between the trustees and Diggins, the builder, was a rather curious one. Diggins had been the landlord of the Manse when it was in Queen's Road. On the one hand they were regularly redecorating church premises, doing general repairs, and now building the new School Hall. In the 20s, they had put in an estimate to repaint the church of £41 - less than half that offered by any other tenderer. On the other hand every so often daggers were drawn over matters affecting the boundary between church land and their land. There was the trouble which arose in 1912 and 1917 over Diggins' overlooking windows. In February 1937 the Secretary reported that Diggins once again had erected an addition to their carpenters' shed up to the boundary which included a large window overlooking church property. The trustees were jealous of their "Ancient Lights" so the builders agreed to pay a shilling per annum.

But two years later Diggens yet again erected more buildings with overlooking windows! In 1940 Diggens complained of stone throwing from the church premises which had broken several of their windows. Sins on both sides were probably about equal!

Apart from the building of the new School Hall another major event of the decade was the transfer of the minister, planned in 1932/33 as described above, and achieved in 1934, from Buckhurst Hill to Loughton. At the request of the circuit stewards the Loughton trustees and leaders met those of Buckhurst Hill chapel on 2 July 1934 to discuss the removal of the minister's residence from Buckhurst Hill to Loughton. The Loughton representatives objected to being expected to pay £100 towards the total removal expenses of £150. Loughton eventually agreed to pay £25, which was later supplemented by an offer of £10 from Sir Joseph Lowrey. This offer they refused to raise. After some uncertainty in view of what was seen as the intransigence of Loughton on the money question, and in the face of much opposition from Buckhurst Hill, it was decided nevertheless to proceed with the "Scheme for rearrangement of Buckhurst Hill and Loughton Pastorate" under which it was settled that the Rev. T. Llewellyn Jones was to supply the pulpit at Loughton and to have the pastoral oversight of Loughton as from September 1934 and the minister's residence was to be removed from Buckhurst Hill to Loughton in March 1935. The circuit then bought 12 Brook Road, a new semi-detached house, for the Manse.

In 1934 the Trust was increased in size to 20 members. Among the new appointments were two schoolmasters, one (Dudley Evans) the son of an existing trustee, a laundry assistant manager (Gordon Wardle), an accountant, a company director, and for the first time ever a woman, Mrs. Ruth Wardle, mother of Gordon, described in the minutes as "married woman". The Church had grown to such an extent and so many families were playing active roles in these years that it becomes impossible to single out individuals for mention. However, some names which will probably be remembered include Burrows, Evans, Goodchild, Robinson, Boulter and Browne, and that of William James Bouch, a member of whose family is still a member of the church in 1997.

With a resident minister, the LMC was able in 1937 to get a full

marriage licence. Something else now taken for granted happened the following year: electric lighting was installed in the church and schoolroom. It is rather surprising to us today how late electricity reached the northern part of Loughton, but one rather sad effect was removal of the fine and decorative brass gasoliers from the church.

Rev. T. Llewellyn Jones was a Welshman of the fiery kind, a man who gave his all when in the pulpit, frequently having to mop his glistening brow while preaching. He was succeeded in 1937 by Rev. Arthur W. Barr. During the ministry of these two men the size of the congregation increased considerably. Mr. Barr too was a very good preacher. He also had the marked ability to organise events, such as socials. He was particularly popular among the young people, for whom he arranged hikes and cycling tours. In 1941, after four years, he became a Methodist chaplain in the forces, but on the occasions that he came back to preach the church would be full. Mr. Barr later resigned from the Methodist Church and became a member of the Roman Catholic Church, for whom he did much good work: he became the general secretary of St. Vincent de Paul in Britain, which dealt with the problems of "down and outs", and in 1946 was made a Knight of the Order of St. Gregory by Pope Paul in recognition of his services. Even after he left the Methodist Church Mr. Barr made a point of calling on every new arrival at the manse and welcoming him to Loughton.

An instance of Mr. Barr's kindness was his custom of having tea every Saturday with an old lady called Mary Bareham who was virtually house-bound for her last years. In the early thirties Mary had been chapel keeper. One Sunday morning, the superintendent, Rev. W. L. Waights, was preaching one of his more scientific sermons. He banged his fist on the pulpit and said "You all think it's wood, but it isn't. It's a series of electrons." At this Mary Bareham blurted out, "What a load of old rubbish, I ought to know it's wood: I have to polish it every week!"

During World War II the Church did its best to carry on "business as usual". Sunday services sometimes had to be held in the new School Hall because no fuel was available for the church. The heating of the School Hall was itself restricted, as far as meetings were concerned, to the table tennis club and Girls' Life Brigade, and Boys'

Brigade. The Boys' Brigade provided the blacking out for the hall windows. For about one month in 1940 the Hall was requisitioned by the Public Assistance Department for the use of London refugees (who did £15 worth of damage!) In 1942 the trustees gave permission for the officer in charge of Emergency Feeding to erect a corrugated iron shed behind the Hall.

In June 1940 the blast from the first high explosive bomb dropped on Loughton blew down the cross and coping stones on the front of the Church roof, the falling masonry causing damage to the roof, which was made good soon afterwards. The cross, however, was not replaced for many years. But far worse was to come. In the early hours of 19 April 1944, during the last air raid over Loughton, the new School Hall was entirely demolished and the Church badly damaged - some of the pews bore the scars until demolition in 1986. Despite this there was only one Sunday when services were not held in the church. On that occasion the friends at the Union Church invited the Methodists to join them. Within a month a rebuilding fund was opened and £100 transferred to it from current account. All the local churches expressed sympathy and offers of accommodation were made, as well as donations towards the rebuilding fund. The proceeds of the Gift Day held in May 1945 went to the Rebuilding Fund. In successive years this proved to be an effective way of raising money. Rev. Eric Alwood was minister at this difficult time but much of the work for the rebuilding scheme fell on Rev. Gordon Brigg, the next minister.

After the opening of the new School Hall in 1936, the trustees had permitted Essex County Library to use the old school room during certain hours. Now deprived of the New Hall, the church was desperately short of accommodation, and had to terminate the tenancy agreement with the County Library, who eventually vacated the room in 1949. In 1946 Messrs. Gould agreed to sell the church land at the rear of the site of the late School Hall, so as to make the church's land regular in shape, and enable the new hall to be larger than its predecessor.

Pressure was being brought to bear on the trustees from all sides to take urgent steps to replace the destroyed Hall with new accommodation of some kind. Work among the young people in

particular was being hampered. Initially the trustees made enquiries of the Universal Housing Co. Ltd. about their sectional buildings and found that although they did not have a pre-possessing appearance they would meet the requirements of the Church. However the trustees were dissuaded by Mr. L. Robinson, a member of the panel of architects on the London Mission Extension Committee dealing with war damage matters; who in view of reports he had received, could not recommend that type of building. Mr. Robinson considered a "Uni-Seco" type of building, which was entirely sectional and easily extended or removed, to be more suitable even though slightly more expensive. But there was a fundamental problem: it would be impossible for the Church to acquire one because they were all earmarked for school purposes! Another argument to be considered was that the Methodist Church authorities nationally were encouraging full reinstatement, if necessary in stages, at Government expense, rather than purchasing inferior hut accommodation out of chapel funds. In March 1946, Mr. Robinson put forward a scheme involving an outlay of £1,950 for the partial rebuilding of a new school hall which would include a large hall divided into two classrooms, storeroom, boiler house, and lavatories; and flexibly built so that the partitioning of the rooms could be adjusted, and the building extended according to requirements until properly completed. This formed the basis of the first part of what turned out to be a three stage plan for the completion of the new school hall, subsequently called the Wesley Hall, and which plan took more than ten years to complete.

Much time was spent after the war trying to extract compensation from the War Damage Commission, not just in respect of the destroyed School Hall but also for sundry other damage to the Manse and to the church itself: the stained glass windows, the cross on the roof, and the repeated flooding in the boiler room which the trustees suspected was caused by drains suffering from bomb damage.

The story of the building of Wesley Hall is not a particularly straightforward one. There were a number of problems, but many of them stemmed from one factor, and that was that so many different parties were involved. With each of the three stages a similar process had to be endured. Once the architect's plans had been prepared and approved by the trustees a licence had to be obtained for the erection of the building, and the licence would specify an

upper financial limit which could not be exceeded. Then, in turn, the approval of the London Mission Extension Committee had to be obtained. Other interested parties who had to be consulted at some point included the Ministry of Works and the Methodist Chapel Department and the local planning authority. By the time this circumlocution had been completed the tenders from the builders would be out of date and the cost of the building would have risen appreciably. This in turn would mean that the financial limit specified in the licence would be exceeded. (Increases in costs were also caused by frequent changes to the approved plans to incorporate all that the trustees thought necessary; for instance, insistence on proper lavatory facilities, which they finally got in the third phase.) Therefore the cycle would begin again with a new application for a licence and so on.

Having surmounted all these obstacles, the first part of the scheme was delayed by a shortage of bricks. However, eventually in May 1950 the first part was completed and opened at a cost of about £3,000. At the opening ceremony the architect, apologising for the delay in completion, said, "Never have so many waited so long for so little." The concluding reunion supper proved so popular that the overflow from the old schoolroom had to be seated in the new Wesley Hall itself. The trustees decided that the use of Wesley Hall should normally be confined to meetings requiring orderly seating, the old schoolroom to be used for drill, games, socials and the like. In the following year they resolved that "the Hall should only be used by church adherents". Two years later the Wesley Hall extension (Part II of the scheme) was completed.

In 1953 fractures appeared in the brickwork of Wesley Hall (Part I) and settlement caused cracks round the front doorway. The architect agreed to remedy the defects, although he considered he was in no way liable. Subsequently in 1954 after submitting detailed plans for the final extension (Part III) the architect resigned and a Mr. Simpson from Woodford was appointed the new architect. In 1955 a further complication arose when it was found that the foundations of the final extension would have to be built over the bomb crater, thus substantially increasing the cost. The final extension was opened on 17 November 1956, though it was some months before all the defects outstanding were satisfactorily dealt

with. The total cost of the scheme was over £12,500.

These difficulties must not be construed as belittling the hard work and effort put in by everyone, not only in planning the hall but also in furnishing and equipping it.

From the earliest days of Edward Pope's work in Loughton the importance of work among children had been emphasised. The early meetings would certainly have been on Sunday after-noon. The present Junior Church has its origins in the "Little Church" set up by Mrs. R. Bray about the time that World War II began in order to meet the needs of those children who had not been evacuated. This "Little Church", which replaced the afternoon Sunday School, was the forerunner of a trend which was to spread to most other churches in that it met on Sunday mornings and joined for part of its activity with the morning service. It was also progressive at that time in emphasising the devotional aspect of the children's worship so that the later transition to normal church service attendance was easy and natural for the growing teenager. To meet the new responsibilities which arose on the advent of the Debden estate in the late forties, an afternoon Sunday school was recommenced. In July 1949 Mr. Albert Perry became leader of the "Little Church". Over the years the name has changed from "Little Church" to "Children's Church", then to "Junior Church".

After working together satisfactorily for some years, in 1957 the afternoon Sunday School was once again incorporated into the morning Children's Church. By then Children's Church had grown to over 100 children and was severely hampered by having too few teachers, whilst the Sunday School with plenty of staff had only some forty children. Since then the Children's Church has gone from strength to strength; from an original membership of about a dozen, meeting as one department, it has grown to its present healthy numbers divided into four departments.

As well as the Junior Church Mr. Perry was active in the early years of the Youth Club. Although over the years there had been various fellowship groups for young people the first youth club so termed was formed in 1950 under the leadership of Mr. Perry and Mr. Sidney Ford. Instruction in ballroom dancing was one of the club's

attractions in early years. For several years in the mid-fifties the club organised weekends for its members at an old farmhouse in Nazeing. At one time the club operated a baby-sitting service at a minimum fee of 1/- per hour, the proceeds going to youth club funds. Today the youth club provides a bridge between young people and the Church.

Concurrently with the efforts to build Wesley Hall attention was being turned towards the new London County Council estate at Debden. It had been decided in June 1946, following the recommendation of the Methodist General Purposes Committee, to negotiate for a site on the new estate. In 1949, the year after the formation of a trust, the L.C.C. offered a piece of land for £785. An ambitious £30,000 scheme was drawn up, the first part of which was opened at a cost of over £6,000 in July 1952. Over 300 people attended the opening. The money came from compensation for the bombed ex-Wesleyan church in Church Hill, Walthamstow. The building comprised a main church hall (to seat about 140), a large kitchen-cum-vestry, conveniences and boiler room, together with an imposing entrance porch intended to form part of the next extension. The main hall was designed for use as a church until further building could be carried out, and when a curtain was drawn back it really looked like a church - with pulpit and communion table. Practically all the fittings in the church, which cost more than £200, had been given by members throughout the Circuit before the opening. Our lively young minister at that time, Rev. Gordon Brigg, had been determined to see the Debden Church opened before he left Loughton. He made it with just a few days to spare!

Largely as a result of the efforts of the new Loughton minister, Rev. A. H. Grant, a year after its opening the first of a series of deaconesses started work at Debden. A flat on the estate was obtained by the Church for their use. With its new building and a resident deaconess the work at Debden made great strides, particularly among young people and children.

Within ten years the new church proper was built, and opened in 1963. The minister at this time, Rev. John Horner, communicated particularly well with young people and it was a great blow that he left after only a three year ministry at Loughton. For a number of reasons attendance fell at Debden and in 1969 the quarterly meeting,

faced with a need to reduce staff expenses in the circuit, decided to withdraw the deaconess. Since then Debden has had to rely on the already over-worked Loughton minister. A Local Ecumenical Project used the Debden premises for a joint Anglican - Methodist church (Trinity) from 1988.

In the fifties people were still recovering from the war; the prosperity of the sixties was still to come. People were still thinking about the atom bomb and wartime issues, such as conscription. One of the questions before a "Brains Trust" held at the Church in 1950 was: Military conscription has been condemned by statesmen, politicians, church-men etc.; why is it that non-conformist churchmen have shown such apathy?"

One of the striking features of church life in those days was the number of week night activities. There was an active young people's fellowship which organised walks and weekend trips. One big event of the church year was the Annual Church Bazaar held in the autumn. This was a great social occasion as well as a money-raising effort, and many later lamented the eventual passing in the sixties of this event to which so much time and thought used to be devoted throughout the year. Bazaars restarted in the 1980s: in the 90s, generally the cash raised was simply given to charity - a most enviable state of affairs. However, it was in the late fifties that there came a growing feeling that the Church's energies should be directed elsewhere and that, if members made a concerted effort towards direct giving, they would be freed for the real work of the Church.

The Rev. Alan Grant came to Loughton in 1952 and brought with him into the Church great spiritual vitality. It was following a Church conference called one weekend by Mr. Grant that the fellowship groups came into being. Mr. Grant was not one to keep Christianity in a watertight compartment isolated from the world about it. He and members of the church vehemently opposed the Government for its attack on Egypt during the Suez crisis. He joined other ministers and clergy in a protest on this issue. An unexpected blessing which arose out of this effort was a new era of inter-church co-operation in Loughton. The Loughton Council of Churches had included the Anglicans formally from 1944, but work really developed in the 1950s and 60s.

After Mr. Grant came the Rev. Ralph Bickford, a dynamic young American. Although here for only a year on an exchange basis his personality made a great impression: he was enthusiastic, unconventional, wonderful with children, and was particularly interested in youth work. A good deal of the foundations of the youth work at Debden Church during the following years was attributable to him. Although nobody in Loughton knew it, Rev. Bickford was a sick man, and a few months after returning to America he died as a result of complications from diabetes. Ralph Bickford had the distinction of being the first minister after the war to have his own transport. He drove around on the motorcycle combination which was owned by Mr. Ray Willson, who was in hospital at that time. For much of his time here the singing in the church was to the accompaniment of a piano, the old organ having given its last. Another organ was dedicated in September 1958. It was used at the last few services of Ralph Bickford with us. Two more outstanding preachers followed Mr. Bickford; Geoffrey Ainger and John Horner, both of whom shared his enthusiasm for work amongst young people. Mr. Geoffrey Tipple remembered an occasion when Mr. Ainger failed to arrive at a church meeting he was due to chair. The reason was that he had to stay with a sick member of the church. Mr. Ainger was one for getting his priorities right: people came before meetings for him. One of Mr. Ainger's characteristics was his irresistible chuckle. He played a large part in the organisation of the "retreats", which took the form of a week-end of worship and discussion at the church "designed to deepen our own spiritual life and sharpen the effectiveness of our ministry as a Church". In a Christmas drama (which involved Mary and Joseph lodging in Brown's Garage in Station Road!) appeared Geoffrey Ainger's carol Mary's Child, which subsequently found its way into the new Methodist hymn-book, Hymns and Psalms. In this collection also is another contribution from Loughton, The Holly and the Ivy, reworked by Emily Chisholm, a long-time church member.

Towards the end of his time at Loughton the Wesley Guild was discontinued and in its stead (although completely different in practically every respect) was proposed a new monthly meeting on Saturday evenings intended to attract all ages and every member of the family. It fell upon Mr. Ainger's successor, John Horner, to complete the arrangements of the meeting points, as these evenings were called. But an important feature of these meetings was that

practically every one was organised by a different member of the Church, thus avoiding unduly burdening any one individual and ensuring variety. These meetings proved very successful (over 100 people attended the first one) and continued until about 1970. This was not for lack of support but because it was felt that, in view of the activities already planned in the church on Saturday evenings, there was for the time being no need for them.

A year after Mr. Horner arrived, on 21 September 1963, the new church at Debden was opened. He took a number of young people from both churches on a holiday to his previous church in Cornwall. They made a cine film and had a wonderful time.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the area around the church, which had previously been mostly occupied by houses, was being transformed into a much more commercial district. In 1959, the house to the church's south was demolished and a Fine Fare supermarket erected. The developers sought an easement to make foundations on church land to the front of the site. The trustees, with commendable foresight, agreed, provided that the developers would allow the footings to be used for any future building on the church site also - which, of course, came in 1987. But the development of the supermarket, with its square box-like structure, well to the front of the plot, altered the aspect of the church site. The church was now hemmed-in and began to look dowdy and out of scale with its monolithic but brightly-lit neighbour.

In 1963, an offer was made to redevelop the church site, which would have provided for shops on the High Road frontage, and a new church rather crammed in at the rear. Unsurprisingly, this plan was rejected by the Chigwell Urban District Council.

Rev. Donald Heap, who was minister from 1965 to 1970, has been described by a member as being a very sincere and devout man with a lovely disposition. He had been a missionary in India. Coming to Loughton, he was amazed to find a membership which included, by his calculation, no fewer than fifty school teachers. He remembered in 1997 the fellowship and stimulation of the Loughton people, and valued keeping in touch after he went through the Grapevine, the Church magazine published monthly. He also had the marked ability to find the right words.

EXPANSION

During his time here, in December 1966, extensions at the back of the 1903 church building were constructed. The Burrows Room and the Kingswood Room added to our accommodation: this was no over-estimate of needs, as every room was soon occupied on Sundays and almost every night during the week. A new boiler installation for the whole chapel was included. The extensions were in a box-like Modern style, with irregular plate-glass windows, which looked rather strange tacked onto the back of the 1903 Gothic chapel. Fortunately, they were largely invisible from the street! The cost was over £5,000, which involved the equivalent of every member doubling his or her giving.

In the late 1960s, discussions about possible Methodist union with the Church of England, which had been going on for some fifteen years, came to the point of acceptance or rejection. Former Loughton minister, Geoffrey Ainger, had been a member of the Anglican-Methodist Unity Commission, appointed by Conference in 1965: their scheme, published in 1968, provided for Services of Reconciliation in the first stage of union, and thus mutual recognition of ministers' status. In the Loughton church, unsurprisingly, the feeling had been very much in favour of union with the Anglicans. In the event, of course, it was accepted nationally by the Methodists, but rejected by the Church of England. Counterfactual history is an inexact science, but who can doubt that if union had taken place, with the LMC equidistant between two underutilised Anglican churches, the valuable High Road site of over half-an-acre would not eventually have been sold, and the LMC congregation merged in St. John's and St. Mary's? The economics and logistics would have surely been irresistible.

Rev. Bert Morris arrived in 1973 and lost no time in reaping the seeds sown by his predecessors, for while he was at Loughton four young men offered and were accepted for the ministry. Even the weakest faith could not fail to be strengthened by one of Bert Morris' sermons; never complacent, often challenging, his preaching was not to be ignored. However powerful in the pulpit as a man he was humble in all things and a good friend at all times. A striking

feature of the Church in the 70s was the variety of ages to be found there; it was not simply a club for the over-sixties! A young man named Geoffrey Harris had the inspiration to work for something which was eventually called "The Superstar Festival" It took place in September 1972. As well as a rock concert in Wesley Hall, there were folk groups singing all weekend (every artist was Christian) and the Sunday Service included two mediaeval miracle plays performed in the church. Much hard work was, of course, involved, but a number of young people opened their hearts to Our Lord and that, after all, is what the festival and, indeed, the Church was all about.

Also in 1973, the Church negotiated with the developer who had bought nos. 262-264 High Road, to the north of the church, for a right of way along the north and west parts of his land. Though these discussions did not bear fruit for some years, it was this that eventually allowed the use of the whole frontage in the 1987 rebuilding. The early 1970s were years of housing and land inflation nationally, and an expanding commercial centre like Loughton saw property developers waiting like hawks to pounce on any morsel. The church site was one such, and at virtually every trustees' meeting, some new offer was reported and rejected. One intriguing one would have involved a new church in Upper Park, and on another occasion, Rev. Morris reported he had had no fewer than five letters offering to buy the site in one month; as well as one received by the trustees!

In 1973, the centenary was celebrated with an exhibition, an appeal for funds, which resulted in the redecoration and rewiring of the church, and the publication of the first edition of this book. Peter Moles and Ian Chamberlain wrote,

"One has only to look at a copy of 'The Week' [then as now the weekly notice sheet] to see that our hall and church building are in use for some activity practically every night! Let's take a look at one or two of these activities, picked at random from this busy programme.

First the Girls' Brigade, these words from a leader-"Our ultimate aim is to train girls to become useful Christian women and thus take their places in the World today". And secondly the Junior Church, "Junior Church is more than a Sunday school, it aims to give the

children a sense of belonging to the wider adult church and to feel a member of the worshipping congregation!"

By this time you must be thinking that "final thoughts" are concerned only with giving ourselves a hearty pat-on-the-back. Far from it, although it surely must be a good thing to rejoice when love and good-works prevail. We must however never think of sitting back and feeling proud of the witness and labours in which the Lord, in his mercy, has allowed us to participate.

Surely we should be very much concerned with the future of our church fellowship in the ever-changing Britain of today. Our country is restless, people are searching for truth, meaning and reality in their busy lives. We know that the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and His message can meet the needs and longings of people in every corner of life.

So finally some words from the Bible: complacency has no place when we read these words from Psalm 127: Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders will have toiled in vain, unless the Lord keeps watch over a city, in vain the watchman stands on guard. In vain you rise up early and go late to rest, toiling for the bread you eat, He supplies the need of those He loves". AND . . . "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

The church also grew in numbers during Mr. Morris's tenure of the ministry, and by the time he left in 1980, was well established as one of the larger churches in Essex Methodism. It began to equal in size of congregation the previously larger churches in the Wanstead and Woodford Circuit, such as Hermon Hill and Derby Road.

1980-1987: THE REBUILDING

Bert Morris's successor was Dr. Leslie Griffiths, a Welshman and a well-known Methodist from his lecturing and broadcasting, who had just completed a tour of duty in Haiti. He had also served a term as minister-in-charge of the large Wesley Church in Cambridge, during the extended illness of its permanent minister, Rev. Whitfield Foy. The appointment of such a prominent member of the church nationally must have been seen as marking Loughton's "coming of age" as an important Methodist society: Leslie himself was to have profound effects on Loughton, just as the place seems, if his writings are anything to judge by, to have implanted itself firmly on his memory, too.

In 1980, Buckhurst Hill Methodist Church closed, and most of its members transferred to Loughton. The Queen's Road building was sold to a Brethren congregation and demolished, the hall at the rear being kept as their church. It had been another of Edward Pope's foundations, opened in 1878 when Loughton Wesleyans were still in England's Lane, and replaced by a brick chapel nearly 20 years before Loughton's. It closed with a membership of about 30, in the face of massive bills for repairs. Leslie Griffiths much deprecated this closure, which had taken place just before his arrival (although Buckhurst Hill had been since the 50s under the Woodford rather than the Loughton minister).

Changes were also underway in Loughton itself. As mentioned above, the commercial centre of the town moved steadily northward. But this drift was accentuated particularly after 1980-82, when the Albion Granaries, which had become an engineering works and corn chandler's, were sold to Argyll Stores, and amid much controversy, developed into a large Presto supermarket, much larger than anything the town had seen up to then. In 1983, the town's large Co-operative store, which had been near St. Mary's Church, was closed, and perforce all Loughtonians had to turn to the north end of the High Road to do their grocery shopping. The Methodist Church was situated some fifty yards to the north of the Presto entrance, and thus assumed much more the character of a town centre church than it had in what the Wesleyans of 1885 had considered a quiet spot. At the same time, a conservation movement grew in Loughton,

out of the Albion Granaries affair, with the intention of preventing future unwelcome redevelopment in the town, and to redress what was seen as inaction by the local Council on the issue. Several Church members were closely involved in this group, which became the Loughton Residents' Association. Others, of course, were active in the town's political parties.

However, the impression began to grow among the membership, shared and fostered by the new Minister, that the 1903 chapel presented a dour and unwelcoming face to the thousands who now walked past it every day. The twin blue painted doors were open only on Sundays, and the whole appearance of the church was thought to reinforce the impression to the population at large of the closed world of the minority who ever thought about religion. Leslie Griffiths was a man of robust faith, who had a way of pushing his vision through the mists of doubt of others. He certainly saw that the High Road site, with its new prominence, offered opportunities for Christian work far in excess of the capabilities of the 1903 chapel. On the other hand, there was a great deal of affection for the building, and a growing feeling in Loughton generally that old buildings should, wherever possible, be conserved. Leslie Griffiths had a record of church building in previous appointments: an echo of Edward Pope's achievements a century before, and what another forceful minister, Samuel Brawn, had done for the Union Church before that!

Leslie Griffiths' idea was that the whole frontage of 75 feet should be utilised, instead of about 40; and that the street facade should be as welcoming and open as possible. The frontage was to be brought forward, nearer the street - the old chapel was set back - so passers by could see what was going on. Plans for a shared commercial/church development having fallen through, in 1983, the Church decided at a special meeting that the 1903 building should be demolished, and a new church built: in authentic Methodist fashion a development committee was then elected, and first met in February 1984. Members of the committee recall the sustained hard work and the fellowship the undertaking involved. There was a meeting every fortnight, and of course onto this had to be added all the fundraising efforts that were necessary to meet the likely cost.

After considerable attention to the aims and objectives of the exercise, and to the enormous cost of the rebuilding, Essex architect, Bernard Gooding, with his engineer partner, Ronald Rowson, were appointed to design the new church. Their design provided for a 275-seat church, which could be extended or reduced by an ingenious arrangement of screen partitions. It would have a wide foyer or "welcome area" across the front, which would be the Church's interface with the community. There would be a range of meeting rooms and lounges, proper lavatories and kitchens, and an office for an administrator, who would work for the whole Wanstead and Woodford circuit. The whole idea was that the community should use and be welcome in the church and its facilities - that the thousands who were total strangers to Christianity should be encouraged to use it, and to make easily the difficult transition from seeing the outside of a church to using what was inside. The cost of the whole project was estimated at £450,000 - over £2,000 per member. The first street frontage to emerge from the drawing board used a great deal of brick, with a massive irregular tower, and a saw-tooth skyline reminiscent of a 1930s factory: this was altered to the present lighter treatment, with a spire and tower, at the Committee's insistence. The first ideas for the interior, however, were just what the church wanted, survived with very little adaptation as the final design. An important development in 1983 was the acquisition of the right to use a roadway into the rear of the church site: the builder of flats next door having granted this in exchange for the purchase for £5,000 of a triangular piece of land which abutted his building site.

The contract for the new building was priced at £375,250, and was signed on 1 April 1986; the last services having taken place in the old chapel on 23 February. The old building was demolished, but its slates were reserved and used for the High Road roof elevations of the new church. Many of the fittings and fixtures of the old chapel were sold off to members. It was at this time that the Grays Methodist Church organ was purchased (for £250) and stored pending completion of the new premises.

During the redevelopment period, a temporary home for the church was offered by the Catholic Church of St Edmund's in Traps Hill, who put their church hall at the Methodists' disposal. The ecumenical

movement in Loughton was of long standing, but the idea of the Methodists meeting and being welcome in a Roman Catholic hall would have been unthought of a few years previously. In fact, the R.C.s had joined the Loughton Council of Churches in 1967, and had signed part of the Local Covenant in 1985. As it was, Leslie Griffiths recalled in the Methodist Recorder in 1996 how grateful the LMC was to St Edmund's and how in his view strange juxtapositions - such as the clinking of beer glasses as the Catholics opened their social club bar, the smell of incense, and the rousing singing of a Wesley hymn such as 'And can it be that I should gain', made him think anew about Christian unity.

Dr. Griffiths left Loughton in 1986, during the period of exile at St. Edmund's; and his successor was Peter Bayley, a native of Staffordshire, who had just finished a period in the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Service. Peter came as Superintendent Minister for the Wanstead and Woodford Circuit, which during his tenure, was amalgamated with Walthamstow, Chingford and Leyton Methodist Churches to form the Forest Circuit. It was thus Peter Bayley who led the LMC into its new premises on Easter Saturday, 18 April 1987, with an initial service that saw the church packed to overflowing, and a team of ministers from most of the Loughton churches and beyond present to welcome and dedicate its inauguration.

The new church building project was not unanimously welcomed. Some members of the church objected on aesthetic and conservation grounds, and others thought that there were more pressing ways for spending half-a-million pounds; for instance in feeding the hungry. But when the new church emerged from the hoardings in 1987, it was universally admired; because it became clear that, though entirely different from the 1903 chapel, it did in a very real sense contribute, architecturally, aesthetically, and as a fine place of worship and of community service.

The interior deserves special mention, because of the imaginative and predominant use of light wood, plain varnished in the Scandinavian style. The massive main beams that soar to rooflights are made of glue-laminated timber; doors, furniture, the communion rails and table, the ceiling panelling, are of a similar style. The result is a most impressive yet in-scale and well-proportioned church, well

complemented by the stained glass designed by a local craftsman and the light green upholstery of the individual seats that replaced the pews of the former building. The organ, rescued from the disused Grays Thurrock Methodist Church in south Essex, and painstakingly restored, provides a rich musical basis for services in the new church.

Loughton, which has seen so much poor and unimaginative modern building, can be proud of the Methodist Church, and Loughton uses it well, not only for the tea and coffee served every weekday in the welcome area, 30,000 cups a year, but also as a meeting place for a whole range of community organisations. Many more Loughtonians now go into a church than otherwise would. Some of them come back on Sundays.

LIFE IN THE NEW CHURCH

Membership grew in the 1980s and 1990s, at a time when church attendances were falling nationally, and when the Methodist Church was occasionally headlined in the national press as a dying institution. By 1997, there were over 700 on the LMC community roll, and 240 members. A particularly healthy aspect was the number in the Junior Church and youth department (the TYs). In the Methodist Church nationally from 1989, children were invited to join in the sharing of bread and wine, an idea likely to be adopted by the Anglicans ten years later. This, with the settled format at the main service - moved to 10.30 from 11 a.m.- of the preacher's address to children after the first hymn and opening prayers, has cemented children's worship into the life of the adult church.

Music and drama have both been important in the recent life of the LMC.

No choir has existed since the 1970s, but the congregational singing, which is generally enthusiastic, is aided by an "occasional choir" - a number of practised and confident singers who, spread through the congregation, encourage the others. Sometimes, too, a soloist is persuaded to sing. The organ playing is supplemented from time to time by instrumentalists, both as small groups or playing solo, or by the large LMC Band, under its director, Malcolm Bell. Drama - from Christian musicals to miracle plays, has also been noteworthy; and Andrea Moles has amassed an enormous store of costumes and properties, known as the Christian Drama Resource Centre.

Four factors at least were at work on the membership figures. One was the cessation of the practice of young people virtually automatically becoming full members at the age of 16 or 17, as had been common in the 60s and 70s. This was probably due to the Methodist church nationally adopting the idea of "confirmation", a more formal act than the previous "reception into membership", plus the fact that most Loughton children tended from about 1975 onwards to leave the town at about the age of 18 to attend institutions of higher education, rather than taking a job. This loss of support is quite a serious problem for the church, because as mentioned above, the Junior Church and TYs (11-18 year olds) are both very active, as is the Church youth club, which of course caters

for youngsters from the locality as a whole and not just from the LMC.

Another factor was the new building, the facilities and informality of which obviously attracted to worship a whole new set of churchgoers. The letting of rooms to community-based, rather than simply to Church-based, organisations must have been a cogent factor in this regard, and the comment the author overheard from a stranger to Loughton, "I've never seen a more welcoming church", must be another. "Sunday best" wear for service, though the rule in the 60s, is now a definite rarity; the majority of men, for instance, preferring not to wear a tie; and hats for women are virtually unknown.

The third factor concerns education. From 1888, when the British School closed, to 1965, religious factors were irrelevant in the choice or availability of educational facilities in Loughton. In the latter year, the Davenant Foundation Grammar School, a Church of England voluntary aided institution, moved out to Loughton from Whitechapel, where it had existed since 1682. In the early 1980s, secondary education in South-West Essex was reorganised on comprehensive lines, with a tertiary college to serve over-16s. This reorganisation also affected Davenant, in that it became an ecumenical Christian comprehensive school for 11 to 18 year olds, retaining a sixth form: a solid record of involvement with and attendance at any mainstream Christian church by the parents being a condition of entry. Since many parents preferred a school with a sixth form and a strong Christian ethos throughout its teaching, as well as excellent examination results, church attendances in the town were bolstered. Though some members have deprecated the "Davenant factor", and noted the strange disappearance a few people after their children had been admitted (or, of course, rejected), as one clergyman (not in Loughton) remarked, "if we can't get something through to people sitting in the pews every Sunday for five years, then the failure is ours!"

The last factor is demographic. The UK Christian Yearbook in its 1995 edition opined the Methodist Church might increase in numbers if only it could stop its members dying. Loughton has its share of older folk, but the LMC is not so predominantly a society of elderly people as are many churches. The southern part of

Loughton has been an area of younger population, and has also been the scene of much housing infilling, as vacant plots are built on and large old houses replaced by more and smaller ones. On to this must be superimposed the factors mentioned above which have tended to promote attendance and participation by younger people and young families, and the net result is that the LMC is a society much more evenly balanced between the ages and the sexes than many Methodist (and other) churches. In 1997, it was the largest church in the Forest circuit by a factor of two.

Other changes of the 1980s included an extension of the covenanted giving scheme; the introduction of lit candles on the communion table (a move that led to the resignation of a steward), the moving of the main morning service from 11.00 am as it had been for a century, to 10.30, and a most important development, the appointment of a Church Administrator in 1988, Brian Walker, an active LMC member and officer since 1969. This appointment, despite its title, was an important pastoral step, as the "administrator" in fact rapidly became in his glass-fronted office facing the High Road a most important ambassador and public face for the church; his cheery wave and kind words for passers-by and visitors reinforcing the outgoing caring vision the LMC had for its new building.

An organisational change was connected with the circuit. The Wanstead and Woodford Wesleyan circuit had been formed in 1878, and survived, unchanged by the Methodist union of 1932, until 1989. It had lost the northern societies - Epping, North Weald and Thornwood - in the 1960s, when Harlow New Town was growing, but otherwise was the same. In 1989, the London (Forest) Circuit was established, merging the old Wanstead and Woodford Circuit with Chingford, Walthamstow and Leyton. Loughton was included, and from the start was by far the largest church in the group. Some people felt the inclusion of Loughton in this circuit was rather strange, as in local government terms, Loughton is with Epping, North Weald, Waltham Abbey and the villages to the north in the Epping Forest District, and parliamentary constituency, and it might be thought strange we have little to do with our fellow-Methodists in those neighbouring areas.

"ONWARD!"

Peter Bayley left after eight years in 1995, and was replaced by Rev. Anthony Miles, who with his wife, Frances, and family, came to us from Colchester. Tony has church communications as one of his interests, so Loughton, with its outgoing church activities and face to the world must have seemed a logical destination to him. He was also, in his early 30s, the youngest minister the LMC had had for some time. A feature of 1997 was the Onward programme from Easter to Whitsun, which was very much Tony Miles' idea. It was designed to map out a clear future for the church and its Christian effort leading up to the millennium, partly by showing where Methodism had come from. Accordingly, a two-part exhibition, on the history of Methodism, and the local history of Methodism, was arranged; all the living previous ministers who had served LMC were invited back to preach; a large Flower Festival arranged for the Bank Holiday weekend, and a talk given on the church's history. It was hoped that the influx of visitors would be drawn into the church's activities, and the involvement of existing members deepened.

At this time, there was considerable involvement of church members with wider community activities: clubs and societies, many of which as a result met on LMC premises, and in Council activities. In 1995, a church member, Kay Ellis, had become Chairman of Epping Forest District Council, the first since Arthur Leech chaired the old Loughton Urban District Council some 75 years before; and when a local council was established for Loughton in 1996, three of its 22 Councillors were members of the LMC, including its first two Chairmen. One of the main parliamentary candidates for Epping Forest in 1988, 1992 and 1997 was an LMC member.

