

(Talk by John Baker at the final reunion service: Sunday 23rd May 2004)

And he appointed seventy and sent them forth, two by two, to be messengers of peace and sons of encouragement.'

I was in Norwich Cathedral last Saturday and picked up a copy of a new bible, and in St. Luke, Chapter 10 it referred to the sending forth of the 72. Either we were incorrectly named, or we are suffering from inflation!

Firstly some thanks. In particular to Bob Liddell, Margot Lewis, Andrew Veitch and others who have helped me in putting this together. And, an apology for what is missing. It was an impossible task to include everything in five to ten minutes! I can only give a flavour of what has gone on in the last seventy years.

In 1933 Godfrey Pain, who was anxious to train in preparation for the Congregational ministry, accepted a part-time appointment at Carrs Lane, and was appointed youth leader and assistant to the then Minister, Leighton Richards. Godfrey Pain had many gifts; a cheerful and friendly disposition, plus the support of his wife Gertrude. He could talk to anybody in very simple language. There were problems at Carrs Lane Church with youngsters aged 17 and over who did not want to take part in either the Church or youth club activities. He decided he would form a club for young people '*of any or no Church*'. He went out into the streets and invited anyone to come along. Carrs Lane Church, in their generosity, allocated rooms on the top floor which comprised a cloak room, a kitchen, a large room, two smaller rooms and a library. The Charter of the Club was written, many saying it was the Gospel according to Godfrey Pain.

In a Club report from 1934 to 1935, apart from the Charter, it says that '*the members have two loyalties; to give service in keeping with the tradition of the Charter and to seek to understand further the truth they proclaim*'.

The Club was formed or founded in January 1934 in Bewdley, and Godfrey Pain's genius was such that he had ability to delegate work and time to train leaders. When he left in 1937 it was those talents he passed on which enabled the Club to carry on until the appointment in 1938 of Alan Knott.

However, back to that report of February to July 1934. Godfrey Pain was the leader, the general secretary Wilfred Shakespeare, the treasurer Donald Moffat, and there are other names here that will ring bells: Jack Payne - boys' club leader, Enid Dyer - girls' club, and Donald Veitch. The General Committee comprised Gordon Veitch, Kenneth Corley, Florence Read, Dennis Edmunds and Doris George. Now, some of those names will mean nothing to many of you; but to others those dates and names will be significant.

They used to meet on the first Sunday of each month; there was work to be done and jobs were allocated; then they had tea, and closed with a short devotional. The numbers attending varied between sixty to eighty and each month the Club met for some social activity in mid-week.

In July 1934 applications for membership of the Club were closed, but it was scheduled to re-open membership to others in the autumn of that year. Those are the early days.

Now to 1938. Alan Knott, at the age of 49, became associate minister with Leighton Richards, with special responsibility for the 70 Club. After 8 months he was made associate and joint minister with Leighton Richards and on the latter's resignation in 1939 he became responsible for the whole of the work at Carrs Lane Church as well as the 70 Club, work which he continued with Grace during the war because, obviously, the activities were restricted.

With the appointment of Leslie Tizard to succeed Leighton Richards as joint senior minister, Alan Knott was again able to concentrate more fully on the rebuilding of the 70 Club, on Bible Study and Pastoral work, etc. Leslie Tizard and Alan Knott are names with which many of us will be familiar and the work that they did was, of course, considerable in the development of the 70 Club. However, let us now have a look at some of the things that the 70 Club used to do.

When it was first formed there was poverty, homelessness, loneliness, dirt, disease and neglect; there was no NHS, there were no carers, no home-helps, no antibiotics; just a lot of suffering and helplessness. Godfrey Pain and those that followed him in the early years organised the troops into teams to work in specific ways - boys' clubs, girls' clubs, hospital visiting, Sunday schools, personal service, study groups and, of course, others were added later on, like visits to the blind school, the decorating section, the family service unit, to name but a few.

When I was asked to do this talk, Jean and I tried to make a list of the things and people we remembered in the 70 Club and, whilst not being comprehensive, here are just a few of them.

The 70 Club camps: coming home on the back of Harry Webster's motorbike. That put me off a motorbike for life!

Geoff Gray: one day he dreamt that he had fallen asleep during a club meeting and when he woke up he found that he had.

The Nuns: Moira Armson (Spence as she was), Christine Harries and Barbara Hare.

Reg Brookes: was a quadriplegic in a home in Leamington. Every week there was a request for someone to write to him and always someone volunteered.

Conferences at Barnes Close and Windmill House: At one conference we had a speaker who asked us to stand up and turn round every 20 minutes so that we didn't nod off. At one stage he cried out, 'It's Stanley isn't it?' referring to Stanley Butchart sitting there, very embarrassed.

The rambles which still go on today; the visits to Yarningale Common and Mrs. Sheath's cottage: the only person, apart from Delia Smith, who could get a boiled egg just right, time after time.

The Blind School to read to the children: they just could not wait for the following week and the next instalment of the latest Biggles book. One Christmas Brian Hands was asked to be Father Christmas. The first child came up and said, 'Thank you, Uncle Brian'. There was no fooling them!

The Christmas Breakfasts, organised by Jack Payne: collecting the old people and taking them back with their food parcels; delivering the invitations to the back-to-back houses in Aston, Hockley and other areas of Birmingham, the courtyard with one tap in the middle to serve about twenty houses and one WC to serve the same number. There has been progress over the last fifty to sixty years.

The All Night Shelter at Winson Green Prison, where we used to conduct Services. I can remember one particular occasion when one prisoner was concentrating on washing his feet, which he obviously felt was far more important than listening to the Word.

Mentioning Brian again, who can possibly forget his jokes and his joke books? He has left us a legacy - he is constantly quoted. Yesterday was a good example.

Following Leslie Tizard there were John Callf, Roy Clark, Philip Lee-Woolf and Michael Hubbard as leaders, all significant contributors to the success of the 70 Club.

I have no idea how many of us met our partners in the 70 Club. There are several here today who did and were indeed married at the Church. Jean and I were married in 1957 by Leslie Tizard, who, sadly, died later that year. If my memory serves me correctly, during that year he married at least three or four other couples, all of whom were members of the 70 Club.

There are a number of absentees today, the most notable being Sir Kenneth Corley and, of course, Bob Liddell. As you know, Bob is unwell but I did have a chat with him quite recently and I know he would have been here, if it had been possible, making a far better job of these memories than I am.

I am unable to comment on the latter years of the club but Andrew Veitch sent me some notes, which I will read to you.

The last twenty years.

In the mid '60s it was decided that 70 Club should have a 'base' where it could have a community, living and working, supported by 70 Club members from across the city. After much planning, a house was purchased in April 1967, in Sandford Road Moseley, and members set about decorating and converting it into 4 bedsits, where members would live.

An application was made to Christian Aid, which was eventually accepted, for the funding of a Christian Aid worker to live and work from 70 Club House. (This was the first time Christian Aid had funded a project in the UK.) Margaret Selby was appointed by Christian Aid and moved in with three 70 Club members, and so began a period of establishing a role for Margaret and 70 Club itself.

Decorating homes for needy people was concentrated in this area, although this then proved difficult for the members who lived on the other side of the city to get there by public transport. 70 Club held social events in the lounge and set up a sewing group as a result of a request from Margaret to provide some activity in the area for young girls to go to: Sonia Lanneman, the UK international athlete, was among the sewing group's members!

Later the house next door came on the market and it was decided to purchase it, and two more 70 Club members lived in it as a 'shared' house.

Margaret Selby developed her work, which ultimately saw the opening of 'The Lane Neighbourhood Centre' on Ladypool Road, to help local people who needed advice or clothing and other household items.

Normal 'Club' meetings continued in the new Carrs Lane Church Centre, but increasingly lonely and needy young adults were referred to 70 Club by various agencies, as there was no other organisation in the city for

them to go to. The number of people who were prepared to do some 'serving' activities at the club decreased dramatically, and it came to a point where the 'needy folk' attending club meetings outnumbered members. Members became disheartened as the whole ethos and ambience changed, and membership fell significantly. In the latter days there would be fewer than ten people attending meetings, and probably half of those would be needy, coming to receive rather than to give. The decision to close the Club was taken reluctantly by the remaining few members. The 70 Club that closed bore little resemblance to the 70 Club we all knew and loved.

It was announced at the Carrs Lane Church Meeting in January 1977 that 70 Club would close: the houses were sold, and an era ended. But the 70 Club spirit did not die; the surplus money from the sale of the properties was transferred to a Social Service Fund at Carrs Lane Church, which financed Old Peoples' Outings, the Christmas Breakfast and other 70 Club type activities until the turn of the century.

In 1978 it was decided that the annual Friends Reunion should continue, which it has done until this weekend.

Finally, a few comments about our activities, past and present.

The Blind School in Edgbaston is my first memory. With Philip Martin we played football with the boys. We were in goal at each end; they had a wicker ball with a bell inside. We were both exhausted after half an hour and never would have made goalkeepers.

The decorating section: Bob Cross and I decorated a house, two up two down, in Sparkhill. There were white enamel buckets all around the owner downstairs, for what purpose I am not sure. We had to decorate a second bedroom with a large fitted wardrobe and, to do the job properly, had to open the doors. We did so in fear and trepidation not knowing what we would find. As we did, at least twenty more white buckets fell out. We used to use Polyfilla in large quantities. When the decorating section finally folded the shares of that company must have dropped dramatically.

Bangolas: I have been given a copy of a letter from Chris Fletcher in Canada in which he mentions that for one that he organised in the late 50's the target was £75; they actually raised £100.

The regular lunches held today by the Golden Oldies and the Silver Seniors. Also holidays taken annually by both these groups.

After moving to Kent we were at Malcolm and Carol Skinner's on a visit in 1971 and were told that we never held parties. I said 'you wouldn't come', to which the reply was 'Oh yes we would!' So in true 70 Club spirit a group has visited us at Meopham and Tankerton for 34 years, and when Roy and Audrey Clark were in Bromley we also went there. Also, since 1982, we have met at the home of John and Heulwen Fellows in Sheringham.

How can we sum up The 70 Club?

A sort of marriage bureau? A Social Club? We had parties and dinners. A catering establishment? We used to have meals from the canteen and we all took it in turns to cook. We had splendid evening meetings on Wednesdays and Sundays. We had fun and more serious meetings on Sundays, often culminating with us all going to the evening service in the Church and my memories are, of course, of the old Carrs Lane Church. We used to play table tennis, and other games too. But mainly in the 70 Club we were encouraged and motivated to go out and serve the community.

Once again I apologise if I have missed out anything memorable to you, but hope that these few comments will have brought memories of good times back to you.

Whilst it is, of course, sad that 70 Club is no more, I think everyone would agree that during its time not only did it serve its purpose but we are all better human beings because we were privileged to have been members of that community. It certainly fulfilled the objectives of the Charter.

So as a tribute to our founder, and all who went before us in forming such a unique organisation, would all former members of the Club please rise and recite with me our Charter.

'And he appointed seventy and sent them forth, two by two, to be messengers of peace and sons of encouragement. He commanded them to go in all simplicity, with no money and no pride; to enter into the homes of the people and become their true friends. He charged them to bring peace to the household; to bind up the broken-hearted; to give sight to the blind; to strengthen the sick, and set at liberty those that are oppressed.'

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