

Anerley Methodist Church, Oakfield Road, London, SE20 8QA
www.anerleymethodist.org

ANERLEY METHODIST CHURCH



SUNDAY SCHOOL & JUNIOR CHURCH



THE HISTORY OF THE ANERLEY METHODIST SUNDAY SCHOOL FROM 1928

"The Story of Methodism in Anerley" written by Mr H. E. Waites, published in 1928, told of the 'earnest work' of the Officers and Teachers of the Sunday school, stating that every successive report had shown an increase in attendance.

Before the School-Church was built in 1865, Methodists in Penge and Anerley met at a house in Maple Road, and there is reason to believe that a Sunday school was held there too. An alternative was the Methodist Church in Upper Norwood, that some took advantage of. The first written records start in 1865 by describing the first Teachers Meeting on April 11th, stating that the door first opened for Sunday school, on April 29th at 9.30 a.m. This was followed by an afternoon session at 3.30.p.m. The Branch of the School at the east end of Penge in Trinity Road mirrored the main one at the Church in the way it was organised and structured. The 1881 census records the family of Mr & Mrs Verrinder living in Station Road with their family. They were members at Anerley, (or Penge Methodist Church as it was then known,) making it a strong possibility that the Branch Sunday school met at their home. This too had a morning and afternoon session and ran from the early 1870's to 1881. It only closed when another Sunday school opened in the area, which may have been at the Mission Hall, at the junction of Mosslea Road and Trinity Road (now Station Road). The Mission Hall opened in 1885. Also, the Primitive Methodists met at the junction of Mosslea Road with High Street, so the Sunday school movement was being well catered for. The Sunday school at Anerley continued to meet and prosper, until the events of the 2nd World War. Even the tragic events of the 1st World War (The Great War) seemed to have little effect, as demonstrated by the number of children attending.

By 1935 the "earnest work" of Sunday School staff continued, with pupils numbering 240, and 24 teachers under the Superintendent Mrs Bryant. Mr C. Hodgson accompanied the children's hymn singing on the piano and continued to do so for many years. He retired in 1959 as pianist but continued as auditor to the Sunday school Council until 1969. The Sunday school Hymn Book introduced the children to the joys of singing, so essential to the Methodist forms of worship. Such hymns tended to become lifetime favourites and never forgotten e.g. "All things bright and beautiful", "What a friend we have in Jesus", "Fight the good fight with all thy might" and "When mothers of Salem their children brought to Jesus".

Sunday school was divided with a Primary and a Junior Dept. The children in the Primary Dept. left to become juniors between the ages of 7 and 8 yrs. They left feeling a sense of achievement, but also a fear



of the unknown, although this was quickly dispelled as the weeks went by, and they became familiar with the new environment. Miss and Mrs Vallence led the Primary Dept. (which was held in the Vestibule) and Mrs Bryant was Superintendent of the Juniors Dept during the 1930's.

The children were separated, with boys one side, and girls the other. They sat on benches, with backs that could be adjusted to allow them to sit facing either way. This became very useful when the school split up for class teaching, as only the minimum of movement was required. After the teaching session was over, the pupils would all face the front again for the final hymn and prayer. Almost all the school benches were destroyed, when the church and school room were bombed in 1940 during the war.

Miss Alice Kelsey

The war with Germany, which started in September 1939, had an effect when people in Penge and Anerley, whose circumstances allowed, moved away to the countryside to relative safety. This resulted in the loss of pupils and teachers. Others who had jobs that were considered to be indispensable (i.e. Civil Servants) were ordered by the Government to move out of the London area. Mr George Vale replaced Mrs Bryant as Junior Superintendent, and Miss Alice Kelsey took over the Primary section of the Sunday school from Miss Vallence. Miss Alice Kelsey, a qualified teacher, led the Primary Dept. until well into 1953 when it was taken over by Mrs Sadie Douglass who started the "Beginners Class". This was because so many of the pupils brought their younger siblings with them, that it was felt that special provision should be made for them, rather than turn them away.

Because Government policy during the war was to safeguard children in high-risk areas, where it was predicted incendiaries were most likely



Sadie Douglass

to fall, a policy of evacuating children to safe areas in the country was implemented. Although this did not, at first, include the south London district of Penge and Anerley, it became increasingly clear that the area was indeed in the high-risk category. Consequently, by December 1940 of that year, attendance at day schools in the District to drop by 50%. As time went by an even greater drop in attendance at Sunday school developed.

During the Battle of Britain, in the last months of 1940 the Church buildings became so badly damaged it was impossible to use them. Following the first bombing, all meetings were held in the Church vestibule, but after a direct hit, nowhere on the premises was safe to use. As a result the Sunday school closed for 5 months. The written records show the local Education Authority offered the use of the very local Oakfield Road School premises; an offer gladly accepted. All things considered, it is surprising that 45 pupils attended the Sunday school regularly, with a number of dedicated staff. Miss Minnie Munday, Miss Daines, Mr Hodgson and Mr H Banks, plus those mentioned above. By February 1942, the old ex-army hut at the back of the Church premises, which had been used for Boys Brigade and Girls Life Brigade meetings pre-war, was made safe by a group of volunteers, and the Sunday school was pleased to move in. For the few children and staff remaining, to be back on site was a 'coming home'. Unfortunately the Sunday school had to close again in late 1944 for five months, when the V1 flying bombs ('Doodlebugs' or 'Buzz Bombs' as they were commonly called) followed by V2 rockets made life so dangerous.



Miss Minnie Munday

There had always been a system to encourage weekly attendance at Sunday school. Mr Waites, in his early history about the Church, describes how pupils received tickets for regular attendance. A prize of a Hymn Book or a Bible was given to any pupil who collected enough. During the 1930's this system was augmented. Each pupil received a book, into which a picture of a biblical scene was stuck, to illustrate a printed text from the Bible. These were highly valued by the children, proving to be a good incentive for attending each week. One of the

casualties during the war was Prize Giving, probably due to lack of funds and it was not until 1960 that the idea of using a reward system for good attendance was once more accepted in principle "as long as there were enough funds".

Supporting missionary work overseas was enthusiastically adopted by the Anerley Methodist Sunday school Council members. If a Missionary was on furlough (on leave), he or she was expected to give talks to church groups, including children, on their experiences in their particular field of work. Sometimes they would illustrate their address with slides, or tactile objects such as traditional costume, from the region and country where they worked. All of which was exciting stuff for children whose concept of what people were like outside of their own country was limited or non-existent. The interest generated, was reinforced when each Sunday school from The Circuit, met to perform a play as part of a competition with the winning performance earning a shield on which the name of the Sunday school would be engraved. To win the shield was the ambition of all who took part, a reward for all the hard work put into the production. High standards were expected. Every child taking part had to attend rehearsals, and become word perfect. If anyone did not do so, there was always another pupil ready to take that persons place. (This was true up until the 1960's, when it became difficult sometimes to motivate enthusiasm for the same things.) Apart from the aim of coming first, there was the joy of "dressing up" in exotic costumes of brightly coloured materials. turbans, saris, grass skirts, baubles, bangles and beads, added even more to the colour and excitement of the occasion. During the drab years of pre- and post-war Britain, when children were deprived of visual stimulation and few toys were available (even for those who could afford luxuries) this annual event was enjoyed by all.

Pupils were encouraged to become a member of the Junior Missionary Association (J.M.A.) by finding people such as relatives and friends, to give a penny, or whatever small sum they could afford, on a weekly basis. To confirm this commitment the Donors name was entered in the official J. M. A. collectors' book, where a record of money collected was entered every week, an entry being made against the name of the contributor, and the total amount paid in to the very patient J.M. A. Secretary, who sat at the back of the room every Sunday, after School was over. Miss E. Kelsey and Miss M. Munday performed this task for page 4

many years. Every year the pupils taking part were rewarded and encouraged with a certificate, showing how much they had collected, and for those whose total was above a set amount, there was the added reward of a medal. The medal could be added to by a bar attachment to the ribbon, if the Collector continued to earn it in subsequent years. It was a well-earned reward that showed a lot enthusiasm and dedication on the part of the Collector and J.M.A. Secretaries. Mr Andrew Tredinnick took over as J.M.A. secretary when Miss Kelsey retired 1962-3, and after several years Mrs Sadie Douglass replaced Andrew Tredinnick, until her retirement due to ill health. Today in 2003 Ms Dinah Anaman ensures that the pupil's efforts are recorded. Unfortunately, as pupils attending Sunday school dropped, so did the numbers of J.M.A. collectors, now just 3 children are members. Many congratulations therefore, that they won the shield for the year 2002/3, awarded for the greatest increase in the Circuit over the previous year. It was 50 years previously that the award was last won by Anerley Methodist J.M.A. collectors.

The Annual 'Sunday school Outing' was looked forward to by pupils, teachers, and parents alike. In days when ordinary people on average incomes did not possess a car, outings to such places as the coast and the zoo were a real treat. Littlehampton was a favourite venue, also Chessington Zoo. A coach on the train was booked and everyone would meet outside the railway station in good time, with their sandwiches clutched tightly. Eventually sandwiches gave way to a tea provided at the destination. The Outing was paid for by parents of pupils on a weekly basis, and collected from the children by their teachers every Sunday. Its' success could be judged by the number of families who went year after year. However, with the advent of the family motorcar, support for the Annual Outing became less enthusiastic. Indeed the new era of car transport had a dramatic effect on the Sunday school, just as it did on life in general. Eventually the



Sunday School outing to Littlehampton

Sunday school Outing developed into a Church Outing by coach, to a coastal resort on the south or south east coast. Other churches in the District and Circuit were also invited in the last years. Sadly in 2001, through lack of support, no outing took place and nothing is planned for the foreseeable future. What was a valuable resource, for personal contact with families of children who attended Sunday school was lost.



*Mrs Gibby with the
Misses Alice and Elsie Kelsey*

Christmas is as special for Sunday school children, as it is to Christian children all over the world. At Anerley the Christmas tree, decorated, shining, gleaming and twinkling brought a bit of magic into the lives of children, as it still does. On Toy Sunday, each pupil has the opportunity to bring a toy to put under the Christmas tree, which are later distributed to children less fortunate. During the 1920's the children of coal miners and the Greenwich Mission must have been pleased to receive them as well as local families. There was a lot of unemployment right across the country following the end of the Great War in November 1918, and for local people, the misery caused must have been exacerbated, when the Crystal Palace burnt down in 1936, as many jobs disappeared overnight. Miss Shermans Children's Home



*Sunday School Anniversary
100 years 1863-1963*

in Newlands Park, on the border of Penge and Sydenham, also benefited from the gifts of toys, donated by pupils of the Sunday school, which must have given pleasure to another less fortunate child at Christmas. When Miss Shermans home closed the gifts went to the Fegan Children's Home. A mark of the change in times and attitudes, is that all donations of gifts have to be new. At Christmas 2000 the Junior-Church responded to an international appeal to send boxes to the suffering children of the Balkans, left devastated by years of

national and racial conflict. They were filled with toys, given not just by pupils of whom there are now very few; but also by any person wishing to contribute. A Christmas Party was enjoyed by all pupils and staff until the drop in numbers made it impractical

Sunday school anniversaries have always been a very special time until recently, with the morning and evening services dominated by the pupils. Every child was given a buttonhole of Lily of the Valley flowers, which was worn with pleasure, as they took pride of place seated at the front of the church. Each class presented a tableau, or song, or poem, with every child taking part. All birthdays should be celebrated with a tea party, and the Sunday school anniversary was no exception. Sadly, in recent years, these traditions have been dropped, due to lack of enthusiasm. The most recent one to go was the Anniversary Party.

Every year Scripture Exams were held until 1983, for any pupil who wanted to take part. (Organised by The National Sunday School Union) For several weeks before the Paper was sat, lessons had to be attended. The Exam was conducted under National Exam criteria, a nerve-wracking experience for the participants, but an excellent experience for later life. Six weeks later, a certificate showing the result was awarded to each participant. For those who had worked hard, it was a wonderful day, because the certificate was awarded in front of all the Sunday school, and the achievement praised. Teachers must have been very good, because most children got good results. I wonder how many Pupils hung on to their certificates, and were able to show them to their own children in later life. Very recently, in August 2002, Mrs Kathleen Brickwood, nee Bishop, came to church to celebrate 60years of church membership (she was made a member at our church in 1942), and she still had the certificates she had won, when a girl in the Sunday school.



Kathleen Brickwood

Bromley District Festival has and does, provide for people of the church to display their skills and talent. Sunday school children have

always been encouraged to take part in the tremendous variety of activities, from needlework, to story writing and theatrical performance. The competition gives a 1st, 2nd and 3rd place in all categories, thereby all participants have an incentive to work hard to achieve an award. Over the years many talented youngsters have won high marks and been entered at the next level of competition. Methodist Sunday schools provide an excellent training for the development of the voice, because pupils learn to enjoy singing the wonderful hymns of Charles Wesley and Isaac Watts, amongst others. During the 1930's the Sunday school even had its own choir, which entertained at church functions. The Adjudicators judging various classes of singing at the Festival would have been glad of this training by the participants, as they listened to the variety of renditions.

In late summer the church at Anerley thanks God for the harvest in a Harvest Festival service, in which the Sunday school takes part. It is a time of joy, and the church building is decorated to reflect it, with vines from the garden at the back of the buildings twisted round pipes and beams, and flowers on every available ledge, and fruit and harvest loaves specially baked in shapes of corn sheaves, knots and twists. Hymn's of joyful praise ring out with everyone surrounded by the most wonderful of earthy scents, rising from the produce brought by everyone gathered for worship at the Festival, be they child or adult. A



Harvest Festival 1956

lot of time and effort has always been put into decorating the church. Some times the Festival produce was given to Hospitals, and in later years Oak Lodge Nursing Home was the recipient. Older Sunday school children would help with packing and distribution, and in other years when a Harvest Supper was held, the children would take part with their parents. In 2003 Bromley Community Link distributed the gifts.

In spite of disruption to the community of Penge and Anerley during the years of the war, by 1948 eighty-nine Pupils' were enrolled for Junior Sunday school, and thirty-seven for Primary. In fact numbers went on increasing until 1959 when there was a dramatic drop, with an average of just 13 children attending. At this date terraced housing in the

Grove's (roads adjacent to the Church,) were demolished and replaced by three tower blocks of flats. Movement of families must have had an effect of disrupting the community in a massive way, and may help to explain the disappearance of pupils from Sunday school. Shortly after, in 1960, comments appear in the Minutes, about how difficult it had become to actually run the Sunday school, because children had become increasingly disruptive and difficult to control. Until Sunday school merged with Junior Church in 1967, the average number of pupils was 30.

The economically difficult post-war years were gone by the middle of the 1950's, with 'rationing' well and truly a thing of the past. From this time on, in spite of occasional years of economic depression, society in general became more affluent, as witnessed by increasing number of ordinary families who owned a car; something only comparatively rich people had been able to afford pre-war. Consequently, children who might previously have attended the Sunday school were being taken out for the day by their parents. The new attitude to Sunday meant that day schools too were expecting their sports teams to play on Sundays.

May 1963 saw Sunday school centenary celebrations take place, when staff and pupils produced a model of the original Church buildings and dressed in period costume. Joyful as the occasion was, a sad note was struck with the announcement of the retirement of Mr George Vale as Sunday school Superintendent. He had been in the position during the dark days of the war, and the difficulties since that time. Many people have fond memories of the 'Quiet Man'. Consciously, or unconsciously, all the children who have come under his influence owe something of their Christian values to him. Mr Ron Smith, a teacher in the Sunday school and previous youth club leader, replaced him. He too had a great influence for good on the youth of the Church, but that will be described in another chapter.



Mr George Vale



Ron Smith

In 1967, it was decided to amalgamate Sunday school with the Junior Church that met on Sunday morning during morning worship. In fact the change was in line with most other churches in the district, a recognition that times had changed with regard to societies attitude to the use of leisure time. Miss Anne Goss, leader of the Junior Church, had organised it as a mirror of adult worship, with children taking prayers, announcing hymns and arranging visiting speakers. The title of Junior Church was retained, but its structure and organisation was that of the Sunday school, with Beginners, Primary, Junior and Senior departments.

In the few years in which it ran, prior to amalgamation, a steady number of children took part. Some were children of those worshipping next door in the church, including immigrant families from Commonwealth countries, comparatively new to the district, and who brought their children to worship with them. Initially the amalgamation of Sunday school and Junior church was successful, as shown by an increasing numbers of children attending. However in 1972 there was a dramatic drop to just less than one third, down to an average 18 pupils for the next ten years, a number only occasionally exceeded since then. This includes the four departments of Beginners, Primary and Senior, and from 1987, a Youth Group for young people of 13+.

During 1952-1972, other organisations had their own classes in the Sunday school, including G.L.B. (Girls Life Brigade), Inters (11-14yr. old boys and girls), and a Bible Class for older children.

The Sunday school has a Council whose members are mostly the leaders and teachers of the Sunday school, with a Chairperson, Treasurer, Auditor and Secretary. It meets variously, at least once a year, usually twice, and sometimes more often. The recording of the minutes of the Council is by the Secretary, giving those who read them a unique glimpse into the rise and fall of the Sunday school movement.

Other bodies associated with the school include W.K.S.S.U. (West Kent Sunday School Union) who organised conferences and teacher training, also Circuit Sunday School Union and a District Sunday School Union.

How was the Sunday school financed? Hymn Books and Bibles had to be paid for, as did all other teaching aids. During very early years there are no records to refer to, but in the 1870's there are references in Minute books about the 'unpaid fee' of the Sunday school. This implies that the Society is charging the school for use of the premises, which in retrospect seems odd. However that is looking at it from the 21st. century. In fact the fee was not cancelled until 1962, when the church started to make an annual grant of £40 to Sunday school funds. Combined with the new ruling that their weekly collections need no longer go to Overseas Missions, meant that staff no longer had to pay for materials. The new funding ruling also meant that teachers could now plan in advance for the needs of the pupils. They also continued to receive all collections from church services on Sunday school Anniversaries. A bank account was opened specifically for the Sunday school, which 30 years later in 1992 was changed, following a decision that all money should pass through the Church account. Further financial help came in 1972, when a defunct Youth Club account was closed and transferred to the Sunday school account. Also just a few years later, in 1978 it became the beneficiary of a considerable bequest from their old Superintendent, Mr George Vale. The money was a wonderful gift, from a man who had given so generously of his time and effort during his life. If just good will could bring pupils into Sunday School, it would be full to overflowing.

In the early years of the 21st century, it can safely be stated that the Sunday school started off, by being financially independent of the Methodist Society, within which it functioned.

During the late 1980's the Minute Book states that 'it has become difficult to enlist permanent help to run the Sunday school on a regular basis', so a compromise situation developed, and then became formalised



Youth Group with leader Audrey Bobb, including Steven and Clarence Hunt, and Martha, Sarah and Georgina

A Rota of teachers was drawn up on 28th February 1995. Young adult's, who worship at the Church nowadays, say how much they enjoyed their time in Sunday school.

Sunday school cannot be seen in isolation from the Church. No more than it can be seen in isolation from the community in which the Church functions. The community reflects what is happening within society in general, and increasingly international events are making their mark, largely because communication across the planet is so accessible. However for the purpose of this history, it is the local Districts of Anerley and Penge that are important, and even more directly, the community living around the Church buildings.

Although I have referred to the very early history of the Sunday school, I have mainly concentrated on the years from 1928, which was where the earlier book by Mr Waites finished. Many changes have taken place in our District during this time; changes so profound that every aspect of life is affected.

The tangible changes are obvious ones, such as the loss of the main Church building, which stood as a constant symbol of our Christian faith. A generation later, the loss of land on which it stood, and which had been used for functions attractive to those people who lived in the neighbourhood of the Church. Local people who would have seen the development of the Community Centre that provided for the spiritual, social and leisure activities of young people of the area. A few years later the same people would have seen how the arson attack of 1979 almost destroyed the building.

In the same context, a short distance from the Church buildings, high-rise flats replaced terraced housing, and four decades later most of them have been replaced by another form of terraced housing. Some District schools have disappeared, and children have to travel miles to get to school. Many neighbourhood shops have gone too.

Our Church buildings are out of sight, behind houses that stand on the foundations of the original church; so unless people hear by word of mouth, or have seen the sign on the lamp-post pointing in the right direction, and stating "Methodist Church", they would not know of its existence. On the positive side we now have our developing website on the Internet. This has instructions on how to get to the Church, and

very soon a bus terminus outside the entrance on the Oakfield Road/Jasmine Grove will bring public transport practically to the doorstep. Perhaps the bus company can be persuaded to describe its destination as "Anerley Methodist Church"!

The Christian message is the same today as it was 60 years ago, and the Anerley Methodist Church believes in the same God. My experience of the people of the Church is that they are as warm and welcoming to anyone who enters the door, whether adult or child, as they always have been, so why do the children of the neighbourhood stay away from Sunday school? At least part of the answer lies in the previous paragraphs



SUNDAY SCHOOL LEADERS

BEGINNERS DEPT.

Mrs Sadie Douglass 1952
Miss Joan Loring 1954-1984
Miss M. Barber



Joan Loring

PRIMARY DEPT.

Mrs Vallence -----1940
Miss A Kelsey 1940-1952
Miss J. Horton 1952-1953
Mrs S. Douglass 1953-1960
Mrs M. Young 1960-1984

JUNIOR DEPT.

Mrs M. Bryant -----1940
Mr G. Vale 1940-1963
Mr R. Smith 1963-1970
Mr J. Douglass 1963-1970
Miss A. Goss 1963-1970
Mr J. Douglass 1970-1994
Mr A. Tredinnick 1970-1994
Mrs V. Tredinnick 1970-1984
Mrs M. Young 1984-1994



*Marion Young, nee Barber
taught in the Sunday School
for over 40 years*

SENIOR DEPT.

Mr A Thompson 1950's
Mr M. Young
Mr V. Tredinnick 1984...

ROTA OF TEACHERS from 1984

Marion Young - Anita Yusuf - Audrey Bobb
Sandra Hynes - Janice Friend
John Douglass - Valerie Tredinnick



John Douglass

Mr Ron Smith took over in 1963 (according to the Minutes) from Mr Vale as Superintendent of the Sunday school. However, I am assured that all teaching staff were equally involved in its organisation a democratic system re-inforced when John Douglass was leader.

PIANISTS

Mr Hodgson
Mrs Payne
Mrs Moon
Mrs Douglass
Miss Goss
Mrs Quentrell



Valerie Tredinnick

CRADLE ROLL SECRETARY

Mrs Sandra Hynes



Sandra Hynes

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to all Meetings Secretaries past and present who have preserved 'gems' of information in their recordings, and which I have found so useful. Mrs Kathleen Brickwood has given me lunch on several occasions while we have chatted about Sunday School in the 1930's. Her memories are invaluable as few records exist for that time. Thank you Kathleen. Others have been badgered with questions and thanks to those for their patience, particularly John Douglass, Marion Young, Anne Goss and Valerie Tredinnick. Many people have supplied me with photographs, in particular Joan Loring, who takes much better photographs than most of us.

Researched and written by Rose Bateman
2003