

The Story of Stockwood Free Church (SFC)

1963-2013

As Stockwood Free Church reaches its Golden Jubilee, it seems appropriate to remind ourselves of how God has led the fellowship through the last fifty years. There have been times of growth and rejoicing, but also some sad and difficult times for individual members and the fellowship as a whole. There have been initiatives which we consider a success, but others we think of as failures. We have been grateful for the leadership provided both by our Pastors and our lay leaders, but have also gone through periods when we have struggled to see where God is leading us. Our leaders have had the joy of leading vibrant worship, baptising new converts, dedicating our babies and marrying some of our young people. They have also had to cope with some very difficult pastoral problems, bereavements, disagreements and all the other problems common to church life. The following account is inevitably incomplete, but this is our story

The Founding of SFC: 1963-1967

The development of Stockwood as we know it only started after the Second World War. At that time the hamlet of Stockwood at the top of the hill consisted of Stockwood House, Stockwood Farm and a few associated cottages. "Prefabs" were built in 1947 along Sturminster Road and its surrounds, extending upwards from the 1930s houses at the bottom of the road. The pre-fabs were replaced in the 1970s by the houses of Durweston Walk etc. Council houses followed in the 1950s, extending all the way up the hill to Craydon Road and the roads around it. In the early 1960s, Bristol City Council planned to build another council estate on the top of the hill. They got as far as laying out the road plans (clearly not anticipating the growth of car ownership of later years), but because improving economic conditions in Bristol resulted in a need for houses for private purchase, they decided instead to sell the land for private development.

We owe our existence as a church to the vision of the Bristol City Mission. Anticipating the building of council housing, they planned for a Free Church witness in the new estate at the top of the hill when the sale of one of their chapels in the post-war redevelopment of the city centre released some funds. So unlike the situation on most new estates, the church building was constructed in 1963 alongside the first houses, and well before shops, schools or even pavements reached the top of the hill. The bus route terminated at the Craydon Road triangle.

Bristol City Mission had difficulties in staffing the new church and the change from council housing to private ownership took the area out of their main target population, so they suggested to the Bristol Free Church Council that they might establish a Free Church, representing all denominations. This was not considered possible, but after discussion with several denominations the Bristol and District Association of Baptist Churches agreed to support the work here. The Mission leased the building to the Baptist Association for twenty-one years for a "peppercorn" rent of £1 per year, on condition that it remain a "Free" church, open to all believers. Totterdown Baptist Church was put in charge of the new fellowship to provide administration and initial leadership via the "Stockwood Church Committee". While the church building was being constructed in 1963, Evening Services and a Sunday School were started in the old Scout Hut at Tibbott Walk. The Association bought and later extended 19 Burfoote Road to be the Manse.

Construction of the church building was started during the famous cold winter in January 1963, but nevertheless was completed ahead of schedule, possibly due to competition between builders to see which building could be completed first: SFC or Christ the Servant. Its design was considered very modern and attractive, and it is certainly more attractive than most buildings of the 1960s in Bristol. However, several of these features have made it expensive and time-consuming to maintain.

The Evening Post reported progress on the church building in its edition of Saturday 3rd August 1963:

***Thousands are on the Move
and a Baptist Church waits for them***

Several thousand new residents are expected to move into Stockwood during the next two years. There awaiting them will be the new Baptist church. Unlike so many of Bristol's post-war estates where houses have appeared several years before a church the trend has been reversed in this section of Stockwood. While work is under way on the first of several hundred houses to be built near it, rapid progress is being made on the church. A spokesman for the builders, E. A. Bicknell and Sons Ltd., told me they hoped to complete the church at least six weeks ahead of schedule and to hand it over midway through October. This is especially pleasing to them for they began at the height of the cold spell in January and valuable preparatory time was lost through the prolonged snow when many difficulties had to be tackled.

The church is being built for the Bristol City Mission, who under a unique arrangement are leasing it to the Bristol and District Association of Baptist Churches. Designed by Kenneth Nealon, Tanner and Partners, the church is centred round five pairs of pre-stressed concrete Portal frames, each of which weighs 3½ tonnes, which form the main rectangular structure. The roof, of asbestos tiling, is very steep, descending from 35 feet to within eight feet of the ground. The Portal frames are a feature of the interior décor and will be left exposed. The front of the building is of Glasgow hammered glass set straight into concrete mullions with a hardwood cross extending from the porch to the apex. The interior has been amended to incorporate a sunken pool suitable for the form of baptismal services conducted by Baptists.

Around the main church building are ancillary blocks which include a classroom, kitchen, toilets with flat roofs designed to harmonise with the adjacent steep roof. Seating for the congregation of 200 will be on beech chairs, which are being manufactured at Bridgwater. Leading the religious work for the Baptists at Stockwood is Sister Isa Lewis, for whom a manse has been acquired in Burfoot Road.

Sister Isa Lewis, 1963-1967



With the support of an Initial Pastorate grant from the Baptist Homework Fund, Sister Isa Lewis was appointed to be Deaconess-in-charge and moved into the Manse. The church building was completed slightly ahead of schedule, and handed over by the builders in October 1963. "Stockwood Free Church (Baptist)", sponsored by Totterdown Baptist Church, was formally opened on Saturday 7th December with a service of Dedication at which Sister Isa's appointment was confirmed. The first Evening Service was held the on following day at 6.30pm.

In February 1964, Freda Ash came from East Street Baptist Church "for six weeks" to set up a Girls' Life Brigade Company. The Company (later known as Girls' Brigade or just "GB") began on 7th April. In the September, Sister Isa started the "Young Wives" (renamed Ladies Circle in 1974) on Monday evenings and "Bright Hour" (renamed "Women's Fellowship" by 1969) on Wednesday afternoons. By the end of 1964 the new Church had 15 Members. The Sunday School and Junior Church, meeting on Sunday mornings at 11am numbered 137 children and 15 teachers. There was a monthly morning Family Service. Four believers had been baptised. 1965 saw the opening of a Young People's Club, a Youth Club and a Boy's Brigade. Another article in the Evening Post, on 1st April 1965 reported on the first year or so of the church's life:

HEART OF A MISSION

A unique example of interdenominational cooperation and church unity which was

launched in Bristol a little over a year ago, is already fulfilling the early hopes and promises of the venture. Stockwood Free Church (Baptist) was built by the Bristol City Mission but is leased and staffed by Baptists. A spokesman for the church has said: "A journey by the 145 bus via Wells Road, West Town Lane and then Sturminster Road, will bring you right to the heart of a real piece of Baptist missionary enterprise.

INFLUENCE

"This evangelical outreach began in the Stockwood area under the guidance of Sister Isa Lewis, and is already showing encouraging returns in an area which only months ago was a wilderness, but where there are now early signs of eventual blossoming like a rose."

So far about 600 of the planned 1,800 houses have been developed and eventually about 7,000 people are expected to come within the range of the church's influence. Since the church was opened two baptismal services have been held there and work among children has progressed steadily. The Sunday school is staffed by 14 teachers and attended by 125 children. The Girls' Life Brigade has a membership of 30 and progress with a Young Wives' League is considered to be especially satisfactory. Not only has the young wives' membership grown to 40, but they are showing a real sense of responsibility in devising ways and means of raising finance in order to help provide items of essential equipment which are needed in the early days of such a new effort. "There's a great future at Stockwood and whatever is given in terms of time, talent or money is a first-class investment in the future."

Bristol City Mission built the church when their long-established church at Redfield was acquired under re-development schemes. When difficulty in finding suitable staff was experienced it was suggested to the Bristol Free Church Council that a Free Church representing all denominations should be established. For a variety of reasons this idea could not be pursued, but the Bristol and District Association of Baptist Churches accepted the challenge which the fast growing estate offered and agreed to launch an initial pastorate financed from their own resources with the aid of the Baptist Union's Home Work Fund grants.

CHALLENGE

On the committee who help to run the church are Sister Isa, the Rev. E. W. Durant, secretary of the Bristol and District Baptist Association, Mr. H. R. Rowcliffe, the association's treasurer, the Rev. F. J. Coward, of Totterdown Baptist Church, two deacons from Totterdown church and Mr. R. J. Cleves, superintendent preacher of the Bristol Baptist Itinerant Society.

At first, the population of the new estate of Stockwood was mainly composed of young families moving into the houses at the top of the hill as they were completed. With the opening of three groups of sheltered flats however, a number of older people (mainly ladies) joined the church. Chestnut Close and Maple Close were built in 1966, with Linden Close following in 1967.

The statement read by John Meacham at the Constitution Service in 1970 gives some idea of what the fellowship was like in the early days. An excerpt reads:

Initially, Sister Isa was presented with a difficult task. Actually, having a church building at such an early stage may seem to many to be a distinct advantage and in some ways this is true. It has its disadvantages. The cold empty building must now be filled with the warmth of a fellowship clothed about with a building. One of Sister Isa's reports at the time says, "One was alone with a church building - and everything to do." Sister Isa brought a strong and steady spirit of Christ-like devotion to her task and was able to form around her a small group of determined Christians. The Sunday School was the most rapidly growing section of the church and very soon found itself in the form of three

distinct sections, beginners, Primary and Junior. Sister Isa was certainly busy and must have looked hard for more helpers. At that time she seems to have been virtually head of everything. She stated in a later report "I am now Sunday School Superintendant, the leader of the Women's work and Acting Secretary."

It is an expression of how many have given willingly of their service, of how Christian people have rendered their time, talents and money and have worked side by side – perhaps not always together – to achieve this established Fellowship within the house of God. It is natural at this time to reflect on those times when we seemed to be taking a step forward. There have been times of course when we appeared not to be moving or even retrogressing but one has to learn that our ways are not always God's ways.

It is not always easy to encourage people into taking on various jobs, and although many good friends have quite naturally accepted certain work from when they first came to us, others have come to play their parts by devious ways. A church meeting minute from February 1967 reads like this: "The meeting opened at 8pm with a hymn and a prayer. It was decided to minute all meetings from henceforth. It was unanimously decided that Mrs Johnston should be Minutes Secretary, and when she arrived a few minutes later, she was unanimously told so." However, despite the difficulty in finding people, our greater problem has perhaps been trying to take on more than we can actually cope with. Youth activities multiply, leaders are hard to find. Also in this particular area people may not stay for more than a few short years before removing elsewhere.

The Church gradually grew and by 1967 had a Membership of 33. In April, Sister Isa Lewis retired and moved to Beckenham in Kent. Discussing the retirement party for her, the church members meeting decided that the church could be used for speeches and the presentation, but NOT for "Light Entertainment" This was held in the "schoolroom" after the food.

In anticipation of Sister Isa's retirement, options for a replacement were discussed. It was agreed to seek a minister and Rev. Ernest Durant was appointed as Moderator in the interim. At this time, Arthur Rutt was Church Secretary and John Meacham was Treasurer.

Terry Thomas, 1967-1972, and Constitution as an independent Church



Rev. Terry Thomas visited in June and the church meeting voted to appoint him as Pastor. Terry, his wife Margaret and children Mark and Joy moved into the Manse at the beginning of August 1967 and Terry formally started his ministry on 23rd September. Their younger son Luke was born later that year.

The first Holiday Bible Club was held in August 1968, organised jointly by SFC and Christ the Servant under the leadership of the Christian Education Movement. No details of this event remain, but a club held in 1969 was reported in the Evening Post. Again a joint venture between SFC and Christ the Servant, the organisers optimistically planned for five hundred children. In fact fifty or so children actually came, but the club was reported to have gone well.

After much discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of such a step, a church meeting on 9th October 1969 took the decision to become a fully constituted Church from 1st January 1970 and elected an interim Diaconate and officers. The inaugural Service of Constitution was held on Thursday 8th January 1970, with 48 Founder Members. At the first AGM in March 1970, John Meacham was formally confirmed as Church Secretary and Derek Watt as Treasurer. Of the original "Founder" Members, four still worship at SFC: Freda Ash, Roger & Pauline Bingham and Doreen Pugsley.

A morning service was started in May 1970, meeting from 9.45 to 10.45am, before the Sunday School. The monthly Family Service continued until 1971, when its frequency was reduced for a while to special festivals. A midweek fellowship followed, which developed into the Bible Study and Prayer Group which has evolved into the current home groups. Terry

Hooper started a Junior Christian Endeavour group in September 1970, running for a year or so.

It would be good to be able to say that the young church went from strength to strength, but in fact it went through the first of some very difficult times fairly soon after constitution. Terry Thomas suffered a serious illness late in 1970, which kept him out of ministry for some months. Several key families left the church or moved away from Stockwood. With the reduction in numbers of members, the church found it impossible to continue to meet its financial commitments and Terry Thomas and family left us in April 1972 to take up ministry in Leicester. Sadly both Terry and Margaret have since died. Derek Watt had to resign from the position of Treasurer due to ill health and Olive Griffiths took over the post at this difficult time. The Association appointed Rev. Fred Bacon as Moderator. Since the 30 or so active church members were not able to support a full time minister, several suggestions were made by the Association. One of these led to our calling a Student Pastor, who would give as much support as he could while studying for the Ministry at Bristol Baptist College.

David Holmwood, Student Pastor 1972-1975



Our first Student Pastor, David Holmwood, joined us in September 1972 with his wife Pat and their sons, three year old Christopher and baby Jonathan. Rev. Harry Mowley from the College provided oversight. Within weeks of their arrival David reorganised the morning service so that all members of a family could worship at the same time. This involved the revolutionary idea of taking the adults into the back hall after an initial time of worship together with the children, to allow the various sections of the large Sunday School to meet everywhere else. Considerable tolerance was required, as the under 5s met in the corridor outside the hall and the strains of their songs could easily be heard during the sermon. Pat Holmwood started a crèche to allow those with young children to come.

Under David's ministry, the Lord called several local Christian families who had been worshipping elsewhere to join the fellowship. These included Ted and Pat Morse, and John and Joyce Stephens, with their children. In September 1973, Pat Holmwood started "Family Circle" (now Toddlers Group), the first group for mothers and toddlers in the Bristol area. David involved himself deeply in the work of the church to the detriment of his studies and health, so in January 1974 the Baptist College provided an additional student, John Sanderson, to assist him. In 1975, Olive Griffiths, our Treasurer, moved away and Roger Bingham was elected to the position. David completed his ministerial training in July 1975, so he and his family (by now including baby daughter Fiona) left us to take up ministry in London. He moved on to missionary work in Brazil, then later to other service back in UK including chaplaincy at Heathrow Airport. David and Pat have now retired and live near Reading.

In 1974, Bristol City Mission decided that they needed to sell the church building in order to free funds for other projects, and very generously offered it to the Bristol & District Baptist Association for the cost price of £20,000. The Association were able to cover £10,000 of this from their funds and a further £6000 was offered by a then anonymous donor. For some time it looked as though part of the church garden would have to be sold off for housing to raise the rest of the money, but in January 1975, Mr & Mrs Bob Woodward generously gave the full £10,000, on the condition that the Church Members made plans to extend the church premises. The gift was initially intended to be in thanksgiving for the recovery of their son Robert from cancer. However, sadly he died at the age of 12 years, and they gave the money in his memory, for which we are most grateful. In 1978, a plaque was placed in the church in Robert's memory.

David West, Student Pastor 1975-1979

By the end of David Holmwood's ministry in June 1975, there were around 40 active



Members. We decided to call David West, another Baptist College Student, to be our Pastor, supported by John Sanderson and with Rev. Trevor Bailey of Counterslip providing oversight. David West came in September 1975 with his wife Mary and their sons three year old Philip and one year old Marcus. John Sanderson left college and David was then assisted by Ken Reynard in 1976/7 and then by Martin North from 1978.

Families joining us in these years included Bryan & Brenda Clements and Margaret & Roy Nash, with their teenage families. Bryan was a keen photographer and most photos of church events of David West and Ken Witting's time come from his collection. During David's time with us, our growing group of young people enjoyed the first of many youth holidays, going down to David's home area in Somerset.

In June 1977, the Stockwood Community Association organised a carnival as part of the Queen's Silver Jubilee celebrations. We entered a small float, a lighthouse proclaiming Jesus the Light of the World, and ran a Christian bookstall. Gaining confidence, the following year we entered a bigger float "Noah's Ark", with the Sunday School children dressed up as the animals. In April of 1978 and 1979, Bristol Baptist College chartered a train for a trip to York. Since the Wests and several other families were great train enthusiasts, we naturally took a party on each occasion.

In March of 1979, Brenda Clements started the Ladies' Singing Group, which took part in leading worship on two evening services a month for the next ten years. The summer of 1979 saw us running a Holiday Bible Club for the first time for many years, which became an annual event through the 1980s. We led both morning and afternoon sessions for up to about 80 energetic primary age children.

At the end of David's course in July 1979, the Wests (now including baby Hazel) left us to take up a pastorate in Kirkby Stephen. They later moved on to ministries in several other parts of the country and David has just retired this summer.

Ken Witting, 1979-1987



Much as we had appreciated the ministries of our various student pastors, the church felt ready to move towards a full-time ministry. Still with only around 40 active members, we would not be able to support a fully paid ministry. After prayer and discussions with our Moderator the Area Superintendent Ron Cowley, we met Rev. Ken Witting and his wife Olive, who were about to retire from ministry of a large church in London. We all agreed to invite them to lead us and they accepted the invitation. Ken and Olive arrived in November 1979 with Andrew the youngest of their children, who was due to start his studies at the University of Bristol in September 1980. The Induction service was held on 1st December. Ken and Olive purchased the Manse in Burfoote Road from the Baptist Association, who agreed to help us buy another when we should need one. In the meantime the Association were able to invest the money for more immediate use.

That month Ken produced a Christmas letter which we delivered to every home in Stockwood, followed by the first of the monthly news-letters which he typed on his elderly typewriter and copied using the church's spirit duplicator. In addition to telling us what was going on each month, we had a message on some appropriate spiritual topic from the Pastor. The newsletter has continued ever since, though the "message" was dropped after Ken left. Its form has also evolved somewhat over the years, thanks to modern technology.

One of Ken and Olive's greatest gifts was in pastoral care. Ken visited everyone in the fellowship regularly, while Olive made sure she knew about, and prayed over, all our joys and sorrows. Worship became less formal as Ken abandoned the pulpit, leading worship and preaching from congregation level. Under their leadership the church thrived and grew.

Many individuals and families joined the fellowship. The youth work expanded and drew in more young people some of whom were baptised and came into membership. Some of the young people from those days are still active members at SFC, with families of their own.

Ken and Olive loved to travel and usually spent the holiday month of August driving and camping around Europe. But in 1980 they spent July on an exchange with Rev. Bob Brewer and his wife Faye. While Ken and Olive ministered to the people of Ailey Baptist Church in Georgia, USA, Bob and Faye spent time ministering with us.

In 1981, our Church Secretary John Meacham and his wife Margaret left the fellowship, joining Knowle Methodist. Roger Bingham was elected to this position, which he has held ever since, but will hand over to Clare Bidgood at the end of 2013. Norma Lea was elected to the position of Treasurer, a position she held until she moved away in 1984. Freda Ash took over the position, then was succeeded in 1986 by Ray Hurst.

In 1982, on Palm Sunday 4th April, we put on a musical Passion Play "Behold Your King". It involved most people in the fellowship in some way or another. The Ladies Singing Group sang and some of our men-folk grew beards for their parts. The play was very moving, and resulted in the baptism of Steve Randall, the young man who played the part of Jesus. Remembering the experience, Steve writes:

Andrea and I have always held fond memories of Stockwood Free Church - even though we only had a brief stay from 1981 to 1982 before we moved to Devon. It might have been brief but we were very warmly received and quickly made to feel part of a large family, this we have never forgotten. We were married in June 1981 and set up home immediately in Stockwood, moving from Salisbury and Witney respectively. Prior to leaving Stockwood, Andrea and I were baptised together at the Church, well actually it was four of us as Andrea was pregnant with our twin daughters.

In the middle of all this we were involved in the Passion Play. I am not sure how the selection was made but I was cast as Jesus. We had only come to our Faith a few months earlier so I was a very young Christian, slowly growing through being involved in the Church and reading the Bible together. Playing the part of Jesus in the Passion Play had a real impact upon me at the time. It helped me tremendously to grow in my understanding of what it meant to be a Christian and to understand the price Jesus paid for me on the Cross.

I have not been actively involved in a Passion Play since. However for our 25th wedding anniversary we went on a tour of Israel. That visit had the same type of impact upon me as my role as Jesus in the Passion Play, albeit slightly different, i.e. 'walking in the footsteps of Jesus'. Over all these years I can reflect that Stockwood, Jerusalem and Galilee have all played their part in my spiritual growth and helping me to know Jesus as my 'Personal Saviour'.

1984 saw us in training to be counsellors, stewards and choir members for the Bristol week of "Mission England", led by Billy Graham at Ashton Gate in May. Although it did not result in many new believers in our church, it did deepen the faith of many and gave us an opportunity to talk about Christian topics to people who wouldn't usually listen. Our youth group continued to enjoy holidays away together. In 1985, they formed the Teens & Twenties "TNT" group which met for Bible study, and also helped to lead the Youth Club. At Easter in 1984 and 1986, some of us were privileged to accompany Ken and Olive as they led a visit to the Holy Land. Seeing the places where Jesus walked really brought the Bible to life for those who went and was an enduring spiritual experience.

Ken and Olive left us at the end of 1987. Although in their 70s by this time, they took up a further ministry in Westbury, Wiltshire, then at Crawley Down in Sussex, retiring only in their late 80s. They sent their greetings to us in 2003 at our 40th Church Anniversary:

"Our longest period of ministry was in Oakwood, London, but in a conversation yesterday

we agreed that our time in Stockwood was the most enjoyable because of the many firm friendships we made and because of the response we found to the gospel we stand for."

Ken and Olive remained good friends to a number of members of our fellowship to the end of their lives. Olive died in May 2008 aged 92, followed in January 2011 by Ken, aged 96.

Gary Foreman, 1988-1992



The Area Superintendent, Rev. Roger Hayden, acted as Moderator while we considered the future of the ministry at SFC. Now with around 65 active members and initially with the assistance of a Home Mission grant, we were once again able to call a full time Pastor. On 17th September 1988, Rev. Gary Foreman joined us, with his bride Becky, both straight from Bristol Baptist College. We found a house suitable for use as a Manse at 3 Townsend Road. At the height of a boom in property prices, the cost of £65,000 was out of our reach, so was financed partly from church reserves and partly by the Bristol & District Baptist Association who made the £25,000 from the sale of the previous manse available as a long term loan. Ray Hurst was our Treasurer during these negotiations but retired in 1989 due to failing eyesight, when Brian Strode took over the position, holding it until 1993.

In December 1988, the church celebrated its 25th Anniversary, with a social evening to which former members and friends were invited. The evening featured a presentation of "Saints Alive" by Bethel Baptist Church, Gary's home church in Cardiff. This was followed by refreshments at which Freda Ash cut the celebration cake.

We had always enjoyed music in the fellowship, from the choir in the early days, to the Ladies Singing Group. Gary's musical gifts on piano and guitar as well as in singing and conducting enabled us to take things further. At Christmas 1989, we shared with Bethel in presenting the Graham Kendrick musical "The Gift", which we later performed at other churches. Christmas 1991 saw "The Glory of Christmas" which was presented as part of an outreach week called "Christmas Unwrapped". Then at Easter in 1992 it was back to Graham Kendrick for "Make Way for the Cross".

The Banner Group was started by Sarah Chalmers, Ethel Harris and Olive Crew in 1988, to make a banner for Gary's Induction. This was the first of many which have enriched worship over the years. The group have sewn banners for all seasons and celebrating all the major events of the church's life. Small banners are presented to each baby at their Dedication.

With the dawn of the home computer age, we started to produce the monthly newsletter and other publicity material using a crude publishing programme and photocopier. Our first rather jagged-edged logo designed by Pauline Bingham appeared in the February 1990 newsletter. The inspiration for this came from the cover of a 1985 Junior Singers music tape created by Keith Arnot. The logo was refined in 1996 thanks to improved graphics programmes to produce the version familiar today.

In early 1992 Gary was offered the demanding position of combined Association Secretary and Youth Secretary for Bristol & District Baptist Association. He accepted, and they left us in July 1992. We were very sad to lose them. Gary still continues his concern for youth and is currently working with disadvantaged youngsters in South Wales.

1992-1994

It took the church a long time to replace Gary. We spent two years during which we met a number of potential pastors, none of whom was quite "right" for us. The 75 or so members found it hard to agree as to what we were seeking in a minister. Meanwhile, church life continued week by week with the leadership of our Deacons and our Moderator, Rev. Roger Hayden. Brian Strode gave up the Treasurer's position in 1993 and was followed by Nick Wagstaff up to the end of 1994. In December 1992 we held another "Christmas Unwrapped"

week, this time with a light-hearted pantomime "Aladdin" which involved a good number of friends on the fringe of the fellowship.

In August 1993, two of our young people Steve Rowe and Kathryn Bracewell were among the UK's representatives at the Baptist Youth World Conference in Zimbabwe. This was an enriching experience for both, with the added bonus for Steve of meeting his future wife Wendy there. Kathryn had already felt a calling to full time service and on returning to England took up a placement at Wells Baptist Church, followed by ministerial training at Regents College, Oxford.

Peter Slee, 1994-2000



After much prayer, the fellowship met and agreed to call, Rev. Peter Slee as Minister. On April 10th 1994 a service was held to welcome him. At first, he had to commute from Wiltshire while we negotiated the purchase of a Manse large enough for a family with four children. Eventually however, his family: wife Pat and children Nathan, Chloe, Michael and Abigail were able to join him at 10 Harrington Avenue and a proper Induction Service was held on 9th July. We were again given the help of a Home Mission grant covering part of Peter's stipend. Marcus Davey was Treasurer at that time, followed by David Chalmers from 1996 to 1999, then Doreen Tomaselli.

At Christmas 1994, we put on a performance of "While Shepherds Watched" showing we hadn't lost all our musical talent. 1995 saw the outreach "Jesus Jigsaw" in June, "Growing in God's Love" Bible studies in the autumn and a pantomime "Dick Whittington" at Christmas. April 1996 saw the first issue of our magazine, Grapevine, edited by Pauline Bingham. This was published bimonthly up to 2000, then at somewhat longer intervals as fewer people were involved in producing it, with its last issue in 2006.

As Freda Ash reached her 65th birthday in January 1997, she had to retire from the Captaincy of Girls Brigade. Sadly, since no-one was able to take over this role, our Company had to close. We held a Thanksgiving Service in May, at which we welcomed many former 14th Bristol Company girls and leaders as well as leaders from other Bristol Companies. In June that year, we took part in the Mission "There's More to Life" led by Luis Palau. From July to September, we welcomed Chris and Katy Ruddle, student friends from Bristol Baptist College as temporary pastors during Peter's Sabbatical after seven years in the Ministry.

On 20th September 1997, we were privileged to see Kathryn Bracewell inducted into Ministry at Thomas Helwys Church, Nottingham. Kat is now in ministry in Oxford, where she has two adopted children.

On Peter's return from his Sabbatical, he led us in an Alpha Course to which we invited people from Christ the Servant and St Bernadette's Churches. This was much enjoyed by all and was invaluable as training for courses which we have run since. 1998 seemed to be a year of statements. We agreed a Mission Statement and accepted the Baptist Union's policy statement on work with children, "Safe to Grow".

Early in 1999, we started a series of Coffee Mornings on Saturdays. The aim was more to provide an informal opportunity for a chat than to raise money. They were reasonably well supported, particularly by the residents of Chestnut Close and ran until mid-2000. On 20th March 1999, we celebrated Chris & Katy Ruddle's Induction at Carey Baptist Kettering. June 1999 saw the first Handicraft Day Workshop, run by Freda Ash. These became a regular event on our calendar for several years. We celebrated the start of the new millennium by joining with other local churches for a service and party at the Whitchurch Sports Centre and later in 2000 with a flower, craft and local history festival at harvest-time. Sadly, in the autumn of 2000, Peter suffered an extended period of illness and decided that he would not be able to return to us in ministry.

2001-2004

During this second extended period without a Pastor, we were very grateful for the loving help and encouragement of our Moderator, Brian Durkin of St Mark's, Easton. The Lord showed us what gifts of leadership and service we have as a fellowship. As a result, we welcomed a number of new members and it was a special joy to baptise five of our teenagers. During July 2002, we were very grateful for the work carried out in the fellowship by Paul and Katy Rhodes.

In 2002 and 2003 we once again ran Holiday Bible Clubs at Easter and Alpha Courses in the autumn. However, this was not an easy time, as most of the Deacons and Leaders were under a lot of pressure, either at work or through family health problems. In particular, Doreen Tomaselli, our Treasurer, died in March 2002. Joyce Wooster took the position assisted by Martin Stephens until he took over in 2005.

In December 2003, we celebrated the 40th Anniversary of the church. We made a special banner, showing a tree whose leaves were made from the handprints of all the fellowship. Many former friends and members came to join us for the celebrations over the anniversary weekend. The social evening looked back to the local and world events of 1963, with "tribute artists" performing some of the hits of the year. The Anniversary service was led by former student pastor David West.

We met a number of potential ministers over the three years we were without a pastor. Although several appealed to some part of the fellowship, we found it difficult to agree together on who we believed to be the Lord's choice for us.

Andrew Ireland, 2004-2009



Eventually, in the spring of 2004 we met Andrew Ireland and felt that he was the person God was calling to be our Pastor. Andrew agreed and joined us, with his wife Cathryn and young sons Matthew and Luke, in the summer. Andrew was inducted as our Pastor on 4th September. This time we were fully responsible for our Pastor's support from the start.

Under Andrew's leadership, we developed and broadened our existing range of activities. Like most other churches, we had found that the Sunday evening service had become poorly attended over the last few years, so we diversified the pattern of worship. David Reeve started a monthly service at Chestnut Close and Allan Mills started a similar one at Linden Close.

A monthly session of informal worship for families was started at the church under a series of names from "Tea and Praise" to "Fun, Food and Friendship". The Youth Club was re-started and has continued to flourish. The children's work was expanded to include occasional Activity Mornings during most school holiday period, as well as the annual Holiday Bible Club in the autumn (now moved to the February half term).

Building on earlier December outreach events, Andrew introduced "Sounds of Christmas", an evening including communal singing of Christmas songs and carols with a time for food and fellowship. For several years, this became an annual event when we invited the neighbourhood to join with us in celebrating our Church Anniversary. In January 2009, we put on another pantomime "Treasure Island", which was hard work but much appreciated by the local community.

Andrew was passionate about mission and under his leadership our interest in Mission was broadened through bi-monthly mission evenings focussing on different local and international mission organisations. We developed a link with Burlacu Baptist Church in Moldova, helping to support pastor Andrei Ghedeon and his wife Eugenie in their work there. Ted Morse and Roger Bingham visited Burlacu in October 2008, encouraging our continued support for the church there. Andrew introduced us to three BMS Action Teams, young

people on “gap year” volunteering to work for six months with BMS. Our teams worked in Delhi and Bangladesh.

In April 2009, Andrew accepted the pastorate at Wincanton Baptist Church. He left SFC at the end of July. We were grateful for all his leadership during the five years he was with us, as well as for Cathryn’s work, particularly with the Ladies’ Fellowship and Toddlers’ Group. We were saddened to hear of Andrew’s death in July 2011 and of Cathryn’s in April 2013.

2009-2013

After Andrew left, we did not feel that the Lord was leading us to call a new Pastor straight away. Instead, we appointed Ted Morse and Lance Mason as Elders. Under their guidance, and with the help of a regular group of outside preachers, the church has continued its work in the neighbourhood. Kris Brunt took over the position of Treasurer from Martin Stephens in 2011 handing over to Hilary Newman in 2013.

Toddlers Group and Youth Club continue their work with youngsters. In 2010, Joyce Wooster initiated the running of a Lunch Club in association with age UK for senior citizens. This work enabled us to obtain a grant to help extend the kitchen, with the hard work of Rob Bidgood and his team. Rob and his helpers have also carried out several other major repair and improvement projects including moving all the projection equipment up to a newly enclosed balcony at the back of the church. We have held a series of Ladies’ Breakfasts, which have attracted women from the neighbourhood and other churches.

Our Music Group, led by Clare Bidgood, has grown in numbers and skill, with five of our youngsters playing regularly with the adults to lead in morning worship, along with our faithful pianists Christine Cowley and Pauline Kelly. Our singers have performed several Roger Jones Musicals, as well as repeating one of our favourites, Graham Kendrick’s “Rumours of Angels” in 2012.

7th December 2013 marks the 50th Anniversary of the opening of SFC. We organised a number of events through the year to raise the profile of the church in the neighbourhood. These include Fellowship Walks, a Barbecue in the Cottle Road playground, a party in the Hollway Road shopping square and a couple of “Love Stockwood” litter clearing sessions. Pauline Bingham has printed our 50th Anniversary Logo onto tee-shirts to wear at these events. The 50th Anniversary celebrations culminate in a special Social Evening on 7th December and an Anniversary Service led by Nigel Coles, Church Lunch and “Fifty Years of Praise” Service on 8th December.

Working with other Churches

We have always worked together with the other churches of Stockwood to witness in our community, particularly with the Anglican Church Christ the Servant, which was opened in January 1964, just after SFC. The nearest Catholic Church is St Bernadette in Whitchurch. For many years the Catholics held services at Christ the Servant and joined us for ecumenical events, but in more recent years they have been based only in Whitchurch, with little contact.

One of the earliest joint projects starting in 1970 was the Street Warden Scheme, an initiative aiming to provide a Christian willing to act as a contact for help for a variety of needs in every road in Stockwood. This ran for some time while volunteers were available and has been succeeded by several other less ambitious projects. Also at this time, Doreen Tomaselli co-ordinated the Stockwood Prayer Link for the three churches.

We have celebrated the period of Lent together each year since the early 1970s. Usually this has taken the form of Lent Groups, looking at the Easter story in many different ways. On other years we have held a series of joint services in each church. In earlier years we often held small discussion groups in people’s homes, and at the Convent in Hollway Road before this closed. More recently groups have been based at SFC and Christ the Servant, following

themes from books or on DVD. Sometimes Lent has culminated in an Agape meal.

Around 1974, the Stockwood Churches started a Palm Sunday walk of witness through the estate led by a donkey from the local Horses' Home (now "Horseworld"). Over the years, the timing and route and number of marchers varied, but the weather has almost always been kind to us and the children always loved the donkey. With changing rules about the use of animals however, Horseworld would not supply a donkey in 2010, so in 2011 we changed to a Good Friday procession. After a shared breakfast at SFC, we carried a cross to the Hollway Road shopping square, via the Closes, for an open-air service. This new format has proved very successful.

In 1991 some of the younger members of SFC, including Kathryn Bracewell, joined Christ the Servant in manning the Youth Bus when it visited the Open Space at the top of Craydon Road on Tuesday evenings. At first, the Bus Project was supported by the majority of the churches in South Bristol, but support dropped off until SFC was one of only four churches still supporting it in late 1998. The work continued, mainly run by Christ the Servant members, into the 2000s.

Over the years there have been several initiatives to lead worship in the Sturminster Road area. Although these have mainly been run by Christ the Servant, a number of SFC members have played a part. For some years, we worshipped together on the fifth Sunday evening of the month, with services either at SFC or Christ the Servant. Each Christmas we join together for Carol Singing in Stockwood Square and have shared in other open air services there over the years.

Outreach to Stockwood

We have always tried to reach out into our neighbourhood to show God's love practically and to invite friends and neighbours to come to church. In 1974, teams of members went round the estate carrying out door-to-door visitation. This led to some interesting conversations and requests for help of various kinds. It introduced us to Ina Blyth, who had recently moved to Stockwood with her young son Steven, but with very few possessions. As a fellowship, we were able to help them, and Ina became a loyal member of the church until her death in 2002.

The square at the Hollway Road shops has been the setting for a number of open-air services over the years, generally with the other churches but sometimes on our own. Response from shoppers has generally been less than enthusiastic, but they have welcomed the most recent addition of songs from our puppet group.

When Ken Witting came in December 1979, one of the first things he did was to produce a Christmas letter to be delivered to every home in Stockwood. This gave a Christmas message and an invitation to our Christmas services, which was repeated every Christmas and Easter throughout Ken's years as Pastor. Since then, invitations to Christmas services etc have mainly been co-ordinated with Christ the Servant.

We have held a number of special days or weeks over the years, inviting friends on the fringe of the fellowship and others outside to come to one of a series of events at the church during the week. The names of the weeks changed over the years, but the format was generally similar, including events for children, youth, men and women. Following the Bristol "Mission England" with Billy Graham in the summer of 1984, we held "Good News Week" in the autumn, including a concert by the Salvation Army rock group "Blood and Fire". We then repeated the event the following year. From 1990 to 1992, we held outreach weeks in December, called "Christmas Unwrapped". 1994 saw the "Jesus Jigsaw", with "Building Bridges" in 1998.

In December 2004, to celebrate our church anniversary we gave cakes to neighbours in the Ladman Road area with an invitation to "Sounds of Christmas", an evening of Christmas songs, secular as well as spiritual, with the children decorating the tree. The response was

great and the church was full. We repeated the event each year up to 2011, though the cake distribution was dropped and response depended on clashes with a popular TV contest final.

2010 saw the first Stockwood Community Festival. We had a stall that year, and have played a bigger part in the following years, with children's activities and gifts and displays by our Puppet Group. The "Muppet" style puppets were purchased in 2009 from a thank-you gift from the Health Care Commission after our Adventurers helped in one of their projects. They mainly perform "pop" songs with Christian words. From the initial three puppets, the troupe has grown to more than a dozen "people" and "animals" which are a very popular part of open-air services and events, as well as being used on occasion at our church.

Several of our weekly meetings and organisations target people outside the church. Since 1973, the Toddlers Group has been meeting the needs of parents and carers with young children and babies. Holiday Bible Clubs and other children's activities have met the needs of older children, with several Youth Clubs coming and going over the years. We have had meetings for women, Ladies Circle and Ladies Fellowship, from the early days to the present. These activities have been much appreciated by their members.

Overall, the most effective outreach has been through the fellowship's personal contacts with friends and neighbours. Our real challenge for the future is how to reach people in their 20s and 30s who have no church background and no apparent interest in "religion".

Mission

As a church which has received a great deal of support from the Baptist Home Mission Fund over the years, we have always tried to support both UK and world mission. In the early days, the "Outreach Fund" was set up to support not only the Baptist Missionary Society (now BMS World Mission) and the Homework Fund (now Home Mission) but also around eight other missions and charities chosen each year by the members. This approach made it difficult to reach financial targets set by BMS and Homework Fund and the amounts sent to the other causes was very small, so the church closed this fund and replaced it with a Mission Fund covering our two official societies. Roger Bingham became the first of a succession of Missionary Secretaries (Joyce Stephens/Wooster, Ray Hurst, Roger Carver, Bernard Price and most recently Christine Crabbe) who, sometimes with the support of a Mission Committee, have encouraged us to give and to pray via prayer letters and Missionary Meetings with UK representatives of BMS and other missions. However, in the early days support and attendance at meetings was often disappointing. Nevertheless, these meetings sometimes proved fruitful in ways we did not expect. David West remembers one in 1977:

One autumn evening the church was due to have a missionary deputation. It turned out that we did not want the missionary and she did not want to be with us - she wanted to be at a service in her own church. The missionary's name was Miss Gladys Cann (she was actually already a retired missionary). She told the story in the course of her talk of someone who had walked for three days to be baptised. I made the appeal at the end of the service, saying that our baptistry did not require the three mile walk. That evening a voice came on the phone saying 'Fill up the tank!' In the course of the next 6 months nine baptisms took place at Stockwood. I later became Gladys Cann's pastor and we often remembered with some joy that evening when she had been a reluctant visitor to Stockwood. Which only goes to prove the point that the Lord sometimes uses the most reluctant of speakers to deliver His word.

Perhaps due to there being few links with individual missionaries out in the field in the early years, it always seemed a struggle to meet the financial targets set by our "official" missions, Home Mission) and BMS. Eventually however, after a period of making up any deficits from the general fund, we decided to close the Mission Fund altogether and commit to giving at least the requested contribution directly from our general church giving. In practice, this means that we more than tithe our giving and has freed us to make prayer for missionary contacts a priority.

The earliest personal contact in our records is in 1973 with Willi Fransch, a Rhodesian who trained as a minister at Bristol Baptist College and returned to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) to work as a pastor. During this period of white supremacy and UDI, being a non-white pastor was not easy. We received regular prayer letters from him and he visited us when he was in UK with his family in 1976.

In 1981 former student pastor David Holmwood, his wife Pat and family, left for Curitiba in Brazil to work as missionaries with BMS. As a church, we became linked with them in prayer support through their time there until their return to UK in 1990. One of our young people, Christine Iles, went out to work with Operation Mobilisation in 1982. We supported her in prayer until her return to England. We also supported Sarah Chalmers' sister Susan in prayer as she worked as a midwife in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) from 1989 until she returned to Bible College in Glasgow in 1992. In 1992, we became linked to the BMS missionaries Peter and Sheila Brewer in Nicaragua.

From around 1993, we supported Alex Donnelly Junior and his Peruvian wife Giovanna as they worked with "Latin Link" and the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA) Church in Peru. They spent most of 1995 in England, living mainly in Stockwood with Alex Donnelly Senior and Heather, then returned to Peru in January 1996 to work in Trujillo. In 1999 they returned to UK for further training, but then left Latin Link.

Our next BMS link missionaries, from 1997, were John and Norma Clark who had been working in Brazil for many years. John ran the Ceara Baptist Theological Seminary in Fortaleza, training Brazilian men and women for the ministry. Among other things, Norma was librarian at the Seminary. They came back to England in the summer of 2001 so that John could have medical treatment. On his recovery, they returned to Brazil in summer 2002, continuing in Fortaleza until 2005. They then went to work in Guayaquil in Ecuador, again involved in ministerial training programmes.

Our current BMS Missionaries are Andy and Jutta Cowie, whom we first met in 2010 when they were training. We supported them through their language training for work in Guinea and their time in Guinea. Due to administrative problems had to return to UK in 2012. They are currently working in Haiti, in the ongoing aftermath of the earthquake, Andy as a motor mechanic and Jutta as a nurse.

During Andrew's ministry, he introduced us to BMS Action Teams, young people on "gap year" volunteering to work for six months with BMS. Our teams worked in Delhi in 2006-2007 (Ben, Chris, Kate & Jen), in Bangladesh in 2007-2008 (Anna, Hannah, Kirsty & Vicki) and another team in Delhi in 2008-9 (Amy, David, Hannah & Katie).

For many years, the Adventurers have been supporting TEAR Fund, who produced attractive charts to show progress towards completing specific projects. The children collected spare change from their parents and the fellowship, which added up to some quite significant amounts. Our support has been less consistent in recent years but we maintain an interest in this work.

Our main current commitment outside BMS is to help support Pastor Andrei Ghedeon in his ministry in Burlacu in Moldova, the poorest country in Europe. Andrei was having to consider taking his wife Eugenia and their four children to USA, because the church in Burlacu could not support him. SFC committed to contribute to his stipend for three years, by pledged giving from several families and by fund-raising events by the fellowship. In October 2008, Ted Morse and Roger Bingham visited Burlacu for a week to meet the fellowship there, witnessing first hand both the physical poverty of the community and the spiritual richness of the church. At the end of the three years, we made a further commitment to continue to support Pastor Andrei and his family for two more years, renewed again in 2012. In May 2013 we managed to see and talk to Pastor Andrei in Burlacu via Skype at the end of morning worship and hope to continue to strengthen our links with the church there.

Musical Ministry

Music has always been a vital part of the life of SFC. In the early days, hymns were from the Baptist Hymn Book, led by Arthur Saunders on the organ and by the late 1960s with a choir seated next to the organ. "Choruses" were for Sunday School. When Arthur Saunders moved in 1970, the organ rota was filled by Barbara Hasell, Miss Eileen Mugford (very fast), and Arthur Thomas (slow) among others. A choir was put together for special occasions.

The 1970s saw the occasional appearance of worship songs led by guitars in services, although these were more usually a part of worship in the mid-week Bible Study. In March 1979, Brenda Clements started the Ladies' Singing Group, which took part in leading worship on two evening services a month for the next ten years. On Palm Sunday of 1982, we put on a musical Passion Play "Behold Your King", with the Ladies Singing Group singing the songs backing the action. In 1983, Keith Arnot brought together a group of our youngsters as the "Junior Singers". They sang regularly in morning services as well as taking the leading roles in the 1983 Nativity Musical, "Christmas Jazz".

Gary Foreman's musical gifts enabled us be more adventurous. At Christmas 1989, we shared with Gary's home church Bethel (Cardiff) in presenting the Graham Kendrick musical "The Gift". At Easter of 1991, we took part in the Tony Ware musical "Kyrios" with Counterslip Church. We then performed Jimmy & Carol Owens' "The Glory of Christmas" in December 1991. At Easter of 1992 we performed Graham Kendrick's "Make Way for the Cross" and in May sang two songs from it at Bristol Cathedral in the BMS Bi-Centenary Celebration Service.

Determined not to give up our musical performances when Gary left us in the summer of 1992, Clare Bidgood took over leadership of the singers and in December 1992 we performed the Roger Jones musical "While Shepherds Watched". In June 1996, Chris Ruddle encouraged us to perform Paul Field's "Burning Questions". More recent musicals have been Graham Kendrick's "Rumours of Angels" in December 2003 and 2012 as well as Roger Jones musicals "Saints Alive" in May 2004, "Snakes and Ladders" in 2005 and "The Inn Crowd" in 2008.

Over the years, music in worship in the Morning Service, has become less formal. After technical problems with two organs, these were replaced by the piano, which is better suited to the rhythms of the modern worship songs which are the main part of our worship sessions. Many members and friends have filled the organ/piano rota over the years, including Barbara Hasell, Julie & Kathryn Bracewell, Brenda Clements, Muriel Marchant, Christine Cowley, Neville Lintern, Angie Davey, Cheryl Boston and Pauline Kelly. As well as the piano, we now have a thriving music group of up to ten instruments played by both adults and talented youngsters. The much loved traditional hymns still have their place, especially as essential parts of Christmas, Easter and Harvest. But we sing them alongside modern songs from "Songs of Fellowship" etc and even zany kids' songs from DVDs.

As with all walks of life, technology has changed music presentation. From the "Baptist Hymn Book" we progressed through "Jesus Praise" and "Mission Praise" with song sheets for other new songs. In 1988, we bought an overhead projector to replace the song sheets. In the 2000s we launched into computerised projection, with "Songs of Fellowship" on hand for power failures. The acoustics provided by the shape of the building make the church a great place to praise God in song and visitors often tell us how well our fellowship sing in worship. We continue our tradition of praise with a nostalgic re-run of "The Gift" for our 50th Anniversary.

Weekday Groups for Women

Women have always been well catered for at SFC, with two main groups which have been running since the start of the church.

Women's Fellowship

Sister Isa Lewis started the "Bright Hour" on Wednesday afternoons in September 1964, for women who wanted to enjoy Christian fellowship. This type of women's meeting consisting of informal service with hymns, prayer, readings and a visiting speaker, followed by tea and biscuits was practically universal in Baptist churches of those days. By 1969 the group had been renamed "Women's Fellowship", but the meeting has continued in a similar pattern. Speakers generally gave a Bible messages, but talks could be on missions, charities, hobbies or a variety of other topics. The members have always loved the old hymns from the "Alexander" hymn book, but also enjoy the new songs, played over the years by Pat Richards and Doreen Tomaselli.

Photos from the late 1960s show that even in those days the majority of the members were retired ladies. Their numbers were sometimes augmented by younger mums from the church who had to rush out at the end of the meeting to collect children from school.

The Anniversary in March, with a sit-down tea was a highlight of the year, with guests invited from other groups. On other weeks in the Spring, our members would take the bus to Totterdown, Victoria Park or Bedminster to visit one of the other South Bristol groups. Sadly many of these groups have now closed as the membership dwindled. Our group continues, led by Pat Morse and a small committee of church members, though numbers are low now and many elderly members need lifts in cars to get to the meetings. As outside speakers are difficult to obtain, and numbers too low to justify inviting them, most afternoons are led by one of our own members. "Sharing" afternoons are popular, when members choose favourite hymns, readings, poems and share the latest news.

Ladies Circle

The other group started by Sister Isa in September 1964 with the help of Margaret Meacham and Barbara Hasell, was the "Young Wives Group". This was aimed mainly at young mothers who needed a chance to get out of the house in the evening and meet with other women. Most of these women did not come regularly to church, but in the early years were very active in fund-raising for the church and helping in many practical ways.

The meeting started with a short devotional time of hymn, reading and prayer, but the main emphasis for the members was the talk from a visiting speaker on a wide range of subjects. Newspaper articles from the 1960s reported a talk on antiques and advertised one on modern embroidery. In 1974, the group renamed itself "Ladies Circle" in order to make it clear that all women were welcome whatever their age or marital status. Since the members were mainly the same ladies who had joined in the mid 1960s, the adjective "young" was also becoming less applicable. This is considerably truer now, as many of the same ladies continue to support the group in their 70s and 80s.

The pattern of meetings has continued through the years, though the singing of a hymn was dropped through lack of a regular pianist. It is still very difficult to encourage the members to come to any other church events, but many appreciate the chance to ask for prayer for friends or family. Speakers have become harder to find and very expensive, but the members all are agreed they want the group to continue.

Women's Breakfast

This is a relatively new initiative which started in 2009 and has been held about twice each year since. The generous breakfast is followed by a talk by an inspiring speaker. It has proved very popular with SFC ladies and many friends from other churches and from the neighbourhood attend.

Men's' Activities

Men's social activities have been less regular and more informal. Nevertheless, we always enjoy them and promise ourselves that we will "do this more often" – a resolve we need to

strengthen in coming years. On the other hand, our men folk work very well together on a variety of practical projects around the church, often involving men who don't come to church regularly.

Youth Work

The first weekday evening Youth Club providing social activities for teens and pre-teens within and outside the fellowship was started in 1965 and continued until 1971, when insufficient people could be found to take over the leadership. Several similar clubs have been run over the years since, when leaders have been available. They have sometimes included a Christian prologue or epilogue, but mainly rely on individual conversations to share the gospel with the youngsters. The current Youth Club is thriving, with around 40 eleven to fourteen year olds enjoying a variety of games including 5-a-side football on the newly marked out pitch in the car park.

As well as Youth Clubs, we have generally run youth groups aimed at deepening the spiritual experience of our young people. These too have come and gone over the years with the availability of leadership. During the 1970s, members held youth "squashes" in their homes after the evening service or during the week. During the 1980s, many of the church families had teenage children and our youth work attracted in other youngsters. The "Teens'n'Twenties" or TNT met not only on a Sunday morning, but held their own Bible Study on a Monday night and helped to run the Youth Club. Many of these young people are now mature adult members of the fellowship. From the 1970s to 1990s, we organised youth holidays, staying in church halls in various locations in the South West or Wales. More recently we have taken family groups of children and young people to Spring Harvest at Easter and some of our youngsters spend a week at a Hill House Christian holiday in the summer.

We are proud of the sporting skills and achievements of a number of our young people, but it is sad that it is becoming increasingly difficult for talented Christian youngsters to continue coming to church when so many of their training sessions or competitions are arranged on Sundays. There are many other clubs, Sunday jobs etc also competing for the time of young people these days as well as peer pressure to give up any Christian beliefs.

Our current Youth Church, led by Yvonne Nichols, are a small but keen group. Several of them belong to our Music Group supporting Sunday morning worship. The group have also led the morning service and organised fund-raising projects for Children in Need etc.

Children's Work

Stockwood has always had a large number of children and in the early days the Sunday School was much bigger than the adult congregation. Girls Brigade ran from 1964 to 1996, with a Boys Brigade running for a year or two on a couple of occasions. Other weekday clubs have been run over the years under such names as "Fun Factory", Holiday Bible Clubs have been popular with many Stockwood children down the years. Toddlers' Group for pre-school children has run since 1974.

Adventurers (Sunday School)

Even before the church was built, some members of the Cumberland Street Mission living in the Sturminster Road area had started a Sunday School in their homes for the local children. Lillian Yorke, one of these ladies remembers ...

Having moved to Stockwood in the 1950s, I continued as an active member of the Bristol City Mission attending the Cumberland Street Mission. We were told that the Mission and the houses around there were to be demolished for re-development and a Chapel would be built at Stockwood on the new housing estate. At that time there was a large number of children in the area. I consulted my minister and it was decided to start a Sunday School. I went to see the parents of the children, who agreed for me to start a Sunday class. I was able to start a class of about ten children in my own home, which proved very satisfactory.

The number of children wishing to come to Sunday School soon increased so I arranged for my sister to have ten children in her home. Before long, I had to find someone else to take some children, so with the help of two friends who were willing to open their homes, there were now about forty children attending a Sunday class. When it was harvest or Sunday School Anniversary, we would hire a coach to take the children to Cumberland Street Mission to join with the children there.

The Chapel was built in due course, but the Bristol City Mission felt that they would not be able to meet the running cost so we would not be able to take over the Church. The Baptists decided to take over the new Church. I was asked to carry on at Stockwood, but felt I had to return to the Bristol City Mission at one of their other Missions.

With increasing numbers, the Sunday School moved into the Scout Hut at Tibbott Walk. Once the church building had been completed in October 1963, Sunday School was able to meet there on Sundays at 11am, starting with 40 children and two teachers. In those days, many people who would not think of going to church themselves were happy to send their children. There were none of today's sports teams and clubs competing for children on a Sunday morning. Our Sunday School teachers of the 1960s held AGMs which show how large the Sunday School was. The minutes for the first AGM in September 1965 record that by this time the Beginners (for 3-5 year olds) had four teachers 45 children on the register. The Primary department (for 5-7 year olds) had five teachers and 46 children. Junior Church (for 7-14 year olds) had six teachers. Numbers continued to rise as the population of Stockwood increased. In September 1965 there were 15 teachers and an average attendance of 108 children. By September 1967 there were 17 teachers and average attendance of 135 and in September 1969, probably the peak time, average attendance was 183.

In the early years, Sunday School Anniversary was a big event, with an invited speaker. The younger children took part in the morning service through songs and readings and the Junior Church took part in the evening service after a tea. Other annual fixtures of those days were the Scripture Examination, Sunday School Outing (later combined with church outing) and the Christmas parties.

A presentation of the Nativity has been a constant feature of each year from 1964. The presentation of 1967 was shown on the local television channel Television Wales and West (later HTV). It was broadcast at 12.15pm on Sunday, Christmas Eve, as a Modern Nativity Play with the title "Sharing, Caring and Daring" and featuring astronauts, doctors, nurses and teachers in addition to the traditional nativity characters. This required some complicated arrangements to be made. The TWW engineers set up lighting and cameras on Tuesday 19th December ready for the final practice on the Wednesday morning and recording in the afternoon, with lunch paid for by TWW. They paid us £20 to enable us to purchase or hire costumes as needed. The letter from TWW detailing the arrangements asked for confirmation that dates of school parties had been rearranged to make sure the children were all there, and for confirmation that a Hammond organ would be installed for the occasion. It concluded with the warning "... TWW is investing a large sum of money in the recording of your Nativity play and it is essential from our point of view that nothing should happen which would prejudice the recording." The play was featured in the Evening Post of 21st December. John Meacham mentioned it as being one of the highlights of the year, though the event did not get even a brief mention in the minutes of the following Sunday School Teachers meeting.

In the 1960s and '70s, the nativity was presented separately by the younger children in the morning service and the older children and teenagers in the evening service. From the 1980s the Nativity was kept to the morning, with the evening service becoming Carols by Candlelight.

By the 1980s SFC, in common with most other churches, had experienced a dramatic drop in number of children coming from non-church families. Many churches were changing the name of their children's Sunday meetings to distinguish them from "school", so our "Sunday

School" became "Adventurers" from 1989.

Accommodation has always been a problem, since the church has only two main meeting rooms. Through the 1960s, the Sunday School used all available rooms. In 1972, David Holmwood wanted to be able to hold an adult service at the same time so that all the family could worship together. Since there were far more children than adults, after an initial time of worship together, the adults moved into the hall. The secondary school aged youngsters met in the vestry and kitchen. The primary age children had the church, while the pre-school children met in the vestibule. This was far from ideal, but we made it work. In later years with lower numbers the basic pattern continued with various subdivisions of spaces and even the use of Chestnut Close's lounge.

A brief attempt to reverse the accommodation was made for a couple of years in the 1990s but it was only In September 2010 that the Adventurers leaders decided that it was time (after 38 years!) to give the church back to the adults and take the children out to the hall after the initial worship session. The change was greatly appreciated, though finding sufficient space for the wide age range of youngsters remains difficult even with relatively low numbers.

Girls' Brigade

From the 1960s to the 1990s, there were few SFC families with girls whose daughters did not belong to GB at some time or other. The list of Lieutenants and helpers over the years is long, including Doreen Tomaselli, Yvonne Nichols, Anne Gulliford and Hilary Newman, but there was only one Captain: Freda Ash. She started the company in 1964 and ran it for 33 years. However, as she reached her 65th birthday she had to come out of uniform and retire from being Captain. No replacement could be found, so the 14th Bristol Company closed at the end of 1996.

The range of activities at GB covered learning about the Bible and about church life and history, crafts of all kinds, service in the church and the community, cooking, singing, dancing, acting and sport, as well as exploring, hiking and camping. From five year old Explorers in their red jumpers, pinafore dresses and huge berets, through Juniors and Seniors to Brigaders in their late teens reluctant to be seen in uniform by their non-church friends, Freda was there with them all on a Tuesday evening and many other times. For many girls, she was a sympathetic ear to whom they could take their news, troubles and joys.

The girls paraded the Colours at church at Family Services and took part in District parades in Bristol and beyond. The company took part in Displays at the Colston Hall, Bristol, around the Region and even in London. Each year, GB took the girls away to camp, to a variety of places in the South West and Wales.

The Celebration of 33 years of Girl's Brigade in Stockwood took place on Saturday 17th May, 1997. During the afternoon, nearly a month's rain fell in the space of less than an hour! Looking at the thunder, lightning and torrential rain just after 6pm, we wondered whether we or our guests would ever get there. Fortunately the worst of the rain was over before seven, and as we mopped up the flood in the vestibule, people started to

arrive. Most got here safely, but sadly the District Commissioner Lesley Wynne couldn't get from Fishponds (!) through the flood to join us.

Guests included GB leaders from Bristol Companies, and past leaders from our own. Gary Foreman was there as a former Chaplain. There were girls spanning the three decades of GB - from Rosemary Watt, Christine Court and Margaret Lacey (née Tomaselli), girls in the 1960s, through Margaret's daughters Keeley and Katie to Emma Baker and Helen Croucher. Peter Slee presented Freda with a beautiful rose bowl on behalf of the church, and Helen Croucher presented a bouquet nearly as big as herself. Roger Bingham brought the greetings of many who could not be with us, including the GB National President

and former chaplains and pastors here, David West and Ken Witting. Ted Morse reminded us of some highlights over the years. It was a great night for catching up with old friends, but especially for thanking Freda for all she had done for so many people. Freda Ash described her highlights of GB in "Grapevine" in May 1997

1964: The Beginning

Just after the opening of the church at the end of 1963, Sister Isa Lewis the Deaconess in charge of the church asked the Commissioner of the division, Mrs Clack, for the support of an officer to start a company at Stockwood Free Church. I was the commandant of the 3rd Bristol Battalion to which the company would be attached. The Commissioner and I met with Sister Isa. I was available to start the company due to the closure of my previous company. I came to start the company for six weeks - and have been here ever since! The company began on 7th April 1964 and was known as Girls Life Brigade 14th Bristol Company.

1976: Rally at the Albert Hall

The Division took "Autumn Leaves" from the district display to the Annual National Rally at the Albert Hall. Our girls (Carol Stephens, Joanne Langley, Mary Strode, Rachel Gadd and Lesley Hasell) were to be tortoises preparing for hibernation! After weeks of practices, dress rehearsal and inspection we set off for the afternoon performance which the parents attended. After tea and the evening performance, we set off home, tired, but happy.

1983: District Netball Competition

We were the youngest and smallest team in the competition. One Company lined up their two teams before the competition to be photographed with the winners and runners up trophies! One of their teams was eliminated early on, and our girls defeated the other in the semi-finals, much to our delight! We lost the final against the girls of St Mark's Baptist after a valiant struggle but were thrilled to have got so far.

1993: Girls Brigade Centenary

This year brought celebrations to mark the centenary of the Girls Brigade. There were Displays and Parades, a special holiday to Austria for the girls and to Switzerland for the officers. Region 6 (of which Bristol Area Division is part) held a parade and display at Exeter in July. The day began with a march through the city to the Cathedral. I had the privilege as the longest serving officer in the division of carrying the Queen's Colour (the Union Jack). Our girls did us proud in marching and smartness of uniform. As we arrived at the Cathedral, the Explorers of the various companies of the region formed a guard of honour outside. We went to the University for lunch, followed in the evening by the display, with our "Characters of Beatrix Potter". I carried the colours at the display, a great privilege.

The Bristol Area Division group travelled to St Paul's Cathedral in London by coach (en route adjusting the hem of someone's skirt and mending someone else's shoe with superglue!). The Officers Brigaders, Seniors and Juniors paraded from the Guildhall to the Cathedral. The Explorers (including our Rebecca Green, Eleanor Beresford, Jenny Chalmers and Lois Croucher) were to have formed a guard of honour but this was abandoned as the weather was so cold.

Holiday Bible Clubs

The first Holiday Bible Club in Stockwood was held in August 1968, organised jointly by SFC and Christ the Servant under the leadership of the Christian Education Movement. There are no details of this event, but the club held the following year in 1969 was reported, along with a photo spread, in the Bristol New Observer. Again a joint venture between SFC and Christ the Servant, the organisers optimistically planned for 500 children. In fact 50 or so children actually came, but the club was said to have gone well. Even at the height of Stockwood's child population boom, it is difficult to believe that there could have been so many primary age children.

New Observer of Thursday August 28, 1969:

"The Anglicans and the Baptists joined together in Stockwood to organise the school; we hoped for larger numbers and arranged for three centres to be set up," said the Anglican Minister Rev. Doug Constable. "About three weeks ago we realised that only a minority of the children were interested, so we agreed to hold just one school in the hall belonging to Stockwood Free Church." As well as the usual Bible stories, games and crafts, the children went on a trip to Cheddar and Wells.

The first plans for an SFC Holiday Bible Club came from the Sunday School, who wanted to hold one in the summer of 1972. They were not able to find enough helpers to run it that year, but did so in the summer of 1975. In the spring of 1978, Joyce Stephens (Wooster) got together a team to run HBC in the August. Running for four mornings for 5-12 year olds, this was very successful and was repeated in 1979. In August 1980, the team ran two sessions each day, 10-12am for 7-11s and 2-3.30pm for 5-11s. Since this proved popular with the children, if exhausting for the leaders, the pattern was repeated in 1981 and 1982. We managed to squeeze upwards of 80 children into the church in these sessions and produced all the material ourselves for each. In 1983, an informal club was held in the Stockwood Open Space. The HBC of 1985 was held in the October half term as part of "Good News Week", then in 1986 HBC returned to the summer holiday.

Gary Foreman re-launched HBC in 1988 as "King's Club" in the October half term. This was repeated in 1989 and followed by "Shipmates" in October 1990 and "J-Team" in 1991. We ran "God's Gang" in October 1992 after Gary left, but with leaders having other commitments, there was then a break of a few years.

In 2002 Pauline Bingham decided it was time to start again. In the April we held "Light Factory", a programme written by Scripture Union with a rapid succession of varied activities: songs, games, craft, Bible story, drama etc. It went well, attracting around 50 children, so the following year we used SU's new programme "Seaside Rock". In 2004, we moved timing to the Autumn half term, since many of our families had started going to Spring Harvest at Easter. The pattern continued in the following years with "Xpedition Force", "Landlubbers", "Pyramid Rock", "Wastewatchers", "Champions Challenge", "Rocky's Plaice" and "Mission Rescue". Numbers fluctuated between 40 and 60, with many children coming back year after year, but there appeared to be an increase in families taking time away in October, so instead of holding the next club in October 2012, we delayed to February 2013 for "Space Academy". With attendance well in the 50s, this seems to have been a good move.

We have a wonderful team with skills in music, drama, craft etc, and some very keen Youth Church helpers. The only regret is that although families are happy to send their children, and to come to the Family Night, very few progress to joining the fellowship on a regular basis.

Toddlers Group

Toddlers Group, originally called "Family Circle", was started in September 1973 by Pat Holmwood, the first group for mothers and toddlers in the Bristol area. It has been a first introduction to SFC, for at least a few of the many families it has touched. At first, the group met in the hall on Tuesday afternoons, squeezing in up to 20 adults and their children. When Fiona was born in 1974, Pat handed on to Pauline Bingham, who led the group with various helpers until 1984. Jan Arnot (Rollings) continued the group as it expanded into two sessions in the church, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The Thursday group was always smaller and had to close in 2012 due to lack of a leader. A number of people have led the groups over the years and many others have helped setting out the room or making the teas. Leaders have generally been under pressure as they had to fit in taking their own children to school and collecting them.

Over the years, the number and variety of toys and play equipment has increased. The church gives the children plenty of space to play, mainly around each other rather than with each other, with toys they might not have at home. It also gives the adults an opportunity to

chat while watching their children and drinking their tea. In the early days, the adult was likely to be a young mum. These days it could be Mum, Dad, Grandparent or childminder, but their need for a time out of the house with other adults is still the same.

Four "big" days have evolved over the years. The Christmas Party with Father Christmas started in 1979. This was later joined by a DIY Nativity, a Summer Treat with Bouncy Castle and a visit from the photographer. These are hard work but both adults and the children enjoy them.

The Church Building

The real Church may be the people, but serving the Lord in Stockwood would have been much more difficult without the church building which is owned by the West of England Baptist Association (WEBA) but our responsibility to maintain. The design was considered to be very modern when it was built in 1963. The church building is certainly attractive and has given us wonderful acoustics for singing but is not without its downside. The large areas of glass and high pitched roof have made heating in winter a big problem. The church was originally heated by electrical under-floor heating which gave us nice warm feet until the off-peak timer turned off. It seems there was originally no heating in the hall, as four (noisy) fan heaters were installed in 1969. After a few years, sections of the under-floor wiring gradually stopped working and in 1986 we installed gas heaters in both church and hall. Shortly afterwards, the suggestion was first made to install ceiling fans to distribute the heat better. This idea was revived on occasions over the years and they were eventually fitted in 2013. The under-floor heating was finally abandoned in the 1990s when a short circuit nearly set the platform on fire.

For the majority of the church's existence, repairs and improvements were something of a struggle. However the new century saw the arrival of a skilled and enthusiastic workforce led by Rob Bidgood. Under his leadership many projects have been carried out. The long-awaited cupboards in the vestibule were constructed. A toilet for the disabled was created by adaptation of the existing facilities. With the help of a council grant, the kitchen was extended and fitted out to allow us to provide full meals for the Lunch Club and our own events. The back of the church has been panelled off and a staircase built to the new balcony for the technical equipment. The outer wooden panelling of the church walls and the window frames have always needed frequent attention. Some areas have been replaced with uPVC, while the rest has all been expertly repainted by Keith Lilley. Leaks through the flat roofs of the vestibule and hall have always been something of a problem. A major leak in the corner of the hall in 2013 finally triggered replacement with a pitched roof, completed just in time for the Anniversary.

The plans of the church building show the intended position for eleven pairs of pews. Fortunately these were never installed and our wooden chairs served us well for nearly 50 years giving us flexibility to set them out in various ways for worship and to clear them away for midweek activities. By the 2000s, they were showing their age and at the start of 2013, we finally replaced them with red aluminium framed chairs.

Many members over the years have contributed financially to our various fabric projects. We are also grateful to those who have given items which have beautified the church. The painting of the Sea of Galilee in the hall was painted and given by Ken Witting during his ministry here. The green Pulpit Fall, recently replaced by a red one created by the Banner group to match our new colour scheme, was given by Mrs Gladys Richards around 1987. After the loss of Doreen Tomaselli in 2002, her husband Phil donated the outer side doors in 2003. Gifts of time and skill are just as important as money. Many people have contributed to arranging

flowers, making banners etc. We are also grateful to those who make sure that the church is clean and tidy for worship on Sundays and use during the week.

In the early years, the church garden consisted of an uneven grass/weedy area which by repeated mowing and removal of stones was gradually transformed into something resembling a lawn. In 1980 Bernard Price got a team together to create island beds of shrubs and trees. A maple tree was planted in memory of Ethel Harris's husband Sid, who died in 1980. Ethel's ashes were buried under the tree when she died in 2010. Most of the plants thrived, sometimes too vigorously. After variable degrees of attention over the years, the garden is currently tended with great care by Giovanni Pitarella and Ken Wooster.

While our main aim is to get the community into the church, we have had to take steps to keep those with antisocial intent out. The original grounds were left as open plan and the boundary was partly enclosed by chain link fencing in 1969. This was reinforced by the hawthorn hedge in 1973, when the gates were also installed. Although the hedge has been effective, it has sometimes been a headache to control. In his greetings for our 40th Anniversary, former Pastor Gary Foreman said:

"I recall my first week, when six foot was taken off the hedge around the church to remind both the community and congregation of the place of the church in the locality it serves".

We'd always noticed that the car park tarmac seemed in poor condition, but it was only in 2012 that we discovered it had never actually been finished. It had only a base coat when originally laid. After much heart-searching over the cost involved, we finally had it properly surfaced and marked out the same year.

Space for all the Sunday morning activities has always been a problem. The church plans show that it was always envisaged that the building might be extended out into the garden area. Double doors (now replaced by a window) led out from the vestibule next to the kitchen and the kitchen window plan says "possible future hatch to phase II". The fellowship have always wanted to extend the church and have started extension funds on several occasions over the years. Unfortunately this has so far remained out of our reach, as immediate needs to support the ministry, repay the manse loan and repair/improve the existing building have had to take priority.

The Future

Where will 2014 and onwards take us? We hope to continue some of the community events started for the anniversary on into the future and to be more effective in reaching those around us with the gospel. Perhaps God will lead us to call a new Pastor, full or part-time. One day we may even build that extension. But whatever the future holds we are confident that the Lord will lead us on in worship and service in Stockwood.

Appendix: A Brief History of Stockwood

According to the Domesday Survey, the lands around Stockwood were part of the Royal estate owned by Edith, widow of Edward the Confessor. On her death in 1075 her estates were given to William, Earl of Gloucester, who founded Keynsham Abbey. The first record of the area which is now Stockwood is a document of 1231 stating that the request of the Constable of Bristol Castle to take timber from Ilsyngrove was refused. This grove was, and still is, a stand of medieval woodland in Stockwood, now part of the Stockwood Open Space, managed by the Avon Wildlife Trust.

The first known use of the place name of Stockwood is in a charter of 1318 which also mentions a hamlet called Stockton which is believed to be a lost village. The name Stockwood probably comes from "stoc" a place or settlement plus "wudu" a wood or woodland. For many years the land came under the control of Keynsham Abbey, until this was dissolved by Henry VIII in 1534.

The Abbey lands were bought by the Bridges family in 1552, but a deed of 1581 in Bristol Record Office shows Hugh Smyth covenanting "*farm settled Stokewood in Keynsham to use of Mathew and his heirs*". Nothing further is known of the area until Donn's map of 1769, which shows Mr Reed's house. This is believed to be Stockwood House which was sold by Sir John Smyth in 1747 to Benjamin Newport, who sold it to James Reed in 1757.

The area stayed as a farming hamlet until after the Second World War, apart from a few houses built in the 1930s at the bottom of Sturminster Road. During the war, Stockwood played a part in the air defence of Bristol. The side of the valley, close to what would become Bifield Road, was used as a part of a Decoy system code-named "Starfish". The Decoy was a cross shape of straw bales soaked in oil set on fire when an air raid was expected, to draw enemy bombing away from Whitchurch Airfield. This seemed to have been successful, as several sticks of bombs fell on Stockwood during the course of the war.

The Sturminster Estate was started in 1947 with the building of prefabs, then in the 1950s, council houses all the way up the hill. In the early 1960s, Bristol City Council planned to build another council estate on the top of the hill. They got as far as laying out the road plans, but because full employment in the Bristol area resulted in a need for houses for sale, they decided instead to sell the land for private development. The result was Stockwood as we know it today.

Road names with any connection with the area were few. Ilsyn Grove and The Coots were both woods. Hencliffe Road, Lanesborough Rise and Roundmoor Gardens came from local field names. Winash House, Hemplow House and Longreach House in Brislington and Lyons Court in Whitchurch all gave their names to Stockwood roads. Most of the other names were taken from Dwelly's National Records, published in 1929. This contains a "Directory of Persons living in Somerset 1670-1674". Most are people exempted from Hearth Tax, imposed in 1662 as two shillings per hearth on all but the poorest. The tax was so unpopular that it was withdrawn in 1689. A few of the people mentioned were John Ladman, residing in Keynsham in 1674, and Anne Burfoote, residing in Brislington in 1670, both exempt from Hearth Tax. Robert Bagnall was Churchwarden of Keynsham Church in 1674 and John Harrington was one of the officials who allowed exemption from Hearth Tax in 1670 and 1674.

More information can be found in "In the Valley, on the Hill: The History of Stockwood and Sturminster from 65 million years BC to 2000AD". Compiled for the Millennium, this book includes the feelings, experiences and memories of some of the people living in Stockwood from the 1940s to 1999. Stockwood Library has a copy.