

Inspire

THE NEWSLETTER OF
THE FREE CHURCH (UNITED REFORMED)
MARKET HILL, SAINT IVES

27th SEPTEMBER
1980 40th 2020
ANNIVERSARY EDITION



Sunday 27th September 1980
is the day exactly 40 years ago
when our building was re-opened
following an 18-month building
project to create the building we
know today. This special edition
of Inspire recalls the story of
The Free Church Centre
and the events which led up to
its opening in September 1980

The Vision of the 1970s

The Vision has been growing over recent years. It is about creating community. It is about the stewardship of our human resources and our material assets. It is about co-operation with others. It is about service to others. It is about pastoral care.

The Vision is about building and about buildings. It is about building people, to be fully themselves, and to see themselves as children of God. And as part of that, it is about building bridges between people and between groups of people, young and old, handicapped and able-bodied, women and men, and between the groups in which people choose to meet, church, civic society, youth club, choir, professional group, recreational activity.

The Vision has gradually become visible in what has been happening to the building in the Market Square in St Ives, known hitherto as "The Free Church". Its internal reconstruction has made it capable of flexible use, seven days a week.

The Vision has included for the church a new realisation that in the scriptures "the church" is the people, and the house in which the church meets, and may share with others, must, if it is to welcome many others, have a new name. We have tried to hold to recent tradition and keep continuity, as well as indicate the building's wider use, and have chosen the name "The Free Church Centre".

May The Free Church Centre's use enable many to serve others, help many who are in need, enable a stronger community to develop in St Ives, and be conducive to the central activity of the Church, to focus it all in the worship of Almighty God.

'Taken from the Re-Dedication Service Booklet' 1980

The decision to proceed



In the 1970's, the congregation of The Free Church began to look at ways of using its buildings more effectively. In 1976, Mr Dennis Adams, an architect from Ely was asked to prepare an initial feasibility study of possible conversion schemes for the 1864 building.

Oversight of the project on behalf of the Church at the pre-planning stages was undertaken by various groups and committees made up of church members - Architects Liaison Group, Project Design Group, Appeals Committee and Project Management Committee. Fortunately, within these groups were

church members with the necessary expertise required for these specific tasks.

So, it was indeed a joyous occasion on Sunday morning, 5th November 1978, when a special Church Meeting voted overwhelmingly (112 in favour - 12 against) to 'proceed with the project to reconstruct the interior of its building on Market Hill' on the condition that a grant was available from the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) under whose auspices a 'Job Creation Scheme' operated. Under this scheme the church would be able to employ directly building workers who would otherwise be unemployed - and whose wages would be met by the MSC 'while they worked on suitable projects'. Without this scheme, the project could not have gone ahead.



Another key factor in the project going ahead, was the church being fortunate that one of its Elders and the son of the former minister, Mr Martin Ballard, was a Quantity Surveyor and was prepared to act as Project Manager. Two other key workers were Mr Laurie Peters, who had been over 30 years in the building trade, and Mr Arthur Luke, who had retired early from the County Council Architect's Department - their respective positions were to be Site Agent and Site Manager. This team of three interviewed some of the long-term unemployed. Under the terms of the MSC agreement, they could be taken on only if they were unskilled and been out of work for 12 months, OR skilled and out of work for 6 months.

On Tuesday 17th April 1979, the men started on the job by demolishing the interior of the church. The pews were removed, some to be sold at a local auction, some in Birmingham. Other large items such as the organ were stored in the upstairs of the Church Hall. And a start was made on one of the most labour intensive tasks - that of removing all the plaster covering the internal walls to reveal the brickwork beneath.

The project would take 18 months to complete and see the building re-opened and re-dedicated on the 27th September 1980.

Raising the funds to build

The creative remodelling project by the architect Dennis Adams included the insertion of a new first floor, effectively doubling the floor area to provide the additional space required for a 'multi use building'. By retaining the best architectural features, the area on the new first floor remained ideal for worship, leaving a hall, shops and other facilities on the ground floor. The old church hall would be used for worship in the interim, and then developed into shops and offices when the church conversion was complete.

This ambitious project came with a hefty price tag - eventually reaching £235,000. In accordance with the Church decision to proceed, the project was conditional on securing major finance from the Government's Manpower Service Commission at that time. A successful Job Creation Grant was negotiated providing £90,000 to pay the wages of unemployed building workers taken on for the project.

The raising of this large sum was a formidable challenge for a church with a membership and following drawn from 100 or so families. A public Appeal was launched to raise £40,000 from the congregation and the town - as well as many other organisations who were approached for help. Within a month of the Appeal being launched, church members and friends had promised £20,000.

Church members took enthusiastically to fundraising and a further £6,500 was raised by fundraising events - an auction; an organ marathon; sponsored walks; many coffee and garden parties; various concerts and a 'Buy-A-Brick' campaign - plus many others.



Organist pulls out the stops



Generous contributions were received from many outside groups - the Town Council donated £5,000; twenty three URC Churches sent donations as did the central URC, the J Arthur Rank Trust, the D of E, the Historic Churches Preservation Trust and Help the Aged. The largest contribution of £21,300 came from Cambridgeshire County Council to pay for the special facilities (including the lift) for the handicapped in the Day Care Centre, which was to be a regular user of the building on three days each week.

The financial background to the project is best summed up in the very simple balance sheet that was included in the booklet issued to everyone attending the Re-Opening Service and is produced again on page 5.

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Receipts

Manpower Services Commission	£90,000
Low-interest loans	£55,000
Local Appeal	£40,000
Grants and other donations	£39,000
Other sources	<u>£11,000</u>

Totals **£235,000**

Expenditure

Wages	£91,000
Materials	£34,000
Sub-contractors	£60,000
Fees	£15,000
Services/hire charges/other	£19,000
Furnishings and fittings	<u>£16,000</u>

£235,000

Work in Progress



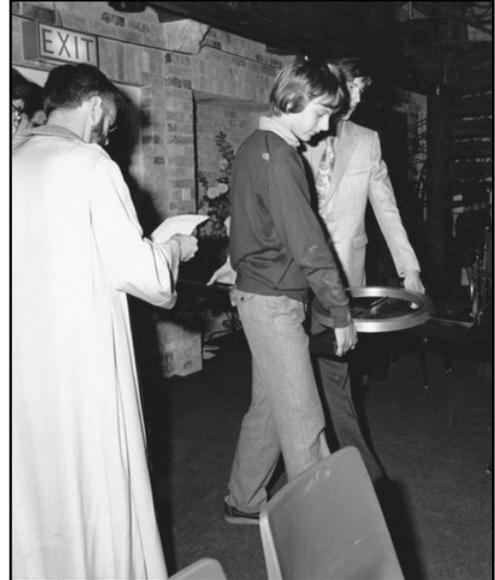
Work in Progress



The Opening and Rededication Service

The late Dr Mary Carter, a local historian and Elder of The Free Church has written extensively on our church's history and it is largely her words that we use here to recall the events of that momentous day 40 years ago. Mary writes:

On Saturday 27th September 1980, the building was re-opened under its new name 'The Free Church Centre'. After eighteen months of planning and hard work, the vision was transformed into reality. The congregation began to arrive an hour before the time of the service and were entertained by the Church's folk group 'Chapter Two'. The organ, unfortunately, was re-assembled but not working. At 2pm the Church bell began to ring, the first time it had been heard for many years. While the congregation took their seats inside, the Elders and children waited on the pavement for the arrival of Baroness Steadman and her husband to perform the official opening. Closed circuit television relayed the events to the congregation upstairs.



The ceremony formally commenced when the architect, Mr Dennis Adams, handed over the keys of the building to the minister, the Rev Donald McIlhagga, and Baroness Steadman cut a ribbon on the door and unveiled the commemorative plaque. The procession then moved upstairs for the re-dedication service. The Moderator of the General Assembly, the Rt Rev J Johansen-Berg, knocked three times on the door, which was opened by the Church Secretary, Mr John Hoare. Two of the young people carried in the new Cross and hung it on the wall of the apse. They were followed by the Elders, Ministers, Lay-preachers and Moderators.



Arthur Carrington introduces the cross carriers, Paul James & Peter Ballard to Baroness Steadman

During the service the whole building was dedicated again to God, for worship and for service wherever He may be. Two past ministers took part in the service, the Rev L J Ballard and the Rev J Phillips - then in his nineties.

Tea and shortbread were served afterwards in both the old and new halls, where there was also an exhibition of the history of the Church and a photographic record of the re-building project. It was encouraging to see that as soon as the service came to an end, members of the public came into the building to look around, thus demonstrating the congregation's faith in trying to make the Church open to the Community.

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The following day saw a crowded Church for the first communion service in the restored building. In the next few weeks, there were a number of special events which included a Concert by the Huntingdonshire Philharmonic Orchestra, an Exhibition of Paintings, a Folk Concert and a Children's Musical. At the same time, the Day Care Centre made use of the building on three days a week, catering for 70 housebound men and women. They were able to enjoy specialised washing facilities, hairdressing and chiropody, as well as a cooked meal and opportunities for friendship and craftwork. The local volunteers, who helped in the Day Care Centre, were assisted by senior pupils from St Ivo School.



If the vision of the Church's place in the community was to be fulfilled, additional qualified help was required. The congregation appointed an administrative secretary to assist in running the Centre and also a Community Minister, to extend the pastoral care of the Church and to work in the north parts of the town. Mrs Catherine McIlhagga, the minister's wife, who had recently finished her training for the ministry at Westminster College, Cambridge, was ordained and inducted to this charge on January 31st 1981.

The opening of the reconstructed building shows that the Church and congregation has looked for new ways to serve God and Community. Jesus' message has been re-interpreted by each generation in its own way, from the time of Cromwell and the Puritans to the present day. History records their witness ending with the beginning of a new life for The Free Church in St Ives. **MC**



Warmest Greetings from the Minister!

I hope that this special edition magazine enables you to take a trip down memory lane as you recall the life of the church since the refurbishment of the building in 1980. I am sorry that I am away on Sabbatical study leave and cannot be with you at present.



My ministry at the Free Church has covered the past 12 years, so I cannot remember the redesign of the church, but I am very grateful for the vision, skill and hard work that went in to this project, and have benefitted from it throughout my time here. The idea of having the building open seven days a week as well as Sunday worship to serve the community, was well ahead of its time. It is impressive that the congregation has continued to live out this vision for the past forty years! Just Sharing, the Fairtrade Shop, and Tookey's café have been open from Monday to Saturday as part of the church mission throughout my time here. Porch chapel prayers each morning have ensured that people could come in for a moment of reflection or to write prayer requests.

This vision for the church has been fulfilled and developed in so many ways, with concerts of the St Ives Choral Society, the Chamber Orchestra, and Tapestry; fun church activities such as LOAF meals, Ceilidhs and pub quizzes; and regular groups such as Photography, RSPB, Gardening Club, Bowls Club and WI using the church building.

The Free Church has much to be proud of – reading Chris Curtis' list of ministerial students who have had internships here shows a positive legacy of the contribution of this church to the wider United Reformed Church. I enjoyed having four of those students, George Mwaura, Ruth Wilson and Josh Thomas who have since gone into URC ministry and Sandy Nunn who was a Council for World Mission intern.

One of the highlights of my ministry here has been being Chaplain to the Town Mayor for two years and leading the community Advent Services in the Centrum.

In addition to being faithful to its heritage, the church has continued to evolve with the changing times. We now use IT in worship, which has been a particular benefit since the Covid-19 pandemic. We set up a Tots and Carers group that serves parents and carers of young children and host local primary schools for key stage events. We became an Eco-friendly church. Elders have had to take on the role of Trustees as well as eldership. In September we conducted our first same gender wedding.

The congregation has experienced sorrow in the loss of many members over my time here, but also joy in welcoming new members, celebrating baptisms, baby blessings and marriages. We have shared tears, but also much laughter and happiness on numerous occasions. This spring/summer we had to endure building closure for the first time in all those years, but with an excellent Eldership and Finance & Property Group and Staff, who have been superb in adapting and accommodating to the situation.

Through it all people have remained faithful Christians and I am grateful to have been a part of your life and look forward to continuing serving as your minister in the coming years.

'Fear not my dearest friends for it is your Heavenly Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom' Luke 12.32

Catherine Ball

Ministers of word and sacrament – the last 40 years.....

We have been greatly privileged over the last 40 years to benefit from a rich tapestry of ministries – some actively employed, some actively retired, some on the way to future ministry. Of the six employed ministers we, of course, enjoy Catherine’s ministry together with the added bonus of Peter. And before that of course Kate and Donald McIlhagga, Bill Mahood, Eileen Springbett and Liz Byrne.

We nurtured two ministers in our family church/youth groups, Melanie Smith and Claire Gouldthorp. When Mel preached here a few years ago she spoke movingly of the way The Free Church influenced her journey to ordination.

We have also received much treasured and invaluable ministry from our, affectionately known, “House of Lords”, our retired ministers. Currently the Revds David Viles, Derek Newton and Roy Muttram. And before that, and equally valuable, Stanley Whiffen, David Dale, John Ballard (minister from 1948- 74 and who later retired back here), Cyril Franks and Ralph Ackroyd.

Others have been placed with us formally from Westminster for a period of time, others have worshipped with us whilst training. Recently we recall the many gifts brought to us by Josh Thomas, Ruth Wilson, Jacob Bali and George Mwaura, Before that we benefitted from getting to know David Hamblin, Liz Byrne and husband Ian Smith (both training at Westminster), Tim Richards, Jeanne Ennals, Neil Messer, the late Paul Breeze and wife Kate (who was training to be a CRCW). Then there was Carole Elphick, Simon Ellis, and Richard Eastman, Chris Wood, Margaret McKay, Dave Salsbury, Karen Knight and David Featonby together with their families and the much missed late Ann Sheldon. Many have gone on to play a part of the wider church at Synod level, many in training roles.

What a wealth of talent and loving ministry and hopefully they all took forward something of the vision of St Ives with them! I plead for forgiveness if I’ve missed anyone out!

Chris Curtis

(Details checked against the current URC year Book).



Revd Ruth Wilson



Revd Eileen Springbett



Revd Bill Mahood



Revd George Mwaura

Memories from Church members

ST IVES FREE CHURCH 1978

As a member at the time, and also a quantity Surveyor with a practice in Huntingdon, I was delighted to be asked to become Project Manager for the proposed redevelopment scheme in 1978. I felt privileged to be asked and very much enjoyed working with the church on this project for the next two years and beyond.....!

All accommodation was to be provided within the shell of the major area of the church, which would then release the Church Hall for sale for other purposes

The Architect was Dennis Adams from Ely (who died recently), he was brilliant throughout the whole project and continued to take a close interest in the church, attending several events here. He went on to work on several other URC and other related projects.



I very much enjoyed working with others on the project and this led indirectly to my experience of working with over 100 churches of various denominations over the following working years.

Having registered for the government Job Creation Scheme, selecting suitable workers was a very regular process on a weekly (sometimes daily!) procedure and we were very fortunate to have a very responsible and reliable 'Foreman' and 'Site Manager' team to ensure this procedure worked and the work was able to continue without any major delay. The quality of the work was very much due to the skills and experiences of our two site leaders.



I visited the Site every morning before going to the office. Sometimes I was delayed but overall I remained amazed and grateful as to the extent that the 'on site team' were so efficient and committed to the overall project.

The project was helped near completion by a group of Quakers doing mainly redecoration work and residing for the period in the Hall. On one occasion when they came to our house for usual ablutions, one of them emptied the entire water tank as his religion meant that he could only wash himself in running water even in the bath!

There are a number of equally amusing stories noted from the time, but overall we were so lucky to have groups or individuals like that who contributed to the progress of the scheme.

Martin Ballard

Diane Woodham and her daughter Katie talked about memories of the Free Church reopening in 1980. Katie says they couldn't go to the actual opening, because it was by invitation only, and they were too new. Before we left London in late August 1980 our Minister gave us a list of possible churches in the area of Elsworth, Fenstanton, St. Neots and two in Cambridge and St. Ives.

We had been shopping in St. Ives and looked out the church, so went there on the first Sunday – 2 adults and 3 teenagers. There was no noticeboard out, so we assumed the service would be at 11am. We got there early at 10.45, but the service had started at 10.30! It was held in the hall across Free Church Passage and it was packed. We stood in a sort of porch area and someone passed us out hymn books and said there would be room when the children came out. We couldn't all sit together but we found people very friendly. On the way home the kids said don't try any of those other churches.

Diane & Katie

One memory to cherish - but another to forget!

In May 1981 the Church Centre hosted 'An Evening of Victorian Music and Poetry' given by the pupils and staff of St Ivo School. The mixed choir, beautifully arranged on the staging, were singing a Victorian version of the National Anthem. At the end, with applause acknowledged, they went to sit down - at which point the singers on the rear row (mostly staff and including the headmaster!) disappeared from view, their chairs having tipped off the back of the staging. At first a hush then gradually, much to everyone's relief, individual faces began to appear and rearrange themselves as if nothing had happened. There may have been loud applause of relief. What I do remember vividly are my own personal moments of panic and intense anxiety at the thought of the church being sued for negligence on health and safety grounds. Fortunately no one was injured and the choir took it all with good grace. Nevertheless - a memory I like to forget.

But a memory to cherish occurred on a Sunday morning after worship around May of 1980. Building work had been going on for over a year and it was deemed safe for the congregation to be allowed into the new building after service that day for a 'first glimpse'. After service we were taken up onto the new first floor into the space that was to become the Centrum. It was one of those communal 'Wow moments' with folk all around being astonished and delighted with what they were seeing. The most amazing revelation was the level of brightness in the space due to the clear glass of the new windows - such a contrast to the rather dim light known previously due to a greenish tint in the glass of the old windows. I came away from that 'glimpse' visit thinking 'YES! This really is going to be a remarkable transformation!', **SMD**

Memories of the Free Church when it was about to be remodelled

David and I moved to Fenstanton from Leicestershire in the autumn of 1978, when David took a job in Cambridge and I subsequently started work at Papworth hospital. Having Congregational roots as students we were looking for a United Reformed church to worship at locally. Initially we attended Fenstanton URC and then decided to visit The Free Church to see what was happening there.

The first service we attended was just after the decision had been taken to go ahead with an ambitious plan to remodel the church so that it could be a seven days a week church serving the community as well. This was sometime in November 1978 and the church was very gloomy inside and the old fin heater rather smokey! However the congregation were very welcoming. For a period of time we alternated between Fenstanton and St. Ives, but David recalls we started attending regularly in January 1979 and we are still there some 40 years later!

We were persuaded to help out at a snack bar when we got to know some people really well between buttering rolls and clearing tables. This must have been the Easter snack bar which would have been the last one before the builders moved in on Tuesday 17th April, the day after Easter Monday.

Worship moved across to the hall on the other side of Free Church Passage and was quite a cosy affair. Our eldest daughter Louise was born in February 1980 and memorably she was christened in the old hall on 13th July 1980, just a few months before the grand re-opening and rededication service on the 27th September 1980.

A team of volunteers from the congregation was formed to finish off some of the painting and getting ready for the reopening. David was working in the porch whilst Jackie Ballard was up a ladder in the centrum painstakingly painting the grapes which adorn the top of the pillars. I think there is photographic evidence of this!

Since then there have been many more snack bars, and notable events, laughter and tears as we have shared in fellowship, and two more Duffett family christenings for Jonathan and Claire!

Barbara and David Duffett

Memories



*The Church Hall - built in 1811
and formerly known as
"The Independent Chapel".*

I had been with my new friends at The Free Church for just over a year, although my daughters had been there well before me.

I began worshipping in the hall over the way as work was well in progress when I started. I can remember the excited build up to preparing for the opening, and was so pleased that I qualified for a place in the congregation for the opening service as I had only been attending for just over a year. The biggest memory I have is when some members of F.U.R.Y. carried the cross in, in preparation for it to be placed on the wall in the Apse. I remember it being a very moving service and was so proud to be a very small part of the celebrations.

I asked my eldest daughter what she could remember. Not a lot came the reply. The thing that sticks in her memory is that when she first went to the church before the conversion, was how high the ceiling was.

I remember being told that the organ was originally in the Apse and everything seemed dark. So imagine my surprise when I first walked into this wonderfully restored church, from the first moment I felt comfortable and welcomed.

Freda Barnard

The Free Church Bowls and Social Club

Following the reconstruction of the Free Church building, Tom McQuitty was quick to spot the potential for an activity with which he had been very involved in his native Ireland. He suggested that the new church hall was ideal as a venue for "short mat bowls". His infectious enthusiasm, together with that of his wife Margaret, was formalised on Monday 11 October 1981, when a proposal for the creation of the club was drafted for the Church Meeting. The club was to be sponsored by the Free Church and the officers (who must be Church Members) were the Minister (President); T. McQuitty (Chairman); S Denham (Vice Chair), P Simpson (Secretary); W Pywell (Treasurer) The initial annual subscription was to be £5 per season. By last season the subs had soared to £6, an increase of 20% ... but spread over 39 years that is not, perhaps, too bad.



The club continued to play without interruption until March 2020, when, like so many other groups, it was forced to suspend its meetings. Over the years we have welcomed both new and more experienced bowlers. Our thanks must go to Tom and Margaret McQuitty who got us underway nearly 40 years ago.

The club has continued with a mix of Church Members and friends from the town, and must be doing something right to get people out willingly on Monday evenings, in the cold, dark winter months. It has always been a club where we have played "properly", but never too "seriously", and has been enjoyed by many, many people over the years. Indeed, we have some members who come along not to play, but to enjoy the friendly fellowship.

Andy Fleming

Re-development of Free Church building

I remember.....attending a Special Church Meeting in October 1978 where plans to 'rehabilitate' the building were put before us. The Architect asked if, without looking up, anyone could describe the church ceiling/roof interior. There being no response we were invited to look up to see how lovely the wooden interior is. It came home to me then how tiny and distant we were at ground level; how wasteful to heat that huge cavern above, Sundays only. Utilising the space above us made absolute sense.

Day Care Centre



A portion of the funding for the building works was provided by Hunts District Council to enable us to accommodate the newly formed St Ives Day Care Centre. A lift was necessary to access the Centrum and a bathroom installed (downstairs, near the kitchen) to facilitate hair

dressing, chiropody, and bathing if necessary. We also enjoyed the luxury of two rows of high-backed, soft chairs with arm rests, for use on Sundays. The Centrum, of necessity, was always very, very warm!



A fleet of drivers was recruited to bring attendees to Day Centre from within the town and surrounding villages. I was one of those volunteer drivers. Mondays were the days I dreaded: negotiating the market stalls to gain access to the back of the church to drop off or pick up was not my idea of fun! One of my regular passengers, a very elderly gentleman from Needingworth, told me each time we passed the Roman Catholic Church



Bob Dicker
Leader of Day Centre

"I 'odded them bricks to build that church". Years later I learned what a really interesting story that was!

The Day Care Centre, after many years of fund raising, acquired their own purpose-built building in Ramsey Road. Their departure left a real void in the life of The Free Church.



Lin Fleming

Some major changes in 40 years

This is a brief look at some of the major changes we have made to our building during the forty years since its re-opening.

In 1980, we had created two separate business units within the ground floor of our building with access only to and from Free Church Passage - a haberdashery and a dress shop called 'The Passage Shop'. Rents from these businesses had serviced some loans taken out to fund the remodelling project. After ten years, the church had taken back both these business units and created internal access to each of them from the foyer.

The dress shop unit was the first to be transformed into a ground floor office / reception desk for the Church Centre which it shared with the St Ives Volunteer Bureau. What is now the Just Sharing office became an Area Office for Christian Aid with access from the outer porch. The haberdashery shop was to follow to be transformed into a 'youth coffee bar' which sadly failed within a year. It was easily transformed to become our first church coffee shop open to the public. Some will remember the bench seating on the left side walls.



By 1991, it was clear that Mary Cox's Traidcraft 'stall in the hall' was doing so well that it required a space of its own where its ever expanding array of fairly traded goods could be permanently displayed - in other words 'a shop'. And so in February 1992, Mary's stall moved into share part of the ground floor office space. Eventually and with its brilliant name 'Just Sharing', it filled the whole space and became the shop we know today, now managed by Sue Billings. When the Christian Aid Office closed, its space became a much needed office for Just Sharing.

In 1999 it was felt that the foyer lacked a 'focal point' for visitors entering through the Benton doors - immediately in front of them were just the solid double doors to the hall. So it was decided to move the hall doors to the left and replace with a large illuminated display wall. This would be directly ahead of visitors as they entered the foyer and create a much more welcoming feel. That has been very successful and remains in place today.

By 2004, our coffee shop Tookeys was still using the servery designed for the youth coffee bar and it was obvious that this arrangement and the seating was not coping with the increasing number of visitors. So Tookeys underwent a major makeover that year. A new modern servery was created, the old bench seating was replaced with individual tables and chairs and a new vinyl floor and lighting system was installed.



In 2012 and after 30 years of constant use, the main kitchen was showing its age and so underwent a major upgrade. New stainless steel worktops and storage cabinets were introduced throughout together with a new larger oven and extraction unit. Perhaps the most important piece of equipment was the fast high volume dishwasher which has proved so beneficial.



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As well as these internal changes, major improvements and repairs have been carried out externally. In the last 40 years, the spire has been fully scaffolded twice for remedial work. And in 1996, the slate tiles to our steeply sloping roof were completely replaced following a successful campaign to 'Raise the Roof'!



I feel sure that the two architects most closely connected to our building - John Tarring (1864) and Dennis Adams (1980) - would both approve of the changes we have made in the last 40 years. **SMD**



Porch Chapel Prayers



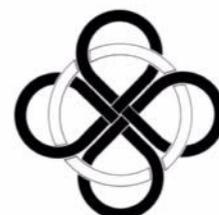
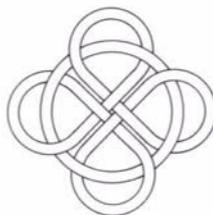
'Prayer isn't a matter of sentimentality. It is consecrated willpower.' The chapel and daily prayers came into being based on the Iona Community. It's proximity to the market square was to enable availability to all who might come in from the street. 40 years later people are still entering and writing their prayer requests, entrusting that their words will be repeated in the daily prayers of intercession.

For 40 years there has been a succession of prayer leaders who enable this daily act of worship to continue. For those who query prayers of intercession

and ask 'Why should the good of anyone depend on the prayer of another?' We can only answer with the return question: 'Why should our love be powerless to help others?' Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.



Jo Dyke & Geraldine Swain



Memories of a Minute Taker

Ian and I moved to St Ives in July 1970 and our sons, Duncan and Dominic were baptised by Revd John Ballard that autumn. Duncan started at Eastfield School where the head was Vine McGill. Later she became President of the Cromwell Quilters who made our pulpit fall (Stewart still has all the original possible designs!).

When there was a public meeting to explain what the church intended to do Ian asked me to take notes, which I did. There was much discussion about acoustics (concerns completely unfounded as it turned out!).

Someone noticed me taking notes in shorthand and I was asked to minute the meetings of the Project Management Committee. Though I wasn't keen to start with, I soon realised I was lucky to be involved. Full minutes were required using my electric typewriter but with no electronic printers to assist. Changing a very austere Victorian space, only used once a week, into a modern and useful space for both congregation and community was to be an expensive and complicated project. Members of the Project Management team are detailed elsewhere in this special edition.



The Committee met frequently to ensure everyone was up-to-date with progress. As work progressed Ian and I would go to look through the windows on Free Church Passage to see the progress. We were very alarmed before the floor went in as the whole structure seemed merely to be supported by the slim Victorian pillars, encased with concrete at Hall level but a distinctive feature in the worship space.

The first main user of the building was to be the St Ives Day Centre and so their requirements were incorporated in the plans. They were to use the Centrum for their activities, using the Warren Room to make refreshments. Disabled toilets were installed upstairs and down. Lunch was to be eaten in the Hall so a large kitchen was placed adjacent. There was also a bathroom/therapy room which later was converted to toilets for the Playgroup and then the Tots Group. The old vestry at the rear of the building was retained as a meeting room (now known as the Lounge).

Some highlights of our meetings:-

- The designer and maker of our cross appeared at one meeting with a sketch on a small piece of paper and he explained his thinking behind the cross combined with the circle depicting the world
- David Peace, a local, nationally renowned glass engraver, brought his design for the front door for approval.
- The architect was firm in his view that the carpet should be light green (later replaced by a muted green/blue) and that the chairs be pale in colour. Some wanted pews retained so some were placed around the edges.
- The brickwork in the apse was somewhat imperfect and it was decided to cover it with a lightweight curtain. It became dirty and fire regulations made replacement prohibitive.
- The capitals at the top of the pillars were to be painted in pale gold, red and blue as a token to the Victorian origins. I remember Jackie Ballard and Denny Gaudin painting them whilst wobbling atop long ladders.
- The decision to have the chapel at the front of the building was made at an early stage. It was to provide space for both daily prayers and also be available for personal quiet and reflection. Originally the main wall was covered by a heavy red curtain donated by David Bryant, however the wall behind became damp so it had to be removed. In 2011 the chapel was kindly refurbished by Freda Barnard in memory of her husband, Peter.

(Abridged) Verónica Angus

Community Lunch Club

Where did it all begin?

It began in May 1989 for a 3-month trial. As this was so successful it re-opened in September of that year every week except for 3 weeks over Christmas.

And Why?

To serve the community, young and old, single and married, mums,dads and children, working people.

Aim

The aim was to offer a 2/3 course meal for between £2.50 & £3.50. Small portions were available and charged accordingly.



All meals were home cooked and included many family favourites. Every year in December, Christmas lunch took place for between 80 & 100 people. Great fun for everyone!

The lunch Club was run by Freda Barnard with many volunteers including Elsie Irvine and Joyce Creaton and later run by Joyce Taylor.



Congratulations to the Free Church on it's achievement in providing a Community Centre for the town of St. Ives for the past 40 years. St.Ives Women's Institute, whose purpose is to bring together and further educate women of all ages, has enjoyed it's amenities since it opened and is sincerely grateful for the opportunities this has given.

Elizabeth Owens, St Ives WI

The Free Church

Here you have a Welcoming Church dedicated to everyone, whose doors welcome every single person who comes through them. **CRUSE Bereavement, Huntingdonshire**

In any project there are amusing incidents.

On one occasion, the workmen demolishing an interior wall near the porch complained that every time he hit a brick, the whole wall on which he was perched, rocked. He climbed down, just as the wall collapsed, sending a huge cloud of dust billowing out of the front door, and over the handbag stall of a marketeer, whose prayer was 'appropriate', and who never used that pitch again.

At the beginning of April, the minister received a letter apparently from the Golden Lion Hotel, alleging that one of their lady guests had been observed by several 'leering' workmen from the church window opposite. She was threatening legal action. The letter said that 'I have persuaded the young lady to meet with me in my office today at two o'clock in order to discuss the matter, which discussion will be without prejudice to any future legal action. She informs me that she can identify the men involved and I therefore suggest it might be in all our interests if you were to attend the meeting. Yours faithfully, Rolf I Alsop, Director'. Mr Peters, Mr Luke, Mr Ballard and the minister made preparations to attend the meeting, before they realised that Rolf I Alsop was an anagram of April Fools.

'Extract taken from 'Not An Easy Church' by Dr Mary Carter.

Finances – the early days....



As the building reopened it was renamed “The Free Church Centre” to mark a new beginning and a renewed relationship with the local community. At the same time it was agreed that the two complementary but integrated aspects of the church should have separate accounts. The reasons were valid at the time for various reasons. The congregation now had a lovely bright and WARM building but it was important that they didn’t rely on external rent to pay for all of this. The concept of “tithes” was important. A biblical instruction to give freely what one could afford (2 Corinthians 9) to church or charity. We were asked annually to decide what we could afford to give to promote the work of the church. It was also felt important that the groups we wanted to encourage, especially those related to mental and physical health should not feel they were “subsidising” the church.

So two accounts were set up. One to deal with direct giving from the congregation and the other dealt with everything practical including setting rents, paying for utilities and staff etc. A proportion of those costs were met by the first account to ensure the church “paid” for its own cleaning, heating, admin etc as it would have done if no remodelling had been done. Alan was Centre Treasurer twice in those years for a considerable period of time. No on-line banking in those days so many Saturday mornings in the office writing cheques!

Rents for user groups were set so that commercial organisations paid most and charities and self-help groups paid least – a principle that still stands today. As a charity in our own right now, we cannot give free use to groups, however worthy, if they are not part of our core purpose as a charity. Even Just Sharing pays for use of its space and amenities.

But times and attitudes change (as does legislation). In time the use of the phrase Free Church Centre seemed to suggest a “them and us” which was never intended and keeping the two accounts separate became overly complicated. So back to one account and the inclusive name “The Free Church” to embrace all that we do in God’s name in this place and following our mission statement.

The Free Church (United Reformed) aims to provide a focus for Christian Worship and Community Development within St. Ives



We see it as our mission to promote the Christian Gospel by:

- Providing for personal and public worship.
- Enriching the spiritual and cultural life of the community.
- Providing a welcoming environment for all ages.
- Responding to the needs of individuals and of groups, especially the most vulnerable in society.
- Promoting issues of global peace and justice, fair trade and ecology.



**The Free Church is a Fair Trade Church
and an eco-congregation
The Free Church is a member of
Churches Together in St Ives.**

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Room Bookings should be made through the Church Office

The Free Church is committed to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults.

Editors: Mary Anthony and Christine Curtis

Acknowledgements and Thanks

For the congregation of the 1970s to contemplate raising nearly a quarter of a million pounds (over 1 million today) to fund an ambitious building project – seemed a formidable task. But so compelling were the visions for the future ministry of the church within the community, many church members stepped forward and put their particular skills to work for the benefit of the church by taking on leading roles in the preparation and management of the project. We acknowledge and give thanks for them today.

Rev Donald McIlhagga, MA, Minister and all the members of the church's Project Management Committee and the Project Design Group

Mr Frank Page, FCA – Honorary Project Accountant
Messrs Geoffrey Caink, Philip Simpson, Patrick Miles and all the members of the Appeals Committee
Mr Richard Helm – for work on the organ
Mr Frank Enfield and Mr Arthur Burling for their advice and practical help

In addition, we acknowledge and give thanks for the professional skills of the architect and of those who in effect became the core of the church's own building construction company' created to organise and carry out the work. They were:

Mr Dennis Adams, FRIBA, Architect
Mr Martin J Ballard, JP, ARICS, AIQS, Project Manager of Fellows & Ballard
Mr Laurie Peters, Foreman followed by **Mr Bill Churchman and Mr Frank Berry**
Mr Author Luke Office Manager
Freeman / Kershaw – Heating Engineers
Mr Derek Broughton and Hephers of St Ives – Electricians
Oldmans of St Ives – structural steelwork
Cromwell Ironmasters of St Ives – decorative metalwork
Alan Scarrow – mobile staging by St Michael's Adult Training Centre
G King & Son of Norwich – for refurbishment and renewal of leaded lights

And we gratefully acknowledge again all the help we received from the Officers of the Manpower Services Commission, the Huntingdon Job Centre, the County Social Services Committee, the District Council Planning Department and Building Inspectorate and the County Chief Fire Officer.

And finally to the bricklayers, carpenters, plasterers and others of the building workforce - we thank you for your skills and hard work that turned our vision into reality'.

