

**Hinckley United Reformed Church**  
**(Congregational Church) 1961 – 2012**

**Highlights of the church years compiled**  
**for the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the congregation**  
**by Phillip Lindley, Church Archivist.**

This quote from the Church Secretary's annual report, January 1969, is as true today as it was when written -

*“The life of any church is not necessarily made up of big events; and the changing pattern is not always of a major sort. Some of our work is sheer dedicated slogging, supported by much faith and hope for the future.”*

Our members and friends have demonstrated over the years their faithfulness, love of their church, willingness to serve and to use their talents and skills to further Christ's cause in Hinckley and beyond.

1961



Minister and Deacons 1961

- *New English Bible* introduced into services
- 190 members
- £50 allocated towards staging of Tercentenary Exhibition (in 1962)



Sunday worship 1961

1962

- Celebrations for the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the congregation
- Borough Tercentenary Fund set up, to be used for relief of needy at home and abroad of any race or colour, with start-up donation of £100 from church funds
- Miss Enid Forryan volunteered to be “church historian”

1963

- Westfield Congregational Church members vote to unite with the Borough Church – 15 members and 40 children were expected to transfer



Westfield Congregational Church

- Estimate of £191.1s. 5d accepted for the repainting of the church, schoolrooms, Institute, covered yard and kitchen exterior



Old Kitchen

- Morning service broadcast by the BBC on 4<sup>th</sup> July
- Compensation proceeds paid for increased usage of Right of Way at side of church by neighbouring shop premises to be used for the improvement and construction of a new entrance to schoolrooms and church on south side of the building

#### 1964

- 201 members

#### 1965

- Communion table, lectern and Garratt memorial cross from the former Westfield Church are now in the Borough Church
- Minister suggests that as there were a very large number of children in the town with no Sunday school connection that the church should commence a cinema club to try to connect with them

#### 1966

- BBC Home Service broadcast a service from the church on 13<sup>th</sup> March
- Rev. Clifford Thomas resigns as minister (to move to Brentwood, Essex)
- Rev. Gordon Baker of Rochester accepts the call to Hinckley, and is inducted as minister
- Membership 190

#### 1967

- Holy Communion services regularised to be every first Sunday evening and every third Sunday morning
- Proposed basis of union of Congregational and Presbyterian churches in England and Wales published
- Offertory plates replaced with bags



Primary Department Christmas party 1967

## 1968

- Centenary of the church in The Borough (former chapel in Stockwell Head occupied as Grewcock's hosiery factory, and now demolished)
- Crèche started
- 196 members

## 1969

- Appeal and restoration fund launched
- Form of Sunday worship discussed – members wanted sermon at end of service followed by short prayers and a hymn

- Printed order of service thought useful but prevents any movement of the Spirit

## 1970

- Late Miss Mabel Smith left c£9000 to the church – income from the bequest to be set aside for rebuilding the church
- Alterations to the sanctuary and new kitchen
- Place of prayer in the life of the church discussed
- Assemblies of God ask to rent the Westfield Centre for their services
- Meetings to discuss the proposed Congregational/Presbyterian Scheme of Union
- Young Wives now known as the Wednesday Club, and open to all ladies

## 1971

- Opportunities for evangelism on the Hollycroft Estate discussed
- Autumn *Sunbeam Fayre* to raise funds to decorate the church interior
- Discussions on the proposed Scheme of Union – concerns over church governance, especially over principle of ordination for life of elders which was fundamentally foreign to the Congregational way.
- The Congregational Church in England & Wales Assembly voted 89% in favour of the Union; the Presbyterian Assembly voted 79.3% in favour, and the scheme was referred back to local churches for their decision on whether or not to join the proposed United Reformed Church by 17<sup>th</sup> December
- New boiler installed

- Pulpit obtained from a closed church in Stretton-under-Fosse, and renovated for use in the Borough Church
- Church Meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> October votes on the Scheme of Union, but fails to raise the required majority [43 votes cast, of which 28 in favour and 15 against. 75% of votes needed for approval.]
- Christmas internal postbox proved successful (continued until 2010)

## 1972



First church family picnic 1972

- Congregational Church in England & Wales reported that 1,668 churches had voted in favour of the Scheme of Union (73.7% of the churches)
- Sanctuary redecorated and re-dedicated
- Rev. Gordon Baker expressed the wish to own his own house and the deacons consider the future of the manse (17 Station Road)
- Church approached for possible artefacts to be donated or loaned for a proposed museum in the town

- Church Meetings discuss standards of Church Membership and whether the Roll of Members should include inactive members
- Approval given for the Leicestershire & Rutland Federation of Women`s Institutes to hold W.I. Markets on church premises
- Tea/coffee before Church Meetings discontinued
- Special Church Meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> October votes in favour of the Scheme of Union (61 votes cast, of which 50 were in favour)

## 1973

- Last Church Meeting as a Congregational Church held on 2<sup>nd</sup> May
- First Church Meeting as Hinckley URC held on 23<sup>rd</sup> May
- Leicestershire District of URC has 20 churches, 11 ministers and 1,528 members, and Hinckley URC has the second largest membership (after St.Stephen`s, Leicester)
- Gordon Baker purchases his own house and vacates the manse (subsequently let to firm of solicitors for £1,405 per annum, exclusive of rates)
- Holiday Club led by John Pugh

## 1974

- Holiday Club led by Ronald & Marilyn Blick
- New chairs purchased for choir use
- Nativity in Dance

## 1975

- First family New Year Party
- 7<sup>th</sup> Hinckley Guides re-started



- Gordon Baker interim moderator at Nuneaton URC
- c.120 attend annual family picnic
- Paul Floe, student from Manchester College, leads holiday club
- First house group formed by Glenda Dodds
- Guide Company formed, led by Cynthia Lines and Mollie Harris
- Church fair opened by the Mayor

## 1976

- URC General Secretary, Rev. Arthur McArthur, preaches
- First concert by the Borough Singers
- 94 at annual family picnic at Bosworth Park
- Holiday Club led by Paul Quilter, from Manchester College
- Flower festival – *The Creation* – in aid of Groby URC
- Assembly of God church moves out of Westfield Centre
- Second-hand Renault car purchased for the minister's use (“as the Elders considered his use of a moped in all weathers was unsatisfactory”)

## 1977

- 10th Hinckley cubs formed, led by Fred Lines, Margaret Garratt, Pat Jotham and J. Wood
- Church secretary, Barbara Blower, gives the very first annual secretary's report during a Sunday service (27<sup>th</sup> February)
- Elders give a decisive “no” to allowing *Housey, Housey, lotto*, or bingo to be played on church premises
- Holiday Club led by David Webb, from Manchester College
- Document relating to possible merger talks with Hinckley Methodist Church approved the setting up of a working party to study and work out the implications of uniting the two churches, and inviting any other Hinckley church to join the discussions
- URC Moderator, Rev. John Young, preaches



*Winter Wonderland bazaar 1977*

## 1978

- Scout group`s new leader is Margaret Garratt
- Merger of URC and Methodist churches in Hinckley discussed
- Centenary of organ
- Holiday Club led by church members – *Where are you God?*
- Flower festival – *Pilgrim`s Progress* (John Bunyon 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary)
- 19 Station Road purchased for £26,000, and planning permission obtained to use premises for offices

## 1979

- Sunday School banner repaired
- 19 Station Road let to firm of accountants
- No Holiday Club this year
- *Upstairs Downstairs* bazaar

## 1980

- All uniformed organisations required to parade on Sundays when parade services take place, and Sunday School members to attend the whole service too
- A 1979 *Avenger* car purchased for the minister to use



*Play My joy and my crown performed*



*Pulpit falls presented by ladies who made them*

## 1981

- Parade services held one a month
- Junior Church production of *A grain of mustard seed* (Robert Raikes)



- Holiday Club led by Chris Ford, from Manchester College



- Exploratory meeting to form Venture Scouts group
- *Galaxy Fair* held in November

## 1982

- Holiday Club led by Robert Barthram, from Manchester College



- Flower festival – *In celebration of the Bible* – with the Bible Society

## 1983

- Martin Ballard appointed to prepare a feasibility study of the use and structure of the church premises for now and in the future. Findings report “*in view of the uneconomical use and high cost of maintaining the present building it will seem prudent to give detailed consideration to the development potential of the site*”. Options presented:
  1. Re-develop site in conjunction with partners to provide shared community/church premises



2. Re-develop site as offices/shops with a purpose built church at first floor level
  3. Removing the church from The Borough to a new location
  4. Alter the existing buildings
- Church writes to Martin Ballard (30<sup>th</sup> May): “*If starting from scratch the ideal accommodation for the church would be*” –
    1. Worship area to seat 300 people
    2. One room to accommodate 100 people
    3. Five rooms large enough for 20 – 25 people
    4. A Minister`s and Elders` vestry
    5. A church office
    6. Good catering facilities
    7. Adequate cloakroom, toilets and washing facilities
    8. Sufficient car parking area, doubling as a games area
  - Mums & Toddlers group formed on Wednesday mornings
  - Halloween Fair in November



## 1984

- John Wright (Modern Design Group) appointed architect for church development project
- WRVS luncheon club started
- Holiday Club led by Celia Whitman
- Church Meeting votes to repair/modernise existing buildings, following extensive investigation of practicalities and costs of all options



Flower festival 1984

1985



Holiday Club members and helpers 1985

- Church Meetings discuss the feasibility study working party's recommendations for first phases of the redevelopment of church buildings –
  1. Re-roofing the Institute and making good drain pipes and brickwork
  2. Alterations and improvements to exterior and interior of the church
- Resolution passed that "*It is proposed that the land and buildings formerly known as the Westfield Congregational Church ... be sold and the proceeds used for the redevelopment of the buildings of Hinckley URC.*"
- *Benjamin*, an oratorio by Philip Harris, performed in November
- Medieval Market (bazaar)

- Church member Andrew Willetts begins his training for the ministry



Fancy dress prize winners at the *Medieval Market*



*Benjamin* performance



Youth Club taking part in Hinckley Carnival 1985



Flower Festival 1986

## 1986

- Feasibility study working party publishes a booklet outlining the proposals, recommendations, and approximate costings of the redevelopment for discussion
- Church building listed Grade II by English Heritage
- J.H.Mason & Son purchases the former Westfield Congregational Church premises for £30,000
- John Wright (architect) instructed to draw up plans for the redevelopment of the sanctuary building and hall block. The Church will decide, when plans are prepared, which areas of the work will be carried through and in what order



Minister and Elders 1986



The Institute block is re-roofed in 1986

## 1987

- 100 new chairs and 100 copies of *Mission Praise* purchased
- Beaver colony established
- Andrew and Debbie Dawson led Holiday Club



- *Nursery Rhyme* bazaar – photograph of fancy dress entrants below



- Special Church Meeting (76 present) on 18<sup>th</sup> November chaired by the Provincial Moderator, Rev. John Slow, discussed the proposed redevelopment plans. Nothing was “change for change sake” as the desire for redevelopment had begun in the 1960s. The most controversial items in the plans were the removal of the pews from the ground floor of the sanctuary and the installation of spiral stairs to the gallery. The scheme would be funded from gifts, loans, covenants, grants, existing funds and rental income for the Station Road properties. The feasibility study working party recommendations presented for a vote were –
  1. The scheme as presented for the church front and worship area to be accepted
  2. The scheme as presented for the rear hall area be accepted

- Special Church Meeting (71 present) on 25<sup>th</sup> November, chaired by Provincial Moderator, Rev. John Slow, voted on the resolutions presented on 18<sup>th</sup> November –
  1. 2 against. Overwhelmingly carried
  2. Carried

Rev. John Slow ended the meeting - *“Thank you for dealing with major matter in responsible manner, motivated by the love of the church. Now the vote has been taken I can say that those who built the sanctuary had a great deal of faith, vision and daring. Some may be afraid that they are disloyal to the past. Now go ahead and make it a reality. Go in faith and achieve.”*



Beavers celebrate their first birthday

## 1988

- Launch of £160,000 appeal for renovations
- Appeals Committee, Monitoring Group, and New Manse Committee appointed
- J.H.Mason & Son appointed to undertake the building work
- Advertisement placed in *Reform* for the sale of the pews
- Talent Scheme ran from April to November with pound coins being offered for increase
- 65 Station Road purchased for use as a manse

## 1989

- Renovation work commences



Final service before renovation work begins in the sanctuary



New spiral stairs to gallery installed



The upstairs hall was used for worship during the renovation of the sanctuary.



Stone-lined well found under floor of sanctuary



Minister and guests at rededication of the sanctuary.



- Rev. John Slow, Moderator, and Rev. Bernard Thorogood, URC General Secretary, take part in service of rededication of the sanctuary, 16<sup>th</sup> September



Renovation underway in the rear hall

- Thanksgiving service for renovation of rear halls, 3<sup>rd</sup> December



*Damnable Barngoers* exhibition  
(300 years of non-conformity in Leicestershire.)

- Andrew & Sally Willett (HURC members) become ministers of a Gloucestershire group of churches
- Leslie Jennings celebrates 60 years as organist
- 127 members

1990



Minister and Elders 1990.



Jean and Gordon Baker



- Rev. Gordon Baker retires as minister (final service led on 11<sup>th</sup> February). Rev. David Gardner and Rev. Conrad Husk serve as interim moderators
- Mite Scheme introduced
- Tredegar Orpheus Male Voice Choir concert



Tredegar Orpheus Male Voice Choir concert  
in aid of the renovation appeal fund

- Flower festival – *Favourite hymns*
- Marilyn Baker concert
- Rev. Malcolm Clarke accepts the call to Hinckley, and is inducted as minister on 13<sup>th</sup> September



Induction of Rev. Malcolm Clarke, 13<sup>th</sup> September 1990



Wedding of Malcolm and Jane Clarke, 8<sup>th</sup> December 1990

## 1991

- Total cost of renovations reported as £189,831.45



“Senior” members enjoy the annual supper  
in the renovated rear hall

- Methodist form of Covenant Service introduced to re-dedicate the congregation anew to God`s work and in supporting each other in the faith
- *Wednesday at One* starts
- JCC Band concert
- 7<sup>th</sup> Hinckley Rainbows formed
- Weekly Bible reading notes on Sunday notices introduced



First fellowship Sunday lunch, 1991

## 1992

- Andrew Philpott (HURC member) runs the London Marathon for youth work funds



- Tredegar Orpheus Male Voice Choir concert
- Discussion on purchase of pew Bibles and *Mission Praise*



Church family picnic at Tamworth Castle grounds

- Junior Church start to sponsor Mexican girl Lixania`s education
- Prayer Fellowship sheet circulated and meeting for prayer and Bible study introduced
- 123 members

### 1993

- Chants to continue to be sung after poll showed majority in favour
- Penny Neate commissioned for service in Madagascar sponsored by Council for World Mission
- East Midlands Provincial Moderator, Rev. Malcolm Hanson, and wife, visit during their 500 mile cycle ride around the province



- Organist, Chris Banks` Playathon to raise money for Save the Children
- Marilyn Baker concert
- Flower festival – theme *Churches Alive*. Churches Alive involved 12 churches in the area, and aimed to help the people of the various churches to get to know one another by working together, and to communicate to others a knowledge of the churches and Christian organisations in the community
- 133 members



Holiday Club 1993.



Storyland Christmas fair 1993.

## 1994

- *On Fire* event
- John Mason gives the first computer for the church office
- Youth band formed
- Children`s workers from 12 local churches meet to share and learn under leadership of John Marshall
- Church 2000 – committees set up to look at ways forward in administration, pastoral care, young peoples` work, and in helping people of all ages to develop their spiritual life
- Church open for the town`s fun fair in November – an opportunity to encourage folk to come in, look around and meet people in the church and ask questions. This has continued on an annual basis ever since.



Sisterhood celebrated its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1994.



Congregation on the church steps, 1994

## 1995

- Mission Statement introduced
- JCC Orchestra concert



The Forties Bazaar with Maria Swain and Kath Abbott

- House groups established for Bible study and prayer

- Young people attend *Spring Harvest* for the first time (photograph below)



- Anne Brown appointed Personal Assistant to the minister
- David Crick becomes organist
- 138 members

1996

- Holiday Club – *Chattabox*



- Portfolio groups to cover the day-to-day running of the church
- Call for 200 “prayers” for children and young people’s work
- 132 members

1997

- 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sunday School – year of celebration focussing on children and young people in the church past and present



- Holiday clubs - *Going Bananas* led by John Marshall and *Awesome*



- *Kids for Christ* launched (Sunday School)

- Church Meetings opposed the URC General Assembly resolution 19 relating to the ordination of ministers living in homosexual relationships
- Mayor, David Wood, sleeps out for the homeless, on church steps
- Website set up for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary

## 1998

- *Mission Week* led by Dierdre Williams
- Links with South Korea and Nepal established



The Hur family with Mike and Cynthia Bowler

- Minister on sabbatical, studying “What is a minister for?”



- Organ placed on National Register of Historic Organs by the British Institute of Organ Studies
- HALO *Light Party* (alternative to Halloween)
- Support given to establishing a Christian bookshop in the Westfield Room on Monday evenings (Good News Bookshop)
- Station Road manse to be sold and new manse purchased



Farewell to the Hur family on the church steps, 1998

## 1999

- Open Church policy to continue with the church open Monday – Friday 9am – 12.30pm except Wednesday when open 9am – 2pm
- 26 Windrush Drive purchased as the new manse (£128,950)
- Minister and family move into the new manse
- 65 Station Road manse sold (£71,000)
- Good News Bookshop extends its opening hours
- Role and distribution of *Contact* magazine surveyed

## 2000

- Vision 2010 introduced
- Coffee no longer to be regularly served after Sunday morning services
- *Fairs past and present* exhibition generated over 600 visitors to the church
- Good News Bookshop closes, and plans for a new bookshop are drawn up
- Keith and Tineka Holmes set up an Alpha course
- Large print Bibles purchased in memory of Philip Harris
- Kitchen refurbished



Wednesday At One members 2000.



## 2001

- Church Life profile undertaken of the congregation
- The Vine Christian Bookshop and cafe opens in the Institute Block

## 2002

- BBC Radio Leicester broadcasts a service on Easter Sunday
- LCD projector tried in worship for screening hymns, videos, pictures, etc.
- Pilots group for children aged 5 – 10 launched



Queen`s Golden Jubilee fellowship lunch 2002

## 2003

- LCD projector and laptop pc purchased for use in worship
- Belarus Children`s Choir concert (first visit)
- Moderator of General Assembly, Rev. Alistair Pratt, preaches
- Church Meeting agrees that wherever possible fairtrade products be used within church premises
- Independent Organ Advisers Association survey the organ
- Child Protection Policy approved



Lighting the Advent candles

## 2004

- Elders hold series of away days to look at the prayer life of the church, use of the church`s central location, worship issues, and the visual impact on the community
- Guides disbanded
- International Friendship Centre opens (joint initiative with Living Rock Church, Stoney Stanton)



Singing carols on the church steps, December 2004

## 2005

- Church becomes a Fairtrade Church
- £100,000 needed for organ restoration
- Advertise for a youthworker
- 113 members

## 2006

- Organ restoration appeal - £108,515 raised



Fund raising for the organ appeal

- Victor Vargas, Careforce volunteer from Colombia, comes to work with children and young people



Victor Vargas

- Church garden renewal project underway
- 104 members

## 2007

- HURC supports the Street Pastor project
- Renovated organ dedicated and inaugural recital given by Dame Gillian Weir
- Victor Vargas, Careforce volunteer from Colombia, to stay for another year
- *AlterNativity* hosted (now annual event)
- Beaver colony disbanded
- Christmas toys and gifts to go to the Elim Pentecostal Church, Kensington, Liverpool, as the Rock Church has closed



Elim Pentecostal Church



Randriamahavorisoa family visiting Andilamena, Madagascar, to see progress on the church being built with the support of Hinckley URC.



Advent witness 2007

## 2008

- Seleta, Careforce volunteer from Zambia
- Rev. Malcolm Clarke to serve as interim moderator at Daventry URC
- Rev. Malcolm Clarke`s weight loss is sponsored for the Mission Fund (Nepal, Madagascar and YWAM) – c. 2 stone lost
- Scout troop disbanded
- 98 members



Easter witness 2008

## 2009

- *Kids for Christ* re-launched as *Search*
- Flower festival – *God`s gifts and promises*
- 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sisterhood
- 98 members

## 2010

- Vision 2015 launched
- Narcisse, Careforce volunteer from Cameroon
- Sisterhood disbands, Tuesday Fellowship for older members launched



Narcisse at a Tuesday Fellowship meal



S@10 launched in 2010  
(children`s activities on Saturdays at 10am)

- Paul Bulima, Careforce volunteer from Uganda



- Upper hall re-decorated
- 92 members

## 2011

- *Bible Wonderland* exhibition
- Joe Goodman, during his gap year, goes to Madagascar to teach English and to visit our partner church in Andilemena
- New website launched [www.hinckleyurc.org.uk](http://www.hinckleyurc.org.uk)
- Crux Theatre Company based at the church
- Prayer Diaries distributed to help us to pray systematically and regularly for members of the congregation and the wider church family
- *Sunday Club* launched on 23<sup>rd</sup> October, for children aged 5 – 11.
- E100 Bible reading scheme
- Margaret Marshall undertakes her TLS placement at the church, and qualifies as an accredited Lay Preacher
- 95 members

## 2012

- 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the congregation celebrated throughout the year
- Church on BBC East Midlands News and Radio Leicester in February following vandal damage to windows



- *Essential Jesus* Bible reading scheme
- Rev. Roberta Rominger, General Secretary of the URC preaches on 26<sup>th</sup> February
- Rev. Peter Meek, Moderator of the East Midlands Province of the URC, preaches on 24<sup>th</sup> June
- Church member Mally Benham attends the International Christian Women`s Convention in Brazil as one of the two UK representatives
- Holiday Club in August with the theme of “Water”
- Service of celebration for the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the congregation on 18<sup>th</sup> November
- 99 members

### **Ministers 1961 2012**

Clifford Thomas

Gordon Baker

Malcolm Clarke

### **Organists 1961 - 2012**

Isaac Buswell

John Buswell

Leslie Jennings

Philip Harris

Christopher Banks

Peter Harris

David Crick

### **Treasurers 1961 - 2012**

Frank Dudley

Ernest Owen

John Jotham

Michael Watkins

Malcolm Hooke

Richard Benham

## **Church Secretaries 1961 - 2012**

John Mason (to 1966) and Vincent Green (to 1968) joint secretaries

Michael Watkins

N. J. Carter (Jim)

Barbara Blower

Christine Thomas

Robert Staines

Anne Brown

From the Church Secretary`s annual report 1987 -

*“Altering the building is only a means to an end. We have to meet the never ending challenges that Christ puts before us – of building his church, his body, here on earth. With the experience we gain during the renovation process of working together, through prayer, we will be guided and strengthened to meet that challenge. Let the renewal of our buildings be a symbol of our commitment to Christ.”*

*“Our effectiveness to meet the challenges put before us as a church, as members of the body of Christ, depends on our ability to understand each other and work together.”*

*“As members of the body of Christ each one of us has a part to play, a talent which, however small it may seem to us, can be used to further God`s work. Much of this work goes on unseen with the reward only of knowing that it is done in love.” (1988)*

*“If we are prepared to step out in faith there will be new doors opened for all of us.” (1989)*

## **Acknowledgements**

To the late Reverend Clifford Thomas for compiling the history of the congregation in its 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary year (1962); to all the members of the congregation who have supplied photographs, reports and minutes for addition to the church archive over the years; and to the current minister, the Reverend Malcolm Clarke, Betty Lea and Anne Brown for their support for this update publication.

Phillip Lindley

August 2012