

Rudgwick Chapel Bicentenary

During 2024, Rudgwick Chapel, which is located in Church Street, opposite the new housing developments at Summerfold and Windacres Farm Lane, celebrated its bicentenary. A photograph of the original chapel, shown left, which came to light (courtesy of Malcolm Francis) late in the year, interestingly shows a circular plaque above the porch, which says 'Congregational Mission Church 1823'. So the chapel was actually built in 1823, but the church - i.e. the formal grouping of worshippers and the trusts under which the church operates – was not established until April 1824. The trust deeds refer to 'the Chapel or Meeting House, lately erected', which is consistent with the fact that the chapel was actually built the previous year.

Rudgwick Chapel was one of four village chapels established by Horsham Congregational Church (now Horsham United Reformed Church) – the others being at Slinfold, Maplehurst and Barns Green. These chapels were founded at different times during the 19th century, but Rudgwick Chapel appears to be the oldest. In the early part of the century, people from the villages surrounding Horsham were travelling to the Horsham Congregational Church, but Rudgwick was deemed too far away, and so the chapel was built in Rudgwick. The village chapels were served by lay preachers from the 'mother church' in Horsham.

The trust deed says that the building was 'to be used for the public worship of Almighty God and for the preaching of the Gospel'. The document states that the preaching was to be 'strictly conformable with the sacred and inspired writings commonly called the Old and New Testaments, which are the only infallible rule for the regulation of Christian faith and practice'. The deeds also tell us that the chapel was built by voluntary contributions.



The 11 trustees who were originally appointed included a Protestant Dissenting Minister and a farmer from Wisborough Green, a bricklayer and a glazier from Rudgwick (George and Henry Port), a timber merchant from Arundel, a yeoman from Horsham, a couple of 'gentlemen' from Brighthelmston (now Brighton) and Middlesex, a sugar refiner from London and the cash secretary to the Home Missionary Society, London. What brought these men together from such geographically and occupationally diverse backgrounds is not known.

The other trustee was Thomas Honeywood, a builder from Horsham, who was presumably a relative of Mary Honeywood. Mary, and her husband John, lived in Horsham and were probably members of Horsham Congregational Church, but Mary owned land in Rudgwick which she conveyed to the original trustees in 1824. The deeds are very hard to read, but it appears that this may have been for as little as 5 shillings. This land provided a frontage to the chapel on which an extension was later built, shown on the photo above. (Incidentally, Mary and John's son, another 'Thomas', born in 1819, was known for his contributions to the fields of archaeology and photography in Horsham during the Victorian era. He is recognized for introducing photography to Horsham and inventing a new photographic process known as "Nature Printing." He made significant archaeological discoveries, including the preservation of the Horsham Hoard of medieval pottery. He was also an entrepreneur, establishing his own museum, and held notable positions, such as Captain of the Horsham Volunteer Fire Brigade. However, as he was only 5 when Rudgwick Chapel was founded, this 'Thomas' is unlikely to be the 11th trustee!)

We know nothing of how things progressed over the next few years, but sadly, in 1846, it seems that the chapel was closed for seven years, until, in 1853, it was reopened at the request of the Sussex Congregation Union. By 1865, only two of the original trustees were

HORSHAM, SUSSEX.—A week of real aggressive work has been done in Horsham and neighbourhood under the management of Mr. J. Cramp, the local secretary, and Mr. R. H. Campbell, of the U.K.A. On Monday, 24th inst., the first of these meetings were held at Rudgwick, in the Congregational Chapel. No temperance meeting had ever been held in this village before. Seven pledges were taken and great interest was created. Tuesday 25th saw the village

still alive and new trustees were appointed by indenture in that year. In 1884, according to a newspaper report (see above), the inaugural meeting of the Rudgwick temperance club was held at Rudgwick Chapel. 'Seven pledges were taken and great interest was created.' In 1907, perhaps, once again, due to the lack of surviving trustees, the Sussex Congregational Union became trustees.

A few years ago, a very encouraging document was discovered. It must have been written in about 1908 and is entitled '*An Urgent Need*'. It recounts how that four years previously the situation was '*most disheartening*'. A mission was conducted by the then minister of Horsham Congregational Church, Rev. W.C. Talbot, following which '*a small company of earnest souls ... pledged to pray until God gave the increase. For nearly 12 months they persevered in patient hope. Then ... God sent willing helpers into the village.*' An evangelist, Mr Cranham came to the village and as a result, '*the good work at Rudgwick has developed gloriously. A considerable number of young men and women have been attracted to the services. Twenty-three persons have been received into church fellowship. A Senior Christian Endeavour Society has been formed, which now has upwards of forty members.*'



The chapel which, at the time seated about 100 people (thanks surely to long pews or benches?) was proving too small and was often crowded on Sunday evenings and the need for enlargement was urgent. A building committee was appointed and they duly recommended 'a frontal addition of 18 feet, reconstruction of the roof, additional side

RUDGWICK.
 Mr. Herbert Russell, second son of Mr. Charles Russell, of Garlands Farm, and Miss Wilhelmina Henrietta Kenzie Saunders, daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. John Saunders, of Shirley, Southampton, were the first couple to be married in the new Congregational Church. Mr. G. Millar, the evangelist, performed the ceremony, during which the happy pair were presented with a Bible as a memento of the occasion. Friends attending the church gave them a carved oak gate-leg table as a wedding present.

windows, improved ventilation, the building of a vestry and an iron palisade and gate in front.' A strip of land to enable a side path leading to a toilet was purchased from Dr Annie McCall at 'Kings' in 1909 and the extended building was eventually opened in 1912. This is the building we see today (below, and previous page).

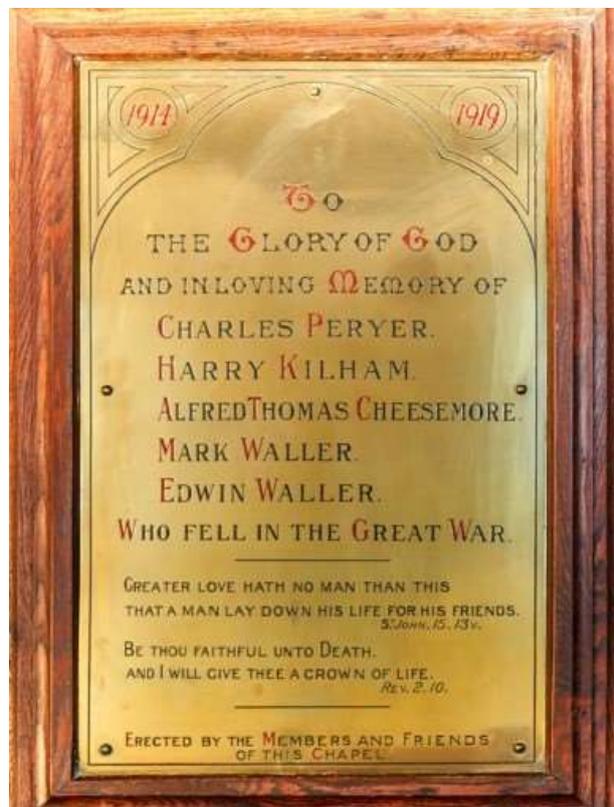
Above, the first wedding in the newly enlarged chapel was in November 1912, between local man Herbert Russell, from Garlands Farm in The Haven, and his bride from Southampton.

During the First World War, 5 men associated with the Rudgwick Chapel, lost their lives (right). They are remembered on this brass plaque inside the chapel. Among them were 2 brothers, Mark and Edwin Waller. Another brother, Thomas, whose

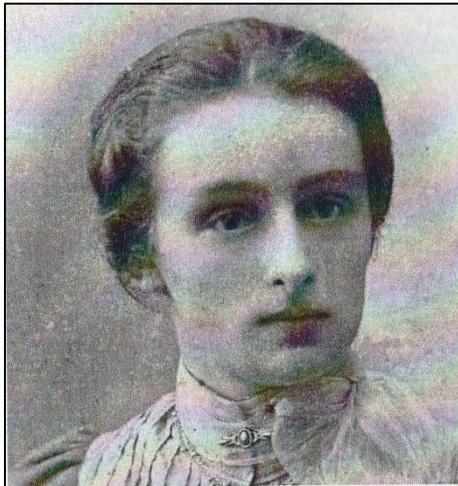


name does not appear on the plaque, was discharged as unfit for service after contracting rheumatic fever in the wet, cold trenches. He died in 1919 – considered too late to be recognised as

'war dead'. Their mother, Fanny had already lost 4 of her 12 children and her husband before the war and she herself died (from a broken heart?) in 1920. Charles Peryer, the village postman, left a young wife, Annie and 2 young daughters. She did not remarry and she is remembered in an inscription on the chapel's old hymn board, which says "In memory of Annie Peryer, who worshipped here for over 50 years and served as Band of Hope leader, Christian Endeavour leader, Sunday School superintendant and teacher, treasurer and secretary." Wow! What would Rudgwick Chapel have done without her?! A long-time member of the chapel still remembers Mrs Peryer, when she was a girl.



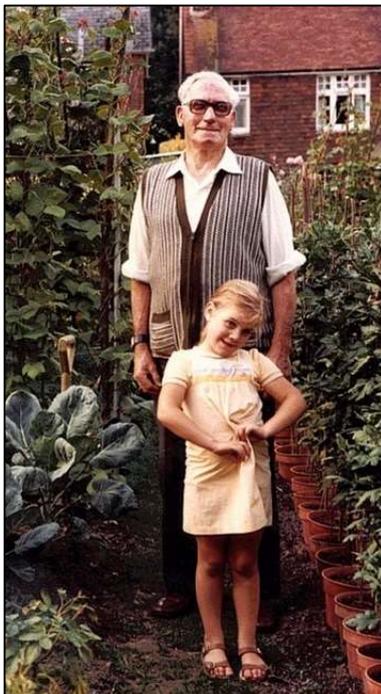
Above left, Fanny Waller, mother of Mark and Edwin.



Annie (Harding) Peryer 1887-1960



The photo on the right is of Annie and Charles Peryer, with their children, Vera and Gladys, just before Charles went to the front. both photos ©DR Banting.



Left, Harold Francis with niece Olivia.

Below, A funeral in 1929, of John Lupton, employee for many years at Gaskyns (now Pennthorpe School), and originally from Leeds from where the Barker family had come when the house was new.

Again we know little of the period between the wars. In her book, 'Rudgwick Memories', Peggy Walker recalls going to The Band of Hope at Rudgwick Chapel as a child – signing the pledge at age 10(!), treats and picnics, learning Bible verses and amusing memories of the organist, keeping time as she played, with her clicking dentures! One family in particular, became key

in the life of Rudgwick Chapel. Arthur Francis was a lay preacher, but it was his son, Harold, the secretary, organist and Sunday School superintendent (see photo at end), who was the mainstay for many years, ably assisted by his wife, Lucy, his brother, Fred (and his wife, Elsie) and Lucy's brother, Ralph (and his wife, Flossie). Malcolm Francis (Fred and Elsie's son) has many fond memories from his time growing up at Rudgwick Chapel – the American organ which was played by both Uncle Harold and Auntie Lucy (eventually replaced by an electronic instrument); the

Rudgwick.

FUNERAL OF MR. JOHN LUPTON.—An old and much esteemed employee at "Gaskyns," the residence of Mr. and Mrs. G. Claud Barker, was laid to rest on Monday in the person of Mr. John Lupton, who passed away on Thursday in last week at the advanced age of 86. He was engaged on the estate as electrician, &c., for some thirty-four years, and was pensioned off a few years ago. Mr. Lupton came from Leeds with the parents of Mr. Barker, J.P. He had been for a long period associated with the Congregational Mission Hall, of which he was formerly the Secretary. Many members of the Congregational Chapel attended the funeral on Monday. The Vicar (Rev. W. H. Chambers, M.A.) conducted the service in the church and at the graveside, and paid an eloquent tribute to the Christianlike character and fine attributes of the deceased, "Jesu, lover of my soul" was sung by request. The chief mourners were: Mrs. Lupton (widow), Mrs. W. H. Anderson, Messrs. J. W. Arundel and R. Harvey (Horsham), Mr. and Mrs. Joyes, Mr. and Mrs. Russell, Mrs. Farley, Mrs. Francis, Mrs. White, Miss Lunt, &c. There was a number of beautiful floral tributes.

By Coach, Car and Cycle

Every available seat was taken and a number of people had to stand when the Horsham Evangelical Rallies visited **Rudgwick Chapel** on Saturday.

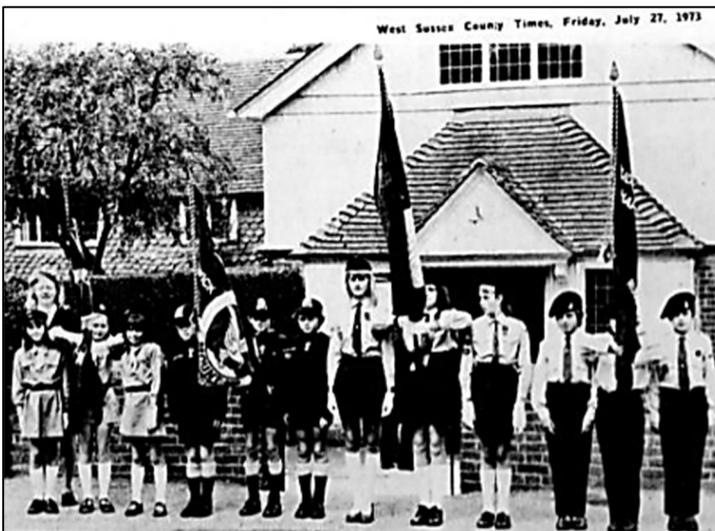
Friends travelled to the meeting by coaches, cars and cycles from many parts of Sussex. The speaker was Mr. Fred Crisp, well known as a speaker to young people. The Horsham Baptist junior choir sang several items, and refreshments were served at the end of the meeting.

large text on the wall behind the pulpit area proclaiming 'God is Love'; the re-laying of the floor after a shoddy job by a previous contractor; the solid fuel heating system, which was eventually replaced by electric heaters; the sights and smells of the Harvest Festival with many contributions by Uncle Harold, whose display of flowers, fruit and vegetables 'was as good as any flower show'.

Left, in 1954, the chapel was at the centre of an evangelical rally.

In the three decades following the 2nd World War, things began to pick up, helped by the influx of a number of young families. By the 1970s, the pews were replaced by wooden chairs.

During this time, the Sunday School grew and a uniformed youth movement, called Campaigners, was adopted in 1971. This organisation really flourished with two separate age groups for both boys and girls, games, crafts and badges, outings and camps, as well as regular Bible teaching, and at any one time, as many as 70 young people could be seen



parading up Church Street for a special service, with their smart uniforms and banners held high and led by their leaders – or chiefs, as they were known. In 1973, this interdenominational youth organisation was raising money at a Christmas Fair for the rebuilding of the chapel kitchen. One of the instructors was Mr SJ Piggott. Pastor at the service was Albert Wood. The same year, the group had earlier been presented with new colours (left).

Below left, girl Campaigners, 1970s.



In 1974, by coincidence the year of the 150th anniversary of its foundation, when the Congregational and Presbyterian denominations merged to form the United Reformed Church, Congregational churches were given the choice to either become part of this new union or to become independent. The members of Rudgwick Chapel chose to become independent and a number of individual trustees were appointed. Several years later, the chapel became affiliated to The Fellowship of Evangelical Churches (FIEC) – a loose association of churches, currently numbering more than 700 across the UK. Some of the individual trustees had died or moved away

Left, and right, in 1974, the 150th anniversary of the foundation of Rudgwick Chapel in 1824.

Chapel's 150th anniversary
Rudgwick chapel celebrated its 150th anniversary on Saturday evening with a thanksgiving service.
More than 80 people attended the service, which was conducted by the Rev. Howard Lewis, minister of Horsham Baptist Church, who is moderator at the chapel.
The Rev. L. C. Sims, priest-in-charge of the Anglican church of Holy Trinity, Hove, preached.

and the remaining trustees agreed to relinquish this responsibility and instead appoint FIEC as corporate trustee.

During the 1980's/90's, under the ministry and leadership of Pastor Graham Wright, who had grown up at the chapel as a boy, the congregation and membership rapidly grew. He introduced many new initiatives and a baptistry was installed under the raised

platform on which the pulpit stood. In 1994, the chapel hosted a service marking the closure of Dedisham School. In the years that followed, further alterations were made, including carpeting of the floor, replacement of the wooden chairs with upholstered ones and replacement of the pulpit with a smaller lectern. A new electric heating system was installed and the toilet updated with support for people with disabilities, including wheel-chair accessible baby-changing facilities. The frontage is currently being improved with raised beds. Moreover, there were a series of weddings at the chapel, each recorded in the pages of the West Sussex County Times.

In time, people moved away and older members died. The current congregation is quite small, but there is an enthusiastic core and signs of new growth are evident. People who visit the chapel describe it as warm and friendly. Amongst other activities, weekly services are held every Sunday at 10.30 am and there is a warm welcome for all. A children's group called *Lighthouse* operates during the adult talk and an All-Age Family Service is held on the first Sunday of each month, followed by lunch to which all are welcome.

Charlie Sanders
Elder of Rudgwick Chapel

Rudgwick Chapel would like to thank the Rudgwick Preservation Society – particularly Roger Nash and Malcolm Francis – for their help in researching aspects of the chapel's history for the Bicentenary celebrations.

Milestones in chapel history

Two important milestones were reached in the history of Rudgwick Chapel, when the church's 150th anniversary was commemorated at a Thanksgiving weekend.

The event coincided with the transfer of the church building from the Sussex Congregational Union to the local trustees, thus giving the church its independence after many years of association with the Congregational (now United Reformed) Church in Horsham.

The celebrations started on Saturday evening when the church was filled for a Service of Praise, conducted by the Moderator, the Rev. H. E. Lewis. The Speaker was the Rev. L. C. Sims, Vicar of Holy Trinity Church, Hove.

Musical items were provided by Mrs. Lorraine Norton and Miss Julie Berger and the Benediction was given by the Rev. J. C. Hart, Vicar of Rudgwick.

A special collection for the building fund amounted to £163.

The weekend festivities ended on Monday evening with a church supper attended by church members and congregation.

A flashback to earlier times: an inter-war Sunday School gathers around Harold and Lucy Francis.



The present-day interior.

