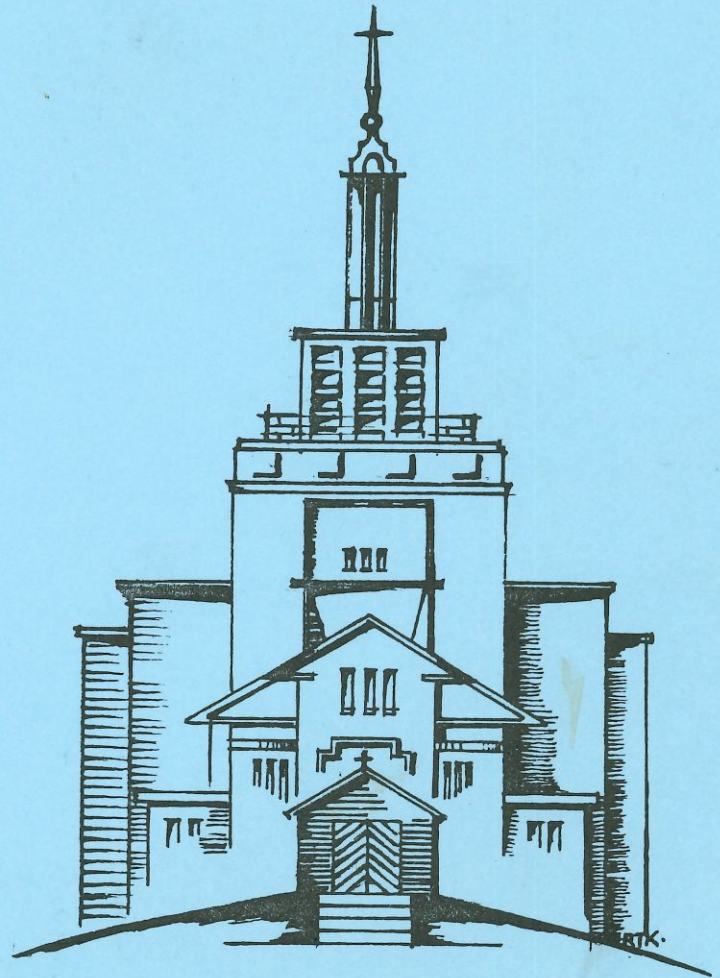


JOHN KEBLE CHURCH

MILL HILL

**The first fifty years of
a parish church**



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The first fifty years of a parish church

by

Rex Walford and Robert Baynes

FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION

by

The late Dean of Winchester

I am very pleased to be invited to contribute a Foreword to this admirable history of John Keble Church, Mill Hill. The account of the founding and early years of this new parish has been written with accuracy and excellent judgment by Mr. Rex Walford, to whom we are greatly indebted.

Looking back, as I do, to those beginnings in the life of the first John Keble Church, I am conscious that they were amongst the happiest years of my life. And the chief reason was the quite extraordinary keenness and co-operation of the people of the district. Never, surely, were the laity such splendid partners in the building of a new church and parish! As I write these few words I think of so many of my friends there and of the valiant labours in the cause of the extension of Christ's Kingdom. Without them the task could never have been accomplished, for it needed a task force and a team ministry. I shall always be immensely proud that I was chosen to be their first leader.

O. H. GIBBS-SMITH

The Deanery, Winchester.

AN APOLOGIA FOR THE LAST TWO CHAPTERS

When I was asked to bring up to the present time the Parish History written nearly twenty years ago by Rex Walford, I saw no point in changing what had already been written. Rex grew up within the John Keble family, and his account of the Founding Fathers is based upon a personal acquaintance. To those who came much later to the Parish, these chapters have the full flavour of that Heroic Age; Gibbs-Smith, like Moses striking the ground with his staff and watching a Church emerge; "Harmonics" harnessing the music of the spheres to the strong tradition of the J.K. Choir; Newell performing miracles of financial wizardry with his legendary two penny notebook.

Against all this the last two decades may seem less highly coloured but nevertheless the parish has progressed steadily, and its subsequent history is not without significance. I have therefore added two chapters to the Walford canon. The first of these covers the decades of the Sixties and Seventies; the second attempts an assessment of John Keble Church's standing in modern Anglican parish development.

ROBERT BAYNES

Chapter 1—THE EARLIEST DAYS

At the beginning of 1932 Deans Lane, Edgware, was still a country lane leading across open fields from the hamlet known as The Hale to the new acres of the L.C.C. Watling housing estate. Elm trees on either side of it met in a leafy canopy above.

At the crest of a hill on the lane stood an old, spacious Victorian farmhouse named Holbrook House. One day in January of that year a small noticeboard was erected in the hedge of the adjoining field. It announced:

By the authority of the Bishop of London
A NEW CHURCH
will soon be erected on this site.

Thus, the history of John Keble Church began.

Deans Lane was not to remain a country by-way for many months longer. Already many of the wooded acres of Middlesex countryside were being rapidly devoured by new building and the tiny village settlements in the area were losing their identity beneath the tide of suburban development. Edgware had been first reached by rail as early as 1906 (on the old Great Northern steam line from Finchley, now closed altogether to passenger traffic). But it was not until the advent of the motor bus and the electric underground railway (which reached Edgware in 1927) that the Commuter Age was properly born in North-West Middlesex. The neat neo-Palladian stations of the Northern Line with the familiar red buses in their forecourts were sometimes optimistically placed among green fields at their opening, but the ease of the journey to London spawned great areas of estate development within twenty years.

The Northern Heights of the London Basin became transformed into dormitory suburbs and not until after the 1939-45 war did strengthened proposals for "Green Belt" areas slow the spread of the metropolis.

The Diocese of London, not unaware of the problems in pastoral care that these new areas involved, planned to build forty-five new churches to deal with the changing pattern of settlement and they set up a fund to raise money for them. One of the new churches was to be midway between The Hale (a district which has become more familiarly known by the name of the public house at its junction, "The Green Man"), Edgware and Mill Hill. The Rural Deanery of Westminster interested itself especially in the project.

The first move was to buy the old Holbrook House and the paddock field adjoining it. It was rented to a retired

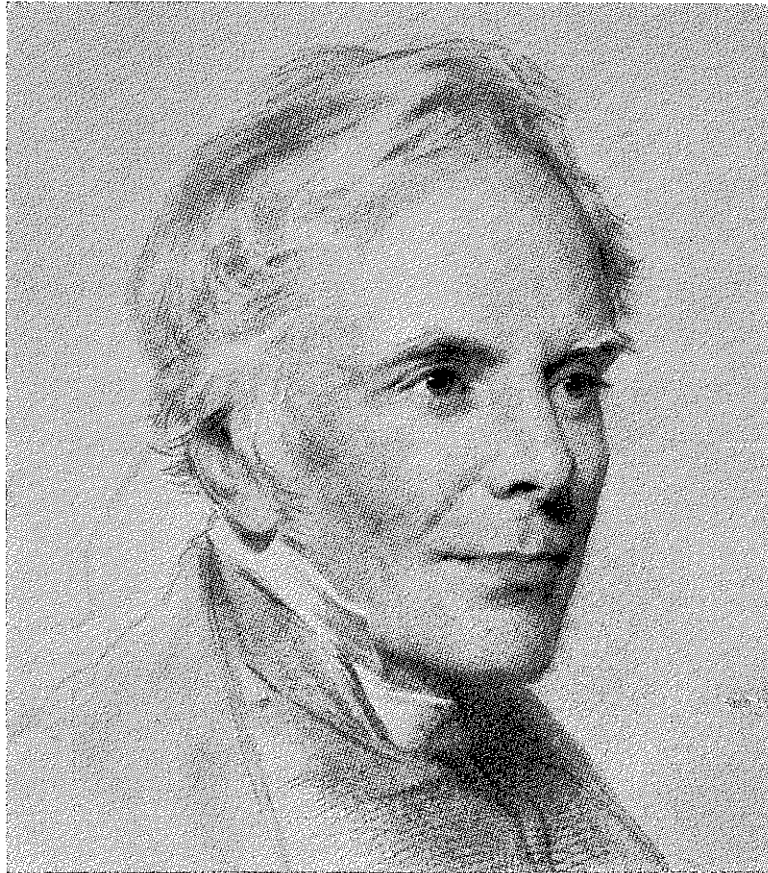


The first vicar Rev. O. H. Gibbs-Smith with the Queen Mother

businessman (who was to become one of the first churchwardens) and in January 1932 the first Priest-in-Charge of the parish moved in as a lodger there. This was the Rev. O. H. Gibbs-Smith, an able, young, bachelor priest, who was appointed by the Bishop of London in late 1931 and who had no

knowledge of his new embryo parish until the day he arrived with hat and suitcase to take up the post.

He was soon at work, however. One of his first tasks was to settle on the dedication of the Church, and acting on an idea from Dr. Milner-White (later Dean of York) he suggested a commemoration of a 19th century Anglican clergyman, the



John Keble 1792 - 1866

poet and reformer, John Keble. The Bishop and people in Mill Hill welcomed the unusual suggestion but it caused raised eyebrows in Westminster. Mr. Gibbs-Smith has recalled, "I had to tell the Rural Dean of Westminster that unless his Rural Deanery could reconcile themselves to the name of John

Keble, I would sooner renounce their adoption than change the name to St. Peter as they wanted me to do. This determined attitude persuaded them to agree, but I had to risk losing their financial support . . ." With the centenary of Keble's Assize Sermon close at hand, the distinctiveness of the dedication was to be appropriate, as well as typical of much of the subsequent life of the church.

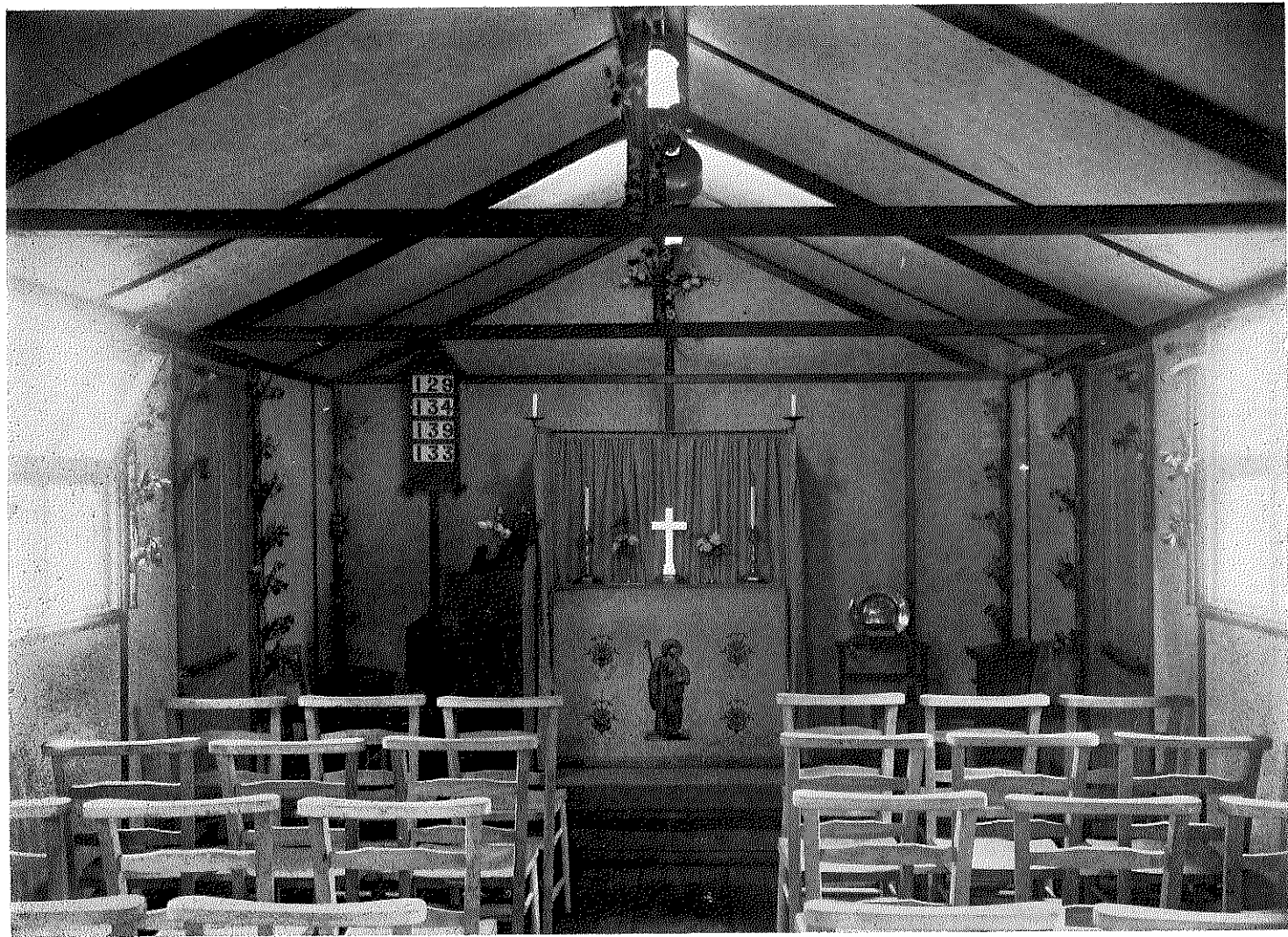
The earliest records of the church were strictly practical; they were donations recorded by the priest-in-charge in a soft-covered 2d. blue cashbook, pending the appointment of a treasurer; the earliest recorded gift was of 15/6d on September 15th, 1931.

Within a few months enough had been raised to purchase a building contractor's hut as a temporary base of activity and so, on January 16th, 1932, Thompson, Bayliss & Co. provided John Keble with its first church at a cost of £35 5s. 0d. The hut was moved into position on the site purchased by the Diocese in Deans Lane, and on the weekend of February 27th-28th the life of John Keble Church was born.

The Bishop of Willesden came to dedicate the Hut and Judge Shewell-Cooper to lay the Foundation Stone of a dual-purpose Hall-Church which was to be the first permanent building on the site, and due to be completed by July of that year. The following day services began in the Hut. (Today that first "temporary" place of worship still exists as a much-used building within the Church grounds; it has given good value for £35 . . .)

The electric atmosphere of the first few weeks and months can perhaps only be fully appreciated by those who were there to enjoy the thrill of the pioneering work. "Do you remember that first night in the Hut?" one member of the congregation later wrote. "The squash, the heat, and expectancy—and the Harmonium squeezed into an incredibly small space beside the altar." Mr. Gibbs-Smith was called "Padre" by the congregation (since he was not legally "Vicar" yet) and addressed his first congregations with enthusiasm, wandering up and down the narrow aisle between the chairs as he preached. ("There was no pulpit or anything to keep him in" it was explained later.)

After only a fortnight, the number of worshippers had exceeded the limited capacity of the Hut. On March 13th two Evensongs were held, one at 6 p.m., the other at 7 p.m., and a few weeks later a large tent was added to the end of the Hut in order to cater for still more who came. As the Hall-Church dual-purpose building took shape so also did modest semi-detached houses in neighbouring closes and crescents. The parish was growing with its church.



The inside of the hut — The first John Keble Church

One member of the congregation was already playing a large part in the organisation of these early services, the Master of the Music, Mr. F. A. Martin-Smith. He had been contacted by Mr. Gibbs-Smith on the recommendation of Sir Sydney Nicholson, a great figure in English church music to whom the Padre had gone for advice. Mr. Martin-Smith had just resigned his post at his local village church and was looking for another appointment; he received a letter from Mr. Gibbs-Smith on Christmas Day 1931 and set off at once to look for the new parish. "That day I eagerly toured the district, but could not find the Church," he recalls, "which was not surprising since even the notice-board announcing that a new church was to be built did not appear until some weeks later."

Mr. Martin-Smith has also spoken of the vital conversations that took place between Christmas 1931 and the Dedication of the Hut. "Being the first of the staff to be engaged, I was privileged—the Padre often spoke his thoughts aloud to me and we discussed them . . . by the time the Hut was dedicated the Padre had more or less formulated his plans." It was at the first parish meeting in April of that year that the formation of a choir, and the production of a magazine were proposed, and by the time that the dual-purpose building was ready in July some of the distinctive pattern of John Keble church life was already becoming evident.

Mr. Gibbs-Smith explained something of that pattern in a national church magazine some months later:

"One of the characteristics of life in any new suburb is that people do not know each other. Batches of houses spring up and are occupied too fast for human friendships to mature in the normal way. The Church has a unique opportunity to capture the social life of these child districts and develop them on Christian lines . . . We aimed not so much to collect a congregation which should attend the services in this Hall-Church, but to build up a family of people who should express and deepen their relationship in a community of work and worship."

Early life at John Keble thus came to centre around a corporate "Family Communion" at 9.30 a.m. on Sunday mornings. The time was deliberately chosen to allow rest and yet enable the whole family to attend; the service was made as congregational as possible, with the choir in the midst of the congregation. The simpler ceremonial of the "English use" was adopted and the Prayer Book order of 1662 strictly followed. (Though today this is a commonplace in Anglican church life, it was a distinctly unusual idea to congregations of the 1920's and 30's more familiar with Matins or High Mass as a morning service.)

The service was followed by a revival of the "Love Feast" of the early Christians. The congregation concluded their service, pushed aside folding doors and sat down at the other end of the Hall to a breakfast. Ham or eggs, tea or coffee, bread, butter and marmalade were served and those who had knelt side by side at the Holy Table now took their seats around another table. Parish Breakfast became the social rendezvous of the week, and members of the John Keble "family" got to know each other and visitors to their parish in an informal and easy fashion. The breakfast was served by teams of lady helpers (resplendent in coloured overalls) for the princely sum of 7d. Though the ham went the way of all flesh in the Second World War, the breakfast and the Communion service which precedes it have remained substantially unaltered—the focus of John Keble family life ever since.

The emphasis on family and community life within the Church was also stressed by the development of a strong number of social and service organisations. The first of these was a central parish club called the John Keble Club which first met in October 1932. It rapidly developed flourishing subsections in many activities and these have subsequently reached independence from it.

Members of the new community were also encouraged to contribute by personal service to the life of the Family and Mr. Gibbs-Smith's masterly powers of encouragement and persuasion built up a "voluntary church staff" or some two hundred people in the first year of the church's life.

The Bishop of London came to dedicate the dual-purpose building on July 14th, 1932, a day chosen as Patronal Festival for the parish, since it was the 99th anniversary of John Keble's preaching of the Assize Sermon in Oxford. The sermon is usually regarded as the starting point of the "Oxford Movement" that spirit of Catholic revival within the Church of England which characterised its life in the 19th century.

With a permanent building now available, activities and congregations multiplied. One part of the building was kept as an altar and sanctuary but, in the other, parish organisations met frequently on most afternoons and evenings of the week. Sunday Schools were begun in late July after Diocesan experts had given the first group of teachers some initial training. At Christmastime the first Confirmation and the first Nativity Play took place in the same week. The latter was a triple performance of E. Martin Browne's "The Christmas story in mime" and had a cast of 80 and an audience of 800. It was the first of many ambitious productions from John Keble and heralded an interest in religious drama which the church has sustained ever since.

Mr. Martin-Smith was hard at work recruiting and training a choir of men and boys inculcating them with high traditions of church music. Teams of servers and sidesmen were gathered together and the expert advice of Mr. (later Dr.) J. H. Arnold was sought on the development of liturgical practice. (He was later to become a keen member of the church congregation.)

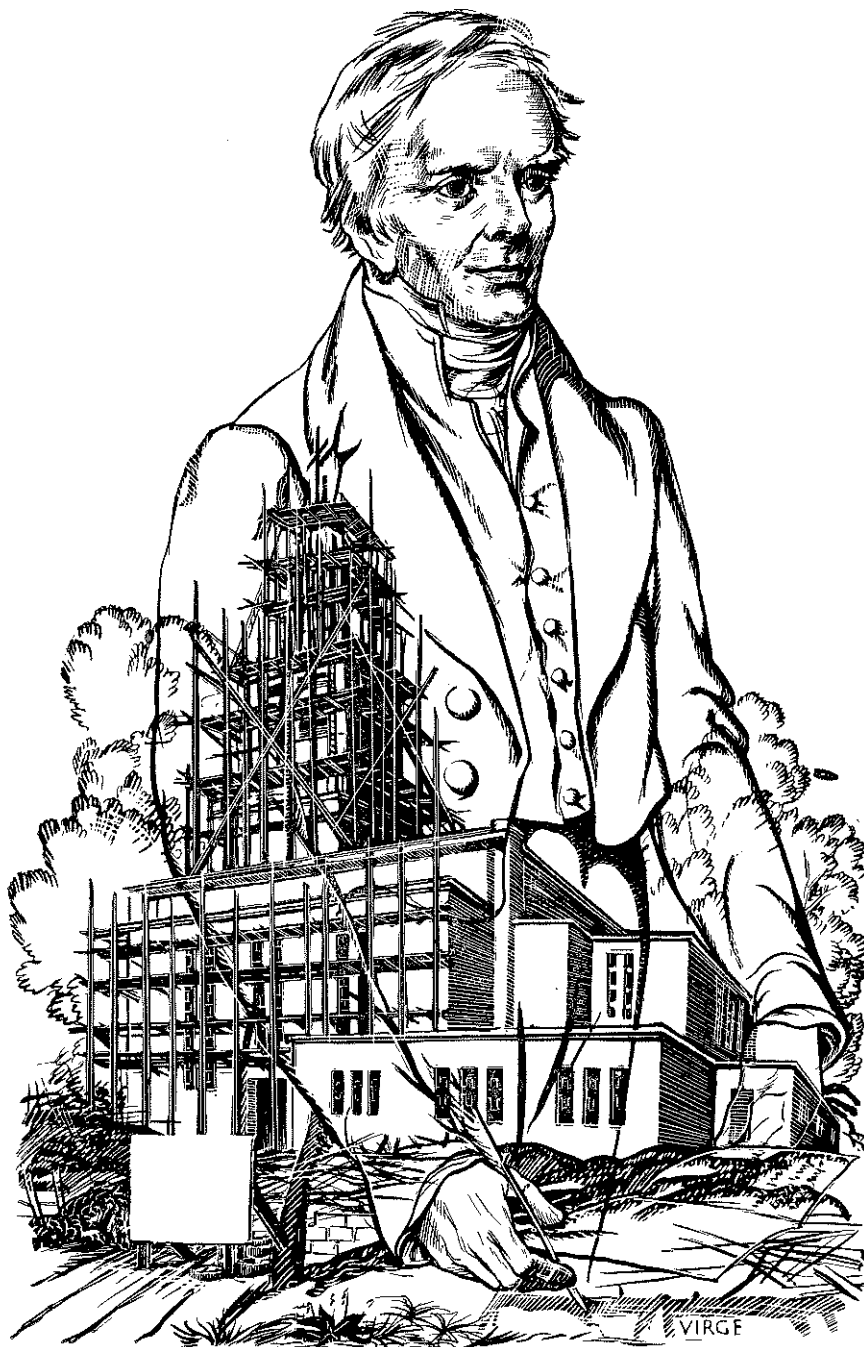
In April 1933 the first issue of the "John Keble Magazine" appeared. "The fact that this magazine makes its debut on April 1st should not shake your faith in our integrity", wrote the Priest-in-Charge as the first words of the first issue, and that, in many ways, set the tone for the Magazine, for its re-styled successor the "John Keble Journal" and for its latter-day descendant, the parish newspaper "Focus".

Under the editorship of, first, Mr. H. G. Reddy, and following him successive Vicars, parish journalism at John Keble has usually been both competent and lively and something more than the usual tired list of badly-printed announcements. Even during the darkest days of the war it has mirrored the life of the parish with a distinct twinkle in its eye. The J.K. magazine was soon established as a lusty and amusing commentator on parish affairs, with much brilliant visual material in cartoon and portraiture coming from the Church's first Verger, Mr. A. F. Erridge. A craftsman in his own right, he contributed also to the Permanent Church and was a man of many parts in the parish until his departure in 1943.

Parish organisations continued to multiply in 1933 and by October of that year it was necessary to open duplicate Sunday Schools. The church had made a start with traditional afternoon times, but the great numbers of children who wished to attend made it imperative to also arrange a second session. At one time 400 children were on a "waiting list". A time of 11.45 a.m., after Parish Breakfast, was chosen and later become pre-eminent. It formed another distinctive strand in the J.K. tradition.

In July 1933, Scouts, Guides, Cubs and Brownies were begun and all filled to capacity on their day of opening. The autumn saw the arrival of two women parish workers on to the full-time staff of the church, and they were followed just before Christmas by the first curate appointed, the Rev.

C. R. W. Goddard.



*Cartoon from the "JOHN KEBLE JOURNAL"
drawn by Mr. A. F. Erridge
VIRGE — the first Verger*

A dramatic society and a concert party (called The Good Companions and The Nor'Westers) had given their first shows and in the following year the parish supplied a large cast for one of the scenes in T. S. Eliot's pageant, "The Rock", which was produced by London churches for a week at Sadler's Wells.

In May 1934 the Church Cricket Club turned out for their first match and were successful, though it was recorded that their gear consisted of "one bat and pads (part worn), a ball (bought very cheaply), and another bat and stumps (borrowed)". They adopted caps coloured light "Keble" blue, a tradition followed today by caps for choristers in the church choir, and by the colour of scarves in the Church-sponsored Scout Group.

Chapter 2—BUILDING THE PERMANENT CHURCH

Within a few months of the opening of the dual-purpose building, the growing congregation had naturally begun to turn its thoughts towards the prospect of a permanent church building. In January a Four Year Building Plan was set up and members of the parish given the target of raising £1,350 per annum for four years. This money would go towards the cost of building the exterior shell of a permanent building and also providing furnishings; £12,000 was promised by the Rural Deanery of Westminster which had taken the John Keble project under its wing.

A Permanent Church Advisory Committee began work in April 1933, and consisted of the Priest-in-Charge, Churchwardens, and four outside advisers. Conscious of the distinctive traditions being developed within the life of the new parish they drew up conditions for an architectural competition. The John Keble Church should be a building in which the "Family Ideal" was apparent, and in which the unity of choir, congregation, and sanctuary should be emphasised.

The committee eventually invited five architects to take part in the competition—N. F. Cachemaille-Day; Frederick Etchells; J. Harold Gibbons; Professor A. B. Knapp-Fisher; and D. F. Martin-Smith, brother of the Master of the Music. The designs were assessed by Mr. Edward Maufe, architect of Guildford Cathedral, and his judgment given in September 1934 found Mr. Martin-Smith's design the winner.

A brilliant young architect, Mr. D. F. Martin-Smith had already come second in the competitions for the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-on-Avon and for Hornsey Town Hall. The first John Keble Church in the Anglican Communion would also be the first church which he had ever built.

His solution to the conditions imposed in the competition had been to design a simple and remarkable four-square building in which the choir were surrounded on three sides by the congregation, as in some Early Christian churches, and in which a wide, imposing sanctuary was dominated by a 14-foot long altar table. Its contrast with many orthodox designs of the time (in which congregation and sanctuary were separated by choirstalls in long rectangular buildings) could scarcely have been more striking.

The exterior of the church was no less unusual in yellow-brick with a stepped tower in Spanish style and an inset West Door below an unusual arrangement of modern windows. The tower was surmounted by a spire and cross of unmistakably modern design. Architectural journalists have never ceased to pay their tributes to it and today it bears the hallmark of a successful and pioneer piece of twentieth-century architecture.

Pevsner in his "Buildings of England" has called it "One of the most interesting of the few London churches in the idiom of the 20th century"; Michael Robbins, the county's most recent historian, comments that it is "the least conventional of any Middlesex church".

Peter Hammond's classic modern text on "Liturgy and Architecture" also pays extensive notice to the church. "Of the three parish churches which occupy a special place in the development of church planning in this country during the years before the war, the first and the most 'contemporary' from the point of view of style is John Keble . . . This is an important church which suggested a new solution to the difficult problem of accommodating a surpliced choir in such a way that they do not separate the congregation from the ministers at the altar".

Hammond is critical of the placing of the altar against the east wall but goes on to say: It is the first parish church in this country which breaks away decisively from the conventional nineteenth-century layout in an attempt to establish a closer relationship between priest and people and to enable the laity to play an active part in the liturgy".

Said the Priest-in-Charge when the result (but not the identity of the architect) was made known, "(It) is a design of our day, frankly using modern methods of construction and therefore in no sense a copy of some Church we have seen before . . . clearly a brilliant architect, sensitive to spiritual as well as aesthetic values".

The Rev. E. Milner-White, then Dean of King's College, Cambridge, and a member of the Permanent Church Advisory Committee was no less enthusiastic. "The Church stands four square; its lines are straight and strong. At first glance you

may think it austere, severe, almost bare. Then look again and you will find that you want to go on looking at it and that you do not tire of it. You may say that you have never seen a Church like it. True, that is one of its merits, when something original attains the dignity of this . . . This will not be a Church which visitors will drop in once to see and then forget about . . . it is a safe prophecy that not only all England, but all Europe, will come to see the Church of St. John Keble."

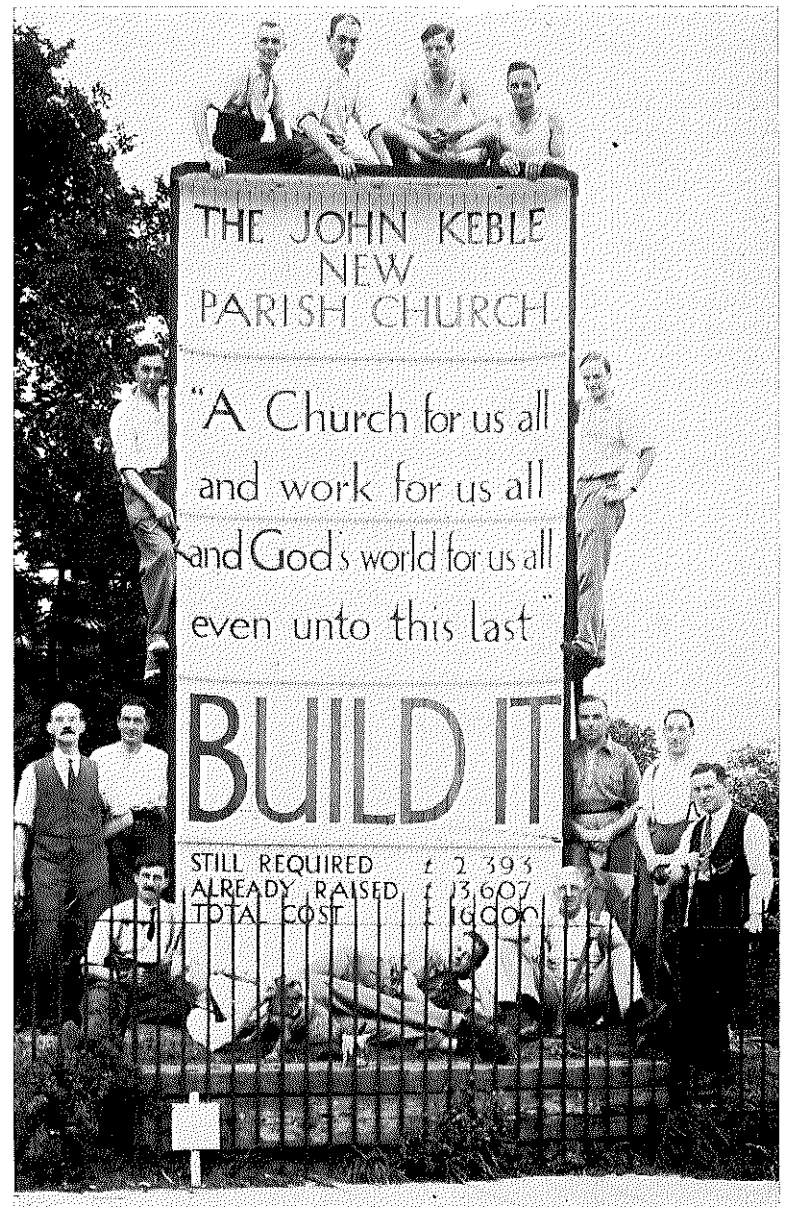
Despite some initial doubts about its unorthodoxy, the John Keble family soon became proud of the bold originality of Mr. Martin-Smith's design. It seemed to echo the new pattern of parish life which they were already building in terms of human relationships. But there were raised eyebrows elsewhere. The Church Commissioners, the Diocese of London, and the Incorporated Church Building Society all rejected the plans in the first instance because of their unconventionality. The parish and the Priest-in-Charge were not easily daunted, however. Persistent pressure caused all three bodies to change their minds; in fact, the Incorporated Church Building Society had such a volte-face that they used a picture of the church as a frontispiece for their next annual report, announcing proudly that they had given it the maximum grant for a new church . . .

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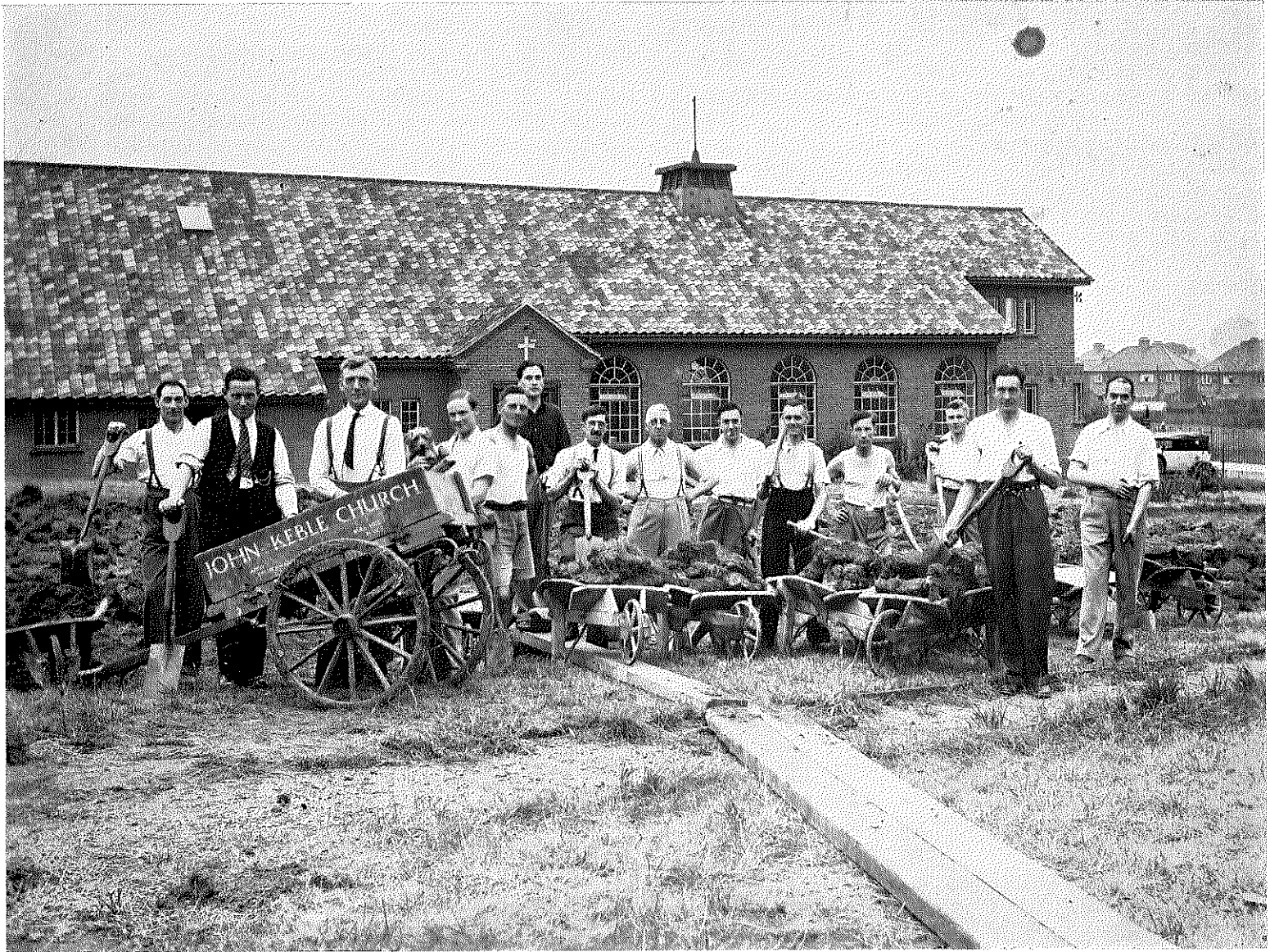
One of the great moments in the church's brief history must have been the night of the Annual Church Meeting in April 1935 when, "with a boisterous vote of acclamation" the "off" to building operations was given. The evocative journalism of the John Keble Magazines of the time capture something of the joie de vivre of local life in 1935 as the congregation rallied to the task.

The Rural Dean of Westminster, Prebendary Austin Thompson, cut the first turf on the site on July 14th, 1935, and the following evening thirty men of the congregation were out at work preparing the site for the builders. There was so much enthusiasm that by the end of the week they were working past late summer nightfall by the light of car headlamps pressed into temporary service.

The contract for building was signed on July 26th with the Hackney firm of L. H. & R. Roberts. The price agreed on seems a ridiculously low one to modern ears; £13,552 6s. 1d. The Magazine commented with typical irreverence and a suitable cartoon, "The men of the congregation ceased their work at the exact moment, presented spades, and fired a salute of 21 clods of earth from a battery of barrows".



Around the notice-board



"The Gang" clearing the site for the permanent Church

One old photograph of the time shows a group of men who were working on the site. They are clustered around an unusually tall noticeboard which was once the roof of an old bus and which still does good service today outside the vicarage. There are echoes of the 1930's in the bold motto painted on the board,

THE JOHN KEBLE NEW PARISH CHURCH

'A church for us all and work for us all and God's world for us all, even unto this last'

BUILD IT

The congregation of the church became even more aware of its relationship as a family as it laboured at raising money and at assisting the builders in order to keep costs down. Viscount Sankey, a former Lord Chancellor, laid the foundation stone on November 10th, 1935.

A "Christmas Fair" had been held in 1934 and this was enlarged to a three-day event in 1936 at which £560 profit was realised. There were other numerous money-raising schemes in progress throughout 1936. Meanwhile the noise of the builders sinking gigantic concrete piles into the difficult sub-soil (see Appendix I) resounded round the district and regular worshippers picked their way across the church grounds by a catwalk of planks laid over tons of sticky, soggy clay.

The church was consecrated on December 12th, 1936, two days after the abdication of King Edward VIII. The Bishop of London, the Rt. Rev. the Rt. Hon. A. F. Winnington-Ingram caused quiet panic among the assembled dignitaries by arriving over half-an-hour late for the ceremony, but once he had come all went smoothly. The Bishop of Willesden celebrated the first service of Holy Communion in the permanent church on the following day.

Churches in Westminster had raised £6,150 of their promised share, and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners had stepped in with a gift of £5,850 from the sale of the site of St. Mary's, Charing Cross Road. The parishioners of John Keble had the task of raising another £4,000 to cover the rest of the contract price and the cost of the interior furnishings. During the consecration weekend the last £32 was raised by the parish in order to set the building fund free from debt.

Chapter 3—J.K. IN WARTIME

Streams of visitors came to see the new John Keble Church in the months following its consecration. They came not only to admire the unusual architecture, but also to see the expression of worship which took place in it and which was related to it. The careful forethought of the Priest-in-Charge in seeking

expert advice in musical and liturgical matters now became fully apparent as the full dignity of the ceremonial became appreciated in the imposing sanctuary and as the choir made their contribution to the services from their place in the midst of the congregation.

Dr. Geoffrey Shaw and Sir Sydney Nicholson, both eminent English musicians, had played their part in shaping the musical traditions; Dr. J. H. Arnold, a leading authority on ceremonial, was a regular contributor to the magazine with clear expositions on the meaning of liturgical practice; Mr. F. C. Eeles, the Secretary of the Central Council for the Care of Churches had been a prominent member of the John Keble Advisory Building Committee. These men, along with others, ensured the establishment of high standards at John Keble and their work set strong foundations for the future.

The completion of the church enabled the dual-purpose building to be converted into a full-time parish hall. The group of men who had laboured long and hard in helping the builders of the church on the site (and who had come to be known simply as "The Gang") now turned their hand towards constructing a permanent stage in the place where the altar and sanctuary had been. Previously, plays and concerts had been performed on a curious triangular-shaped portable stage which had to be erected and dismantled in a corner of the hall on each separate occasion. The result of their work remained substantially unaltered until further extensions were authorised in 1964. It was fitting that "The Gang" themselves should christen the stage, with a concert on April 24th, 1937. It was the first of many plays and musical evenings put on there.

The full "maturity" of the parish was completed when, by an Order in Council on July 29th, 1937, the area was legally constituted as a parish and Mr. Gibbs-Smith was appointed by the Bishop to be the first Vicar. The area of the parish was constituted by taking parts from two neighbouring parishes, St. Michael's, Mill Hill, and St. Alphage, Burnt Oak.

This partially (but not completely) explains the curious shape of the boundaries over which the new Vicar was now legally entitled to exercise his pastoral care. The shape of the parish is like an hour-glass; it is longer north-south than it is wide, and near its centre ("The Green Man" junction) it is narrowest of all. It includes areas which are north of Apex Corner and which are south of the Deans Lane railway bridge and yet does not include areas so close to the church as the Sunbury Avenue group of roads.

The southern boundary of the parish runs along Deansbrook Road, the western boundary is the Deans Brook until it reaches Mill Hill Golf Course. The northern boundary runs



The 9.30 a.m. Family Communion



John Keble Parish from the air

along Courtland Avenue and the eastern boundary pursues a tortuous path via Hankins Lane, Marsh Lane, Selvage Lane, Hale Lane, Hale Drive and Gold Hill. (At a later date new roads in the Worcester Crescent area came into the parish's general oversight by agreement with the Vicar of St. Paul's, although the roads are legally part of his parish.)

The Vicar called for an evangelistic campaign to the area in November 1937, and so the congregation embarked upon "The Evangel", a mission to the houses in the parish which might not yet be aware of the thriving community life of their new parish church.

That community life went on even more vigorously following the completion of building on the church site. Though there was no longer a need for a Four-Year Building Plan, a scheme of regular pledged giving through envelopes was continued under the name "The Family Purse".

There was plenty of activity in the Hall on each week-night and outside recreation also. A Cricket and Football Club had grown up, comprised of younger members of the church and one of the strongest sections of the John Keble Club was the energetic "Ramblers". On many pre-war Bank Holidays mass rambles were organised for all in the congregation who cared to come; and with the open fields of Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire close at hand, it was not surprising that often fifty or sixty chose to spend their leisure in this way.

During the Patronal Festival weekend in July, it became the custom to hold a Garden Party for the parish on the Vicarage lawn. Games and entertainments were organised by church organisations and there were always teas in the shady orchard which formed part of the garden of Holbrook House.

The Vicarage lawn was used for other purposes, too. The newly-formed Youth Club (first meeting on September 27th, 1937) rented the lawn for a rent of 1d. a year in order to play tennis, "in return for cutting and rolling the grass".

The gaiety of church life was subdued by the clouds which rolled across the international horizon in 1938. There is a sombre note about the way in which the John Keble Magazine records in October of that year, "Many of our readers will be glad to hear that the Air Raid Precautions Department of the Borough of Hendon have arranged for four public lectures to be given in the Church Hall . . . "

Then, suddenly, in September 1939, Britain was plunged into war. At John Keble, on the morning of Sunday, September 3rd, helpers were putting out chairs for Sunday School when the first Aid Raid Siren sounded. As people stopped what they were doing in amazement, "Padre" was busy rush-

ing round the church premises and collecting church helpers and officials together.

He led them to a hastily improvised shelter, the basement celler of Holbrook House. Even that situation had a lighter side, as he later recalled. "We sat there till the 'All Clear' sounded. When they had all gone I found that one of my good friends, a rather large lady, had been sitting firmly the whole time on my Sunday joint" . . .

Within weeks much of the family life of John Keble was fragmented. Younger men and women enlisted in the services or were called up; others found that their business or factories or Government departments or schools were hastily evacuating to the fathest corners of the British Isles. In the later years of the war, it was estimated that over 150 members of the J.K. family were in uniform.

But for those who stayed at home, there was much to endure. Mill Hill was close enough to London to be plunged into the full force of the "blitz". The Hall became a temporary reception centre for homeless families, and the area beneath the gallery at the back of the Church was bricked up and used as an Air Raid Shelter. The strong construction of the tower made it suitable for this, and it was fortified (at the church's own expense) by hundreds of sandbags which the congregation themselves laboriously filled and stitched. The Scout Troop gave assistance to A.R.P. and organised waste paper collections; the Sunday Schools were held in private homes for a time for greater safety. Fire watchers patrolled the church roof each night, since it was a fine vantage point over the surrounding neighbourhood. The parish breakfast became spartan fare, but was thronged each Sunday with young men and women in uniform, home at J.K. on a precious "weekend pass".

One could detect a certain grim irony about the November 1939 wedding report of Scoutmaster Bill Turner and Assistant Cubmaster Eileen Walker. "As Eileen is now an A.R.P. Ambulance Driver, they had an excellent send off from her Detachment, who provided an arch of splints for them to walk under . . . "

And at Christmas-time the solemnity of the local Police order provided something to laugh about. "Carolling will not be banned under the Control of Noise Order, providing people do not warble like Air Raid Sirens".

The heavy bombing of 1940 disorganised local life, but the parish kept going. Church helpers manned the Emergency Rest Centre each night and provided meals, clothes, camp beds and blankets for those who were bombed out. The October 1940 magazine was published late and the Vicar

apologised . . . "At the time when it should have gone to press, we were immersed in receiving the homeless from the more heavily bombed areas".

J.K. organisations had been curtailed or suspended during the worst of the blitz, but each Thursday night there was a "Shelter Party". The services continued, though Evensong was held earlier to avoid the "blackout". The number of communicants went on rising—a testimony not only to the faithful work of the clergy, but to the realisations that war can bring.

In the spring of 1941, Mr. Gibbs-Smith left the parish to become Rector of Christ Church, Marylebone, and St. John's Wood Chapel. His memorable ministry of nine years had done much to shape the family life of John Keble parish and its traditions of worship. He had made it an example for many other new parishes springing up all over England in similar new housing areas and had left a core of deeply committed Christians within its congregation.

His successor, the Rev. E. W. J. Motley, came from the heart of the blitz where, at the famous church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, he had been "Curate in charge of air raid shelters". His warm friendliness soon won him many friends and he guided the parish through the later years of the war with great skill.

Organisations gradually revived their activities, and the Scout Group was particularly active with the Vicar himself proving an energetic G.S.M. to them. But many members of the family were still scattered far and wide on war service. The newly titled "John Keble Journal" was full of letters each issue from those away from home; letters came from Hong Kong, North Africa, Malaya, India, many of them expressing appreciation of the Parochial Church Council's thoughtful practice of sending them all a small gift each Christmas.

One notable event near the end of the war was the visit of the Bishop of London (now Lord Fisher of Lambeth) to the parish. He came on September 10th, 1944, to ordain the parish's Lady Worker, Miss W. Adams, to the title of Deaconess Chloe. When, some 15 years later, as Archbishop of Canterbury, he was reminded of his visit to the church and to the family breakfast, he remarked memorably, "Ah yes, the marmalade was very good there" . . .

Chapter 4—THE POST WAR PERIOD

Mr. Motley's keen aesthetic sense enabled him to complete the interior furnishing of the church with several unusual

ornaments that fitted well into the modern style of the building. He was the moving spirit behind the organisation of a patronal festival of arts and crafts in 1945, which included not only secular exhibits (models and photographs and much craftwork) but also some vestments and altar hangings that had been made by members of the congregation. The "exhibition" idea was repeated successfully in 1951.

In drama, too, the Church was active. A strong youth club performed such diverse offerings as a riotous pantomime and T. S. Eliot's "Murder in the Cathedral" in the immediate post-war-period.

But with the war concluded, the parish's thoughts turned again to evangelism. New building was going on in the Courtlands area, north of Apex Corner, and as early as 1946 Mr. Motley had gained permission from the Borough Council to erect a temporary hut on a site in Courtlands Avenue. Through a variety of reasons the plan did not materialise, but regular Sunday Schools were organised first at The Fairway School, and then at Courtlands School, and these today play a valuable part in the youth work of the parish.

Mr. Motley organised a parish mission, which was conducted by Fr. Alan Hughes, C.R., in 1947, and this served as a prelude to the 1949 "Mission to London" for which John Keble was a local centre. On this occasion, loudspeakers conveyed the services to much of the immediate neighbourhood, and one letter of appreciation was received from a man who had listened to the sermon while in his bath! 900 people attended on the first night of the mission, and following this there was an average of over 400 at each service. Services were followed by vigorous question sessions in the Church Hall, presided over by the Missioner, the Rev. Tom Savage, then Vicar of Leominster, and now a Bishop.

A glance at the rising number of communions made each year demonstrates clearly the way in which the John Keble family continued to grow; the number doubled between 1944 and 1958. Many younger people were drawn into the fellowship of the church as the parish Youth Club blossomed in the 1950's, and acting as its Leader became almost a full-time job for later curates.

A Mothers' Union was formed in 1949 to complement the work of the existing Women's Fellowship and strengthen women's organisations within the parish.

The older "pioneer" members of J.K. found their sons and daughters and new post-war arrivals in the district taking their place in church affairs, and healthy ripples of discussion spread as the basis and the traditions of John Keble family life were examined afresh by those who came new to them.

A sermon against self-satisfaction, "What's wrong with J.K.?" was re-published in the October, 1952, Journal and served as a focus for some of this discussion. The correspondence columns of the magazine reverberated with answers and rebuttals the following issue; the vigour of them certainly discounted apathy as a possible fault.

Earlier in 1952, on Ascension Day, the B.B.C. had broadcast the Family Communion service from the church, interpreted from Dr. J. H. Arnold. This was not quite the first time that J.K. had been heard over the air, however, since two short half-hour services had been broadcast to Forces and Commonwealth listeners on April 20th, 1947. (In 1959, the B.B.C. paid a third visit to the church, this time to televise the whole of the Family Communion service, and even the beginning of the parish breakfast.)

* * *

The final appearance of John Keble Church (as shown in the water-colour painting that the Architect had hung in the Royal Academy exhibition of 1937) showed an imposing set of steps which were to lead down from the west door. Lack of finance had prevented the construction of these steps at the time of the building of the permanent church and doubts were subsequently cast about the wisdom of excavating them on the treacherous clay hillside site of the church.

The front of the church had thus remained in an unfinished state for several years and in 1947 the Master of the Music (also a keen gardener) had, in consultation with his brother, produced a scheme for formally laying-out the grounds of the church. He proposed that the grounds between the church and Deans Lane should be left informal and wooded, but that elsewhere lawns and flower-beds should be introduced. The impracticability of the large flight of steps in front of the West Door was accepted and alternative plans suggested.

In the summer of 1953 (in one of those bursts of activity which are all the more energetic for being spontaneous) members of the youth club and of the nearby Deansbrook Social Club decided to mortgage some of their time towards improving the grounds at the front of the church. Within a few weeks they had levelled the ground in front of the West Door, and laid a concrete forecourt for wedding photographs and guests. Their work was the beginning of other schemes in the church gardens which have today almost reached completion; for many, the pre-war days of "The gang" were irresistibly recalled, as members of the church family worked on a number of tasks.

An even more pressing practical problem was the ram-

shackle nature of the Vicarage. Gaping cracks in the walls and frequent flooding of the cellars eventually caused the house to be condemned and Mr. Motley was forced to move into temporary residence in a house in Hale Lane for six months, while the old Holbrook House was pulled down and a new Vicarage erected a little to the east of it.

The Vicar moved into the new house in September, 1952; it was an unusual building with a large single-room on the ground-floor and a raised dias for dining purposes. It was also designed by Mr. D. F. Martin-Smith and well in keeping with the bold and unusual architecture of the church.

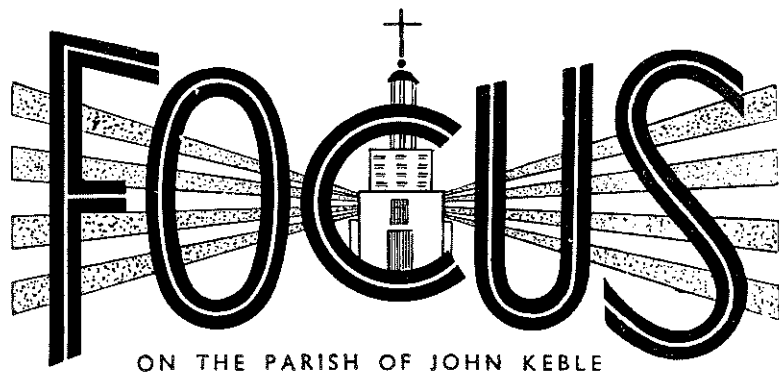
Another building added to the grounds was the Scout headquarters, which were erected in April, 1955, after a long period of planning and raising money. The original Hut was then moved (for the second time) to its present position between the Church and the Hall.

In 1955, after 23 years service to John Keble, Mr. F. A. Martin-Smith, the Master of the Music, resigned. He recalled highlights of the church's music at his farewell—singing the Eucharist at the Festival Church during the 1951 Festival of Britain, deputising for the St. Paul's Cathedral Choir when it was on holiday, organising a United Festival Evensong at J.K. in 1948 when Dr. Dykes-Bower of St. Paul's conducted 150 voices. He handed over the music reins to one of his former choristers, Mr. David Norman, whose father had been one of the first men in the J.K. choir when it was formed in 1932.

Ecumenical activity was developing in the district by this time and Mr. Motley had played no little part in this, as one of the first chairmen of the Mill Hill Council of Churches. He had also encouraged a strong missionary Association to grow, and organised a contribution from the parish to the Diocesan campaign for family worship, "Operation Firm Faith". On October 13th, 1956, nearly 200 members of the parish took part in a pageant-procession around St. Paul's Cathedral, at the opening service of the campaign. The procession represented "The Christian Family" and the ideals of John Keble parish could scarcely have made it a more apt choice.

In October, 1957, an important journalistic change was made, and the "parish magazine" discontinued. It had always been lively and readable, but primarily intended for members of the church congregation. Anxious to reach many people who lived in the parish but who did not come to church, the P.C.C. authorised its replacement by a "parish newspaper". This was to have the policy of seeking to mirror the life of the parish as a whole and not simply that part of it that was of interest to churchgoers. The new "Focus" was to concern itself with local schools, road safety, rent increases, and other district matters, besides giving church news and

Christian comment on issues of the day. Its provocative style was an immediate success and circulation of the parish's publication rose from 600 to 2,000 with the first issue; 75 per cent. of the readers were non-churchgoers.



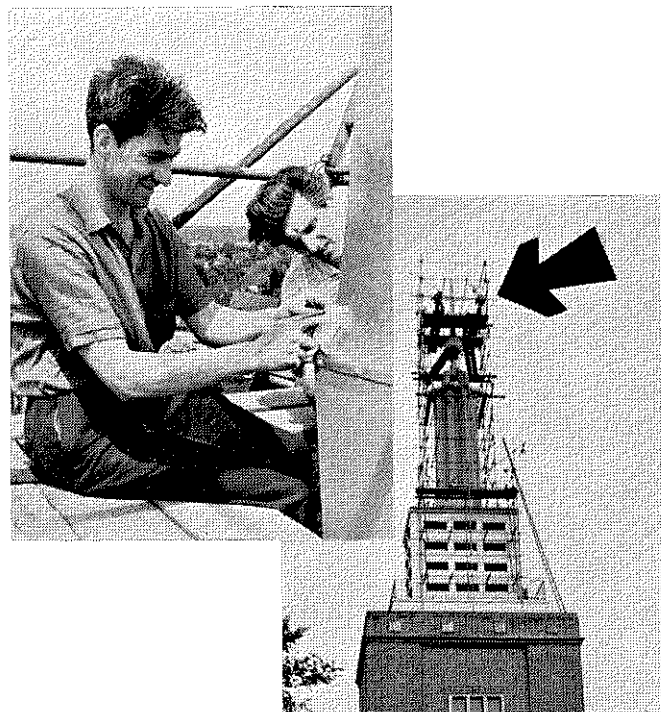
In 1958, Mr. Motley resigned as Vicar to go to the parish of Redbourn, Herts. Both he and his wife had been lively and colourful personalities in the parish, and they were given a rousing affectionate farewell party on their departure. Mr. Motley's successor was a priest from the staff of St. Paul's Cathedral, whose first contact with the parish had been through the "Operation Firm Faith" procession—the Rev. Rennie Simpson.

Chapter 5—RECENT YEARS

Mr. Simpson arrived at a time when the population of the parish was changing rapidly. Many of the first generation of John Keble parishioners were now reaching the age of retirement from the London jobs and seeking quieter and more rural surroundings for their later years; they were being replaced by younger couples, who chose the pleasant outer suburbs of North-West Middlesex as a convenient area in which to settle. Many of these younger couples were encouraged to join the family life of the church and so new faces kept pace with the many departures.

Only four months after he arrived, the new Vicar was faced with a difficult problem, since cracks began to appear in the roof and in the walls of the church. It was also apparent that a redecoration of the church was necessary, and also a re-gilding of the cross. The architect, called in to examine the cracks, pronounced that they were not structural,

but were inevitable because of the shifting nature of the treacherous clay foundations. There was slight shifting of the concrete "raft" on which the church was built and this had led to cracking in the brickwork which was between the structural pillars of the church.



Re-gilding the cross

Mr. Simpson launched an appeal for £2,000 to cover the repairs and redecorations and the money was successfully raised in just over a year. It was the first special appeal that had been made to John Keble parishioners since the building of the church in 1936.

John Keble's third Vicar was also to make his mark on local life very quickly in another sphere. He had been inducted for only a few weeks when Alderman Arthur Paul, a Burnt Oak Alderman on the Hendon Borough Council, asked him to act as Mayor's Chaplain for the year 1958-59. Alderman Paul was a regular worshipper at St. Luke's, Old Street, and an occasional visitor to J.K. also.

Thus in June, 1958, the first Civic Service was held in John Keble Church, attended by members of the Borough Council, robed in their official dress. Mr. Simpson's great ability to make quick friends with many people stood him in good stead during his arduous year of office, which entailed attendances at many functions, including the dedication of new skyscraper flats at Spur-Road by the Queen Mother. (It was not a first meeting, however; for as a Deputy Priest to the Queen, he was occasionally absent from J.K. and doing duty at the Chapel Royal.)

It also made him an obvious choice as one of the new breed of "TV parsons" who were being engaged by the television companies to present late night epilogues. The Vicar of John Keble became a familiar face to millions through his regular appearances on ITV during his first three years in the parish.

But this did not reduce his efforts on home ground. He, like his predecessor, became Chairman of the local Council of Churches and played a leading part in fostering closer relationships among local clergy of all denominations. In May 1959 many members of the parish were involved in a combined churches production of Diego Fabbri's drama "Man on Trial" which was seen by over 1,000 people during its five performances. There were also conversations with the elders of the neighbouring Presbyterian church on the prospects of unity (meetings which were to be repeated with Methodists concerning reunion in 1964).

The Silver Jubilee of the Consecration of the Church was remembered in December 1961, with a week of special events. Trumpeters from Kneller Hall sounded fanfares at the commemoration celebration of the Family Communion on December 16th. During the week there was a Silver Jubilee Ball, and a nostalgic "This is your life" programme in the Church Hall at which well-known figures from the church's past history returned to tell their memories of earlier days.

A Christian Stewardship campaign was organised in June 1962, seeking to convince members of the congregation of the need for systematic financial responsibility towards the church. The campaign began with a spectacular dinner at Hornsey Town Hall attended by hundreds, and it was the prelude to many people pledging a regular weekly amount for the first time. The church's income was doubled to £6,170, and as a result over £1,900 (30% of the total income) was sent outside the parish in 1963, the first full year of stewardship.

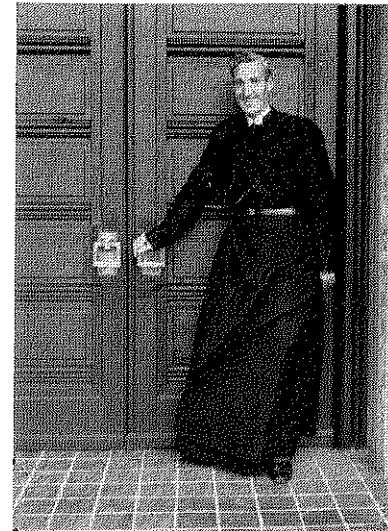
The Parochial Council budgeted the increased income with foresight and care and were able to put money in reserve

for Major Repairs and Pension Funds. The principle of stewardship was further extended in the following year when a "time and talents" campaign was organised.

Members of the congregation specified their available skills and spare time and a committee now functions to co-ordinate needs and offers of help within the parish. These include such matters as baby-sitting, transport for the elderly and infirm; and professional advice.

The stewardship scheme was significant in again emphasising the role of the laity in the pastoral care of the parish and, subsequently, a system of road observers and wardens has been set up to help the clergy know quickly of emergencies and the Church generally of any needs which can be met.

Since Stewardship was introduced the proceeds of the biennial Christmas Fair have been devoted exclusively to non-church charities. In 1962, £830 was given to Cancer Research; the 1964 profits go to Oxfam.



Bill Hogg — Verger from 1946 - 1978

There was also strong financial support for the adoption and education of a refugee boy at the Ockenden Venture Homes, as a result of a casual paragraph by a columnist in Focus. The money was contributed by both churchgoers and non-churchgoers and formed part of the parish's strong contribution to World Refugee Year in 1959-60.

Mr. Simpson left the parish in 1963 to take up a post on the staff of Westminster Abbey. His successor was the Rev. J. H. Ginever, previously Vicar of All Hallows, North Greenford. Soon after his arrival, two links with the earliest days of the church were broken.

Mr. R. F. Newell, Treasurer of the Church from the day that the 2d. blue cashbook had been handed to him by the Priest-in-Charge in March 1932, died soon after completing the preparation of the 32nd annual accounts. His work for the parish had been immense, and he enjoyed universal respect.

Another to relinquish office was the Sacristan, the Rev. Alfred Turner, who had seen to the service preparations from the earliest days of the Hut. (He estimated that he had walked from his house to the vestry some 10,000 times in the course of his voluntary labours.) Happily, his work in the parish went on in other spheres. A former Lay Reader at John Keble, he was ordained in 1959 to a curacy at the church, following his retirement from business.

There are others of the first years of John Keble still active in the work of the parish; but, encouragingly, there is also a new generation of John Keble family continuing the work. The parish has always been a live and active one and its standards have been high. It seems likely in the future to continue to represent the family ideal in Anglican church life.

REX WALFORD

Chapter 6—THE SIXTIES AND SEVENTIES

Two incumbents in turn led the parish through the next two decades of the Church's history—John Ginever from 1963 to 1970, and John Dennis from 1971 to 1979. Social changes were taking place at an accelerating pace, and just as Gibbs-Smith had shaped a Church for the special needs of a newly established suburb so his successors worked to ensure that the Church served the newly emerging society of the second half of the twentieth century.

One aspect of social change was inflation. The Stewardship Committee served as a continuous reminder of the sacramental use of money, as a means of transferring time

and talents from one corner of the globe to another, as Christian needs required. Regular reviews of our commitments to giving under the Stewardship Scheme, and the Parish's good fortune in continuing to be served by a series of able Treasurers, kept pace (but only just) with rising costs. A healthy dialogue within the Church membership preserved a balance between immediate and obvious needs—perhaps to repair a leaking roof—and less immediately perceptible but equally real needs of the many charitable organisations outside the Parish who look to us for regular support. There were, from time to time, critical debates over the occasional use of money raised by the Christmas Fair to finance urgent repair to the fabric. Difficult decisions were reached after much heart-searching, and not only among P.C.C. members who bore the burden of such decisions.

There were more fundamental problems posed than those of inflation. The Parish was not isolated from the pressures imposed by society upon itself through what became labelled as "permissiveness". In an age when the family as the basic unit of society was weakened by easy divorce, and as the concept of the "single parent family" became a commonplace, the vision of Gibbs-Smith of "the John Keble Family" assumed a new importance. Looking back on those activities within J.K. that can broadly be described as 'Mission', a very great deal of effort has been devoted to the creation of unity, to offset the tendency of society to fragmentation. Shortly after John Ginever's arrival, the Clergy and Church Wardens invited members of other congregations to join the J.K. family at a Family Communion—to worship, though not yet join in the communion itself. This was followed by a Lent Exercise in 1967, "The People Next Door" which proved to be the forerunner of Mill Hill's subsequent regular ecumenical house groups. In 1978 John Keble took its place, with all the other Mill Hill Churches, in the Mill Hill Churches Ecumenical Project. How much progress had been made at a local level in the intermediate years is evidence of a very real desire among Christians of all denominations in Mill Hill to make a common and effective witness for Christ.

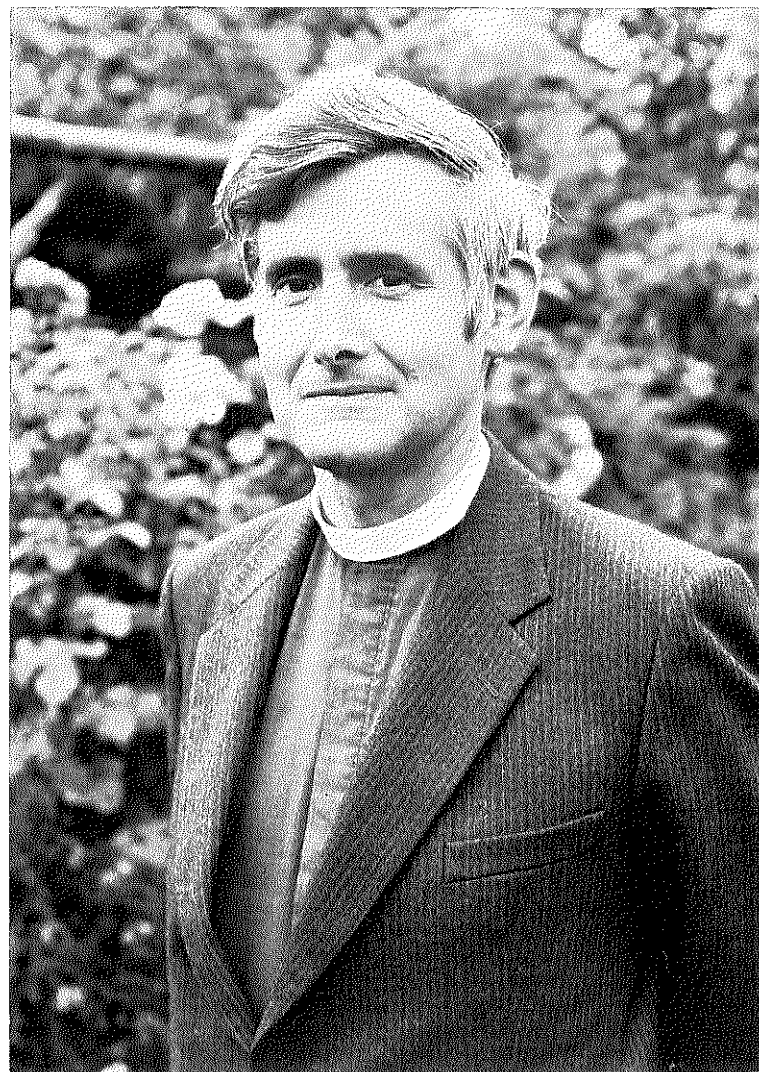
As part of the Parish outreach, the Youth Organisation, the Good Companions and the Clubs and Fellowships of the Church have continued to play their traditional role. Under David Norman's guidance, a regular series of Choir and Orchestral Concerts has filled the Church. John Ginever gave considerable thought to the preparation offered to young couples coming to the Church to be married; and his successor placed confirmation training, through the Ichthus Groups, on a much more thoroughly programmed structure.

The Parish also perceived a need to train and retrain its own members. In February 1964 a group of theological students from Bishop's College, Cheshunt, spent ten days in the Parish. This was not an old fashioned 'Students' Mission'; the students came to conduct a survey so that the Parish could better understand its own nature. A comparable exercise took place in 1977, when David Wasdell who is both a priest and a sociologist, brought his expertise from the Urban Church Project to assess the future points of growth within the Parish. His most urgent advice was that we should look to the development and potential of the House Group. In May 1976 the Parish organised a 'Teaching Week' led by Father Peter of the Order of the Glorious Ascension. During this week the Parish was given the opportunity of hearing able theologians on matters of faith and belief. The Parish newspaper, Focus, has fulfilled its own didactic function (not, of course, its only function) with informative articles covering the new ideas and new activities abroad within the Church. Since 1965, John Keble has been designated a Training Parish for recently ordained clergy. Both the Vicars of the period have every reason to feel that they have done well by the young clergy who have passed through their hands, en route, to wider responsibility. The parish equally can feel that it has trained its Vicars well too!

John Ginever left J.K. in 1970 to become Rector of St. Peter's and Rural Dean of Wolverhampton. The Church of St. Peter goes back to pre-Conquest times and is now the Mother Church of a town of a quarter of a million inhabitants. The Rector's pastoral responsibilities are diverse and demanding, since he leads his immediate team of five assistant clergy, but also maintains close links with the twenty-five daughter Churches of the town.

John Dennis left in 1979, upon his appointment as Bishop of Knaresborough, within the Diocese of Ripon. As Bishop he is responsible for about 150 parishes and 200 clergy. As "John Knaresborough" he initials documents "J.K.,"—which keeps our Family fresh in his mind.

John Keble has of course shared in the liturgical experiments that have taken place within the Church of England over the past decades. Series II was adopted in 1968, and a 'Focus' editorial commented that "John Keble Church would wish to be in the vanguard of liturgical renewal". Of Series III five years later, 'Focus' added, "Its use here will be in the liveliest traditions of J.K." When the Alternative Service Book appeared in 1980, as a durable 'hardback' after years of paper backed pamphlets, the congregation was already comfortable with the new forms of worship.



The Rev. John Dennis — Vicar 1971-79 — now Bishop of Knaresborough

The move of John Dennis to Yorkshire was followed by an Interregnum of eighteen months—an unusually long period. In part, this was the consequence of major defects in the structure of the Vicarage. For a time it appeared that the most sensible course was to demolish the Vicarage, and rebuild. However, in the event it proved possible to repair the existing building. During the interregnum the Parish was singularly well served by two young curates who acted in turn as Priest in Charge—Jim Wellington and Robert Atwell.

Eventually in January 1981 the Parish welcomed as its New Vicar, Oliver Osmond, who joined us from a parish in Canada, together with his wife Rosalie and his three children. His incumbency will be for the record of a later issue of the Parish History, and another Historian.

Chapter 7—FIFTY YEARS—A BACKWARD GLANCE

“One of the characteristics of life in any new suburb is that people do not know one another. Batches of houses spring up, and are occupied too fast for human friendships to mature in the normal way, and social agencies are non-existent. The Church has a unique opportunity to capture the social life of these child districts, and develop them on Christian lines.

In our case we determined upon one governing principle—the realisation of the Family Ideal; and because people had been starved of friendship and fellowship, they were quickly drawn to make this ideal their own. As a new Church centre came into being everything was subordinated to this aim. We aimed not so much to collect a congregation which should attend services in this Church, but to build up a family of people who should express and deepen their relationship in a community of work and worship. They were invited not simply to accept what the Church could give them, but to contribute by personal service to the life of the family.

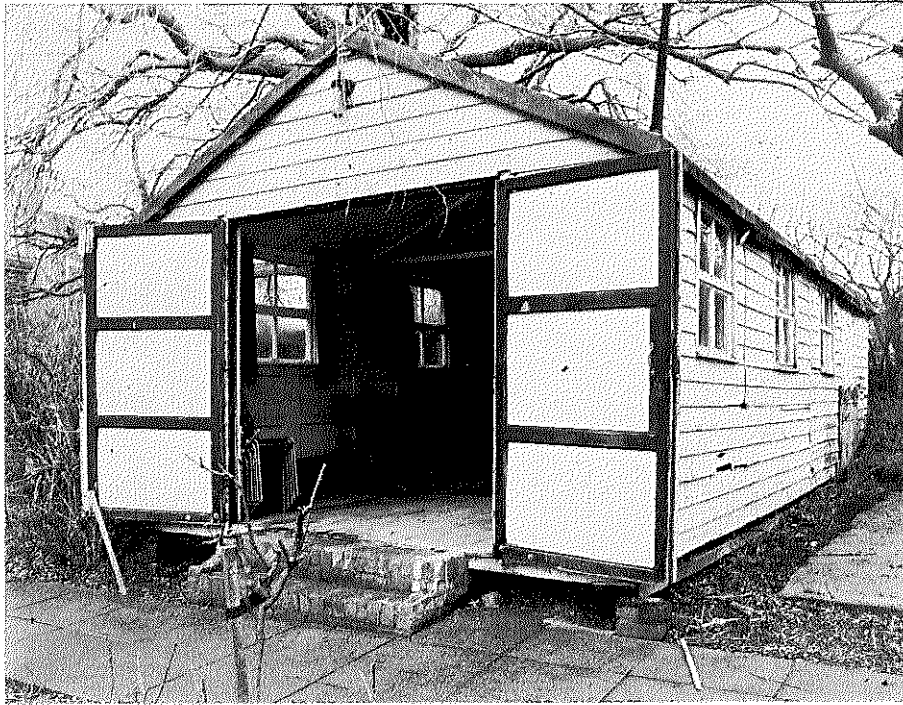
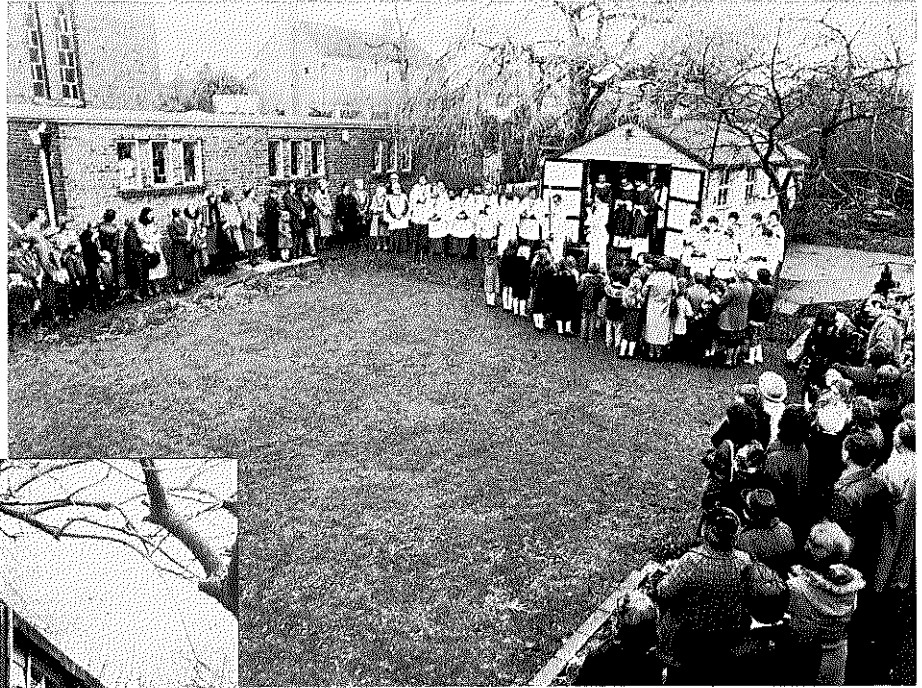
Now Christian work without worship is as futile as daily work without sleep, and this Family Ideal I am describing owes its soul and strength to the weekly Corporate Communion. We call it Family Communion, for it is the centre of family life, and the seat of our union with the Lord, and with one another. The service is as congregational as it can be. Worship, intercession, communion, sacrifice, reading the scriptures and instruction are all embraced in the one and historic representative act of the Christian Community”.

This account of the genesis of John Keble by its first Vicar is of great interest on three quite separate counts. Set

against a more general account of Anglican parish life, as described by John Moorman, Bishop of Ripon in his “History of the Church in England”, we can place the development of J.K. in a wider context. Moorman writes of the post-War (1914-1918) Church “facing a new situation. A large number of people were now almost completely out of touch with organised religion, while their children were growing up totally ignorant of the Christian faith . . . On the outskirts of the town new housing estates sprang up with great rapidity. The new Churches were mostly designed to meet the changes that were taking place; one the growth of eucharistic as against homiletic worship; the other, the need to make a service such as the Holy Communion far more congregational. The great increase in divorce stimulated interest in the Church’s responsibility for the Family”. In this we recognise that John Keble’s growth and development was not a unique phenomenon, but very much a reflection of the general needs of the age, and the response of the most far-sighted clergy to meet them. Gibbs-Smith’s assessment shows him to have been one of this group.

Secondly, the emphasis on personal involvement is a hallmark of both Gibbs-Smith and J.K. A newcomer to the congregation was at once found a job. The inside cover of the first issue of the Parish Magazine lists “John Keble Church Staff”; there are one hundred and thirty names on the list. Some names, appear twice, it is true, but this is compensated for the unnamed “Sunday Breakfast—40 ladies: Cleaning rota—28 ladies: Club rota—24 ladies”. At about the same time Gibbs-Smith produced a diagram to illustrate the relationship of the P.C.C. to its sub-committees and the Church clubs; it is a formidable document. Christianity for the young J.K. was action. It is still a useful exercise to calculate how many of the laity are making a special contribution (as well, obviously, as a general worshipping contribution) to the Family Communion. The list includes servers, choir, sidesmen, readers both of the lessons and of the intercessions, the offertory procession; while out of sight are the Sunday School teachers, the minders of the creche, the breakfast team; and visible evidence remains of the work of the polishers, the dusters and the flower arrangers. Gibbs-Smith’s perception that families are bound together by a shared purpose and a common achievement has served our community.

Thirdly, it is clear that Gibbs-Smith was an opportunist, in the best sense. The message of the Gospel is eternal, but as Michael Ramsay said at the Lambeth Conference of 1968, “God is in His Church, renewing it so that the Church may more clearly proclaim its faith to the world, and more effectively discharge its mission to the world”. Gibbs-Smith, the



50th Anniversary of the first service in the Hut — 28th February, 1982

opportunist taught the J.K. family to be more receptive to that renewing spirit for the more effective proclamation of the faith.

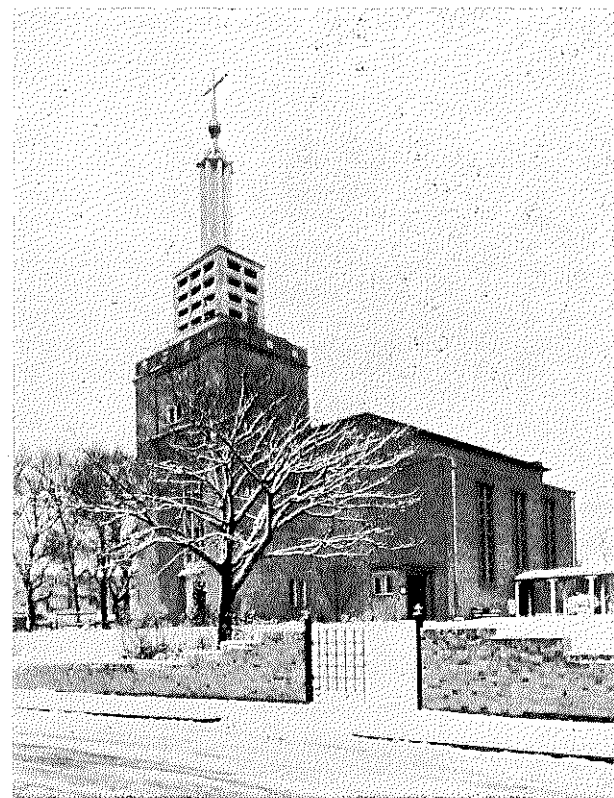
Just as Gibbs-Smith set out his statement of the modus operandi when J.K. first began, to carry the Family through its first decades, so nearly fifty years later, John Dennis turned the attention of the Parish to new needs of the future in his 'Green Paper' a discussion document entitled "Forward into the Eighties". As fifty years earlier Gibbs-Smith studied the needs of the "child district" he had been set to work in, so his successor explored the needs of the present—to isolate, as Gibbs-Smith had done, "the new opportunity to capture" souls.

John Dennis isolated two issues which appeared to him to challenge the Parish.

1. David Wasdell had reported of John Keble, after his visit in 1977, that "There can be no further growth while the present structure of the Church is retained, but the membership is still sufficiently large for the Church to continue on its present course, and ignore such distressing and uncomfortable information". John Dennis commented on this that, "the recognition of the need we all have for the support of each other is one of the great insights of today. It is in small groups of about a dozen people that members can best learn about each other, feel supported by each other and really get a growing sense that they belong—to the Family and to God. Jesus Christ knew this well, and acted upon it".

2. It is necessary in a world where women have claimed rightly and successfully, equality with men, that the Church should examine its own current practices and attitudes. John Dennis wrote, "What of women? Do we consciously share power and delegate responsibility across the whole age range here too? . . . This is not really a theological question. Women are not ordained at present in the Church of England. They do, however, minister; they do administer the chalice; they do read lessons and preach; they do minister to the sick and the dying; and in many churches they do now serve at the altar". Since there is no theological bar to all these things, which are now a matter of wide common practice, John Dennis was forced to put the question, "Is there an unexpected undercurrent here which we must bring to the surface from our subconscious, and deal with, if we are to be true to the Spirit alive in His World today?"

But, like Gibbs-Smith before him, John Dennis inevitably returned to what has remained the essential heart of the life of the J.K. Family—the Family Communion. Its shape has changed over the last fifty years: we have now the priest



John Keble Church

celebrating facing the congregation across the altar; in place of the 1662 Prayer Book we use the 1980 Alternative Service Book; the lessons are no longer read from the Authorised Version, but from modern translations; an Old Testament lesson and the Intercessions are now read by laymen and laywomen; laymen now offer the chalice, which twenty years ago was restricted to clergy and licenced readers. There may well be an even greater degree of congregational participation in 1982 than in 1932. But the final words of John Dennis reflect almost exactly the final words of Gibbs-Smith. "We must ensure that our Sunday Worship, particularly the Family Communion, is vibrant, alive and attractive and that it is seen as the essential centre of our corporate life. Upon our relationship with Christ, at his Meal together as His Family, all else must depend".

ROBERT BAYNES

Appendix 1—THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CHURCH

The actual site of the church (like much building land in North Middlessex) was not at all a good one from the point of view of finding stable foundations. Yellow clay extends down for twenty feet before blue clay, and there is a tendency for one to slip over the other.

The architect therefore provided for eighteen-foot deep concrete piles, which were sunk into the ground and then joined together just below ground level by beams. From the beams rise concrete columns to support the roof. Thus, the building is a kind of concrete cage, floating on the clay. Much of the brickwork simply serves to fill up the space not required for windows.

The large roof, uninterrupted by supporting columns, was constructed by a system known as "Diagrid"; John Keble was the first church in the British Isles to use the system. The diagonal concrete beams were laid flat across the roof (hence the absence of the normal arched church roof) and are exposed to view inside. The panels formed by the diagonals were then decorated with a mosaic of differently coloured acoustic tiles. Insulating tiles on the outside of the roof reduce expansion and contraction to a minimum, and gutters were formed in the roof itself, preventing the need for metal gutter channels. The rainwater pipes that carry the water away are of copper.

The spire of the tower is constructed of concrete, and the cross and ball are of copper, covered with gold leaf. (They were re-gilded in 1960.) The function of the louvred lantern tower is to act as a sound-box for a peal of bells, though the church at present has only one hanging in the belfry.

The organ (as yet still unfinished) was installed by the famous firm of Henry Willis & Sons, and has been called "a most valuable work of art, entirely out of the run of the ordinary church organ".

Mr. A. F. Erridge, a former Verger of the Church, has also made a notable artistic contribution to its interior. He was the artist responsible for the Baldachino over the High Altar which represents the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the crucifixes behind the pulpit and in the John Keble chapel were also of his own design and making. In addition he was responsible for the cross and two altar candlesticks in the Lady Chapel.

The oldest piece of furnishing in the church is the font, which is possibly some 250 years old, and was originally an old mortar in which corn was ground. It was given to the church from friends in Kensington, and came from Devonshire House, Piccadilly.

