

PERRY HILL CHAPEL
1822 TO 1914

By Herbert Farris.

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For the first part of my story I am indebted to a book which was published in 1908 entitled "The Story of Congregationalism in Surrey" written by the Rev. Edward E Cleal who was the minister at Mortlake Congregational Church and Secretary of the Surrey Union he writes. The Chapel at Perry Hill was built in 1822 and opened on June 5th of that year. Revs Leifchild, Forsaith, and Ivimey were the preachers. The building cost £380 of which £50 was contributed by friends at Guildford.

For some time the pulpit was supplied by students from Hackney College, but Mr Gayton having resigned the post of rural evangelist it was thought advisable to appoint a resident minister. In 1824 Mr Benjamin Haymes a Hackney Student was invited to the charge of Elstford and Normandy being also included in his sphere of labour. The work was very difficult; almost every report bears witness of the benighted condition of the neighbourhood. Mr Haymes was ordained as pastor at Epsom in 1829. Some of Mr Haymes letters are interesting reading, and give an excellent idea of the labour of a County evangelist.

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in those days "One Sabbath day (he writes in 1843) I thought I must have given up the service owing to the drifted snow, but I went on and found some waiting to hear the word of life. The nights have been so dark and chilling that I think nothing short of the love of Christ could have induced the poor creatures to leave their homes to attend our prayer meetings" on Tuesday October 16th 1849 Mr Haymes attended the annual meeting of the Surrey mission at Croydon, thence proceeding to London on business. Returning home on Friday he was seized with cholera, and after a few hours of great suffering died in the fifty-seventh year of his age. He was buried under one of the lawns in front of the Chapel, and a tablet to his memory is erected in the Chapel. Rev Mr Young of Malden supplied for a few months, and was highly appreciated but the state of his health prevented him from accepting the permanent charge of the station. The Committee then invited Mr Hardiman another Hackney Student. He entered on the work in 1850 and laboured faithfully till March 25th 1859.

when he removed to Takeley in Essex. For the next three years the Surrey Mission, through lack of funds, was under the necessity of discontinuing its support of the station. Meanwhile services were maintained at Perry Hill with tolerable regularity, first by local brethren, and then by Mr Colebrook, a lay preacher from Guildford, a portrait of him hangs in the vestry. In 1862 the Society again took charge of the district and in October of that year appointed Mr Lynn to the oversight of the work. Singing Classes, lectures, and popular readings were among the methods whereby he endeavoured to interest and instruct the villagers. Mr Lynn removed in October 1864 and was followed in February 1868 by Mr Hawkins. Early in 1870 Mr Hawkins resigned to enter Nottingham College. About this time we meet with references to Revs Manning and W. Heath in connection with Perry Hill, but can learn nothing definite about them. It was during this decade that the Chapel was taken over by the Guildford Congregational Church and

added to their list of district churches. My Father (W. Harris) was then an assistant minister to the Guildford Church was given the charge of the Chapels at Rydes Hill, Normandy, and Perry Hill, and this continued until the year 1890 when the congregation at Perry Hill wished to become independent of the Guildford Church, and applied to the Surrey Mission to do so. The application to do so was opposed by the minister and some of deacons at Guildford, but the majority of the deacons, friends of my Father, were in favour. At the time there was a gentleman living in the Village, a member of a very well-known family a Mr Pelham Clinton Hope who interested himself in the matter and declared that in any case the people should have their freedom. At his own expense he had a Mission Hall built in the garden of Perry Hill House, by kind permission of Mr and Mrs Samuel Burch, who were staunch members of the Chapel. In the meantime the members of the Chapel had invited my Father to become their minister and he accepted their invitation. On a certain Sunday morning

both my Father and the Guildford Minister arrived to take the service. In those days there was one postal delivery on Sunday, and the congregation were waiting outside the Chapel not knowing quite what to do when they saw the Secretary of the Chapel a Mr Farley coming up the road, waving a paper which he had just received. This proved to be from the Surrey Mission, giving the people their independence, and so the congregation and my Father, moved in to take the service, and the other minister returned to Guildford. The Mission Hall built by Mr Hope, was named after him and proved to be a very useful place for social gatherings connected with the work of the Chapel. After a short time there came a period of considerable progress, the Chapel became a centre of nonconformity for the area, and the congregation increased considerably. In addition to a large proportion of people from the village there were all the inhabitants of Kemishford, three families from Mayford, a Doctor and his family from Old Woking, three families from

Pitright, and two families from Brookwood including a retired Canon of the Church of England. My Father was a great believer in the social side of Church life, he looked upon the congregation as one big family, and so during the summer months outings were arranged to a number of beauty spots, which were much enjoyed. In addition to this, parties were held, to which the whole congregation were invited; one on Boxing Day and the other in the summer in our garden. There were also two tea meetings held at the Chapel, one on Good Friday afternoon followed by an evening meeting, in which a number of speeches were made on its meaning an effect on the Christian Church, and the other was held at the Harvest Festival Celebrations. In 1896 the congregation had so increased that it was realized that something must be done at the Chapel to try and provide more room. The Chapel in those days was a rather dreary looking place, there was no porch, no

no windows in the front, a flat ceiling, no real vestry, and inside there was a partition six feet high built across the Chapel from the side door. Inside the partition was divided into three sections, the centre one held the pulpit, one side was used as a small vestry, and the other side was used as a kitchen for tea meetings. There was a coke burning stove for heating and oil lamps for light. It was therefore decided that some alterations be made which produced the Chapel as it is now with the exception of the glass screen inside the front door, which was built later, and which I had the privilege of designing. As soon as the work was started, a few complications arose. It was found that there were no foundations and so a number of buttresses had to be built to take the weight of the roof, and the back wall was found to be in a dangerous state, and had to be pulled down and rebuilt. This of course added considerably to the cost, but the

whole congregation rallied around my Father and they devised all manner of things for raising the money. The total cost was around £400 which was a lot of money in those days, but when the work was finished and the re-opening service was held, my Father was able to announce that all the money had been raised. During the time that the work was in progress the services were held in Hope Hall. The Chapel was noted for its Choir which consisted of 16 voices - 9 women and 4 men, and they were asked by several villages around to give them a concert, and so we went to Pirbright, Camberley, Normandy, and Merrow, we also toured the village at Christmas time singing carols. We had a very good Sunday school of over 50 children and presided over by Mr Samuel Burch of Perry Hill House, and what a man he was! He gave freely of his time and energy to do anything that he could, because of his love for the Chapel. In addition there were two ladies who were great workers in the

Chapel, one was Mrs Philips who was the Organist for 65 years, and who gave the Organ which is now in the Chapel in memory of her husband, she was also very generous with other bequests. The other was Mrs Heather who devoted many years of her life to the Sunday School. One Sunday morning my Father in the course of his sermon said "I would very like to see the commandments of God engraved on the wall of the Chapel", and there was a lady in the congregation who was staying in the village for the weekend and the next day she sent my Father a cheque for the work to be done. The tablets on the back wall of the Chapel were made by a member who was a builder, and the commandments and the Beatitudes were written upon them. I very much regret to see that they have disappeared. Amongst our other activities we formed a Cricket Club, and named it the Hope Hall Cricket Club. It consisted of 25 members and we used to play every Saturday in the summer months, and sometimes on Wednesday. Our cricket pitch was on the common opposite the

Chapel which was then a lovely level patch of green grass. There was also a meeting of the ladies sewing meeting which met every week, and used to make various garments for the children of poorer parents, and these were given to them at the Christmas Sunday school treat. At the beginning of the century my Brother and I started a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon meeting at Hope Hall, and this proved to be very popular. We had a different chairman every Sunday appointed from the congregation, and we invited speakers from every walk of life to address the meeting on subjects in which they were interested. My Sister and I also formed what was known as the Worplesdon and District Temperance Society, and we invited everyone in the district who were interested in the Temperance cause, to join us, irrespective of whether they were Church or Chapel people, or neither and we soon had over 100 members. During the winter months I started an excursion fund, and members who were interested could pay in whatever they could afford. In those days the old South Eastern Railway used to

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then an excursion every week from Guildford to places on the South East Coast, from Margate round the Coast to Worthing. We arranged trips to most of these places and quite a number of our older people had never seen the sea and what a joy it was to see their faces when they first caught sight of it. On Wednesday evening we had a mid week service at the Chapel, and once a month we had an Entertainment in Hope Hall. This consisted of a programme of various items Solos, recitations, dialogues, and musical instruments. I have in my possession a number of these programmes dating back to the beginning of the Century, and so our weekly activities worked out as follows.

Sunday services at 11 AM and 6-30 PM

" Sunday School 10 AM and 3 PM,

Pleasant Sunday afternoon in Hope Hall

Monday Temperance Society in Hope Hall

Tuesday left open for special items

Wednesday Mid week service in the Chapel

" Entertainment once a month in Hope Hall

Thursday Ladies Sewing meeting at 3 PM.

Friday Choir practice at 7 PM

Saturday Cricket matches in the summer

" Winter Young peoples meeting in Hope Hall

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Our relations with the members of the Parish Church were very good, in fact some of them were members of the Temperance society and came to our meetings and also to our entertainments, and my Father and the Rector were good friends. Both of them were members of local Committees and took part in local events. An event which happened later proved how strong this friendship was, and although it was not connected with the Chapel in any way, it brought it into the news, and I felt that I would like to record it. In 1909 the Village had its first resident Doctor, an Irishman with a very friendly nature, and very soon a remarkable friendship came about between the Doctor, my Father, and the Rector. Every morning except Saturday and Sunday, after the Doctor had finished his surgery, he used to go to the Rectory and spend half an hour there, and then come to our house and spend half an hour with us. One day in the winter time, the Rector was conducting a funeral in the Churchyard when he slipped on

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wet grass and broke his ankle. This necessitated him to walk with the aid of two sticks ever after. There were one or two people who attended the Church who did not like to see him walking with two sticks and so they got together a group of people most of whom did not attend the Church and when the Easter Vestry was called they were going to propose that a request should be sent to the Bishop to have him removed. The Rector got to hear about it and came to see my Father, in great distress, and asked him if he would go and speak on his behalf at the meeting, to which my Father readily agreed and asked the Doctor if he would also come. The meeting duly took place in the school and the malcontents brought forward their resolution, but before they could put it to the meeting my Father arose and attacked them, and told them that they should be thoroughly ashamed of themselves. He said that the Rector had sustained his injuries in their service, and what they should be doing was to rally around the Rector and

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and make his duties lighter. While he was speaking one by one of the malcontents left the meeting and when my Father ended his speech by proposing a vote of confidence in the Rector, and seconded by the Doctor, it was carried unanimously. This event was not only recorded in the local newspapers but also appeared in the London papers, one of whom said that it was the greatest act of Christian Charity that they had known, that a vote of confidence in a Rector of the Church of England should be proposed by a Nonconformist minister and seconded by a Roman Catholic. It was not very long before the Rector died, and he was not only mourned by his two friends but by all who knew him. On August 15th 1914 my Father, while preparing his sermons for the next Sunday, had a severe heart attack from which he did not recover. A large number of people attended his funeral not only from the Village but also his old friends from Guildford

The service was conducted by the Congregational Minister from Guildford and also the new Rector took part in the service, and I shall never forget that on the way back from the churchyard, the Doctor who was sitting next to me in the carriage suddenly turned to me, and with a far away look in his eyes said "I wonder if the two old boys have met yet, and talked things over" a few years after. - the Doctor died, and in my quiet moments when I look back on the days that have gone, I like to think of the three old boys sitting down happily together and talking things over. In memory of my Father, members of the Village and a number of friends from other parts, built the manse for future ministers to live in, and a tablet recording the fact is placed on the wall of the manse. To end my story I do not think I can do better than quote the verse of a hymn, with which I am sure that everyone who has had any connection with the Chapel will agree.

We love the place O God
Wherein Thine honour dwells
The joy of Thine abode
All earthly joy excels.

Herbert. Farris. September
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