

A Brief History
of the
British Hall
STOCKSBRIDGE

by
Charles Brown
in collaboration with
Herbert and Grace M. Peace

60.

A Brief History of the British Hall

in its relation to the Stocksbridge
Congregational Church and Sunday
School from 1827 to 1961.



by

Charles Brown

in collaboration with

Herbert and Grace M. Peace.

To commemorate the final closing of the British Hall as a place of worship, it was felt by the Minister, Deacons, and members of the Congregational Church in Stocksbridge, that because of the foregoing, and in view of the Tercentenary Celebrations of Nonconformity to be held in 1962, this "Brief History" would be a fitting record of the growth of Congregationalism in this valley.

Minister: REV. BERNARD SHEPPARD, B.Sc.

Deacons: HERBERT PEACE

TILLY HAWLEY

RONALD BREARLEY

GEORGE HANCE

REX BREARLEY (*Secretary*)

FRANK CLARKE (*Treasurer*)

WALTER KENWORTHY

JOAN MICKLETHWAITE

PETER MAY

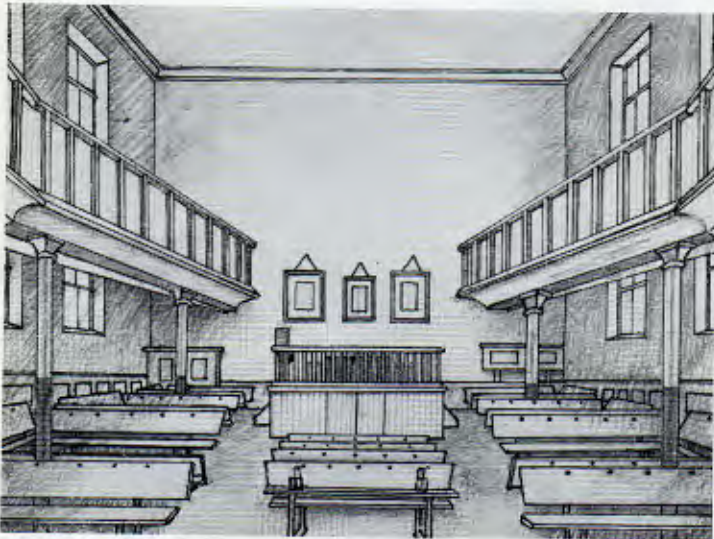
ARTHUR BENTHAM

RONALD WHITE

31st December, 1961



(1) The Ebenezer of 1846 prior to the alterations made in 1901.
(From an old photograph).

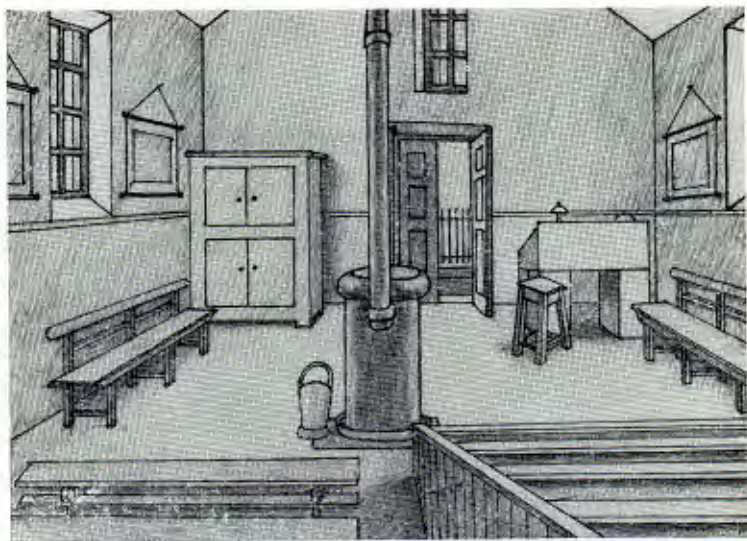


(1a) Interior of British School as it appeared in 1900 showing side galleries with iron pillars (replaced by long iron girders in 1901), and Day School desks arranged for Sunday School Classes. Seating in each gallery consisted of 3 rows of pews, some of which had doors.

Drawn from memory by Herbert Peace



(2) Infant School built in 1853. (From an old photograph).



(2a) Interior of Infant School as it appeared before alterations in 1901, showing floor-level gallery used for the Baby Class, access to it being on the extreme right. The desks on the left were for older scholars. It was heated by a coke stove. Slates were used then, the slate pencils being sharpened on an outer wall, to the right of the door.

Drawn from memory by Herbert Peace

There is reason to believe that a few Godfearing men and women, who called themselves Independents, formed a Sunday School near Bolsterstone before the year 1800, and by 1805 were meeting regularly in the parlour of John Ridal at Glass House, now called Pothouse.

A company of these worshippers also met in 1812 for services in the house of John Micklethwaite, at Whitwell, and in 1816 this Independent School became affiliated with the Sheffield Sunday School Union.

On Sunday, August 15th, 1819, Anniversary Services were held in the barn at Greave House, the school still being known as Bolsterstone Independent. A hymn-sheet used at this service, and printed by James Montgomery, of Sheffield, has been preserved. Two years later, in 1821, the School was being referred to as Glass House Ebenezer.

In 1827, the first chapel on the site of the Present British Hall was built. It was a single-storey building and was called Ebenezer. It was opened for worship in 1828, the services being conducted by the Rev. G. Ryan and the Rev. J. A. Coombes of Manchester. Two hymn-sheets dated 1834 and 1836 relate to Anniversary Services held in Ebenezer Chapel and conducted by Joseph Helliwell, a former scholar who became a minister.

In 1846, this building was enlarged by adding ten feet to the height and putting galleries on three sides, access to this upper portion being provided for by two staircases. (See photos 1 and 1a). The original doorway was walled up and can be seen on the north side. The altered building was re-opened by Dr. Stowell, Principal of Rotherham College.

A year later, in 1847, the chapel was registered for the solemnisation of marriages. The first marriage was between George Milnes and Ann Yates, of Greave House, the Minister being the Rev. G. S. Spencer, who was the first resident minister from 1847 to 1853. To mark this occasion, the bride was presented with a Bible bearing the following inscription:—

“Presented to Mrs. George Milnes on her marriage, it being the first solemnised in the Ebenezer Chapel, Stocksbridge by the Rev. G. S. Spencer, on behalf of the congregation worshipping at that place. December 29th, 1847.”

In 1849 a manse was erected adjoining the building on the west side, at a cost of £180. The Rev. G. S. Spencer was followed by the Rev. G. Thomas, 1854 to 1856, and by the Rev. Henry Robertshaw, 1857 to 1907. During the ministry of the latter, the manse became the School House and was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Henry Jones. Later it became the caretaker's house.

By 1853 another building had to be built for Sunday School work. (See photos 2 and 2a) and the Ebenezer was used for services. The new building, after 5 years, proved too small and was then only used as the Infant School, the older scholars having to go back to the Ebenezer for Sunday School work as well as for services, until in 1867 Mr. Samuel Fox built the Red School (later called the Works School, and now part of the Co-operative Stores) and allowed the Infants' room in it to be used by the older Sunday School scholars. This they used for 15 years, at the end of which time Mr. Fox required it for his own purposes.

In 1862 a second Independent Chapel was built by Mr. Amos Ridal on the site of the present Congregational Church and was called the Salem. Twenty years later in 1882, the Ebenezer and Salem were amalgamated. Services were held at the Salem which then became known as the Congregational Chapel, and the Sunday School was held at the Ebenezer, which was further adapted for this work, by having three classrooms built upstairs in the East gallery, leaving a single gallery row in front of the classrooms. This row proved most popular at concerts and similar occasions.

In 1901 considerable extensions were made to the School Buildings, now known as the British School, after they had been used as a Day School for 25 years. (See photo 3).

In 1915, 1,430 square yards of land were bought for possible future use, adjoining the British School.

On November 16th, 1921, the Congregational Church was destroyed by fire and during its rebuilding services were again held in the British School until February 14th, 1924, when the restored church was reopened.

The British School ceased to exist as a Day School in 1929, but continued as a Sunday School. Mr. Henry Jones, who was appointed Headmaster of the Day School in 1876, and Mrs. Jones, retired on 31st March, 1920, after 44 years of excellent service to Stocksbridge in both Day and Evening Schools. They still continue to serve in the Church and Sunday School until 1927, when they left the district. Mr. Frank B. Kenworthy succeeded as Headmaster on 1st April, 1920, and was followed by Mr. Thomas Vardy in 1924, when the School became a Boys' School, the Girls and Infants being transferred to the Works School. When the new Council School was opened at Shay House in January, 1929, the scholars of both the British School and the Works School were accommodated in it.



- (3) The British Hall showing part of Infant School on the left, altered in 1901, and additional Baby Room and portion of Lobby built in 1901. Double doors to Infant School and ramp and door to Baby Room added 1940 for Casualty Station during war.

(Photo by J. M. Ambler)



- (4) Interior of British Hall showing balcony erected in 1931.

(Photo by J. M. Ambler)



(5) Interior of British Hall showing Stage as reconstructed in 1931.
(Photo by J. M. Ambler)



(6) Memorial Tablet affixed to the West wall adjoining the Stage.
(Photo by J. M. Ambler)



(7) Interior of Large Classroom built in 1901 and later used as a County Library by the West Riding County Council.

(Photo by J. M. Ambler)

In 1931 the British School became known as the British Hall. The side galleries were removed, the classrooms upstairs replaced by the present existing balcony (see photo 4), and the platform made into a stage by incorporating a portion of the caretaker's house (see photo 5). This reconstruction was undertaken by public subscription, in recognition of the religious and educational work of Mr. and Mrs. Jones. A tablet to this effect was affixed to the wall adjoining the stage (see photo. 6). Although it was retained as a Sunday School and for various other purposes by the Congregationalists, it was also let to local organisations for concerts, meetings, teas and entertainments. One of the large classrooms has been used as a West Riding Public Library (see photo 7) and other smaller rooms for clinics. About six years ago it was leased to the local U.D.C. subject to certain conditions, and it has been of great value to the community generally, especially to the Darby and Joan Club, to whom the Council let it at a nominal rent.



(8) The British Hall—December, 1961.

(Photo by J. M. Ambler)

At the rear of the Hall itself is an Old People's Rest Room, built in 1938 by the late Mr. Joseph Sheldon, a faithful worker in the Sunday School for 67 years and a deacon of the Church for many years.

The Rev. Henry Robertshaw's ministry was followed by those of the Rev. Herbert Walter Hard 1907-10; Rev. John Wright Davies 1911-15; Rev. Henry Stephenson Shepherd 1916-26; Mr. D. M. Perkins (Student Pastor); Rev. George Whitefield Sackett 1929-47; and Rev. Robert Andrew Hopley 1949-58, all of whom were keenly interested in the work of the Sunday School. The Rev. Bernard Sheppard is the present minister, 1959—

Three scholars in our history have become ministers—Joseph Helliwell, Joseph H. Stanley and Matthew Stanley; also within the last few years, Micah Hopley, son of the Rev. R. A. Hopley, has been studying for the ministry and is making good progress. He had already preached here on several occasions.

When the Ebenezer joined the Sheffield Sunday School Union in 1816, there were 44 scholars on the books. At the centenary in 1916 there were 326. To commemorate this occasion, a procession of scholars, teachers and friends, walked to Greave House, where a special open-air service was held near the barn. The service was conducted by the minister, the Rev. H. S. Shepherd.

Since 1877, our scholars have continued to enter for the Sheffield Sunday School Union Scripture Examinations and for many years our School was awarded the Illuminated Diploma for gaining the highest percentage of marks. National Prizes were won by Miss F. L. Robertshaw, 1907; Miss W. M. England in 1913 (Bronze Medalist); in 1914 and 15 National (Teachers' Division) and in 1915, 1st Sheffield Prize. In 1908, Miss H. R. Watson was the first scholar to obtain 100 marks, to be followed by Miss L. Rowbottom in 1917. Other outstanding successes were Miss M. C. Kenworthy, Miss C. Jubb and Miss A. Oates, who passed examinations in "The History of English Congregationalism." More recent National prizewinners were Max Walters, 1937 (4th); Betty Marshall, 1947 (1st) and Enid A. Peace, 1951 (2nd in teachers' division). Bible Study Scholarships worth £30 were awarded by the Sheffield Sunday School Union to Alec Walters, 1931; Max Walters, 1938; Leila Marsden, 1941; Betty Thickett, 1944; Barbara Gaskell, 1947; Enid A. Peace, 1948, Margaret S. Peace, 1950. These successes are mentioned to show the calibre and enthusiasm of the religious instruction.

During the second world war, 1939-45, the British Hall was taken over by the Government as a Casualty Station, involving certain structural alterations, and the Sunday School was transferred to the Church until well after the war.

It is important to note also in this brief history the better relations which exist today between the various religious bodies, compared with those existing 70 years ago. Today, the Christmas Day and Good Friday services are held in a different church or chapel each year. The Procession of Witness, at Whitsuntide, is now an event in which all the local religious bodies (with the exception of the R.C. Church) take part, and almost the whole population turns out to see it, whether they walk in it or not. The various Sisterhoods and similar bodies of the Free Churches unite in their annual rallies. United Prayer Meetings, Bible Study Groups and the exchange of pulpits, signify a desire for mutual understanding.

On 24th September, 1961, the British Hall was used for the last time as a Sunday School, future Sunday School services being held in the Congregational Church. To mark the final closing of the British Hall, a Farewell Service was held on Sunday, 31st December (see photo 8).

In closing, grateful acknowledgment is made for the help received from the late Mr. Joseph Kenworthy's "Early History of Stocksbridge" and from a pamphlet by Mr. Henry Jones commemorating the "Centenary of the Stocksbridge Congregational Sunday School" in 1916.

Thanks are also due to the Staff of the Montgomery Hall, Sheffield; Mr. S. Wright, West Riding Education Officer; Mr. J. A. Atkinson, Editor of the Fox Magazine; Mr. J. M. Ambler, photographer, and to members and friends of the Congregational Church who have helped in supplying information and in verifying details.

CHARLES BROWN

in collaboration with

HERBERT and GRACE M. PEACE.