

IN 1999, the Brotherhood (and Sisterhood) & PSA Society achieved a continuous 80 years of existence at Eltham Park, and to mark this, our Secretary, Tom Bunce decided to pen a few interesting notes. I marvel at the incredible changes which have taken place during that period, affecting every facet of our existence. I wonder what the centenary in 2019 will show?

Originally produced as a pamphlet, here is an electronic version – unthinkable in 1875 the foundation date of the movement. Tom highlights our aims and achievements.

ELTHAM PARK BROTHERHOOD & PSA SOCIETY

Some reminiscences and
historical notes about this
Society which, in 1999
celebrated 80 years of service.

Compiled by Thomas G Bunce

Secretary 1949 – 2005

Our meetings are held at
Eltham Park Methodist Church,
Westmount Road, London SE9

By affiliation through the London Federation,
our Society is part of the
National Brotherhood & Sisterhood Movement (inc).

ELTHAM PARK BROTHERHOOD & PSA SOCIETY

We believe that 1999 marked the 80th year in the life of the society. Unfortunately, we do not know the exact date when our meetings began! The earliest Minute Book rescued from a fire at Eltham Park Methodist Church refers to previous Minutes, but sadly these are missing.

However, hearsay has indicated that in 1919 meetings for men – a Brotherhood – began. The ladies had already started a Sisterhood in 1916 under the presidency of Mrs. L F Church. The Sisterhood met regularly for many years, but eventually closed.

The Brotherhood has survived although in a changed form..A 1922 Register in our archives records 120 names with a weekly attendance of about 65. In 1926 our name was changed to “Eltham Park Pleasant Sunday Afternoon” which permitted us to invite the ladies. Our present title of “Eltham Park Brotherhood & PSA Society” was adopted in 1953.

Under our Constitution, our objectives are “To promote the spirit of brotherhood in civic and industrial life” – and we endeavour, through music and fellowship to promote a spirit of Christian citizenship.

THE BROTHERHOOD & SISTERHOOD MOVEMENT

By affiliation through the London Federation, we are part of the National Brotherhood & Sisterhood Movement. The Movement began when a man named John Blackham, a deacon of Ebenezer Congregational Church, West Bromwich, started Christian meetings for men —which were to be ‘brief, bright and brotherly’ – the year was 1875. Sundays were more like Holy Days than the holidays they have now become. People really worked hard 6 days and rested on the

seventh day. Just imagine – no Sunday shops, no cinemas, no radio or television, no motor cars (unless you had a steam-driven one). Daimler was experimenting with a new manufactured substance called “Petroleum”. There were no telephones (Alexander Graham Bell’s experiments took off a year later in 1876). There was no National Health Service – that came after World War II. I recall a visit to the Doctor costing 3/6, or if you called him out, 7/6. [37.5p today].

The Movement spread to London; Crusades were made to France, Belgium and to Canada. Subsequently the work spread to Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa and a World Brotherhood Federation was established in London. A Sisterhood Movement was established in 1912 which is now part of the National Brotherhood & Sisterhood Movement (Inc).

Much practical work was done by both brotherhoods and sisterhoods – there being no Social Services as we know them today.

During World War 1, special campaigns were organised nationally to send relief to the over-run countries of Europe, and through Brotherhood agencies on the continent, money, food and clothing were sent and distributed. Orphaned children from Serbia, whose parents had been casualties of the onrush of the German forces, needed shelter and food in England – and this was organised. 170 were cared for until they could be returned to their own land.

Also, during the NATIONAL STRIKE in 1926, the Movement proved its position as a national force, being instrumental in bringing together the leaders of the Employer’s federation at a meeting in the Mansion House, London, presided over by the Lord Mayor of London (a Brotherhood man). Arising from this a Conference was convened and brought about a new spirit to industrial relations.

Many unemployed men came to London seeking work only to find disillusionment and despair. To meet a great need, men of the Brotherhood’s London Federation organised themselves into friendship groups visiting the Thames embankment and London parks to talk with men and to try to alleviate their sad plight. Clothing and Boot Centres were set up and arrangements made to supply sausage and mash meals for the destitute.

The Sisterhoods organised a “Safety for Girls” service which offered a friendly escort service to young women from the provinces seeking work in London – escorting them to and across London. The service continued for many years under the title “Friendship for Girls”.

(Members of our own Society at ELTHAM PARK played their part in visiting the slums of London)

With a much smaller population in those days, the main centres of attraction were the churches, public houses and theatres. An Elementary Education Act had been passed in 1870, and some education was provided by Church Schools and Sunday Schools. My father’s parents had to pay 3d a week for him to go to school – later reduced to 2d a week,

Daytime meetings on Sundays were often well attended. Sankey & Moody’s Mission attracted 4,000 at Birmingham Town Hall. John Blackham’s Brotherhood men’s meetings became “Pleasant Sunday Afternoons” when instrumentalists came along.

In 1975 the Brotherhood Movement celebrated its Centenary with Rallies in eight different areas throughout the country. In the London area, where there were at that time 33 Sisterhoods and 21 mixed meetings (or PSAs) the largest Rally and Service was that held at Westminster Abbey.

OUR SOCIETY AT ELTHAM PARK

We are grateful to Eltham Park Methodist Church, where we have been meeting for 80 years, for the help and support they have given us.

Traditionally, the Minister or the Church is invited to be the Society's President. During my time (now more than 70 years) I've known some 14 Ministers at Eltham Park, beginning with the Rev. E J Hill up to our current President, Rev. A Wesley Cooke, BA.

I think I joined about 1924/25 – I would be 12 or 13 years old – certainly in short trousers I recall! A Miss Whittingham had suggested to my father that I might join the orchestra and play my violin.

At one time our Society had its social side, with outings to places of interest; also a Drama Society and our Scottish Dancing evenings. Even a cricket team.

We no longer meet every Sunday afternoon – just on the last Sunday of each month except for breaks during August and December. The orchestra rehearses every Tuesday during the season.

Through the orchestra we are able to help some charities and have entertained folk in the Spitalfields area and tried to brighten the lives of many in circumstances of poverty.

We've played at Well Hall Pleasaunce; at Sutton-at Hone; at the (Royal) Eltham Palace; at Eltham Little Theatre (now Bob Hope Theatre); at Eltham Palace Cinema (now demolished) and at Lewisham Theatre. In 1963 the orchestra played at Leas Cliff Hall, Folkestone, as part of the Methodist Association of Youth Clubs (MAYCs) celebrations before an audience of nearly 1,000. It has played at several London Federation Rallies.

For a number of years the orchestra played for Christmas Carol Concerts at Woolwich Town Hall, arranged by the North Kent Federation of Townswomen's Guilds. We have also been able to help various charitable organisations, including Overseas Mission, and for TocH - providing entertainment for handicapped people – thereby endeavouring to use music as a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

In 1975 BBC Radio 4's 'Sunday' Programme contained an interview with the Society Secretary (that's me) as part of the Brotherhood Movement's Centenary Celebrations. The programme concluded with a few bars of our orchestra's music played from a tape recording which my son Graham has made.

When I joined the Society, Mr. W H Hurlstone was Musical Director, followed by Mr. Clarence H E Maggs, who later handed over to me. In turn I handed over to Ewart Cotton, then to our current Musical Director, Ted Williams (with Martin Bunce as Principal Deputy).

Our registrar is Mr. Bill Mills who took over on the death of his wife Florrie Mills. The orchestra has had a number of accompanists over the years – one of our most loyal and brilliant being our present accompanist, Tom Wade, whose wife Ann Wade is leader of the orchestra.

Our present PSA chairman is Ernie Lake who opens our meetings with a reading from the Scriptures and with a prayer. Miss Ivy Hunter is our Treasurer, who took over this task on the retirement of Mrs. Kathleen Brown. We are indebted to all who help towards the smooth running of the Society.

We believe we can act as a "half-way house" where some committed Christians meet others who perhaps have no such allegiance: and where through our Christian fellowship an opportunity is provided to learn something of the love of Jesus Christ.

One former member of the orchestra left to do missionary work in Thailand; another, through the friendship and fellowship he found, not only joined and helped the society, but later dedicated his life to the service of our Lord Jesus Christ and became a local preacher.

Several players from the orchestra later became professional musicians and from time to time we see the names of one or two mentioned on Television programme credits.

Two world wars and changing times have inevitably affected the National Movement and to some extent its former strength has diminished. The ease of modern travel and the many distractions offered by today's materialistic age, have all had their effect upon the habits of many people.

Nevertheless, the Movement and the Society at Eltham Park will, we hope, continue to fill a need, reaching over the barriers of religious denominations and political parties and be a place where youth and age can meet and understand one another through music and a common desire to serve others.

In doing so, we pray that we may be a means to lead people to a knowledge and love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For, as the Movement's motto quotes from Matthew's Gospel:

.....For one is your Master, even Christ;
and all ye are brethren.

ELTHAM PARK BROTHERHOOD & PSA SOCIETY, COMMITTEE for 1998/99 :-

Rev. A Wesley Cooke, MA – President

Tom Bunce – Vice-President & Secretary

Richard Feakin – Deputy Secretary

Simon Eastwood – Personal Assistant to Secretary

Ivy Hunter – Treasurer

Dorothy Williams – Librarian, Asst. Treasurer, Orch..Treasurer

Ernie Lake – PSA Chairman

Ted Williams – Musical Director

Martin Bunce – Principal Deputy MD

Bill Mills – Auditor & Registrar

POSTSCRIPT 2007

We are grateful to the Rev. Robbie Riddell, BSc, who accepted the Presidency of the Society in February this year.

Departed Friends.....

Bill Mills died in 2000 (in his 80s)

Ivy Hunter (treasurer) died in 2005 (in her 80s)

Heather Corps (flute and dep. Conductor) died in 2006

Deputy Chairman Roy Rudd died 2005.

The author himself, Tom Bunce, died in September 2005, aged 93. The perfect gentleman and true Christian, Secretary to the Society for many years, accomplished trumpeter, organist, pianist, violinist and conductor. A good friend to many. This reprint, with corrections, is issued in his memory. [T.W: Nov.2007]

CONTACTS

For information about the Society, rehearsals or membership, speak to the Secretary, Richard Feakin, or any orchestra member. OR through our website at: www.pleasant.org.uk

with links to a web-log or 'blog' at:

<http://psasociety.blogspot.com>

which contains current information.