

History of Christian Alliance Centre written by Mrs Elizabeth McClune

Dear Brenda,

Here is a long scrawl for what it is worth. I got it together for the Women's group in our Church in Ireland so there are obviously some extra bits you won't need. Take of it what you will. My only plea is don't put too much of E. McClune with it. Jim is the one who provided all the management skills and put so much into the Housing Association. It took up quite a chunk of our lives but thanks to the hard work of so many I believe it has been of benefit to many young people and taught all of us valuable lessons ...Elizabeth

Deuteronomy Chapter 8.

Moses is standing on the brink of the promised land, but is not allowed to go in. He reminds the Children of Israel of all their journeying v. 2-6 . He describes the delights of the land awaiting them v. 9-10 and then gives them a warning. V.17-18

There is a great oral tradition of storytelling in Ireland of things handed down by word of mouth. The storyteller usually came in winter and early spring and announced himself by lifting the latch and by the greeting "God save all here".

I am your storyteller here this evening and I warmly greet all you kind people who have mad me feel so welcome in Donegal. "God save all here".

The story I want to tell you is about the goodness of God over a particular project - the setting up of a young people's Christian hostel in Central London. (picture of Centre)

Search your minds for a moment and think of one example of God's goodness to you. ?loving parents,? A close family, ?a happy home, ?good health, ?sufficiency for your needs. As we look around us here at the beautiful scenery so much reminds us of God's goodness--" To see the waves, crest on crest of the great shining ocean, composing a hymn to the Creator, without rest" For all these things we say "thank you" to Him.

I read in the Irish Catholic this week that Michael Farnell has written a book called "The Father's very fond of me" How blest we are if we know the truth of that from an early age because it is the starting point of our love for others. Even those of us who, like Moses and the Children of Israel passed through many years in the wilderness sand suffered all sorts of hardships can know how much the Father loves us. This sets us free to love others. We love because God first loved us

If you remember nothing else this evening remember that phrase "The Father is very fond of us" not because of anything we have done or refused to do but because that is His nature and God is love

I make no apology for this long preamble because the setting up of the Christian Alliance Centre in London was entirely due to God's goodness and His prompting of many diverse people to use the gifts He had given them for this work. It is very important to remember that. It was not that any of us were particularly clever or special or good or virtuous but we all shared a knowledge of the love of God and wanted young people to know about Him.

As Moses reminded us in Deuteronomy it is so easy to say we did this and forget that God has given us the ability and strength.

In 1973 Jim went to work in London and our son James and I went to look for a house, preferably within walking distance of Whitehall and affordable. A brief encounter with an Irish naval friend sent us to look in Waterloo, that is another story but you might say what a strange place to start! Dominated by the station, in Victorian days Waterloo was full of crime where murders took place almost nightly. The home of jellied eels and the Old Vic theatre but nowadays the National Theatre and the Festival Hall on the South Bank of the River Thames with a strong quota of old Londoners and many homeless people.

It was there that we found 7 Theed Street, a tiny 3 bedroomed Victorian terrace house with a minute garden, and one tree home to a blackbird, within five minutes walk of Waterloo station and about 20 minutes on foot from Jim's office in Whitehall. God is very good and He put us there for the work He had planned for us. He had prepared a place for us close by.

The Church situation was rather sad. St John's, Waterloo Road, once used as the Festival of Britain Church had been built after the battle of Waterloo in 1815 and its wealthy high church congregation in Victorian times arrived in carriages from all over London. We went in search of our nearest church and found St. John's locked, with no notice board., the garden was full of alcoholics and down and outs. We thought it was closed. Later, the Vicar in his cloak and wide black hat became a familiar figure. He was the father of Anna Ford the newsreader.

There had been a church very close to our house, St. Andrew's, Waterloo, destroyed by bombing in the second world war. With the bomb damage money from that another church, a new St. Andrew's had been built in Short Street. The old church had been built in Victorian times at the request of furnished by working people and was known as the workman's church. The vicar of the new St. Andrew's was also a familiar figure, elderly, bent and white haired in a very shabby raincoat. He was very kind to the elderly and used to take them on holiday in a mini bus!

Seen through the window the church looked very clean and we knew someone loved it. The cleaners turned out to be two elderly sisters in their eighties who had come to clean it temporarily 10 years before

,The churchmanship was low evangelical and the congregation was composed of 2 men, about 16 old ladies and a few children sent there to be out of the way on Sunday mornings!

We had one able bodied Church Warden. I never saw the other Warden even during the

interregnum. His wife was also an invalid and blind.

There was a Church primary school shared by the two churches. Very sadly the Vicars had little in common and the school was a battle ground. Jim became chairman of governors and tried unsuccessfully to save it from closure.

Today, due to the goodness of God the two churches are united in one parish of Waterloo, but that is another story.

Like many people the world over, Lambeth people are cheerful, resilient and friendly. They had a tough time during the war and the scars remain.

Buster Edwards, the great train robber had a flower stall under the railway arch. Two familiar itinerants were the 'Pigeon Lady' on the streets since her youth, who searched bins for bread for the pigeons and always came to the church sale, and 'John the Baptist' as he was known, a dark bearded young man severely mentally disturbed. Sadly all have gone, the pigeon lady disappeared, Buster committed suicide and the young man was knocked down and found to have his socks full of money. There were plenty of drug addicts, one of whom had given birth on the steps of St. Johns and dossers. Many of these elderly went in fear of mugging. Our evening service was discontinued after one such incident

By day the street markets were hives of activity. Rivers of commuters passed through each day. Within 5 minutes walk were the Church Mission House (with the message carved over its doors "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel") I used to think that means "right here"; St Thomas Hospital, a beacon of healing opposite the Houses of Parliament; the Shell Centre and the Festival Hall Also nearby were the Tudor Bargehouse Stairs where Queen Elizabeth 1st kept her barges moored.

I found Waterloo in the 1970s to be an interesting, historical and simply scary place, but it soon became home to us.

As a country girl I also found the noise and dirt of the city, the bad language, the despondency of the street dwellers and the plight of the elderly very depressing. I remember walking along the Cut one day saying over and over to myself "O God what can be done about this? O God what can we do?" That turned out to be a very significant question to which God had an answer in store for us stretching over the next 23 years. I once heard our Rector in Bath say that the vital question is not "What can I ask of God, but what does He ask of me?"

As we read the papers and watch T.V. don't we often think "What can be done about this?" and when young think we have all the answers, but it takes a life time to discover that God's way of working is quite different. He puts a task in front of us, gives us gifts and talents to help us and His inexhaustible wisdom and counsel to draw on through prayer so that together we may all make a difference. What does the Lord require of us? "That we do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with Him" Obedience and faith in fullness

Soon after coming to London I was walking over Hungerford Bridge to Charing Cross one day when a girl stopped me "Oh please" she said, "Can you tell me of anywhere safe to stay?". She explained that where she was she had to push furniture against the door to

keep people out at night. Newly in London I had no answer to give her. At our home there was no space even for a mattress on the floor. "I'm so sorry I don't" I said. I could not get her out of my mind. She was the first link in the chain which was to follow. In September of that year 1973 we were visiting James at boarding school in Bath, where we had put him because of our frequent moves. There, to my delight, I saw an old friend from University days who also had a son there at school. Christians know that nothing happens by chance. After catching up with one another's news Helen said "What are you doing in London? How would you like to sit on the committee of a girl's hostel?" I was surprised to hear myself say "I'm willing to try anything once"

On my return to London I was quickly visited by a member of the Council of the Christian Alliance of Women & Girls' to talk about their hostel in Queensgate, West London. Jim Had met Grace Laurie Walker when his ship was in Glasgow during the war. Grace was the third link in the chain.

The CAWG, later to become the Christian Alliance, had been an off shoot of the YMCA in 1920, founded to help girls in domestic service and later nurses with clubs to go to on their time off. Now they were running hostels and holiday homes as well. Early in 1974 I joined the Queensgate committee. It proved a valuable training ground for the next step. On May 21st 1974 (our 21st wedding anniversary) we were asked to a Christian Alliance lunch. I met the General Secretary Edgar Hall. The 4th link in the chain. He told me that CA was urgently looking for a new London Hostel and was raising money for it. As a result of the work of Helen Maude, my college friend in Liverpool CA was investigating the possibilities of becoming a registered Housing Association and had already received grants from Local Authorities.

Our house in London lay in a little Victorian Estate in the east of Waterloo Road. Looking from our window we could see St. Patricks R C. Church and the Presbytery HQ of the London Franciscans and the back of the Union Jack's annex for Women's services and families and over the top the spire of St. John's Church.

The main Union Jack Club in Waterloo Road was being rebuilt as a skyscraper to house all their work. Meanwhile their Secker Street building in front of us was being used for all their work.

In late 1974 the sky scraper was nearly completed and one Sunday morning as we lay in our bed I saw one crane lifting another crane out of the centre of the site and suddenly the thought came "I wonder what is going to happen to the old hostel? Would it do for Christian Alliance?" I startled Jim with the thought and then even more by saying "I must go and tell Edgar Hall" In all humility I am now certain that God sent that thought in my mind, because I then had a strange sensation like a hand put on my back pushing me. On the Monday morning I went to see Mr. Hall and very surprisingly he said "Find out about it". So it was that I entered what was later to become our Hostel to meet the retired Colonel who was in charge there.

I think Col. Leatham was quite startled to see me even more so when I said "Please what are you going to do with your building?" "We're going to put it on the market. Why do you ask?" "Well" I said "I know an organization that is looking for a hostel for young people in London" "Oh" he said "I'll give you the name of the agent. You should know

we are asking a quarter of a million for it". and he handed me the particulars.

I excused myself as gracefully as I could and went straight to Mr Hall at CMS House - the Hand still on my back. Then began the waiting, a real test of patience, while Mr Hall got the sanction of the CA Central Council to pursue enquiries.

I was asked to attend a Central Council meeting and tell them about Waterloo. Helen had been encouraging them to think about it. But Helen with her suggestion of Housing Association involvement was a little suspect to CA because some of the CA ladies thought government money might be 'tainted' in some way. I was enormously cheered to hear one lady Veronica Madeley say "but God said the cattle on a thousand hills are Mine and surely it depends how money is used that is important. Then it was thought that Waterloo might not be a very good part of London - dirty and full of 'down and outs' "I live there" I said "and our neighbors are such lovely people. One works on the railway and one is an Italian shoe mender. It is just like living in a village"

Eventually it was decided that the Central Council would look over the building.

I kept urging Mr Hall to speed them up. My fear was that a developer would snap up this prime Central London site if we dallied and 'the hand'. was on my back

It was with some trepidation that I joined the Central Council members to look at what I was already calling 'our hostel' to myself. Obviously the Union Jack Club had done no repairs there for some time as they were building new premises. The situation was excellent - very central the bend in the Thames and the bridges like spokes in a wheel put in reach of much of central London. Because of the station, public transport facilities were excellent. It was separated from the noise of Waterloo Road by the green of the Church garden. There was plenty of accommodation, in all nearly 20,000sq. Feet. no lifts apart from luggage lifts which needed overhauling!

I was so excited that I kept thinking as I looked 'what could we do here or how could we use this? But oh! What did the Central Council ladies think? "it's a very noisy area" "Oh those awful basement kitchens" "Did you see the mouse bait? "What about the beds and the tatty wardrobes!! (These having been abandoned by the Union Jack Club) Talk about a pricked balloon I was it!

However, Mr Hall was on my side and he kept plodding away saying how good the site was and what the possibilities were. It was agreed to investigate and that Mr Hall should ask the District Valuer to value it.

Well, when you have exhausted all the things you can do personally there is nothing left to do but to talk to God and encourage all your family and friends to do the same and wait for Him.

By the eve of our 22nd wedding anniversary 1975 the only good news we had had was that the District Valuer thought 250,000 a 'very fair price'. I went to the CA annual reception in the basement of Mary Summer House, the Mother's Union HQ in Westminster, determined to try to catch Lady Pat Anderson the Chairman of CA to remind her about Waterloo. I confess that was my chief thought all through this meeting. As it ended I went on to the platform to try to catch her but she had already gone. The MU floor had been recently polished, it was absolutely gleaming. I sped over the platform, slid on the floor and fell over the edge landing on my wrist which came up looking very bent indeed. As the ambulance was called I urged anyone I knew in sight to

remind Lady Pat about Waterloo before going to Westminster Hospital to have my wrist set.

Well, it was worth it! And it proved to be the 5th link. "Who was the woman who broke her wrist?" "Oh she was the one who was so keen on Waterloo!" It was decided to pursue the Waterloo project and engage in negotiations. At the end of the year 1975 I was asked to try to get together people for a local committee. So once again we began searching and praying and, like Moses, remembering all the way we had been led and thanking God. All those previous contacts came to mind we had in the Bible Society, the CMS, the Crusaders, the Navy, The London City Mission, The Embankment Mission and an Irish Lawyer for the particular skills that would be needed. Management, Building, Personnel, Catering, Legal & Finance. And so we got our first committee together. I then went with Mr Hall to visit Lambeth Town Hall. Lambeth was then the communist Red Ted's Empire. If the project went ahead they would grant the money so we had to sell this Christian idea to them. We went to meet members of the Housing Committee. I felt like Daniel going into the Lion's den but "The Father is very fond of me". He had been there first and one of the committee Mrs Maberley, wife of a local Vicar, a powerful ally. I told them about the girl on Hungerford Bridge and the local needs and what we would like to do with the UJC. We came away unsure what their decision would be

Mr Hall had a good contact with a man in the Department of the Environment who had much practical good advice to offer to us as babes in the Housing Association World. I'm sure God put him there. Eventually we heard that Lambeth would grant us the total purchase price of £250,000. to buy the building with no residual mortgage! That was a miracle in itself since only a few weeks later the government decided that no more large hostels would be funded. Then we had to find an architect and a quantity surveyor. The following month Feb 1976 the sale of our building was completed! The CA Trust Corporation held the deeds and I saw them! The agent had kindly given us all the spare sale particulars and we used them as promotion leaflets with an information sheet as to what we, in Christian Alliance, hoped to do asking for the prayers of all in Christian Alliance. I often think that the work at Waterloo and its development was in answer to the prayers of many elderly ladies who would ring me up and say "What would you like us to pray for, dear"/ What a help and comfort that was as we had to work harder and harder and had less time to pray ourselves. You will remember when Joshua went to fight the Amalekites as long as Moses had his hands raised in prayer the Israelites did well but Moses' arms grew tired, so Aaron and Hur held his arms up for him until the battle was won. So many people held our hands up metaphorically speaking through the years. They were significant links in God's chain. Remember, however old and infirm we are God has a work for us.

Well, I now held the keys to the old Union Jack Club building, all 20,000sq. feet of it! There was a problem at that time of squatters taking over empty property and it was very difficult to evict them. So one of our committee who worked at Bible House told me that they had an assistant security man who lived in the Salvation Army hostel. Bill Jackson came to live in our building as caretaker. He was so excited - a home of his own! We kitted him out with a kettle, pots and pans and a bed. He had a good choice of bedrooms! One morning he discovered that an intruder had been in and had made up a couple of

beds with curtains from the curtain store. They had departed, fortunately. There was much to attend to and many decisions to be made. Fortunately, Jim soon showed us how to parcel up the work into manageable divisions - legal & finance, building, outreach and publicity, outreach and publicity, furnishing etc. etc. We divided up the committee into subcommittees. It was such a thrill to see how selflessly everyone threw themselves into the work, traveling long distances sometimes, bringing all their gifts and talents to this Christian task. Our Father is very fond of us!

We had told Lambeth Borough Council that we would provide beds for 140 young people. So we went to Christian Alliance and asked if we could have men as well as women! Thus the Christian Alliance of Women and Girls became Christian Alliance. The building took up 2 1/2 sides of a rectangle and could be divided into a men's wing and a women's wing with staff flats between them on each floor. Then we decided not to provide central catering having visited many other hostels and taken advice. We would provide kitchenettes and our evening only snack bar as a venue for meeting. Our splendid architect divided the rooms into 16 groups or 'clusters' each with a kitchenette and one or two bathrooms depending on the numbers - between 4 and 12. All the rooms fortunately met the building regulation requirements, but some were quite tight on size. However the public rooms were large. We had a large lounge, a large study room, a club room, a snack bar, a prayer room, a laundry and 2 TV rooms. Everyone would share those. We also had staff offices, a workshop, furniture store, boiler room and later on a gym, computer room and a roof garden.

We found a marvelous Christian Quantity Surveyor. He costed the whole thing. Amazingly, Lambeth Borough Council gave us the £360,000 required. Still more amazingly the eventual costs were £100. Within his estimates! Very sadly while our surveyor Ron Downey was engaged on our project his 15 year old daughter became ill and died suddenly. Particularly sad when her father played such a part in bringing joy to so many of our young people.

All the old furniture had to be moved. That was a jolly day! Our local London City Missioner, by then a committee member, said he would find me a team of strong men. I made a trolley with Shepherd castors. The gang arrived, two of them slightly the worse for wear. We whizzed the wardrobes along the corridors on the trolley to the outside fire escapes. The first sound was of a mirror crashing down the fire escape three stories to the courtyard below! However we got everything down to the ground floor. The beds and much of the furniture we gave to the London City Mission. Then there were 120 chairs and 26 tables to be moved to the basement before the builders arrived. It was done on a Saturday morning with a team of helpers.

Christian Alliance thought that we could spare a corner of our building for Headquarters' offices. The dining room and two other rooms provided them with office space. In those days there were only 5 HQ staff and they were lovely people. We were all one big family. They moved in in 1976 and endured the noise and dirt of building work around them and encouraged us.

At the end of 1976 Jim was sent to a job at Portsmouth. We kept our little house in London as Bridget was training to be a nurse at St. Thomas' Hospital and James was at London University. I commuted to & fro from Portsmouth Dockyard to London for

us to be accepted locally and made many friends for us. When the Thames flood barrier was completed the need for a refuge passed. I learnt a big lesson here. It is not enough to have an idea for it to work you must enlist the help and sympathy and even cooperation of everyone in the area, especially people who have lived there for a long time. The local people were feeling quite threatened by all the building going on in Waterloo especially of offices and high rise buildings. Its character was being changed. The coming of two Housing Cooperatives nearby to provide housing for local people helped to restore the balance and much later the union of the two churches into the Parish of Waterloo, a miracle and a story in itself, helped to unite the area.

The opening date was fixed 2nd December 1977.. The builders were really rushing about. Now the furniture was ordered HQ Staff were helping us clear up after the builders, cleaning out cupboards, hanging curtains etc. On 1st December a lorry load of beds had gone missing but by another miracle they were in place with their sheets, pillows and duvets before the first residents arrived. The kitchens were ready with cookers frigs and a locking cupboard for everyone. We provided no crockery, pans or cutlery but shared cookers, frigs, ironing boards and cleaning equipment. There were coin-op machines in the laundry. We provided bed linen, residents provided towels

I was standing in the hall on 2nd December preparing myself to hand over what had been 'my baby' to Roy the warden, when through the front door came a very scared looking young lass with her parents. She was 'Beryl' from Manchester, a shy girl leaving home for the first time with parents very worried at leaving her on her own in the big city. I tried to reassure them, introducing them to Roy and Mary Dory and their teenage children saying that we would take good care of her. She was just the sort of young person we aimed to help, single people of any race or creed, aged between 18 & 30, coming to London for the first time. We suggested that residents came for at least three months and probably not more than 3 years. Beryl actually stayed a little longer, but I wish you could have seen her when she left. Still quite a shy personality but transformed. Her parents wrote to us to thank us. "Our Father is very fond of us."

Two months later we were full up and in June 1979 we held the official opening by Mrs Donald Coggan, wife of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Buster Edwards supplied the flowers A young naval officer's wife, trained by Constance Spry did the decorations and there I must leave my story of setting up a London Hostel

I wish I could meet the girl on Hungerford Bridge again to say to her "I know just the place for you"

(the following is written part by Elizabeth and part by Brenda!)

I would like to tell you so much more about the wonderful Christian staff we have had down the years. Rosa, who sang in the choir at the Church where Jim and I met in 1947. She came on the committee and offered to stand in when we could not find a replacement warden. She was 'mother' to all in the CAC for 10 years and even now keeps in touch with past residents around the world and has traveled round visiting them Danny a Ugandan who came as deputy warden, whose two children were born in the CA centre and who is now Archdeacon of Reigate.

David ,a painter from New Zealand who lost his mother as a child and who kept returning to the Centre. He painted me a wonderful picture of CAC when I retired as chairman in 1996.

Susan Staff daughter of Kathy Staff of “Last of the summer wine“ who came as our receptionist and is now an Anglican vicar.

Joseph the head cleaner from Jamaica who always greets me with a big hug and a kiss

Davina a Roman Catholic girl who always averred that God led her to CAC when she was wandering around Waterloo and saw the name Christian on the building

Elias, our Lebanese maintenance man who was married from the Centre and whose children were born there.

Johnny a resident from Malaya who died of cancer in CAC and whose Buddhist funeral was attended by his parents and a bus load of residents``.It was known that he had placed his faith in Christ.

Bruce Duncan who came to us after many years work in S.Africa and who has worked faithfully on through changes of management , staffing and rules to provide help and support to many generations of young people

Ken & Eileen Hamilton formerly missionaries in Zambia

The mother of a housekeeper who redesigned the patio into a patio garden which is now a joy to all. Ken & Eileen lovingly care for it . Blackbirds and sparrows nest there and blue tits feed on the bird table - another miracle!.

Steve who looked after our accounting system until the finances were centralized

The Genesis project run by David Ellis and Adrian Umpleby ex residents have a quiet Christian witness reflecting the theme - exploring the world and asking how it came about through scientific and archaeological research.

By the 1990s the hostel need refurbishment. Health & Safety required larger kitchens with each resident having their own ‘frige. Head Office also needed more space so for CAC that all meant fewer bed spaces which was a sadness for the beds were needed.

The hostel gradually began to house overseas students as UK young people preferred to live in their own flats and shared housing So now CAC has become an International Students hostel . Often 35 different nationalities living peacefully under the same roof!

Ken & Elias completely renovated the basement area into a study, computer room and library saving many thousands of pounds. Bathrooms and bedrooms began to be upgraded with their help

Through the years it has been our prayer that all who come into the house may have the opportunity to find out more about the Christian faith if they so desire. It is always a great encouragement to see so many coming to the annual Carol Service. They come to find out what a Christian Carol Service is all about. Muslim, Hindus and Christians sit side by side and their understanding of each others faith is increased Sometimes the Christmas story is read in different languages Arabic, French ,Russian Korean, Cantonese and Swahilli etc.

Another miracle that we should fulfill Acts 1v8 and be “witnesses to the uttermost part of the world through CAC.