No Strangers Here!

Are you feeling lonely? Do you need a friend?
Do you need to know there's one on whom you can depend?
There's a place I often go - have you found it yet?
Come inside and you will find
No Strangers Here - Just friends you never met.

Come on in, feel at home,
Come in and make a friend or three;
Any race, any background,
We're just one big family.

Here we trust in Jesus, here we try to do His will;
Lifting up the down at heart, comforting the ill,
Bringing news of Christ to those who haven't found Him yet,
And this message is for you;
No Strangers Here - Just friends you never met.

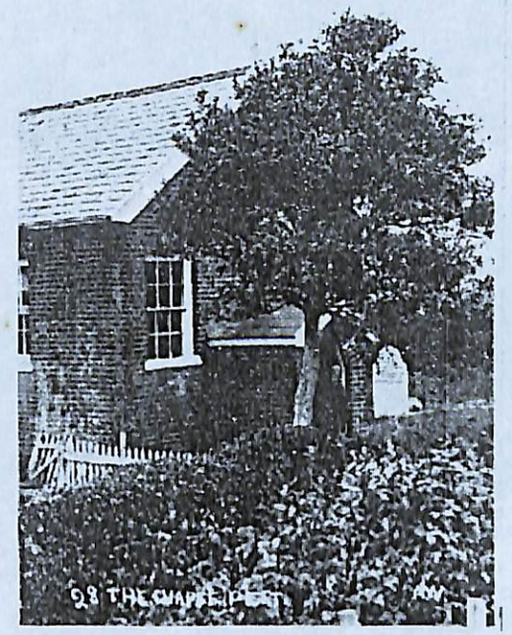
Simply trusting Jesus, simply walking in His way,
Help me, Lord, to share your love in all I do or say.
Hang a sign around my heart in case I should forget,
Write it clear for all to see
"No Strangers Here - Just friends who never met".

This song, written by Keith Miller, was performed by Wendy Hatch at the History Pageant, upon which this booklet is based. It describes true Christian fellowship as it should be, and we hope that this will be the experience of all who enter through the doors of Pett Methodist Church.

Pett 150

Pett Methodist Church

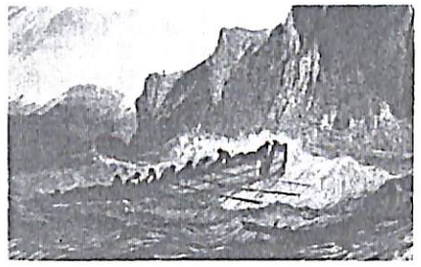
1848-1998



An Illustrated History

Watch the wall my darling !

150 years ago, at about the time of the birth of the Methodist Church at Pett, the area was famous for smuggling. This poem*, supposedly spoken by a father to his little daughter, takes us back to those times.



Five and twenty ponies ,
Trotting through the dark;
Brandy for the parson,
Baccy for the clerk,
Laces for a lady,
Letters for the spy.
So watch the wall, my darling,
While the gentlemen go by!

Some of these smugglers probably still have descendants in the area. John Harrod, at least, admits to an ancient smuggling connection.

The local coastguards proved to be very inept at dealing with local smugglers, preferring to turn a blind eye. Therefore coastguards from the distant West Country were drafted in to deal more vigorously with the illicit trading. One of these was the great-grandfather of Michael and Heather Ward, still actively involved within the Circuit.

Many of the new arrivals belonged to the Bible Christians movement, and they brought their beliefs and enthusiasm with them to Pett. The earliest Bible Christian evangelist we know of, at Pett, was a Cornish coastguard named Matthews, stationed at Cliff End. He was a fervent member of the Bible Christian Methodist Connexion, an offshoot of the parent body, and, with the help of others, built a strong group of enthusiastic worshipping people.

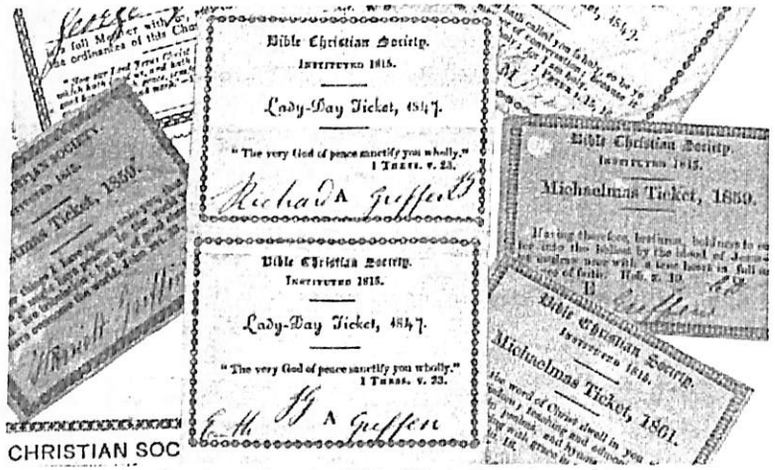
** Rudyard Kipling - Smugglers' Song*

Bible Christianity

The Bible Christians trace their origins to William O'Bryan (1778-1868), a local preacher in the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Finding many of the villages of Devon and Cornwall in almost complete ignorance of the Gospel, he extended his own very successful evangelism beyond the limits of his own Circuit. In the conflict with the local Wesleyan authorities which ensued, O'Bryan, not without hesitation and regret, separated himself, and in 1815 he founded the first society of a new community at Shebbear in North Devon.

Although faced by much opposition and persecution, the new movement spread rapidly. At the end of the first year there were 567 members, and after only five years of work in the West , missionaries were sent to London, Kent and Sussex. The Bible Christians held the doctrines common to all the branches of Methodism, and placed the Bible very much at the centre of life and worship. One of their greatest pioneers was Billy Bray, tin miner and reformed drunkard, whose simple and no-nonsense application of biblical principles won him an enduring reputation.

Another interesting point to note is that the Bible Chistians admitted women to the Ministry equally with men. It took the Methodist Church a long time to get back to sound Bible Christian practice!



A selection of early Bible Christian class tickets.
Note that the earliest, dated 1847, pre-dates the building of the chapel.

New Beginnings

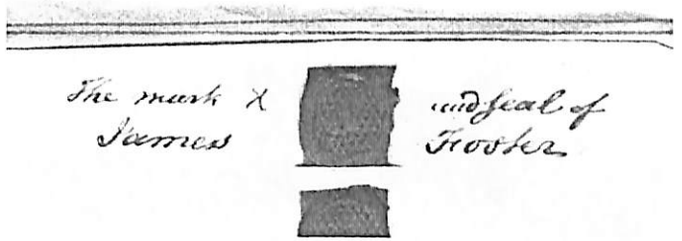
These Bible Christians in Pett, it is believed, originally worshipped in Barden's Forge. As time went by they began to grow in numbers and were able to find the resources to build their own places of worship. The chapel here in Pett was completed and opened in 1848. It was known then as the Mount Calvary Bible Christian Chapel.





Not much is known about those early days. Their church building was, of course, what is now the hall, alongside the more modern building. The plot, measuring eleven and a half perches *(which is not, incidentally, a resting place for eleven and a half parrots!)*, was purchased on the 30th May 1848 for the sum of £10.

The original trustees were George and Richard Griffen, Thomas and Spencer Davis, Charles Beeching, William Cloke and James Foster, who could not sign his name, but made his mark.



The chapel was registered as a place of dissenting worship at Lewes on the 7th March 1849. We can be sure that they loved their church, as we do today, and found God's presence within its sacred walls. For us, the thought of continuous devotion here enriches our worship and fills us with rejoicing!

By the waters of Babylon

The early Bible Christian ministers were, in a sense, "exiles" being far from their West Country homes and loved ones.



Delias, wife of Richard Down, one of the earliest of these ministers, was even further removed from all she knew and loved. She was the daughter of James and Delias Woodcock, and was born in the Scilly Isles in 1837. Married at the age of 25, she died in childbirth a year later. The baby Emily lived 17 days!

In 1907, the Bible Christian denomination was merged into the United Methodist Church. At Pett, it was necessary to appoint new trustees, as every one of the 1848 trustees had died, and there was no one to take responsibility. A special meeting was convened on the 8th May 1906.

Again, we find some familiar names appearing, with Charles and Richard Griffen, James and Robert Foster, and William Cloke continuing the good work begun by their relations. The other trustees were Jeremiah Davis, William Merricks, Thomas Parker Dunlop, George Smith and Richard Scrase Moon. The last was described as a Temperance Hotel Keeper. This reflects the power of the local squires, the Shadwell family, who were able to impose their temperance principles on the entire village. The hotel in question is now the Royal Oak Inn, where children once went to buy sweets. To enjoy a pint in those days, villagers had to trek down to Pett Level.



A Rural Community

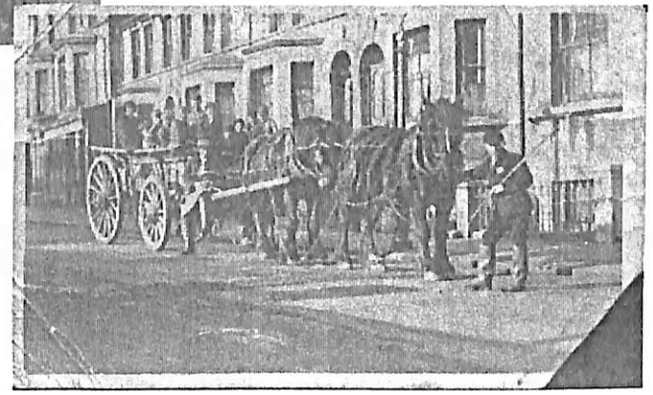
As the years went by, Pett developed as a farming village. The picture on the front cover, taken around the turn of the century, shows the church with a tree outside the front door. In this picture the two ladies pictured were sisters, Ruth and Rosina Griffen.



Another of the same era was an old lady, known as "Chapel Granny" because she never missed an event!



In those days there was work among the children, too, and here is a photograph of the wagon which used to take them on their Sunday School treats to Winchelsea Beach. Imagine that going down Chick Hill which, at that time, was little more than a rough track!



The Good Shepherd

At the turn of the century, Pett was a rural community still, as we can see from this photograph of Charles Griffen (known as Henry) working in the fields.



MR HENRY GRIFFEN & MR SPENCER
TAKEN IN THE HORSE FIELD BY CARL COLBERT
CARTERS FARM ABOUT 1923



A prominent reminder of our rural roots remains in Geoffrey Etherington's beautiful carving of a Sussex shepherd. This not only links us with the past, but also reminds us of our Lord Jesus as the Good Shepherd, and following in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd, Pett church has tried to maintain pastoral care for all.



Len Polhill has a story of an uncle who was the last coastguard child to be baptised at Pett, about 1900. His surname was Alford. He was the husband of Len's father's sister, and was born in the cottage at Pett Level, still known as Granny's Cottage.



Tying The Knot

The church was first registered for marriages in 1852, and over the years several couples have made their vows before God within these walls. Here are just a selection of them.





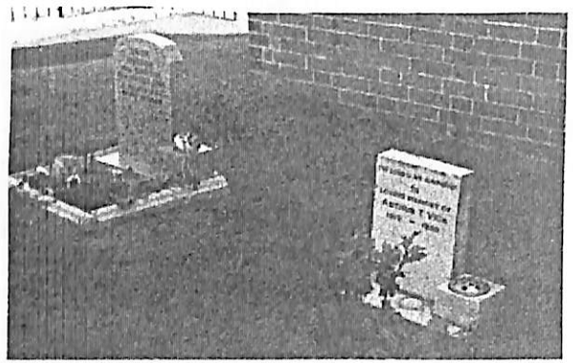






Abide With Me

Christenings, marriages, and also funerals have had their place. It is rare for a Methodist church to have its own little cemetery and, in the old days, this one served Three Oaks as well. The graves link us with key families; The Griffens at Pett, Harboroughs at Three Oaks, and one of the earliest trustees, William Cloke.



This graveyard is still used for the interment of ashes, the two most recent being Arthur Vick, and Gwen Sutton. A particularly interesting feature, sadly, was stolen not so long ago. A miniature statue of a Girl Guide stood in tribute to Jeanette Harris who died, aged 12, in April 1968.

Rev John Leech has a happier memory of the Harris family. During the Harvest celebration of 1967, the youngest member of the family, Steven, then aged about 2, brought to the altar rail, as his offering, an enormous marrow, almost as big as himself!

John Leech also remembers old Mr. and Mrs. Morris, who are buried in the cemetery. He conducted a double funeral as they died within hours of each other. Mr. Morris used to illustrate texts and sell them round the village.



Mr. & Mrs. Morris, pictured with friends on their Golden Wedding Anniversary

Keep the Home Fires Burning

While thinking of those who have died, we should take a look at the War Memorial, commemorating those who gave their lives in defence of their country in the 1914 - 18 World War. One of these was Percy Griffen, the brother of Annie Cooke.





Another was signalman Bernard Foster, father of Mary Tiltman, still active in our Rye Church. Here is a transcript of his last letter to Mary, then aged just 4, written in 1918, only days before his death.

Mon.day Sep 9th

My own Dear little Mary,

Today it is your birthday and Daddie sends you a little letter wishing you many happy returns of the day and I trust & pray that you may be spared to see many more and Daddie prays that before another birthday comes he may be with you all again and this awful war finished. Daddie does so long to be with little Mary again and I know you want to see Daddie again. You must get Mamma to read this to you as I am sending her a few lines with yours. I hope you will have a happy birthday and may God Bless you and soon bring me back to you again.

With love and kisses from Daddie. xxxxxxxxxxx

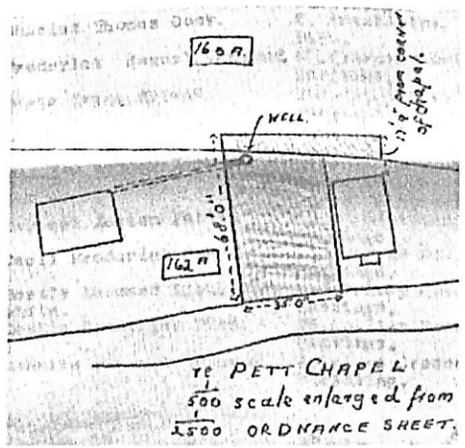
The Post-War Years

After the war the nature of the village gradually changed again, to become a dormitory and residential centre. This was reflected in the life of the church.

In 1949, the trustees, who belonged to the old village families, were elderly. The new trustees were mainly people from elsewhere in the Circuit, names still known to us today; Lambourne, Pattenden, Hammond, Ward, and Mr. Charles Brooker, who had moved into Friars Lane. Later renewals completed the process. The only representative of the original village families to remain a trustee was Charles Thomas Cooke.

The 1950s were a decade of expansion for Pett. In January 1950, Mrs. Cooke gave £50 to the church in memory of her brother, Percy Griffen, and suggested that a fund be set up for extension or rebuilding. The Minister chairing the meeting, Mr. Somerscales, thought new toilets would be a good idea! However, the newly appointed trustees provided an enthusiastic team who were prepared to take up Mrs. Cooke's suggestion and follow it through.

Mrs. Cooke and Miss Davis, in accordance with wishes contained in the will of their relative, Charles Griffen, gave the church a plot of land to the left of the old building. Since the plot included a well, arrangements had to be made for a new water supply to the neighbouring property.

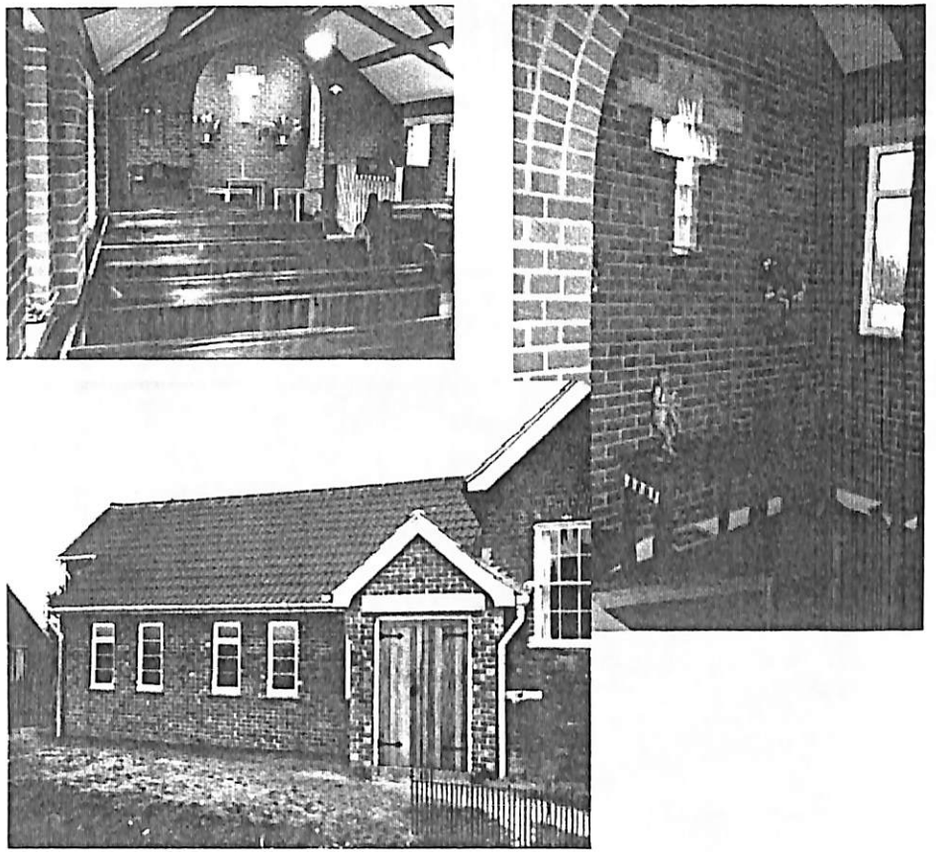


Initially, things moved very slowly, and in January 1954, the trustees were talking about a new schoolroom with a flat asphalt roof costing no more than £1000. The next year, however, witnessed a new sense of urgency, largely due to the efforts of Mr. F. S. Hammond, Mr. Leslie Ward and Mr. Charles Brooker, treasurer of the Building Fund.

In passing, it is interesting to note that Mr. F.S. Hammond had been present at the 50th and 100th Anniversary celebrations of the Church, and his son, Cecil, played the organ at the pageant to celebrate the 150th.

In January 1955, the trustees were planning a new chapel with a budget of £2500. Mr. Burstow was appointed architect and the local firm of Bardens (note the link with the first meeting place of the Bible Christian group) were chosen as the builders.

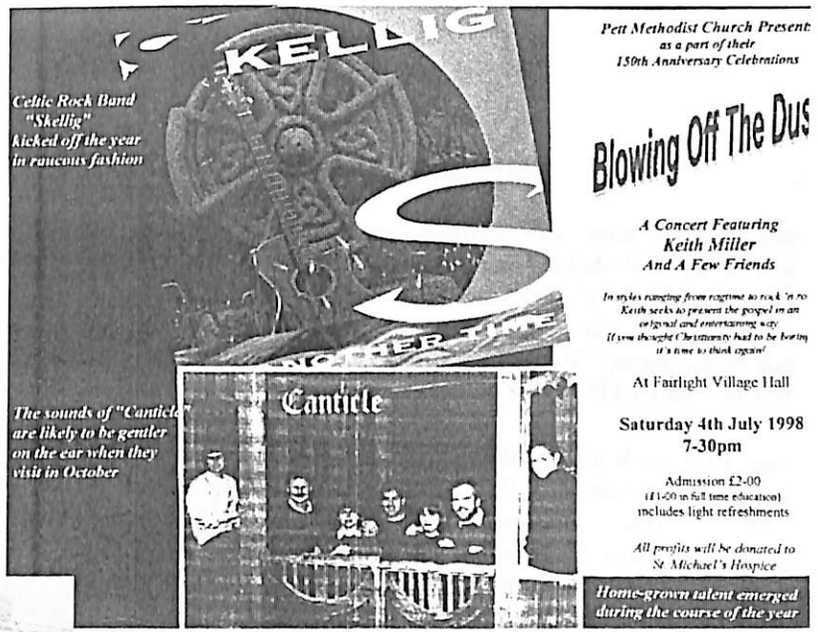
Mr. Ward obtained a grant of £1000 from the Rank Trust, and with local fund raising and a grant from the Circuit, the target was achieved. The old building was retiled to match the new, and the cost of seating was reduced by transferring some of the pews from the original chapel. To meet the budget, however, one further sacrifice had to be made. The new church is three feet six inches shorter than the original plans.







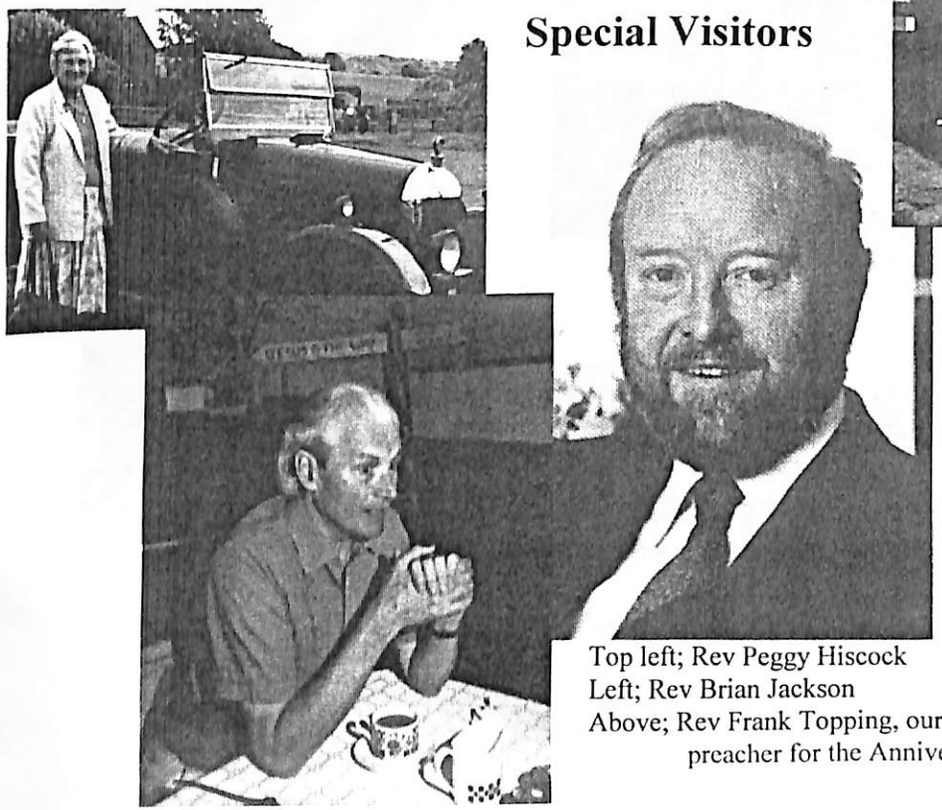
Rev Derek Brice MA BA Ph.D
Minister at Pett since 1991



Music has played an important part during our Anniversary

1998

Special Visitors



Top left; Rev Peggy Hiscock
Left; Rev Brian Jackson
Above; Rev Frank Topping, our guest preacher for the Anniversary



Mrs. Topsy Brice carried out most of the research for this booklet

Ye Olde Country Fayre - May Bank Holiday



Specially commissioned photographs by Adrian Barnett

"Blest be the tie that binds"

Mrs. Cooke, born Anne Griffen, and known affectionately as "Cis", to whose generosity and dedication we owe our present building, is remembered as a much-loved lady. Clarice Huntley recalls that in the fifties, she went with her mother to visit Mrs. Cooke. She describes "a tiny lady, with grey hair in a bun, very correct and house-proud". Boots had to be removed before entering, and husband Charlie was not allowed to smoke his pipe indoors!

The Cookes lived in the bungalow next door to the church, with a large agricultural wheel outside their front door, which again reminds us of the rural nature of the village at that time. Charlie Cooke was famous for his marrows. Every year he grew one especially for Harvest Festival at Calvert, and would engrave "CALVERT" on it in large letters. Mrs. Cooke confided in Clarice that, in her younger days, she had been in love with Clarice's father, and would have liked to marry him! Sylvia Goodsall recalls how the Sunday School children were always expected to visit Mrs. Cooke on their way to church on Sunday mornings.



Mamie Figg told of how, soon after she came to live in Fairlight, she visited Mrs. Cooke, then bedridden, because she wanted to give Barbara (Mamie's daughter) a gift towards her missionary work, and was delighted to be able to hand it to her with a kiss.



PETT

METHODIST CHURCH

Opening Services

Wednesday, 29th August, 1956

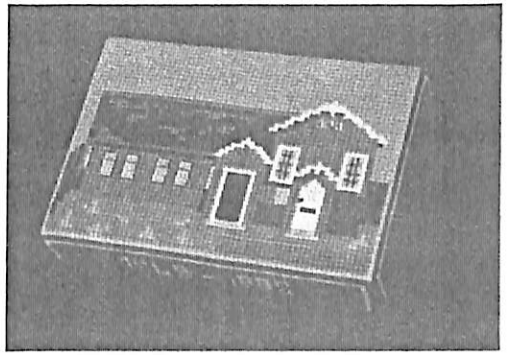
The opening of the new church took place at 4-00pm on Wednesday, 29th August, 1956. The sharpness of the shadows on the photographs suggests that it was a really bright summer's day.

Mr. R.E. Burstow, the architect, presented the key to Miss Isabel Blackman, who performed the formal opening. Others present included the Rev. H. Crowson Muncey, the District Chairman, who led the Service of Dedication. Since that day, over 40 years ago this lovely building has been used for worship and been filled with the presence, power and glory of the Lord!



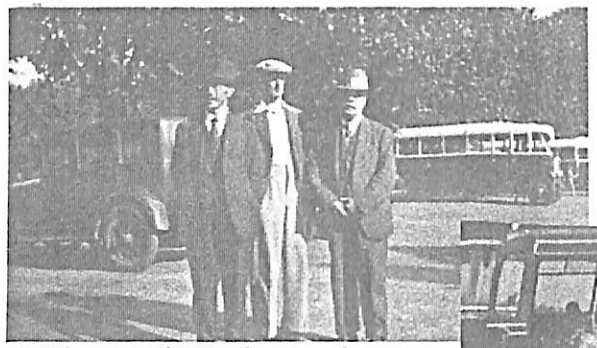
As a personal footnote, thirty years later Derek Brice had Rev Crowson Muncey in his pastoral care as a ninety year old supernumerary in a village near Faversham.

After the dedication of the new building, God sent new people to build the life of the church. The Etheringtons and the Brittons moved to Pett, on retirement, bringing new life to the church. Mrs Etherington is still involved at the age of 90, this beautiful kneeler being her magnificent contribution to this year's celebrations!



A Little Child May Know

Children have shared in the life of the church through the years, and a big event of the year was always the Sunday School Outing.



Here is a picture of the 1935 outing to Guildford, a considerable undertaking in those days! Pictured, from left to right, are Charles Foster, Len Coomber and William Cloke.



Another outing, date unknown, features leaders, Dorothy Brooker, Charles Cooke, and Mrs. Coomber, whose daughter, Joy, is still worshipping at Brede.

Joy remembers selling the "Sunny Smiles" pictures for the National Children's home, and the silver and gold tree, a silver birch branch on which people hung small brown envelopes containing texts and donations for the Chapel Anniversary. She also recalls a Youth Club, and how Ronnie Barden always had to be home by 6-45pm, to listen to "Dick Barton". One very vivid memory is of Sunday September 3rd 1939, when Cyril Barden returned to the Sunday School to report that war had broken out! Joy half expected enemy planes overhead immediately!

Mrs. Sylvia Gutsell (nee Prior), whose father was a farm manager, can remember being taken to Pett Sunday School, in a pushchair at first, in 1947. Mrs Coomber, she says, was a wonderful lady commanding great respect, though very gentle and loving! On a Sunday morning the little church was filled with happy children, singing a good deal , listening to Bible stories, and engaged in crayoning and other activities. Sylvia recalls freezing cold winter days with only one stove with a long flex.

Sundays were important! Sylvia had to wear a special, pretty dress with two matching bows, purchased at Mercer's Drapers. But, in those days, even more special were the annual outings, an absolute highlight for children who seldom left the village, and to whom a trip to Hastings was a big event!

This Little Light of mine

Sometimes children from London came to Pett, camped in a field, and joined in all the activities with the local children. Sylvia Gutsell has a very early memory of a London lad, named Ron Simpkins. He taught the Pett children to sing "This little light of mine" with actions. Because Sylvia would not hold up her finger he used to hold it up for her. Ron later married a local girl, Norma, and they settled in the village, later to play a very important role in our youth work.



Jumping to 1962, we have yet another outing, this time to Winchester. Pictured from left to right are Miss Dorothy Austin (who lived at " Sealands" in Fairlight, now the home of Ralph and Ursula Hatch), Mrs. L. Coomber (still Superintendent of the Sunday School after more than 30 years), Bill Bowen (the driver), Vi Cooke, and her husband's uncle, Charlie Cooke (husband of Annie).

Miss Austin was a very generous and hard-working lady and it is to her memory that we owe the present font and a communion table.

Such commitment to Sunday School work in the 1960s led to further building extension, and a new schoolroom was added on the north side of the premises. The work, costing just over £1,400, began in September 1968. The plans were drawn up by Mr. L. F. Morris of Pannel Lane, and the contractors were Heasmans of Icklesham. Their task was completed by the turn of the year, and the opening and dedication took place on Saturday 25th January 1969. The official opener was Miss Dorothy Austin who apart from being a great advocate and supporter of children's work, had contributed generously to the overall cost of the scheme.

You may have noticed that pictures of outings always seem to feature the adults rather than the children ... perhaps they were too excitable to keep still!



Well, that shortcoming can now be put to rights with a picture of the Sunday School in 1962.

New Blood

During the 1970s, the lively Junior Church, under the leadership of the Simpkins and Mrs. Etherington, filled every room in the building. Transport was provided from Winchelsea Beach in one direction, to Friar's Hill in the other. Meanwhile, a Mothers and Toddlers group catered mostly for farmers' wives and their small children.

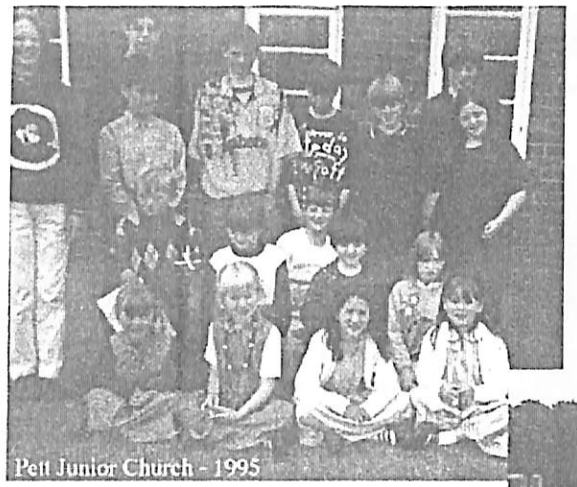
Sadly, this period of vibrant activity was followed by a very low period and, by 1985, the situation at Pett was critical. All youth work had been discontinued, services had been decreased to fortnightly, the bank account was in overdraft, and parts of the building were in need of urgent attention. In fact, the church was only surviving due to the gritty determination of a very few members, notably Beryl Vick. Some sort of psychological boost was needed.

It came when Rev Godfrey Johns took up the case, and a working party was assembled to lend a hand. Materials had been donated, and equipment loaned, from various sources, and with Michael Clarke in charge of plastering, Rev Brian Jackson wielding a paint brush, and many others helping out, the drab church hall was transformed amid much singing and merriment.

It was shortly after this (in 1989) that, having experienced a call at Easter People in 1989, Wendy and Ken Hatch moved, with their family, from Calvert. Wendy felt particulaly called to re-establish work with youth in the village. In visiting Pett a couple of times, they felt a warmth of fellowship and a willingness to respond to a new challenge. It was agreed that meetings had to be more frequent, and mornings would be better.

Unbeknown to Wendy, at the same time, members at the Parish Church were also attempting to address the same issue, but they had no suitable building in which to meet. Word filtered between the two churches, and the possibility emerged of working together for the benefit of both and, most importantly, for the youngsters of the village. A meeting was held at Pett Rectory, and Pett Village Junior Church was born.





Since opening on 5th November 1989, the Junior Church have enjoyed meeting most Sundays and working together to take part in special services and celebrations. As a group they have enjoyed outings including trips to Butlins and Chessington World of Adventures, as well as visits to local farms.



A Mothers & Toddlers group, too, has been re-established, proving so popular that sometimes the buildings seem to bulge.

As in any fellowship, numbers fluctuate, staff change, and problems arise, but throughout all of the ups and downs, the vision has remained to provide a loving, happy atmosphere, and to give both children and families an opportunity to come to know Jesus.





Above; The Mothers & Toddlers enjoy meeting outside when the sun shines.
Left; A typically boisterous game when a few youngsters (and some bigger kids!) get together.

The Christian Year





Of course, here in Pett, the great Christian festivals have always been celebrated! Annually there have been Carol services at Christmas, particularly memorable being the ones held in Tim Jury's barn where the animals helped to create an atmosphere in which we could imagine the scene in a stable in Bethlehem.

Easter is always a time of rejoicing, when we meet for Holy Communion, and since 1989, an Easter Breakfast has been enjoyed by young and old alike.

Pentecost, of recent years, has been given much more prominence, as we have come to recognise its importance as the birthday of Christ's church. Along with this, perhaps we have begun to be more open to the work of the Holy Spirit, and so this great Christian festival can be a time of inspiration and renewal.

Echoes of the old pastoral community survive in the continued enthusiasm for the Harvest Festival. The suppers held here are always much appreciated. Both Millie Rolfe and Derek and Betty Snow first entered the building for a Harvest Supper, and afterwards continued to share in worship regularly and contribute richly to the life of the church. The Etheringtons, too, recognised the importance of this festival, as is shown by the hymn on the opposite page. Written several years ago by the late Geoffrey Etherington, it was set to music by Keith Miller especially for this year's celebration.



The Harvest Table

A Harvest Hymn - by Geoffrey Etherington

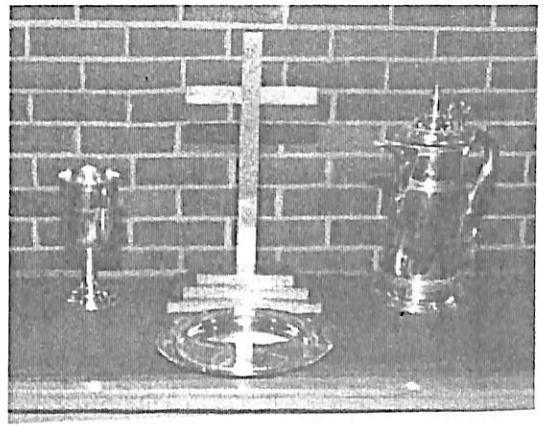
We bring to you these fruits of earth,
The products of our toil,
That we may praise your goodness
For the bounty from the soil.
The golden sheaves of Autumn,
The harvest of the sea,
This is our thanksgiving
That all your people see.

For the sun-scorched parts of earth,
Where famine lingers long,
If only we could give our harvest,
If only we could right this wrong.

So let us spread these gifts around
To hungry stricken lands,
And give these fruits of earth
To eager stretching hands
Then may we walk this sunlit earth
With our brothers hand in hand,
And share our love and harvest
And peace from land to land.

Although, in recent years music in the church has been enhanced by the use of keyboard and guitar music in our worship, the organ has played, and continues to play a major role. The old harmonium (just visible in the 1956 photograph), was replaced after the opening of the new building, when Wilf Brooker, brother-in-law of one of the organists of that time, Mrs. Dorothy Brooker, started a fund with a gift of £100. In all £900 was raised. Our current instrument was donated by Little Common when they felt the need to upgrade, and this, in turn, enabled us to give our organ to Three Oaks.

The closure of a church is always sad, but when Wesley Methodist Church, in Hastings Old Town, closed in May 1988, Pett was able to benefit, from the arrival in the congregation of Doreen Cleland, and Pat (later a steward) and Adrian Barnett, who have contributed much to the life of the church. Also from Wesley came the lovely Communion ware. This is the oldest in the circuit - older than our chapel - the plate being date-stamped 1834. So each time we celebrate Communion we are linked to a glorious past!



No Strangers Here

Over 150 years Pett Church has continued to offer a warm welcome to all.



Betty Snow, a recent arrival, is fairly typical when she describes how she and Derek, having planned to try out a number of churches in the area, felt immediately "at home" at Pett, and never bothered to go anywhere else. The fears expressed by their friends back in Hertfordshire, knowing that they were moving to an area where they would be total strangers, proved to be unfounded, and they have now thrown themselves whole-heartedly into the work of the church, with Derek taking over the treasurership, at the same time as directing his considerable energy towards the recent renovations programme, while Betty is equally at home with a computer or a cook-book ... truly an answer to prayer!



The Methodists at Pett, as we have seen, enjoy an excellent relationship with their Anglican friends. Fostered at first by Norman Greenfield, this continues with Robin and Eileen Balch. Of all the joint services which we enjoy, a highlight of every year is the rededication of the Pett lifeboat, the service alternating between the two churches in July.

But the work of the church, and especially among the ladies of the Circuit, extends far beyond the geographical limits of this small village. Mamie Figg, who came to live in Fairlight after having spent many happy holidays in the area was, along with Beryl Vick, very active in Women's Work, now known as Network. This began for her, here in 1969, when she was invited by Mrs. Ivy Ward to help with refreshments for the annual visit of Calvert ladies to Pett. This tradition continues to this day. Through such important involvement, Pett is linked to the wider work of the Christian Church in the world.

Which Way Now?



So what of the future?

What lessons can we learn from the last 150 years, and what relevance will Pett Methodist Church have for future generations?

One message which comes over quite clearly through what we have read is that just a few people, or even an individual, who puts his or her trust in God, and seeks to do His will, can make a difference! This should be of great comfort when it seems that helpers are short supply. At various times, difficulties will arise, but with the help of the Holy Spirit, they will be overcome just as they always have been.

Pett Methodist Church was born out of the life of this village. Over 150 years, the world has seen ceaseless change, and much confusion and uncertainty. However, the Church has stood at the heart of all this, proclaiming a changeless truth, ministering a ceaseless love, at one with the life of the community in happy times and sad. This is how God wishes us to remain, wedded to the village we serve, and there to respond to its needs. Never apart from the community - we would wish to stay at its heart.

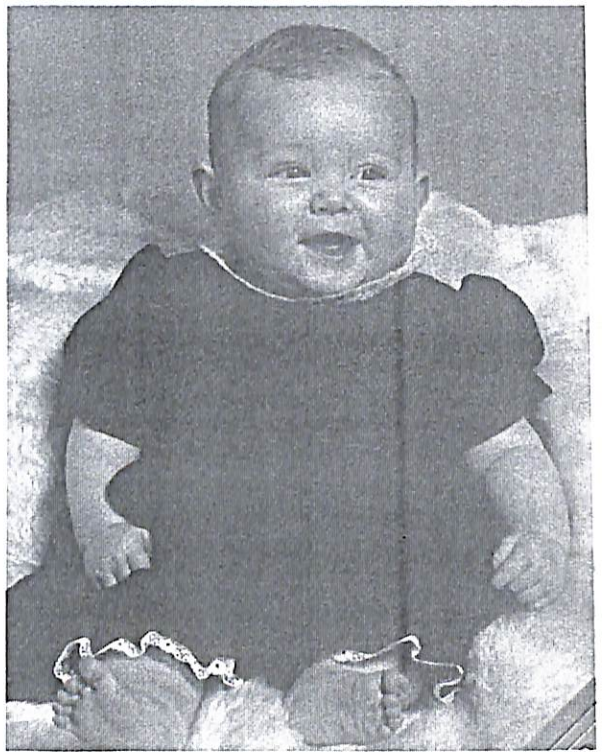
During this anniversary year, we have been celebrating, not the fact that a certain pile of bricks and mortar has held together for 150 years. Rather we celebrate the vision of those who built it, and we rejoice that the Lord that they knew and loved is still alive and well in Pett, and waiting with outstretched arms for all who seek Him.

Hope For The Future

It is, perhaps, fitting that, as we entrust the future of this chapel to our Lord, the postscript to this short history is provided by an event over which we had no control whatsoever.

150 years after James Foster made his "X" at the beginning of our story, another Foster, Isobel Marie, was brought by her parents, Richard and Stephanie Foster, to be Christened. Like James, she is unable, at this stage, to write her name, but nevertheless she has made her mark on the history of this chapel.

We pray that Isobel, and others of her generation and beyond, will find within these walls a place of welcome, of peace, and above all, a place where they can come to know Jesus Christ as their Saviour and friend.



And the date of the Christening .... 31st May, 1998 .... 150 years ***and one day*** after the original Deed was signed.
Or, to put it another way, the very first day of the next 150 years.

Now is <u>that</u> a sign of hope for the future ... or what?!