

## **Memories of the New Youth Hall building project (opened in 1991)**

*by Dave Morgan (written in 2024)*

A recent document, written by Russell Luckock about the building of the new church made me think it was time I put down on paper some of my own memories of the new youth hall building project, which was 33 years ago, as I chaired the project alongside the late, and much missed, Doreen Pearson

The question could be asked why a youth hall wasn't included when the new church was planned and built in the 1960's. This was before my time at Catshill but according to Russell, who was a member of the original 1960's building committee, it was felt that there would be problems raising additional finance whilst other buildings, that could still be left standing on the site when the new church was complete, could be used as a hall. There were several discussions on the subject, but the sticking point was that the church had to be multi-purpose, hence the design with the raised rear as a potential stage. Therefore there was not the financial sympathy for additional buildings.

So the plans to add a new and up to date youth hall weren't resurrected until the late 1980's. It took several attempts to come up with a set of plans that everyone approved and faced with a potential bill of £180,000, it was agreed not to start any work until we knew where most of the money was coming from, and we felt confident we could make a start and pay all expected invoices. So we started out on a period of fund raising in October 1989 and seeking gifts, grants and even loans to cover the cost.

By mid 1991 we felt confident enough to give the builders the go ahead to knock down the old youth hall, remove the rear of the existing suite of buildings and start the build of the new hall, kitchen, lounge area and 5 rooms upstairs.

Part of the £180,000 estimate was a bill of just over £24,000 for VAT, however on examination of the VAT regulations I discovered that Youth/Village/Community Halls etc could be zero rated for VAT purposes. However the initial response from Customs and Excise was that because there was a planned internal access from the existing buildings (down the corridor) the building would be considered as an "extension", and as such all the building work would still be charged at the full VAT rate. Clearly a visit to HM Customs and Excise was needed!

A meeting was arranged for mid-November between myself, as Chair of the project, and a very nice and helpful lady from HMCE who was sympathetic to our cause but was still adamant that it was an extension and not a stand-alone building. The discussion centred on whether if we didn't have that access from the existing buildings, it could be classed as "stand-alone" and not an extension, and therefore zero rated. She said in theory yes, but it would need its own external entrance (I confirmed that it did), its own heating system (I confirmed that it did) and other facilities like a toilet (again that was confirmed!).

At this point she asked whether we had "taken delivery" yet (e.g. the keys handed over and the liability for the building transferred from the builder to the church). I said that was due to happen in December – to which she smiled and said that if there was no internal access from the existing building at hand over, it becomes a stand-alone building, albeit physically attached to the existing one, but not an extension and can therefore be zero rated!

Because I knew we all wanted access from the existing suite of buildings and I wanted to be honest with her, I asked what would happen if we then knocked through to create an internal access once we had "taken delivery". She replied that we would have to pay VAT at the standard rate – but only on the cost of knocking through, and not on the full build cost! This would save us about £24,000.

By December the building was complete and we had a service of thanksgiving and dedication on December 7<sup>th</sup> in the church and then all processed down the outside of the building to the new youth hall entrance, there being no internal access, and sang our first hymn in the new hall – which was the same one we sang as the last hymn in the old hall – “This, this is the God we adore”.

In early 1992 we finally gained our internal access and paid the VAT on the small amount incurred by the builder. Were we being clever (with the willing help of the VAT lady) or was it God blessing us? I like to think the latter.

So in the end the final cost was about £155,000, of which nearly £40k came from gifts and donations from church members and friends, £45k from grants, nearly £20k from over 50 fundraising events and another £16k from existing funds we held and bank interest. We had several 3 year loans arranged, with £20k from Circuit, £40k from The Methodist Chapel Aid Association (which would cost us nearly £8k extra in interest) and nearly £10k from church members. In the end we didn't need the £40k loan (saving us the interest), nor the members loans and only took part of the circuit loan – and it was all paid off within 12 months! We were certainly blessed.

#### Fund raising (how we raised nearly £20,000 ourselves)

By far the largest single fund raiser was an “Abilities Auction”, where members of the church offered services (abilities) as diverse as making a cake or doing some shopping to a few hours of plumbing or house painting. It took time to complete them all but raised nearly £3,000.

There were several sponsored events (4 walks, a sponsored slim, a silence and even a potato grow) which together raised over £2,500. Items, such as pens, mugs, sweatshirts and coasters were bought and sold at a profit totalling about £200. Items were donated for sale including a grandfather clock, a set of encyclopaedias and even a car, which totalled another £600! Fetes, coffee mornings and garden parties raised about £1,750 whilst the church band recorded a musical cassette and a book was written that together contributed another £1,100.

There were 4 different concerts (£850), a quiz night (£470), barn dance (£235), valentine's gift day (£215), the filling of smarties tubes (£496) and an exemption dog show (£125)! You could even buy a miniature brick for the cost of a real one showing you had put something concrete into the building – and that brought in another £470.

All of this shows what can be done when everyone pulls together – and equally how folks can enjoy themselves even faced with a large fundraising target.