

Enemy Action

Dec 1940 -1943

“This is the anniversary of the visit by the enemy in 1940 and this is an account of its impact on ourselves, and its consequences. The Church was practically gutted by fire, resulting from incendiary bombs.

We had just completed arrangements for the opening of a Services Canteen with games and refreshments. Mr. Morgan and other helpers were in the Ladies' Room preparing for the opening night, and they saw the beginning of the fire. Mr. Morgan tried to enlist the services of the Fire Brigade, but they were very fully employed and the Church just had to burn, becoming as a result a mere shell.

When eventually a complete clearance of the debris was made it was possible to assess the completeness of the destruction and see that when the time came for reconstruction, we would have a completely new Church, inside the old walls. Fortunately the Hall was untouched, except that the heating apparatus was out of commission.

About twenty faithful and hardy people turned up on the Sunday morning and the first discussion took place as to carrying on and how to surmount the many and serious difficulties. Mr. Morgan also conducted a short service, so that the continuity of Sunday worship was unbroken. It was not possible for security reasons, to give any definite information to our members through the public press, and it is perhaps worthwhile to recall the wording of the advertisement in the following Saturday issue of the local paper. “Services in the Hall, – with overcoats – ...”

The response of our people was remarkable, and rather embarrassing to our officials. The Hall was furnished as a Sunday School and not a Church, with old forms and cane chairs, some of them very rickety.

At that time we were having the welcome attendance of seventy or eighty soldiers and it was only by the goodwill and patience of the congregation that we were able to carry on. Every seat was occupied at Morning Service and many had to stand throughout the service at the back of the Hall. On one or two occasions people were actually accommodated in the two small rooms at the back of the Hall, where with doors left open, they could join in the Service. It must be remembered in those days the present serious transport and domestic help difficulties had not developed.

We now had to set about furnishing the Hall as a Church and to provide both for Presbyterian dignity of worship and for as comfortable conditions as possible for the congregation. One of the first things we had to buy were four second-hand oil stoves, all we could get, and they came from Warwickshire, through a friend. These proved to be quite insufficient to temper the Arctic conditions, and we were all thankful when the heating apparatus was finally repaired and put into commission.

We also, after many enquiries, managed to obtain what appeared to be the only remaining stock of new Church chairs available for purchase. St. Anne's Church, destroyed like ourselves, lent us their brass Lectern; a new Communion Service was purchased; an excellent reconditioned piano was obtained at a very reasonable price; Mrs. Christie gave the very beautiful oak Font in memory of James Christie, a name which has been a landmark in our Church's history; two brass flower vases were given as a memorial to the late Mrs. Cumming, wife of the Session Clerk and one of our oldest members; – and so we gradually furnished the Hall as a Church as far as supply difficulties would allow.

The accommodation for the Children's Church was quite inadequate, but the reconstruction of the old Ladies' Room in the Church premises, has gone a long way to solve this difficulty. The cost of the re-

decoration of the two small rooms behind the Hall was provided by the Children's Church out of their own funds and if we do very occasionally, hear some indefinite murmurs from these rooms during Service time, well – they are our own children.

The provision of this new room has proved to be invaluable for many purposes, as a general meeting room. Mr. Cyril Fox has added to its amenities by the gift of a handsome storage cupboard. Here we are then, three years after the destruction, able to carry on the work of the Church with a bare minimum of the necessary facilities, but, as I think will be generally conceded, with sufficiently comfortable and worthy conditions for Church worship and work, until the happy day arrives when we shall be able to assemble in the new Church.

The increasing difficulties of transport and domestic help have already been mentioned. Our cause here depends increasingly on transport facilities. Our smaller attendances of recent months are a direct reflection of this handicap, but we have a solid body of faithful people who come in spite of all difficulties, and we are still adding new members, faithful Presbyterians who are not deterred by present conditions. It will be recognised that these conditions have made the task of the Ministry much harder, but I think that we, both Minister and Congregation, may justly claim that we have stood up manfully to a severe test, and that we may, in the words of the Prime minister, look forward to the future with sober confidence."

W. S. Harcus.

1946 The Hut

"The Hut". These two small words hold considerable promise for the children and young people of St. Andrew's and at the same time issue a challenge to all our members and adherents. It is unfortunate that the structure should be called "The Hut" as that name carries the suggestion of a small, very temporary and, perhaps, uncomfortable makeshift. 'Our Hut' is, in fact, a large hall and is most comfortable and inviting. It will provide ample accommodation for the Children's Church. It will be an ideal meeting place for the Cubs and Brownies and it is just possible that the members of the mid-week meeting may transfer their affections to the new building. At any rate those who have inspected the Hut may rest assured that the House Committee is providing a place where our children and young people may feel at home.

The cost of the Hut is well beyond our first estimates. £700 seems a large sum for temporary accommodation. However it should be pointed out that, when the Hut is no longer required it can be dismantled easily and sold or used for some other purpose. Depreciation of the building itself will be small within the next three or four years. Its sale value will only depreciate with the natural reduction in prices which we expect with the return to normal conditions. A contribution to the Hut is a good investment. There will be, we are sure, rich dividends in the character and lives moulded within its walls.