

A BRIEF HISTORY

There have been services of worship at the Church of the Martyrs stretching back over more than 120 years to when it was first built as part of a new housing estate in 1890.

In 1990 a booklet **History of the Martyrs** was produced to mark the church's centenary. The text of that booklet appears next.

A healthy church is one that is always gently evolving so as to relate effectively to an ever changing culture (and also to harness new technologies that can benefit its worship and mission).

At the same time a healthy church is one that stays true to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and helps people in uncertain times to be anchored in that faith through its worshipping heritage stretching back over many generations.

The Martyrs has evolved in numerous ways in recent years, both in terms of its mission and worship and in terms of its buildings, for example:

- A music group has led worship at our 10.30am services for over 25 years and the space formerly occupied by the choir in the chancel was reordered in 2012 to allow more flexible use in worship for drama, evening worship, children's activities during our Tomatoes breakfast club. At the same time the beautiful war memorial that surrounds the chancel continues to be a focal point for our annual service of remembrance.
- With the creation of a kitchen and server at the back of the church, it has been possible to introduce a bi-weekly breakfast event called 'Tomatoes', with live music, time to chill and chat, newspapers, a short talk, prayer and a full cooked breakfast! Many who would not have darkened the door of a traditional church have thereby been welcomed into our fellowship.
- The addition of a large screen in the chancel and smaller screens in the side aisle has enabled the words used in all services to be projected for everyone to see and the use of both photographic and visual images to enhance talks and prayer times. It even means that baptisms can still take place in the original font at the back of church, whilst simultaneously projecting the images on the screens to enable everyone to see children and adults being baptised.
- With the creation in 2012 of a fully glazed prayer vestry it has become possible for people to pray quietly before or after worship even when there is large amounts of noise in the main building; and it has also become possible to locate the children's crèche in this newly sound-proofed space, enabling parents to access it any point with their children during morning worship.
- The focal point of our worship in sharing communion has been enhanced in 2013 by the addition of a second, removable, curved communion rail at the front of the chancel, allowing more time and space for worshippers to remain at the communion rail in prayer and enabling a healing prayer team to minister more easily in the chancel area.

But evolutions and developments in both mission and worship have been ever present in the history of the Martyrs as the following older history of the Martyrs makes clear.

Booklet: History of the Martyrs

This History of the Martyrs was produced in 1990, as part of the Centenary Celebrations of the Church. It was written by Bob Plant, and compiled from church records, local histories, directories, interviews and material supplied by church members and others.

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In the Beginning

During the latter half of the 19th century industry in Leicester grew at a great pace, principally in its already well established knitting, hosiery and boot and shoe industries. The increase in the work force created a need for more housing, together with the social and spiritual requirements of the newly developed areas.

Such was the case in the West End. The bridges over the River Soar were improved and easy access between the town centre, the factories, many of which fronted the river, and the newly created terraced housing which was spreading from West Bridge via King Richard's Road, Hinckley Road, Narborough Road, Wilberforce Road and Western Road. It was to meet the spiritual needs of these developing areas that St. Paul's was built in 1871, St. Augustine's as a small mission church in 1889, the Martyrs in 1890 and, "across the water" St. Andrew's, Jarrom Street in 1862.

Leicester had long since been a stronghold of the non-conforming churches and their needs were met by such places as Emmanuel Baptist Chapel in New Park Street. This was built in 1871 and, aided by a fire, demolished in October 1978, to make way for the new West Bridge Road Scheme. Methodists, Wesleyans, Pentecostal and others are all present in the locality including the Robert Hall Baptist Church.

The parish of the Martyrs was created from that of St. Mary de Castro. Consent was given by Her Majesty in Council on March 20th 1890 and this was ratified and registered by the Registrar for the Diocese of Peterborough as announced in The London Gazette of May 6th 1890, and the church was consecrated by the Bishop of Peterborough on the 10th July. Leicester was, of course, at that time within the See of Peterborough. It was not until 1926 that the Bishop of Peterborough, Cyril Bardsley, caused the division of his See into two, and it was he himself who became the first Bishop of the new Diocese of Leicester in 1926, with St. Martin's being chosen as the cathedral church.

The new parish of the Martyrs was endowed by the Reverend Joseph Harris of Herm House, Eastbourne and he enjoyed the right of patronage and thereby able to nominate the minister or incumbent to The Martyrs. This right subsequently passed jointly to the Principal of Ridley Hall, Cambridge and the Bishop of Leicester, and the right of appointment now rests with them.

The Building

The church, and the land upon which it stands, was given by Joseph Harris. The church architect was Ewan Christian. It is of red brick with a tall south east tower topped by a plain square pyramidal spire covered, as are the steeply pitched roofs, with attractive green Westmorland slates. As originally planned the church was to have a north and south aisle, but the north aisle was never constructed, and the north side still has "temporary" timber-framed windows.

There is a keeled bordered timber roof with a dormer window. An imposing apse to the chancel has five lancet windows with somewhat nondescript stained glass, beneath which were placed, after the First World War, four Sicilian marble tablets inscribed with the Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer and a painted frieze with the words "Be Thou Faithful Unto Death and I will give thee a Crown of Life".

The Baptistry at the west end is also in the form of an apse, now with five small stained glass windows portraying the Scout and Guide movements in honour of those members who served in the Second World War. Of the six windows on the south side, five contain mid 20th century stained glass and depict, William Tyndale, Elizabeth Fry, David Livingstone, St. George and William Wilberforce (the latter two were designed by Donald B Taunton NRD MGP, and made by John Hardman Studios, Birmingham).

Trollope records as an addendum to his Inventory of the Church Plate of Leicestershire, which was published in 1890, that the Church of The Martyrs was consecrated on 17th July 1890 (in fact the 10th July) and that the Communion Plate which comprises two silver cups, two silver patens and a silver flagon were the gift of Mr William Harris of Sykefield, Leicester, the brother of the founder. All five pieces are inscribed "This Do in Remembrance of Me' Luke XXII 19, 1 Cor. Romans XI 211, 25" and "Church of The Martyrs, Leicester, Consecrated 1890".

After the First World War the reredos and the oak panelling round the apse was placed in the church as a memorial to those members of the congregation who had died in the war. Their names are engraved on brass tablets adjoining the oak panelling.

The subject of the reredos is sacrifice. The kneeling figure of the knight represents the men who died, that of the kneeling woman, the mothers, wives, sisters and girlfriends who lost loved ones, and the child represents the little ones who lost fathers or brothers. The central figure of course is that of the Saviour holding the cup of sacrifice in his hands. He is seated upon the rock from which the "living waters" flow. The words "This Do in Remembrance of Me" give us the motive for all true sacrifice, and the text above promises the reward for a life of sacrifice for Christ's sake. The small shields represent the symbols of the Passion. The cost of the reredos was about £500 and was subscribed by members of the congregation and friends in the Parish.

The Harris family

It is appropriate that some history of this family should be noted. The family moved into Leicester from Worthington in about 1750. Joseph Harris, born in 1797, married Eliza Gibson of Thrussington in 1828 and in 1843 bought Westcotes, a fine William and Mary house on the outskirts of the town. He was the first President of the Leicester Law Society in 1861, and died on 21st February 1882 and was buried at St. Mary de Castro Church.

Their eldest son, also named Joseph, was born on 23rd March 1831. He became an M.A. of Trinity College, Oxford, was Rector of Sheepy, and married Susanna Clark of Harmston Rectory, Lincoln in 1862. It was he who built and endowed the Church of the Martyrs in 1890. At that date he lived at Herm House, Eastbourne. He died two years later and was buried at Ocklynge, Eastbourne.

Joseph and Susanna had three sons. Revd Joseph Montague, born 1864; William Cecil, born in 1869; and Henry Blackwall, born in 1871. Joseph married Edith Annesty Malcolmson. William

married Rhoda Mary Barclay, daughter of Dr Barclay, who acted as Sanitary Medical Officer for the Borough prior to 1849. He was a local historian and lived in The Newarke, Barclay Street being named after him. Henry died unmarried in 1929.

Revd Joseph Montague Harris had two daughters and a son, Sir Ronald Montague Joseph Harris KCVO CB, who became First Church Estates Commissioner. Joseph Montague built the Vicarage of the Church of the Apostles, and died aged 99 years in 1964.

William also had two daughters and a son, William Barclay Harris QC. He was President of The Leicester Law Society in 1930, and he planned, developed and improved a large part of the West End of the city. It was he who laid the foundation stone for the new Parish Hall in 1927, he died in 1942.

Henry was also a solicitor and was Chairman of Directors of the first Garden City at Letchworth. He died in 1929.

Joseph and Eliza's second son, Samuel, was a solicitor with his father. He married Charlotte Georgina Woodd of Conyngham Hall, Knaresborough. They had seven children of whom only two daughters married. Alexander, the eldest son was a solicitor. He died a bachelor, as did the younger son, Frederick William (see below). The eldest daughter, Margaret, married a clergyman in the West Indies, and had four children. Constance, Beatrice and Dorothy were unmarried, but Edith married Captain Neilson a Scot, whose daughter, Miss Mary Neilson, has provided the commentary of Sykefield (see content list above).

The Memorial Hall

Much information concerning the Hall, as well as other matters relating to The Martyrs, has been gleaned from previously unpublished material written by Canon Andrew Raby who became Vicar on 13 December 1913. He stated that his predecessor, the Reverend Arthur Buxton had done wonderful work during a short three years ministry. This resulted in the church being filled on Sunday evenings. Over 700 Sunday School pupils were housed mostly in the Shaftesbury Road School buildings and the seniors in the Ruding Road Schoolrooms.

The Ruding Road building only accommodated about 120 people, it was badly planned, badly heated, constantly needing repairs and was some distance from the church. Nevertheless this, and a small corrugated iron building, known as the Parish Room, in the Vicarage garden, had to suffice for mid-week meetings and activities.

It was used for Bible Classes on Sunday afternoons, and by the ladies sewing parties on Tuesday afternoon and missionary sewing parties on Friday afternoons. "The Gleaner's Union" worked for missionaries and met once a month on Saturday afternoon under Mrs Snasdell.

Mr Buxton started a scheme for a small Hall near the Vicarage, but this would only have accommodated about half the Sunday School. Canon Raby therefore suggested to the Church Council that a building large enough for all our Sunday School, Bible Classes and mid-week activities should be erected near the church. This was accepted, and a contract was let for the work to begin at the end of August 1914. However, the First World War broke out at the beginning of that month and the scheme had to be shelved. The original cost for building the Hall was to have been £3500.

Four and a half years were to pass before the scheme could be commenced and during this time fund-raising events took place. Sunday School children used to sell chocolates, scented soaps and lavender bags, a mile of pennies which would produce £211, and a wide variety of events. It is interesting to note that at this time the sum of money which the church had to pay to the Diocese, known as the Diocesan Quota, was £66 – at the present time the Parish Share as it is

now termed, is over £35,000. Also during this time a new heating apparatus was required in the church, the existing hot air system being ineffective. The present hot water system was installed but with a coke fired boiler, later to be converted to oil and then gas. Also electric lighting was brought in for the first time to replace the gas lighting.

When the war ended an estimate was received for commencing the building of the Hall. This was in the sum of £10,000, but it was hoped that if this was deferred there might be a reduction in the cost of materials and labour. Some two or three years later the cost was then estimated at £7000. During the years of waiting the building fund, with the aid of £2000 realised by the sale of the old school in Ruding Road, had increased to about £5200. The cost of the building was to be £7000, to which must be added the cost of iron railings to the boundary, the purchase of 250 chairs, two pianos, cupboards etc. together with kitchen and catering equipment. The suggestion was made by Canon Raby that a sum of £2000 should be borrowed from the Leicester Building Society at 5% interest.

Work commenced in 1927, and the foundation stone was laid by W Cecil Harris on the 3rd November 1927. Eventually the Hall was completed and furnished, and it was opened in 1928 at a ceremony with the Bishop, Archdeacon and other clergy present.

Briefly, the Hall is built of brick with slated roof and contains five rooms on the ground floor with two entrance halls, kitchen, toilets, and on the upper floor a large concert hall with stage and two smaller rooms. The eight rooms have a total floor area of 8720 sq.ft.

The Leicester Education Committee asked to have the use of five rooms and, with the proviso that the church had the use of all the rooms at weekends and in the evenings, a letting was arranged at £240 per annum. This greatly helped in repaying the loan to the Leicester Building Society, but unfortunately with the outbreak of war in September 1939 the Education Department had to withdraw, and shortly afterwards the army commandeered the Hall except for one room which is known as The Den. All our furniture and equipment had to be packed into this room as tightly as possible, and the available floor space only allowed for meetings of about forty people.

The Senior Sunday School had to make use of the Shaftesbury Road School accommodation and, on the advice of the Bishop, the Junior Sunday School was closed down, and on account of the blackout all our week-night activities were curtailed. Before the war ended the debt to the Building Society had been reduced to £1000, and a concerted effort was then made, and this was achieved by having two Gift Days.

At one time three-day bazaars were held in the hall to provide church funds – people were asked to give a "pound of something" for a stall. In 1947 the bazaar actually produced a third of all the church income, more than from collections.

People from the past

Martyrs Scouts

The earliest troop was formed about 1911. Keith Brown was one of the early Scout Masters and during the First World War he was in the Scottish Highlanders, and was killed on his way home. The 57th Troop was started in 1926, aided by George Greenfield the Curate, who attended the 40th anniversary in 1966.

Charles Tinsley was well known as a member of the choir, but possibly even more so as a Scout Master. Being a Quartermaster Sergeant in the Leicestershire Regiment he had contact with Colonel Sir Robert Martin of The Brand at Woodhouse Eaves. As a result he allowed Charles Tinsley to take the scouts over to The Brand to camp, following which the Guides were allowed

to go, and still do so at the present time due to the kindness of the present owner, Colonel Sir Andrew Martin.

Young People's Union – YPU

This was led by Miss Winifred Goodman, the Deaconess who lived at 143 Upperton Road. She was always very proper and rather forbidding in her blue uniform with head veil. She was Deaconess at The Martyrs for 26 years, and died at Seascale in March 1947. There is a plaque to her memory in the church.

The Youth Club

The Youth Club was formed in 1946 at the time the Rev. William Martyr came to the parish. It soon became established with about thirty members meeting in the Den, the only room available in the Hall at that time since it was still being used by the army. Numbers rose to over a hundred and there was regularly sixty to eighty members meeting on Friday nights. Members included Ken Newcombe, Roy Richardson and Bob Ward son of George (Verger at the Martyrs) and Dorcas Ward. Fortnightly dances were held in the Hall on Saturday nights.

Youth Fellowship

There was a very active group at the Martyrs over many years and the names of some of the helpers and members will be remembered by many – Elaine Clifford, Helen Webb, Helen Proctor, Kathleen Woods, Ken and Mary Newcombe, David and Michael Cross, George Mercer and Brian Adams the renowned road walker who represented England in the Olympics.

Sunday School outings and Street Witness

Frequent visits were taken to the Charnwood Forest area. A sixpenny ticket on the Great Central Railway to Quorn and then a two mile walk to Hanging Stone Rocks, and then a walk back to Quorn. Visits were also made to Skegness. A five shilling (25p) ticket was taken from the Great Northern Station on Belgrave Road for a day trip to Skegness.

Morning Sunday School took place in church at 10.30am prior to the 11.00am Service and then they withdrew before the sermon. During Canon Raby's time a Bible Class was held at 5.30pm on Sundays in the Vicarage and was taken by Joan Raby.

Occasionally Street Witness meetings were held on Sunday evenings, and in 1916 open air meetings were held at the corner of Westcotes Drive and Fosse Road South. In later years the choir and congregation would from time to time process up and down the nearby 'Martyrs' streets.

In the early years of the century a magic lantern was used in the church for illustrating the Easter stories.

During the last war there was, of course, no blackout to the church windows and therefore "evening" services took place in the afternoon.

The Working Party

The Friday Working Party was completely different to any working party on any other day of the week. The chief difference being that it was Mrs Pestridge's Working Party. One did not decide to

go to the Friday Working Party – it was strictly by invitation of Mrs Petridge, and it was held at her home on Fosse Road South.

All sat at a large dining table presided over by Mrs P. Everyone except the young were addressed as Mrs or Miss. The chat and the work, in that order of importance, went on until Mary, a uniformed maid, brought in an enormous tea. On departure Mrs P would send some tea home for husbands, children or those living alone. It was at this point that Mr P would sometimes look in on us on his return from his High Street shop. He kindly had cushion covers we had quilted or embroidered made up for us professionally.

The Sale of Work was held in November in aid of the Church Missionary Society. Everyone had their special job and, unless asked, kept to it. Cakes and produce were presided over by Miss Knight. Miss Pass, a very enthusiastic maker of aprons and needle cases, usually manned the cash box on this occasion.

A Garden Party was held in July at Mr Rimington's lovely old house at Newtown Unthank. Hats were worn by the ladies, and we were honoured by the presence of Vicar Cross, Mr Petridge and the Kershaw's friends of the Petridges, the Curate of the time and any children, Mr Rimington and his housekeeper, Miss Chamberlain. The main excitement of the afternoon was croquet, and although it was a magnificent church event, at times there was quite a lot of dirty work at the hoops!

Drama at the Martyrs

Members of the church and of various organisations have formed drama groups over the year. Light comedy and farce were the usual productions such as Dry Rot, Sailor Beware, Amorous Prawn and from time to time Gang Shows. Some of those involved include Dave King, Denis Lewitt, Bob Withers and his wife Dilys, Toni Tyler, Rosemary Matley, Joe Stacey and his daughter Jane, Henry Morton and his son John who became a Producer, Diane West, Angela Preston, Ken Ladbrooke, John Harding and John and Jennifer Stanton, Joan James and her daughters Christine and Valerie. John Collins was both actor and producer.

Hockey Team

Phyl Collins played in the mid 1930's in a mixed team. Betty Tinsley took them to matches in her car.

Cricket Team

Roy Richardson, a founder member of the Martyrs team, provides the following information. Norman Crowe was instrumental in its formation in 1956, he was at one time the chairman, John Cansick was Secretary and Roy the Treasurer. There were fifteen regular players: Alf West was best bat and Don Melvin, still living in Braunstone, the best bowler. Infrequent players were Curate Roy Powdrill and Vicar Alan Cross who had a keen interest in cricket but ceased playing after suffering a heart attack in 1960. The team had its own badge and tie, and they played in the Mutual League on Saturday afternoons at Western Park. Stumps were drawn after about ten years.

Memories in Westcotes

- The first electric tram on the Narborough Road and Hinckley Road routes commenced on 12th July 1904 and ended on 21st November 1948.
- The Narborough Road Post Office had twelve postal collections each weekday from 7.30 a.m. to 11.00 p.m. and on Sundays at 5.45 and 8.45 p.m. It was possible to post a letter to Sheffield early morning and receive a reply by the third delivery that day.
- The Library on Narborough Road celebrated its Centenary in 1989. The site upon which it stands was given by the Rev Joseph Harris, and he also donated £200 towards its cost of erection which was £1600!
- Many will remember the very smartly uniformed brisk-walking lamplighter who came round at dusk to light the street lamps in Westcotes. Also a very portly woman wearing a black hat and white apron and with a very pallid face who pushed a barrow from which she sold blocks of salt. Many will also remember a man named Flanagan who started his business from a two-wheel cart with small pony from which he sold fish and rabbits. He later became tenant of one of the new shops on Fosse Road South which were built in the late 1920s between Upperton Road and Beaconsfield Road. There was also waste ground between Barclay Street and Harrow Road upon which the Westleigh Cinema was built, later to be demolished and now the site of a petrol station.

Quips and Quotes

- Canon Andrew Raby: "The representatives of this meeting (PCC) view with much regret the renewed attempt to open the Western Park Golf Links on Sunday. If successful it would lead up gradually to establishing the continental Sunday in our country, a condition that would mean a serious moral, economic and social loss to the country." – from Parish Magazine, 5 February 1929.
- At the Church's 70th anniversary service Bishop Ronald Williams said that The Martyrs was "the church of the cheery faces".
- Canon Raby said of a Curate: "He is very good but he has this Nottingham accent".
- In January 1891, the church was insured for the sum of £3000, in 1960 it was £46,000 and is now £2,250,000.
- The enormity of the great influenza epidemic in the autumn of 1918 can be gauged by the fact that the December 1918 Magazine records the funerals of 53 people at the Martyrs during the month of November, as opposed to a norm of around six.
- The following church appointments were made at a meeting held on 11th August 1890:

Mr C N Wright Organist £30 per annum

Mr J H Curtis Verger £14 per annum

Mr O Smith Bellringer two shillings per week

Mr T Smith Organ Blower one shilling per week

Mrs Kirkland Cleaner three shillings per week

SYKEFIELD, Westcotes Drive

(formerly the home of Frederick William Harris)

A commentary by Miss Mary Neilson

The Westcotes Estate, formerly in the possession of the Ruding family since 1558, was sold, in 1821, to Thomas Freer, Clerk of the Peace, with office in New Street. His son sold it in 1843 to Joseph Harris, the last owner.

The mansion known as Westcotes, was sited in the area now occupied by Cranmer Street, and it was the home of Joseph Harris until 1886 when much of the estate was sold and the house demolished.

The eldest son, Joseph, had taken Holy Orders and was Vicar of Sheepy. The second son, Samuel, a solicitor with his father, had a growing family for which he built "Westcotes Grange" in the mid 1870's (since the 1920's a maternity hospital, now a psychiatric assessment unit).

Then a 'smaller' house was built for the youngest son, William, who, though qualified as a solicitor, never practised as he was almost totally deaf. He never married and lived at Sykefield till his death.

The Grange was lived in until just before the First World War by Samuel, one surviving son and four unmarried daughters. This son also remained a bachelor and moved into Sykefield on selling The Grange, so this house was for the greater part of its existence the home of an uncle and nephew.

The nephew was my uncle. He occupied Sykefield for almost thirty years. I was a regular visitor from the late twenties when I accompanied my parents on their annual visit, until the late forties when I left for war service in India.

The house was built to meet the needs of my great-uncle who, being deaf, had an almost phobic fear of fire or burglary. It was to delay the spread of the former (should it have occurred) that he ordered the teak staircase which was such a great feature of the house. The teak is supposed to have come straight from Burma and is the slowest burning wood there is.

Similarly, the tiny leaded French windows were partitioned with very solid bars. It was impossible even on a hot summer's day to put your arm out above the elbow. Although this may have been protection against an intruder it meant that in spite of the slow-burning teak staircase, you were trapped inside should there have been a fire!

There were special times in the year for visiting my uncle at Sykefield to help him to consume certain delicacies! My mother often went in May when the asparagus was best. This had been transplanted from Westcotes Grange and was exceptionally succulent. The produce of the greenhouses was at its best in August - green figs with pink insides, and on alternate years peaches or nectarines - never both together! My uncle picked these himself after tea and before the 'dressing' gong. If more were ripe than could be eaten that evening or at the latest for breakfast next morning, a basket was tastefully arranged and despatched to Canon Raby at the Vicarage of The Martyrs. These were usually delivered by 'Ellingworth' who served the family for over sixty years, starting as a groom aged eighteen at The Grange and eventually becoming coachman.

During the 1914-18 War he worked in a munitions factory in Leicester, returning to Mr Harris, who still had two horses, in the 1920's. He lived on (in the lodge to Sykefield) until he and his master were both in their eighties. No-one thought of his leaving or retiring. He fetched the evening and Sunday papers, took out "Tim" the brindle cairn terrier for 'walkies', cleaned shoes and did other odd jobs. Latterly, as a widower he was given his meals in the kitchen at Sykefield.

The last time my uncle came downstairs was to see Ellingworth, who had called. My uncle was adamant that Ellingworth could not be expected to mount those slippery stairs!

Up to the end of the First World War there were pigs in the piggeries outside where the small ground floor rooms have now been added. They included a large quantity of iron work, which was removed in 1940 together with the beautiful wrought iron gates at the foot of the drive, to aid the war effort.

The rose garden was my uncle's special pride. Here again he liked to pick his own blooms and snip off dead-heads in the leisured hour or two between tea and dinner.

As long as I can remember my parents went to Sykefield early in August to play tennis, eat peaches, and my father, to ride. At that time there was a paddock where the poplar trees form a boundary with the houses backing on the garden. My first visit was not until my mid-teens when I was judged mature enough to come down to dinner in the evening.

It was nine o'clock or thereabouts when we retired to the library for coffee and liqueurs. I was allowed one small cup of weak coffee (no liqueur!) and then Elizabeth came to the door and called me by name. I was bidden to rise instantly, say goodnight, and expected to follow her upstairs.

At that time (the late twenties) Sykefield was lit by gas and candles only. It was with candles that latterly my uncle would see me to my room, the first on the right at the top of the stairs, known as the "Blue Room".

The telephone made a late entry into Sykefield – it was installed in the Library. I recall being reprimanded for seeking to answer a call and being told "If you are required you will be sent for, such urgency demonstrates a vulgar curiosity."

Looking back with detachment, life at Sykefield was before all things ordered and peaceful. There was never any uncertainty. The times of rising and retiring, the meal times were fixed immutably. If changes were made, they were announced well in advance. Sunday lunch-time was occasionally moved because Cook needed to get a particular 'bus to Nottingham for an afternoon off. Dinner in summer was half an hour later to allow more time for tennis.

Comparatively late on in his life my uncle acquired a 'wireless' or, as we now call it, a radio. He woke from his siesta to listen to the Bournemouth concerts in mid-afternoon on Sunday, and followed 'Evensong' with a prayer book long after his neuritis made it too painful for him to sit through a church service.

One night a week in winter he changed his dinner hour, to the undisguised amusement of his domestic staff to whom he had confessed a partiality for "Gert and Daisy", the comic chorus girls. Familiar as he was with the Music Halls of the nineties, they recalled his youth. "Fancy, Miss", a housemaid said to me, "the Master likes Gert and Daisy!" My mother was not surprised.

In those days "The Week's Good Cause" was always on a Sunday evening after the Service. From the time he had a radio he also listened to that programme with unfailing regularity and, with equal regularity (unless on a rare occasion he disapproved of "the cause") he contributed most generously to it.

One summer his sight was threatened and he had, on doctor's orders, to give up smoking. His sight was, in fact, so badly affected that his reading and writing were very restricted. It was that

year that he called on me to write out the cheques in response to the appeals – duly signing them himself. Posted early on Monday morning, he expected an acknowledgement by Thursday at least. If this did not arrive, I was instructed to write and ask if his donation had arrived, and if he did not hear from them by a certain date, he would stop payment on his cheque.

My uncle died in 1950 at Sykefield, and I am sure he would approve of it now being used for social needs in the community.

This commentary on life at Sykefield was provided by Miss Mary G C Neilson, grand-daughter of Samuel Harris of The Grange, and a niece of Frederick William Harris, now living in Edinburgh.

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