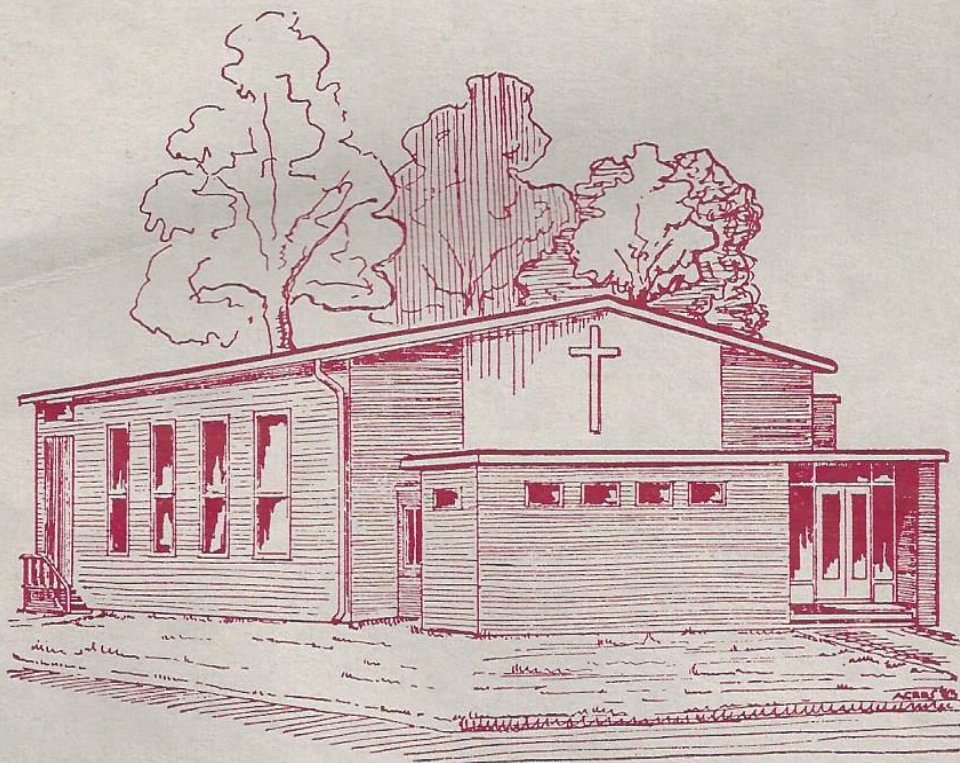


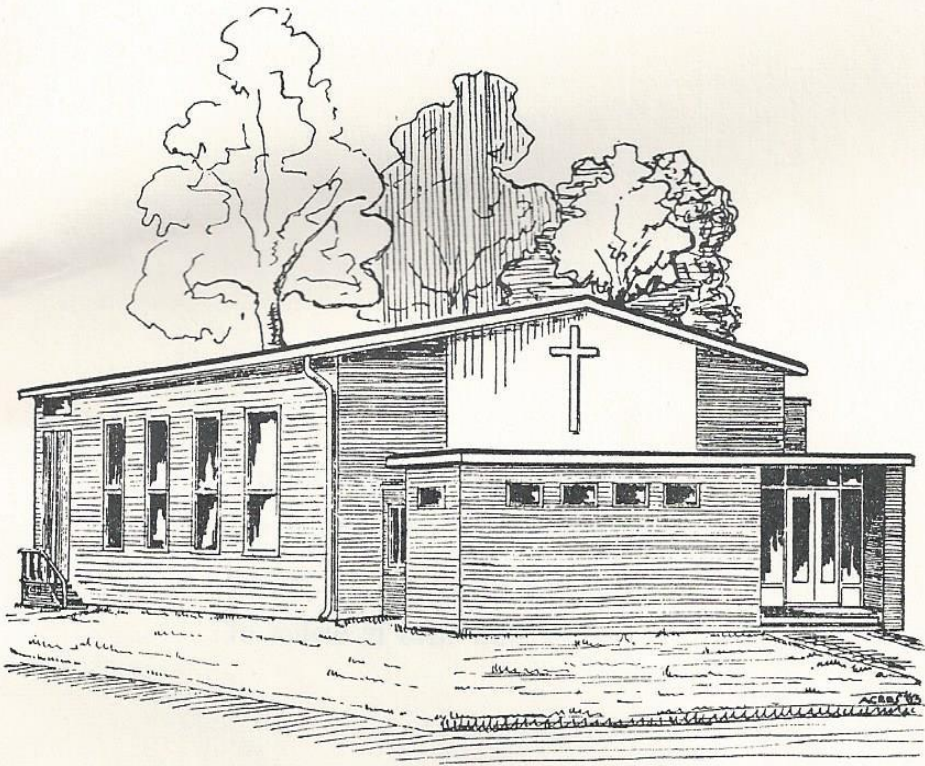
*From Acorn  
to  
Sturdy Oak...*



**The First Century of the Goffs Oak (Herts)  
Methodist Church  
(1868 - 1968)**

by  
**JIM PRIEST**

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In honour of the lives of all who have passed,  
are passing,  
and shall pass this way

A noble army, men and boys,  
The matron and the maid,  
O God, to us may grace be given  
To follow in their train.

## A Foreword by the Minister

Dear Friends,

The centenary celebrations confront us with the temptation to indulge in an orgy of reminiscence, and, as a church, we are concerned that we do not fall to that temptation. Whilst we are keen to learn lessons from the past, we must fix our attention on the goal ahead. We remain thankful for the rich tradition into which we have entered, but we are keenly aware that it would be fatal to be chained by it. The Christian faith is unchanging, yet it has to be re-stated if it is to make sense to the people of our secular society.

Having been privileged to serve in Goffs Oak during the past four-and-a-half years, I have come to cherish the many people who, through loyal service and diligent devotion, are re-stating Christianity in intelligible terms. The witness of those who have cared for the sick and lonely; of those who have made time to listen to youth; and of those who have struggled to lead worthwhile worship, has not been in vain. Nor ought we ever to expect such service to be so. The servant who throws himself away in love for God and neighbours is aligning himself with New Testament Christianity—a force which has continued to bring a new dimension to human life wherever it is taken seriously.

Those who have gone before us had faith, vision and love. It is for these gifts that we pray at the milestone. Goffs Oak as a community frequently shows us generous goodwill, and may we, as Christ's servants, never forget that it is for the well-being of the total community that we exist as part of the Christian Church.

Yours sincerely,

DONALD J. SAMPSON.

March 1968.

## FROM ACORN TO STURDY OAK . . .

THE FIRST CENTURY OF THE GOFFS OAK (HERTS.)

METHODIST CHURCH (1868-1968)

In the early years of last century, there were few meeting places for those who are now generally described as Free Church people, but who were then referred to—often opprobriously—as Nonconformists or Dissenters. A mighty book entitled **Nonconformity in Hertfordshire**, completed by a St. Albans congregational minister in 1884, mentions, in connection with the formation of a County Baptist Union in 1810, Newgate Street and Goffs Lane as “places reported as enjoying evangelical instruction though not a regular ministry”. Although there is no supporting evidence, it may well be that this “evangelical instruction” had some influence on events which came about in Goffs Oak in the 1860's.

In those days, Cheshunt itself was looked upon as something of a nonconformist stronghold, there being several “meeting rooms” in addition to the distinguished Crossbrook Congregational Chapel. Furthermore, there was the celebrated Cheshunt College, established originally in South Wales in 1768 by the Countess of Huntingdon, and moved to Cheshunt in 1792. Its function was the training of ministers according to “Protestant Calvinistic Methodist” principles, though the young men so trained were “left entirely free in their choice of the denomination of Christians among whom they may prefer to exercise their ministry.” The College has been known for many years now as Bishops College, men being trained there for the Church of England ministry.

These matters are mentioned here, in passing, to stress that, a century ago, there was plenty of nonconformist influence in Cheshunt, though its “outreach”, it would seem, was not always in a westerly direction! That is not surprising, for, undoubtedly, there was a cluster of adjacent villages which were virtually the kingdom of the landed gentry of the day. These good people showed benevolence, but in the main they were autocrats who expected their tenants and estate workers to support the Establishment

—there was little encouragement for the expression of independent or radical thought in religion or politics! That probably explains why today, in villages like Newgate Street, Bayford, Essendon, and Northaw there are no free church buildings. A century ago, of course, Goffs Oak was very much a scattered hamlet of Cheshunt, while Cuffley was an even tinier hamlet of Northaw.

Although only 15 miles or so from London, there was, in the 1860's, no thought at Goffs Oak about a time when green belt preservation would be important! It was a quiet spot, sparsely populated, in a rolling, well-wooded countryside. Farm houses, with workers' cottages a discreet distance away from them, a village smithy, a windmill, and an alehouse or two constituted Goffs Oak a century ago; there was also a small school (in Goffs Lane near the present village hall), and there was S. James Church, which was consecrated by the Bishop of Rochester in 1862. Goffs Oak did not become a separate parish ecclesiastically until 1871.

It is a pity that records about the beginnings of Methodism in Goffs Oak are so scanty. The population of the scattered village in 1868 was probably fewer than 600, for, by the 1890's when the nursery industry was beginning to infiltrate the Cheshunt area, it was only 846. Nor does it seem likely that another event of 1868—the invention of gun cotton—could have had much influence upon the people of Goffs Oak, although it obviously led to the development of more industry in the Waltham Abbey area. But, then, Waltham Abbey was a long way from Goffs Oak—there were no buses or cars, a bike was a rarity, and movement from one place to another had to be on foot, or by the aid of horse and ass.

It is not unreasonable to assume however that nonconformity in Cheshunt may have touched a few people living in and around Goffs Oak. Union in Methodism was more than sixty years away (it was not achieved until 1932), and competition between the Wesleyan, Primitive, and other Methodist sects was often extremely keen. Wesleyan Methodism had not become really firmly established in Cheshunt by 1868, though there are a few desultory references to a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel on the north side of Goffs Lane in 1833. The exact location of this building is difficult

to determine, and it is said to have been purchased (prior to 1858) by the then Vicar of Cheshunt as a chapel-of-ease for Goffs Oak, and was thus the precursor of S. James Church.

It is, of course, impossible to say with authority, but is it not likely that a handful of zealous people were dismayed and distressed that the activity of this Wesleyan Methodist Chapel on the "north side of Goffs Lane" could not be continued? The closing of one door may well have led to the opening of another. The 1860's were years in which the Primitive Methodist Connexion was vigorously expanding its evangelising efforts in various rural areas as well as in London and other cities. It is by no means illogical to assume, therefore, that there was a small company among the farming folk in and around Goffs Oak who deeply cherished the Nonconformist way of religious life, and were determined to do something about it!

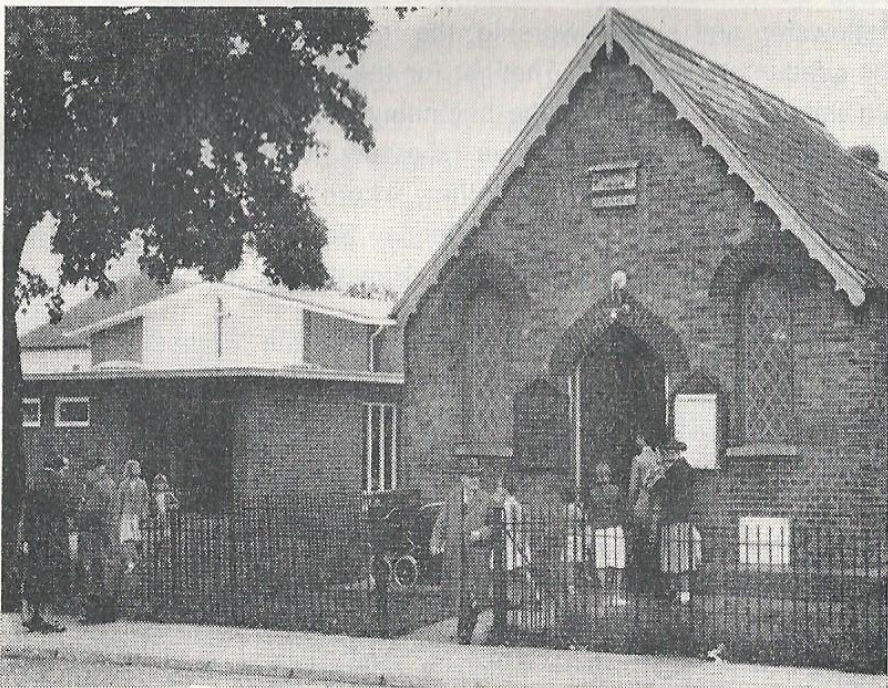
In such manner, possibly, it came about that Goffs Oak was included in a Primitive Methodist "preaching station" (as P.M. circuits were generally known). A local reference book, produced at the end of last century, briefly mentions that the "Primitive Methodist Chapel, built in 1868, seats 100 persons." But there are many still in and around Goffs Oak, and many, undoubtedly, throughout this and other countries, who remember with a sense of deep gratitude the unpretentious brick and slate building known for so many years as the chapel. Its interior was severely functional, with pitch-pine predominant, but the atmosphere created by it must have been the homeliness and warmth characteristic of Methodism a century ago.

The foundation stone of the old church is preserved in the vestibule of the present modern dual-purpose hall. Its inscription proclaims quite simply:—

THIS STONE WAS LAID  
OCTOBER 19th, 1868  
BY J. FOWELL, ESQ.  
OF LONDON

Despite a great deal of research, it has been impossible to discover how much the original Goffs Oak Methodist Church cost to build and furnish. Such information as has been "handed down" indicates that the small plot of land on which it stood was grudgingly given by the owner of the estate. Building and furnishing

costs were probably no more than a very few hundred pounds—but to have raised such a sum in the 1860's must have involved much sacrificial giving and patient, though zealous endeavour by a comparatively small company of faithful and determined people. Their labour was not in vain, and, like so many pioneers, they "buidled better than they knew". One of these pioneers, it has lately been discovered, was a Mr. John King who, in 1851, moved to Goffs Oak from Rede, in Suffolk. He came to work on the Woodgreen Park estate, and undoubtedly brought with him the Primitive Methodist fervour which influenced him as a young man in Suffolk. When John King died, in 1921, at the great age of ninety-eight, it could be said with certainty that he had been a trustee of the Goffs Oak church for 53 years. Reference is made in another paragraph to his son and grand-daughter.



The original 1868 chapel, and (left) entrance to the dual-purpose hall built in 1957

One other man must be named in this chronicle, although he was not in Goffs Oak at the actual beginning of the church. He was Mr. Albert Wombwell, who came to live and work at Beaumont (another outlying hamlet of Cheshunt) somewhere around 1900. Mr. Wombwell was a native of Langley, a north-west Essex village with tremendous enthusiasm for Primitive Methodism.



Throughout his many years at Goffs Oak, Albert Wombwell gave all that he could to the task of extending the church's influence. His daughter, who with members of her family regularly attends the church now, remembers how, as a little girl, she walked with her parents, three times on a Sunday, across the fields from Beaumont to Goffs Oak—it was an important part of life.

Village life a century ago was not, in all respects, as idyllic as it is now sometimes portrayed. By those who declared themselves to be "chapellers" (as Nonconformists were usually dubbed) opposition and persecution in one form or another often had to be borne. Yet their faith was strong and their outlook serene. There is no valid reason to suppose that the little chapel in the Common Road (as Newgate Street Road was at that time known) drew packed congregations, although, of course, it may have done! But, unquestionably, it became a centre of warm fellowship and simple worship, the influence of which can never be adequately assessed. Thought for the youngsters obviously had an important place from the beginning, for the grand-daughter of the John King mentioned above (she now lives in Cheshunt) has a book presented to her late father, wherein is the inscription:—Goffs Oak Primitive Methodist Sunday School. George John King—A reward for good conduct, 10th August, 1873.

Although it has no direct concern with the Methodist Church, there is one aspect of life in Goffs Oak a century ago which is worthy of mention here. There were, no doubt, then several people living in the village who could scarcely read or write; the small school, as already mentioned, was accommodated in a cottage which still stands near to the Village Hall in Goffs Lane. There was, however, an educational development of importance to the village when on December 13th, 1872 the "New Schools" (now S. James Parish Hall) were officially opened at 6 p.m. "After the Addresses", the announcement of this event reads, "a Musical Entertainment and Readings will be given by Local and other Friends; admission:—Front Seats, Sixpence; Back Ditto, Threepence". It may be added that the announcement makes no reference to refreshments!

There is, unfortunately, no sound evidence about the extent of the circuit or Primitive Methodist Preaching Station in which the Goffs Oak church was first placed. One clue to this is pro-

vided by the Baptism Register, a historic volume started in 1869 and obviously taken round the circuit by the minister in charge. Entries over many years covered Tottenham, Edmonton, Enfield, and Southgate, in addition to Cheshunt (Goffs Oak), the first record of a baptism at the Goffs Oak Methodist Church being on September 24th, 1872 of "Arthur and Mary Anne, son and daughter of John and Ann Brace". This Baptism Register, incidentally, has been used exclusively at Goffs Oak since 1938, and there are still several pages to be filled.

But from around the beginning of the present century, Goffs Oak was, for many years, part of the "Enfield Station of the Primitive Methodist Connexion", the other three churches in the circuit being Enfield Chase Side (now the Salvation Army hall), Bush Hill Park, and New Southgate. It was a "one minister station," though at different times a probationer was appointed to help. The Goffs Oak church maintained its cause and pursued its work, at various times its membership (35) being greater than that of the church at Bush Hill Park. On several occasions, Goffs Oak was congratulated by the circuit on an excellent Sunday School attendance, and on one occasion (in 1935) the Goffs Oak Trust was able to lend £100 to the circuit, the financial condition of which had become precarious. Shortly thereafter the Chase Side church was closed and the Enfield (P) circuit, as it was known, was amalgamated with what subsequently became the present Enfield circuit, the little church at Goffs Oak being something of a country "out-post" at the extreme northern end of that circuit, with its pastoral care being, for many years, the responsibility of the minister living at Enfield.

A fact of considerable significance and interest in celebrating the centenary of the Goffs Oak Methodist Church is that the most striking developments, so far, have occurred in virtually the final decade of that church's first century. It must never be forgotten that throughout all its years Goffs Oak, like so many other churches, has been served by faithful and energetic people. Before the last war, the trustees were investigating the possibility of acquiring additional land and building a new church, and by the end of the war, through the activity of the London Mission committee, a site on Cuffley Hill was acquired. But there were enormous pressures on building resources of all kinds, and the project

for a new Methodist Church at Goffs Oak was some distance from the head of the queue!



Sanctuary  
decoration,  
Harvest  
Thanksgiving  
1967

In the early 1950's, however, the expansion of the village of Goffs Oak as a residential area was very apparent. The pace of house building quickened, the population steadily increased, and it became plain for all to see that Goffs Oak, the erstwhile isolated hamlet of Cheshunt, would soon be a sizeable residential part of that town, without the total disappearance of the characteristics of a self-contained community. In 1956, there was opportunity to acquire some land adjacent to the little church built in 1868, an opportunity which was quickly seized by the Goffs Oak trustees who, having disposed of the Cuffley Hill site, vigorously set about the planning and building of a new church. Rev. G. A. Lardi had by then become superintendent of the Enfield Circuit and minister-in-charge of Goffs Oak, and with unflagging zeal he led a band of equally zealous stalwarts. The effort was tremendous, generous grants were obtained from the Rank Trust and the London Mission and Extension Fund, the essential connexional procedures were negotiated and finalised at top speed (for nobody was allowed to keep anything in a "pending" tray!), there was a stone-laying ceremony in March, 1957, and, on Saturday, September 28th, 1957, the new premises, comprising a dual-purpose hall with various other rooms, were

dedicated. It was a day of thanksgiving and great rejoicing, made all the more memorable because, as in October 1868, there were brought together the gifts in money, materials, and service, of people devoted to the welfare and happiness of Goffs Oak.

More history than usual has been made by the Goffs Oak Methodist Church in the last ten years or so. It has endeavoured to shape itself as a centre for all sections of the community; it has endeavoured also to emphasise its truly ecumenical outlook. Without in any way devaluing simple Christian principles, Goffs Oak Methodist Church has tried to chart a course untrammelled by anything in the nature of sectarian rigidity, with the result that folk of all ages, who have settled in this still-growing area, have come to feel that the church is their's, and is not the particular perquisite of a few.

It must not be thought that, following the dedication of the new building in 1957, crowds flocked immediately to receive its ministrations. Far from it. The impact was steady and in no way spectacular, but at no time was there unwillingness on the part of the church to seek the best ways of changing the old order of things in order effectively to meet the challenge of a greatly-changed and continually-changing Goffs Oak.

The first real change occurred in the Sunday School (or Junior Church as it is now more appropriately called). For years, as in other churches, the Goffs Oak Sunday School had met in the afternoon. But many of the families who came to make their homes in the new houses springing up in the village ten years ago had been living in London's northern outskirts, and Sunday afternoon was obviously a convenient time to go back to visit relatives and friends who remained there. So, early in 1958, the Goffs Oak Sunday School changed from the traditional hour of 3 o'clock in the afternoon to 10 in the morning. One result was that a high average attendance was quickly established and maintained, the numbers joining have progressively increased, and the change was one which pioneered the pattern of Sunday morning family worship at 10.15 a.m. which has now been followed for several years.

The formation of a Cub pack later in 1958 paved the way to the soundly-based Scout group, a development which was quickly followed by Brownie packs and a Guide Company. There

was also a revival of the youth club, the organisation and management of which have passed through many different phases in the last decade. Today, it is a purposeful activity with a beneficial "out-reach" to many young people. Yet another development of tremendous benefit to the community is the Wives' Club which through its regular meetings (with an organised creche) is an effective means of bringing together wives and mothers who might find it difficult to get to know each other in new surroundings. But in this context, the quiet and influential work of the Women's Fellowship, now celebrating its thirty-first anniversary, is not overlooked; with its lively and active interest in women's missionary work at home and overseas, it continues to do a power of good. All these organisations, whether for the youngsters or for those who are older, owe much to the devotion and energy of an inspired band of men and women who lead them. For sometime after the new premises were opened, the original 1868 chapel was used for much of the growing youth activity, but the day came when it just had to be demolished and, to replace it, two temporary "pre-fabs" were acquired by Rev. George Martlew, the present Superintendent Minister of the Enfield Circuit, and were erected and made habitable by prodigious effort on the part of men and women in the church and many others who were willing to lend a hand in what was readily acknowledged to be a desire on the part of the church to help a growing community.

That community sense is clearly demonstrated in the organisation of the church's annual fete, which has undoubtedly come to be regarded as an important village event. From modest beginnings in 1959, it has grown to be a carnival day of tremendous importance in the locality. All those who so generously labour to make it a success are glad to feel that its financial rewards help to further the work of the church which is determined to minister to people of all ages. Whilst the Goffs Oak church cherishes the support and labour of men and women with a sturdy Methodist background, it cherishes equally the support of many others who have been nurtured in other denominations, or with no previous attachment to any church. The Goffs Oak outlook is thoroughly ecumenical, and in the still-growing neighbourhood is likely to become more so in the days that are ahead. There is, for example, a real sense of fellowship with the Parish Church of S. James. This began, a few years ago, with united ser-

vices on Good Friday and Easter Sunday, from which there has developed a pattern of regular joint worship on one Sunday evening a month, the services alternating between the two churches. Joint study groups and other activities are also engaged in, resulting in increasing affinity of purpose. Reverting to the Goffs Oak Methodist Church as a centre of worship, there are many occasions during the year, the great festivals (including harvest thanksgiving) in particular, when the family service attracts more than a capacity congregation! At this point, it is appropriate to mention that a year or so ago the church received a most generous anonymous gift in the form of a new electronic organ.



Youth Club holiday in Venice

It will quickly be realised from the foregoing that ministerial leadership of the Goffs Oak Methodist Church is certainly no sinecure! For by far the greater part of its first century, pastoral oversight of Goffs Oak has been inevitably, the responsibility of the Superintendent Minister living in Enfield. There is grateful recollection of the many who have thus served the "country outpost" of the Enfield Circuit, but, until comparatively recently, no Methodist minister has lived in or very near the village. In the early 1950's, however, the Rev. B. Bernard Beard, on his retirement from full work, settled in the home of his sister at Goffs Oak, and soon revealed his gracious personality and helpful

influence in the life of the church. The many who knew and loved him will readily agree that some of the most fruitful years of his long ministry were those which he spent in retirement at Goffs Oak.

As the activity of the new church gathered strength, much careful thought and planning was given to the matter of ministerial leadership, resulting in the Enfield Circuit adopting a policy by which the services of a probationer minister should be secured whose main task should be shared between Goffs Oak and the S. John Methodist Church in the Great Cambridge Road, Enfield, leading, ultimately, to the stationing of an ordained minister who would live at or near to Goffs Oak. As a result of this policy, Rev. Raymond H. Norgate, B.A., was appointed in 1961 for the remaining two years of his probation prior to ordination. He made his home at Goffs Oak, and accomplished a great deal of valuable work in steering the activity of the new church towards the course that it must obviously take to serve effectively the growing neighbourhood in which it is set. Moreover, the beginnings of the much closer association with the Anglican Church came about during Raymond Norgate's time.

When Mr. Norgate left in 1963, he was succeeded by Rev. Donald J. Sampson who is now concluding an outstanding five-year term as minister of the Goffs Oak and S. John Methodist Churches. Although he has lived (perhaps slept for a few hours each night would be more accurate!) in the Great Cambridge Road, Mr. Sampson has undoubtedly become "very much part of the village of Goffs Oak." In the daily life of that village, bringing its personal joys, sorrows and problems, Donald Sampson has effectively demonstrated to youth and age alike, that the church which he represents is always at hand "to serve the present age".

On his ordination in 1965, Mr. Sampson was cordially invited to remain, as a minister in full connexion, for a further three-year period. At that point, hopes were high that in his final year in the circuit (1968) a manse would be acquired in or near to Goffs Oak. But, alas, the policy adopted in 1960 has had to undergo subsequent revision, and that part of the forward planning to which Goffs Oak energetically set its hand and heart has not yet found fulfilment. Meanwhile, the village of Goffs Oak becomes an ever-expanding part of the urban district of Cheshunt, while the

imminent development of a "mini-town" stretching across from Flamstead End extends still further the responsibilities to be faced by the church. Within Goffs Oak as a parish, there are only two churches, namely, S. James and the Methodist. Serious consideration is now being given to circuit re-organisation, the outcome of which, it is hoped, will be a definite link between the Goffs Oak and Cheshunt Methodist Churches, with a minister living midway between them. This is an obvious logical development, for the Goffs Oak which a century ago was a scattered hamlet has now become a "new area", the growth of which has not yet ended.

It is with its present and future responsibilities very much in mind that the Goffs Oak Methodist Church joyfully celebrates the completion of its first century. Details of the events which are being planned are set out on a succeeding page. There is a tremendous sense of thanksgiving for all that is past, but there is tremendous confidence about what needs to be done now and in the future to help in the extension of the Kingdom of God on Earth. In October, 1868, a small company of faithful people planted an acorn in the form of a modest Methodist Church in Newgate Street Road; its successor in 1968 can reasonably claim to be a fairly sturdy oak!