



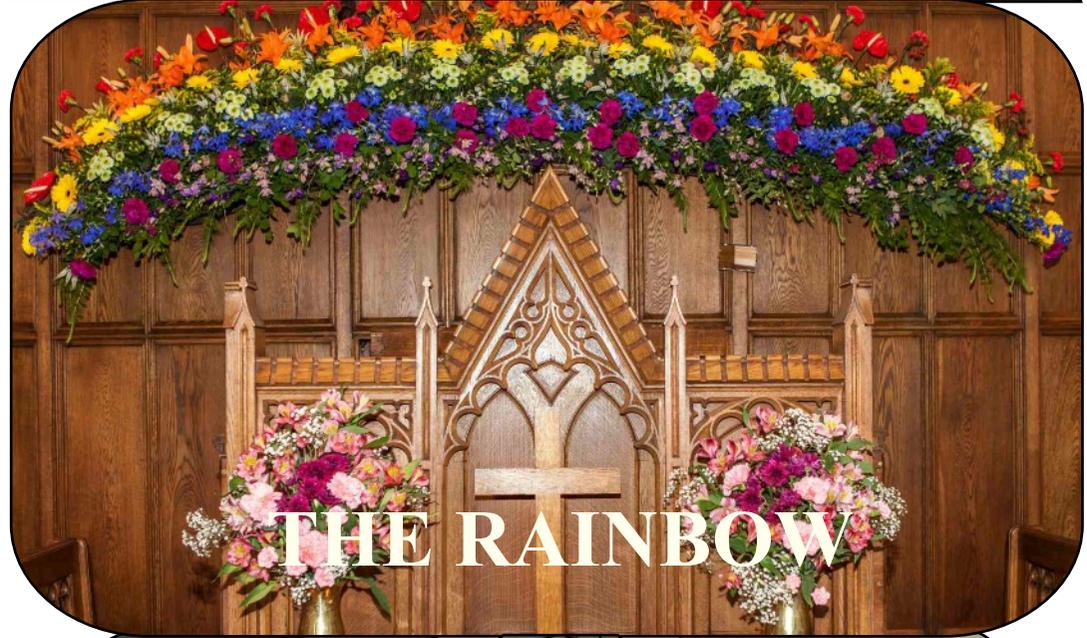
**UPPER HALL
DISPLAYS**



**FOUNDATION
TROWELS**



**SOUTHGATE
WEDDINGS**



THE RAINBOW



PARENTS & TODDLERS



GB DISPLAY



BB DISPLAY



LADIES' MEETINGS

THE SOUTHGATE CENTENARY

It's been a long journey - and that's just the last 12 months, in the run-up to what turned out to be a wonderful centenary weekend at Southgate. The longer journey started, not in 1915, when St Paul's Church opened at the corner of Southgate and Catherine Street, but back in 1850, when a group of Methodists broke away from the first Wesleyan chapel in Huddersfield Road and took a room at Joshua Dodgson's dyeworks at Bank Bottom Mills in Saddleworth Road. They called themselves the Elland Wesleyan Reformers and five years later they built their own chapel at the bottom of Coronation Street.

For those who have not yet bought our excellent new centenary brochure (a bargain at £2) here's the rest of the summary. That first chapel at Central Hall, in Coronation Street - still there today - was called Southgate; it opened in 1855 and two years later became part of the United Methodist Free Church. By the mid-1880s the growing church needed new buildings and in 1889 it bought the land, bounded by Southgate, Langdale Street and Catherine Street, that Southgate Church and Christian Centre now occupy. The plan was for separate Sunday school and church buildings but because of financial difficulties the trustees had to settle for building a school-chapel, modifying the plans for the Sunday school. This - now the Southgate Christian Centre - opened in December 1891, the church being on the upper floor. It wasn't until 1915 that the dream of a separate church was realised. It opened on June 5 that year, 100 years to the day to the start of our centenary weekend. Along the way, following the mergers of the 1970s, our church has regained its old name of Southgate.

But back to the present... and that shorter journey of the last 12 months. It started in July 2014 by commemorating the laying, 100 years before, of an extraordinary 10 foundation stones, laid by local worthies who included the likes of John Mackintosh, Halifax's Toffee King, Albert Sharratt, of the Elland brickworks firm, and Emily Dodgson, in memory of her father, Jonathan, and grandfather Joshua, leader of the breakaway group in 1850. There followed a series of social and fundraising events in the run-up to the centenary weekend - a quiz night, a craft fair, a brass band concert and a choral concert celebrating 100 years of music at Southgate.

And so to the big weekend. It began on the Friday, exactly 100 years from the church's opening, with an evening for invited guests, the Mayor of Calderdale, members of the Elland Partnership and local historians among them. On Saturday the church and Christian Centre threw open the doors to the public to see the premises and learn about the work of the church over the decades. In the upper hall there was an extraordinary range of displays covering so many aspects of Southgate, from the building plans of the church to biographies of its ministers, from the Boys' Brigade and Girls' Brigade to the various activity groups. Wedding and baptismal registers were on display and there was even a selection of members' wedding photos... so many happy days remembered.

Downstairs in the lounge tea and cake was consumed - and boy, was there ever so much cake in one place? - while in the church itself were more displays about the church's current work, from BB and GB again to women's groups, the social and drama group and the choir. Also on display were some of the silver trowels used to lay the foundation stones back in 1914, along with war memorials from St Paul's, Elland Wesley and Temperance Street. And at the heart of all of it, over the altar, was the stunning rainbow of flowers, created by Dawn Shaw, on a stepped bridge of wood, made by Dawn's father, Alwyn Kershaw. The rainbow was the idea of the Rev Colin, signifying God's promises to his people. It was so beautiful, he told us on the Sunday, that one church member burst into tears at the sight of it. Just in passing, if anyone fancies making one of these, you'll need the following: lots of **red** anthuriums and carnations, **orange** lilies, **yellow** gerberas and solidasters, **green** sky chrysanthemums with white veronica and green hypericum berries, **blue** delphiniums, **indigo** carnations and for **violet** purple and lilac lisianthus and aquilegia, all combined with various green foliages. And the best of luck!

Dawn's wonderful creation was dismantled after the weekend's events and the flowers distributed to church members. We must all agree, seeing the amazing range, quantity and quality of all these displays, that must have taken months to create, yet were dismantled after only three days, that we owe a huge debt of thanks to those who did all the hard work. Saturday evening was barbecue time at the home of Keith and Jenny Iredale, with all the usual fun and games. Although I was not there apparently the weather tried hard to disrupt proceedings but only managed to replicate Dawn's rainbow, in the sky - a promising omen there, then.

And so to Sunday, and two memorable services to bring the weekend to a close. The day started with a procession of the church family, led by the Boys' Brigade Old Boys' Association Band, from the old Southgate Church at Central Hall, Coronation Street, along Southgate to the "new" church, where they also played a couple of numbers on the church steps. It all brought back memories of the championship-winning years of the 1960s and '70s. They may be getting on a bit but they can still bang out a tune!

With all due respect to the wise words of our special guest as preacher, district chairman the Rev Dr Roger Walton, the highlight of the morning service had to be Rev Colin's cookery masterclass with the church's youngsters. Never can the ingredients for cake have been so randomly slopped into a mixing bowl! The point, of course, was the missing ingredient - Colin had used plain flour instead of self-raising. As it happens there was also an unplanned shortage of marg; even I know you have to have fat in any decent cake. Miraculously the extraordinary mixture found its way to the kitchen of Nancy Aldridge, who returned for the evening service with a wonderfully moist chocolate cake. Amazing!

The choir, in good voice, sang two anthems; thanks to them for their sterling service over many years, and also to our top-notch organist, Andrew Jacobs. The service ended on a rousing note with a fine rendition of possibly Charles Wesley's greatest hymn (no, I don't want to start a row here!), 'And can it be', with what I think are the most inspiring words in the hymnal, "My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth and followed Thee". Afterwards the celebrations continued with the spectacular release of 100 balloons from the church steps. Lunch followed, provided, of course, by our wonderful ladies, who always do us proud on such occasions. This is an opportunity to thank them for what they do so well, month by month, year in and year out.

The evening service was our last chance to celebrate this great occasion for the church, with some robust singing and wise words by the Rev Colin Sherwood before he embarked on his sabbatical. A magnificent centenary cake, baked by Helen Alsancak, not only proclaimed "Happy birthday" but recalled the names of those churches which merged with St Paul's in the 1960s and '70s to create Southgate: Temperance Street, Elland Wesley and Middle Dean Street, West Vale. The all-important first cut was made by Irene Iredale. And Rev Colin's wondrous chocolate cake also appeared, as if by magic.

As someone who doesn't appear at Southgate as often as perhaps I should, I can only reiterate Colin's words of thanks to all who were involved in making Southgate's centenary weekend such a success. "Southgate can be proud of what we have achieved this weekend," he said, "Thanks to all who have worked so hard. It has been a phenomenal weekend." So say us all; it was truly memorable. Here's to the next hundred years.

David Hanson



Photos, courtesy Howard Pickles and Ray Wilkinson