

STANBOROUGH PARK CHURCH

ANNUAL CHRISTMAS TOY SERVICE

DIAMOND JUBILEE

1961-2021



**THE 60TH STANBOROUGH PARK CHURCH
ANNUAL TOY SERVICE**

MESSAGE FROM PASTOR TERRY MESSENGER

The annual toy service is a highlight of the SP Church calendar. It is a time when less well off families in our community receive gifts of toys for their children.

When I was at SP 30 years ago the toy service was going then but I understand that it had been going long before then!

It is testimony to the fact that many people are still in need of these gifts to enhance their Christmas experience - perhaps especially now with the effects of COVID 19.

A big thank you to those who have donated in the past and this year - it really does bring joy and the presence of Jesus into many homes!

**Message from Former Youth Minister Pastor
Dejan Stojkovic**

So often we can feel overwhelmed when we see the world around and wonder can anything be changed? But when I became Youth Pastor at the Stanborough Park I realised that we truly can change this world to be a better place. Sometimes one meal, one hug, one toy, one prayer at the time and truly feel privileged to have the chance to be part of this beautiful movement.

I hope and I pray that Stanborough Park will continue with this beautiful service and will inspire new generations to continue changes to better any way possible.

Dejan Stojkovic

Message from Baroness Thornhill, former Elected Mayor of Watford

During my sixteen years as Watford's Elected Mayor I must have attended over a dozen toy services and, in truth, it got that I really looked forward to that special Saturday service.

It felt as if Christmas had begun with an explosion of generosity for all the congregation.

What was always so pleasing was the generosity shown. The gifts were really top drawer so much so that the occasional child rather reluctantly parted with said gift hoping that perhaps their kindness be rewarded with a similar gift! It made me smile.

I swear that over the years the toy pile became a mountain and the task of trooping on and off the stage far more precarious for we guests on the platform!

A real show of Watford's Christian community at its best. Something to be proud of for your church and for the town.

Message from Peter Taylor, Current Elected Mayor of Watford

Stanborough Park Church's Toy Service is a really valued part of the life of the town. Every time I attend the service, I am amazed by the generosity of those who attend. I know that the gifts that are donated go to grateful local families. Many of them are struggling because of difficult circumstances. The kindness of Stanborough Park Church makes a real difference. The toys are enjoyed by the children but, even more importantly, the gifts show families that they are loved and people care about them.

Best wishes
Peter Taylor
Elected Mayor of Watford (Lib Dem)

1961-2021



STANBOROUGH PARK CHURCH CELEBRATES THE DIAMOND JUBILEE OF THE ANNUAL TOY SERVICE

The annual Toy Service at Stanborough Park Church has become a staple in our church calendar. There are few members of the congregation who can remember the days before it began and became what must be one of the most looked forward to events at the church.

First established in 1961 by the late Alf Kelly MBE whose concern for the elderly, disabled, impoverished and needy citizens of Watford made him recognise a need to provide toys for children whose parents could not afford to buy toys to enable them to give their children the kind of Christmas they would like them to have. The sort of Christmas that would be enjoyed by their children's peers at school.

Alf persuaded the church to let him run a Toy Service there that year and invited members to donate brand new toys or pin paper money to the Christmas tree that he persuaded Garston Supply Yard to donate. (There were £1 and 10 shillings (50p) notes in those days!) He would use the money to buy toys and add to the display. Such was its success it became an annual event and a church tradition. He would invite the Mayor of Watford along as part of the platform party. After his death his younger daughter Pat kept the tradition alive in his memory, also aware through her welfare work of the continuing need for the service in the local area. The format of the service continues today much as established by Alf.

Although it wasn't the very first Toy Service - that honour must go to the Wood Green and then the Ealing churches - it is certainly the longest running and most enduring. Only Grantham can claim theirs to be almost as long but as it was established by Stanborough Park Church members who moved to Grantham when the Stanborough Press relocated there back in 1966 it cannot catch up whilst it continues to run at Stanborough Park!

Ten years ago the event celebrated its Golden Jubilee. The Diamond Jubilee seemed a long way off then but time moves steadily onwards and we have now reached the 60th service. For Pat it is the 25th one that she has been responsible for organising, so a double celebration of what is a very special event for her. One which is much appreciated by its recipients and thanks to the continuing generosity of church members and a number of willing volunteer helpers who, like Pat, are committed to continuing the tradition at Stanborough Park Church.

ALF KELLY MBE: THIS WAS YOUR LIFE

Over the past 60 years the Annual Toy Service has benefited many local families who have very little money and are always extremely grateful for the gifts they receive to give to their children at Christmas. For some, it means the difference between the child receiving a present and having nothing. Receiving support from the Toy Service makes a huge difference to their enjoyment of, and participating in, Christmas celebrations. The first service was held at Stanborough Park Church in 1961 instigated by one member with a big heart, the late Alf Kelly MBE.

Alf Kelly was one of those people who seemed to be everywhere. After his retirement he seemed to be a permanent fixture on the church premises always busy with some aspect of his work for the church including opening up the church for events and helping out at weddings and funerals. Even before retirement you could guarantee his involvement in any project.



An Ingathering leader – yes he was there counting the money and promoting it actively from the platform usually in former times with a visual aid to show how much personnel from each of the Park's institutions were collecting. The sanitarium staff usually did very well!

The disabled? Yes, again. He was Chairman of the local branch of Hertfordshire Association for the Disabled. He encouraged the church members to collect for Alexandra Rose Day as the funds went to this charity and as local chairman he was responsible for handing out grants.

The homeless? Yes, again. He campaigned for those sleeping rough on the streets of Watford and established the first GRPW hostel for the 'Rootless of Watford',

He also set up the Emergency Furniture Unit for those who had been re-housed by the local authority, including refugees, who needed furniture. He would collect it himself or organise others to help. Pat ran this herself for some time after his death.

He also set up and ran the CARE scheme, a local 'Good Neighbours' scheme until an organiser could be found.

Not content with that he also persuaded the council to set up a local council for voluntary services which collated the efforts of local charitable and action group and filled in the gaps. He was once found outside its local pop-up shop in Watford High Street selling charity Christmas cards dressed as Father Christmas encouraging people to go in and buy!

It is hardly surprising the he was awarded the MBE for Services to the People of Watford just before his death.

But that isn't all. The church's efforts for the welfare of the local citizens? Yes he was involved there too quite actively, collecting and organising donations. Repairs to the church? Yes again. Looking after the young nurses training at the Peace Memorial Hospital – yes, organising services for them. He also at one time conducted church services for patients in the wards. The elderly residents of Beechwood Old People's home enjoyed a regular midweek service organised by him.



Sabbath School teacher? That goes without saying; he taught a large class extending the whole of the central balcony. If a volunteer was needed he was at the head of the queue.

So it isn't surprising that when Pat came home one day saying that her boss, Lionel Davison who was elder at the Ealing Church, told her about the Toy Service he was organising at his church providing toys donated by members for needy children in west London who would otherwise not enjoy the same sort of Christmas as their peers her story found a responsive audience.

Alf immediately recognised that there was a similar need in Watford and probably berated himself for not thinking of the idea himself, especially as this is something that the Wood Green Church had been doing since 1956 (and had been reported in the 'Messenger'). He decided to persuade the members of Stanborough Park Church to adopt this as an annual event as a service to the local community and the first Toy Service was held in the church in 1961. Knowing where the local hardship cases were locally he used to distribute the toys himself, sometimes dressed as Father Christmas. He would certainly be surprised to see that 60 years later there is still as great a need as ever for this service.



Is it any wonder that the local papers referred to him as 'Watford's Father Christmas' and gave extensive publicity to his community service and his MBE award and received a tribute from the editor of the 'Watford Observer' following his death?

Just before his death, a frail Alf (who had been released on parole from Watford General Hospital where he was undergoing investigations for stomach cancer) attended a 'This is your Life' event at the church one spring Sabbath afternoon organised by Audrey Balderstone who also acted as host/presenter. So many people stood up to speak of how Alf had affected their lives and others for good. The event was quite well attended, those present not realising that this

would be the last time they saw Alf alive.

Alf was born in Islington, London, and a true Cockney he said although he grew up in the West Country, on 22nd February, 1916. He died on 24th April, 1996 at Watford General Hospital. He now lies alongside his wife Ruth in the 'Adventist Corner' of Watford Cemetery awaiting the call of his Maker

**Peter Wilson-Leary, editor
of the Watford Observer in
an editorial. 26.04.1996**

An example to us all.

ALf Kelly was a man who dedicated his life to helping others.

So many people moan and groan about their lives, but Alf's example should be the one for us all to follow.

There could be no tribute too great for a man who for 60 years worked selflessly to help people less fortunate than himself.

Even when he was seriously ill there was nothing he would not do to help a neighbour, friend or stranger.

He brought a lot of smiles to people's faces and his generosity has brought help to many people and made their lives more bearable.

Some donate large sums of money to charity, but it is people like Alf who are the real heroes and it is fitting that this was recognised with a MBE at the turn of the year.

Watford should be proud that a man with such a big heart and dedication should have lived in this town.

161 words

1995: ALF KELLY BACK RIGHT



THE PICTURE BELOW WAS PROBABLY TAKEN DURING THE EARLY 1980'S



TOY SERVICE: 1967

**Alf Kelly is far right on the platform. The Mayor is Miss Doris Scawen.
The photo taken by a photographer from the Watford Observer.
(Obtained from the paper's archive by Pete Walton.)**



in the gospels. Illustrating his talk with extracts from a book of letters to God written by children, Pastor Ferraz invited the children in the audience to write one of their own.

Later on in the day, Alf Kelly started the mammoth task of sorting out the toys ready to be delivered to the needy children of Watford in time for Christmas.

JUNE COOMBS

Watford honours SDA Father Christmas

'Town honours its very own Father Christmas' was the bold headline which stretched across the entire 'Diary' page of the pre-Christmas edition of the *Watford Observer*.

Underneath was a large photo of Stanborough Park church's Alf Kelly, heavily disguised as Father Christmas (in an outfit borrowed from the church's Mother and Toddler Club) complete with a sack of toys. Alongside this was a very large feature article detailing Alf's extensive work for the local community over the past thirty years.

In recognition of this achievement, Stanborough Park members presented Alf with a large picture frame containing a copy of the article, a print of the original photograph, and a letter from the Mayor of Watford concerning 'his many achievements in obtaining a higher quality of life for sections of the local community'.

Well done, Alf, long may your valuable work for the local community continue! JUNE COOMBS

SDAs on Radio Devon

On Sabbath 3 December, Exeter church had a visitor from Radio Devon, Roger Thorne, the presenter of the 'One-Two-One' religious programme broadcast every Sunday. He has been attending services at different churches and denominations. In later radio programmes he reports his impressions of his visits. He will be reporting on the Exeter Adventists on 22 January.

The same Sabbath we had a fellowship lunch to celebrate the birthdays of two of our members; Amy Pope, 90, and Ruth Brown, 80, who spent many years as a missionary in Africa.

On 10 December a sacred concert was held in the church. Our talented young people performed a music ensemble. The ensemble was joined by 'Forte Flutes' from Torquay, and by the Hulbert family from Cornwall. Members of the public were invited and a collection was taken for FORCE, a local cancer research project.

EVELYN BEECHY

WANTED URGENTLY! A gas cooker for Barnsley church. Contact Mrs L. Cowin, 21 Copperas Close, Millhouse Green, Penistone, Sheffield, South Yorkshire.

12/4/96

NEWS



Alf Kelly with his MBE.

Photo: Kish Poddar

Alf collects MBE from the Queen

Stanborough Park member Alf Kelly collected his MBE from the Queen at Buckingham Palace on 27 February. 'It was a thrill to meet the Queen face to face and to shake hands with her and for her to congratulate me. I was very nervous,' he said.

He was accompanied to Buckingham Palace by his daughters Margaret and Pat, and also his son David who had flown from his home in Sydney, Australia, for the occasion. 'It was nice to have the family together to show off my medal,' Alf said.

He was awarded his MBE for 'services to the community in Watford' which have spanned some sixty years. He has campaigned tirelessly for the rights of local disabled people and has been involved with the Hertfordshire Association for the Disabled since its beginnings in 1960.

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The Mayor of Watford, Councillor Norman Tyrwhitt, commented, 'Alf Kelly is a shining example of excellent and long service to the larger community of Watford. It is a pleasure to pay tribute to his services to the Borough of Watford.'

JUNE COOMBS

Ruth's faithfulness

Mrs Ruth Neal had given loyal service to West London Community Services Depot from its opening in the mid sixties until its closure in 1995.

During the thirty years of operating this depot, many local organizations were helped regularly with clothing and bedding.

As an expression of thanks to Sister Ruth, the Federation presented her with a cheque and a bouquet of flowers.

MARGARET ROBERTSON

Meet the candidates
who will represent you
in the local elections

Picture line-up, Pages 6-7

Time comes to say 'that was Kelly'

A MAN who dedicated 60 years of his life to helping the people of Watford died on Wednesday. He was 80.

Mr Alf Kelly died in Watford General Hospital aged 80, a week after a major stomach cancer operation. He had been ill for some time but had refused to let his health obstruct his work helping others.

His tireless work for the disabled, homeless and elderly of Watford earned him an MBE in this year's New Years Honours List.

In a personal profile in the Watford Observer in December 1994, Mr Kelly said he would continue his voluntary work "until I drop and they put me in a wooden box, screw down the lid and say 'well, that was Kelly, we didn't want to lose him, but we think he ought to go'."

According to Mrs June Coombs, a



Alf Kelly: A tremendous inspiration to others

fellow worshipper at Stanborough Park Seventh-day Adventist Church, this summed up Mr Kelly's whole outlook on life.

She said: "He was always there to

help someone else out and it's nice his work got some recognition before he died."

Last week, Mr Kelly was the subject of a This is your Life ceremony, celebrating his life, which was attended by Watford mayor Councillor Norman Tyrwhitt.

On hearing the news of Mr Kelly's death, Councillor Tyrwhitt said: "This is very sad news. He was a shining example of a person prepared to help everyone in the community.

"He worked in so many different fields and he set an example which will be a very hard one to follow."

Mr Kelly was born and raised in Islington, north London and came to Watford in 1933 to search for work as a builder.

A year later he joined the town's branch of the St John's Ambulance Brigade and later became involved in hospital visits through the church.

He was invited to help set up a group helping disabled people in Watford and when it was absorbed into the Herts Association for the Disabled in 1960, he became chairman of the local area committee and the executive panel of the county organisation.

In 1969, the organisation raised money for a holiday home in Clacton-on-Sea and Mr Kelly was still involved in running it, right up until his death.

He was a driving force behind both Watford Council for Voluntary Services and the GROW hostel, which helped homeless young men in Watford and, in his own words, gave Mr Kelly the most satisfaction.

Mrs Audrey Balderstone, who has known Mr Kelly for 30 years and helped organise the toy services, said: "He was a man who was a tremendous inspiration to many, many people. He had a very big heart and the world is a much poorer place for his passing."

He leaves a son, David, who lives in Australia, and daughters Margaret and Patricia. **Letter, Page 8**

Community's tribute to man of action

HUNDREDS of mourners gathered to pay their final respects to community hero Alf Kelly last week.

Watford Mayor Norman Tyrwhitt and former mayor Peter Kelly joined more than 200 people last Wednesday at Stanborough Park Seventh Day Adventist Church to remember the man who had been a church member for more than 60 years and a tireless community worker.

Former church minister Mr Roy Burgess paid tribute to his friend, quoting a recent Watford Observer editorial that described Mr Kelly as "an example to us all".

And in his address to the congregation, church minister Patrick Boyle remarked how much Mr Kelly would be missed.

He said: "He will be missed because he was a servant in the true sense of the word, someone who serves others.

"He was an action man - when others talked, he acted.

"He lived his religion. When faced with the seriousness of his illness he was not afraid of death and put himself in God's hands."

Mrs Mary Hamilton, general secretary of Watford Council for Voluntary Service (WCVS), said the community had a lot for which to thank Mr Kelly.

She said: "The community, WCVS and I in particular have lost a very dear friend."

WHERE DID THE IDEA FOR THE TOY SERVICE ORIGINATE?

Alf Kelly established the long-running tradition of the annual Toy Service, a legacy which has been continued by his daughter Pat, who always reminds us of this during her speech during the service.

For a long time it has been received wisdom that the idea began with Brian Davison's father who was Pat's boss at the Adventist Travel Agency situated in London. It was he who told her about the event he was about to hold at Ealing, the west London church where he was an elder. He was asking the members to donate toys which would be presented at a special service to the local townspeople in need – families who were unable to afford to give their children the type of Christmas that their peers would be enjoying.

Knowing that this was the sort of thing that her father would embrace she came home and told him about this idea which he instantly appreciated just how beneficial it would be to Watford and probably wondered why he hadn't thought of it first.

He promptly set about persuading the church to hold a similar service, also persuading Garston Supply Yard opposite the Park to donate a large Christmas tree. It turned into a 'money tree' as people would pin money to it if they were unable to buy toys themselves and he could then use this to top up the toys. Thus began what became a church tradition.

Knowing where the local hardship cases were Alf would deliver the toys himself in time for Christmas, often dressed as Father Christmas.

However, recent research has revealed that the honour for the very first Toy Service must go to Wood Green Church in north London. Elders from London churches used to meet up regularly and Mr. Davison must have come across the idea at one of these gatherings.

Wood Green Church held its first Toy Service back in 1956 and according to the 'Messenger' this tradition continued there for about 10 years after that. One year the speaker was Pastor Stearman who would later become the minister at Stanborough Park.

According to the 'Messenger' archives a similar situation occurred at Ealing. It was a popular time for Toy Services: Watford Town held one for the NSPCC and Oxford established what was planned to be an annual event.

Although our church's Toy Service began in 1961 a trawl through the 'Messenger' archives reveals its first appearance in that publication was not until 1965.

In the early days the 'Watford Observer' would send a photographer to record the event but to search through its archives for reports would involve a lot of work – and backache! - as the bound volumes in the Watford Reference Library are large and very heavy, each one holding 52 copies of what was then a much larger newspaper.

Now the only Annual Toy Services are held at Stanborough Park and Grantham where departing members moving north with the relocation of the Stanborough Press after its devastating fire took the idea with them.

The Birth of the Toy Service in Wood Green 1956 - from the Messenger archives.

Wood Green Toy Service

A VISITOR, entering the Wood Green church on the morning of Sabbath, December 15th, could have been excused for thinking, at first sight, that he had come to a very belated harvest festival. Arranged in tasteful display in front of the platform on four long shelves, and spilling over onto a table and the floor, he would have seen a large number of brightly-coloured objects. These, however, as closer inspection would have revealed, were not fruits and flowers, but dolls, games, model cars and aeroplanes, paints, balls, puzzles, books, tightly-packed Christmas stockings, and many other of those things which so delight the hearts of children at Christmas.

The previous Christmas, one of the church-members had bought some toys, and presented them to a friend, who works for the Hertfordshire County Council Children's department, for distribution to the children in his care. These are children whose homes have been wrecked by marital disaster, or who no longer know the love and care of one or both parents, and have to be accommodated in institutions, or with foster-parents or widowed mothers, who, although able to provide the necessities of life, are often too poor to give the little extras which do so much to make Christmas what it should be to the child. A very appreciative letter of thanks was received, which told, among other things, of a little girl of seven, who had never had a doll in her life, and was quite overcome with joy at receiving one.

British Advent Messenger: Volume 71/02.
This is the first time that the SPC Toy Service
gets a mention in the journal.

CHRISTMAS STANBOROUGH PARK

that we had caught again a glimpse of Bethlehem through the eyes of children, and happy in the conviction that our children know Jesus, the Creator, their personal Saviour, whose second coming they are eagerly anticipating.

May we, in all humility, thank our Lord who, in His wisdom, has provided us with such schools as at Stanborough Park, that our children might gain an abundant entrance into His kingdom.

MISS N. TUCKER.

Watford Mayor Attends Toy Service

STANBOROUGH PARK CHURCH was in the news again when its welfare committee arranged a bumper toy service. The Mayor of Watford, Alderman Wright, and his wife, attended the service and in a short address said: "I have been to many toy services in my time, but I have never seen such a lovely array of presents as I see in this church today." He went on: "I feel sure that there are going to be many happy children and old people because of your gifts."

It is good that our church is well represented in Watford. One of our outstanding workers is Mr. A. W. Kelly who serves on several welfare committees in the borough. He has organized hospital visitation, is chairman of the Handicapped Club, and leads out in frequent visits to a local old people's home. Mr. Kelly told the Mayor that the toys and other presents came not only from the adults, but from the children of the church. During the service many of the seven to ten age group, placed their presents at the foot of a sixteen-foot-high Christmas tree. The tree was a gift from Garston Supply Yard, and was later sent to a boys' home in St. Albans.

Also at the service was an eight-foot-long Christmas cracker. This was made by some young men of the church and was packed full of presents for the residents of "Beechfield" Old Folks Home. Many young ladies had made soft toys in a wide range of animals for young children.

The 670 presents made a vivid spectacle at the service and must have delighted many children at Christmas who otherwise would not have had a gift. The Mayoress, who read the lesson, was presented with a bouquet by six-year-old Stephanie Leonard, daughter of one of our teachers at Stanborough School. A set of *Footprints of Jesus*



The rostrum of the church piled with presents for deprived children.

was given to the Mayor, who exclaimed that his wife was usually the lucky one when it came to gifts. He said he would surely treasure and read these volumes. The Mayor told us that although he was of a different persuasion, he nevertheless rejoiced with the congregation in the common beliefs of the birth, death, and resurrection of our Lord and "in the fact that at least once a year we are brought face to face with the true way of life—the way of giving."

Pastor B. F. Kinman gave the address and brought us all quietly to consider ourselves at the manger, where, he said, "We must give above all our hearts to the One who has given the greatest gift of all."

G. M. BELL,

Press Relations Secretary.

"Operation Santa Claus" at Stanborough School

FATHER CHRISTMAS and all his red-nosed reindeer can't have been working harder to make the season a happy one than the children at Stanborough Secondary School.

But whether Father Christmas has an "Ops. Room," like they have at Stanborough School is another matter. Operation Santa Claus at the school is carried out with military care. Yellow flags stuck in a local road map indicate the areas where calls are to be made with Christmas cheer.

"Operation Santa Claus" is always carried out on the last Tuesday before the school breaks up for Christmas. It has taken place now for four years. It began when the children decided to forgo their own end-of-term Christmas Party and help those in need instead.

BRINGING THE TOY SERVICES UP-TO-DATE

A key feature of Alf's services featured a bear but it disappeared in 2006 when it was retired and went to a good home.

In 2011 the event's Golden Jubilee was celebrated. Past and present Mayors and church ministers were invited to the service.

In 2014 the service took place during the redevelopment in far from perfect circumstances in 'the tent' situated on the playing field in front of the BUC building. Frost covered the ground outside and a police helicopter hovered overhead for a while but the spirit of the occasion was as warm as ever.

By 2015 the event was back in the church building presenting a new challenge for Audrey Balderstone who was arranging the display as the new platform design required a major rethink. She rose to the challenge and since then the display has moved further back rather than featuring more obviously along the front where it would block access.

2020 was a sad year as it was the first time the event occurred in a near-empty church. Toy collection was arranged outdoors under a gazebo the previous Sunday. Despite the problems members donated generously, especially financially, which enabled Pat to top up those toys donated personally.

2021 saw the Diamond Jubilee in a more scaled back version of the normal event but still attended by around 260 people. The generosity of members continued leading Pat and Audrey to conclude that it was 'the best Toy Service ever'!

Demonstrating just how much the event is appreciated, one previous beneficiary was the local Children's Centre Manager, Vicky Attarzadeh, who wrote,

"The Toy Service is a service which is extremely valued by the families who have benefited from it. Families who have very little are always extremely grateful for the gifts they receive to give to their children at Christmas. For some, it means the difference between the child receiving a present and having nothing. This makes a huge difference to these families, who otherwise have a very bleak time when everyone else is celebrating. Parents have said that they like to have something that they can wrap themselves.

"These families are very isolated and do not have the benefit of support from extended family. Receiving support from the Toy Service definitely makes a huge difference to their enjoyment of, and participation in, Christmas celebrations. All the families whose names have been put forward by the Children's Centre have been asked in advance and have been very grateful for being thought of. We are very appreciative of this brilliant service which we are able to offer to families as we know it makes a huge difference for them."

The late Mrs. Davison, whose husband gave Pat and her father the idea for a Toy Service at the church, surrounded by her family.



Annual Toy Service Achieves Its Golden Jubilee

Former Mayors of Watford and Stanborough Park Church ministers were invited to attend the service. 'Keeping a tradition going for so long is commendable, especially in the knowledge that the toys will be so much appreciated by those less fortunate than ourselves. As was said, it is so much better to give than to receive.' So wrote Watford Councillor Alan Burtenshaw after attending the service.

WATFORD OBSERVER, right and MY GARSTON, January 2012 below

My Garston January 2012.

Church celebrates 50 years of toy donations

An annual toy collection service in Garston which provides gifts for local children celebrated its golden jubilee last month.

A celebration event took place in December at Stanborough Park Seventh Day Adventist Church in St Albans Road.

Having been established in 1961 by the late Alf Kelly MBE to provide toys at Christmas to needy local families, the service has run every year since.

Watford Mayor Dorothy Thornhill and Watford Borough Council chairman Lindsey Scudder attended the celebration last month.

A church spokeswoman said: "Any fears the current financial constraints would affect the number of donated toys proved to be unfounded.

"Perhaps an awareness of the fact that some are suffering severe hardship at the moment encouraged the members' generosity ensuring that some local children could have a better Christmas than their parents had anticipated."

Members of the community flocked to the event to celebrate the service's 50th birthday.

Mr Kelly died in 1996 shortly after his 35th toy service. The gratitude of local social and community workers for this annual resource, which is now the only one in the area, led his daughter, Garston resident Pat Walton, to continue this annual event. This year marked her 16th service.

After the event the toys were distributed to local community groups and social workers including Watford Women's Refuge and Berrygrove Children's Service.

by Jerry Lyons



2002

MNS
81
8

- Primary Sabbath School with conductor Jean Hinks, 2002
- Under canvas
- The Junior Choir



TIMES PAST



Memories of the times when we could celebrate the occasion as an entire church family with no masks or social distancing.

(Sadly some faces pictured here are no longer with us.)



Maybe next year we will be able to meet altogether again and see the church back to full capacity once more.



2020 saw church closure - and the need for ingenuity.

But, sadly, it was a Toy Service with a maximum congregation of 30 with no opportunity for the children to donate toys during the service. Hence provision the previous Sunday to call at the outdoor collection point which was filmed and shown during the service.



2021 saw a reduced congregation of 200 - with masks and social distancing – and an overflow of about 60 in the Cedar/Sycamore Room but, nevertheless, still a very special occasion. The 'best ever' according to Pat and Audrey!

THE DIAMOND JUBILEE TOY SERVICE DECEMBER 2021



The Diamond Jubilee Toy Service was 'the best ever' according to Pat and Audrey. Members rallied to the occasion and the platform seemed to be even more tightly packed than ever with toys. The Junior Choir under the direction of Sangbin Jung gave an excellent performance despite the problem with missing music. 'Angel Voices' under the direction of Joy Bussey performed beautifully in tune despite having to perform at home via Zoom and the ingenuity of their mothers in providing suitable costumes was commendable. The bell ringers also rose to the occasion and Pastor Wayne Erasmus gave a new dimension to the Christmas story. Special guests were the former Elected Mayor of Watford, Baroness Thornhill, a veteran of many Toy Services, and current Elected Mayor Peter Taylor. Watford's MP Dean Russell had to pull out at the last minute following a positive lateral flow test.

For Pat this year marked her 25th anniversary of organising the Toy Service. So it was especially appropriate that

during the service Pat was presented with an 'Unsung Heroes of Watford' award by the Mayor in appreciation of the work that she does for the town.



Baroness Thornhill above, and the bell ringers right.



Peter Taylor above, Pastor Erasmus left.





2021 photos thanks to
photographer Dan
Sabatier



Pat's Speech at the 60th Toy Service – 11th December, 2021 at 11 a.m.



I would like to add my welcome to everyone here at the church this morning. I am delighted that the Mayor of Watford is continuing the long tradition of being part of this annual Toy Service. I am also very happy to welcome a long standing supporter and friend of the Toy Service – Dorothy Thornhill.

Since the Wise men bought gifts to Jesus at His birth the giving of gifts has always been part of the Christian spirit. Especially to the children. Toys are such a wonderful inspiration for children they can bring them joy and happiness and help learn to play together and open their minds to unlimited possibilities.

There is nothing as sad as a child without a toy. That is something that we all want to respond to by making sure many more children can have a toy, at least for Christmas. The response to this service from the congregation and supporters demonstrates their heart felt generosity.

The Toy Service began 60 years ago – back then it really was a happy celebration of the birth of Jesus and the joy of giving gifts. We want to keep this celebration alive.

It is a truly wonderful display on the platform. I would like to thank you all for responding so generously to what seems to be an ever growing need.

As it is the 60th anniversary of the Toy Service I would just like to reflect on what a different world it was then. We really did have a Father Christmas from this church going around on a horse drawn sleigh! And people really did celebrate the birth of Christ.

It was 60 years ago when my father, Alfred Kelly, organized the 1st Toy Service and whatever the changes one thing hasn't changed – the love in people's hearts for the children.

I must say many thanks to my helpers in the welfare team who work hard to support the families in the Watford Borough that are struggling at this time.

The joyful task of taking the toys to those who need them is carried out by several organizations like Watford and Three Rivers Refugee Association, MIND, Westfield School* and others. Without them we couldn't fulfil the task of getting the toys to the children.

I want to thank the Mayor of Watford Peter Taylor for attending this service today and as the representative of Watford I am happy to ask you to accept these Christmas gifts on behalf of the children.

Pat Walton

*Family Centre situated on the Westfield School site