

The History of Chelmsford Spiritualist Society LTD

The Society was Formed in 1933 with Mr A.R.P. Hickley, elected as its first President. During the early years' services and meetings were held either at 40 Duke Street, now the Co-Op Supermarket, or in the County Hotel ballroom, Rainsford Road. Many well-known Spiritualist of that time came to Chelmsford to give demonstrations of mediumship, of clairvoyance, of trance diagnosis and spiritual healing.

On the 11th of October 1934, the first Annual General Meeting of the Society was held in the Ballroom of the County Hotel. The Officers of the Society report to the members stated, "Was one of enthusiasm for the progress made in so short a time and of the optimism for the future. The Society was sufficiently supported financially to meet the demands of a new and growing organisation".

In the 1930's the Society welcomed many well-known Spiritualists, including Mrs R Champion de Crespigny, Mr Horace Leaf, Mr Thomas Wyatt, Mr J Arthur Findlay (Stansted Hall) Denise P S Doyle (son of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle) Mr Shaw Desmond amongst others. These meetings were held in County Hotel Ballroom, Shire Hall and the then Regent Theatre. Many prominent people of the town attended those meetings. One meeting being Chaired by Alderman J O Thompson JP. Town Mayor. Another by the Reverend H Horton, Rector of Minsted in Hampshire.

In May 1943 the Society's rooms at 40 Duke Street were lost due to enemy bombing. Much of the area was damaged by the bombing and the Society had to find alternative venues to hold meetings. Many members opened their homes for meetings to be held. The Society continued to hold regular meetings at various locations. At one such meeting held at Shire Hall the guest speakers were, Air Marshall Lord Downing GCB, GCVO, CMG (of Battle of Britain fame) and Mr Shaw Desmond' a well-known Irish writer.

In 1948 the Society became a Limited Company. The Chelmsford Spiritualist Society Ltd. A Company limited by guarantee and not having share capital. The Memorandum and Articles of Association were drawn up and the Society incorporated as a Limited Company on the 30th of June 1948. Seven members of the Society signed their names as Directors to the Company. The registered office at that time was at 72/73 Duke Street, Chelmsford.

Also, in 1948 a piece of land was purchased in South Primrose hill, Chelmsford. A building fund started, and many other fund-raising events got under way. Whist Drives, Farthing Fund, Dances, A weekly lottery, buy a brick were just some of the means used.

Work on the building got under way in 1963, the official opening taking place on Saturday 26th September 1964. The opening ceremony was performed by Major Leith Hay Clark. This was followed by a service on the Sunday and a week of activities in celebration. Over 450 people attended these events. The week ended with a 'Grand Social Evening' with over 70 people attending. Many new members were received during that week, and the membership stood at nearly 150.

Over time records show that the building has been given many names. For the record, however, the building is registered as, The Spiritualist Church/ The Spiritualist Centre.

In 1965 the registered office for the Society was transferred to, 10 South Primrose Hill, Chelmsford and remains so to this day. The registration plate is affixed to the wall at the main entrance. The Society and the Centre are registered to perform Weddings and Funerals. The Certificate of Registration is displayed within the building. The Company Seal is also held at the registered office.

Over the ensuing years many changes have been made to the building. The Sanctuary extension in 1976, followed by a new roof, double glazed windows, new chairs, central heating system, cooling fans for the Summer, hot water to the toilets, the kitchen refurbished and more recently the disabled toilet facilities and the gardens re-laid. The building redecorated inside and out, new window blinds and the Car Park resurfaced. Other internal and external upgrading has taken place to bring the building compliant with current Fire and Insurance requirements and regulations.

In 2011 the Society achieved Charitable Status and is now a formally recognised Charity.

Since 1933 the Office of President or Chair of the Society has been in the custodianship of;

1933 to 1936 Mr A R P Hickley
1937 to 1940 Mr J H Betts
1941 to 1953 Mr J H Odom
1954 to 1957 Mr J Betts
1958 to 1965 Mr S W Bigg
1966 to 1967 Mr R E Eden
1968 to 1973 Mr R Michaels
1974 to 1980 Mr K G Hunt
1981 to 1984 Mr E O'Brien
1985 to 1997 Mr K G Hunt
1998 to 1999 Mrs S Cutter
2000 to 2003 Mr G E Stevens
2004 to 2005 Mrs S Burns
2006 to 2010 Mrs P Barclay
2011 to 2021 Mr C A Abbott
2021 to 2023 Mrs M Bannister
2024 to Mrs M Johannessen

Over the years the Society has continued to grow, some people have stayed, others after a short time have gone on their own way. Over the years, membership has fluctuated, but we remain financially sound and guard our independence with pride. Our Society/Centre continues to evolve we will forever remain steadfast in our Spiritual beliefs and in our Service to Spirit. May the doors of our Centre forever remain open to all who will enter and that there will always be someone here to help in their time of need. The Beacon of Spirit burns brightly here. May it always do so.