

Parkside - part of a church's 'normal worship'

Story by BRIAN COOPER

"PARKSIDE", a substantial family house in Romford, Essex, has been converted into a residential home for the elderly — as "part of a church's normal life and witness".

The home was opened on Saturday.

The idea of such a home was first mooted at a church meeting at Romford Baptist church in the summer of 1967, when the minister, Norman Wright, outlined the challenge to care for the elderly of the church and local community, in a discussion on the theme of "Caring for People".

The idea was immediately accepted, it was promptly decided to form the "Romford Baptist Church Housing Association Ltd." — and within 15 minutes of that decision a friend telephoned the manse offering the first gift, of £1,000.

"This seemed to confirm that the church had come to a right decision".

Faith in that initial decision was tested over the next two years, during which time the Housing Association viewed several sites and properties, only to encounter many frustrations and disappointed hopes.

Almost "out of the blue", Parkside came to the church's knowledge.

Contact was made with the owner; planning permission obtained, negotiations with the local authority commenced; and finally Parkside was bought by the church in July 1969.

Work began on its conversion and extension a year later — today it is occupied by 30 elderly people.

A substantial family house in its own grounds, Parkside used to have seven bedrooms

and three large reception rooms.

Since conversion and the addition of a rear extension to the property, it is now an excellently-equipped and brightly-furnished old people's home, with 20 single rooms, five double rooms for couples, a spacious front lounge with red brick open fire hearth, a television room — dedicated to the memory of the late Rev. Godfrey Robinson — and a light and airy dining room, with spacious kitchens.

Some of the furniture was donated by a local store, some bedroom items given by church members; some of the old people have brought their own furniture.

Curtains, carpets and other furnishings have been deliberately varied in colour and design — "so that it does not seem too uniform and regimented," a church member commented.

Mr. Skilton, who is one of Parkside's first residents, and was himself for many years a deacon of Main-road church, Romford, declared: "It's just like a mausoleum!"

While the house has been thoroughly modernised, care has been taken to retain its decorative woodwork in the classical style.

The purpose of Parkside is to provide a Christian home where people can have independent lives and at the same time have a sense of belonging to a family.

"The home is just part of the worship and activity of Romford Baptist church," members declare.

The staff — the matron, Miss W. Doughty (S.R.N., S.C.M., Queen's Nurse), and her as-

stants, Miss F. Townley and Miss W. Coles — are all committed Christians, in membership at Main-road church. Some of the residents are Christian, others not. "The home is not just for our own folk, but to help the community at large.

While each resident and the family concerned are expected to pay what they can, no person is to be refused admission on financial grounds and any differences are to be made up by help from the Fellowship Fund, donated by 'Friends of Parkside'.

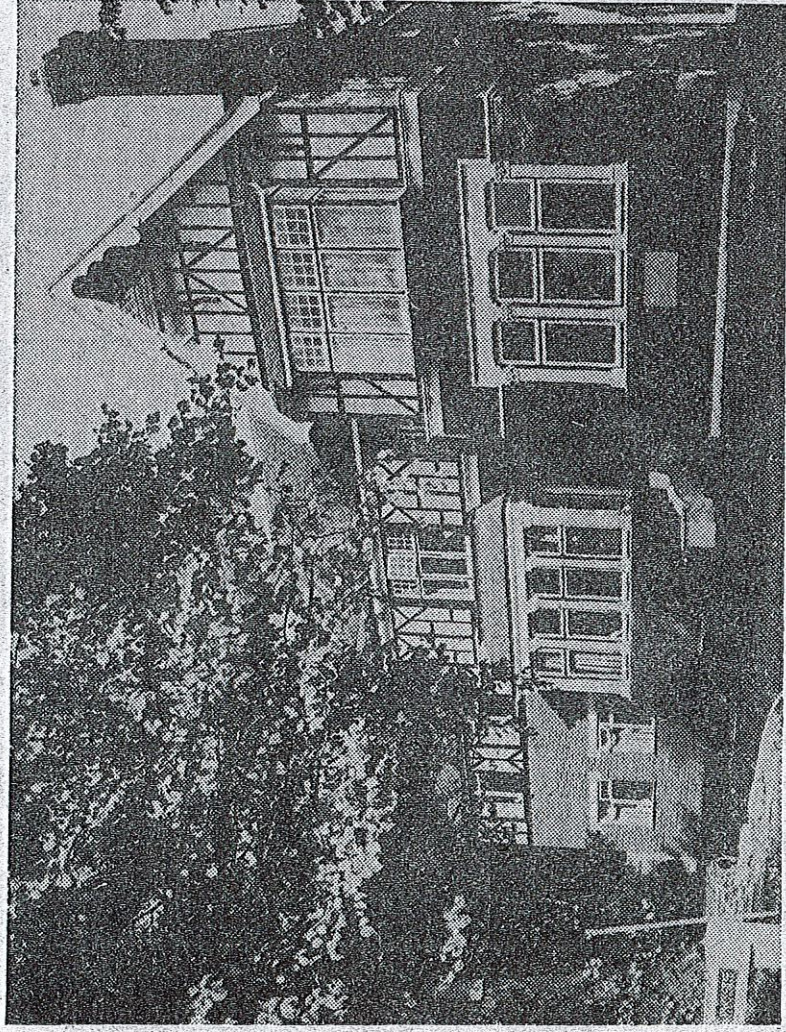
Over the past four years, some £40,000 has been given towards the total cost of £75,000, mainly by church members.

"People of all ages have given sacrificially," said Mr. Wright. "People have given in memory of loved ones, in thankfulness for health and home, prompted by examining their consciences, wedding anniversaries, and other similar occasions. Some people have given a day's wages.

"Young people' have walked and worked. We had a furniture sale. The Boys' Brigade had a 'Big Dig' and the Girls' Brigade had a 'Big Swim', to raise money."

"Parkside will continue to provide many opportunities for service. Mr. Wright commented.

"It is the product of the faith in the Living Christ through Romford Baptist church and it will continue to be in the heart of the church and part of its normal life and witness. It is our continuing responsibility".



ARLIVE: That is Parkside from the outside

A lovely home — church members gave so generously to bring it about

BELOW: The residents get to know each other over a cup of tea.



IN autumn sunshine about 500 people gathered for the opening ceremony of "Parkside" on Saturday.

After the minister had welcomed the assembly the church secretary read a letter of good wishes from Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. This was followed by civic greetings. The minister's assistant, Mr. Douglas Harbour, read the lesson.

Before dedicating the house and unveiling the stone on behalf of the church, Mr. Wright presented a 13 seater mini-bus to the church in gratitude for his parents. Mrs. Norman Wright spoke and formally declared "Parkside" open.

Following tea at the church and greetings by various friends, a thanksgiving service was held at which Baptist Union general secretary, Dr. David Russell was the preacher.

During the service Cidee Bibbies were presented to the staff and residents, and a bou-

quet was given to Mrs. G. Robinson by Janet Barnes.

On behalf of the church, Mr. W. R. Sawfell, church secretary, handed on engraved silver-framed picture of "Parkside" to the minister in gratitude for all his leadership in this project.

The builders who adopted "Parkside" to its new use were — a Christian firm C. S. Wiggins and Son Ltd, of Thundersley. The architect was Mr. Derek Silverton, a deacon of Leigh-on-Sea, Baptist church, Essex.

As stated in the main story, the Main-road church sees "Parkside" as a normal part of its life and worship.

As Mr. Wright puts it: "Worship does not end with the benediction at the end of a service. Such a service, in which we meet with God together, challenges, inspires and equips people to offer the whole of life to God as a living sacrifice.

"We are enabled to say Let us worship God, let us drive the bus — let us serve in the shop — let us dig the garden — let us teach the class — not only let us sing hymns no —".

"In worship in church the hearts and minds of men are touched with the Lord's compassion for people — because He loved and served so we in His strength love, serve and care for this family of 30 elderly residents.

"The Devil loves Christians to be vague, and trembles when they become definite.

"Help the Aged" — is excellent but what about aged Mr. Skilton who lives down the road?

"Unless worship in the sanctuary challenges and equips us for this service then there is something lacking. We are to be gathered together for worship and then scattered for witness to Christ, in practical service."

FROM A CORRESPONDENT

JESUS CHRIST IS LORD

WESTMINSTER CENTRAL HALL

Friday 22 October 1971 8 pm

A multi-media presentation produced by Nigel Goodwin and designed to demonstrate that

Jesus Christ is Lord now and forever.

It's the sort of thing you can confidently invite a non-Christian friend to see. And that's exactly what we hope you'll do.

Tickets cost 50p but they admit two people.

Send SAE to:

London Baptist Youth Office
Metropolitan Tabernacle,
Elephant and Castle SE1.
Telephone 01-735 6766