



# Y's RETIRED OF THE UK

Affiliated to the World Fellowship of YMCA Retirees

JULY 2022

[www.yretired.co.uk](http://www.yretired.co.uk)



## President's ponderings

As we have been celebrating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, I have been reflecting on the encounters we have had with the Royal Family through the YMCA. Over the years I am sure many of us had the nerve-racking experiences of hosting members of the Royal Family at functions and building openings.

One of my memorable encounters with the royals was at Hawksworth Wood in Leeds when the Duchess of Kent kindly came to open the new Hawksworth Wood YMCA Family Centre. This was a huge event in the life of this somewhat neglected council estate and it was a pleasure to show the Duchess around and introduce her to members of the various groups and activities of the centre until we left the building to meet flag waving children from the local primary school who were standing on a grass bank outside which grew increasingly steeper as it followed the path.

Keen to speak to the children, the Duchess moved along the bank unaware that she was reaching the steepest part and began to gently slide backwards! That created a dilemma for a young and callow YMCA Youth worker. Which part of a Duchess was it appropriate to grab to prevent a Royal catastrophe????!! Suffice it to say I was able to gently catch an elegant elbow and guide her down safely.!!!

There were other occasions that were challenging too! Like being at the side of Princess Anne at the opening of Basingstoke YMCA while hiding holes in my trousers (don't ask!) and trying to keep ahead of her as she yomped around the Golf Course at Fairthorne Manor. These are two that spring to mind.

The most important occasion was of course at the International Year of Youth Gala at Harrogate Conference in 1985 when I was privileged to present to the Queen herself to a group of young people from Hawksworth Wood along with two YMCA secretaries from the then emerging YMCA of China. I can still see the slight (only slight!) look of bafflement on her face as she obviously was not too clear where they fitted in with our teenagers!

The YMCA is of course one of many charities of which the Queen is Patron, but many, many, members, service users, volunteers and staff have been encouraged by the interest shown by successive generations of the Royal Family in our work and circumstances.

Mark Greene of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity has analysed the Queen's Christmas Broadcasts. In it he identifies the recurring mention of trusting in God, the importance of service, looking out for neighbours and disadvantaged people, our dependence on each other and the importance of peace and reconciliation.

These are the very values expressed in the life and work throughout the YMCA, which we share with our Patron and which I hope will endure for ever.

Graham Clarke President Y's Retired

Please note: All members of the Royal Family referred to in this article survived unharmed!

*(The Queen's Way by Mark Greene is available from [licc.org.uk](http://licc.org.uk) and The Bible Society)*

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## GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE

Dear David,  
Thank you for the most recent May Newsletter. It was, as always, a reminder of the privilege our now retired generation enjoyed in serving this YMCA Movement.

I am now going to use the phrase which every editor must detest. Because of the sensitivity of the situation in which our Ethiopian brothers and sisters work; you will have to exercise a degree of discretion as to whether or not to publish what I am going to write.

**(The editor felt the membership were now all of an age to – bring it on!!)**

During the catastrophic famine of the late 1960s and much of 1970, the Ethiopian YMCA, under the leadership of its then General Secretary Tsegaw Ayele, was deeply engaged in relief work in the Dessie Region. This in the face of repeated statements from the almost revered Emperor, Haile Selassie that there could be no famine in the land of Ethiopia. It also placed Lij Endalkachew Mekkonen President of the Ethiopian YMCA, Ethiopia's Representative at the United Nations and President of the YMCA World Council in a very difficult position. I was not aware of conversations which might have taken place then but I was later when the extensive relief work from 1970 onwards was financially supported by the World Alliance. This was known and approved by Lij Endalkachew Mekkonen and co-ordinated by Tsegaw Ayele and was contrary to the Emperor's declaration. I was then in Geneva and present at meetings chaired by Lij Endalkachew which approved this support.

During one visit which I paid to Dessie, some thirty children suffering from measles had been isolated in a small hut and left to die. Members of the Dessie YMCA brought them out, loaded them on a flat bed truck and took them to the home of the District Governor. A highly dangerous thing to do. He was a compassionate man, knew of corrugated sheds at the nearby village of Bati. The children were driven there, the village people came out to help and thus the Bati YMCA Children's Home was established. Every child survived.

Lij Endalkachew Mekkonen was recalled to Addis Ababa by the Emperor and appointed Prime Minister. There then followed the Marxist revolution, the Emperor was arrested, jailed and it is believed starved to death. Lij Endalkachew Mekkonen was arrested, spent 54 days in prison then executed. His family were reduced to extreme poverty and for some years I would visit Addis Ababa periodically with US dollar bills hidden in my shoes. These found their way to the Mekkonen family through a trusted intermediary.

At least three Mekkonen children were smuggled out by international YMCA initiative, but Mme. Mekkonen refused to leave. Perhaps the present Ethiopian YMCA leadership would know what happened to her. I remember her as a most gracious hostess.

Now young David. Sort that lot out and exercise your renowned editorial skills.

Kindest regards,  
**Jim (Thomson)**

Hi David  
Thank you so much for the opportunity to see the YMCA film in the May Newsletter which reminds us of what the YMCA focus should be.  
Love to Sue, God bless,  
**David and Margaret (Libby)**

Hi David,  
Many thanks for the bumper copy of the Newsletter. Very newsy what with reference to WW1, its humorous content and the extremely disturbing information of world actions and events revealing stories of Ukraine and the dominance of the human spirit when challenged to the utmost.

How gratifying it is to learn of the efforts of the YMCA in the Ukraine and their outstanding population under top 'leadership'. Would be that all valiant efforts come to a swift conclusion and 'World Powers' involved ensure that peace and concord reigns again.

I can see you have both burned the midnight hours in preparation of the Newsletter and express thanks on behalf of our members!

Warm regards,  
**Jim (Lamb)**

The European Alliance of YMCAs lets me have regular reports. The most recent one told of National Movements in Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany and Spain being involved in meeting trains and doing all they can to assist those who have fled Ukraine.

In Ukraine itself, nineteen YMCA local associations are collecting food, other essentials and arranging their distributions. All under the concerned care of the Ukraine National Council and its General Secretary, Victor Serbulov.

Although the situation was very different, I am reminded of YMCA men and women performing extraordinary tasks at a time of warfare and danger. I dug out the report which went out to all National Councils regarding the ending of the Vietnam war and wondered again how it is that this Movement becomes a vehicle for such compassion.

I remember the time well when as YMCA International staff, Miyazaki and I did not leave Vietnam voluntarily.

He, Yamashita and I were instructed to be at the airport at a certain time, were relieved of any cash and it was only when Miyazaki and I met at the aircraft steps, that we realised that Yamashita was missing.

He had done a bunk; gone back through the terminal wire and was waving goodbye from the other side. He stayed in Vietnam for another eight months caring for his now unemployed staff until successfully deported. Miyazaki and I arrived in Laos penniless, but I had an international air card which got us on a flight to Bangkok and home. Mary got a call from Swissair to say I was on my way. The first news she had had for about six weeks.

I did not sign up for this when I became Youth Work Secretary of Glasgow YMCA.  
**Jim (Thomson)**

Dear David,  
Thank you so much for sharing the Y's Retired Newsletter and Annual Report. I appreciate being able to keep up a little bit with your activities.

I am writing to extend thanks on behalf of the Secours Speciaux committee and the worldwide Y staff and retirees the Fund serves and to all members of your retiree association. Their ongoing support is wonderful. It has enabled us to respond both to more traditional emergencies and to the special needs caused by Covid. Your group was one of 5 national associations that made both an annual gift and a special gift for Covid relief.

Your membership has already received John Naylor's excellent annual report. He has been a great asset to the committee and deserves thanks as well.

Those of us in countries with good retirement funds are fortunate as we have the opportunity to share. Thanks again to all of your members who have shared their concern for their colleagues in need.

**Bonnie Mairs, Secours Speciaux Committee Chair**

Hi David,  
As shared at the Zoom gathering, my name is Robert Loveless and I was assistant secretary at the Worcester YMCA from May 1976 to September 1980. Currently at the age of 74yrs. I am supposedly retired but I am very much in demand as a green badge tour guide for 'Worcester Walks' and this is our 22<sup>nd</sup> year.

During the summer holidays I host students from our twin town of Le Vesinet for work experience and enable them to practise their English.

In my last 2 years at Worcester YMCA, I organised what proved enormously popular a holiday Scheme for top year primary schoolchildren with the objective of preparing them for their move up to high school.

When not involved with the above I have a garden which gives me much pleasure and I assist on a weekly basis with the Ombersley Road Methodist Church luncheon club which has about 40 members, team of 6 helpers and a professional chef and we are all volunteers.  
Best wishes

**Robert (Loveless)**

Our President Graham has challenged the membership to send in to me your personal remembrances of meetings you may have had with any one of the Royals.

Let me start the process off. I remember meeting with the Queen twice; in Lambeth Palace gardens for the 1994 World Conference celebrations and receiving Maundy monies in 2019 at Windsor Castle. Then there was Duchess of Kent at the opening of Bedford YMCA, Prince Charles at the Norwich YMCA Sports Hall and the Duke of Edinburgh at new student accommodation in Leicester YMCA.

**David (Smith) Editor**

## **Y's Retired Cambridge Luncheon**

Girton Golf Club, Cambridge.

Wednesday July 13<sup>th</sup> convening at 12noon}

If you have not booked yet - there are still 4 places available

Contact Vic Hills. on 07974 683627 or  
[vic\\_hills@vahoo.co.uk](mailto:vic_hills@vahoo.co.uk)

## **THE STORY OF "ROSE"**

Dear David  
My wonderful friend of many years, **Ian Green**, has forwarded this May newsletter to me. I was wondering who wrote the piece on Rose Venn-Brown.

Rose was Sandy and my great aunt (not grandmother) who passed away the year before I was born. My older sister remembers Rose in her final years here in Sydney. Sandy Venn-Brown's (the author or Red Cross Rose) father and mine were first cousins.

We had the official launch this week (beginning of April 22) at New South Wales Parliament House and I was speaking about connections Sandy might have had with the YMCA in the UK. So, this newsletter is very timely. I note the pictures. Maybe in your archives you have pictures of Rose we have never seen.

Sandy has done an amazing job telling Rose's story, which could have been easily lost in archives. It's incredible, amazing, almost unbelievable the impact one woman had and the risk and sacrifices she made, courageous and inspiring.

On another note, I have also had the joy of [working with the YMCA](#) in 2015, not aware at the time of the connections the Venn-Brown family had previously with the Movement. Life is interesting, isn't it.  
I've cc'd Sandy as I know she will be chuffed about this.

**Anthony Venn-Brown OAM**  
**Founder and CEO of Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International (ABBI)**  
**Author of the bestseller 'A Life of Unlearning - a preacher's struggle with his homosexuality, church and faith'**

**Honoured to be voted one of the 25 Most Influential Gay & Lesbian Australians (2007 & 2009), winner of 2015 ACON's Health and Wellbeing Award and awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for service to the LGBTIQ community (2020).**

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Hi all  
I think I can fill in some blanks! I was so fortunate to have David Smith as a source for some of my research for the book. David kindly has reprinted excerpts of Red Cross Rose in Retired YMCA UK newsletters (with my permission).

As Anthony says we had a marvellous book launch in Sydney last week. David, a representative of the YMCA in NSW Australia spoke glowingly of the work they do.

Again, I am very grateful to all those who assisted me in my research. And if you can, David, could you please send me all the other copies of the newsletter for my records?

Kindest regards **Sandy Venn-Brown**

Thanks for getting back to me David and for the additional newsletters. This is wonderful. Thank you for getting our great Aunt Rose's story out there....and thank God for archivists and historians who ensure the past is not lost.  
I see now through Sandy's newsletter that you have been a great help to her. Much appreciated.

**Anthony Venn-Brown OAM**

## Members correspondence

Dear David,

You may recall that some issues ago you printed my note re. **Oscar Escalada** who was CEO of Tijuana YMCA, Mexico and since a strong member of the WFYS.

A few of our members will recall the outstanding conference of the YMCA World Urban Network held in Mexico City and the superb contribution made by our retired colleague Oscar. I referred then that Oscar was awaiting 'open heart surgery' and now follow with this update and quote **Jerry Prado-Shaw** letter to me recently.

*"Oscar went into his open-heart surgery back in December; it was a very successful intervention. Later doctors discovered that the sternum bone had not welded properly and an urgent operation was performed to open the chest and reposition the bone. It was a very painful procedure with a very slow recovery that will take about three months.*

*He recovered well, and is making good progress, slowly but surely, as a man of strong faith he is still thinking that he will be able to walk again, for that he re-assumes his daily therapy sessions. Back in February, I believe, he was invited to teach at the Biblical Seminary in Sonora. He spent two + weeks teaching there, with great enthusiasm and excelling his extraordinary gifts in sharing the gospel. I talk with him frequently and appreciated chatting with friends very much. In general terms he is doing well, busy with all the extent of his possibilities."*

David, please use the whole or parts to illustrate the immense faith of a colleague who continues to serve despite such fortitude.

Warm regards,

**Jim (Lamb)**

Dear David

Thank you for the interesting WFYR news from around the world. Mervyn is still battling manfully against the after effects of radiation e.g. great tiredness and a bit of additional weakness in his limbs.

However, our Minister Darren, prayed for him the other day and he felt he did experience a touch from the Lord. Darren used to be a Pentecostal before he decided to become a Methodist Minister, so he fully believes in the full gospel, inclusive of healing.

So, Mervyn is competing with the queen now as to who can live the longest!

However, it's all in the Lord's hands isn't it?

We have a holiday slot booked at the beginning of June and our friend hopes to drive us to Mawgan St Porth and then on to Mevagissey where a former Methodist Minister rents a second home out.

If we can make that successfully, we can feel a sense of achievement and the change will do us both good.

Our love to you both

**Beryl and Mervyn (Moorehead)**

## NOTICE FROM YMCA PENSION PLAN

Several members of Y's Retired of UK will be in receipt of a YMCA pension, either paid via the Plan's administrators, XPS, or via an annuity provider such as Legal & General or Aviva.

Information on the YMCA Pension Plan can be found on the website [www.pensions.ymca.org.uk](http://www.pensions.ymca.org.uk) which does not require any password to access it.

To help with the ongoing administration, it is important to let the YMCA Pensions Administrator know of any changes to your circumstances, such as change of address. You can do so by contacting XPS Administration by email: [YMCA@xpsgroup.com](mailto:YMCA@xpsgroup.com) or telephoning 0118 918 5750 and ask for Balbir Sandhu.

## GRANTS FROM THE BENEVOLENT FUND

Grants of assistance are available for Y's Retired Members, through the Officers of Y's Retired of the UK.

Are you in a situation where you are about to make a significant expenditure on something that will help or improve your condition of life, i.e., stair-lift, mobility scooter, electric chairs, adjustable bed, or similar?

Do you personally know of a Y's Retired member who would benefit from a gift (of up to £500) towards such costs? If so, please make contact (by email or in writing) with brief details to our secretary, Vic Hills. Vic Hills Email: [vic\\_hills@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:vic_hills@yahoo.co.uk) (underscore between Vic & Hills) or 5 Kernham Drive, Tilehurst, Reading, RG31 6GB

All applications will be quickly assessed by two independent panel members who may contact the applicant for any additional information required to assist consideration of the request.

Lots of current news across the federation of YMCAs are on the Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn platforms and I have included the links to those platforms below.

For information, please tap on the links below.

[ymca.org.uk](http://ymca.org.uk) |  
[Facebook](#) |  
[Twitter](#) |  
[Instagram](#) |  
[LinkedIn](#)

**1st Y's Retired of UK National ZOOM gathering  
10.30am, 28 April 2022**

In Attendance: - Graham Clarke, Alison Robertson, David Bedford, Ray Allen, Ron Ingamells, Mary Mc Ginty, Robert Loveless, Paul Kerridge, Eric and Brenda Moore, Vic Hills, Geoff Cooper, Mike Wilkinson, and YMCA England and Wales National CEO Denise Hatton.

Apologies: - John Drake, Nick Nightingale, Andrew Jenkins, Clyde Binfield, Walter Crosby.

After introductions and humorous sharing amongst friends mostly led by our President we were offered a welcome and inspiring update of the current health, focus and direction of the work of YMCA England and Wales from Denise, who like each of us shared her personal appointments within the Movement prior to National CEO.

On her appointment in 2013 the areas of concern were:-  
**The culture of the English Movement was not in a great place**  
**A new national branding was needed**  
**A clear expression of value required**  
**Making use of the same language**  
**Gaining of Association membership agreement**  
**Working together – Praying together**  
**Creation of a new foundation through Federal working**  
**Some Associations opted not to be included and change their name such as “Impact Bedfordshire”**

With the new strategic direction, no further Associations were lost. All remain open through and with the present challenges and looking to the future

83 YMCAs operating in England and Wales with new areas and greater reach. Looking always for excellence and growth and assisting with needs of other services.

**Present challenges include: -**

Cost of living increases

Fuel Increases

Effects of both on services offered like nurseries and gyms

Looking at various business models to compensate.

On the staffing front 20% changeover of CEOs in recent years – important to ensure correct induction into the ethos of the YMCA as a Christian Worldwide Movement.

**YMCA College** – Experiencing difficulties with folk not choosing Youth Work careers or wanting to have an impact on young lives.

**Y Care** – joined forces with “All We Can” which is part of the Methodist Church (two brands cooking in the same kitchen!!)

Quality Standards – new website to succeed “George” and intranet access – However, ethos will remain the same.

Denise then shared that internationally YMCA England is in contact with Ukraine and Russia YMCAs and working with communities in Poland – Head of Fundraising has been seconded to help and give support.

On second day of invasion local YMCAs sent £30k to Ukraine. Romania doing amazing rehabilitation work – more recently £126k sent.  
Four county-based YMCAs in “UK” working to help bring, house and home to Ukrainian refugees

in Aarhus Denmark 2022 July 3<sup>rd</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> World Conference has over 1000 registered to attend with on-line attendance of 1500 registered participants.

The three main themes of the conference will be:-

**New Strategy**  
**Global Watch**  
**Health and Well Being.**

For Denise “The most important things we can do as an organisation is to see people – whether they are young people, staff or volunteers – to realise their potential; to strive for quality and at all times and the emphasise trust, openness and transparency in everything we do. That is how we work with young people and I believe this should be reflected across all of YMCA.”

Denise was thanked by President Graham for her excellent input.

The Zoom meeting ended with prayers offered by Graham and rest assured, each and everyone within our membership and beyond were fondly thought of and prayed for with much love and every blessing.

It was agreed a further ZOOM meeting in Autumn/winter would be arranged for a further collective catch up.

**Date and time will be circulated through the newsletter nearer the time.**

*Dear David*

*I am kicking myself for mistaking the date of the zoom meeting. I thought it was today 29<sup>th</sup> April! We have all been a bit confused lately to say the least.*

*Blame Mervyn's medication and his after' effects' of the radium treatment. He is liable to fall asleep at the drop of a hat, which I thought was my prerogative! Never mind, we count ourselves lucky or perhaps blessed to have such good and loyal friends and especially well blessed to be given the opportunity for the treatment at 94!*

*Last night we both retired from the Gideons after 32 yrs and were made 'Hon members' and given a 'presentation bible'. Of course, it's under a different title now as we broke away from the Gideons International over a dispute in policy!*

*He retired from forty years' service with the YMCA and was recruited straight into the Gideons which he has served as Chaplain.*

*We also distributed bibles to the hospital, so he deserves any well-earned rest now, in the knowledge that some of those scriptures brought people to the Lord! But Mervyn is a 'get up and go' person, so he doesn't take lightly to being 94 years old!*

*Best thing he ever did' being a dedicated employee of the YMCA he reckons and he actually has time now to reminisce and relive some of his exploits! I am getting to learn things he never had time to tell me before.*

*Well anyway we would so have enjoyed meeting you all again, such a rich and enjoyable group of friends. Be assured we are still in the land of the living  
All love from*

**Beryl and Mervyn (Moorehead)**

## **YMCA relief and rehabilitation work has always been, wherever its required**

**Just as the NOW stories of massive assistance and support through relief work is readily given to the peoples of Ukraine who have been invaded by the Russian Army, YMCAs worldwide but especially those in Europe, are working daily to alleviate as best they can, all ages from further hostilities and fear, giving warmth, food, accommodation and comfort.**

Similarly, the same was reported in the mid 1970s when YMCA members and staff were involved with civilians savaged by the Vietnamese war. Testament to this follows in the letter sent 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1975 to Jim Thomson from Fredrick Franklin, Secretary of World Alliance of YMCAs and Jim's précised report is featured below.

*Dear Friends,*

*Jim Thompson returned to Geneva on May 27<sup>th</sup> 1975 after more than a month in Saigon, during which he experienced the end of the war in Vietnam and the beginnings of a new era. He also participated in the relief of the work of the YMCA team which continued beyond the final days of the war until all voluntary organisations were instructed to cease their activities.*

*He participated in negotiations concerning resumption of relief programmes, the outcome of which is at this moment still undetermined. The story he tells in the enclosed report is one of courage, endurance and dedication on the part of the 50 members of the YMCA team and a large number of volunteers. To them all we owe a debt of admiration and gratitude.*

*Sincerely yours*

**Fredrick Franklin**

**Secretary General of World Alliance of YMCAs**

### **Vietnam and Laos**

It is not intended that this brief report should be thought of as a formal document, or a final one. It is the compressed story of a group of YMCA people in a confused and difficult situation; of how they tried to meet these difficulties and continue to serve, so that through this continuing service the YMCA might have a part to play in the rehabilitation and reconciliation of the people of Vietnam.

The months of March and April 1975 were filled with decision and movement for the staff of YMCA's services in Vietnam. As the force of the "Provincial Revolutionary Government" moved southward with great rapidity, work on ongoing plans for new projects had to be abandoned. The refugees fled and where the people went, our staff followed.

Eventually, the situation became so fluid that it was necessary to bring the entire staff back to Saigon so that fresh contingency plans could be drawn up. At this time the staff of YMCA services in Vietnam consisted of 50 Vietnamese, one American and two Japanese, one of whom was a Director - Masaichi Yamashita. Plans made to fly 3 Americans ("young professionals abroad") into Vietnam had to be curtailed at the last moment and unfortunately, we were only able to call upon the service of one of these young men for a brief period.

At Long Diene one of many temporary resettlement centres in the Vung Tau area, 2/3rds of the occupants were children. During the time of our service, the YMCA provided 10,000 meals, milk rations for 3257 babies and paid over 2000 home visits. This last named, "a human contact programme", proved to be quite invaluable. Our staff went from family to family asking about their situation, trying to reunite those who had become separated from their relatives and encouraging them to overcome their present hardship. This work continued until military action made its continuation impossible.

The YMCA "immediate relief programme" at Vung Tau was concerned with alleviating the distress of thousands of refugees who came to this seaport every day.

It should be kept in mind that some of the refugee ships had been as many as 10 days at sea with very little food and water and on arrival at Vung Tau could not get close to the beach because of their size. YMCA staff and volunteers cooked large quantities of rice on the beach and put these rations into polythene bags. This food together with milk for babies was ferried out to the larger ships standing off Vung Tau and thrown up to the hungry refugees on the decks above.

Other YMCA workers were busy on the beach working among the small ferryboats, helping to bring ashore small children and the few possessions of the refugees. At this time there were 16 emergency centres. The YMCA staff worked in four of these, carrying out a "human contacts programme" and doing whatever could be done to reunite families. Once again, military action caused a massive outflow of refugees, and our staff were forced to evacuate by sea and make their way back to our headquarters in Saigon. One young Vietnamese female staff member became separated from the rest of the team and had to make her way back alone, walking the last 80 miles and skirting a tank battle as she did so. It happens that I was in the office of YMCA's services in Vietnam when this young lady limped in. She sat for a few moments on a stool then looked up with a bright smile and said, "What do you want me to do next?"

Many of the refugees with whom we had worked at Rung La were to be found in the Phu Van emergency centre which came to have a population of 10,000 refugees. It was natural, therefore, that a YMCA team should find itself working at this centre. Once again assistance was given in food distribution together with organising young people to work in groups with essential services such as garbage disposal and the construction of sanitation pits. In addition to all this the team visited hundreds of refugee families, doing everything possible to soften the distress of their situation.

At Tan Phu, another YMCA team was engaged on work of a similar nature. Here again, the YMCA had the advantage of working with people whom we had known from the past and in an area which we knew. Work with children and young people was carried out, labour given for necessary services organised and a full "human contacts programme" functioned.

It should be borne in mind that all these activities were carried out in an atmosphere of acute tension since daily military activity was never more than a few kilometres away from these emergency centres.

The wives of foreign staff had previously been evacuated and now a decision was taken that Mr Luce our programme director and an American citizen, should also leave Vietnam. This he did with reluctance but at the same time with an awareness of the effectiveness of the months of staff training in which he had played a prominent role. I arrived in Vietnam on the 25th April and was joined on the 27th April by Mr Yukio Miyazaki of the Japanese YMCA movement, who was representing Mr Soo Min Lee Asian Area Alliance of YMCAs secretary. At this time the work of YMCA services in Vietnam was going on at Tan Phu, Phu Van and at Tu Do Thon village in the Cholon district of Saigon and I had the opportunity of visiting this work on the 26th and 27th of April.

During the nights of 27th 28th and 29th of April, Saigon airport came under heavy bombardment and there was incessant street fighting on the perimeter of the city during the hours of darkness. As a precaution against the city of Saigon coming under heavy attack it was decided to bring all staff members to headquarters to prepare for what might lie ahead.



On the morning of the 30<sup>th</sup> April it was reported that large numbers of people were isolated at what had been helicopter evacuation points and had been there without food for two days. Accordingly, a YMCA team began deliveries of rice and powdered milk to these points, but this action had to be discontinued due to shell fire at close proximity. However, important contacts were made with members of the United Nations agencies during this time and these contacts were to be useful in the days that lay ahead.

At 11.30 am on the 30<sup>th</sup> April 1975 the government of South Vietnam capitulated and surrendered the city of Saigon to the forces of the provisional revolutionary government of north Vietnam - the Vietnam War was over - the city was occupied and the military administration committee of Saigon Giadinh was set up.

During the whole of this time, it should be remembered that our staff were busy at headquarters in participation of the city coming under heavy bombing bombardment. On one arm each person wore the insignia of the YMCA and on the other arm the insignia of the Red Cross. Our vehicles were ready at headquarters and there were supplies of food and powdered milk available to be taken to any area of the city should an extreme emergency arise. In the event, these services were not needed. Apart from the considerable damage at Saigon airport, there was only light shelling in other parts of the city.

Next morning, 1<sup>st</sup> May, Mr Yamashita and Mr Miyazaki and I presented ourselves at the ministry of social services where we were immediately taken before a senior officer of the occupying authority. This officer was the interim head of a department known as "EX2" and was responsible for the administration of all the social services of the city pending the setting up of a civilian administration. We were listened to with courtesy and had every opportunity to speak of the work of the YMCA with refugees and in rehabilitation in different parts of the world - of the work that had been done in Vietnam in the past - and our hopes that we would be allowed to continue such work in the future.

Following a lengthy discussion, we were instructed to return to our headquarters and to remain there until we should be contacted. In the days that lay ahead our director divided his staff into teams and many of the refugee areas on the perimeter of the city were visited. In this way a complete picture of the refugee situation was maintained. Senior members of staff visited many parts of the city attempting to make contact with other international non-governmental agencies. It became clear that few remained of the original 51 who had been working in Vietnam prior to the collapse of the formal former government of South Vietnam. Among those remaining were:-

International Social Services  
Asian Christian Service  
The Mennonite Centre Central Committee  
The Society of Friends  
The International Union of Childbirth Welfare  
The YMCA

It was at this time that we learned that several voluntary agencies (but not including any of the previously named) had been found unacceptable by the occupying authority. These were ordered to disband forthwith, and their property and equipment was confiscated.



After an interval of a few days, I attempted to make contact again with the ministry of social services but was only successful in meeting the outgoing minister and members of his staff. They were able to do nothing to advance our case.

Again, after an interval of some days Mr Miyazaki and I contacted the department which had been known as EX2. The officer whom we had met originally had now been superseded by a more senior officer of the Saigon Giadinh Military Committee and a meeting between us took place. During this meeting we were joined by a lady officer from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Once again, we had the opportunity of explaining the work of the YMCA in different parts of the world of what had been done in Vietnam in the past and our hopes for the future.

It was clear to us that the kind of work which we had done in the past in Vietnam was not likely to commend itself to the new government but nevertheless, within narrow limits and in conformity with the aspirations of the government there might be work in which we could engaged. We recognise that using community work would be the sole province of the government but, for example, there could be a role for the YMCA to play with children who were seriously disadvantaged and in need of special care.

At the conclusion of what was a lengthy meeting, we were invited to present a letter making a formal offer of our services to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This was done the following morning and thus the YMCA was registered with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an international non-governmental organisation seeking recognition from the government of Vietnam.

This does not mean that our offer of service had been accepted but that we take our place among a very small body of organisations who have been so registered and whose offers of service are being considered. Into this category also fell the United Nations Agencies at present located in Vietnam. The present situation is that we must wait and see if our offer of service is acceptable.

To continue these discussions and to hopefully direct new phases of our work, Mr Yamashita will remain in Vietnam. With him, as his principle assistant will be Mr Ikezumi also from the Japanese movement. 25 Vietnamese members of staff have gone on temporary leave pending a decision on their future and 25 members of staff remain on duty and are engaged in daily training. Some feeding and family contact work was carried on up to the third week of May but on the instructions of the occupying authority, all services to refugees have now been discontinued.

Mr Miyazaki and I left Saigon on the 26<sup>th</sup> May via Vientiane, Laos to consider our situation there. Following meetings with the resident representative of UNHCR and the director of Asian Christian Service, there is now no possibility of commencing work in Laos as an identifiable international agency. Most non-governmental agencies expect to be asked to leave and they may be followed by the UN experts. Future YMCA participation would only be in financial participation in programmes of rehabilitation work undertaken by the people of Laos themselves.

Before concluding this report, tribute should be paid to our staff in Vietnam. Ignoring personal danger discomfort and long hours of hard work, they served unselfishly. Some could have been evacuated but chose not to do so. It is to be hoped that the skills gained through such a hard experience will continue to be at the service of the people of Vietnam in the future.

**James CB Thompson**  
**Secretary World Alliance of YMCA's Committee for Refugee and Rehabilitation**  
**Geneva June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1975**

## **Alerted by a Review to that Room at 72**



I was introduced to the *Times Literary Supplement* by Geoffrey Palmer, a YMCA Secretary, in the autumn of 1961 and I have subscribed to it ever since. A review in the issue for 13 May 2022 immediately caught my attention, thanks to its first two sentences. Kathryn Sutherland, an Oxford don, was reviewing Daisy Hay's *Dinner with Joseph Johnson: Books and friendship in a revolutionary age* (London: Chatto and Windus, £25). These were the sentences:

In August 1787, aged twenty-eight and recently dismissed from her job as governess, Mary Wollstonecraft turned up at the premises of Joseph Johnson, No. 72 St Paul's Churchyard, at the centre of the London book trade. A few months previously Johnson had published her work *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, for which he paid her ten guineas.

What, apart from any possible coincidence, has this to do with the YMCA? Bear with me, as harassed shop assistants, those spiritual descendants of the YMCA's founders, might say.

For nearly fifty years, from the 1760s to 1809, Joseph Johnson, a bookseller and publisher of Liverpool Baptist stock, plied his trade in St Paul's Churchyard. His list was comprehensive, to say the least. It included John ("Amazing Grace") Newton and William Cowper. It ranged from Erasmus Darwin and Thomas Malthus to Sarah Trimmer and Anna Laetitia Barbauld, all best sellers in their day. In Kathryn Sutherland's words, Johnson's list "reads like a *Who's Who* of the most experimental thinkers and creative artists of the age".

Authority disliked Joseph Johnson and he was imprisoned for seditious libel in 1798-9 but he was one of nature's enablers, merging into the background of what he enabled, not least at his dinner table. Johnson's three o'clock dinners were an institution. They were not for gourmets. Dr Sutherland describes the food as "stodgy and unvarying – bland school-dinner fare of boiled fish, roasted veal, boiled potatoes and rice pudding", but those dinners attracted an almost dizzying array of diners, unusually content to agree to differ.

What about the room itself? A contemporary described it as "a little quaintly shaped upstairs room, with walls not at right angles ...". In 2016 an edition of Johnson's "Letterbook" (his outgoing business correspondence) included "an image, c. 1844, of an upper room at No. 72 that may be the very dining room: odd-shaped, a confined space with dark wood panelling and a table round which eight chairs are closely set".

I think we know that room. Surely it was the room in which on 6 June 1844 London YMCA, the prototype for YMCAs worldwide, was founded. Johnson, bookseller, had become Hitchcock, Rogers, drapers.

That room was destroyed in the Second World War but replicas survived. There is one in the International YMCA on Jerusalem's King David Street and there was another in George Williams College, Chicago, although that was put into packing cases when the college closed.

Perhaps this was more coincidence than continuity; perhaps there was something in the air.

There was nothing revolutionary about the YMCA apart from its relationship to the retail revolution, yet it was marked almost from the first by an engagement with education and among its earliest members was Matthew Hodder, whose family intermarried with that of George Williams, that employee of Hitchcock, Rogers now universally regarded as the founder of London YMCA.

Hodder's family business was publishing and the list of Hodder and Stoughton was almost as pace-setting as that of Joseph Johnson.

What is, however, wholly coincidental is that George Williams's direct descendants include a Joseph Johnson whose brother is the present Prime Minister.

Even so, how I wish that I had had the curiosity to investigate the earlier history of 72 St Paul's Churchyard when, in the late 1960s, I was delving into the life of George Williams in preparation for *George Williams and the YMCA* (London: Heinemann, 1973).

**Clyde (Binfield)**

**James Wogan, 3<sup>rd</sup> Baron Remnant, CVO**  
**(23<sup>rd</sup> October 1930 – 4<sup>th</sup> March 2022)**

Presidents of national voluntary organisations come in all shapes and sizes. They enhance a letter head. It still helps if they are in the House of Lords. They certainly need to have useful contacts. Theirs is, nonetheless, an arm's length role. Some see it as purely ceremonial, presiding benignly at an annual meeting, heading an appeal. Some are more hands-on. The wisest – and wisdom is a prime requirement – strike a balance, and they are invaluable.

As National Vice-Chairman and Chairman I encountered two Presidents, Jimmy Remnant and Frank Judd. They could not have been more different from each other, but their presidencies were pitch-perfect. They were good to meet, good to listen to, ready to be involved, always encouraging, and always wise.

Jimmy Remnant, who died early in March, was a class act in every sense of those words: Eton, Coldstream Guards, asset management (Touche Remnant was a pace-setter), Berkshire when in the country, Belgravia when in Town. One saw that when he came to the Dunford-in-August weeks, created in John Naylor's time to thank and encourage YMCA lay-people.

I recall the Annual Assembly when an appropriately irreverent skit featured Lord Leftover. There were anxious looks to see how he might take it. There was no need to worry. It was a bit obvious, it was corny, but it was affectionate as well as very funny, and our President showed every sign of genuine delight.

A Service of Thanksgiving for his life was held on 30 May at St Paul's, Knightsbridge, his church when in London. There he was married and there we remembered him. St Paul's is early Victorian. It is yellow-brick Gothic, worryingly incorrect as to detail, but it is airy, its acoustics are superb, and later Victorians and their successors worked hard and well on its interior to make it attractive to those whose Anglicanism is on the high side. George Williams might have had his reservations.

The service was a joyous occasion. The church was well filled. The hymns were sung whole-heartedly. The choir, just visible beyond the screen, was magical: Faure, Mozart, Parry, John Rutter. And the tributes from Jimmy's sons and daughter recreated the man whom we had known as President. Their father, our past President, the friend, neighbour, and business associate of most in that congregation, was, after all, the same man, recognisable to all.

All was over in an hour. As his son pointed out, Jimmy was a man who looked at his watch when the sermon (to which he listened intently) took more than fifteen minutes. If only some of us had known that when sounding forth in his presence at Assembly or at Dunford-in-August ...

**Clyde (Binfield)**