

## **A Brief History of RAD**

by Arthur F Dimmock (1918-2007)

### **150 years of charitable work**

RAD has a long history that spans over 150 years as a pioneer of charitable work. To record every event in the space of time allocated to me today is unfortunately not possible; hence the account I am about to give is known as a brief history, touching important issues mostly where deaf people who contributed to the Association, are concerned. But in the long run it would be appropriate to mention others than the deaf who have done magnificently.

The Institution of providing Employment, Relief and Religious Instruction for the Adult Deaf and Dumb was established in 1841. A prosperous London printer and bookbinder, George Crouch, who had five deaf children, was an influential member of the original committee. There were several deaf adults in workhouses that were rescued from the destitution of these places and given training in such trades as printing, bookbinding and shoemaking. Later dressmaking and needlework was introduced for women. Religious instruction was mandatory so all had to attend.

The scheme managed by Mr James Simpson appeared successful as some trainees became excellent workers. But owing to financial difficulties, it was suspended for 10 years. During that time, a disturbing feature was that some of the trainees had to return to the workhouses from which they had been rescued. The Institution, however, was not defunct. Nevertheless, there was a church service at a leased chapel in Fetter Lane every Sunday where Reverend Robert Simson preached to a congregation of more than a hundred deaf people.

### **Signed church services**

An office was maintained at 1 Red Lion Square in London and outstanding debts were met in full. In 1854 a Public Meeting to organise the Society was held at Exeter Hall when it was resolved that the attempt to maintain an Industrial School in the nature of a home be discontinued. For the future, operations of the Society were to be carried on as an Association in Aid of the Deaf and Dumb. The predominately evangelistic emphasis of the reorganised work is indicated by its objects which refer to the employment of qualified agents to impart religious and moral instructions to the deaf and dumb in their homes and the establishment of religious services for the deaf and dumb throughout the metropolis.

Also covered were the encouragement of early training and the promotion of piety among deaf and dumb children, preparatory to their admission to educational

institutions and advice and friendly aid, when required by the deaf and dumb suffering from oppression or any other cause. Thus, whilst the former Institution had attempted to give vocational training as well as religious instruction the main concern of the new Association was to ensure that "the glad tidings of the salvation" be made known to the deaf people.

The first missionary of the association, appointed in 1854, was Mr E. Chalmers who had for the previous 17 years been employed as a teacher of the deaf and dumb. The Association's new office was at Bedford Row in Holborn. Chalmers recognised that the deaf and dumb were widely scattered through out the metropolis and recommended that London should be divided into at least six districts with a qualified agent appointed in each, so that having his whole attention directed to a separate division, all the mutes within it may be found out and the blessing of the Divine Truth brought before them. Cases of destitution, sickness and suffering were brought to light and were numerous which taxed the ability of the Association to the utmost for relief. It was then that "work seeking" became a major issue for the Association.

In 1855 Chalmers returned to teaching and was succeeded by Samuel Smith who had been an assistant at the Doncaster Institution. In 1861 Smith, who had been allowed to qualify for Holy Orders at King's College, was ordained and appointed chaplain to the Association. Despite opposition Reverend Smith strongly supported deaf people's preference for sign language and his church services conducted expertly in this language attracted large numbers.

### **A separate church for the deaf**

Meanwhile in 1860 seven deaf and dumb gentlemen had formed themselves into a committee and stated that they were desirous of promoting the erection of a church for the deaf and dumb because of the want of proper reverence on the part of some of the persons attending the Sunday services which was attributed to the secular character of the rooms used.

The committee of the association were at first opposed to the proposition on grounds that a separate church for the deaf would unnecessarily perpetuate the distinction between deaf and hearing persons and strengthen the class feeling among the deaf and dumb so that the endeavour to qualify for general intercourse would be forgotten. It was also stated that there were so very few people among the deaf and dumb that were of sufficient intelligence to follow the service of Communion and to encourage the administration in that vague language of signs except under special circumstances in which no church is required. The special church would involve such practical details as the alteration of rubrics and the omission of many parts of the service untranslatable in signs.

The objections were answered by the deaf in a further memorial stating that an ordinary service to their condition was lifeless and monotonous. They claimed that they were as much entitled to a special and perfectly constituted service in their own language as foreigners living in London were able to attend services specially provided to meet their conditions. As to such a plan perpetuating the distinction between the deaf and dumb it was argued that the difference arose from deafness.

The Bishop of London, however, had promised to relax rubricalities as far as he lawfully could to facilitate them. Finally, the pious deaf and dumb ought to receive the Lord's Supper and however deficient in the knowledge of ordinary language it could be so explained to them by signs that its meaning and import would be clear to them. A proposal for a separate church that was thought to create unnecessary distinction between the deaf and hearing led to controversy but it was eventually agreed that the matter should be submitted to the headmasters of four schools for the deaf and dumb, three of whom were against a separate church and one in favour the proposal.

### **Raising Funds**

In spite of this decision, however, a Building Fund to the tune of £3,000 was raised and in June 1875 a church named St. Saviours was opened on a site in Oxford Street that had been leased to the Association by the Duke of Westminster for a term of 60 years at the nominal rent of 10 shillings per annum. The founding stone was laid by Edward, Prince of Wales and Princess Alexandra who was known to have a hearing impairment. The following year, the Queen consented to become the patron of the Association whereupon it became known as "The Royal Association in Aid of the Deaf and Dumb"

In addition to the royal patronage the Association had a succession of leading figures in government and Society vice-presidents, the most notable was William Gladstone, the Prime Minister during 1880 - 1886 and 1892 - 1894 who served for 41 years and the Marquess of Westminster, MP. Not to be ignored was the Duke of Westminster who gave 55 years of service.

There are three reasons why the early history of the Royal Association is of significance for the purpose of this study. Not only was the Association a continuation of the first attempt to provide spiritual and secular needs of the adult deaf in England but Reverend Smith and St Saviours was respectively the first clergyman to be ordained and the church to be dedicated expressly for the work in connection with the deaf and dumb.

Samuel Smith was also the forerunner of many chaplains to be sent to King's College, London, and it may be said that the Association made the first systematic attempt to organise the recruitment and training of men for the work with the adult

deaf. In general the earliest societies of the adult deaf were Nonconformist but the advent of Smith marked the beginning of an increase of a strong Anglican influence in deaf work. He is remembered for his association with the London Asylum, the school for the deaf and dumb in Bermondsey, resulting in a register of school-leavers so that they could be helped. A Magazine for the Deaf and Dumb, the first RADD publication was edited by Smith. The question of finding a replacement for Reverend Smith, in event of death or retirement, appeared to pose great difficulties as there was no one known to be adequately qualified.

The 1872 report of the Association records that the chaplain had been invited to plead the cause of the deaf and dumb and to hold services and lectures for them in South Wales, Birmingham, Northampton, the Potteries, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Reverend Samuel Smith was the only chaplain till 1870 and also the association secretary till his death in 1883 when he was still in his fifties. He invited princes to listen and merchants to give that kept the Association on even keel.

He was succeeded by Reverend Charles Rhind who became Chaplain Superintendent but he died in 1888 and Reverend William Stainer who had joined the RADD took his place but his tenure was short and Reverend Frederick Gilby succeeded him. Gilby was the hearing son of profoundly deaf parents and had a remarkable expertise as an interpreter in early age. His church services were always packed with the congregation wondering at the amazing skill of his signing, peppered with humour.

### **Achieving recognition**

Five missionaries worked in various areas. A notable one was John Pugh Gloyn who was deaf and greatly loved by the community; he spent 40 years with the Association. The missionaries knew only too well from personal observation of deaf people in their own homes that a large proportion of them had difficulty surviving in conditions of acute deprivation. In 1885 the number of missionaries was, therefore increased to nine in an effort to relieve the people from such destitution. Growing recognition of the organisation's work was underlined by the number of leading churchmen who became vice-presidents. They included the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the Bishop and Dean of Lichfield, the Bishops of Carlisle, Ely, Lincoln, Oxford, and Winchester.

The Bishop of London was succeeded as Patron by Queen Victoria in 1873 and he and his successors served as President until 1940. New centres were opened and an average of 15 services and some lectures were made available but it was particularly hard for deaf people in the midst of trade recession and funds were low so a tight rein was kept on missionaries' salaries. A number of deaf people contributed to the cause

of the Association and among them were Sir Arthur Fairbairn and his deaf sister, Matthew Robert Burns, and A.J.Wilson. Another was Arthur Henry Bather who had exceptional talents and served the Association as honorary secretary from 1865 to 1892.

### **Works of art**

Deaf artists such as Thomas Davidson contributed a picture Ephpatha which depicted Jesus healing a deaf man, Joseph Gawen, the sculptor executed the Good Shepherd and the busts of the Prince of Wales and Rev Samuel Smith. Another contribution, The Last Supper was done by Mr Maguire. The works gave cause for a museum to be opened and what was available was a library and reading room where chess and other games were played. St Saviours was in effect a fine place in a prominent position and enhanced the profile of the Association. Deaf people flocked from all quarters of the city to be there.

At the turn of the century on a Saturday hundreds of deaf people were left gaping at a sparkling new car driven by A.J.Wilson, a prosperous business-man, who became the first and only deaf person outside America to drive a car. Wilson founded the Federation of London Deaf Clubs in 1918 that enabled competitions in billiards and other board games to be played at St Saviours and other centres at Deptford, West Ham and Green Lanes, all of which came under the Association's control. Hearing residents of the parish were allowed to use the chapel for their own services.

The Federation sent a team of athletes to the first World Games for the Deaf at Paris in 1924 that was led by Reverend Vernon Jones who had a slight hearing defect but was well respected in the Green Lanes church and club. He was chosen on account of being able to understand French, the official language of the games.

The Deaf and Dumb Debating Society whose president was Thomas Davidson attracted a number whose intelligence were found to be outstanding.

In 1911, Rev George Chetwynd, soon after his ordination set himself the responsibility for systematic visits to all aged, infirm and afflicted deaf and dumb people in all the 29 workhouses, infirmaries and asylums in the East London district. Over the years RADD's services continued to grow but funding remained a major problem. In 1920 expenditure had risen to £4,000 - £1,000 in excess of income so it was not possible to employ more than three or four chaplains.

The site was due to expire in 1931 but it was agreed to surrender the site in 1922. It eventually became the Selfridge's store. In exchange, the Association received £15,000. It was envisaged that a further £10,000 was needed to build a new church, institution and chaplain's residence on a site between Acton and Shepherd's Bush to

be purchased from the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths. New offices were set up in Paddington when the Association's other premises in Oxford Street expired. In 1917 Reverend Albert Smith succeeded Rev Gilby who had retired on health grounds. St Bede's in Clapham was annexed to the Association in 1924 and St Savours in 1925, the year when the founding stone was laid by Prince of Wales, later Edward V111. Soon afterwards Rev Albert Smith started and edited the Ephpatha, the Association's next magazine.

The Association's chair, Rev W.G.Pennyman, worked hard in fund raising during the early twenties. He staged a few theatrical matinees, one of which was attended by King George V and Queen Mary. The funds raised was £2,263 that greatly helped. A further £694 was raised at a ball attended by the prince.

A maternity home for unmarried deaf mothers was opened at Clapham and post-maternity care was provided for them. Another initiative was visiting services aimed at deaf people in mental handicap institutions that commenced in 1923. Many deaf children were misdiagnosed as mentally subnormal and the Association's aim was to have them transferred to the special school at Penn. At the time deafness was an enigma to many doctors. Another involvement was the provision of helpers for the deaf-blind and this went on for many years and by 1960 there were 200 of them.

### **Effects of the War**

During the war air raids wrecked some churches that included the ones at Deptford, Clapham, West Ham, Paddington and Acton. Deaf members volunteered to help in the task of repairing and clearing up. Rev Sowter at Clapham trained some fire-watching crews. Albert Smith was the first RADD chaplain to be honoured with the award, Prebendary, at St Paul's Cathedral in 1941. The next Chaplain Superintendent was Rev Canon Alan Mackenzie, another son of deaf parents. His assistant was Rev Leonard Kent.

The Association was involved in the oral v manual controversy and became well aware of what the majority of the deaf community stood for and as a result strong support was given to back the combined form of communication that favours sign language, English and speech. The Association had several deaf clergymen, notably Rev Frank Goodridge, Rev Benny Morgan, Rev Leonard Kent, Rev Ron Cade and later Rev Vera Hunt, the first woman priest ordained in 1992. In addition there were deaf collectors employed in various districts.

For many years work-seekers were engaged to find employment for deaf people. A noted person was Mr Parmenter who was rated as a star job finder. Although small and stout he had a remarkable persuasive voice and wide knowledge about the potentials of deaf workers. But according to the financial report in 1958 there were

difficulties so almost all the work-seekers were made redundant. By 1963 there was a wind of change and the Association had to renew its dedication to the spiritual care of the deaf and reduce its involvement in purely material welfare work. The Association always had a major problem and economic difficulties on a national scale but a prominent vice-president, the actor Andrew Cruikshank, of Dr Finlay's Casebook, raised a magnificent total of £25,487.

### **Change of name**

In 1986 the RADD changed its name to the Royal Association in Aid of Deaf People (RAD). Leaving out the word "dumb" may have some effect on the decline of funding since this word tends to attract more sympathy than "deaf". But according to a survey most deaf people object to "dumb" as a term to describe their person. Nevertheless, over 5,000 benefit from RAD's social work services. A Job Club, headed by a deaf man, Mika Brojer, started at Green Lanes in 1988 and it was well appreciated but it lasted till 1998 when Brojer died.

At the end of 1991 RAD maintained no less than seventeen deaf clubs and most of them were allowed to sell alcoholic drinks on the premises when Reverend Scott Oldfield, the RAD Chaplain Superintendent (1963 - 1988) relaxed the Association's stringent stance towards temperance on the 1970s. During 1987/8 the RAD supported holiday outings that included a venture at Jersey and Sark. For the deaf/blind there were regular visits to Godstone Farm in Surrey so that they could touch young livestock. But transport costs became a problem.

The Association was an obscure evangelical agency. By the middle of the 20th century the Association had 11 centres exclusively devoted to its work and a full time staff of eight chaplains and 17 lay-workers serves some 8,000 profoundly deaf and 400 deaf-blind people. In addition the Association ministers to about 900 deaf patients in the 22 psychiatric hospitals and nine hospitals for the mentally handicapped within the area of its operations covering Greater London, Essex, Kent and Surrey. It was therefore the largest local voluntary society for the deaf in Great Britain with a special place in the history of voluntary effort for adult deaf persons. But almost every year since its founding there was always financial deficits that enforced the sale of its property, notably Selhurst (founded in 1912), Deptford, Lewisham, Redhill and Guildford.

The Federation of London Deaf Clubs which arranged competitive indoor games during the 1920 - 1960 period helped to popularize club attendance and at times it became impossible to gain admission. After this period there was a decline that mystified many, especially the older deaf people who had known these halcyon days. Despite this the RAD clubs are still in existence and good facilities are there so it is

hopeful that deaf people with real potential could roll up their sleeves and do what the departed stalwarts had done in the past.