

A history of CDRC

Amusing anecdote, - the Pope's wife – the hand costume!

The beginning and founders

Four people sat round a kitchen table in my High Beech Road home. Upstairs were the remnants of costumes left by LADS (after collecting their own to put in new storage) and my parents (avid dramatists) when they down-sized.

What to do with them? We four felt that God was prompting us to use our drama experiences for Him rather than just a secular dramatic society. It was the 1970s - a period of creativity and colour and we wanted churches to be involved in these vibrant times. The idea of a Christian Drama Resource Centre was born - and took over our spare bedroom

48 York Hill first time

Sometime later, with a new born baby and three adopted children, my husband Pete and I moved to 48 York Hill, a spacious semi-detached house with a large attic floor (not needed by the family), into which we poured all the costumes and other resources

We had performed a magnificent musical about Moses (by Ronald Corp) at our own church and created more costumes to give it impact, (no tea-towel headdresses and dressing gowns here!) so the collection was growing. People started coming to borrow things and our reputation spread.

One of the 'founding foursome' (Mary) came round once a week to help order and sort the costumes; we were trying to be businesslike and professional. Then another friend (Jane) joined us and had the idea of trying to make us a formal charity. It took two years and was a demanding learning experience, but Jane did not give up and in 1996 we became a registered charity. Assorted people (from churches, schools and community groups) climbed the stairs to our attic to choose and borrow from the expanding resources. Our own church drama group staged a pantomime and we were given some exceptionally flamboyant costumes to use which predictably became much borrowed by other groups in the following years.

1996 Queens Road

Being a registered charity meant we could apply for grants and rent a former shop (with storage space to the rear) located in the middle of the community. So near to Staples Road School that I believe the teachers thought we were there just to serve their needs and no one else's! Staff and parents would pop in after school to find costumes for their children. It was a time when historical visits to museums in London and historical dress-up days were much in vogue

While we were at Queens Road some wonderful costumes from around the world were donated to us by the Methodist Missionary Society and it became apparent that our growing collection needed larger premises.

By some incredible God-incidence we learned about a building in Church Hill being available to rent; we fund-raised like mad to gain enough finance and also applied for grants.

One of our big fund-raising events was an Elizabethan banquet in St John's Church Hall and in due course, with the help of many friends, we moved into Church Hill in 2001. We were now 'on the map' for dozens of callers a week, in a High Road location. Even with several volunteer workers on different days it became rather invasive to family life. So we decided to open just 4 days a week, something we have kept to ever since

2008 – Goodbye Church Hill

Demand continued apace until the owner of Church Hill asked for his property back. We thought we'd found premises on Oakwood Hill but it didn't work out so it was back to 48 York Hill Office in our front room and a large converted stable store on Great Gregories farm in Epping

48 York Hill again

Driving to and from Epping took a lot of organisation and having callers in our own house was not really appreciated by our burgeoning teenagers.

LifeWorks the big move

The Church took pity on us and offered (as an office) the lobby utility area of Wesley Hall, so there, amongst the boiler and its accoutrements, we carried on our service to the community, It was a bit cramped but at least it was warm!

Then, miraculously, the Church was given a grant of £250,000 towards building a Creative Arts Centre (eventually called LifeWorks) and we are now ensconced

in a [decent] office in that building plus a large store behind it full of hundreds of costumes. It was tremendous to have that from Loughton Methodist church and we are perennially grateful. Their annual Holiday Club is always a big event for costumes and props including some beautiful voiles and saris

These days although we had a lot of schools and parents using our resources over the years we have found that senior schools performing end of year productions needed large quantities of costumes for musicals.

Retirement and new management

In 2021 I retired as manager of CDRC and we employed our first paid manager, Ruth.

She did an excellent job but family circumstances led to her leaving after 3 years, and now we employ Teresa as our Coordinator. As well as admin, Teresa has a real gift for costumes.. We have 6 trustees, with me as chair, and ...team leaders, extra volunteers of all talents and some special needs helpers too

I still take my puppet Fudge into Toddler Church and other places. He is popular with all ages and has been to many training events to teach other puppets how to behave.

[I hope this brief canter through the last 4 decades has given you a flavour of the growth and development of CDRC from its humble beginnings We are always open to change and Gods leading in our service to the community.