



SHREWSBURY HOUSE, EVERTON: 'THE SHEWSY'

The impetus for the foundation of the Shrewsbury School Mission came from the School itself; its nature was determined by its leaders in Liverpool. Digby Kittermaster founded the boys' club, in an old pub building in 1903, as a Christian institution to promote 'godliness and good learning'. He hoped to involve Salopians in the club as much as possible, not only to provide skills and support, but also, by getting to know and love the regular members of the club, to civilise and refine their character. This aspiration was typical of the motives of several Public Schools at the time who were founding similar School Missions in deprived areas of big cities. But the objective sounds strange both to Salopians and to members of Shrewsbury House nowadays. They have long since learned that the benefit is mutual, and that they have much to learn from each other. The relations between School and Club have always been close; and the relative proximity of Liverpool and Shrewsbury was and remains a vital factor in promoting this close and regular contact.

Kittermaster's successors faithfully nurtured and promoted his aims, and the School's support of the Club in Everton was invaluable, particularly during the years of profound deprivation during the Depression. Characteristically, H.H. Hardy (Headmaster 1932-44) established that support on a more businesslike footing. In 1928, largely due to the initiative and devoted support for over thirty years of an Old Salopian, Barr Adams, an Old Boys' Association was formed and developed, a library was equipped, an interest in classical music was encouraged, and a typewritten news sheet, which commented on local and world affairs, was produced. Barr Adams' positive influence had a life-changing effect on some individuals. During the Second World War his news sheet was published two or three times a week and provided a deeply appreciated means of communication between the soldiers at the front and their families at home. The Club was beginning to be forged into a family, but only a skeleton service could be provided in the Club itself and many of its members had been evacuated.

It fell to the Revd James Hill, also an Old Salopian, who became Missioner in 1944, to build up the Club again. His unaffected Christian faith endeared him to the whole community. This was a time when the early initiatives of the Welfare State had led some to believe that the new system could fully replace the services to the community in disadvantaged areas which had until then been provided by the Public School Missions. Others, however, felt that there was a further spiritual dimension which continued association with the School would help to preserve. This was the view both of David Bevan, who almost single-handedly had maintained that link throughout the Second World War, and of James Hill himself. At the Bishop's invitation James added responsibility for the congregation of St Timothy's Church to that of being Missioner; both he and David resisted the Bishop's plan quietly to close St Tim's, and David secured the services of a party of forty boys and masters, during a week of the Easter holidays of 1949, to renovate the Church completely. Arthur Broadbent's painting of the four evangelists in the walled-up east windows was the crowning glory of this enterprise. The effect of this initiative on the

Everton community was profound, making its connection with Shrewsbury School a reality in the area, though the School was slow to realise this impact. Links between the School and the Club continued much as before, with visits to the School by the Missioners, James Hill, John Turner and David Street. Short weekend visits to the Club by House groups took place in rotation. Another holiday painting party in 1960 to renovate St Ambrose's Church Hall (including another painting, of the coming of the Holy Spirit, by Arthur Broadbent) kept the School's interest and presence in the Everton area alive.

The 1960s were a decade of significant social change and it soon became apparent that a new stimulus was needed to reinvigorate the relationship between the School and the Club. Weekend trips to Liverpool were no longer the only glimpse of the outside world available to Salopians in term-time. Shrewsbury House was no longer simply the recipient of Salopian missionary zeal. From the start it had provided the location and the means for forming valued personal relationships and the widening of horizons on both sides. It was becoming ever clearer that it had something of great value to offer in return. David Street had pioneered the idea of Social Studies courses in Liverpool for Salopian Sixth Formers, but he moved on in 1962 and the idea was temporarily allowed to lapse.

In 1963 three men arrived who were to give huge impetus to David Street's initiative. Donald Wright's first instinct, feeling that the days of Victorian patronage were over, had been to sever the link, but Roger Sainsbury, the new Missioner, was a charismatic and resolute figure, who enthusiastically resurrected the Social Studies courses and not only converted Donald to the cause but secured him as his greatest ally. It was said that the Headmaster never seemed to be quite so much at his ease as when he was visiting Shrewsbury House. Roger's wife Jenny soon opened the Club for girls, further developing the family pattern whose foundations had been laid by Barr Adams. Roger was freed to concentrate on Shrewsbury House when Richard Allen arrived to preside over a team ministry in the area. Richard was a man of wide experience, and although the School never really got to know him, it has been said that if the School learned to be proud once more of its connection with Everton, this was due to Richard Allen. He gave publicity to the Club and he founded a free newspaper, *The Everton Telegraph*, still produced by the Club and personally delivered to every house in the parish. Shrewsbury House soon became one of the best-known youth clubs in the country. The Social Studies courses thrived, were enthusiastically received and made a huge impact, evidenced by the growing number of younger Old Salopians who soon became regular subscribers to the Club. A visit to the Club now, reciprocally, proved to be a life-changing experience for more than one Salopian. This was a period of dynamic progress, tragically checked by the premature and irreplaceable loss of Richard Allen in a car accident, but quickly resumed.

It was apparent to all that the old building in Portland Place, which had housed the Club since its move there from the pub in 1907, could no longer accommodate all the varied activities which were being developed. Donald Wright master-minded a massive fund-raising effort by the whole Salopian community. This funded a new centre, including St Peter's Church (reviving the name of a church destroyed in the Blitz) to replace St Ambrose's and St Timothy's which were demolished (sadly, together with Arthur Broadbent's much-loved art work). Accommodation for visitors had always been available, but now a proper hostel for seven residents was provided, in which many Salopians have

subsequently stayed to provide voluntary help in the Club. The new centre was opened by Princess Anne in July 1974. The Rt Revd Stuart Blanch described the opening of the new 'Shewsy' as one of the most important and innovative initiatives in his time as Bishop of Liverpool.

Adrian Struvé comments that:

This link between Shrewsbury School and a thriving, grown-up, battling inner-city community is surely unique and has come about naturally. It is a huge privilege for Shrewsbury School to have that relationship and to have that educational resource to call on at will; and it is a wonderful gift to Everton to be able to count on the moral support of the School as exemplified in its many corporate and individual fund-raising activities. Boys at Shrewsbury can learn much in theory. To see at first-hand how a community led by Christians reacts to the Toxteth riots, to the attempts of the Militant Tendency to destroy the area, to the nationwide report of the fatal stabbing of a young visitor outside the Club door, is quite another thing. The word 'mission' was dropped several years ago. But Kittermaster would rejoice that godliness and good learning are still central to the Club's policy and he would laugh to see how Shrewsbury House is educating Shrewsbury School, for he always said that should happen.

The new centre has provided the location and amenities in which Shrewsbury House has been able to develop further. The original boys' club, to which girls were subsequently admitted, has extended its reach and its appeal from being a Youth Club to become a full-blown community centre, catering for local inhabitants of every age. Particular attention has been paid in recent years to the Junior Club, with the aim of preventing future teenage problems before they occur. Julian Charley became Warden in 1974. He played a major part in the wider ecumenical movement in Liverpool, and Shrewsbury House has played a significant role in defeating denominational tensions. In subsequent years the Warden's principal focus has been on the church and the local community at large in Everton. The fortunes of the Youth Club have depended primarily on the calibre, charisma and devotion of a succession of Youth Leaders (John Hutchison, now Chairman of the Board of Management, Peter Brennan and David Brereton being prominent among them), and upon their capacity to attract volunteer helpers.

In common with many similar institutions, controls on staffing, together with health and safety regulations, have had a major impact upon Shrewsbury House. Its financial basis is still precarious. The grant which the Liverpool City Council makes towards the salary of the Youth Workers and the maintenance of the fabric has recently been cut. Money is raised by the Club itself, by renting accommodation, the club premises and the minibus. It is also financed by gifts from Old Salopians and by fund-raising initiatives at the School. Regular Sponsored Walks in aid of Shrewsbury House have featured prominently among other initiatives launched in its support.

The social environment in which Shrewsbury House is situated has changed drastically during the last thirty years. The high-rise flats have been demolished. There has been a consequent reduction in the population and open spaces have been created. The catchment area of the Community Centre has also been extended. But the Christian ethos which informed the Club at its foundation still permeates all its activities. Wide-ranging

discussions, usually on Tuesday evenings, still provide an opportunity for the discussion of ethical issues and choices. The community which has been built during the century in which Shrewsbury School has been associated with Everton remains as strong as, and wider than, it has ever been. Shrewsbury House is at the centre of it, but it is a very different kind of community from that which existed fifty years ago. In Everton, as in the nation as a whole, 1963 was a year which presaged dramatic change.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the hostel accommodation was filled with a stream of young Christian men and women, attracted to the inner city and the learning experience they could gain through helping out in the club, church and community. And the club in particular benefited enormously from the input and efforts of those people, maybe some 150 in total. As Gap Year opportunities have broadened and become more exotic, this factor has become less prominent, but the centre is still able to offer a unique experience for those keen to take up service in areas such as Everton.

And then there were the celebrations, which did much to strengthen the community which had formed round Shrewsbury House. John Hutchison, the Youth Leader, planned the 75th Anniversary celebrations in 1978 in the knowledge that the Club's tradition had suffered a severe break in the prolonged move from Portland Place. Accordingly he invited as preachers former Missioners, including James Hill and Roger Sainsbury, whose presence would emphasise links with the past. He made a great effort to attract to the celebrations recent members who had observed and would represent the traditions of the old location. (Sadly, a third designated preacher and former Missioner, Eric Treacy, who had become known as 'The Railway Bishop', had collapsed and died shortly before on Appleby station, while waiting to photograph one of his beloved steam locomotives.) A joint relay of Salopian masters and boys, with members of the Club, brought the best wishes of the School for the success of the celebration. The famous city-car, 'The Shrew', constructed by Ted Barber and the boys, was raffled to contribute to the purchase of a long-wheel-base Ford Transit minibus for the Club. A group of Salopians listened enthralled to the description, delivered in the broadest 'Scouse' by a Club lad, then a reformed character, of 'life inside'. In less dramatic vein, a large gathering of Salopian masters and other friends of Shrewsbury House, together with members of the management committee and Club lads past and present, assembled for a cheese-and-wine evening.

In July 1999 the twenty-fifth anniversary of the new building was celebrated with a Children and Young People's Day, at which Rt Revd Roger Sainsbury and his wife Jenny, Adrian Struvé and his wife Brenda, and Terence Harvey, great supporters of the Club over many years, were among those present. In 2003, 'the Shewsy' celebrated its centenary with a year-long programme of reunions, events and visiting preachers in St Peter's, culminating in a service with the Bishop of Liverpool, James Jones, in the Anglican Cathedral. At every reunion, former club members spoke of the impact the Club had had upon their lives, giving them values that held them in good stead, opening up opportunities they might otherwise not have thought of, making friendships that lasted, and building a good foundation for life. In 2013 a lovely week of events was held to mark the 110th anniversary.

The Club continues to serve the Everton community and beyond, and especially its children and young people. Henry Corbett succeeded Julian Charley as Warden in 1987. Henry's wife Jane has been a local councillor for the Everton Ward since 2002. Her work

and influence in this capacity have, in many respects, reinforced and complemented that of the Club; and the Club has former members, such as John Dumbell, as key members of the staff. The Social Studies courses continue to serve the School's Sixth Form. Five groups of twelve pupils visit the Club each year, and there are increasing exchange visits for plays and special events, with an annual Club weekend visit to the School in the spring, including a service in Chapel. On the School's Speech Day, the Club's archive group put on a display, with pictures ranging from the early years to the present. The Club, with St. Peter's, also continues to produce the community newspaper *The Everton Telegraph*, and the Shewsy works carefully, in partnership with other organisations in the area, to support and strengthen the Everton community and its families, for example with the West Everton Community Council, the Friends of Everton Park, the Whitechapel Centre and local schools.

In the 1980s and 1990s the Club contributed, with local residents and other agencies, to the transformation of the area's housing. It saved the Langrove houses, immediately adjacent to the Club, from demolition and then went on significantly to improve the housing conditions across the area. The local Primary School in West Everton is now Faith Primary School, a joint Church of England and Roman Catholic initiative. Such an interdenominational association would not have been possible when the Club was a Protestant boys' club. But from the 1960s onwards the Club has not only welcomed girls as members, but has also been an important agent in further easing the long-standing tensions between Protestants and Catholics, helping the churches and communities to work effectively together. The Club has been innovative, too. One notable example is the inauguration of an Encouragement Academy, formed under the leadership of Kathy Riley, a local club helper and qualified teacher, to help Primary School children with behavioural issues. So successful was the project that the City Council adopted the programme and implemented it across the city.

The Everton area has changed dramatically since 1903. Housing has developed from terraced houses with an outside toilet, first to tower blocks and then to a much improved housing plan, which has also recovered and exposed the great view from the top of Everton hill. Encountering, in turn, the sectarian problems of the past, the unemployment problems of the 1970s, the drugs problems of the 1980s, and, in 2014, the second highest child poverty figures in Liverpool, the Shewsy has consistently shown a way ahead with compassion and courage.

What is the secret of the Shewsy's success? The Warden, writing in 2013, suggests that it is not buildings, though they help; it is not money, though it is needed. It is the quality of the people involved. He pays tribute to an outstanding team led by Youth Leader, Dave Brereton, with ex-Club member John Dumbell as assistant, ex-Youth Leader John Hutchison as Chair, and Frances Croft, ex-Club member as Vice-Chair, Treasurer and one of a team of motivated volunteers. But there is one person whom he does not mention, namely himself. Henry was associated with the Club for more than a decade before his appointment as Warden, but in that crucial capacity he has served with total devotion for nearly thirty years, more than twice as long as any of his predecessors. Dan Nicholas, a Salopian who had visited the Club in the 1970s as a boy returned thirty years on in 2009, as a housemaster, with a Social Studies group. He noted that although the environment had changed out of all recognition and the problems which the community faced were different,

Henry and his team are the real glue which makes this community one large family and, as public political figures come and go, some bringing promises only, while a few manage to deliver something, the Shewsy's work is what makes the real difference ... it was the fact that the future success of many former members of the Club was attributed to the formative years in the Shewsy which really struck me.

Henry Corbett and his team are the current guardians of a long tradition. This includes not only his faithful and distinguished predecessors, but also laymen like Barr Adams and David Bevan, Terence Harvey, and, most notably, Adrian Struvé, whose long service on the Management Committee and as Acting Missioner and Warden, made him the rock of the Club in his time. In March 2015 a meeting was convened under the chairmanship of Professor Donald Ritchie to inaugurate and discuss the future activities of *The Friends of Shrewsbury House*, an institution and an initiative which hold great promise for the future.

The plaque installed on one of the Club walls says it all: 'Welcome to the Shewsy, where people matter more than things'. Long may the Club continue to live up to that motto, to the great benefit both of the Everton community and of Shrewsbury School.