

YMCA INDIAN STUDENT HOSTEL, LONDON

# Our mandate

To provide a home for Indian students and help new arrivals to become acclimatised and adjusted to the new environment

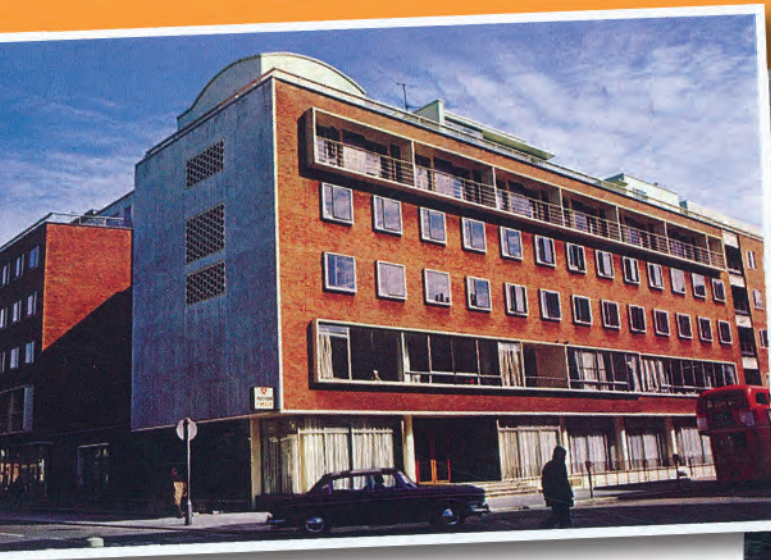
To provide a social and cultural centre with the necessary amenities and programmes

To offer the right atmosphere for study and interchange of thought and ideas

To foster among students representing the different provinces, communities, creeds, languages and cultures of India the spirit of fellowship, understanding, service to the nation and the sense of unity amid diversity

To help Indian students to understand, appreciate and imbibe what is best in the tradition and culture of Great Britain and at the same time prove to be worthy ambassadors of India

To promote goodwill between India and Britain and foster an international outlook



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Solomon P. Benjamin, Officiating General Secretary  
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# YMCA INDIAN STUDENT HOSTEL LONDON

Triumph of Faith

1920 – 2010



# 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

*Revised Edition 2010*  
Published by the  
Committee of Management  
YMCA ISH London

# YMCA INDIAN STUDENT HOSTEL LONDON

**A project of the National  
Council of YMCAs of India**

A journey with the Indian  
students

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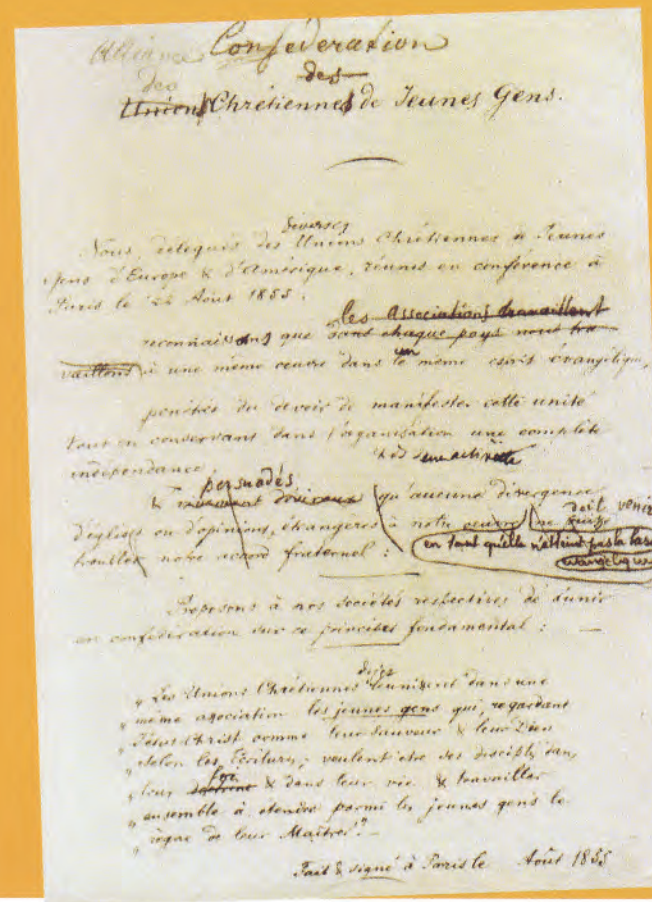
1920 – 2010



# Our legacy

Young Men's Christian Association is a worldwide Christian, ecumenical, voluntary movement for both men and women with special emphasis on genuine involvement of young people, which seeks to share the Christian ideal of building a humane community of justice, peace and reconciliation for the fullness of life for all creation.

The first YMCA was started in London in 1844 and today there are more than 15,000 local associations with 45 million members in more than 125 countries, making the movement the largest international ecumenical youth organisation in the world. YMCA aims at the overall welfare and development of spiritual, mental and physical faculties of the people without any distinction of caste, colour, sex or race.



## The Paris Basis

The Young Men's Christian Association seeks to unite those young men who, regarding Jesus Christ as their God and Saviour, according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to be his disciples in their faith and in their life, and to associate their efforts for the extension of His Kingdom amongst young men.

The Paris Basis is the motto of the YMCA adopted in 1855 at Paris. The original text is reproduced here.



### Sir George Williams

Founder of the YMCA,  
1821–1905

The Young Men's Christian Association started in 1844 when George Williams and 11 friends, all new to London, met together to help young men find fellowship – and God's grace.



Funeral procession of George Williams

George Williams was born in 1821, the youngest of eight children. When he came to London to work as a draper, he described himself as a 'careless, thoughtless, godless, swearing young fellow'. He became a devout Christian, businessman and philanthropist and by the time he was knighted by Queen Victoria in 1894 there were 5,000 YMCAs in 24 countries with 500,000 members.

A stained-glass window in Westminster Abbey honours him and the YMCA.



YMCA window in Westminster Abbey



# The story begins...

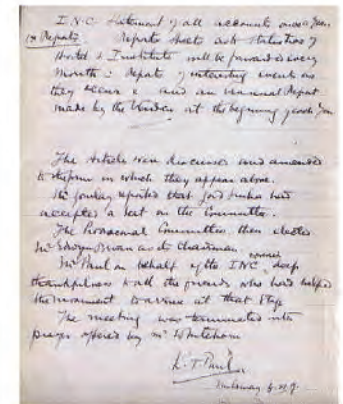
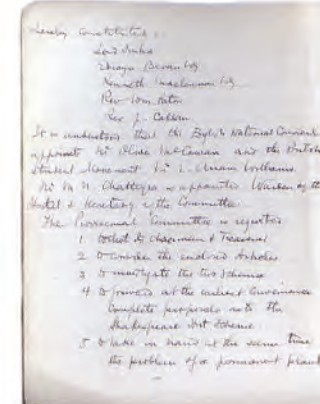
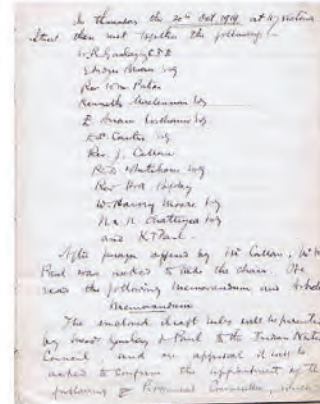
20 October 1919



K.T. Paul

On this historic day, like the 12 founders who met in the upper room at St Paul's Churchyard to initiate the YMCA movement, 11 men met at 117 Victoria Street, London, with K.T. Paul – the first Indian National General Secretary of the National Council of YMCAs in India – in the chair to explore the possibility of setting up a hostel to provide 'suitable living accommodation for Indian students in London'.

Many Indian students came to London after the First World War and Paul realised that they needed a centre where they could live, enjoy social and cultural activities and obtain advice about living away from home. As a result of these discussions the Indian National Council opened a hostel in London and sent secretaries from India to look after it.



Copy of the first minutes written by K.T. Paul

# 1919

## The objectives identified

- To provide suitable living accommodation for Indian students in London
- To provide opportunities for physical, social, recreational, religious and educational facilities usually found in YMCA hostels in India
- To afford facilities such that Indian students could entertain suitable British men and women and meet with them for mutual profit
- To arrange holiday camps for the benefit of Indian students in the British Isles

## Major decisions

- Provisional Committee appointed to initiate the project. M.N. Chatterjee appointed as Warden and Secretary of the Committee. Edwyn Bevan elected as Chairman of the Committee
- To provide accommodation for 100 students, 75 per cent of them Indian
- To be available for hostel residents and for about 500 outsiders, such outside membership being normally restricted to Indian students
- To institute hostel work outside London
- To start the London hostel temporarily in the Shakespeare Hut, leasing the property for five years from English National Council

## Men of vision

W.R. Gourley

Edwyn Bevan

Revd William Paton

Kenneth MacLennan

E. Ariam Williams

E.C. Carter

Revd J. Callan

R.D. Whitehorn

Revd H.A. Popley

W. Harvey Moore

M.N. Chatterjee

K.T. Paul



## Setting up home

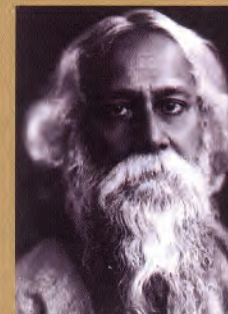
The hostel's first home was the Shakespeare Hut – so called because it was owned by the Shakespeare Society – in Keppel Street, Bloomsbury. The Hut's use was sanctioned by Sir Arthur Yapp, K.T. Paul's British counterpart, for whom it was also an expression of gratitude: 'During the darkest times of war, India came to our help. I do not know what we would have done otherwise without that help given so ungrudgingly.' He added that the hostel was 'a little bit of India in which England may be welcome and may learn'.



Shakespeare Hut, Keppel Street

The hut – an expression used to denote a temporary building – had been used during the war to provide a relaxation place for troops. The Shakespeare Hut, owned by the English National Council of YMCAs, which had done excellent work for their men who came home from the battlefields of Europe for brief periods of rest, was put at the disposal of the Indian YMCA. The Shakespeare Society charged a ground rent of £3,000 pa and the Indian YMCA spent £8,000 on modernising facilities, which included 100 beds, a restaurant, large lecture hall, billiard room and other sporting provisions. The Indian YMCA National Council also agreed to provide an annual grant towards the running cost of the home. This was the starting point of our service and the humble beginning of an exciting story.

## Rabindranath Tagore



The much-revered Indian poet and Nobel laureate visited the hostel and addressed the students. His message to the students at the time is still relevant and kept as a treasure and piece of advice to all students of coming generation:

*Be not ashamed, my brothers, to stand up before the proud and the powerful with your white robe of simpleness.*

*Let your crown be of humility, your freedom the freedom of the soul.*

*Build God's throne daily upon the ample bareness of your poverty.*

*And know what is huge is not great, and pride is not everlasting.*

# 1920-3



Lawrence Binyon

The hostel was opened on 4 February 1920 by Lawrence Binyon, the orientalist, best known for his poem 'For the Fallen' published in *The Times* in 1914 to honour the war dead.

*'They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old.  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun  
and in the morning  
We will remember them.'*

In his speech which commended closer East-West contact, Binyon said: 'Europe has this strong genius for action and India has genius for contemplation. Let us recognise each other's gift. Let England and Europe recognise the extreme value and power of thought and the things of the mind. Above all, let us try to understand each other.'

# 1922

## Reaching out

It was also the concern of the Indian YMCA to reach out to the students in other cities of the British Isles and hence efforts were taken to initiate similar work among Indian students in Edinburgh and Glasgow. An Indian student hostel in Edinburgh was started concurrently with the London hostel. It was followed by the opening of the International Student Club in Glasgow. The Scottish National Council of YMCAs of India financed and directed both of them, while the Indian YMCA provided wardens. J.S. Aiman, who later became the General Secretary of the London hostel, was the warden in the Edinburgh hostel and Shoran Singha, the warden at Glasgow in the early stages. Later the work was discontinued.





106-112 Gower Street

## A permanent home

After nearly four years at the Shakespeare Hut the Indian YMCA was proud to move the hostel to its own property in Gower Street on 1 October 1923. The freehold of 106-112 Gower Street was bought from Shoolbread & Co. for £13,000 and converted to a permanent hostel with 40 rooms, restaurant, library, recreation and club facilities at a further cost of £8,000. On 6 October 1923 the building was dedicated by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

## The lectures

### Preparing and training leaders for Swaraj India

The first two decades in the history of the institution were a period of Indian nationalism and Indian renaissance led by the great leaders of the country. The debates and discussions held in the Indian YMCA became the sounding board of public opinion on Indian affairs.

The major areas of work that were carried out vigorously and effectively during the first two decades were educational and social activities, in which the lectures stand out prominently in the work of the hostel. The fields covered by these lectures and study circles were very wide – religion, literature, art, history, science, politics in India as well as England, contemporary life, both in England and other parts of the world, etc. The speakers were outstanding personalities in their respective field and whatever view they may have taken of the political relations of England and India, the students greatly benefited from personal contact and conversation with them. The lectures facilitated infiltration of vision and ideas from the great leaders of the time to great 'leaders of India in the making'. These lectures became so popular that an average of 40 to 50 were organised every year in which around 150 to 200 Indian students participated. Many prominent Indian national leaders gave lectures.

# 1923

### Membership

The YMCA Indian Students' Union and Hostel followed an open membership policy and membership was given to Indian students and friends irrespective of their caste, creed or faith. As a result, membership increased considerably during the interwar period to an average of 500 a year. Alumni units were also established in all major cities of India which kept in constant contact with the hostel, serving as ambassadors of the Indian Students' Union in London.

### Widening horizons

The hostel's original objectives were broadened to improve the welfare of residents, including advice about university courses, assistance to students in finding jobs, introductions and references to homes and institutions and travel arrangements. Social activities continued to play a vital role in student life.



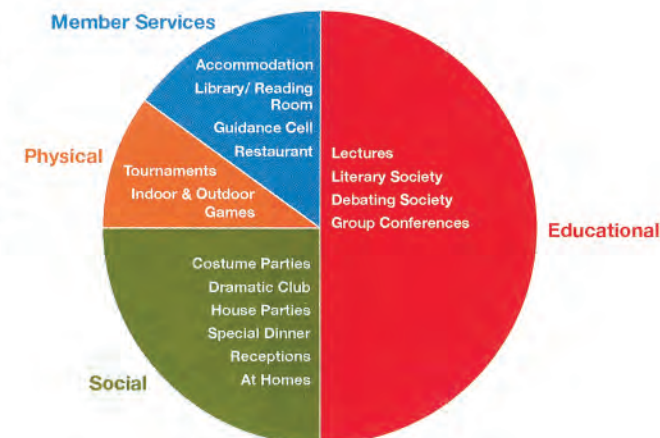
Coach trip and picnic to Broxbourne

## LECTURES

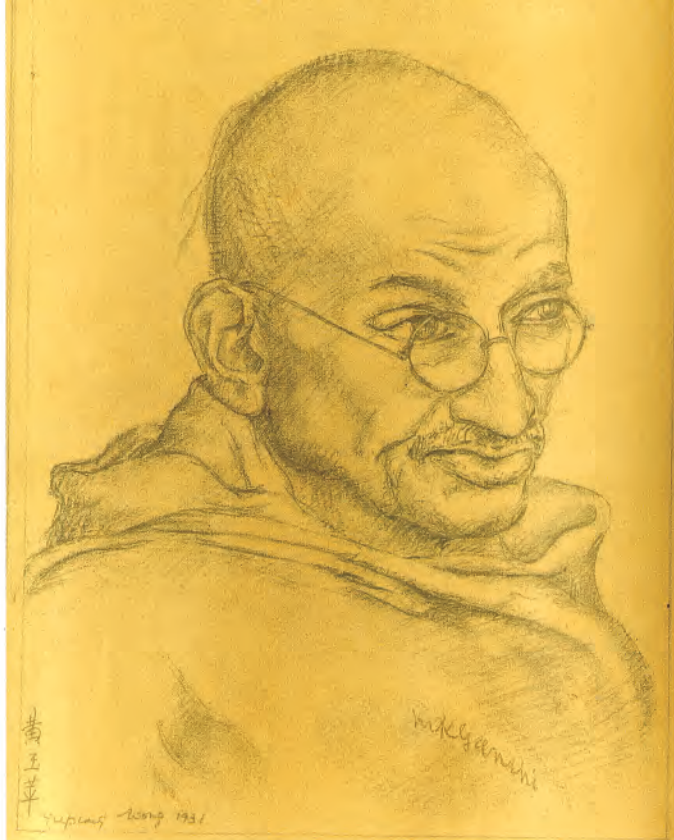
Lecturer.	Subject.
BAILLEY, R. H., B.A. ....	"London's Underground."
Do. do. ....	"The Story of the London Omnibus."
BAKER, PHILIP J. ....	"International Diplomacy."
BARKER, Prof. ERNEST ....	"East and West in History."
BAYLAS, Miss LILLIAN, M.A. ....	"The Old Vic."
BAYNES, Prof. NORMAN ....	"The Roman and British Empires: A Comparison and some Contrasts."
BEVAN, EDWYN, M.A. ....	"Western Civilisation: its Meaning and Prospects."
BINYON, LAURENCE ....	"Dante and Dante Translation."
BROCKWAY, A. FENNER ....	"New World Civilisation."
BURNS, C. DELISLE ....	"Nationalism."
BUNTON, C. R. ....	"Shakespeare's Comedies."
CHARLETON, H. C., M.P. ....	"Houses of Parliament."
CRU, R. L. ....	"The Soul of France."
DOYLE, Sir A. CONAN ....	"Psychic Experiences."
DYSON, Sir F. W. ....	"The History and Work of Greenwich Observatory."
FORSTER, E. M. ....	"The English Character."
GOOCH, Dr. G. P. ....	"Modern Political Ideas."
GUPTA, S. N. ....	"Indian Painting."
HARRIS, H. WILSON ....	"The Opium Problem."
HOWELL, BASIL P. ....	"Britain and India—the next Step."
JOSHI, N.M., M.L.A. ....	"Labour Conditions in India."
KENYON, Sir FREDERICK ....	"The Mediæval Historian of England."
KERR, PHILIP ....	"Democracy."
LANSBURY, GEORGE, M.P. ....	"Socialism."
LASKI, H. J. ....	"Reason and Unreason in Politics."
LINDSAY, H. A. F. ....	"Indian Trade."
PERCY, Lord EUSTACE ....	"Education."
POWER, Miss E. E., M.A., LL.D. ....	"An International Outlook and the Study of History."
PRICE, M. PHILIPS ....	"British and Russian Foreign Politics."

10

### Hostel activities at a glance







Gandhi through the eyes  
of a resident

(A portrait of Mahatma  
Gandhi by resident artist  
Yuping Wong portrayed on  
the occasion of the visit of  
Mahatma to the hostel in  
1931)



**Dr B. R.  
Ambedkar**



**Lala  
Lajpat  
Rai**



**C. F.  
Andrews**



**Acharya  
Kriplani**



**Annie  
Besant**



**M. M.  
Malaviya**



**S. C.  
Bose**

A few of the outstanding  
Indian national leaders  
who gave lectures



**Jaiprakash  
Narain**



**Dr S.  
Radhakrishnan**



**Mohammed  
Ali Jinnah**



**Nehru**



**Tagore**



**Sarojini  
Naidu**

# 1931

In 1931 Mahatma Gandhi made a historic visit to the hostel which welcomed the champion of non-violence and other national leaders who had come to London to attend a round-table conference and participate in the talks related to India's Independence. Mahatma Gandhi, Mrs Sarojini Naidu, Pandit Malaviya, Dr B.R. Ambedkar, M.A. Jinnah and other leaders addressed crowded meetings and the students had the opportunity to meet them. An interfaith prayer meeting was also conducted by Gandhiji in the YMCA.

## *My life is my message*

Mahatma Gandhi, the architect of India's freedom, was one of the greatest men of the twentieth century. Gandhiji's life was dedicated to the ideals of Truth, Non-violence and Love. A traveller, who came from Europe to India, was asked: 'What do you wish to see in India?' His reply was: 'The Himalayas, the Taj Mahal and Mahatma Gandhi'.

## **Tributes to K.T. Paul**

Kanakarayan Tiruselvam Paul, whose inspiration led to the foundation of the hostel in London, died suddenly on 11 April 1931 in Salem in South India. Among the many legacies he left, the Indian Student Hostel in London stands tall as the lasting one.

Tributes were paid to him by, among others, Mahatma Gandhi who praised his tolerant Christianity and said:

'His death, especially at this time in the life of the nation, is a distinct loss to the country'

The British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, and other government officials also mourned the loss of a great figure in the Indian Christian community.



## Dr Radhakrishnan's testimony

Dr Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, who later became the President of the Republic of India, visited the hostel and spoke at the Annual Dinner.

### Certificate of Affiliation

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF  
YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATIONS OF  
ENGLAND, IRELAND AND WALES,  
112, GREAT RUSSELL STREET,  
LONDON, W.C.1.

Duplicate

The INDIAN STUDENTS' HOSTEL Young Men's  
Christian Association, having signified its acceptance of the  
Constitution of the Divisional Union  
and thereby undertaken to conform to the requirements  
contained in the conditions governing affiliation,  
was duly affiliated to the  
METROPOLITAN  
Divisional Union of Young Men's Christian Associations  
on the SEVENTH day of DECEMBER 1937

Given under the Common Seal  
of the National Council of Young  
Men's Christian Associations  
Incorporated, this Second  
day of February 1939

President of Divisional Union.

Secretary of Divisional Union.



Annual dinner, 17 December 1938

# 1936

# 1937

# 1938

'My first night in this country was spent in this hostel. No longer did I feel a stranger; I felt that I had moved from home to home. To the new arrival the hostel makes the transition more or less a gradual one and for that we must be very thankful. This organisation is thus fulfilling a very real need.'

*Dr Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan*

Excerpt from speech by Dr Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, as Guest of Honour at the Annual Dinner, 1936

The ISH became an affiliated entity with the National Council of YMCAs of England, Ireland and Wales. The relationship with the English National Council and its Metropolitan Region continues.

The annual social gatherings were significant occasions in the life of the hostel where the concerns of the movement were explicitly expressed and the spirit of nationalism and unity among diversities permeated to the students and local communities.

"There was no better place in which young Indians could muster and strengthen the spirit of true nationalism than this Y.M.C.A. centre. Here they could meet in a corporate capacity, exchange views and make preparations, mentally and otherwise, for the work that lay before them when they returned to their own country. If, after their return to India, they still maintained their corporate capacity they would prove an irresistible power in tangible constructive work."

Excerpt from the speech  
of Sir Abdul Qadir



## Times of Crisis

### FACING THE CRISIS

If there was ever a time when this Institution could be said to have received an unequivocal justification of its existence, it was in the first weeks of the present war, when we were literally besieged by many of our countrymen and women for advice, help and guidance in coping with the situation brought about by active hostilities. Day and night we strove to the best of our abilities to deal with an endless stream of enquiries and requests regarding homeward passages, facilities for communicating with India, methods of transit across Europe, information concerning missing sons and relatives, financial embarrassments and numerous other problems that weighed upon the minds of our countrymen and countrywomen beset by war-time anxieties. At a subsequent stage we were glad to act as a channel

of communication for many of the young men from India who were anxious to take up some form of war-time service, combatant as well as non-combatant; and still later on, when our International Secretary, Mr. Shoran Singha, was asked by the National Council of the British Y.M.C.A. to organize welfare work for the Indian troops in France, we were only too pleased to place our resources at his disposal and to support him in every way possible. Mr. Singha was also able to visit some of our evacuee students in their new surroundings and so helped us to keep in touch with them and their problems.

# 1939-40

Excerpts from Annual  
Report 1939-40

Throughout the period of war, the centre was engaged in aiding Indians who were in need of help or advice. Refugees from countries invaded by Hitler, seamen from torpedoed ships, families stranded in Britain, men and women anxious to return home or to secure some form of war employment – all sought the assistance of the centre of one kind or another and the centre helped them to the best of its ability.

### Evil strikes

On 23 September 1940 the Gower Street hostel was bombed and three out of the four houses that made up the hostel were destroyed. Tragically, a student, Barindra Nath Sen, was killed and five other students injured. However, the remaining one house (112 Gower Street) remained intact and with it, the records of the hostel.



Remains of the Gower Street  
hostel

### Rising from the ashes

At a meeting held on 17 December 1940, the Committee of Management placed on record its clear and emphatic determination to continue the work and functions of the Indian Students' Union and Hostel in all possible ways. Consequently, the lease was taken on a large detached studio at 115 Gower Street (opposite the bombed building) for use as a temporary club room to do emergency service for the students and those Indian men and women who were affected by the war.

I hope that this new abode will form a rallying ground and meeting place for such students as are still in London and for those who visit London at weekends and during vacations. We are not without hope that we may be able to make use of 112 Gower Street, which alone remains of the four Gower Street houses. Both the Indian National Council and the Committee of Management are in full agreement that the Union and Hostel should be rebuilt

on its present site after the war, and that it should be rebuilt in a manner worthy of India and of the work we do here on behalf of the Indian Youth. We hope as soon as possible to start preparing plans for rebuilding, so that they may be ready when the war is over and victory is won.

*Excerpts from address of Sir Ewart Greaves, Chairman, on the housewarming function at 115 Gower Street*



### Hostel reopened

Accommodation was provided for 36 students in temporary premises at 25 and 26 Woburn Square, a building leased from the University of London. Twelve further students were able to live in 112 Gower Street once the necessary repair work had been completed. All the activities of the Union and Hostel started again.



Students and staff outside the Woburn Square hostel

# 1946

While India was reeling under communal tensions during pre-independence days, the hostel hosted a wedding reception for a newly married couple, Captain B. M. Chakravarti and Miss Asha Khan, demonstrating peaceful co-existence of Hindus and Muslims.



Hindu-Muslim wedding

### Nobel Peace Prize for John R. Mott

Dr John R. Mott, a great YMCA leader and friend of the Indian YMCA movement was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace on 10 December 1946. For 27 years Dr Mott was leader of the American Intercollegiate YMCA and later led the World Alliance of YMCAs. During the First World War he worked on behalf of prisoners of war and in 1939 he was the logical chairman of a 'War Prisoners Aid Committee'. His work to bring aid to prisoners of all nations and creeds was far-reaching and inspirational. The hostel celebrated the occasion in a fitting way.



Nobel Peace prize awarded to John R. Mott (second from left)





### Independence marked

The hostel celebrated India's Independence in solemn prayer, flag raising and a rededication ceremony. However the general mood of the students, who longed for the united Independent India, was sombre.

During the past year the world has witnessed the birth of the new India. We awoke on the morning of 15 August to face the grim reality that our ancient land was divided into two parts – India and Pakistan. There was no alternative but to reconcile ourselves with the inevitable. We met in solemn prayer after the hoisting of the flags to rededicate ourselves afresh for the service of the nation, to be worthy inheritors of the legacy bequeathed to us. Independence has come as a challenge to youth to rise and play its rightful part in the realisation of the vision and hope of the India of tomorrow, which shall rest on the secure and imperishable foundations of love and united service. The role of students in the new India, and the new significance attached to the student community, demands that whether they are training to be doctors, teachers, lawyers, engineers or technicians, whether they are equipping themselves for the arts or engaged in the pursuit of humanities or social sciences, they must be imbued with the spirit of service to the Nation.

Excerpt from Annual Report, 1947

1947



Sir C.V. Raman

### Sir C.V. Raman

The genius who won the Nobel Prize for Physics with simple equipment barely worth Rs.300 visited the hostel in 1947. The first Asian scientist to win the Nobel Prize, he was a man of boundless curiosity and a lively sense of humour. His spirit of inquiry and devotion to science laid the foundations for scientific research in India. And he won honour as a scientist and affection as a teacher and a man. Sir C.V. Raman is famed for his discovery of Raman Effect – the inelastic scattering of light.



## Students mourn the death of Mahatma Gandhi

The death of the Father of our Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, the author of India's freedom, came as a great national calamity and shock to the students. But his death presented a dynamic challenge to live up to the high ideals he set, to bury all divisions, to become one in the service of the Motherland, subordinating all sectarian and selfish interests to the larger hope and the higher vision of the new India. The students would never forget the inspiration of the memorial meeting in 1931 at which almost every Indian student in London was present, when they solemnly declared that they would do their best to put into practice the ideals for which Gandhiji gave his life, to work for communal harmony and selfless service to the Nation. To commemorate this event the members presented a portrait of Mahatma Gandhi to be hung in the library. The nucleus of the M.K. Gandhi library proposed for the new building was more than 300 books on India generously presented by S.L. Polak.

Excerpt from Annual Report  
1947-8



Woburn Square hostel

## MAHATMA GANDHI MEMORIAL MEETING.

(Beveridge Hall, University of London)

*Chairman:* THE RT. HON. LORD PETHICK-LAWRENCE OF PEASLAKE

*Speakers :* LADY PETHICK-LAWRENCE  
PROF. HAROLD LASKI  
MR. PALME DUTT  
MR. HY. S. L. POLAK

*Student Speakers :* MR. OMAR KHAN (*Muslim*)  
MR. F. CHOTHIA (*Parsi*)  
MR. V. B. KHER (*Hindu*)  
MR. K. SINGH (*Sikh*)  
DR. D. C. GHOSE (*Indian Christian*)

The following Resolution was unanimously passed and communicated to Pandit Nehru and Sri Devadas Gandhi :

"We Students, representing all Indian communities, present at the meeting convened by the Indian Students' Union (Y.M.C.A.), held in London, under the Chairmanship of the Rt. Hon. Lord Pethick-Lawrence, deeply mourn the demise of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of our Nation. We offer our sincere condolence to you and the people of our country. We assure you that we shall do our best to put into practice the ideals for which Gandhiji gave his life, and dedicate our lives afresh to the cause of communal harmony and selfless service to the Nation."

*I do not want my house to be walled on all sides nor my windows to be shut. I want the culture of all lands to blow about my house as freely as possible: but I refuse to be blown off my feet by any of them.*

Mahatma Gandhi

(These words of Mahatma Gandhi are inscribed upon the foundation stone of the hostel)

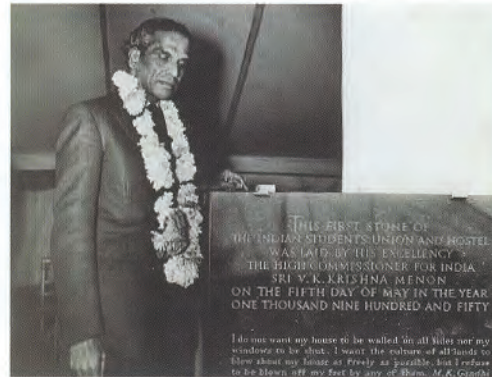


## Towards Fitzroy Square

The plan to construct a new hostel acquired momentum with the identification of a suitable site at 41 Fitzroy Square, the present location of the YMCA Indian Student Hostel. This freehold property was offered by the University of London in exchange for the Gower Street site as University College had a post-war plan for an extension in Gower Street. We willingly transferred our premises to the university to make room for the Department of Medical Sciences.



V.K. Krishna Menon, High Commissioner for India, laying the foundation stone for 41 Fitzroy Square



## New building fund

The cost of the building was around £150,000. Substantial contributions to the fund came from the Government of India, the provincial governments, the states of Mysore, Travancore, Cochin, Bengal, Assam, Bombay, Madras, U.P., Orissa, the Tata Trusts, Maharajah of Cochin and other individuals and trusts both in India and Great Britain. Substantial grants from the International Committee of YMCAs of North America and the War Damage Fund and compensation from the University of London were also received. The contract for the new premises was signed and the architect of the Dome of Discovery at the Festival of Britain, Ralph Tubbs, was engaged.

1950



Site of the new hostel – the dream begins

## The dream is realised







Residents of the Woburn Place hostel

In a year of notable visitors, the hostel welcomed Dr Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, Vice-President of India in June and General Cariappa, Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army.



Reception for Dr Radhakrishnan

## New building opened

The highspot of the year was the opening, on 24 March, of the new hostel at 41 Fitzroy Square by Shri B.G. Kher, High Commissioner for India. Residential and club facilities included 56 single rooms, Mahatma Gandhi hall, dining room, library and study room, lounge and common room, television room, games room and roof terrace for badminton and tea parties.

# 1951



Maulana Abdul Kalam, India's Minister of Education



Alexander Fleming visits the hostel

# 1952



General Cariappa with students

# 1953



The new building seen from Fitzroy Square

## An act of faith

It is an achievement, not only in bricks and mortar, of steel and concrete, but the triumph of an act of faith and of humble effort, of modest beginning, and of strenuous endeavour over the years.

*Shri B.G. Kher*



## Ralph Tubbs, architect of a heritage building

The new hostel at 41 Fitzroy Square was designed by the celebrated architect Ralph Tubbs who did an excellent job in designing and commissioning the building in record time. The *Architectural Review* (July 1953) commended it as one of the finest examples of contemporary architecture in London and Ralph Tubbs later said: 'The important consideration in the design of the building was to ensure that its form and scale related successfully to the existing Fitzroy Square, two sides of which were designed by Robert Adam.'

## Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

The first Prime Minister of India visited the hostel on 13 June – his signature appears in the visitors' book for 1953.



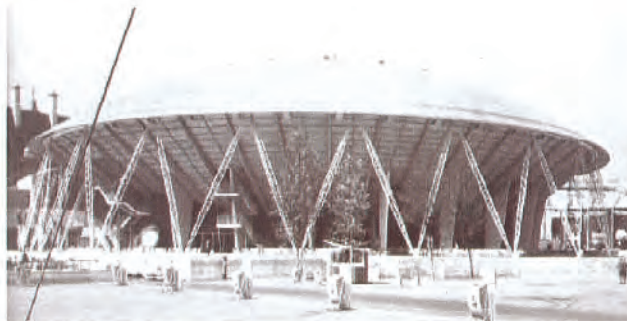
Nehru

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who first visited the hostel in 1935, was a leading star in India's freedom struggle and a valiant fighter for the rights of the people of India. All his life Jawaharlal Nehru was at the centre of the freedom movement and the mainspring of the progressive forces. As Gandhiji's foremost disciple, he provided the leadership, the intellectual rationale and the driving force around which the struggle for freedom unfolded. He

consistently strove for the awakening of India and the gradual build up to the democratic upsurge. After Independence, as India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru devoted himself to the task of transforming India into a modern state, firmly grounded on a democratic base and wedded to the ideals on which the freedom struggle itself had been fought – national integration, secularism, socialism and universal welfare.

## The Festival of Britain

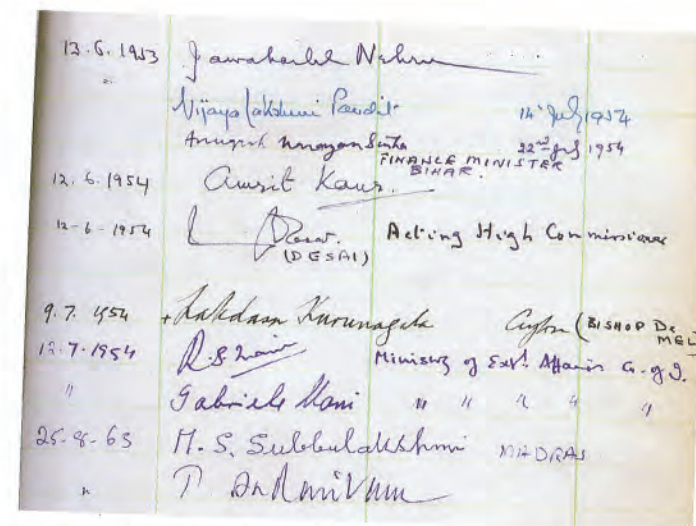
The Dome of Discovery, designed by Ralph Tubbs, was the most dramatic pavilion in the Festival of Britain and a remarkable technological achievement. It became the instant visual symbol of the Festival which was visited by 8.5 million people.



The Dome of Discovery at the 1951 Festival of Britain

## Mahatma Gandhi Assembly Hall

This splendid hall at the base of the new building seats 250–300 and was the first memorial of its kind, outside India, to the Father of the Nation. It is still a constant reminder of the religious tradition and cultural heritage of India.



A page from the visitors' book



## Royal visit



HRH Duke of Edinburgh  
visited on 10 November

## Mar Thoma Syrian Church

Several religious groups and linguistic churches sprouted from the platform provided by the Indian YMCA. Typical of these was the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, which initiated its first congregation in Europe through humble beginnings in the Indian YMCA in 1957.

By 1957 the hostel facilities were also increasingly used by various Indian organisations like India League, the Bengali Association, the Tamil Sangam, the Maharashtrian Mandal, the Kerala Samajam, the Indian Doctors' Association, the Asian Music Circle and Syrian Christians.

ISH still keeps the legacy by providing a meeting place for several service oriented and interdenominational agencies like the Indian Christian organisation, Andhra Association, Mahatma Gandhi Foundation, Indo-Somalia Association, the Philharmonia Chorus and a few churches.



This chalice, used at the first service, is now an exhibit in the hostel

Everyone who arrived in London came equipped with the address of the YMCA Indian Students' Hostel as one place in a strange land where help and friendship could be found and where people of Indian origin could meet. The arrival of the Revd V.V. Alexander for further studies in the United Kingdom gave us the opportunity of starting organised worship. About a dozen members of Mar Thoma Orthodox Syrian and the Church of South India joined in the first service conducted on 29 September 1957 in the YMCA Chapel according to the Mar Thoma rite.

*(Excerpts from the Church History)*

# 1955

# 1957

## The Philharmonia Chorus

Of the many musical groups who rehearse or perform in the Mahatma Gandhi Hall, perhaps the one of longest standing is the Philharmonia Chorus, a choir of between 100 and 200 singers. Their first rehearsal took place there in February 1957, and the Chorus rehearse in the hall regularly still, usually twice a week. Through its doors have stepped – and still step – the world's most distinguished conductors to add to the Chorus Masters' painstaking work those final interpretative nuances and polish, ready for performances in the concert halls of London and abroad. The Indian YMCA takes pride too that in the 1960s an employee, Suvi Raj Grubb, was invited by the Chorus's founder to work with him in the famous recording company EMI, and went on to become a distinguished classical music record producer.



## Welcome to women residents

An adjacent site on Grafton Way was bought from University College London to meet the ever-increasing demand for accommodation and the need to provide rooms for women students. Shrimati Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, High Commissioner for India, laid the foundation stone on 26 May 1960. On 18 January 1962 the new building was opened by Shri T.N. Kaul, Acting High Commissioner for India. It had cost £85,000, of which £60,000 came from the Indian Government (£30,000 as grant and the remainder as a long-term loan), and provided 56 new rooms for women. The annexe block was also designed by Ralph Tubbs.



The Queen Mother's visit on 3 March 1960



First women residents of the annexe with Shrimati Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit

## Visit of Indian leaders...

On 7 May 1962 the Prime Minister of India, Shrimati Indira Gandhi, visited the hostel followed on 14 October by the last Governor General of India, Shri Rajagopalachari.

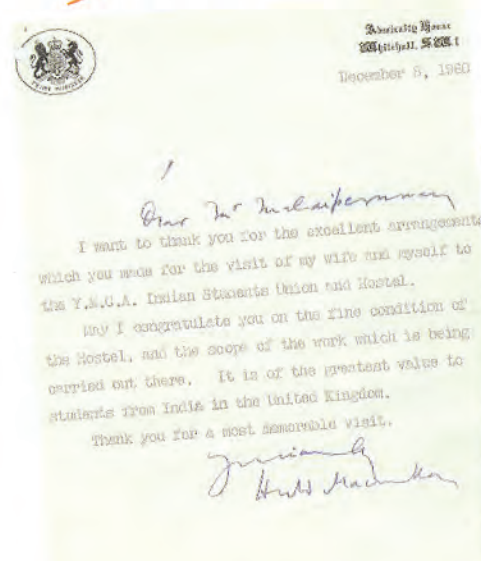


Indira Gandhi



Shri Rajagopalachari

# 1960-2



The Rt Hon. Harold Macmillan, Prime Minister of Great Britain, visited the hostel on 7 December 1960



J.R.D. Tata, the doyen of Indian industry, paid a visit to the hostel on 16 November 1960. The Tata Trust also made substantial contributions to the hostel-building fund.



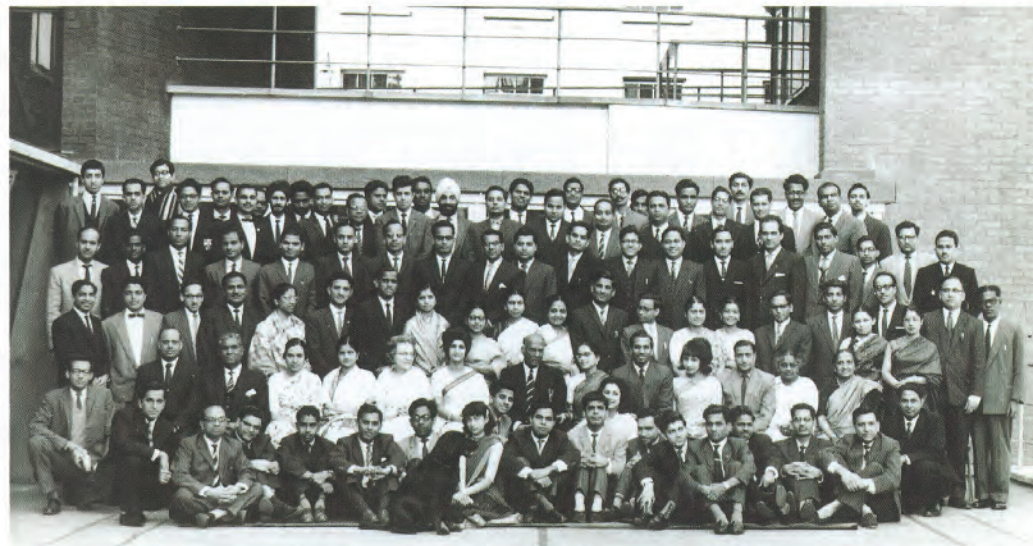
### ...and the British



Earl and Lady Mountbatten came to the hostel on 7 May

# 1964

The Rt Hon. Alec Douglas-Home visited on 19 November



Hostel residents in 1964

### Student power

When Fitzroy Square was originally mooted for the new hostel the student representatives were strongly against the site as the square was 'full of pimps and prostitutes'. The police took measures to clean up the square and when students moved into the new building they were so satisfied with the modern amenities provided that they raised £200 towards the building fund.

But conflict arose on the Council of the Indian Students' Union between residents and non-residents which came to a head in 1964. As a result the Students' Union was wound up and a student committee of six residents was elected at the beginning of each academic year with two co-opted non-residents. This system of student participation has proved to be a good one.



## The Queen's visit

On 24 February 1965 the hostel was honoured by a visit of HM Queen Elizabeth II who met residents, including women from the newly opened annexe.



In 2004 Yashuben Amlani, fourth from right in the photograph with the Queen, recalled this memorable day and her other hostel remembrances through a letter to the General Secretary of which extracts are shown below.

# 1965

Letter from Buckingham Palace commemorating the Queen's visit



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

26th February, 1965.

Sir,  
I read your letter of the 25th February and was glad to learn from it how much pleasure her Majesty had given to you, to the members of the Council and the students at the Y.M.C.A. Indian Students' Hostel.

Her Majesty commended me to say that she greatly enjoyed the visit and was most pleased with the excellent arrangements made under guidance for it.

The Queen also told me to ask you whether you would like her to give to the Hostel a number of beautiful cushion covers which, I think, were given to King George V at the time of the Delhi Durbar. They are made of velvet embroidered with gold and are of various colours such as green, red and purple. There are twenty-two of them and you would like to have them, I would be glad to send them to you.

Yours sincerely,  
M. A. Thacker

I had joined the hostel in January 1965 for only six months. During that time I had met some various good people. It was very enjoyable environment. Obviously there is always something to improve on but in general it was not too bad. Food was good.

It was good to meet many people at the hostel in such a short stay. Diwali was celebrated with variety show in which I had participated. Meeting HM The Queen was highlight of my stay. She visited when I was there and it made me more important. At that time only students from India who were doing advanced degrees etc at the Universities, and higher studies were offered accommodation at the hostel. I was in London for a very basic course..

Obviously there is much to remember in such a short time. I must say I had good experiences and enjoyed my stay at the hostel. Visiting it again all these years brought all the memories back. The highlight was 24th Feb 1965 when I had an opportunity to meet and greet HRM The Queen. Since I have met her again when I was awarded MBE at the Buckingham Palace in 1997.



राष्ट्रपति भवन, नई दिल्ली-4.  
RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN,  
NEW DELHI-4.

July 15, 1967.

The Indian Y.M.C.A. in London, in addition to serving the Indian students for over forty years, has been promoting goodwill between India and Britain which is very essential in the interests of the two countries. I hope they will continue to do their good work in the years to come. I send them my best wishes for the future.

# 1967

Letter of commendation from Zakeer Hussain, President of India



## Worldwide Church acknowledges

Our special relationship with the Indian YMCA in London goes back many years. It was in September 1969 that we first hired the Mahatma Gandhi hall for some of our London area activities – especially on Saturdays for our worship service.

Our Church has historically used its income from the membership to support our Christian outreach in both the electronic and publishing media, rather than invest in buildings. In London, where there is such high population density, the Indian YMCA has become our home – and our relationship has always been most cordial and supportive.

## Coming home

What is home? We like to say that 'home is where the heart is'. Special events make places special and attach us emotionally to a particular location. Sometimes these attachments come out of a long-term association with a place – like the place where we grew up.

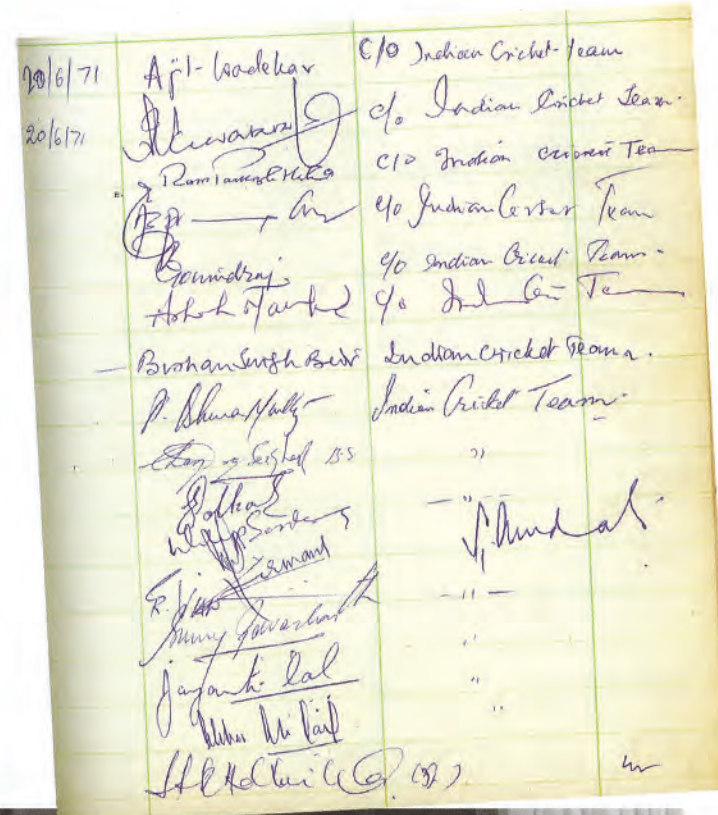
## Golden Jubilee celebrated

The hostel celebrated its Golden Jubilee with a concert at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on London's South Bank on 1 February 1970. The occasion was also marked by the opening of the Sir Francis Low Suite (Low had been Chairman of the hostel's Council of Management in the 1950s) and Golden Jubilee conference room on 11 May and a reception on 20 May.

## Hit for six

Sports fans among the hostel's residents were delighted when the Indian cricket team visited in the summer of 1971. Their signatures in the visitors' book are highly treasured. 'I am better out there, not for an after dinner speech,' said Ajit Wadekar, skipper of the cricket team.

Receptions for the cricket team and other National teams and sporting personalities visiting London became routine affairs for the hostel.



# 1969

# 1970

# 1971

*Thirty two years ago I laid down my life for the Lord, and the first place of worship I attended was at the Indian YMCA. In the years since then I have sometimes re-visited Mahatma Gandhi Hall and always felt a sense of 'coming home'. There is an emotional attachment, that's why.*

*I pray that everyone has benefited from their contact with the Indian YMCA, not just in the provision of shelter, warmth and food, but also in the ambience of safety that is rooted in the ultimate value system – that of Jesus Christ; that there is a sense of it being a spiritual home. And that all the future occupants of the hall are similarly blessed.*

*Nigel Kiernander, Member of the Worldwide Church of God*



*Indian Cricket Team 1971*

The national cricket team on the hostel's steps



**Harold Wilson**

On 21 January Prime Minister Harold Wilson followed a long line of British premiers who have visited the hostel.

Harold Wilson speaking at a dinner at the hostel



**K.M. Philip**

K.M. Philip, President of the World Alliance of YMCAs, the first Asian to be elected to the coveted post, was given a reception at Fitzroy Square on 20 February 1975.

Padmashree K.M. Philip speaking at a celebratory dinner





## Diamond Jubilee

HRH Prince Charles, Prince of Wales, attended the celebrations on 8 July 1980 to mark the institution's 60th anniversary.



President Reddy's Diamond Jubilee visit



HRH Princess Anne, Chancellor of the University of London, visited on 16 February 1983

# 1980



The Hon. N. Sanjiva Reddy, President of India, also marked the hostel's Diamond Jubilee with a visit on 28 July.



राष्ट्रपति भवन नई दिल्ली भारत  
RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN NEW DELHI INDIA

5th March, 1980.

I am glad to learn that the Indian Y.M.C.A., London, is celebrating its Diamond Jubilee this year. I had the opportunity of visiting the Students Hostel and was impressed by its endeavours to serve as a social and cultural Centre for generations of Indian students in London. On the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee, I send my greetings to all those associated with this institution and my best wishes for its continued progress in the future.

*N. Sanjiva Reddy*  
N. Sanjiva Reddy,  
President of India

# 1983

## K.T. Paul and Malaiperuman scholarship

The hostel initiated a Diamond Jubilee scholarship programme for YMCA Secretaries in India in the name of the founder of the ISH, K.T. Paul to give the Secretaries exposure to YMCAs in Britain and work of the ISH. Later, in 1988, another scholarship in the name of Dr S.D. Malaiperuman, whose contribution to the development of the Fitzroy Square building was great, was instituted.



### Major refurbishment

The major development in the hostel was the refurbishment work undertaken in 1986 in order to bring it up to the standards set for similar hostels in UK. The cost of this major scheme was approximately £900,000 and was implemented in three stages.

### Platinum Jubilee

His Excellency Dr L.M. Singhvi inaugurated the Platinum Jubilee celebrations on 4 February 1995. On 24 May HRH Princess Alexandra visited the hostel as part of the celebrations.



Princess Alexandra with L.M. Singhvi and YMCA leaders

### Refurbishment work again

Timely refurbishment work was carried out which gave a face-lift to the existing building and strengthened the hostel reserves. This paved the way to funding the building expansion project undertaken in 2003. The total cost was about £400,000.

1986 1991 1995 1996 1998-2000

### Indian National Council celebrates centenary



The commemorative stamp released by the Government of India in recognition of the contribution of the Indian YMCA for the development of its people

### English Heritage honour

In 1996 the Fitzroy Square building was listed by English Heritage and included in the list of buildings of special architectural and historic importance. The observation made by them on the building was noteworthy and something to be proud of.

'An early post-war design, in contrasting brick and stone with large areas of glass. The building is entirely modern in design, yet its scale and proportions relate well to Robert Adam's Fitzroy Square, then being restored. It is a monument to India's independence, then recently won, and was sponsored by the new nation's leading institutions. Its non-denominational prayer hall symbolises religious tolerance.'



## Jubilee building for the new millennium

A new block, for which planning permission had already been granted, was initiated on 17 March 2003 to meet the ever-increasing demand for improved accommodation facilities for students, scholars and trainees. The work added a wing to the existing building with 19 ensuite bedrooms and a modern conference room.

The new block at a total cost of £2.5 million upgraded the facilities in the hostel to provide cost-effective modern living facilities, additional space and facilities for educational, social and cultural events and expanded the hostel's scope to include other social and developmental activities.



Starting a new venture



Yet another milestone in the history – a triumph of faith

# 2003

The wing was named the Jubilee Memorial Block, to commemorate the Platinum Jubilee of the initiation of the hostel in London and the Golden Jubilee of the completion of the existing hostel building at Fitzroy Square.



Building construction  
committee members

# 2004

The Jubilee Memorial Block was completed in the middle of 2004 and opened by HRH The Duke of Gloucester on 29 June 2004.



HRH The Duke of  
Gloucester



## HH The Duke of Gloucester Visits

On Tuesday, 29 June 2004, in the presence of His Excellency Mr. Satyabrata Pal, Acting High Commissioner, the Jubilee Memorial Wing was opened by HH the Duke of Gloucester.



Hon'ble Union Minister for Human Resources Development, Government of India visits YMCA ISH.

On Friday, 14 October 2005 Sri Arjun Singh, Hon'ble Union Minister for Human Resources Development, Govt. of India, visited and delivered message. He was accompanied by the High Commissioner of India, H.E. Shri Kamalesh Sharma.

# 2004



HH The Duke of Gloucester

## His Grace Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church speaks.

On Wednesday, 22 December 2004, His Grace Dr. Thomas Mar Makarios, delivered an inspiring Christmas Message at the annual Christmas Dinner.

# 2005



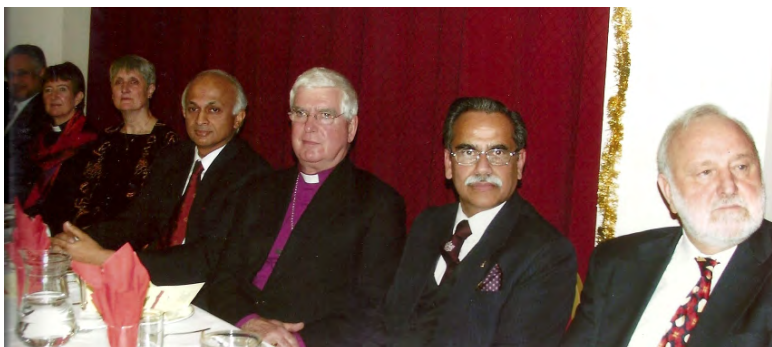


YMCA ISH, hosted a dinner meeting With local MP for Holborn and St. Pancras the Rt. Hon. Frank Dobson To felicitate his position on Tuesday, November 8, 2005 at the M.G. Hall



2007

The Rt. Revd. Dr. Thomas Butler, Bishop of Southwark at the Christmas Dinner at YMCA ISH on Thursday, 22 December 2005



### President and Secretary General of the World Alliance of YMCA, visit YMCA ISH London

On Monday, January 8, 2007. The World President, Mr. Martin Meissner And the Secretary General, Dr. Bart Shaha visited YMCA ISH while attending a meeting of leaders and professionals of YMCA England in London.





Ms. Medha Patkar of Narmada Bachao Andolan, a noted social activist visits YMCA ISH in October 2007



Workshop for YMCA ISH Front Office on Customer Care



Mr Andy Winters and Mr Solomon. P. Benjamin were the Resource Persons.

2008



Lord Swaraj Paul being felicitated by Mr. J. Alexander, IAS President NCYI



Hon'ble Chief Justice of India Mr. K.G. Balakrishna and Hon'ble Mr. Justice Arijit Pasayat of the Supreme Court of India visit ISH London on Saturday, November 1, 2008





## Know Britain

on Tuesday, February 24, 2009, An Orientation Lecture on "Understanding Britain (well enough)" was dealt by Mr. Mike Ashfield, MBE, Member of the Committee of Management of ISH. This is to further facilitate our students/residents integration into life in London and is in addition to regular coach trips to places of interest in Britain.



Chairman Dr. Philip John, Treasurer Mr. Abraham Mathews, Officiating General Secretary Mr. Solomon. P. Benjamin and Committee of Management with Secretary General of World Alliance of YMCAs, Dr. Bart Shaha and National President of YMCAs of India, Mr. K. John Cherian at the Annual Day Dinner.

## 2009 visits

Visiting German YMCA Team



Visiting European Alliance Team





Games Room in action



Mr. Abraham Mathews Chairman YMCA ISH and Mr. Solomon Benjamin playing with the residents, while inaugurating games room.



## Ambassador of India to France Visits YMCA ISH

On Monday, September 21, 2009 His Excellency, Mr. Ranjan Mathai, Ambassador of India to France visited YMCA ISH. Met staff and wished them.



His Excellency Mr. Ranjan Mathai



World Alliance Service Award for YMCA ISH, London on Monday, October 12, 2009, Dr. Bart Shaha, Secretary General of the World Alliance of YMCAs at the Annual Day Dinner, awarded a Service Certificate to YMCA ISH, in Recognition of the Outstanding Service to youth, students and community of London.





## Coach Trips

### A regular activity of YMCA ISH

YMCA ISH, conducts coach trips for residents to integrate them with British life and and significance of history. Many join the trip with commentary and guided tour.



Mr. Solomon P. Benjamin, Officiating General Secretary was invited as guest speaker at the YMCA College, Germany.

Danish YMCA visits ISH  
On Friday, October 30, 2009 the Committee of Management Hosted a dinner in honour of the visiting colleagues and leaders of the National YMCA of Denmark. The leaders exchanged greetings and fellowship.







### Dean, YMCA Springfield College USA, visits ISH.

From 27th December 2009 to 3rd January 2010, Dr. Robert Willey, Dean of Springfield College visited YMCA ISH and interacted with Chairman and members on the legacy of Basket Ball and Volleyball, invented in the college.

### Lord Bishop of London awards St. Mellitus Medal to YMCA ISH in honour of Service to Youth and Community in London.

On Thursday, December 10, 2009, Lord Bishop of London, Rt. Rev. Hon. Dr. Richard Chartres, awarded St. Mellitus Medal of Service to YMCA ISH for their engagement in Inter-faith initiatives and community work.





**90th  
Anniversary  
of YMCA ISH  
London  
1920 – 2010**



Staff at the 90th anniversary

**Officers of the National Council of YMCAs of India visit YMCA ISH London**



Mr. Rolland Williams (Sr VP), Mr Jeyakar Doss (VP), Dr. George Varghese (Treasurer), John Varughese (NGS) along with Revd. Johan Eltvik and Mr. Colin Williams

# 2010

**Thanksgiving Worship**



Revd. Samuel D. Stephens, Deputy President, World Alliance of YMCAs, delivered anniversary message

**90th Annual Day Dinner**

On Thursday, September 9, 2010, we had Revd. Johan Vilhelm Eltvik, Secretary General Designate, World Alliance of YMCAs and Mr. Colin C. Williams, Vice President, YMCAs of England and great great grandson of Sir George Williams, founder of YMCA in 1844.



Revd. Johan Vilhelm Eltvik with Chairman, Treasurer and Officiating General Secretary



### ISO 9001 Certificate Award

YMCA ISH, London was awarded ISO 9001 certificate to the YMCA to continue and strive for excellence in deliveries.



The Officers of the National Council of YMCAs of India visited the property and surveyed the facilities. The property also has 4 bungalows and Principal's quarters with car park. There are conference halls and seminar rooms.



### Birmingham Project

The former College of Ascension of USPG, is being explored by YMCA ISH & NCY. The property that spreads over 3.5 acres of land with well laid out lawns, can host 120 students. The Birmingham project will replicate services of YMCA ISH, to commemorate the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary.





1920 – 2004

# Chairmen and General Secretaries

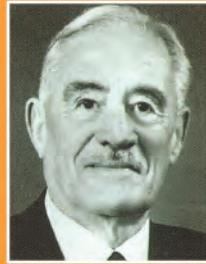
## Chairmen



Dr Edwyn Beven  
1920-29



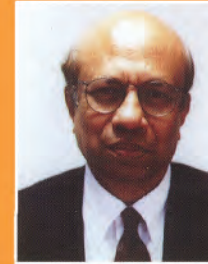
Sir Ewart Greaves  
1930-53



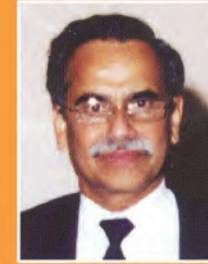
Sir Francis Low  
1954-72



M. A. S. Dalal  
1972-97



Mathew Panikar  
1998-2003



Dr Phiip John  
2003-2009



Abraham Mathews  
2010-

## General Secretaries



P.D. Runganadhan  
1921-28



J.S. Aiman  
1929-34



D.S. Chinnadorai  
1975-78

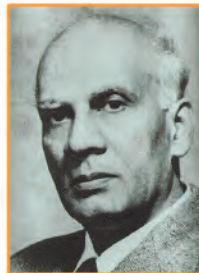


H.S. Raychaudhuri  
1979-84

T.D. Santwan  
1935-40



Joseph T. Thomas  
1984-88



S.D. Malaiperuman  
1946-54, 1960-65



K. Muthian  
1988-91

J.S.B. Abraham  
1954-57



Egbert Samraj  
1991-94

O.V. Alexander  
1957-59



T. Thomas  
1944-97



N.G. Joseph  
1965-70



Stanley C. Karkada  
1997-2000



Param Bhelwa  
1970-75



Jacob Abraham  
2000-2004



Anjan Mukherjee  
2007-2009



W. Issac Judson  
2004-2007



Solomon. P. Benjamin  
2009-