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New Church College Memories *by David Friend*



As the time of the Annual General Meeting of the New Church College, more commonly known as SOLCE these days, comes round once more, I'm reminded of my much earlier association with that establishment.

The College in my youth was located in Sydney Road, Woodford Green, in a leafy part of Essex to the north-east of London. My father, who had been Secretary of the College at some earlier time, used to take the family to daytime events there. I attended Easter Schools at the College on a number of occasions before I was married; travelling by bicycle, with packed panniers, from Uxbridge in the west to Woodford Green in the east - not a journey by cycle which I would undertake with enthusiasm these days in the high-speed traffic encountered on our roads now.

I well remember many of the 'students' who attended those schools - a great number of whom have now passed on - and also remembering how small my actual knowledge of the teachings of the church turned out to be compared with the majority of the other participants. Great fun was had, in addition to the more serious lectures, discussions and worship periods which provided a splendid basis for my later qualification as a Recognised Worship Leader and involvement with outreach for the church.

The College premises at that time comprised a very substantial three-storey building set in its own large grounds surrounded by mature trees. There was space in the building for a flat for the College Principal and room for a number of dormitories, a wonderful small chapel, and all the normal catering facilities. I remember the visits of the resident ordination students to lead worship at Kensington church as part of their training, and thus got to know a number of those who subsequently took up pastorates around the country.

So what's the picture of a flowering Rhododendron got to do with all this?

The reduction in the number of ministerial trainees during the sixties was such that maintaining a huge building for the purpose became too costly and so it was agreed that the premises should be sold and the College moved.

Hence, in the summer of 1970 or 1971, several years after I got married, the College held its final Garden Party at Woodford Green before being relocated to Manchester. All those attending were encouraged to 'raid' the huge garden and carry off a plant or two as mementos. Not to be done out of something long-lasting myself, I selected a small rhododendron to plant in my back garden - and there it is today, after more than 50 years, still a small plant, in flower at just the right time to remind me of the splendid times I was able to enjoy with the College at Woodford Green. How many other people who attended that garden party remember the event, and still enjoy their memento from 50+ years ago?