

I have decided to tell you how George and I first met - and to talk about our early days of working together. One or two people will talk about their later experience of working with him.

In 1969, some weeks after I had attended a 5-day course with T R Batten on 'working with groups', I remembered that Mrs Batten had suggested that I should contact a Methodist minister called George Lovell.

It was several weeks before I told myself that I had better do something about phoning him. I picked up the phone and explained that Mrs Batten had suggested that I contact him - and he started to laugh.

I thought to myself 'he's a nut case'. George quickly apologised profusely and said that he had at that very moment put down the phone from Madge Batten - explaining about me!

We fixed a date for me to visit him in his manse in Thornton Heath and he said that he could give me an hour. That was probably because he wondered if I was a nutcase!

When I arrived he took me into his study and I quickly realised we both had the same basic purposes in relation to the church.

After an hour I reached down for my briefcase, but George said "That's all right, I'll ask Molly to give us a cup of tea, come and meet her". I realised that I had passed his test! That was my first and exciting meeting with George.

Shortly after this, I invited George to come and meet my Grail Community. We were living then at Waxwell House in Pinner. It was a lovely hot day and I was delighted to see that the Community liked him and he got on well with them.

After that, George ran a 3-day course at Waxwell in which I was involved. I vividly remember feeling the whole atmosphere was buzzing with questions and ideas. I had never experienced anything like it before.

George suggested that I apply to attend Batten's 3-month international course in London. Batten accepted me.

As part of the course we ten participants visited George in his Methodist church in Parchmore where he explained what he was doing.

I remember one example he gave. He was working with a new women's group and he wanted them to decide what they wished to do by way of an activity. So he asked them for ideas.

There was dead silence until one woman said "WE don't know what to do - YOU tell us" and they all took up this refrain, got up from their seats and advanced on George. He said it was quite frightening as they pinned him against the blackboard.

He saved the situation by laughing and saying "If YOU don't know what to do, how do you expect ME to know!" A discussion followed and all was well.

As part of Batten's course, George showed us around Parchmore, talking as he did so. Batten interjected and expanded with valuable comments.

We were all very impressed and I was really glad not only to see George again but knowing that I would be working with him on several occasions in the future.

Some months after my 3-month course with Batten was over, George suggested that we try out the community development approach in a London Borough.

We chose an area that had several churches of different denominations and invited the local clergy to a meeting to explain our ideas.

We also explained that we intended to apply to various trusts for financial assistance - that certainly helped the local clergy when they knew they wouldn't be expected to finance the operation!

All but one of the clergy were keen to take part - the one who didn't want to, said firmly 'If we have any decisions to make round here, I am the one to make them.'

Soon after this, George obtained permission from the Methodist Church to become a sector minister, so that he could work full-time on what became known as Project 70-75.

I also obtained permission from my Grail community to work full-time.

We invited John Budd, an Anglican priest, and Patrick FitzGerald, Superior of the Missionaries of Africa in their training house in London. They worked part-time as they both had other work responsibilities. Together we formed an ecumenical team.

At one of our early meetings, we identified key people in the churches whom we thought would be in positions of authority and influence in five years' time. These we visited in pairs, explained about the Project and offered to keep them informed about the work. We also gave them a brief booklet and subsequently sent them monthly information leaflets on how things were progressing.

I remember visiting one Catholic Bishop and him saying "If the other bishops knew what you were doing, they wouldn't touch you with a bargepole!" Fortunately that did not prove to be true.

Once Avec was formed as a training organisation, Archbishop Worlock became a Trustee and would fly down from Liverpool for our Trustee meetings.

When Project 70-75 came to an end, we - mostly George - wrote it up and I sought a publisher. I remember one well-known publisher refusing to publish it - but asked to be given a copy 'as it would be so useful for our staff'!

It was subsequently published by the Search Press under the title 'Churches and Communities - An approach to development in the local church'.

As time went on, we ran courses both separately and together. Those courses for people working nationally or internationally we mostly ran together.

George usually took the lead and I chipped in with questions or clarification if I noticed someone who seemed puzzled. At times George would sit back and I would realise that he was working out something in his head. I would then lean forward and take over as group worker.

I must tell you briefly about our courses for missionaries - as they became an increasingly valued part of our work.

Colin Morris, from Mission House on Baker Street, having heard about our work, had asked George and myself to visit him to explain what we were doing. He asked if there was any way we could help missionaries. Missionaries returning to this country after years overseas faced a difficult adjustment: after being a big fish in a small pool, they now found themselves a small fish in a big pool.

This conversation led us to work with prospective missionaries before they went overseas, working with them on their return and again a year later when they realised some of the difficulties they were facing.

This missionary work grew exponentially with some ex-missionaries staffing the courses together with George and myself.

David Cruise and his wife were among the first batch of missionaries and also Peter Russell.

I'll end by summing up our relationship:

George and I were equally committed to our shared purpose;

We were both hard workers; and we enjoyed our work;

George had a better mind than I had, though I improved through working with him;

The work of each of us was the better because of our partnership;

I was better at phoning and approaching people to recruit them for courses;

I was also better at getting hospitality from various convents when we needed to work in other parts of the country! They were only too pleased to welcome a Methodist minister under their roof!

Looking back, I realise what a valuable and rewarding experience it had been to have worked with George for nearly 50 years.