

Rare stained-glass windows from Leavesden Hospital chapel on display 24th April

By Martin T Brooks

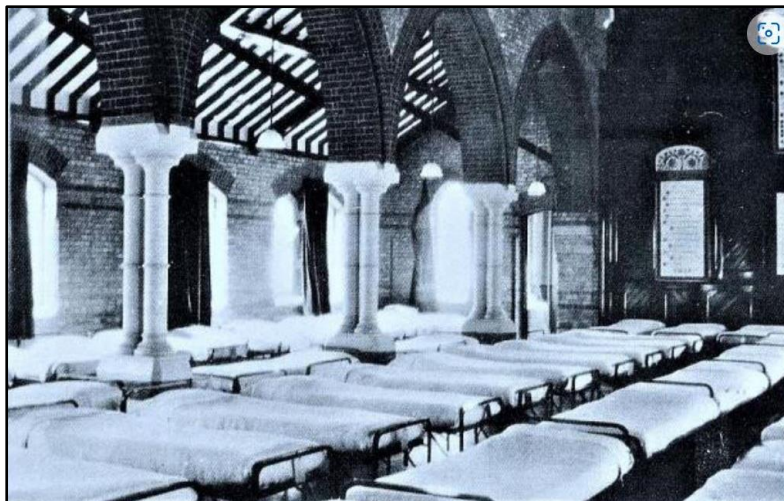


The three stained glass windows now on display again. Images: Martin T Brooks

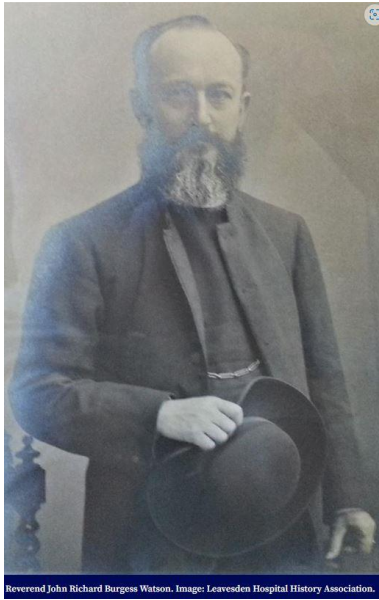
The Leavesden Asylum/Hospital, Chapel of the Good Shepherd was a Church of England church and was part of the original design and construction of Leavesden Asylum in 1868, although it may not have originally been called the "Chapel of the Good Shepherd" until later in its history.

Over its time, it saw use as a place for both staff and patients to worship, to say goodbye to people who had passed on, celebrate weddings (Dr Eric Shepherd's daughter was married there on April 6, 1974) and many christenings.

It was also used, along with most of the other buildings in the hospital, for the billeting of soldiers arriving from all parts Britain on their way to fight in both world wars.



Leavesden Hospital, Chapel of the Good Shepherd, during World War Two. Image: Leavesden Hospital History Association.

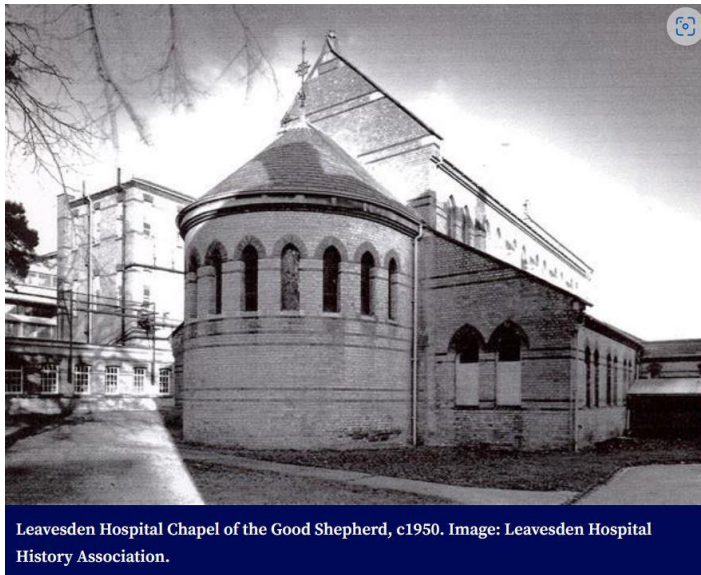


Reverend John Richard Burgess Watson. Image: Leavesden Hospital History Association.

The first Chaplain of the Chapel of the Good Shepherd was Reverend J Finch-Smith who served from 1870 to 1872. He was followed by Reverend John Richard Burgess Watson who lived and worked at the hospital from 1872 to 1902.

Reverend Watson lived in the hospital's Chaplain's House with his daughter Caroline, who became very well known for her use of fruit from the hospital's five-acre fruit orchard to produce and market "Parochial Marmalade". A plaque dedicated to the Reverend Watson, who passed away on April 20, 1903, still hangs in the old Chapel. He is buried near the tower in the St Lawrence Church graveyard.

When the Leavesden Hospital closed in October 1995, it was feared that the old Chapel would be demolished like the rest of the buildings on the site and that its 125-year service to the community would be gone forever. Luckily, the not-for-profit organisation DEMAND stepped in to save the old chapel and continue the cultural heritage of helping those with physical disabilities first started by the hospital in 1870.



Leavesden Hospital Chapel of the Good Shepherd, c1950. Image: Leavesden Hospital History Association.

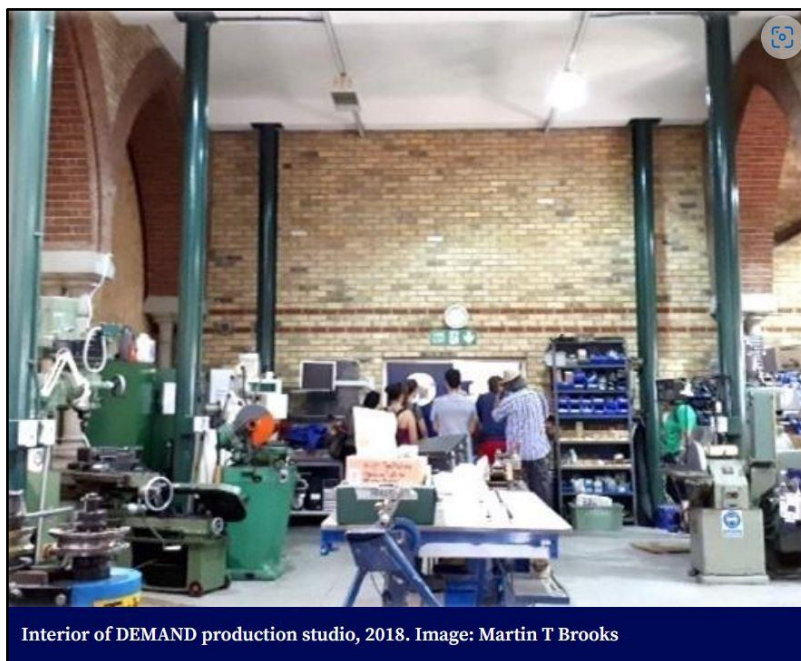
The idea for DEMAND (Design, Engineering & Manufacturing for Disability) began life in 1900 as the Shoreditch Technical Institute for The Furnishing Trades and renamed the London College of Furniture in 1964. In 1978, Lord and Lady Renton visited the college to receive a chair that had been made for their daughter who suffered from Rett Syndrome and became major benefactors of the college and its work. Lady Renton became the first Chair of the newly formed DEMAND charity in 1980 and set about raising the funds needed to purchase of the freehold of The Old Chapel to enable the group to have the stability of a permanent home. The charity took over the site in July 1998.



Plaques in memory of Dr Eric Shepherd and Dr Edward Hewlitt on display in the Leavesden HIVE, 2023. Image: Martin T Brooks

DEMAND's client's range in age from pre-school babies to retirement age, and everything in between with the majority struggling to cope with debilitating conditions, such as Arthritis, Cerebral Palsy, Multiple Sclerosis, Spinal Injury, and sensory impairments. DEMAND's services are based on a genuine need and are provided free of charge to people with disabilities.

Sadly, after occupying the Chapel of the Good Shepherd for the last 25 years, DEMAND is moving out of the building to a larger, more modern facility in Enfield.



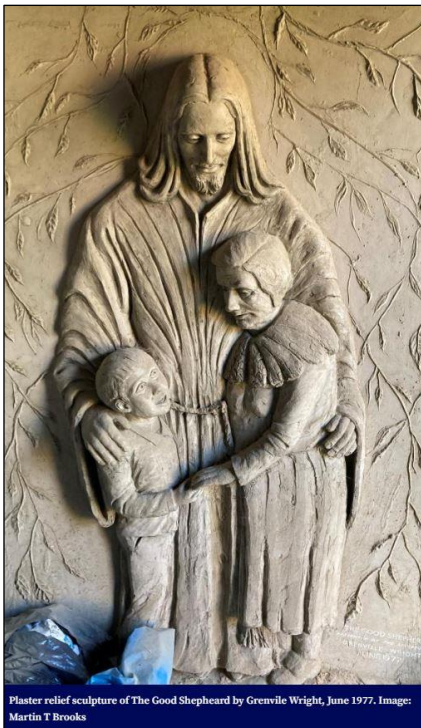
Interior of DEMAND production studio, 2018. Image: Martin T Brooks

But thankfully, not before contacting me to let me know that they had some "bits and bobs" that they thought might be of some interest to me. And boy, were they right. Some of the donated items were plaques dedicated to the memories of Dr Eric Shepherd who served as the hospital's Consulting Psychiatrist/Physician Superintendent from 1953 to 1981 and Dr Edward Hewlitt, Physician Superintendent from December 1951 to March 1963.

But the rarest and most colourful items donated were three of the original stained-glass windows which would have been seen in the round part of the chapel where the alter would have been back in 1870. The majority of the original stained glass window pieces, and there were many, had been stolen or damaged after the hospital had closed and before DEMAND moved in. This makes these pieces of 153-year-old-stained glass the oldest and rarest artefacts we have in our every growing collection of memorabilia from the hospital. These items are now on display in the Leavesden HIVE Heritage Centre for all to see.



The three stained glass windows now on display again. Images: Martin T Brooks



Plaster relief sculpture of The Good Shepherd by Grenville Wright, June 1977. Image: Martin T Brooks

There are also two other stone plaques as well as a very large plaster relief sculpture of "The Good Shepherd" by sculptor Grenville Wright left in the chapel which will all take some special care to remove undamaged.

DEMAND vacating the Chapel of the Good Shepherd heralds the end of an era and a 153-year history of the site of the former Leavesden Asylum/Hospital being used to help improve the lives of those living with physical and mental disabilities.

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