

It Can Be!

150 Years German YMCA in London
1860 - 2010

Bernd W. Hildebrandt

Published by German YMCA in London 2010

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First published in the UK in 2010 by
German YMCA in London, 35 Craven Terrace, London W2 3EL
Reg. Charity No. 250118

www.german-ymca.org.uk

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-9566779-0-7

Commissioned by the Board of Management of the German YMCA in London

Design, copy-editing, additional research and cover design by
Markus F. Hildebrandt and Martina M. Hildebrandt

Printed and bound in the UK by
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

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Preface

In the context of the worldwide YMCA Movement, the history of the German YMCA in London is both distinctive and significant. By having its roots in the English parent Association, the Aldersgate Street YMCA, the German Association has become one of the oldest YMCAs in London, contributing over many decades to the multi-cultural community in the Metropolis without compromising its national heritage, and upholding its Christian values in an ecumenical spirit.

Writing about this Association for its 150th Anniversary is entirely fitting. The subject had occupied me already for some time, concluding that this remarkable history should not fade from memory for ever, so I was happy to undertake this project.

As a former Secretary of the Association I have for thirty years been literally surrounded in my office by an amazing collection of the Association's historic records. For fifty years I have been an active participant in the events that are now the Association's past. But these were not the only reasons why I felt well placed for the task of compiling this book, even if it meant that autobiographical references could not be entirely avoided. I am fortunate in having gained the know-how required to research the wide variety and varied source material in the Association's own archive. Early diary entries and handwritten minutes are in old German script, readable today by only a relatively few with a special interest in this long out-of-use style.

A large amount of archive material comes from the Association's own publications, from 1885 to 1910 printed entirely in German. Minutes were also written in German until 1919 when they changed to English, but regular publications resumed after the Second World War, remained predominantly in German until the 1970s, when a balance between English and German was introduced. All this made the selection process and subsequent translations for this history a time-consuming task. In translations I have tried to retain the expressions and style of the original text as far as possible and some of the original German words have also been left. Translated texts have been marked * in the notes. For the sake of consistency some terms have been used throughout although they changed over time. For example, the word "Board" stands for all the variants in the naming of the governing body of the Association, over

the years called *Verwaltungsrat*, “Council of the German YMCA”, “General Committee”, etc.

The idea to present the chapters in units of decades emerged very early on. These divisions are unforced, with each decade revealing its own distinctive theme with often-unexpected turns of events and surprising developments. Due to the various elements of the Association’s work, a chronological narrative could not always be maintained within the decades. Some information, although considered important but disruptive to the flow of the narrative, has been placed in appendices.

Over the past 150 years the circumstances in times of war, but also in times of peace, of conflict and reconciliation, of changing political, economic and social conditions, led the Association into several difficult situations, where common sense proclaimed that a satisfactory outcome “cannot be!” But an astonishing determination to preserve the Association’s existence and its chosen purpose to “serve the Lord” through practical, every-day deeds, is much in evidence. The Association could well have been lost long ago, but ways were found, again and again, to turn, with faith and perseverance, adverse circumstances around into an encouraging “it can be!” This observation led to the title for this book. May past generations’ dedication to Christian service, combined with their sense of obligation to future generations, be examples towards a progressive future for the Association.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to several leadership generations of the German YMCA in London, who have preserved valuable records of the Association, reaching back to the founding days in the 1860s.

Special thanks for the input received from a number of people with whom I have been in personal contact in Britain and Germany, covering a period of over fifty years. They are listed here in a chronological order of the chapters for which they provided information: Margitta Keil, Karin Benner, Thea Benner, Martin Krapf, Johann Schneider, Frank Knight, Otto Deutsch, Eberhard Kalinke, Ernst Löwer, Martin Finke, Joachim Trieschmann, Karlfrieder Walz, Bernd Wangerin, Eckhard von Rabenau, Bill Leyland, Mozammel Huq, Friedrich Schmengler, Uwe Maynard, Franz Schönauer, Barbara Fiedler, Jörg Conzelmann, Udo Bauer and Eva Kleinert. Thanks to all members and staff who have been quoted when their comments are representative for a larger group of people or illustrate the aim and image of the Association.

I wish to thank the YMCA Archive, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

For permission to quote in some detail from C. P. Shedd's *History of the World's Alliance of YMCAs*, kindly granted by courtesy of the World Alliance of YMCAs, Geneva, Switzerland, I thank the General Secretary Dr Bart Shaha.

All authors listed in the bibliography I thank for the information provided in their works which helped me in my research.

My grateful love and thanks go to my family: my son Markus and daughter Martina for their research assistance, proofreading, judgement and ideas, in fact for all editorial and layout work necessary to produce a print-ready book; and to my wife Ilse, who with her exceptional memory and personal diary notes could verify many references to dates and events in our joint, over fifty years, first-hand experience in the service of the German YMCA in London. To her I dedicate this book. B. H.

Introduction

In Victorian England, London's world-leading economy attracted emigrants from mainland Europe in unprecedented numbers. As there was no State control on immigration, anyone could work and reside in England for as long as they wished. The largest foreign ethnic community in London, until the late nineteenth century, was German. Numbers increased from 9,566 in 1851 to 16,082 in 1861 and reached 26,920 in 1891. From there on until just before the First World War, London's German population remained at around 27,000.¹

That "Germans were well assimilated in all levels of society"² was an approving acknowledgement by the host nation. Apart from the German Court Chapel, which was funded by the Crown and under Anglican control, there were four Protestant church congregations and a Catholic Mission in the London districts where the German immigrants had found work in their particular skills and had settled near their place of work. These included the West End, where the houses of business attracted clerks and artisans, and the East End, surrounded by docks, the place of arrival for most foreigners to London, and nearby Whitechapel, where the sugar refineries were based.³ For the German clergy, serving these independent congregations, in around 1850, the assimilation process became a great concern. The pastors saw it as one of their duties to preserve in their congregations the theological and the traditional background of the mother church at home:

In general the following observations made by Carl Schoell (1852) applied to the whole of the 19th century: "The children of the Germans, especially those of the wealthy, are for the most part educated in the English way, so that the German families of the second and certainly of the third generation completely merge with the English nation. The consequence for the German churches is that among their members they have relatively few residents, far more poor than wealthy, more single people than families, and that in a short time the congregations change and only retain a few of the older members in their midst. Add to this another misfortune. For some time now it has become an almost general custom for the wealthy Germans to live in the suburbs of London and, due to the long distance from the German churches for the most part, to join English churches."⁴

As a direct consequence of the arrival of German emigrants in larger numbers, and the move of the more affluent compatriots into the suburbs,

three more German Protestant congregations were established between 1854 and 1887. Between 1864 and 1893 there emerged also three German Wesleyan congregations.⁵ Very little information can be gained from the history of London's German churches about the daily life of their parishioners. In a rapidly changing world with increasing secularisation, Christian congregations in general, and therefore also within the German Colony, were a minority. All the German diaspora churches were financially dependent on membership contributions and donations from the better off, mainly the urban middle classes.

On the whole, church activities throughout the land concentrated on the strict observance of Sunday as a day reserved for worship. When a Bill was presented to Parliament, attempting to tighten the prohibitions on the Lord's Day to an unbelievable extent, Charles Dickens attacked this in a short story, "Sunday Under Three Heads", published as a pamphlet in 1836. Just a few lines give some insight into the religious and daily life across the class divides of the time. Dickens describes the end of an upper class Sunday morning service:

The organ is again heard; those who have been asleep wake up, and those who have kept awake, smile and seem greatly relieved...

About a service in a chapel of the lower classes he wrote:

There is something in the sonorous quavering of the harsh voices, in the lank and hollow faces of the men, and the sour solemnity of the women, which bespeaks this a strong-hold of intolerant zeal and ignorant enthusiasm.

A further citation from Dickens's pamphlet conveys the conditions in Victorian England:

I would to God, that the iron-hearted man who would deprive such people as these of their only pleasures, could feel the sinking of heart and soul, the wasting exhaustion of mind and body, the utter prostration of present strength and future hope, attendant upon that incessant toil which lasts from day to day, and from month to month; that toil which is too often protracted until the silence of midnight, and resumed with the first stir of morning. How marvellously would his ardent zeal for other men's souls, diminish after a short probation, and how enlightened and comprehensive would his views of the real object and meaning of the institution of the Sabbath become!⁶

Most churches held a morning and an evening service and expected their parishioners to attend both. This was no different in London's German churches. Pastor Dr Carl F. A. Steinkopff of St Mary's, at the Savoy Palace, Westminster, commented in 1844:

...there is the great distance which makes it impossible for many of them to attend the service more than once on a Sunday.⁷

St Mary's history adds:

In order to move his strayed parishioners to turn back in fact, Steinkopff introduced edification and prayer meetings, and conducted a "heart to heart talk" every Saturday

night with 12 to 16 young men, mostly workers from the London sugar refineries... The concern was to draw the faith directly from Holy Scripture and introduce it into practical life.⁸

This was an early indication of an effort by a pastor to meet with hard-working German young men on consideration of a day and a time convenient to them. The appreciation of the little and varying time for leisure in the life of all classes of young men, the strict observance of the Sunday as a day for worship, and the drawing of the faith directly from the Bible and applying it in caring ways to daily life, were to become important principles of practise throughout the nineteenth century history of the German YMCA in London.

At the time, the emerging *Jünglingsvereine* (associations of Christian young men) differed greatly from place to place, country to country. In Germany, the initiatives and leadership came, not exclusively but to a large extent, from Protestant pastors believing in the need for an “Inner Mission” that confronts the social concerns of the time. “The church of the Faith knows the calling for a church of Deeds.”⁹ Emphasis was put to varying degree on mission, spiritual improvement, edification, education, welfare, self-help, solidarity and, not least, on pastoral care. One of the important services the *Jünglingsvereine* became known to provide were *Herbergen* (hostels) for young artisans and apprentices sent into the world by their guilds for several years to lead a nomadic life, as journeymen, in order to improve their skills and become masters in their trade:

This provision of Christian homes for young men (out of which has grown the immense network of “homes”, “hostels”, “dormitories”, and YMCA hotels which now encircle the globe), and the emphasis of the importance of national organization with a national journal, were among Germany’s unique contributions in these formative days of the World Movement.¹⁰

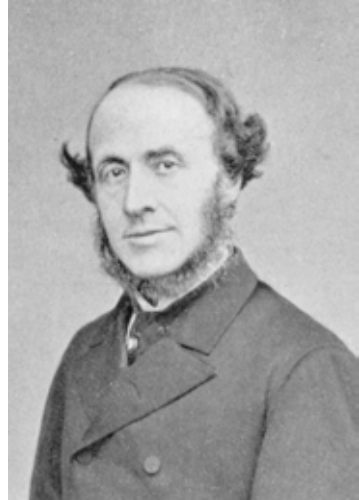
In Victorian England, especially in the City of London, the young professional men lived in very different circumstances from the young men constantly on the move on the Continent. William Edwyn Shipton gave a vivid portrayal (to the first YMCA World’s Conference in Paris of 1855) of the situation in the years preceding the founding of the Young Men’s Christian Association in London:

There were 150,000 young men living in London – these were either clerks in banks, counting-houses, or in the offices of professional men; or assistants in the various departments of wholesale and retail trade. By far the greater number lived in the houses of business in which they were employed. They commenced their labour from seven to nine in the morning and closed it from nine to eleven in the evening, in the most favourable seasons and neighbourhoods; while at times the toil of the day did not end till long after midnight, and the duties of the following day were resumed at six o’clock... The domestic apartments were small and badly ventilated. Several slept in the same room, and of the juniors, some occupied the same bed... The necessary rule of commercial houses forbade the visit and counsels of any minister or religious agent... Sad indeed is the picture, yet it is not overdrawn.¹¹

In London, as in other English towns north and south, devout young laymen from diverse denominational backgrounds took action. Twelve young men met in George Williams's bedroom, at Hitchcock and Rogers drapery establishment, 72 St Paul's Church Yard, for prayer and Bible reading. So, history places the beginning of the Young Men's Christian Association in the City of London:

Failing other records the minutes may be said to exist in the following entry in the diary of Edward Valentine: "Thursday, June 6, 1844, met in G. Williams's room for the purpose of forming a society, the object of which is to influence religious young men to spread the Redeemer's Kingdom amongst those by whom they are surrounded".¹²

By that time the movement had already spread to another large drapery business in the West End. A second meeting at which twenty were present was duly held "for the purpose of carrying into effect the system of introducing religious service into drapery establishments throughout the Metropolis", and thus was started a service of weekly gatherings held regularly throughout the early days of the Association.¹³



George Williams

For a movement like this, it was truly the fullness of time. England in the years from the accession of Queen Victoria in 1837 to the time of the Great Exhibition in London in 1851 passed through a period of bloodless but radical social revolution. The YMCA itself was but one of many new socio-religious movements which symbolized the change that was taking place in the social structure of English life. It was quite as much an expression of the changes as it was a response to the needs of young men.¹⁴

After the first meeting, a room was rented at St Martin's Coffee House in a court on the south side of Ludgate Hill and within a few weeks the meetings were held at a large room at Radley's Hotel in Bridge Street, Blackfriars. Radley's Hotel became the headquarters until 1849. By 1846 prayer meetings and Bible classes were started in Islington, Pimlico, Southwark and Whitechapel. In the first ten years the Association had outgrown building after building: Radley's Hotel, Serjeant's Inn in Fleet Street, and Gresham Street. In 1854 the lease was purchased for new premises at 165 Aldersgate Street, formerly occupied by the City of London Literary and Scientific Institute: "The Aldersgate Street building was in size and equipment a notable advance on anything hitherto attempted by the Association..."¹⁵

The Ninth Report of the London YMCA of 1853 mentions the efforts made to relate programmes to the specific problems of young men "...at a time when the inquiring spirit to so large a degree characterises young men."¹⁶

The first contact between the YMCA in London and the *Jünglingsvereine* in Germany was established through the initiative of Pastor Gerhard Dürselen of Elberfeld. In September 1854 the YMCA was invited to send a delegate to the *Kirchentag* (German Church Assembly) in Frankfurt. If there was no earlier contact – and there seems to be no record of any – then a *Jünglingsverein* of German immigrants in London, founded as early as 1846, was unaware of the English YMCA, founded only two years earlier.¹⁷ It was, however, in correspondence with the Elberfeld *Jünglingsverein*, which fulfilled the role of parental organisation to German-speaking Christian societies in other countries.

Evidence of the existence of this early *Jünglingsverein* in London is supported by a reference to London in an *Aufruf an die christlichen Handwerker- und Jünglingsvereine* (Appeal to the Christian artisan and young men's associations). This originated in 1847 from the *Jünglingsvereine* in Berlin and other towns in the east of Germany, to establish contact between each other for the mutual benefit of young people, especially the young journeymen, who moved from town to town and country to country:

It is uplifting for us to know that in the faraway places abroad, where Germans live together, like Paris, London, Constantinople, exist Associations to which we feel a cordial spiritual nearness. Contrary, in our German Fatherland, between Basel, Bremen and Hamburg, between the Rhine and Königsberg in Prussia, for not a few *Vereine*, who aim with us at the same objectives, we are sadly still far.¹⁸

This appeal for closer contact did not find the hoped for resonance. Only Elberfeld answered, and in nearby Ronsdorf the *Jünglingsverein* reacted by publishing the first German Association paper, the *Jünglingsbote*. “It was the first Association journal to be published by any of the Movements which joined together in 1855 to create the World's Alliance.”¹⁹ A suggestion in the *Jünglingsbote* led in 1848 to a meeting in Elberfeld of delegates from nine *Jünglingsvereine*. They formed the *Rheinisch-Westphälische Jünglingsbund*, which became a model for other regional alliances in Germany.²⁰ Through their president, Pastor Gerhard Dürselen, the *Bund* encouraged the American, Dutch, German-Swiss and French Associations to follow the Elberfeld example and form themselves into Alliances. The advice was given on first-hand experience in such an Alliance:

Thus we see that Elberfeld was earnestly trying to aid in creating in other countries effective national or regional unions as a basis for wider international relationship among the Young Men's Christian Associations.²¹

The *Jünglingsverein* in London (of 1846) had the patronage of The Queen and other high dignitaries:

Its aim is described as “mutual edification in the leisure evening hours after work, educational lectures, perfecting of the English language, mutual support and help of the lonely German young men”. On December 15, 1850, the *Jünglingsbote* No. 24 published further news of this German Association in London, giving its address

as 30 Church Street, Soho. "This Association is already four years old... it was first intended for the western part of the town where many German artisans, mechanics, and artists live... but the great distances render regular attendance rather difficult".²²

Here also, as with the German church congregations, distances and transport were a real issue. By 1840 horse buses were the main public transport, but not affordable by the average worker in London. Only in 1860 did construction of London's first underground railway start, and the first horse tram experiment was made in 1861, lasting six months.²³ It is clear that distance was one of the reasons why this early *Jünglingsverein* may have been relatively short-lived. It is not mentioned again. Instead, the Twelfth Report of the London YMCA (1856-7) refers to another attempt to establish a *Jünglingsverein* in London:

A meeting established during the year for young German residents in London, originated by a native of German Switzerland. This German Union is already in correspondence with the *Jünglingsvereine* of Germany and German Switzerland." The German Swiss referred to was Jacob Steiger of Herisau, a wealthy merchant with many foreign contacts. The Elberfeld Minutes of December 4, 1855, mention the receipt of a letter from Steiger who "wishes to form a *Verein* amongst the German artisans in London."²⁴

There is no evidence that either of the before-mentioned *Jünglingsvereine* still existed by 1860. As the later reports from the German YMCA in London show, attempts to establish Association work amongst the German artisans and related classes proved very difficult. Even when external conditions seemed favourable and resident leadership was in place, it was not possible to establish a viable German Association in the West End, and one in the East End led an unstable existence.

There was consensus between the London YMCA at Aldersgate Street and the *Jünglingsbund* at Elberfeld that there was no difference in their respective Christian aims and purpose, but in approach and organisation the differences were considerable. These differences came as no surprise to the Elberfeld Committee, because they existed already between Associations within Germany. At the first World's Conference of YMCAs in Paris in 1855, Düsseldorf, as one of the four delegates representing the German *Jünglingsvereine*, explained to the conference:

Our brethren in the South do not admit to their Associations the unconverted, and restrict their aim to the mutual edification of their own members. We judge differently in this matter. Our eyes are upon the thousands who are living "without God in the world". The miseries of the crowds without attract our notice. We wish to do a Samaritan's work amongst them... Nevertheless, the centre or kernel of our Association is always distinctively Christian, and the committees are composed entirely of decided Christians.²⁵

History shows that the German YMCA in London went through a transition from the former to the latter concept described in the above statement.

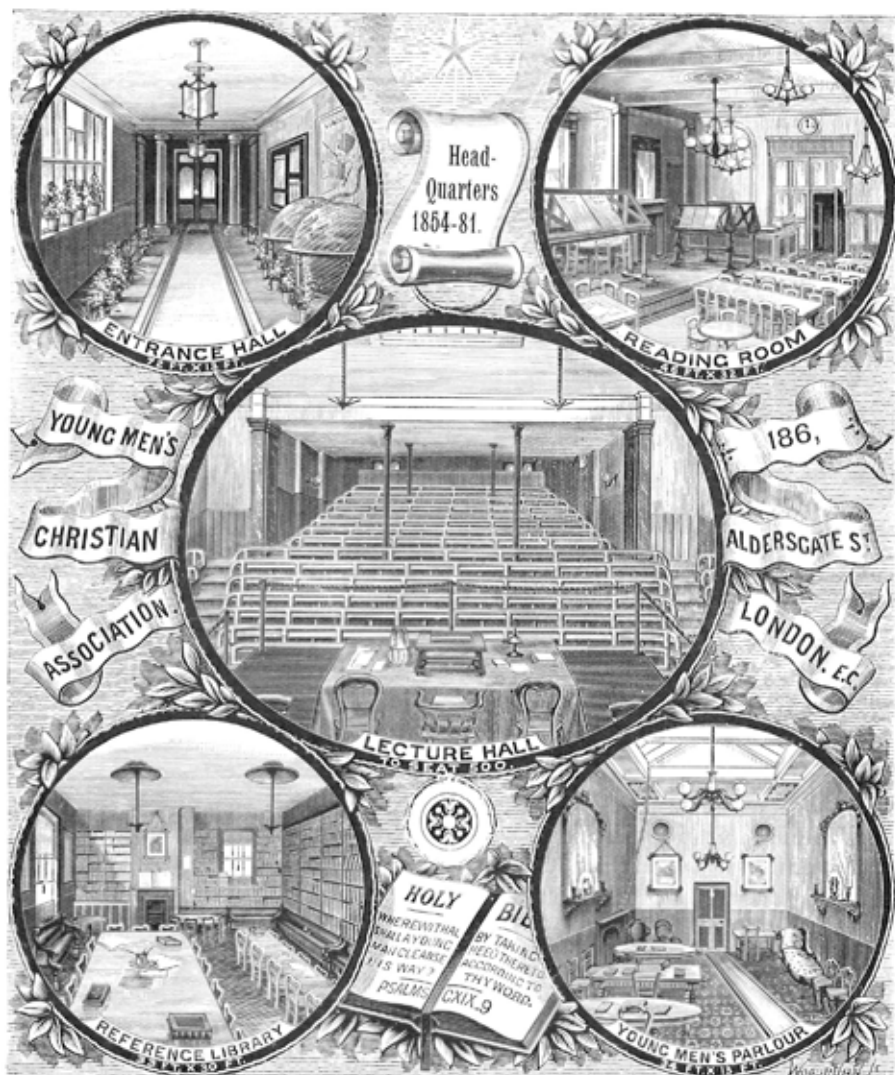
The delegates to the Paris Conference of 1855 formulated a “fundamental principle” for the Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations which became known as the “Paris Basis”:

The Young Men’s Christian Associations seek 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 doctrine and in their life, and to associate their efforts for the extension of His Kingdom amongst young men.²⁶

The Conference added to this fundamental principle three further statements. The first one was of great importance. It opened the way for the *Rheinisch-Westfälische Jünglingsbund*, which was not willing to change its membership principles, to become a member of the World’s Alliance. The paragraph reads:

Any differences of opinion on other subjects, however important in themselves, but not embraced by the specific designs of the Associations, shall not interfere with the harmonious relations of the confederated Societies.²⁷

This addition to the Paris Basis gave individual Associations the freedom to arrange their work in ways most fitting to their local needs. Throughout the history of the German YMCA in London, this flexibility is most evident and it remains relevant to the present day.



YMCA Headquarters, 186 Aldersgate Street (formerly no. 165)

Chapter One : 1860s

This is initially the story of a small group of young German and (German-speaking) Swiss merchants, who, after completing their business training at home, were venturing out into the world. Following the lure of London, the great centre of commerce, they came to improve their English language skills and to broaden their knowledge in the world of business. In their own words:

We were looking for employment in the office of an experienced merchant or banker, to learn from him good business sense, business composure, the art of making money.¹

In the autumn of 1859 Ernst Klemm, an engineer from Schleswig-Holstein, came to London aged 23. He came prepared with letters of introduction from his father to some of his old English friends and to Pastor Theodor Kübler at St Paul's, the German Reformed Church in Hoopers Square, Whitechapel. All evidence indicates that Ernst Klemm came from a devout middle class family, whose "commitment to the Christian faith was inextricably woven into the texture of daily living."²

One of Klemm's first visits was to Pastor Kübler, who welcomed him cordially and recommended to him, there and then, the Young Men's Christian Association in Aldersgate Street. On the following Sunday at 3 p.m. he went to Aldersgate Street, where he found that about 300 young men, mainly commercial clerks, were attending Secretary Shipton's popular "Conversational Bible Class". Over tea he straight away made several valuable contacts:



Aldersgate Street YMCA

For me everything was so attractive that I rarely missed a Sunday in the Association. A few weeks later, around the beginning of December, Shipton's assistant approached me after the meeting and asked if he could introduce to me several German and Swiss gentlemen present in the hall. Naturally I agreed with pleasure and a few minutes later stood face to face with the young Swiss Arwed Schieß, not foreseeing that this would be the beginning of a life-long, happy friendship.³

Klemm describes Arwed Schieß:

He was a character of rare integrity and energy, a man childlike in his piety. What he deemed right, he carried out with great, never wavering sincerity. And no fear of men or complaisance could make him leave the right path. He hated nothing more than praise, which he believed unmerited. What he was for me, God the Lord alone knows, and as for me, as a young man in London, so he has later in his homeland, become a true and active friend and helper.⁴

Through the recommendation of Shipton, two more Swiss and three Germans from Wuppertal joined up with the two friends and in the spring of 1860 were encouraged by Shipton to form a *Deutscher Jünglingsverein* as a Branch of the Association in Aldersgate Street. When the first members of this *Jünglingsverein* applied for membership in the English Association, they were asked to give information on their conversion to God on the application form. This they refused, and the Secretary showed understanding and did not insist on this requirement. That their refusal came not out of a lack of faith they showed in their general conduct. They were given a basement room for their meetings and had the benefit of all the services and privileges the Association offered their members.⁵ They used the reading room with its numerous daily newspapers, weekly and monthly magazines, the library, and joined the various educational classes and, of course, the Bible classes which Secretary Shipton presented so attractively to the young people. In addition they had their own regular weekly meetings on Fridays. These centred on the contemplation of a Bible text. On Sunday mornings they attended the German church service nearest to their lodgings. After lunch they met at the Bible class at Aldersgate Street and agreed over tea which of the prominent English preachers they wanted to hear at an evening service.⁶

Although being a self-managing *Verein*, with Klemm as president, the members were on a par with the members of the English Association. Their membership too was based on the Rules of the London YMCA.⁷ Being like-minded in their Christian conviction, they met for their own edification and supported each other as friends and brothers in Christ. They looked after each other in many practical ways. At times a member would not leave his job until he could recommend a replacement to his principal from amongst his friends in the Association. It became the practice to notify the *Verein* of vacant positions and to help foremost those who came to the meetings in the hope to gain help and support from the members.⁸



William Edwyn Shipton

Their Friday Bible study laid the foundation for life-long friendships and gave direction to their lives. Ernst Pilgram, who had followed Klemm as second president in 1863, confirms that the early members became in later life holders of office in the church or worked in the institutions of the Inner Mission of their home country.⁹

Already in 1860 the *Verein* introduced itself to the *Christliche Vereine Junger Kaufleute* (Christian Association of Young Merchants) in Hamburg, Bremen, Barmen, Elberfeld, Stuttgart, and Amsterdam with the request to inform members and friends, planning to come to London, about the *Verein* at Aldersgate Street. This was met with promising responses. The core group of members increased from 9 in 1863 to 15 in 1868, although the coming and going, especially of those who trained for mission work overseas and came to London to learn English, created an element of restlessness. The great changes amongst the members are reflected in the observation that the *Verein* had five presidents in the first eight years, most of them serving for just one year. On the other hand, there were a few who remained in membership throughout their life, as for instance the Swiss member Emil Walser, who became the third president in 1864 for a year. He continued to serve the Association as treasurer and benefactor until his death in 1910.¹⁰

Some young people who worked and lived in the West End of London showed an interest of joining the *Verein* but the journey into the City was

often a time-consuming burden. Therefore, this group was given branch status at the YMCA West Branch, 48 Great Marlborough Street, near Oxford Circus. From the English side there was encouragement to establish further German Associations in other parts of London. This was not successful and even this



The Members 1863

West End *Verein* could, over time, not survive; the nucleus of faithful resident members was missing. The same fate befell several French Associations which had been established as branches of English YMCAs. Sooner or later a committed junior generation did not emerge. The longest survivor was a French Association that had the backing of the French church in Endell Street. This Association and the *Verein* in Aldersgate Street often visited each other because some members, mainly Swiss and Dutch, were fluent in both French and German:

That the German Branch at Aldersgate Street could withstand all undermining circumstances was, humanly speaking, due to the excellent facilities and the strong support of the Aldersgate YMCA.¹¹

The support of the Aldersgate Street YMCA is personified in its energetic Secretary, the already mentioned William Edwyn Shipton. The German YMCA in London should remember with gratitude this “largely forgotten man in YMCA history...”:

In 1849 he resigned his business to accept appointment as the Assistant Secretary (really Corresponding Secretary) of the London YMCA... When, in 1856, Tarlton [the first YMCA secretary] resigned his Secretaryship, Shipton was the natural choice for the position of Secretary. By this decision he became the first man, in any country, to devote his entire life as a salaried secretary of the YMCA... To all intents and purposes Shipton performed the function of a National as well as a London and World Secretary... He personified and sought to maintain the conception of London as a Parent Society of all Associations in the English-speaking world – as an “elder brother” of all Associations. It was his hope that they would all accept the relationship of Branch Associations adopting as their own the Rules of the London Association and *especially Rule VII, which defined membership*... Shipton was equally zealous in protecting the name YMCA. ... It is fair to say that by insisting on an organisational regularity as regards membership requirements, Shipton created a kind of British Union based on this parental theory with the London Committee *as quasi* “Central Committee”.¹²

In the “History of the World’s Alliance of YMCAs” he is described as “the inescapable man”.¹³ Thanks to Shipton’s leadership, the attempts made at the Paris Conference of 1867 to amend the Paris Basis were successfully withstood. This proved to be of vital importance for the Alliance in the ensuing years.¹⁴ Because of Shipton’s strong views on a number of issues it is not surprising that there was, at times, tension between him and YMCA leaders in other countries, and resentment among other British leaders. For this reason the creation of an English National Council was delayed until 1882, two years after Shipton’s retirement.¹⁵ It is a remarkable achievement that Shipton, with his overall responsibilities and workload, combined with his aversion to enlist help, never lost sight of the needs of the individual young man. He seemed always approachable and ready to give guidance.

Based on Shipton’s concept, the *Deutsche Jünglingsverein* in London was

a Branch Association in a dual sense – because of the real connection with, and dependence on, the Aldersgate Street premises and its provisions in the 1860s, and also in the wider context of the conception of a central committee at Aldersgate.

Not much is known about the daily life of the young men who constituted the membership of the *Verein* in these early years. But it is worthwhile to cite here from the memories of Karl Heinrich Feldmann from Elberfeld, an agent for foreign drapery who joined in 1863 and became, as president of the *Verein* from 1868 to 1888, an influential personality:

As member of the *Christlicher Verein Junger Kaufleute*, founded by Daniel Hermann in Elberfeld, I knew that several *Wuppertaler* had joined the *Verein* in London. For these I obtained letters of introduction. After my first visit of the *Verein* I rarely missed a meeting and participated in all activities, initially of the German but then also of the large English Association. At the time we lived frugally and were easily satisfied. The English Association offered a very limited choice of refreshments and we mostly made do with a large cup of tea for 2 pence, two thick slices of bread for 1 penny and butter for 1 penny. So, our supper came to 4 pence and with that I was content for years.

At that time, in the 1860s, the free Saturday afternoon was by no means common practice in all businesses. Also the bank holidays were introduced only later. The social life amongst the members of the *Verein* was therefore restricted to the Sundays. In summer we arranged to meet at 7 a.m. and liked to choose a destination for a long walk through the still completely open countryside of Hornsey... On the way back we passed through the graveyard of Hornsey and made a point to show new friends a headstone with the following inscription:

“As you are now, so once was I,
As I am now, so you will be,
Therefore prepare to follow me.”

Underneath was a postscript from a different hand:

“To follow you, I’m not content,
Unless you say, which way you went.”

Together we ended our Sunday walks by attending the service at the German church in Islington.¹⁶

In the summer of 1868 one of the highlights was a Sunday excursion to Hastings in honour of friends on a visit from Stuttgart. The event made a lasting impression on the members. Escaping safely from a life-threatening boating incident, they felt that the Lord was giving them a message. What this was became clear when one of the founding members, after having received the Annual Report, wrote and expressed his sadness that the *Verein* undertook Sunday outings. He could not condone this precipitous path of conduct. This warning was the end of the Association’s Sunday excursions.¹⁷ Day excursions only took place again when, in 1871, bank holidays were introduced in England and Wales.

Repeatedly the inadequacy of the basement meeting room was brought to the attention of Shipton and in 1868 he made a spacious room available for evening meetings once a week. This was a marked improvement, but because of the room's multi-purpose use, the *Jünglingsverein* could not make itself at home here. The growing number of members and visitors around this time brought the need for larger premises to the fore, and with it the wish for a meeting place they could call their own. Members like Feldmann had experienced in Germany the benefits associated with Christian *Herbergen*:

It was the need of the journeymen apprentices wandering from town to town that led the German Movement, following the example of [Johann Hinrich] Wichern's *Innere Mission*, to build hostels where young men could have good companionship, lodging, and food at low cost.¹⁸

For the *Jünglingsverein* in London the idea of combining meeting rooms with a German hostel for young newcomers to the city suggested itself, and thus the plan for a Hostel and Association Centre under one roof was discussed. But, up to now, the expenses of the *Verein* had been small and met by the members themselves. In the first decade there is no evidence that the *Verein* sought any external means of finance. Therefore it was an act of faith when, still in 1868, the *Verein* confirmed its intent to pursue this project by pledging the sum of £100.¹⁹

Whilst the Danish-German war over Schleswig-Holstein in 1864 had no effect on the London *Jünglingsverein* and the Austrian campaign against Prussia in 1866 created only temporary tension between the members from the North and South German States, political developments on the Continent were soon to overshadow the *Verein*.

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