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
YMCA INDIAN STUDENT HOSTEL LONDON

A project of the National Council of YMCAs of India

A journey with the Indian students

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

YMCA window in Westminster Abbey
The story begins...

20 October 1919

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 YMCA's 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.

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’.

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 YMCA’s, 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 simplicity.*

*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**

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 YMCA’s of India financed and directed both of them, while the Indian YMCA provided wardens. J.S. Alman, 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.
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 Shoolbred & 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.

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.

Hostel activities at a glance

- Member Services
- Physical
  - Tournaments
  - Indoor & Outdoor Games
- Educational
  - Lectures
  - Library Society
  - Debate Society
  - Group Discussions
- Social
  - Guest Room
  - Banquets
  - House Parties
  - Special Dinners
  - Receptions
  - All Events

- Coach trip and picnic to Broxbourne
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.

1931

**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**

Kanakarayalan 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.

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. We 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.

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 Annual Report 1939–40

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

Remains of the Gower Street hostel
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.
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

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

MAHATMA GANDHI MEMORIAL MEETING
(Beveridge Hall, University of London)

Chairman: THE RT. HON. LORD PETHICK-LAWRENCE OF PEASLACE

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

Student Speakers: MR. OMAH KHAN (Muslim)
                  MR. F. CHOTHIA (Parsi)
                  MR. V. B. KHER (Hindu)
                  MR. K. SINGH (Sikh)
                  DR. D. C. GHESE (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 condolences 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.

Site of the new hostel - the dream begins

The dream is realised
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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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)
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.

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.

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

Hostel residents in 1964

1964

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

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.

I had joined the hostel in January 1965 for only six months. During that time I had met some various good people. It was a 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.
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.

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
Harold Wilson

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

Harold Wilson speaking at a dinner at the hostel

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

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.

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

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.

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.

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 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.

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.

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

Starting a new venture

Yet another milestone in the history – a triumph of faith

Building construction committee members
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.

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

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.
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.

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.
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.
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.

Coach Trips
A regular activity of YMCA ISH
YMCA ISH, conducts coach trips for residents to integrate them with British life and significance of history. Many join the trip with commentary and guided tour.
Lord Bishop of London awards St. Mellitus Medal to YMCA ISH in honour of Service to Youth and Community in London.


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.
90th Anniversary of YMCA ISH London 1920 - 2010

Staff at the 90th anniversary

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.

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

Thanksgiving Worship

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

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

2010
**ISO 9001 Certificate Award**

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

**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 90th anniversary.

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.
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 Philip John
2003-2009

Abraham Mathews
2010-

1920 - 2004

General Secretaries

P. D. Runganadhan
1921-28

T. D. Santwan
1935-40

J. S. B. Abraham
1954-57

O. V. Alexander
1957-59

N. G. Joseph
1965-70

Param Bhelwa
1970-75

Anjan Mukherjee
2007-2009

Solomon P. Benjamin
2009-

D. S. Chinnadorai
1975-78

H. S. Raychaudhuri
1979-84

J. S. Aiman
1929-34

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

K. Muthian
1988-91

Egbert Samraj
1991-94

T. Thomas
1944-97

Stanley C. Karkada
1997-2003

John Jacob Abraham
2000-2004

W. Issac Judson
2004-2007

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 Philip John
2003-2009

Abraham Mathews
2010-