



**YMCA**

**175**

Celebrating our past,  
shaping our future

Our Story

**1844 - 2019**

History of the YMCA  
in Sussex and Surrey

**YMCA**  
DOWNSLINK GROUP

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## WELCOME

YMCA is the largest and oldest youth Movement in the world operating in 120 countries and providing services to over 65 million people. 2019 is a special year for YMCA as we mark 175 years since George Williams founded the YMCA in London. YMCA DownsLink Group is joining YMCAs across the globe in marking this special 175th anniversary – [www.ymca.int](http://www.ymca.int)



*Chas Walker, CEO*

YMCA DownsLink Group (YMCA DLG) is a formation of local YMCAs across Sussex and Surrey, that over the last decade have decided working together provides YMCA with greater capacity to offer more and better services to young people. We can trace our legal history back to Hove YMCA and this year, 2019, we are also celebrating a local anniversary because it is 100 years since Hove YMCA was formed in November 1919.

To mark this important local anniversary and join in the wider 175 celebrations of the YMCA Movement we have commissioned a history project to research the history of local YMCAs across Sussex and Surrey. The project has revealed an amazing, previously undocumented history and the important role the YMCA has had in communities across Sussex and Surrey through the 19th, 20th and 21st Centuries. I would like to thank David Standing for all his work in researching and producing this fascinating history of YMCA in Sussex and Surrey. I hope you find this booklet as informative as I do and it inspires you about the work of the YMCA and its potential to make a significant difference in the lives of young people and the communities in which they live.

Chas Walker  
CEO, YMCA DownsLink Group

# YMCA THROUGH THE YEARS



Founded by George Williams, a drapers assistant in London

1844

First international conference, Paris Basis. Aims of YMCA agreed with focus on body, mind and spirit

1855

1844 - 1849

Spreads to other towns and cities providing support to young men

Focus on fitness - gyms opening in England and USA. American YMCA invents basketball and volleyball



1879 - 1895

YMCAs in 45 countries with 707,000 members

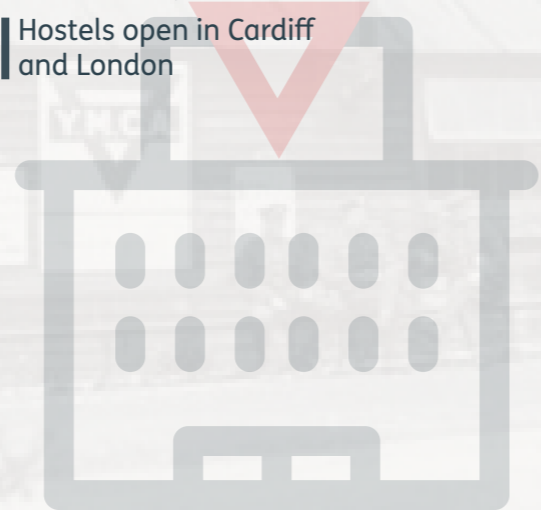
1905

Hostels open in Cardiff and London

1912

YMCA has huge programme of huts providing food, recreation and support at home and abroad during WWI

1914 - 1918

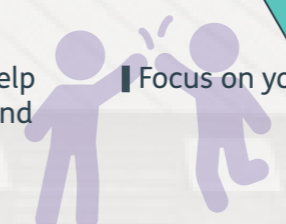


Mobile canteens and support for prisoners of war and refugees

1939 - 1945

Programme to help ex-servicemen find employment

1916 - 1921



Focus on youth work

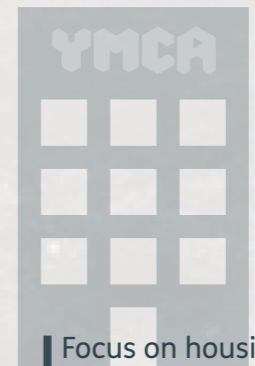
1960s - 1970s

Focus on housing and training for young people, sport and fitness, health and early years

1980s - 1990s

Creation of larger YMCAs through collaboration and mergers

2000



YMCA Downslink Group

2014

Sussex Central YMCA 2009

Hove YMCA 1919

## YMCA DOWNSLINK GROUP THROUGH THE YEARS



## ABOUT THE FOUNDER

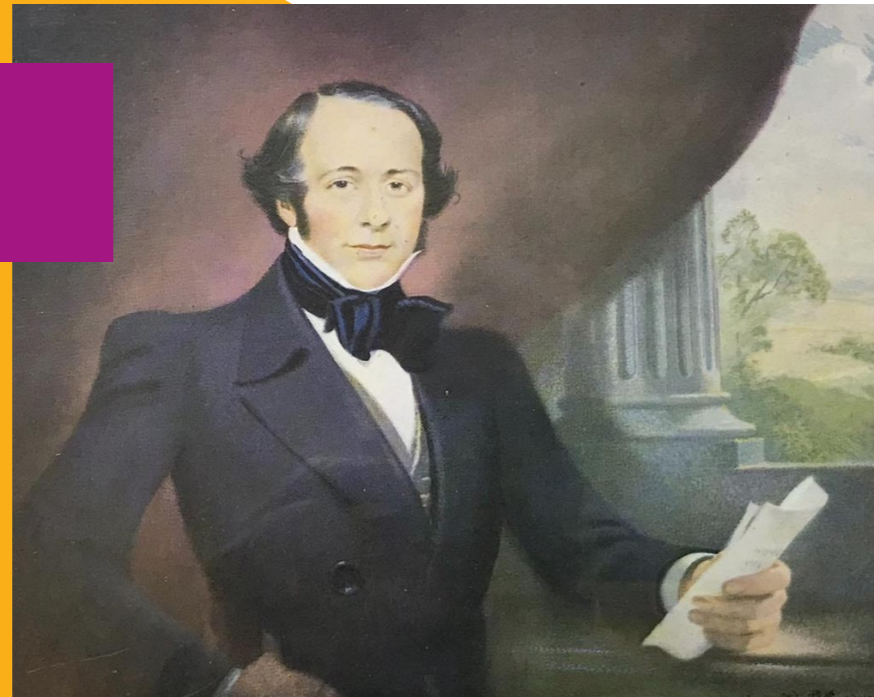
### George Williams (1821 – 1905)

George Williams was born in 1821 into a farming family in Dulverton, Somerset. In 1841 he moved to London to become a draper's assistant, rapidly progressing to a more senior role. He was concerned for the welfare and spiritual wellbeing of his fellow workers.

On 6th June 1844, together with 11 other young men, George Williams set up the Young Men's Christian Association.

The aim of the Association was to share the Christian faith and to prevent young men being drawn into some of the harmful aspects of city life, including excessive drinking, gambling and prostitution.

In 1853, George married the boss's daughter and became a partner in the business which continued to prosper. He was knighted by Queen Victoria in 1894 and buried in St Paul's Cathedral following his death in 1905.



George Williams

## THE EARLY YEARS



The YMCA movement quickly expanded at home and abroad, and by 1851 there were YMCAs in nine countries. In 1855 they had their first international conference in Paris.

They adopted the Paris Basis as the common mission for all YMCAs, with a focus on unity - adopting the Bible verse 'That all of them may be one...' (John 17:21). From the outset the aim was to develop the whole individual in **body, mind and spirit**, as symbolised in the famous **YMCA red triangle**.

In the late 19th Century the YMCA grew rapidly, and by 1889 there were 568 local YMCAs with over 72,000 members in England, Wales and Scotland, with 17 individual YMCAs in Sussex and Surrey by the end of the century.

The vision for creating a global movement was attributed to Henry Dunant, the Secretary of the YMCA in Geneva, who later went on to establish the Red Cross and to win the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1878, the headquarters of the YMCA World Alliance was established and has remained in Geneva.



First international conference in Paris, 1855



James Naismith a YMCA sports coach, invented basketball in 1891 in Springfield YMCA, Boston Massachusetts.

## THE YMCA IN WAR



Throughout the 20th Century's two world conflicts, the YMCA was a significant presence both on the frontline and at home – offering material, educational and spiritual support to the troops and their families.

### First World War

The YMCA made a huge contribution to the war effort, providing huts at military camps at home and abroad for support and recreation for the troops.

Scores of courageous YMCA volunteers eased the misery and suffering of soldiers with places offering food, drink, somewhere to rest and facilities to write home.

By 1916, the total number of huts had grown to 1500, with many served by the Women's Auxiliary, including Clementine Churchill.

### Second World War

The YMCA continued to serve troops during the Second World War, providing practical, emotional and spiritual support, with library rooms, entertainment and cinema vans as well as canteens providing refreshments and the famous tea vans.

As part of its Christian mission and commitment to all people, the YMCA worked with German prisoners of war, training over 1000 prisoners to become teachers, youth workers and pastors. The YMCA's mission has always been to serve all people who may need their support.



YMCA tea van



*"I want to thank you for what your association has done for my boy. When war broke out, he went to Crystal Palace for his training and found the YMCA there a boon.*

*He was sent to Blandford to complete his training and the YMCA was there. He was drafted to Gallipoli and to his amazement he found the YMCA on the peninsular. He was wounded and sent to Suez where, once more, the YMCA was a great help to him and yesterday I received a letter from him from Alexandria to say he was convalescing and spending the whole of his spare time in the YMCA building."*

An extract from a mother's letter to the YMCA during WWI

# THE YMCA IN SUSSEX AND SURREY

## The early years



*Canteen and recreational hall, Roffey Camp*

There was a rapid spread of YMCAs across Sussex and Surrey from the mid-19th Century, with 23 having been established by the time **Hove YMCA (the founding member of YMCA DownsLink Group) was established in 1919**. The first YMCA to be established was Dorking in 1849, followed by Chichester in 1858 and Guildford in 1868.

Immediately prior to and during the First World War, the YMCA in Sussex and Surrey focused very much on providing recreational facilities for the military. The area had a large number of military camps, and they all tended to have YMCA huts – these included Seaford, Uckfield, Crowborough, Shoreham, Frimley, Forest Row, Roffey and Eastbourne.



*Shoreham Camp, HQ and Quiet room*



*YMCA hut in a railway carriage near Lewes*

Later in the War, the YMCA provided hospital and rehabilitation facilities in its huts and buildings, particularly in Brighton – including a hospital hut in Dyke Road, which was later moved to Marmion Road in November 1919 to become Hove YMCA's first home.

By the end of the First World War, a number of the smaller YMCAs appear to have folded, with those providing a wider range of activities being the ones that flourished.



*YMCA members outside the original Hove YMCA*

## YMCAs OF THE DOWNSLINK GROUP

### Past and Present

In 2014 the Trustees of Sussex Central YMCA and Guildford YMCA took the decision to merge and form YMCA DownsLink Group with the aim of creating greater capacity to maximise the impact of the YMCA across Sussex and Surrey. YMCA DownsLink Group is named after the bridleway 'Downs Link' that connects the North Downs Way with the South Downs Way and symbolises the geographical reach of the organisation to communities across Sussex and Surrey.

### Hove YMCA

YMCA DownsLink Group has grown and evolved from Hove YMCA, which was established in November 1919.

Land in Marmion Road, Hove, was gifted by the Duke of Portland, and a YMCA wartime hospital hut was moved from Dyke Road in Brighton with funding from Bernhard Baron, a Russian Jewish tobacco magnate and philanthropist.

A new building was opened in 1934 by Princess Helena Victoria, granddaughter of Queen Victoria and great supporter of the YMCA. In the early years it provided youth work activities and Bible studies.

In the Second World War, the building was used for recreation and refreshment for troops, including a number of Canadian troops stationed nearby.



Recreational room in Hove YMCA

## Guildford YMCA

Guildford YMCA was the earliest YMCA of the DownsLink Group, being established in the Congregational Chapel in North Street in 1868. The YMCA later moved to Woodbridge Road, and then to 143 High Street in 1914. Following several other moves, Guildford YMCA opened a new hostel, Midway House, in Wharf Road in 1969.

Subsequently, the 'Y' Centre in Bridge Street opened in 1989 a state of the art 120 bed housing scheme with a range of youth and catering facilities.

Guildford, throughout its history, saw its Christian mission as serving the needs of the local community – as early as 1902, providing reports on the lack of affordable housing in Guildford.

### Activities

In the early years, the focus was on recreational activities and Bible study, and in post-war years youth work was developed, combined with supported housing from 1968 onwards.

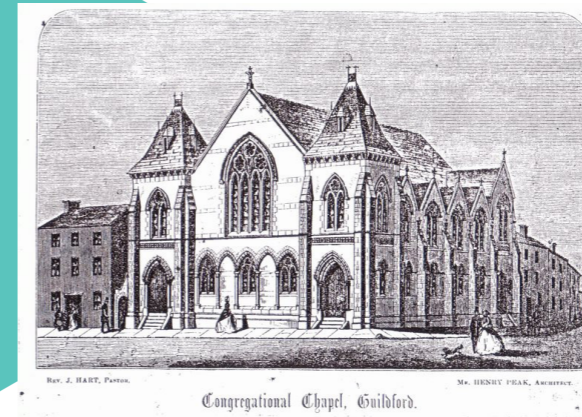
A number of creative youth initiatives were developed in more recent years, working closely with local churches. In addition to supported accommodation the 'Y' Centre provided an attractive café venue and meeting place for local people.

### Sussex Central YMCA

During the 1990s Hove YMCA expanded its service offering and subsequently its reach extended into other parts of Sussex. This led to a series of mergers between local YMCAs and Sussex Central YMCA was formed in 2009. Foyers in Crawley and Worthing were acquired by Sussex Central YMCA to create new YMCAs in those towns.

### Activities

After the war, youth work and sport remained the main focus, with funding from the local authority in the 1960s and 70s. As funding for youth work and training was withdrawn, Hove YMCA developed a range of counselling, advice and housing services in the early 1990s and this formed the basis for subsequent growth.



Congregational Chapel, Guildford.  
Photo: Guildford Institute of the University of Surrey Archive

## Lewes YMCA

Established in 1877 with Thomas Pelham as President, they moved to the Pelham Rooms in the High Street in 1889, and purchased St Anne's House in the High Street in 1921.

Their building in Westgate Street was completed in 1939, the foundation stone being laid by the Duke of Gloucester.

### Activities

Up to the 1950s the activities included football, gymnastics, chess and cricket, with later years focusing on youth work, pre-school and holiday clubs.

## Mid Sussex (Burgess Hill) YMCA

Established in 1922 as the Red Triangle Club in Station Road, later renting the premises to the Red Cross.

### Activities

In its early years, youth work and sport were the main activities. Their building was sold in the 1980s and they established a small housing scheme for young people with the proceeds.



*Duke of Gloucester visiting the YMCA in 1939 to lay foundation stone for new building. Photo: Reproduced with permission of East Sussex Records Office*

## Eastbourne and Wealden YMCA

Eastbourne YMCA was established in 1880, with a separate Hailsham YMCA established in 1889.

### Activities

From its early days, Eastbourne was an active and thriving YMCA with a mix of evangelism and wide ranging recreational activities, including swimming, boating, chess and cricket. Later developments included youth work, advice, counselling, housing and varied community activities.

## Horsham YMCA

Established in 1898 they acquired a building in East Street which served as a youth centre for many years. The Y Centre in Horsham, a housing project based on the Guildford model, was opened in 2005 and provides supported accommodation to 50 young people.



*Princess Helena Victoria – Horsham YMCA, 1934  
Photo: Garland Collection West Sussex Record Office*

### Activities

After the First World War, Horsham YMCA helped find employment and accommodation for ex-servicemen. Sport has always been key, including football, cricket and athletics.

In 1929 the football club moved to its present site in Gorings Mead. Since 1959 they have played in the Sussex County League (now in the Premier Division of the Southern Combination Football League).



*Crawley YMCA – 1907  
Photo: From 'Lost England', 1870 – 1930.  
Atlantic Publishing*

## Crawley YMCA

Crawley and Ifield YMCA was set up in 1899 but it appears to have ceased around the time of the First World War. In 2011 Sussex Central YMCA was able to acquire the Crawley Foyer to form the basis for a range of YMCA activities serving young people in Crawley.

## Worthing YMCA

Set up in 1882 there was an active Worthing YMCA based in Liverpool Terrace - providing a reading room, football, cricket and evangelistic meetings. It closed in 1909. With the purchase of Worthing Foyer in 2015, Sussex Central YMCA was able to invest in the establishment of a new and vibrant YMCA in Worthing.

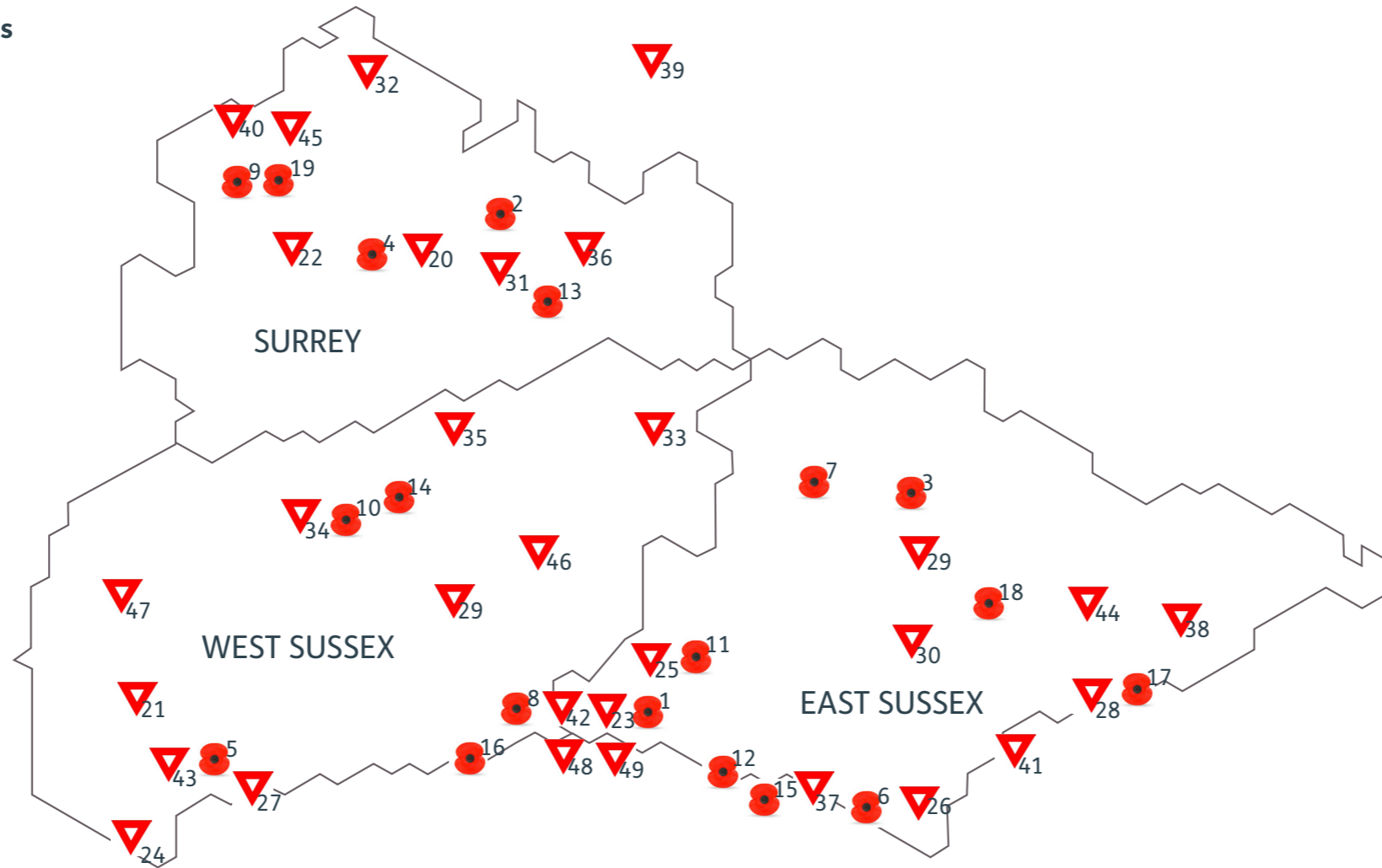


## Development of YMCAs in Sussex and Surrey and YMCA Huts in First World War



### YMCA military camps and hospitals

1. Brighton
2. Caterham
3. Crowborough
4. Dorking
5. East Preston
6. Eastbourne
7. Forest Row
8. Hove
9. Frimley
10. Horsham
11. Lewes
12. Newhaven
13. Reigate
14. Roffey
15. Seaford
16. Shoreham
17. St Leonard's
18. Uckfield
19. Woking



### YMCAs and date formed

20. Dorking 1849
21. Chichester 1858
22. Guildford 1868
23. Brighton 1871
24. Littlehampton 1873
25. Lewes 1877
26. Eastbourne 1880
27. Worthing 1882
28. Hastings & Rother 1883
29. Henfield 1886
30. Hailsham 1889
31. Reigate 1889
32. Addlestone 1896
33. East Grinstead 1898
34. Horsham 1898
35. Crawley and Ifield 1899
36. Redhill 1899
37. Seaford 1902
38. Rye 1903
39. Sutton 1907
40. Camberley 1911
41. Bexhill 1912
42. Hove 1919
43. East Preston 1919
44. Heathfield 1919
45. Woking c1920
46. Burgess Hill 1922
47. Dunford House 1951
48. Sussex Central YMCA 2009
49. YMCA DownsLink Group 2014

## OTHER SUSSEX AND SURREY YMCAs

Many of the smaller YMCAs closed in the years up to the First World War – but some remained active in serving their local communities.

### Brighton YMCA

Brighton YMCA was founded in 1871, moving to Steine House in 1884, where they remain to this day. Brighton has always been one of the largest YMCAs in the area and hosted regional meetings for a number of years.

#### Activities

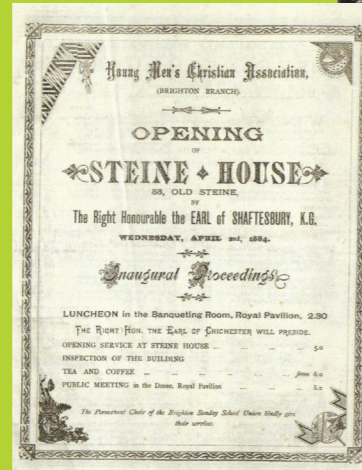
In the early years, Brighton YMCA offered a range of sporting and recreational activities. Latterly the focus has been on housing, initially for working young men, but now accommodating adults with support needs.

### Woking YMCA

Woking YMCA served its local community for over 90 years, until its closure in 2014.

#### Activities

Woking YMCA provided youth work, sport and housing services.



Opening Steine House - 1884



Steine House

### Reigate and Redhill (East Surrey YMCA)

Reigate YMCA was established in 1889, becoming Reigate and Redhill in 1900. Early years were focused on Christian mission and sport.

#### Activities

East Surrey is now a thriving YMCA, providing accommodation, counselling, sport and fitness services, including support to those with disabilities.



Badminton at East Surrey YMCA

### Hastings and Rother YMCA

Hastings and Rother YMCA was established in 1883 moving to the Claremont Building next to the library, where there is a YMCA window. The YMCA was re-established in the 1970s, moving to its current site in St Leonards.

#### Activities

The YMCA actively serves the local community, providing a wide range of youth work, sport and community facilities.



Tiled floor in entrance hall of the Claremont Building

## THE PEOPLE

There are a lot of people who have played their part in the development of the YMCAs who form YMCA DownsLink Group over the years:

### Bernhard Baron

was a Russian Jewish tobacco magnate, who funded the acquisition and erection of the first Hove YMCA hut in 1919 on a site in Marmion Road, provided by the Duke of Portland. His son, Louis Bernhard Baron, was a major funder of the new building completed in 1934 – which remained the main home for Hove YMCA for the next 70 years.



*Bernhard Baron*

### Charles Candlin

was a glass and china merchant and became Guildford YMCA Secretary in the late 1870s, establishing YMCA meetings in the Congregational Chapel.



*Charles Candlin*

*Photo: By permission of Priscilla Jones of Farncombe*

### Roy Holgate

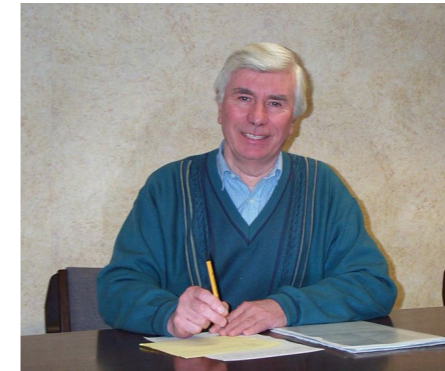
became General Secretary of Hove YMCA in 1961 at a real low point in the Association's history. Over the next 5 years, he built up a thriving YMCA with over 200 members. The subsequent Secretary, Ted Milburn, built on Roy's achievements.



*Roy Holgate*

### Alex Cloke

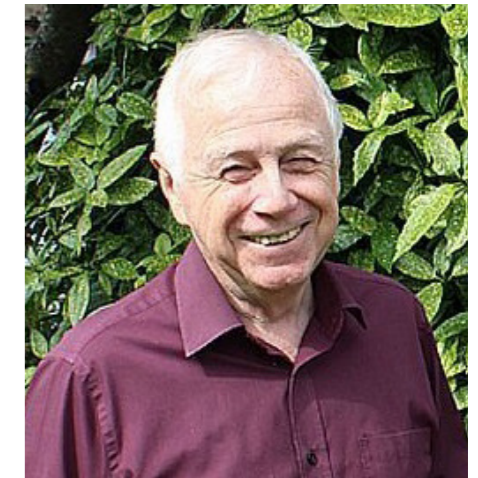
joined Guildford YMCA as Chief Executive in 1989 after a career in business and 6 years with the YMCA National Council. Alex oversaw the completion and opening of the 'Y' Centre in Bridge Street, and it was very much his vision to create a home for young people with hotel standards, which led to Guildford YMCA's growing success. On leaving Guildford in 2001, Alex went on to drive forward the establishment of the Y Centre in Horsham, based very much on the Guildford model.



*Alex Cloke*

### David Standing

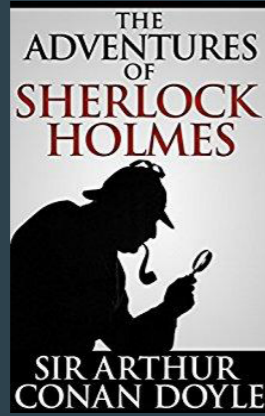
became Chief Executive of Hove YMCA in 1990, at a time when its future was in doubt through the loss of core funding. After a career in local authority Social Services, David used his experience to build up a range of services for young people including housing, advice and counselling. Through a series of mergers, new contracts and becoming a registered provider of social housing, Hove YMCA grew to become YMCA DownsLink Group, which is now a major provider of housing and support services to young people across Sussex and Surrey.



*David Standing*

# DID YOU KNOW?

- ▶ **Sir Arthur Conan Doyle** was a judge in a novice boxing championship in the YMCA Crowborough military camp in 1916
- ▶ Worthing YMCA won **the McArthur Cup** – a countywide chess competition in 1905 – as the opposing team did not turn up!
- ▶ Bernhard Baron, who funded the original Hove YMCA centre in 1919, was a Russian Jewish émigré, and owner of **Carrera tobacco company**
- ▶ The original **Brighton Road Baptist Church** in Horsham was a tin hut that was bought by the YMCA and sent to France in 1917



- ▶ Brighton YMCA building Steine House was the home of Mrs Fitzherbert, the mistress of the **Prince Regent**
- ▶ From 1898, Horsham YMCA played at Lyons Field, on land owned by the **Bowes Lyons (Queen Mother's) family**
- ▶ **The Beatles** were enrolled as members of Woking YMCA in 1964 – although they probably never took up their membership!



## CAMEO OF A YMCA

### East Preston (near Worthing)

The YMCA in East Preston was established in 1919 in a large hut moved from the Shoreham military camp – it was known as the Red Triangle Institute and opened by Sir Arthur Yapp, General Secretary of the YMCA.

It became a centre for the local community – providing cricket, stool ball, a gym, Scouts and Guides and even a cinema and theatre hosting Shakespeare plays.



*East Preston Football Team, 1922 by a YMCA hut*



*YMCA Gymnastics, c. 1920s*

In *'East Preston and Kingston – an Illustrated History'* local historian R W Standing described the foundation of the YMCA as 'probably the most important social event of the century', sponsoring the development of many other clubs, a number of which still survive.

After serving for 20 years as a youth centre, the YMCA closed in 1966 and was sold for housing.

This is an excellent example of a YMCA transforming a local community.



## THE YMCA THROUGH THE YEARS

The YMCA has flourished over the past 175 years, to become the world's largest youth organisation.

The secret of the YMCA's success has been its unwavering commitment to improve the life opportunities for young people, and its ability to respond to the changing needs of the society that it serves. The whole person focus of **Body, Mind and Spirit** symbolised by the **Red Triangle** has remained consistent throughout the YMCA's history.

Probably the biggest single catalyst for change in its history was the First World War, where YMCAs entertained and supported troops across the theatre of war – breaking the mould of being a middle class organisation primarily for Christians, to become an organisation that served a wider society in a more inclusive way. This change was accelerated further in the Second World War.



Rooted in its Christian mission, the YMCA has always demonstrated a love for those on the fringes of society, be they child soldiers in the Ivory Coast, or homeless young people in Brighton – and whilst today a majority of staff in many YMCAs would not share the Christian faith – they are united by a common purpose of making our society a better place for all.

The basic mission of the YMCA – to help young people belong, contribute and thrive in their local communities - has remained unchanged through our history. Our services have evolved to keep pace with our changing society and the changing pressures facing young people, and we are committed to work with local communities across Sussex and Surrey to create a better future for our young people.

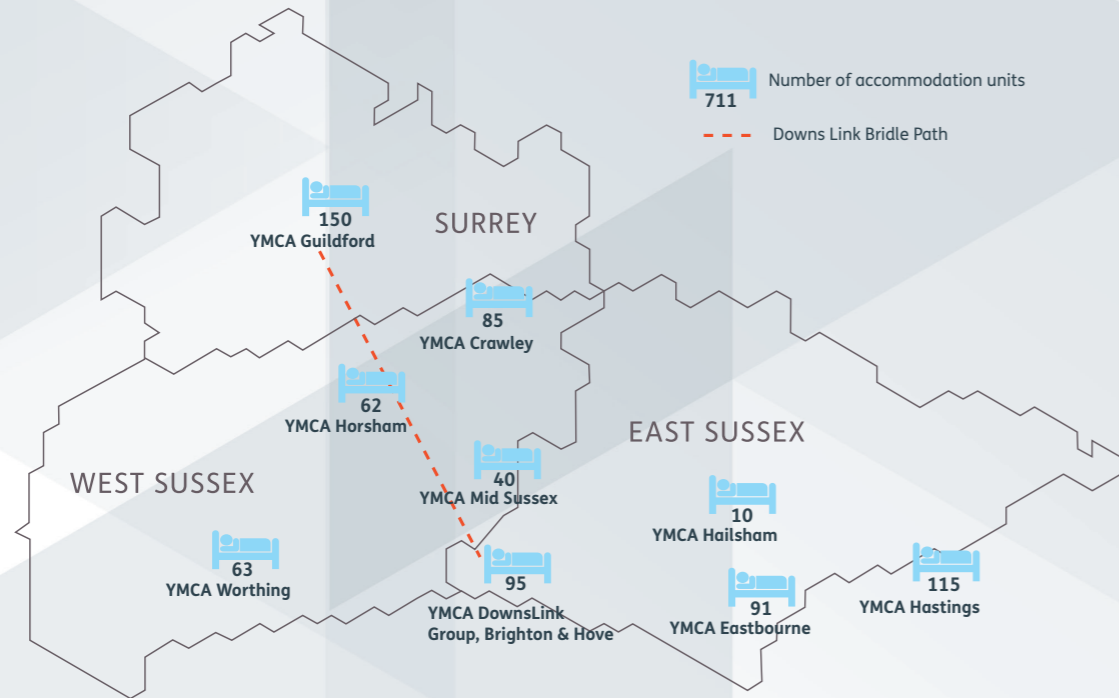
## YMCA DLG IN 2019

YMCA DownsLink Group is committed to transforming local communities so that all children, young people and families truly belong, contribute and thrive.

We provide a place and space for young people to feel safe through accommodation, training, learning, support and advice, counselling and mediation that will lead to better life chances and a positive future.



We support over **15,000 YOUNG PEOPLE** each year



**We welcome all** ▶ **We inspire** ▶ **We support**



YMCA WiSE reach over **4,000 YOUNG PEOPLE** through group work sessions and assemblies with information around the **RISKS OF EXPLOITATION**



YMCA YAC give **ADVICE AND SUPPORT** to over **3,000 YOUNG PEOPLE** in Brighton & Hove



YMCA Right Here reach around **1,000 YOUNG PEOPLE** through volunteers who work in schools to **IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS**



YMCA Positive Placements provide **MENTORING TO OVER 100 YOUNG PEOPLE** seeking education, employment and training



YMCA Dialogue provide **COUNSELLING AND WELLBEING** services to over **3,000 YOUNG PEOPLE**



**45 VOLUNTEER CHAPLAINS** of all faiths work in our housing projects supporting residents and staff

## THE FUTURE

By Chas Walker, CEO, YMCA DLG

I believe that if organisations are to have a clear idea of where they are heading in the future then they need to understand their history, reminding themselves what has shaped them to date. What makes the YMCA unique is that we are a 'Movement', a bottom up organisation that evolves from the needs of local communities to become the largest youth movement in the world and our own history in Sussex and Surrey illustrates this well.

Our history also shows us how we have adapted to fundamental changes in society, always responding to emergency situations like two world wars or more gradual change over time as YMCA has integrated into the fabric of our social and community services in this country.

So as we look to the future what do we take from our past? Firstly the importance that YMCA remains rooted in local communities. If young people are to belong, contribute and thrive in society they need to be an active part of their local community and if communities are to thrive then they need young people at the heart of them.

YMCA DownsLink Group is now a large regional charity, but our aim remains to be a 'bottom up' organisation and our focus is still on developing and supporting local YMCAs that make up YMCA DownsLink Group. Currently we have 9 local YMCAs, my hope is that in 10 years time YMCA DownsLink Group will be supporting 18 local YMCAs.

Looking to the future our global world is changing. When the YMCA was formed in 1844 no one could have imagined then that you could get from London to Sydney in 22 hours and that the world would be connected through a world wide web. The world is changing more quickly than ever and a lot of that change is good, but there are now some fundamental threats to our global future. Young people of today have a set of challenges to face that no other generation has ever faced. How does YMCA, the oldest and largest youth Movement, help prepare young people to face the economic, societal, political and environmental challenges of the future? My favourite element of the founding story of YMCA is that George Williams was only 22 years of age when he formed YMCA. I take encouragement from young people like Greta Thunberg because it reminds us that just like the story of George Williams young people can change the world and are probably best placed to do so. YMCA needs to be advocating for and helping young people prepare for the challenges of tomorrow, just as we have for 175 years.

This year (2019) YMCA DownsLink Group comes to the end of our 2020 Vision to be a youth minded community approach organisation. This strategy has enabled a regional YMCA to remain locally focused and ensure we continue to reflect the local communities in which we work and benefit from their support. As we start to contemplate a future vision for our YMCA I believe we must focus on how young people don't just feel that they belong in their local community, but that young people are shaping the future of their local communities.



George Williams



Greta Thunberg

## Celebrating our past


Over the past 175 years the YMCA has impacted the lives of countless young people, meeting them in their time of need, providing acceptance and understanding, and working with them to achieve their potential.

We know we have not done this alone and would like to say thank you to the many volunteers, public bodies, churches, various funders, donors and partner agencies who have made this possible.

## Shaping our future

We know our task is not finished as pressures and demands on young people increase and services available to support them are constantly stretched.

So please give some thought as to how you might partner with us to give all young people the opportunity to feel that they belong, can contribute to the society in which they live, and achieve their personal potential.



*“The YMCA for me is my rock, my second chance. It has given me the opportunity to flourish in myself and in my day-to-day life.”*

Ruth, 18



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W [www.ymcadlg.org](http://www.ymcadlg.org)  
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