

sunstone

SUNSTONE AT SWEET SIXTEEN

Women can get loads of things at 16 Northwold Road - a Luxury Pamper, an Indian Head Massage or a swim. But way back in history it was exactly where loads of women - and men - went to get something else. Married!



It was just before Christmas, nearly two hundred years ago: Stoke Newington was full of fields, and farm animals munched in the meadows. The **Duke of Wellington** had just beaten Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo (and designed the fashionable new wellington boots).



Wealthy women from the grand houses of Clapton wore dresses made of the finest silks. One group of friends was hoping for a very special present for Christmas in 1817: two stockbrokers, a printer, cabinet maker, doctor, builder, plumber & warehouseman were all members of the **Society of Methodists of Stoke Newington** - and there was only one thing on their Christmas list. **A new Chapel.** The December days ticked by, and time was running out... Just **two days** before Christmas, at a lawyer's office in Bloomsbury, Reverend James Wood, Minister of the Gospel gave them what they **really really wanted**:

"a lease of a piece of land and two cottages with the use of a private road in the front, on the East side of Stoke Newington Road, and the **newly erected meeting house or chapel** on the same ground".

Gradually, the world around that little chapel completely changed - slavery was ended, **trains, trams and telephones** were all invented, and the countryside of Stoke Newington bustled with new streets, houses and schools. But for almost 150 years, a Methodist Chapel stood in the same spot in what we now call Northwold Road. After nearly fifty years the Victorians had rebuilt it, and the **Primitive Methodist** community life went on where Sunstone Club is now: there were **weddings & christenings, funerals & gossip** and two services every single Sunday went on **until** . . .

During World War Two bombs rained down in the Blitz, and the poor old chapel got into a terrible state. The services came to an end and the building stood **empty and unloved**. Until, in 1953, the year that millions watched the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in Westminster Abbey, someone had a **brilliant idea**, and the battered chapel got a new lease of life ...



Nearby in Brooke Road a little Jewish community had been squashed for nearly twenty years. **Beth Hamedrash Ohel Yisroel** were desperate to have a real synagogue



of their own with enough room for services, bar-mitzvahs - and weddings. The old Methodist Chapel was **exactly** what they needed - and they turned it into the synagogue of their dreams. On December 18th 1955 men in shiny black top hats and women in their smartest frocks welcomed the **Mayor of Hackney** to the consecration of their new house of worship.

Way before its life as the Sunstone swimming pool, the Ladies Guild had fixed up the basement as a spacious Hall; beneath the brand new octagonal roof, the synagogue walls were covered with lists of names, written in golden letters. Where women working out on machines now row, run and stretch their way to fitness and health, grooms once stood with their **brides under a canopy of flowers**: a glass was smashed, a promise of eternal devotion was made - and the Rabbi proclaimed them man and wife.

After 36 years, the synagogue closed its doors for the very last time and only the pigeons visited the old building - until local lawyer **Michael Sinclair** gave it fresh start On **7th December 1992**, Olympic star Tessa Sanderson came along to declare Sunstone officially open. Now, where the Rabbi once ruled, the motto is: **"Women are Our World"**.



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