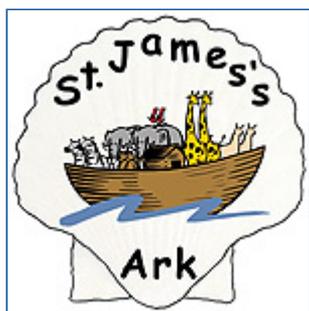


St James's Ark through the years



St James's 'Ark' was introduced under the direction of Revd Debbie Oades, St James's curate at the time, as a result of the 2007 Mission Action Plan. The overall aim was "A church community and local community brought closer to God". One of the six themes identified in the MAP was 'Outreach' and another was



'Children and Young People'. The theme 'Outreach' aimed to develop further contacts with the wider community, at home and abroad. The theme 'Children and Young People' aimed to give children and young people every opportunity to become involved in the Christian life by making it more attractive and accessible.

As a result of the MAP Away Day, Revd Debbie Oades produced a paper about the possibility of setting up a Carers and Toddlers group at St James's. She went to St Mary's Church, Staines, to observe their group, and other research was also carried out to discover how different churches organised their groups. It was decided that the group would be Christian based and non-educational. It was suggested that September 2009 would be the right time to start and in the meantime the PCC gave the idea their blessing.

Several mothers offered to help with the new group, had their CRB checks and updated their First Aid cover. A name, 'St James's Ark', was chosen and a logo was designed. Other plans were made, an article was placed in the Spire and flyers were produced to advertise the venture.

St James's Ark celebrated its first birthday in September 2011. This milestone was marked with a short service of thanksgiving with communion, followed by a delicious Ark cake. A short service was held once or twice a term and there were parties at Christmas and at the group birthday in September. On Monday 26th April 2010, Laura McGregor from St John's Ambulance came to hold a session on pre-school first aid.

The families collected money for Welcare and St James's each term. A series of cake sales raised money for the Maternity Hospital in Bethlehem, and this money was presented by Canon Julian Reindorp and the Revd Peter Vannozzi during the parish pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2013.



Telling a story



A special communion service



Singing songs

Fun, socialising and sanity!

The Spire Magazine of December 2011 / January 2012 featured the following article written by a parent, Sarah English:

I have always believed that a church not only provides the congregation with a place of worship, but a body of support and friendship, and this is certainly true of a Monday morning at St James's Church. On 17 January this year I woke up to face a challenging day – after four weeks off my husband Chris was returning to work, leaving me alone with our one-month-old daughter Abigail for the whole day. And not only that day, but the next day, and the next day... and so on.

Whilst I loved my new role as Mummy I was not sure how I would cope without support and the day loomed ahead. If it had not been for the prospect of going to The Ark, St James's club for toddlers and carers, I think we would probably have spent the day in bed and crib respectively. As it was, I had a reason to get up and out of the house!

The warm welcome which greeted me that first week is what has brought me and many others to St James's every Monday morning. It gave my confidence a boost when, on arrival, the ladies of the committee welcomed me warmly, and, furthermore, appreciated just how much of an achievement it was for me and Abigail to arrive clean, clothed and smiling (well, perhaps smiling is pushing it, but at least I was not fully crying!) They are always friendly and take time to chat with all who arrive, getting to know all the 'pram pushers' and their young charges. Peter often visits to chat with the adults and make a fuss of the children and the atmosphere within the church is warm and friendly. I would agree with others I've heard commenting on what a lovely playgroup it is.

What I find most invaluable is the company, advice and support from the other mums there. I do have lots of support from my family and friends, however I feel that there are some elements of motherhood that only other mothers fully appreciate. The relief I have felt on more than one occasion when another person says "I know exactly how you feel" makes the adjustment to motherhood all the easier.

I am also aware that those friends in a different position will only have a degree of patience as you bemoan disturbed nights, the trials of feeding, and, perhaps more importantly compare tips on the noise a camel or giraffe makes! We have discussed the former extensively but are still looking for a decision with sound effects, so if anyone has advice please feel free; my elephant noise is also somewhat lacking!

Perhaps I should also mention the more important member of The Ark – Abigail. She has always loved coming to church and greets everyone with a smile when we arrive. Now that she is ten months old it has been a pleasure to watch her grow up with the other children who go. I feel that socialising is really important for babies and children and I can imagine her forming solid friendships with the others she plays with on a Monday morning.

The range of toys is very good and there is always an art and craft activity. At the moment Abigail tends to try to eat the play-doh and paint, so we avoid the table, but doubtless it will not be long before we are walking home with master-pieces to adorn the fridge. A highlight for both of us (and I think, all who go) is the singing – brilliantly led by Debbie Nunn – which has given me a chance to remember long-forgotten songs, rhymes and, of course, the actions. There is a large box of shakers available for the children and, whilst they do not necessarily add to the rhythm, they do add to the enjoyment!

It is much more than just a playgroup. The queue outside church on a Monday morning shows how popular the Ark is locally; it is an excellent way to start the week and gives me something to look forward to. Some of you reading this may be surprised at how much importance I place upon those three hours a week; it is, after all, just a playgroup. However, to me, and many who attend, it is much more. The Ark provides a safe, friendly environment for our children to play, learn and socialise. For the adults, it provides a warm and, perhaps more importantly, an understanding welcome when we arrive 'in the car this week' or 'almost didn't make it'. Furthermore, my Monday mornings are now active and social. I have made friends and grown in confidence as a result of The Ark and I would like to thank those who established, run and support it.

The above information covers the period from when St James's Ark was started until November 2016. This was when Revd Derek Winterburn became St James's tenth vicar and from this time onwards any new information can be found on the main site.



Colouring



First birthday cake



Collage of birthday pictures