

Our church in the community through the years



What is now Hampton Hill was formerly within an area known locally as The Common and later as New Hampton, as part of the parish of St Mary's, Hampton. For more than two hundred years local Hampton government had consisted of Vestry (the church committee), Churchwardens and Poor Law Guardians, supervised by the local Justice of Peace. In 1863 an [Order in Council](#) set up St James's Chapelry and its new parish, officially designated as Hampton Hill, although not called so until about twenty years later. The vicar of this parish was, and still is, appointed by the vicar of the mother parish of St Mary's,

Hampton. Thus a Vestry separate from that of Hampton was established and this dealt with many affairs, both secular and spiritual, of the new parish.

Thus the early history of both St James's Church and its community, the village of Hampton Hill, are inextricably linked. The first vicar, Revd Fitz Wygram, saw his rôle as improving both the spiritual and social conditions of the new parish, and this included developing a wide range of organisations to benefit the community. Some of these were explicitly religious, some were secular in their activities and others bridged the gap between them. However, all were based on his sense of Christian responsibility towards fellow human beings at a time and in a place where there were no other authorities able to take on the task. In this work he was helped by his leading laymen. *"They looked after peoples' human rights and dignities, keeping them safe from injustice and encouraging healthy use of leisure."*

The quality of the property in the neighbourhood during this period was apparently very poor. The area was described by the Revd J Burrows, Vicar of St Mary's, Hampton, at the ordination of the parish's first incumbent, as *"a wilderness with a number of habitations of the most wretched kind, inhabited by a still more wretched class of people"*. Revd Fitz Wygram and his wife dedicated their lives and a good deal of their money to improving the unpleasant living conditions and poor prospects of the parishioners. In the words of Henry Ripley: *"The many squalid, unhealthy and overcrowded cabins were acquired and pulled down; streets lined with comfortable cheaply-rented cottages or commodious villas sprang up in all directions, and nearly every institution or movement necessary to the well-being of a community was inaugurated and carried out to a successful issue, without any regard to the expense entailed"*.

One of the first attempts to improve things for the villagers was to consider the costly business of lighting and so in 1866 a public meeting was held in New Hampton to decide whether some at least of the streets should be lit with gas. There were objections to this and in the end no general street lighting was established until 1891 when the first contract was placed with the Gas Company on January 17th to install lamps at a cost of seventy shillings a lamp, the Company to clean and repair the lamps when necessary.

Early on in his incumbency, Revd Fitz Wygram discovered that only thirteen children out of a population of 1,100 went to any sort of school. Having a keen interest in education, he made a grant of land in Mill Lane to the vicar and church-wardens *"on trust for the education of children and adults, or children only, of labourers, manufacturing and other poorer classes, and for no other purpose"*. For a detailed account of the historical background to St James's Church Schools, read the page [St James's Church schools through the years](#). St James's continues to be keen on its connection with the local schools with the clergy going in to talk to the children and also encouraging the schools to visit the church.



The boys school

The Hampton Hill Day Nursery was established in 1885 in the High Street to take in the infants of poor women who had to go out to work. The April 1885 magazine reported: *"These little babies often wither and fade from neglect, or the seeds of ill health and suffering are sown, which mar the comfort and happiness of life. It is hoped that with care and good nursing, in a warm and comfortable room, many, who otherwise would be neglected, may grow up into strong and healthy children."* However, the nursery was closed in 1892 due to *"lack of support it received from the parents"*.



Mrs Alice
Fitz Wygram

The Parish Lending Library was run by St James's with Mrs FitzWygram as the *"Lady Superintendent"*. It was housed firstly in the Fitz Wygram Club and then in a small hall in Eastbank Road, presumably the Eastbank Mission Room. The subscription for working people was 1d. per month and other subscribers paid at least 2s 6d. a year. Miss Barnard had charge of the library in the 1890s. The March 1899 magazine reported: *"The Parochial Lending Library does not seem to be so well known or used as it deserves to be. It contains a very large number of excellent books, and its home is at the Eastbank Mission Room. It is mainly for grown up people, but there are some books suitable for children as well."*

The August 1886 magazine reported: *"A portion of the Hampton Glebe, our 'Common, as we call it has been set apart by the Vicar of Hampton for allotments. We are very glad to see the allotment system extending itself around us. By this means the difficulties which working men now meet with, owing to the scarcity of work, can best be met, and to some extent be overcome."*

As there still was no National Health Service at this time, St James's decided to celebrate Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee by the providing the parish with a nurse, a *"Victoria Diamond"* nurse. A committee was set up in April 1887, funds poured in, and the first nurse was appointed in September. Her services were much in demand as there were many outbreaks of measles and influenza during these years. In February 1892, the Parish Magazine reported: *"It has been a sad and troublous time these last six weeks. Never during its existence as a parish has our death rate been so high. The number of entries in our Burial Register is quite double the number recorded for any similar period before. The influenza which has attacked us again, has assumed almost the proportion and severity of a pestilence. So many have been laid low, and so fatal in many cases has it proved. There is scarcely a house which isn't mourning the loss of a relation or a friend. And just when our own home troubles seemed at their worst, there has fallen a blow upon the whole of England, we might almost say, upon the world at large. This terrible disease has spared neither poor or rich, high or low, and amongst its victims is the young Prince Albert Victor, who, had he lived, would one day have been our king....."* Over twenty years later the magazine of 1909 reported that the nurse had made 3,086 visits in that year and that her services were still being paid for by public subscription.

In 1887 the Vestry moved a resolution *"that the slowness and infrequency of the trains are extremely detrimental to the Parish, by keeping many houses empty, whereby the rates of the remainder are increased and all local institutions crippled"*. The magazine reported that the trains were the popular means of transport for Sunday School, Choir and other outings. In 1901 an outing of two hundred and fifty-four people caught the train to Crystal Palace and in 1907 two hundred and fifty-two people went on a parish outing to Portsmouth, starting from Fulwell at 6.30 am and returning at 7.45 pm. The adult fare was four shillings with children travelling half-price.

The Hampton Hill Fire Brigade was formed in 1888. A considerable number of the members of the Hampton Fire Brigade expressed their willingness to help forward the movement and co-operate as far as possible. *"We heartily commend our new brigade to the support of the inhabitants of Hampton Hill."*

For a long time it had been thought that more provision should be made for the needs of the parish of Hampton Hill out of the continually increasing funds of the Vicarage of Hampton. Hampton Hill contained nearly half the population of the old parish but had only received twelve acres of glebe towards its endowment. On the 2nd of August 1889 a deed of transfer was

completed, by which about eighteen acres of glebe land adjoining the Vicarage grounds and Churchyard were annexed to the living of Hampton Hill. It was thought that in time this land might be required for building purposes, and its value largely increased. The magazine of October 1889 reported: "*By this means an endowment would be secured to the living, and it would no longer be dependent upon the somewhat objectionable method of raising funds by pew-rents.*"

In June of 1890 a public meeting was convened by the vicar "*in pursuance of a requisition by thirty-six tradesmen that the name Hampton Hill should be the accepted name for our village*". The Revd H Bligh, in the chair, reminded those present that when their village was just a small hamlet it had been called 'The Common' and a Post Office had been established. That hamlet increased and the name New Hampton attached itself to the then rapidly growing village. Twenty-six years before a parish giving its name as Hampton Hill had been formed by an Order in Council but this official name had not been generally adopted. The meeting agreed to petition the Post Office to change the name to Hampton Hill. In mid July the Post Master General replied "*to the memorial from nine tenths of the householders of Hampton Hill*" and sanctioned the official change of designation.

A Local Board for Hampton and Hampton Hill was formed in 1890 and the village entered a new phase of parochial life taking on "*its arduous responsibilities*". The drainage of the two parishes alone gave work and anxiety for a long time. This was in addition to the ordinary work of maintaining the roads and footpaths, lighting and sanitary inspection, which in a district which was fast developing from a rural village into a suburban town was no light task. The Board was elected from a long list of candidates who voluntarily offered their services for the public good and heavy demands were made in the form of rates.

The unusual severity of the weather in the winter of 1890-1891 threw many out of work and caused much hardship among the working classes. So a soup kitchen was opened "*with a view to mitigating as much as possible the suffering which prevails*".

When War was declared in August, 1914, it was decided that, until the war ended, the church bell would ring at noon every day to remind everyone to pray for "*the King and all those in authority, our sailors, soldiers, the suffering, the anxious and the sorrowful*". All military cases of relief were dealt with in connection with the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families' Association, and the Local Aid Fund was used to assist those who were suffering indirectly through the war. For the first time in the history of the village, in October, 1915, the villagers were threatened in their own homes by attack from the air. There were many not prepared for such an attack, as we read that "*during the Zeppelin raid it was surprising to see how very well illuminated were several of the houses in this vicinity*". In 1916, local residents opened a canteen at the FitzWygram Coffee Tavern for the benefit of wounded Canadian soldiers from the hospital which had been set up in Upper Lodge, Bushy Park.

In response to many requests Mr Coad-Pryor preached sermons dealing with different aspects of the war and made daily intercessions for those fighting or being trained. A Roll of Honour was included in the magazine and fund-raising events were held to raise funds for sending comforts to the local soldiers at the front. Thanksgiving and Memorial Services were held in church after the war. In May, 1945, at the cessation of hostilities in Europe, the church bells rang out at last. They had been silent so long, their chimes being reserved as an invasion warning. Never before had there been such displays of flags and bunting and there was music and singing in the streets and parties in the open air. The schools were given holidays and later on the spire of St James's was floodlit to mark the occasion.



The floodlit spire in 1945

In 1935 there were special services of thanksgiving for King George V's Silver Jubilee. There was also a procession, the "*best ever seen in Hampton*", a special dinner for the elderly and the celebrations for the children were "*real fine*". The death of King George V in 1936.



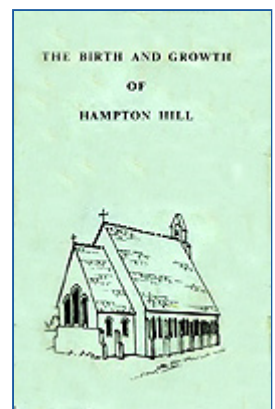
Model of the church

There was much controversy when Revd Harvey decided to sell a large part of the vicarage grounds bordering St James's Road for building. This move on his part gave rise to much bitterness in the vicinity and several old-established families "*left the church*". In 1939 the residents of the large houses opposite were so disgusted by the invasion of their privacy that many of them, gathered up their goods and chattels, held last regretful tennis parties and moved away in search of "*fresh fields and pastures new*".

During the Second World War the church was used as a rest centre after air raids. In 1940 an RAF plane, returning from a raid over Germany, crashed onto Lady Stanton's home at 63 Park Road after the crew had bailed out when their plane had become uncontrollable due to icing. "*The house was soon completely gutted and sparks and flaming debris showered the roofs of nearby houses. The Revd F Harvey was on firewatch duty that night and he paraded St James's Road, sheltering under a large umbrella, keeping an eye on the roofs in case the fire spread. It was anxious work since the ammunition from the Wellington's guns kept exploding in the heat and it was thought at first that enemy planes were machine-gunning the fire.*" It was so near St James's Church but only knocked off the cross at the top of one of the tower pinnacles by the tip of its wing which has since been replaced. Some time during the war the wooden replica of the church, displayed in the baptistry, was built by a civil defence worker made EE Bryant.

Exactly one hundred years after St James's was dedicated on December 11th, 1863, a large congregation gathered together for a service of thanksgiving for a century of worship and prayer. During the centenary year there were many services, including a confirmation, and numerous entertainments including local history exhibitions with slides, a centenary party and finally a special evening service on Friday, December 11, 1964 to bring the centenary year to a close. The Bishop of Kensington was preacher and he dedicated a new altar table.

The immediate vicinity of the church was protected from undesirable development. In the face of much opposition and due to Revd Brunt's convictions and perseverance, Larkfield Lodge on St James's Road was demolished in 1964 and it was proposed, with the consent of the planning authorities, to erect a three-storied block of nine flats. This became the subject of a Land Tribunal enquiry. The Birth and Growth of Hampton Hill recorded: "*On Tuesday, July 28th, 1964, the Revd R H Brunt, acting on behalf of St James's Church, and the St James's Residents' Association formed for the purpose, opposed an application for the release or modification of the 1874 covenant which applied to the land under question. As a result of their action the application by the developers was refused. In the opinion of the tribunal the covenant was not deemed to be obsolete as claimed by the purchasers of the land, and the amenities of the church were thus protected, as had been the intention of the far-seeing Revd F J Fitz Wygram when drawing up the agreement so many years ago.*"



'The Birth and Growth of Hampton Hill'

The book, 'The Birth and Growth of Hampton Hill', was published by St James's Parochial Church Council in 1965 and was deemed a great success by all who read it. It includes chapters on the history of St James's Church and its personalities as well as on different aspects of life in the village.



Long before the borough council began recycling, in 1974, there was a parish doorstep collection of waste paper. A team from church scoured the area once a month on a Friday night and piled the paper and magazines outside Wayside in St James's Road where it was collected. From 1974 to 1982, £4,000 was raised for local charities and 163 tonnes of newsprint and 52 tonnes of magazines were recycled.

Waste Paper Collection

On 15 May 1974 a meeting was held in the then St James's Church Hall in School Road. Fifty people were expected, but over 150 turned up. The CCG was born. They had the vision that with the building of the Nurserylands site in Hampton we would need to develop a community-based support service to improve the wellbeing of the residents of Hampton and Hampton Hill. These included parents and young children, one-parent families, and senior citizens. In 1990 it was announced that the Hampton Fuel Allotment charity would support the building of a new community centre. The Greenwood Centre was officially opened by The Duchess of Gloucester, on 3 July 1992. From the very beginning it has been supported by the local churches, not least St James's, from one of the co-founders, Hannah Stanton, to today when many members of the congregation help with transport, deliver newsletters, work in the office and many more duties, all done quietly, but with dedication and commitment. We at St James's are proud that the Greenwood Centre developed from our need to move our church hall and we are sure that Hannah and her two co-founders could not have envisaged how much the VCG would have developed from their initial enthusiasm nearly 40 years ago.

The church Social Committee was co-organiser, along with the Hampton Hill Association, of the Jubilee Celebrations in 1977. During this celebratory period, St James's put on special services, a concert and actually won first prize for the best dressed float.

During the 1980s the PCC decided it would be best to bring all the activities of the church under one roof. After looking at the alternatives it was eventually decided to sell the existing church hall in School Road and Wayside in St James's Road in order to enable a new church hall to be built next to the church. In 1992 the hall was sold to the Hampton & Hampton Hill Voluntary Care Group to become their new centre, the Greenwood Centre. Since its opening, the new church hall has provided a venue for many community activities including a nursery school and a variety of classes and workshops such as yoga, dance, drama and photography. It has also been used for a wide variety of children's parties, dinner parties and family celebrations of baptisms, anniversaries, birthdays and weddings. Not least the hall became used as a Polling Station for local and general elections. Read the page [St James's Church Hall through the years](#).



Building the hall

In 2000 the bishop sent a double decker bus around all the church schools, to help children find the answer to '2000 years since what?' Some of the congregation were on the bus and visited the schools in the area. St James's was represented at Hampton and Hampton Hill Carnival for the first time in 2010 with an 'Adopt-a Teddy' stall. Lots of soft toys were kindly donated for prizes and a profit was made for church funds.

During 2013 our [150th Anniversary](#) celebrations were an opportunity to celebrate the beginnings of St James's, but also to do something now, with a legacy for the future. This was a significant year owing much to the impact of our first vicar, Revd Fitzroy John Fitz Wygram. A deeply spiritual man whose approach and own life displayed a practical spirituality, he not only preached the good news but also put it into practice. This has been a feature of the life of this church ever since.

The above information covers the period from when any records could be found 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.