

## St James's groups through the years

The early history of both St James's Church and the village of Hampton Hill are inextricably linked. The first vicar, Revd Fitz Wygram, saw his role as improving both the spiritual and social conditions of the new parish, and this included developing a wide range of social organisations. 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. Over the years, many different groups came and went, and those not directly organised by, or associated with, the church took on a separate life of their own much as they have today.



Revd Fitz Wygram

When Revd Fitz Wygram became vicar, he started and encouraged many groups, clubs and societies. These included a Masonic Lodge, the Crown and Anchor Harmonic Society, a Pigeon Club, Slate Clubs, the Tam O'Shanter Lodge of the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes, and a new lodge of Odd Fellows. The New Hampton Cottagers' Garden Society was founded in 1871 and held its annual shows in the extensive grounds of St James's vicarage. The Horticultural Society flourished as the parish was built largely on the site of a thriving nursery garden industry. Then later in 1896, land in Bushy Park was acquired for allotments and in that year the Society was affiliated to the Royal Horticultural Society.

At the beginning of the 1880s Revd Fitz Wygram started a Working Men's Club and Coffee House, the village's first community centre, with the parish library being housed in its club room. The club was where the men could play chess, draughts and dominoes, read the daily papers and buy reasonably priced refreshments. This is described by the local historian, Ripley, as "*a commodious block of buildings*" which is "*replete with every feature essential to the edification and amusement of the working man, and is an institution of which any village might be proud.*" The Surrey Comet stated that it was established mainly "*to encourage habits of temperance and to counteract the evils of strong drink*". A new temperance organisation, the Hampton Total Abstinence Society, held weekly meetings in 1884. The cause of temperance gained ground rapidly with twenty seven people subscribing to the Pledge in one evening alone. Even as late as 1903 a local branch of the Church of England Temperance Society was formed and showed signs of "*considerable vigour*".

Revd Fitz Wygram was a keen sportsman, encouraging his parishioners to start the Hampton Hill Football Club and to play cricket in the St James's Cricket Club of which he was president. However, even though leading churchmen were great supporters of the sports clubs, they were not actually run by the church. There was a New Hampton Quoits Club and the Fulwell Football Club. The Lawn Tennis Club, established May 1st, 1880, was started "*to enable the middle-class to indulge in this favourite exercise*".

Mrs Fitz Wygram built on and expanded her husband's work in spreading religious knowledge to all age groups of the rapidly growing population of the parish. After his early death she moved across St James's Road into Larkfield and proceeded to make it a centre of church life, holding and organising a number of Bible Classes. There were separate groups for men, women, young men and young women, as distinct from the Sunday schools for children. The many members which these classes attracted were treated to special entertainments from time to time. A "*capital*" supper was held at least once a year for each group and there were many concerts and musical evenings. All the members were treated to an "*annual excursion*" and in 1895 "*A Steamer was chartered, and the whole company, together with some invited guests, were conveyed to Windsor and back.*" The following year a special entertainment was held for the men's and young men's classes. As late as 1910, three years before her death, it is recorded that the classes were "*as usual entertained with accustomed generosity by Mrs Fitz Wygram*". By this time there were also lectures regularly for the Church Reading Union, and the adult Bible Classes survived Mrs Fitz Wygram's death and were thriving in the 1930s. A local branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society was formed in 1896 and there was a branch of the Scripture Readers' Association.



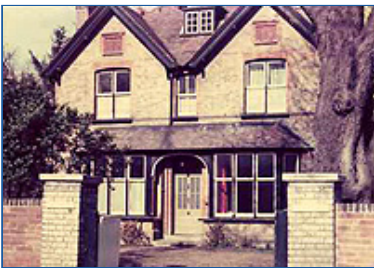
Mrs Alice Fitz Wygram

Communicant Classes were held once a month. About these the November 1884 magazine reported: "*Their object is to help Communicants to be regular in their attendance at the Sacred Feast, and to induce others who are not yet Communicants to become so. They are also meant to be an assistance in the due preparation which is required of all those who come to the Lord's Supper. It is intended that there should be a class within reach of all those who have been confirmed.*" The Communicants' Association, later known as

the Communicants' Guild, flourished in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and was supported by many adult churchgoers. In addition to its regular meetings it held an annual tea which was later replaced by an annual general meeting.

By the mid 1880s, in the absence of perhaps more suitable premises, the public houses became the meeting places for a number of these classes, clubs and societies. There was also a local branch of the London Needlework Guild and the Middlesex Bee-keeper's Association and Institute. The village possessed its own brass band which was much in demand at public and church functions. In 1885 the band had an annual income of £37. The Orchestral Society flourished in the early 1900s, performing Handel's Messiah in 1909, and the village brass band continued to flourish. The "*Lend-a-Hand*" Musical Society, conducted by a Mr Phillips, was started in 1905 and developed into a Choral Society.

A Married Women's Club, with Mrs Fitz Wygram as the Lady Superintendent, was formed in 1885, and three separate Mothers' Meetings were held in different parts of the parish. The mothers brought their work and their babies and an interesting book was read to them. There was a religious reading and the meeting closed with prayer and the singing of a hymn. "*Occasionally the ordinary routine is interfered with by the introduction of a cup of tea.*" A local branch of the Mothers' Union was formed in 1897 with about forty members. Pledged to defend the principle of the lifelong sanctity of marriage, it soon became the dominant voice in many parishes. It held monthly meetings, sometimes with distinguished speakers, amongst them, in December 1902, the wife of the Bishop of London, an annual general meeting and a supper in February. At the same time, a more informal 'Mothers' Meeting' started up and continued until the 1930s. A comparable society for men did not appear for some years, but in January 1910 a branch of the Church of England's Men's Society was formed. Within a few months it had a full programme, including a social evening, a slide show and a lecture on church history. This varied type of programme continued for many years with a regular service each month.



Wayside

In addition to those mentioned elsewhere, other groups, clubs and societies came and went during the next hundred years or so. These included the Continuation School for Youths, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Missionary working parties, the Scripture Readers' Association, the Church of England Waifs and Strays Society, Our Dumb Friends' League, the Colonial and Continental Church Society, the Home and Foreign Missionary Societies and the Church Missionary Society. There were free Technical Instruction Classes, in connection with the County Council, in shorthand, laundry, dressmaking, horticulture, cookery and ambulance work. A monthly Parish Meeting, open to all, became a regular feature for a while as a way of discussing issues within the church and parish. One of the Discussion Groups organised a parish breakfast at Wayside on Advent

Sunday, November 30th 1958. The Holy Communion at 8 am was the only one that day and as many people as possible were encouraged to join together in the family meal afterwards. Children were welcomed with their parents.

A Men's Society was formed in 1951 with Revd Brunt as president and all men were encouraged to join. "*It's good to be in at the start!*" In the same year the Mothers' Union decided to have an extra women's monthly meeting. This resulted in one meeting a month being devoted to MU business and the other meeting open to all women of the parish who would like to join. The second group was called the 'Women's Guild', but it was hoped that members would attend both sets of meetings.

A flourishing Young Wives' Group was inaugurated in 1951 due to the enthusiasm and personality of Mrs Brunt. Its first tea-party was held in the parish hall in November for mothers and their babies who have been baptised in St James's. Recreational and social activities were organised as so many mothers of young children found it very difficult to join in these things elsewhere. "*The really important thing, of course, is to let husbands know well ahead the nights on which their presence as baby-sitters will be appreciated!*" A Baptismal Roll of children under five years old and baptised at St James's before March 1951 was started at the end of 1951.



Young Wives Group 1960s

Hearing that prayer groups could be one way of strengthening parish life, six parishioners started meeting regularly in 1950, praying together for the parish, for people known to be sick, and for other parishes, people and interests. They came to value this fellowship and welcomed new members and the new ideas they would bring with them. In 1957, there were monthly meetings of a different Prayer Group, which was first intended mainly for streetwardens, who brought to it the needs of different sections of the parish. But its scope changed and it became a group of people seeking to learn more of prayer for its own sake.

Lent Groups started in 1952 and by the 1960s the Parish Weekend made decisions and arrangements about these Lenten studies and projects. By 1964 a 'Circle of Prayer' developed and grew rapidly as it was found to supply a very real need. It provided a constant link around the parish with people praying in their own homes for those in any sort of need. *"The MRI Group and the Prayer Circle are doing much to add to the spiritual life of the church"* and the February 1968 Spire reported: *"Those who attended the special meeting of the Prayer Circle found it so rewarding that it was unanimously decided to hold regular meetings at which the Vicar would again be present to help and advise and to join in discussion of people's difficulties, perplexities and experiences."*

The production of the play, 'Mystery of Christmas', in 1951 was a *"grand effort of team-work"* which sprung spontaneously from a group providing stewards for the Missionary Exhibition. Those involved so enjoyed the experience of acting together that they decided to form a Drama Group in the parish. They started with play readings and very simple acting but also arranged theatre outings. The following year the group read a Passion Play in church *"as an act of worship, and as a way of conveying something of the greatness and dignity of our Lord in His Passion"*. Due to its great success a junior section was formed and the group continued for quite a few years eventually being merged with the Council of Churches' Group, with performances such as 'Christ in the Concrete City'.



A Parish weekend



The Drama Group in 1954



The Christmas Play in 1954

The Young Families Group was held in Wayside and the St James's Young Families Group Pram Service was held about four times a year in church. *"Whilst we sang, our offspring seemed to be stunned into silence, which was quite magical. The power of music is quite remarkable."*

During the sixties and seventies other groups were started, like the Tuesday Club in 1968 for discussion on a programme of current or topical interest with a speaker invited once a month. Among others there was a Ladies Afternoon Choir, Keep Fit Club, Badminton Club and the Young Families Group, 'Bib and Sucker', the latter being a young-member group of the Mothers' Union, but run completely independently.

### *The Ladies Choir*

The Ladies Choir, started in the 1960s as a Mothers' Union Choir, was open to anyone who loved to sing, 'had a go' at all kinds of music and enjoyed every moment of it. *"We really do not claim to be very good, but we do have a great deal of fun."* They used a great deal of music, two and three parts, all written for ladies voices. Some songs were very familiar but some were less well known and more challenging and although singing was the main object, fellowship was equally important. The choir entertained folk at the Old Peoples' homes in the area, at the blind club in Twickenham, Hampton Court House and various churches and at Christmas they ran a 'Carol Sing-a-long' afternoon with mince pies, sherry and a cup of tea. It closed in 2011 due to the fact that most of its members were over eighty!



The Ladies Choir in 1977



The Ladies Choir in 1983



The Ladies Choir in 2005



Old Peoples' Welfare Float 1971

There were three particular groups in existence in the 1970s in the parish, which helped people in different ways to come to a deeper understanding of their faith: the Catechumenate, Good News Group and Koinonia.

The Catechumante was rather more formal than the others and was based on the experience of Continental Christianity. The Good News group was started in 1976 to provide fellowship, opportunity for prayer and study.

The Koinonia started after the Lent course in 1979 and continued during the 1980s. Its aim was *"to help each member to grow into a more mature Christian"*. The word Koinonia is Greek, meaning fellowship, and by meeting together regularly for prayer, praise and discussion *"we hope to make the fellowship between ourselves and with God more real"*.

The Prayer Circle continued as did the annual Lent Groups, and the Parish Quiet Day was still popular. During 1987 new Fellowship Groups were formed within the parish for people to widen their fellowship with one another and to learn about the Christian faith.

### *The Liturgical Dance Group*

A small but enthusiastic group formed a Liturgical Dance Group, a Dance Choir, in 1979 to explore dancing as a form of worship and continued meeting for twenty five years. *"There is a freedom in Dance and a joy in the use of the body which is not found in more traditional forms of worship."* What others expressed with words, the dancers expressed with movement, dance and mime. The members put various themes and ideas to music which sometimes culminated in presentations during services, where a visual presentation could be meaningful or helpful. After about twenty five years the dance element receded due to the advancing age of members so the group changed to the Fellowship Group with the mutual support continuing. They extended their evenings by including study of biblical themes and discussion of any other topics which interested them. The evenings always include prayer and a quiet time.



Open House took place in church on Monday mornings from 10.30 am to 12 noon, for a drink and biscuit with a chat. *"The north aisle of the Church provides a very pleasant and comfortable meeting place - and our charges are very modest!"* The group moved to the new church hall at the end of 1994.

During the 1980s Quiet Days became quite popular, being *"an opportunity to spend more than the usual amount of time we allow ourselves not only for 'our' prayer but for listening deliberately to God speaking to us in the silence"*. The Parish Weekend, often held at Fairmile Court in Cobham, was always popular and was held for several years.

The Julian Group, primarily a prayer group formed in 1983, continued. A further study group was started in 1994, meeting in the church hall on alternate Tuesday evenings. The group was led by its own members and consisted of some prayer time, Bible study and discussion. The Nurture Group began in September, 1997. It met fortnightly and was a structured but informal group with time to worship, study, discuss and grow, both in commitment to each other and in discipleship.

There were several changes to parish groups in the 1990s. Parish house groups were set up in 1990 and followed a programme of Christian Learning called 'New Concourse', essentially comprising open-ended questions for stimulating discussion. The Young Families Group and the Tuesday Club were closed down due to dwindling numbers.

The Mothers' Union continued for a while and celebrated its hundredth anniversary in the London Diocese during 1990. Following its closure at the end of 1991 it was felt that there was a need for a wider group within the church to strengthen faith, stimulate minds and help people to play their part in the life and work of the church, so a new Womens' Forum was started with a variety of speakers, talks and discussions. However, by the end of Revd Leathard's incumbency, most of the above-named groups had closed down due to so many other activities available in the then changing social climate.

However, one new group, the St James's Theatre Club, started in the early millennium to organise trips to see productions in mainly local theatres. Most people in the congregation only met on a Sunday so the idea was a regular trip to the theatre could help bring people together during the week in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. The first play they went to was 'Star Quality' by Noel Coward on 22nd May 2006. It was a very enjoyable evening, with everyone mixing in and chatting to one another. Since then, they have been to many more productions, including pantomimes, comedies, musicals, ballets and murder mysteries. Later they added The Orange Tree Theatre to their list and were over-subscribed for Gilbert & Sullivan's 'The Pirates of Penzance'.

In total, over 100 people, young, old, single and couples, have been to these outings. Whilst the theatre itself gives great pleasure, St James's Theatre Club is about other things too. It can bring people into contact with one another for the first time: *"I hadn't realised she was so interesting"*, said one about another! It also allows people to go out during the evening in a safe environment when they may not otherwise have done so: *"It's ages since I've been to the theatre but it's so nice to have the company of so many friendly people."* And it also allows people to help others: *"I'd drive to Richmond anyway, so it's no trouble for me to pick you up and drop you off at the end of the evening."*

Other prayer and study groups, held in peoples' homes, also came and went during these years. Every Lent and Advent, Revd Vannozi led courses for prayer, study and reflection. The 'Start! In Lent', a six session course to explore Christianity together, was held in 2010. These groups continued during 2010 and followed different themes.

A member of the congregation, a retired clergyman Canon Julian Reindorp, led a course called 'Faith at Work'. The format was simple: a member of the congregation talked to the group about their occupation and the part Christianity plays in their everyday lives. Then the discussion was opened up to the group. The October 2010 Spire reported: *"A group to explore our experiences - What difference does our faith make to our daily lives, our daily work? What are the challenges we face, the tensions we feel? We want to start a group to explore these issues. Our work may be paid or unpaid, we may be facing redundancy, or having been 'let go', working from home, or retired. Can we support each other through these experiences?"* This proved very popular, involving many members of the congregation, and continued for many years.

Going to the cinema suddenly became a lot more local. With the installation of the new sound system and big screen a Film Club was launched in 2016. The idea came from a young PCC member and his family joined forces to offer the full experience, including sales of popcorn, drinks and snacks. There were cushions for hire if the pews prove too uncomfortable! There was one film night a month, with the first two being 'The Sound of Music' and 'It's A Wonderful Life'.

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.



The Mothers' Union  
75th anniversary in 1972  
and 100th anniversary in 1990