

## St Paul's Church Centre

The Church Centre is situated on the edge of Rusthall Common where Rusthall Road, from Tunbridge Wells, joins Rusthall High Street.

The complex comprises the Mission Church, Parish Hall and Parish Office.

Following the increase in the number of dwellings in Rusthall village it was decided to provide a building for Christian worship to accommodate the artisans and others residing locally. As a result the Mission Church was built.

The building was dedicated on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1887 by the Rev'd Benjamin Smith, Archdeacon of Maidstone and the former Vicar of St Paul's. For the previous 27 years Sunday evening services had been held in the Infant School, now the Library, in the High Street.

Erected at a cost of £1,000, from plans prepared by a parishioner Mr Henry Taylor, the building comprised a church for services with an adjoining class room – now a kitchen. Entrance was by the front door and a screen hid the altar when the room was used for secular purposes.

The church was well furnished with more than 100 chairs, choir stalls, a lectern and a movable pulpit. Now only the chairs remain, arranged in the round rather than rows as prior to the 1990's. The original pedal organ survived until the 1970's when it was replaced by a key-board organ which soon gave way to a piano.

A surpliced choir of men and boys was a feature of the evening services; they joined the parish choir on festal occasions.

Many activities were associated with the Mission Church: for example Sunday School, Band of Hope, Boys' Brigade – with a band, Mother's Union, Scouts and Guides. Coal and Clothing Clubs were well supported, usually on Saturday mornings while the evening saw the library – of 800 books – at its busiest.

The church was extended in 1908; the join in the brickwork can be seen clearly. At the same time the Parish Hall was added, which with the small hall and the upper kitchen was renovated in the 1960's. The lower kitchen and toilets were added to the main hall in the 1990's. The upper kitchen was renovated again during the summer of 2010.

The church was originally heated by a stove which stood beneath the clock near the bell-rope, now the whole complex is centrally heated. During the Great War (1914-1918) the building was used as the girls' school while theirs was used as a VAD Hospital. Sunday evening services continued until the 1970's, usually conducted by a Lay-Reader.

Today (2010) the Mission Church is well used. Family Service has been held on most Sunday mornings for more than 42 years. Morning Prayer is said every Wednesday and Holy Communion is celebrated every Thursday, coinciding with the Pensioner's lunch in the Parish Hall. There has been one wedding; there are frequent baptisms and sadly occasional funerals.

In November 1987 the Lord Bishop of Rochester Dr David Say attended the Centenary Celebration Service.

At the turn of the century the back of the Mission Church was converted into the Parish Office; the ante-room thereof occupying the space which was previously curtained off as the Vestry. Within the church can be seen the Family Service Banner and an altar cloth, both made by members of Family Service: Also a processional brass cross, a free standing candle holder and a piano all suitably inscribed