

Chapter 3 - The Parish Church of St James's



Within a year of the appointment of the Rev. James Burrows, M.A., to the living of St. Mary's, Hampton, in 1862, plans were made for the building of a new church to serve the rather scattered, outlying village of New Hampton, situated a mile or more away on the hill above Hampton. Glebe land was given by the mother parish, and a simple, rectangular building with a nave 67ft. by 24ft. and a chancel 24ft. by 20ft. and a small vestry room was erected at the cost of £1,300. The architect was William Wigginton of County Chambers, Cornhill, and the contractors Messrs. Bond of Hackney. On its completion the

Rev. Fitzroy John Fitz Wygram was appointed Vicar, and the building was consecrated on December 11th, 1863, by Bishop Tait, Bishop of London.

From the Court at Windsor on April 7th, 1864, was issued an "Order of Queen in Council" stating the boundaries of "the District Chapelry at Hampton Hill." This was the first time the village had been so called, although the old name of New Hampton persisted for the next twenty years.

During 1864, a vicarage, a large, gabled residence, costing almost as much as the church itself, was added to the village. Most of the money was given by Mr. and Mrs. Fitz Wygram, although a small grant was made by the Church authorities.

By 1872, the Hampton Historian, Ripley, states "the Parish was beginning to make rapid strides as regards both the numbers and respectability of its inhabitants." The population had indeed increased to 1,400 and an enlargement of the church was necessary. A northern aisle and an outer porch at the West entrance were planned at a cost of about £1,000. On November 9th, 1873, the Rev. John Fitz Wygram preached a sermon at Hampton Parish Church on behalf of the building fund which still needed £150. The SURREY COMET noted that "St. James's church has for some time past been temporarily closed, divine service having in the meantime been held at the schools in Mill Lane. The alterations being nearly completed, the Church will be re-opened by the Bishop of London on Saturday, November 29th." The paragraph closed hoping that Mr. Fitz Wygram would meet with generous support from the mother parish, and listed the many ways in which the vicar had promoted the well being of the working class.

After the dedication of the extensions the SURREY COMET criticises that "the work did not seem to be in keeping with the old. The addition consists of a northern aisle of six bays with transverse gables. To gain height and light these gables pierce the roof of the old nave. The new work has a more pretentious appearance." Internally, however, the new work seems to have been viewed with more favour - "the advantage of the increased height obtained by the gabling tells admirably. It has afforded space for stone columns of a fair height with remarkably well proportioned arches also of stone work, permitting at the same time of aisle windows, large enough thoroughly to light the northern side of the church. The Chancel, always effective from its admirably proportioned arch and tripel lancet windows, showed at its best from the removal of the organ into the eastern bay of the new aisle and a slight change in the position of the pulpit. It has gained vastly in effect from the introduction of stained glass of geometrical pattern to the eastern window, an offering from the Rev. John Fitz Wygram."

This was the beginning of twenty years of additions and alterations which changed the simple village church into the building we know today. In 1874 a new organ chamber and vestry were added and an organ, originally built by Bishop for St. Peter's, Eaton Square, was purchased by the Vicar for the sum of £150. Two years later the Chancel was enlarged, and by prefabricating the masonry, the work was completed within five weeks from the start of demolition. "The chancel which is too small will be lengthened eight feet, additional seats provided for the choir by the new choir stalls, the whole of the chancel will be repaved with tiles of choice design, the late east window will be removed to the west end of the church and a new beautifully stained window by Baily of London, of three divisions (one the gift of G. T. Ewens, chapel warden) will

take its place. The alterations are again from the designs of the architect of the church, W. Wigginton. The estimated cost is £700 exclusive of the window, of which the Rev. F. J. Fitz Wygram has donated £400."

Again, in 1877, the November Vestry records "it is desirable to enlarge the Church by the addition of a south aisle, a new porch, a tower and spire in accordance with plans now submitted to the meeting by Mr. Wigginton and that the said plans be approved and signed on behalf of this vestry." The next two years were spent once more raising money for the new venture. By subscription, sales of flowers, needlework, bran pies and so on, nearly £300 was raised. Church societies donated another £220 and the balance bringing the total up to £2,001, was once more met by the vicar and his wife. So the porch and south aisle were completed, and the work was again dedicated by the Bishop of London on Friday, July 18th, 1879. All seats in the new aisle were entirely free, while in the rest of the building they were reserved until the commencement of the Psalms.

The nave of the church was now complete and this was the last alteration Mr. Fitz Wygram supervised for he died two years later. As a memorial to him a window depicting the Transfiguration was placed in the west end, and others in the chancel; the west porch with a gable and stone cross was erected replacing the old bell turret, and the single service bell was rehoused.

Under the new Vicar, the Rev, and Hon. Henry Bligh, alterations still continued, and for the first time Vestry records specify repairs to the roof, a recurring item which was to worry all subsequent vicars up to 1963 when church finances at last made possible a complete overhaul.

During Mr. Bligh's administration the organ was also repaired and the vestry door was transferred from the chancel to the South aisle. Subscription lists once more met the account.

Except for repeated instances of the willingness of parishioners to give financial help there is no indication in the Vestry records of the enthusiasm shown by the parish for the new church, but the SURREY COMET describes the "Labour of Love" of a willing band of workers who decorated the church at Easter 1875. There were "many designs and large collections of choicest flowers" while "a profusion of flowers, moss and ferns ornamented the beautiful new font, devices in evergreens entwined the gas brackets and wreaths of arbor vitae encircled the handsome pillars supporting the new wing. Richly worked texts and mottoes in red mounted on white cloth adorned the pulpit, reading desk, choir stalls and altar, all pointing the joy and praise felt, while evergreens, violets, white tulips, lilies and cyclamen and other choice exotics were displayed throughout the chancel."

The year 1887 being Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, it was proposed to commemorate the event by the building of the Tower and Spire, so completing the Church. A public meeting was called for February 10th in the Boys' School. It proved a lively one with much applause for Mr. Bligh's address. He claimed the work was important for two reasons: "first, it would be taken in hand as an expression of loyalty . . . to the Queen, and secondly, if they had a Tower and Spire which could be seen for many miles round, attention would be drawn to the place . . . and people would know they were approaching the village of Hampton Hill." So a new building fund was launched.

The architects were Messrs. Romaine-Walker and Tanner of 19, Buckingham Street, Adelphi, and the contractors were Messrs. Dove Bros., of Islington, and labour was to be found locally as far as possible. The tower was to be in the style of the early decorated period coinciding with the western elevation of the church and the overall height would be 160ft. The total cost was £2,425 towards which £1,325 was quickly subscribed.

Jubilee celebrations started on June 19th, 1887, with a thanksgiving service held in a crowded church. On June 20th, the anniversary of the Queen's accession a procession of the local clergy and gentry, headed by the choir chanting Psalm 84 - Oh how amiable are Thy dwellings - proceeded to a platform erected on the tower site where a short service was held. The foundation stone of pink granite, situated at the base of the southern wall, was laid by Edward Bligh, the only son of the vicar, and inscribed "To the glory of God and in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the accession to the throne of his servant Victoria..." Behind it was

placed a specimen of every coin of the realm from a farthing to a guinea.

After the short ceremony, watched with interest by a very large number of parishioners, a move was made to the vicarage grounds "where the rest of the day was spent in general rejoicings." At four o'clock eight hundred children sat down to a "capital tea" and each received a special Jubilee medal. From five to seven-thirty, one thousand four hundred adult parishioners were supplied with tea on the vicarage lawns, and celebrations continued with "frequent performances of Punchinello," swings and races. "A capital selection of music" was supplied by the Hampton Hill brass band and dancing continued until dark when the grounds were "very prettily decorated with Chinese lanterns and fairy lamps." At nine-thirty there was "a nice display of fireworks" and half an hour later the crowd dispersed to the common where a huge bonfire was lighted which must have been visible for many miles. So ended a day of rejoicing in which "all classes and sects united harmoniously in the effort to make the celebrations a success," and doubtless the day was long remembered by those who took part in it.

During the following months the tower grew, but it was not until September that loans were promised and the Vestry felt able to build the Spire. The pinnacles were reached by November and the Spire completed in the New Year. On January 3rd, 1888, in warm sunshine, the vicar and the intrepid Mrs. Annie Bligh, together with the Church Wardens and other parishioners, climbed the scaffolding to the summit where Mrs. Bligh placed the capstone in position. The choir up in the new belfry sung the Te Deum which was heard by the parishioners and innumerable school children below but not by the party so high above. When the ceremony was completed, Mrs. Bligh, we are told, threw buns out of a large clothes basket down to the crowds below, to their amusement and delight. That spring the parish was recorded as being delighted with the new spire. Parishioners were informed that there was an excellent staircase mounting to about eighty-five feet and beyond that a ladder to the middle look-out and for sixpence a spectacular view could be obtained; particularly, would-be viewers were informed, "When there is a good breeze with sunshine after rain." The view from the top, on a clear day, extended as far as Henley, Harrow, Highgate and Boxhill and beyond.

The Tower debt proved a great anxiety, money mounting very slowly, but in June, 1891, a Fancy Fair was held to clear off the remaining loan. This was a tremendous undertaking, lasting two days and under the patronage of eight titled ladies, and the always generous Mrs. Fitz Wygram and Mrs. Carr. The Fair opened on June 30th in "a sort of Scottish mist" while the following morning there was a downpour, but in spite of this it was a great success. The central feature was an ingenious street of card houses decorated with masks, flags and fairy lights, constructed by Mr. Richard Roe. This earned much admiration. There was every type of entertainment, "Gipsies" organised coconut shies, swings and palmistry and there were stalls of all kinds, even "galvanic shocks" were dispensed at a penny - although the receipts from this indicate that only thirty-odd were intrepid enough to brave this hazard. The local band was in attendance, also the Thames Valley Orchestra with choirs and soloists, while dancing continued on both evenings until eleven o'clock.

Financially the fair was a success, and the debt paid off. The indefatigable committee immediately opened the Clock and Bells fund to which the oldest inhabitant, Mr. Skelton, gave the first pound. It was not until December, 1893, that the full amount of £375 had been raised and the clock and bells installed. The clock, with four dials, was made by Messrs. Smith and Derby who built the great clock of St. Paul's. It strikes and chimes the quarters on the four bells which are inscribed "Enter into His gates with Thanksgiving and into His courts with Praise," "Glory to God in the Highest," "On earth Peace," and "Goodwill to Men," respectively.

The dedication service was held on December 23rd, 1893, when the former vicar, the Rev. Henry Bligh, who had been chairman of the Clock and Bells committee from 1887-93, returned from Fareham to preach a sermon appropriate to the texts on the bells. He then "set the clock in motion by pulling a tassel, which liberated the pendulum and immediately the sweet-toned chimes were heard." A short peal was rung and the choir sang "To Thee O God we dedicate our bells now raised on high." By starting the clock and the first chime "which delighted everyone within receiving distance" Mr. Bligh had the satisfaction of completing the work he had begun with the building of the tower.

A further two bells were added in 1902 at a cost of £100, thus completing a peal of six. It was

planned that they were not to be heard until the eve of the Coronation of King Edward VII "unless the South African War should end before that date." The six bells are sounded by a carillon, while the single service bell is rung by hand from the base of the tower.

So, by the enthusiasm and generosity of the parishioners who had found most of the money needed, the church had been built in thirty years and with surprising richness of detail. The head of each nave pillar has its own relief design of leaves with flowers or fruit; on the arch corbels in the Chancel are the heads of St. Mary and St. John; the reredos has symbolic designs of the Holy Communion surmounted by the dove of peace. Above the west porch there is a bas-relief showing Christ, and accompanied by the text "Ask and it shall be given you," while over the main doors, adjoining the Baptistry, another delightful relief depicts the text "Suffer little children to come unto Me."

The church has been richly endowed with stained glass given in memory of men and women whose untiring efforts brought so many benefits to the parish. The memorial window to the Rev. F. J. Fitz Wygram, "The Transfiguration," for which £500 was collected by public subscription, is at the west end of the church above the porch which was also built in his memory. On the south aisle are a series of handsome windows based on the Parables, also given in memory of the first vicar by his wife and her mother, Lady Ward. The choice of the parables "The Sower and the Seed," "The Good Shepherd" and "The Good Samaritan" is a particularly apt memorial to the man and his work. The great East Window represents the Ascension, flanked by representations of the Nativity and the Visit of the Magi. The central light was given by Mr. G. T. Ewens, churchwarden, and the two side lights were presented to the church by Mr. Fitz Wygram. In the Baptistry are windows given in memory of Mrs. Fitz Wygram, the Rev. Henry Bligh and the Rev. Richard Coad-Pryor, and the plain cross which commemorates the Rev. C. R. Job is to be found in the nave to the right of the pulpit and his memorial window is to the right of the chancel. The North aisle, too, is filled with memorials to such families as the Pembertons, the Butlers, the Halls, and two representing King David and St. Cecilia were installed by public subscription to the memory of the first organist Mr. William Singleton. Four beautifully worked mosaics are to be found in the east end of the nave, the one on the North wall, depicting Christ the King is to the memory of Wallace Jakeman, churchwarden for many years; St. James fitly commemorates Jane Barnard; St. Michael, and Mary and the Babe commemorate Captain and Mrs. Isdell respectively. Mrs. Emma Bligh, Henry Bligh's first wife, is commemorated by windows to the south of the chancel. The marble pulpit was given by the Rev. Henry Bligh, while Lady Ward presented the eagle lectern and the font in memory of her husband, one-time Governor of Madras and Ceylon. These were the larger gifts but there were very many more, too numerous to list, given to increase the beauty of the church and the comfort of the worshippers. Electric lighting was installed in 1905 and the organ was rebuilt in 1913 and again in 1951.

The Churchyard originally comprised only the area which immediately surrounded the church; the cemetery at Hampton still serving the new parish. In the light of the growing population of the new parish this was found to be unpractical and in 1882 the vicar of Hampton gave an acre of land adjoining Park Road to be used as the parish burial ground. In 1901 people were distressed that trees were cleared to make more room, but smaller ornamental shrubs were planted. After the First World War the Vestry ordered that no artificial wreaths under glass should be placed on the graves and a memorial was planned and eventually a design by P. M. Andrews was accepted for the memorial which was unveiled on May 26th, 1920. This has a prominent place in the older part of the churchyard and features the Roll of Honour of the two World Wars. Not far away are the Canadian War Graves, a legacy from the Canadian Military Hospital which was situated in the park during the first war.

Keeping the cemetery tidy has always been a problem and damage to the Lych gate, fences and even the graves themselves was constantly being reported. Seemingly, the proverbially strict Victorian parents were no more successful in restraining their children from this particular form of vandalism than are their present day counterparts! So, in October, 1923, the gentlemen of the parish were asked to lend a hand and a churchyard committee, made up of workers rather than talkers, was formed. In 1924 there were further extensions which included part of the vicarage field, much of the preparatory work was done by voluntary help to reduce costs. It can be seen that churchyard problems, and the way in which they are tackled, are much the same today! The older part of the churchyard shaded by different varieties of trees which lend colour

and a sense of seclusion, is carpeted with spring flowers in the early part of the year. It contains several large family memorials, the earliest grave, indeed the only one in 1864, being that of Walter Dames, a name well known in early parish times. The church's dedication stone is placed on the outside of the east wall and reads "To the Glory of God, St. James's Church, Consecrated A.D. 1863...." To the north of the church in the narrow strip of land which separates it from Park Road can still be seen the foundations of the Lych gate, which used to lead into St. James's Road, but now stands at the eastern limit of the churchyard and leads into Park Road.

"During the Second World War St. James's narrowly escaped destruction when one of our own planes, returning from a raid over Germany, crashed on to No. 63, Park Road, the home of Lady Stanton. The only trace remaining of the incident is the absence of the cross at the top of one of the tower pinnacles, which was removed by the plane's wing-tip - so close was St. James's margin of safety!

In 1947 villagers could see steeple-jacks at work when urgent repairs to the Clock and Spire were effected as a result of a parish-wide collection, and 1953 was the year of the Great Renovation Drive. This was a carefully planned operation and many were the functions planned to add to the sums shown on a progress ladder displayed outside the church. The parish enjoyed the spectacle of various of their fellow parishioners, attired in all kinds of fancy dress, pushing or pulling an ancient barrel organ around the streets, accompanied by Mr. Brunt who did valiant duty churning out the music. Slogans such as "We are not doing this for a living - £2,000 urgently needed for St. James's," exhorted the villagers to give generously. The novelty and fun were appreciated and this venture raised over £66 towards the total of £1,600 collected. This sum made possible extensive roof repairs, new gutters and drain pipes, the replacement of rotten beam ends in the north and south aisles and various other urgent details.

Now, in the church's hundredth year, and for the past two years, due to the benefits reaped from the Christian Stewardship Scheme, over a thousand pounds have been spent in eradicating traces of dry rot, whilst more than three thousand pounds have been expended in stripping and re-tiling the roof, thus making it really waterproof for the first time in eighty years. Extensive interior decoration has been carried out, including the stripping of the dark stain from the beams in the roof of the nave and and chancel. Future plans envisage an expenditure in the region of £3,500 on further cleaning, redecorating, relighting and rewiring, together with a complete overhaul of the organ, and as we go to press we can report that stone-work has been extensively cleaned by means of a new chemical process, ugly beams in the ceilings of the north and south aisles have been enclosed and painted, together with the church interior walls, and the whole building has been rewired in readiness for the new lights. The results speak for themselves, and St. James's stands steadfast and in good shape to face its second century.