

Revd Prebendary Dr Brian Leathard, MA



Revd Brian Leathard

Introducing Revd Brian Leathard

Revd Leathard was born on 2nd May, 1956 and attended the Judd School, Tonbridge, Kent, from 1967 to 1974. He and Ramani met while undergraduates at the University of Sussex. He read European Studies from 1974 to 1978 and Ramani, who came from Sri Lanka, read Economics in the School of African and Asian Studies, a background which prepared her well for her employment with Christian Aid. Between 1976 and 1977 Revd Leathard taught in the University of Bonn, West Germany, before returning to Cambridge from 1979 to 1982 to read Theology & Religious Studies at Selwyn College and prepare for Ordination at Westcott House and indeed to marry.

Revd Leathard and his wife returned to Sussex to the parish of Seaford where he served his title for three years, as Assistant Curate, St Leonard, Seaford, Diocese of Chichester from 1982 to 1985. A daughter, Anusha, was born in Seaford on 12th May 1983. He was ordained Deacon of Petertide at Chichester Cathedral in 1982 and Priest at St. Saviour, Eastbourne in 1983. The family moved to the midland Diocese of Leicester, where from 1985 to 1989 he was Senior Anglican Chaplain, Loughborough University & Colleges, Diocese of Leicester - three Institutions with a population of about 15,000. While in Loughborough Ramani completed a Masters degree and Brian continued with his doctorate. The family enjoy music, food and travelling, value spending time together and enjoy meeting people.

Revd Leathard obtained his PhD from Loughborough University in 1991. He became Director of Ordinands for the Kensington Episcopal Area of the Diocese of London, responsible for the discernment, selection, training and placement of those who felt they may have a vocation to ordained ministry in the Church of England. He was also co-ordinator of the partnership between the Diocese of London and the German Protestant Church in Berlin. The Bishop of London offered Revd Leathard the Prebendal Stall of Reculversland in St Paul's Cathedral in 2005. As a governor of the local schools, Revd Leathard chaired various panels and was a counsellor to staff and families.



The Leathard family

Appointment and induction

After a fifteen month interregnum, the Institution and Induction of Revd Brian Leathard as vicar of the parish of St James took place on Thursday 14th of September 1989. The October/November 1989 Spires reported: *"Full house - Standing room only - and not much of that! That is how the board outside the church might have read, for the parishioners of St. James filled the church to welcome our new Vicar, Brian Leathard.....Our new Vicar's prayers gave hope for the future. They had spiritual depth. They were not just words but truly meant, coming straight from the heart delivered articulately. The whole induction service was so splendidly staged, our dear church looked so beautiful and the sermon by the Bishop and all that was said all struck just the right note."*

Significant developments during Revd Leathard's incumbency

Back in 1988 during the interregnum, the churchwardens at the time knew what the parish wanted: someone who possessed a high degree of spiritual leadership; supported innovative

forms of worship utilising a variety of musical styles; had an ecumenical approach; endorsed St James's sponsorship of overseas causes and welcomed foreign visitors; encouraged the ministry of all believers and promoted, in particular, the ministry of women; would oversee the rationalisation of the church's properties and the re-ordering of its buildings. These aspirations set the agenda for Revd Leathard's incumbency.

Mission Action Plans were introduced by the Diocese of London in 1993 and became a process and a focus for the development of the work of the churches in the area. Revd Leathard encouraged the MAP by involving as many people as possible in activating St James's mission, the basic aim of which was and is: *"To build the kingdom of God on earth, and particularly here in Hampton Hill"*.

His strong belief in inclusivity encouraged the ministry of women by having two women curates during his incumbency. He worked with the PCC to form the Resolution 2000: *"All people who respect one another and respect our church are welcome, regardless of race, age, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities or economic circumstances."*



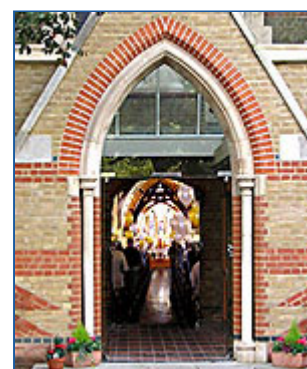
The new hall

The church hall in School Road and Wayside, the house in St James's Road, were sold, releasing capital that enabled a new hall to be built next to the church in 1993 so that all church activities could be carried out on one site rather than three. Included in the new building was a *"very attractive porch joining the church and the hall, somewhat in the style of a Lych-gate, like a bridge between the spiritual and the secular, between the Church and the World"*. The vision started into reality in the late eighties when plans were drawn up, the buildings were sold, land was transferred, alterations made to the vicarage and suddenly the whole project began to take shape. Finally, the actual building started to rise out of the

ground. Progress was slow, the foundation stone, blessed by the Bishop of London during the St James's Festival in 1993, waited for its final resting place. The 'topping-out ceremony' in December of the same year was another milestone on the way, but it was still another eight months before the building was eventually completed. Read about the [building of the hall](#) (scroll down half way).

The spire was renovated, the church interior redecorated and the organ rebuilt. The then controversial red purpose-built chandeliers were installed, the sound system updated and a TV link created to the new hall. A series of new kneelers was a millennium project for the church involving about thirty volunteers. The [south aisle stained glass windows](#) and the chancel east window were repaired and restored in 2005. The churchyard, being full, was closed for burials in 1990, and responsibility for its maintenance passed to the Local Authority. The massive task of recording all the details of the graves and drawing plans was completed in 2001. In 1999 a three bedroomed terrace house was purchased for the new curate, Revd Freda Evans, since when it has been occupied by a curate or let to bring in funds for the church.

A major change and challenge lay in the new west porch project, entitled 'Opening our Doors', that was launched in 2002 and officially opened in 2005 after a number of difficulties. *"We have a beautiful church which we want to share with those who pass by. More than this, the glass doors would also state that this church is open and welcoming. It is a church which is active in proclaiming the mission and purposes of God in our community. Glass doors would help to open up the mystery of God's presence in our world."* The glass doors gave a view of the whole length of the church, and the extension contained for the first time a parish office. New wiring enabled the altar to be floodlit so that the interior of the church could be lit at night to enhance the 'Open Door' aspect of the project. Read about [The west porch through the years](#).



The new west porch

Changes to patterns of worship continued during Revd Leathard's incumbency, initially mainly to Sunday evening services. However, by November 1994 all the Sunday evening services,

apart from an occasional Choral Evensong, were stopped due to falling attendance. Further services were added during the week to support those unable to attend on Sundays, and also commuters. He welcomed children and encouraged them to be actively involved in services.

Revd Leathard's support for music meant that few ordinary parish churches could match the range and quality of musical activities of St James's. After much debate, the PCC agreed that the choir should sing at the Parish Communion Service one Sunday a month. The Travellers' group of musicians and singers now started to accompany the All Age Service on the first Sunday of the month, changing during 1997 from being a rock style band to a small orchestra involving families and youngsters, and eventually being renamed the St James's Players to reflect this change in style. Music in the church was reviewed in 2001 and again in 2003 as a number of exciting ideas had come out of the MAP. A children's choir was introduced in 2003 and sang during special services like Christmas, Mothering Sunday and Harvest.

Most of the time the church was short of money for its regular expenses. The Stewardship giving was insufficient and so there was a return to fund raising and other schemes to augment planned giving. However, Revd Leathard ensured church funds continued to be available for charitable giving both at home and abroad. The magazine continued to be distributed free of charge. It was considered to be an important part of the church's outreach into the local community and members of the congregation were encouraged to contribute articles. Photographs were added for the first time and advertisements excluded when the format was changed from A5 to A4 in 2006. The website was officially launched in 2000 by the Bishop of Kensington as another form of communication, both internally to members of the congregation and also externally to the wider community.



One of Revd Leathard's gifts

The end of Revd Leathard's incumbency

Revd Leathard left the parish in 2006 to become Rector of Chelsea, St Luke & Christ Church. The church was full to bursting with friends from near and far for his last service. After the service he was thanked for all his hard work over the years and was presented with gifts from the parish, including beautifully made books from the Sunday School, Brownies and Guides, a watercolour painting of the church, books about Dietrich Bonhoeffer and a book made of photographs and memories from parishioners.

There were many tributes to him including *"he was truly a Man for All Seasons, Brian's message always was sensitivity, humour and above all a Christian spirit he was many things to many people a priest with a high degree of spirituality, who encouraged all believers, not somebody with the qualities of the archangel Gabriel, but one whose feet were firmly on the ground and yet whose faith was strong enough to lead us forward His ability to 'speak to' everyone providing intellectual challenge with a clarity of delivery, has enabled us to achieve a deeper, clearer and more meaningful comprehension of spirituality. In management-speak 'empowerment' may be an overused word, but in the context of Brian's 17 years at St James' it accurately describes the way in which he has sought to build up the body of Christ within the church and in the wider community. He is a very thorough, careful and prayerful person giving kind and gentle support and encouragement. By knowing people's skills and talents, followed by that all-important personal invitation, he has given many the confidence to take on roles and to contribute with remarkable effect to our common life."* In seventeen years, Revd Leathard was so many things to so many people - preacher, teacher, friend, comforter, supporter, inspirer, challenger, theologian, writer, listener, music maker, thinker, mediator, visionary, priest, scholar, friend, raconteur, counsellor, businessman and many more.