

## St James's youth groups through the years



Young people meeting in Windmill Road in 1908

The Church's endeavours to 'catch them young' has always led her to foster activities for young people. Whilst Sunday Schools cater for them in their early years, other organisations are necessary to keep them interested when they grow past this stage and approach the age of confirmation. The youth organisations which existed at the end of the nineteenth century were considerably different in character from those which exist today.

A Band of Hope, a very popular youth organisation in connection with the schools, was started in 1893 and from the start showed signs of *"strong and healthy vigour"* with an attendance of about a hundred. Its name typifies the evangelical spirit of the time, but it had little of the dullness associated with the Victorian age. References in the 1890s to its increasing numbers testify to the attractiveness of its programme which

included magic lantern shows, entertainments and activities of all kinds, not to mention a quarterly tea.

The oldest Church youth organisation in the village was the Church Lads' Brigade, which trained youths in *"health, citizenship and the principles of the Church of England"*. A company of the Church Lads' Brigade was started in 1892, *"When members know their drill, they will be eligible to join the Seaside Camp in the summer. We heartily commend this movement to the attention of our young friends."* In 1894 a boy had to be a member of St James's Bible Class or Sunday School before he could join the Brigade. It made a new departure in 1895 with the first church parade taking place, when the company, preceded by the Hampton Hill Brass Band, marched to church. The Brigade Band was large and effective and was thus called into use at many village functions. In 1900 it met the Sunday School children at Fulwell Station and marched them back to the village after their outing to the sea, and also led the processions on the patronal festivals. Captain Isdell was the Captain and treasurer at the time, Sergeant Isdell was drill instructor and the Revd H Clarkson the chaplain. Teas were held from time to time and the Pantile Mission Room was used for meetings. By 1896 the Brigade had reached its full numerical limit. In the early 1900's there were regular shooting parties and the Brigade, resplendent in full uniform attended the local Battalion parade for an official distribution of medals and stripes. At the St James's Day fête in 1906 the Brigade played a prominent part with their exhibition drilling and the following year they they gave a concert of sufficient dimensions to merit the hiring of the Victoria Hall. At this time their captain was Dr Dashwood Howard, of Fairlight, one of the more colourful of local personalities.

Other groups formed in the 1890s included a Lads Institute was established in the church room to provide recreation, games and so on for boys over fourteen. A Young Peoples' Social Guild was formed to *"draw young communicants, and those who are anticipating becoming communicants in the very near future, together for social intercourse. There were lectures and talks of a serious, as well as of an educational nature."* In the 1890s a Girls' Friendly Society was started and became very popular with weekly handicraft meetings and a quarterly service followed by a tea being a regular feature. They were sufficiently strong in numbers to have a special communion service and there were local annual festivals which the village contingent attended. By the 1920s more general clubs were inaugurated to take in all sections of the village youth. Amongst these was a Lads' Club and in 1929 a Girls' Club, but these went out of existence before the Second World War.

St James's Young People's Social Guild was started in 1932 with thirty seven youngsters as members. St James's Youth Club began between the two World Wars and met in Windmill Road School for games, indoor sports and dancing. It had a considerable membership, maintaining contact with church affairs through an advisory committee of parish council members. The Youth Club was suspended in 1951 and a Youth Fellowship, more closely attached to the church than the old youth club used to be, was started. *"It was affiliated with the Anglican Young People's Association, with four principles - Worship, Work, Fellowship and Edification - and definitely expects loyalty and high standards from its members."* The new venture was aimed at interesting all between the ages of 15 and 25. Its programme included visiting speakers, practical topics, Bible study and open meetings. Until the parish communion was inaugurated the fellowship used to hold a breakfast for its members once every three weeks after the communion service but many of its activities were purely social. Well attended fellowship holidays were arranged and the group owned a boat, Boanerges, having much fun with it. Group members were much in evidence as waiters and helpers at church functions and took their place in church life in a responsible and thoughtful manner. The CLB Company which had just been attached to the church had their first parade in the church on Sunday, May 13th 1956. Then in 1960 the Youth Club restarted with social evenings on Fridays and extremely interesting discussions on a variety of topics on Sundays.



The Spire of Flowers made by the YPF for the church Jubilee float 1977



The Questers performing at the 1983 Open Day



The YPF performing at the Jubilee Concert in 1977

1970 was a time of expansion and several younger people got together and began the Young People's Fellowship (YPF). This was a Friday and Sunday nights church-oriented youth club, with emphasis on having fun activities on the Friday and a more serious discussion group on Sundays after the 6pm Evensong service. In its early days the YPF met in the homes of the members of the congregation then later in Wayside, a grand but somewhat 'institutional' house in St James's Road which the church sold in the late 1990s. It proved to be a good follow-up to Sunday School and activities and numbers increased. *"Friendships, marriages even, were kindled by the good nature of the generally happy and contented times we had. Many of us at one time or another chose to go on the YPF annual holiday trip, usually around Easter. Typically, this would take the pattern of hiring a minibus and the leader driving that group to a remote hostel to stay for a week. Ones that stick in the mind are visits to the Norfolk Broads, Snowdon, Yorkshire Dales and the Scottish Lowlands (lots of 'goings-on' you see!).* The YPF even owned a small boat that members could use on the Thames. The YPF became known, among other things, for their dramatic performances in church and the hall and for leading services at Laurel Dene. The Questers was a small group of young people who met weekly in Wayside or sometimes outside to enjoy searching for new games or playing those already well known - the early stages in their development to be self-reliant and, hopefully, to find a relationship with God.

In the mid-1980s a Youth Fellowship, crossing parish boundaries, was opened for young people aged ten to fourteen. It was held temporarily at the vicarage of SS Michael and George, then in Wayside on Tuesday evenings. Being a Christian based Youth Group they had some time committed to the Bible in one form or another, the rest of the time being fairly open, with snooker, table tennis and various other games. They were called 'The Rebels' - rebels against the conventions of the world, a little like the first disciples. This group had stopped by the the end of decade.



The Young Church Fashion Show in 1999

A new group, for young adults from about thirteen to about eighteen, started up in the portacabin situated outside the church during the building of the new hall on Sunday evenings during 1993. The Youth Club was re-launched in February 1995 on Sunday evenings in the church hall between 7.00 and 9.00pm, with regular Christian discussions, talks or activities. However by the turn of the millenium there were no specific groups for teenagers, partly due to lack of suitable leaders and partly due to so many other activities then available for youngsters. There were, however, other local church-based groups for teenagers who welcomed those from other churches.