

Social life through the years



Revd Fitz Wygram

It is not clear to what extent any organised social life existed in the village prior to 1863 but 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 rôle 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.

The social life of New Hampton almost certainly centred around the "Beer Houses". These beer houses, some of which became public houses still in existence, were far from being the orderly places they appear today. There were many reports of drunken fights amongst "the wretched people" who escaped from their "even more wretched dwellings" - to quote the then vicar of Hampton - to seek solace in strong drink. Revd Fitz Wygram was strictly against drink and its "attendant evils", and so "he put his energy into the foundation of traditions specific to New Hampton and distinct from the public houses". To encourage the cottagers away from them and these drunken fights, a series of popular entertainments, known as Penny Readings, was started at St James's School. People paid one penny admission and the programme was usually made up of readings on a variety of subjects, interspersed with glees.

The Penny Readings came to an end during the 1880s, spoiled by "rowdiness", and it was thought that the time had come for a more elaborate form of entertainment. Much more ambitious Winter Entertainments were introduced which flourished during the following years. As there was no hall suitable for any major events until the 1890s, the public houses and the schools became venues for these entertainments. Every year the Winter Entertainments Committee, believed to have been run by the ladies of St James's, organised a programme including concerts with recitations, dramatic entertainments and parish teas. The December 1884 magazine reported: "One great advantage of this sort of Entertainment is that there is no question as to who is to be invited or who left out. It is open to all who like to take a ticket, at least to all who will behave themselves with decorum."

The Revd Fitzroy John Fitz Wygram, finding that only 13 children out of a population of 1,100 attended any sort of school, started the local schools in 1867. The school children gave excellent entertainments at Christmas with one that included a musical drill and "quaint little recitations" by the infants. The boys and girls both gave musical drill performances and sang many "capital songs", the girls excelling themselves in their pretty Japanese Fan Song, and the boys in the closing naval and military performance. The teachers also gave some excellent glees and solos.



School children

The church encouraged beekeeping around this time. According to the August 1885 magazine: "Cottagers should be encouraged to try what they can do with bees, and see whether they cannot pay their rent by the produce of their hives, and also store their cupboards with a sweet which will always be welcome to the little ones." In 1886 a clergyman gave a lecture on beekeeping which was advertised as being for "cottagers, agriculturalists and labouring classes" to "stimulate a pursuit capable, not only of affording rational and profitable occupation, but also a material increase to the income of the poor".

May Days were celebrated by parades, as well as by games and competitions in Bushy Park. There were teas and sports, followed by dancing and fireworks. Many different concerts, parades and outings took place. An annual Flower Show in the vicarage gardens was held, together with the mother parish of Hampton, and organised by the local Horticultural Society. The attractions included "manipulation of bees" by a very experienced and successful bee-keeper and there were prizes for fruits, vegetables, flowers, bee hives, honey and the best gardens. There were Cottage Garden Competitions and an Exhibition of Home Industries was held in conjunction with the Flower Show in July 1890. The August magazine reported: "It may seem invidious to mention particular exhibits, but we cannot omit a word of commendation of the stuffed birds, the fretwork, a desk, and needlework done by men and boys and a beautiful model yacht. HRH Princess Frederica was loyally received and the band, which was present in full force, played God Save the Queen. The Princess was conducted by a guard of honour of our Firemen in their smart uniforms and glittering helmets...."

Around the same time the Summer Amusements Committee were advocates of out-door games and athletic sports: "we must need admit that we are well supplied with clubs to promote such like health-giving and innocent amusements". There was a Hampton Hill Lawn Tennis Club and several cricket clubs. The July 1889 magazine reported: "There are few parishes better provided with the means for enjoying outdoor amusements than our own. The new gate in the village brings Bushey Park as it were to our doors, and a walk amidst its verdant green and pleasant scenery may be enjoyed at any time. Our Common is always available for the sports and pastimes of our young people, and over and above these there is our Recreation Ground, which has been generously made over to the parish, and which is kept in order by subscription for the special enjoyment of the people." In 1890 permission was granted by the 'Woods and Forests' to use the ground just inside the new gate into Bushy Park for cricket as well as football.

St James's organised a parish tea and entertainment for over one hundred and fifty people in 1885. A few years

later the magazine reported many successful "*tableaux vivants*" with beautiful life-like magic lantern shows and later still popular "*Amateur Theatricals*", variety entertainments, parish teas and suppers. Smoking concerts were held in aid of various good causes and cases of individual hardship. Music and song was the order of the evening and we read of one house after another acquiring a music licence. Song was obviously a necessary adjunct to the "*capital meals*" or "*sumptuous repasts*" which seemed to be a feature of village life, particularly as prosperity increased.

A sacred concert in March, 1896, was described as "*a new departure*". From 1897 these entertainments were held in the new Victoria Hall which was larger, more convenient and more accessible than the schools. Also in that year, the annual parish tea was replaced by a "*conversazione*", with a lime-light lantern picture show and songs, and was so popular it was held for many years.



Revd Phillips

The church also played a great part in encouraging sporting associations. Revd Job was a great enthusiast and played for the Cricket Club. He was also president of the Football Club in 1897 and his popular curate, Revd ES Phillips was vice-president. The Junior team had been district champions the previous season. In 1903, the Football Club played a match on Easter Monday in aid of the Nurses' Fund - one more indication of the community spirit. Sporting activities were also arranged by the Working Men's Club and Institute, still at that time closely connected with the church since its foundation by the first vicar. Revd Job still remained ex-officio president. The annual sports, which started in the Golden Jubilee year, continued to be held and, in 1899, the "*chief attraction was an electrically lighted steam roundabout*". Events included a Long Clay Pipe Race, and a Hampton Hill Fire Brigade competition, which involved a 100 yards race in full uniform, carrying two full pails of water, the spiller of least water being the winner.

St James's Day was always celebrated with different services, including a special children's service. No church magazines were produced during Revd Fitz Wygram's incumbency so nothing is known about this for that period. However, from the earliest magazines that were produced, there were articles about St James's Day which would also have been appropriate for this time, one of which reported: "*According to usual custom well over 500 children met at the Schools and marched with the Hampton Hill Brass Band to the Church. After a short service the procession was once more formed, and passing round the race course staked out in the Vicarage grounds, filed into circles of seats which had been arranged respectively for the boys, girls, and infants. The 100 flags, which to the intense satisfaction of the children had been carried in the procession, now decorated the race course and other parts of the Vicarage grounds. As soon as grace had been sung, the children set to work in good earnest on the bread and butter, buns, cake, and tea. The children then scattered in all directions to take part in the various activities arranged for their amusement including Punch and Judy.*" The adults also enjoyed the afternoon with wheelbarrow races, three-legged races, sack races, and spoon races for the women. Then there was bobbing for sugar plums, bell in the ring, the basket trick, and quintain. "*The Band played during the intervals and towards evening was responded to by a goodly company of dancers. On Sunday there were festival services in the Church, which were bright and well attended.*" Find out more about [St James's Day](#) at this time.

Drawing Room Meetings, on behalf of the Colonial and Continental Church Society or the Diocesan Church Reading Union, took place at the vicarage from 1894 in the form of lectures. The December 1902 magazine reported: "*I am glad to say that the Church Reading Union Lectures have awakened some interest in Church History, and the good attendance has been decidedly encouraging.*"

As can be seen, the church had a great influence over the social activities of the cottagers but after thirty years the situation gradually began to change. During Revd Coad-Pryor's incumbency social activities, like concerts, lantern lectures, demonstrations, conversaciones, missionary teas and school entertainments continued but were slimmed down during the war years. There was an annual sale on behalf of the Missions of the Church, and proceeds from the carol singing parties one year enabled the District Visitors to distribute 50 tickets for groceries.



The vicarage garden

The usual St James's festivities were not held in 1915 due to the war but successful whist drives were held to raise funds for sending comforts to local soldiers at the front. Social Gatherings, as they became known, picked up again after the war. There were subscription dances, garden fetes, dramatic entertainments, cafe chantants, dialogues and after refreshments there were competitions and a brief address.

From 1923 the winter monthly socials were commonly known as the Vicar's Socials. There were "*Lantern Lectures and Cinematograph Exhibitions*" in 1926, and some years later the winter season was started with a "*Parish Social*" which was "*not merely a Parish Dance but a real Sociable Evening which will lead to a greater family feeling, and that a greater interest in parochial affairs may be the result.*"

The main social function of St James's Church by 1930 was the Summer Fête, which these days was held not just to entertain the parish but also as a matter of financial necessity. It gave the parish an opportunity to help the church in its less "*palmy*" days as the church had helped the parish in its days of financial need. Hampton Hill continued to celebrate its Patronal Festival of St James's Day much more than many other parishes as the whole parish owed so much to the church. However in July 1934, "*although it has of late been shorn of much of its social side there is still the spiritual and more important part of the Festival. Our acts of thanksgiving for the example of the life of the Apostle to whose name and memory the Church is dedicated cannot be too many.*"



The fete in 1950



The fete in 1953

At a meeting of the Parochial Church Council in 1933 a Social Committee was formed to provide "parochial social entertainment" such as dances, concerts, whist-drives, bridge-drives, community singing and lectures. "With such a committee the stigma of dullness should be removed from Hampton Hill." It was hoped that the entertainments that they organised would bring in some of the much needed money for the church and the vicar kept stressing that the support of the congregation was vital in realising this.

Revd Brunt introduced an "At Home" after the Patronal Festival Evensong in July 1952: "After the St James's Tide evening service on July 25th, my wife and I will be 'at home' to members of the council and congregation at the Vicarage, and shall be very glad to see as many there as do not mind a squash!" After eighteen years of this arrangement in 1969 a different way of celebrating St James's Day was introduced when, after the Parish Communion, there was the breakfast as usual and then another social gathering in the afternoon. The evening service was brought forward to 6.00pm so that it was not too late for the children.

Most of the social activities during this time were to raise money for the Renovation Fund, for example a Bonfire Party, a Modern Dance, Variety Show, Film Show, Shrove Tuesday Party, Concert Party and a Grand Social. A new venture, an Autumn Fair and Social, was introduced in 1952 with feelings that it would promote

good fellowship and bring aid to hard pressed finances. In the same year a fete was held in the grounds of Laurel Dene: "As well as being a very pleasant occasion in its own right, the fete is also one of the means by which we bridge the gap between current income and current financial obligations." The first Flower Show was put on in the parish hall in 1954. The hall was completely transformed by the array of flowers, fruit and vegetables and on the third day it was crowded with exhibitors and visitors for the prize giving. During these years other social events put on by, or on behalf of, the Church Council were the Harvest Supper, Bonfire Party, Christmas and Easter Socials, summer Garden Party and Parish Guest-Nights.

However in 1958, as a result of the successful Stewardship Scheme, "the Summer Fete now passes into history, and the Garden Party takes its place". It was a real party, not a fund raiser, with just an entrance fee to cover expenses. The only stall would be that provided by the Old People's Welfare Committee, and the proceeds from this would be for their own funds. One highlight was the exhibition organised and arranged by members of the Young People's Fellowship, 'Hampton Hill - Past, Present and Future'.

The centenary of the church was celebrated in 1964 with the preparations starting in 1963. Read the article [The Centenary](#). Beetle Drives and Ludo Drives were introduced in 1964 and representative members of the church organisations successfully produced "Grand Concerts" in the parish hall with skits, songs, dances, a mimed melodrama and a short play. Newcomers' parties were introduced in 1967 with an interesting slideshow and talk describing what Hampton Hill was like in the past. This was followed by refreshments and an opportunity for newcomers to meet each other and also some of the more established members of the community. The Tuesday Club was started in 1968 for discussion or a programme of current or topical interest.



The first Open Day in 1969

The first Open Day was in 1969 when nearly a thousand people attended and about seventy actually participated. A beautifully decorated church was filled with displays and various youth activities, including the Sunday School's puppet theatre. There were organ recitals, refreshments and later, in the evening, a barbecue with folk music. The whole day was a resounding success.

The September 1969 Spire reported: "Following the example of many institutions desirous of promoting interest in their buildings, possessions, pursuits and above all their aims, St James's Church is holding an Open Day in which the entire parish will be invited to participate. St James's exists to serve God and the community, and this day will provide a special opportunity for those who would like to accept the invitation to come and be 'at home' in their parish church. The church itself will be decorated with flowers and fruits, and there will be displays of embroidery, vestments and church plate, pictorial records of events and places important in the history of the village and exhibitions of the various youth activities. From time to time throughout the afternoon there will be organ recitals by the church organist, and teas will be served in a marquee on the south lawn. There will be a barbecue from 7-8 p.m. to the sound of folk music provided by members of our own Young People's Fellowship and visiting friends."



St James's Float in 1971



St James's float in 1972

St James's produced floats for several occasions such as the Old Peoples' Welfare Pageant and the Hampton and Hampton Hill Carnival the former representing 'Fitzwygram's Times' and the 'Naughty Nineties'.

Social events continued to flourish with Parish Outings, Harvest Suppers, Firework Parties, Carol Singing round the parish, New Year Parties, Parish Rambles, Folk Evenings, Buffet Dances, Barn Dances and tennis matches. In 1973 "St James's Happening" took place instead of evensong, with the congregation marching round the outside of the

church singing, followed by hymns, songs and readings, highlighting periods of St James's life. Parties for local newcomers were put on regularly and the history of Hampton Hill was described with illustrations. These proved to be very popular.

The church Social Committee was co-organiser, along with the Hampton Hill Association, of the Jubilee Celebrations in 1977 and was enjoyed by some 2000 people. There was a procession through crowded streets followed by a fete on the Holly Road Ground, with fancy dress, sports and a tea-party for the children, and in the evening, a barbecue and open-air dancing. During this celebratory period, St James's put on special services, a concert and actually won first prize for the best dressed float. The Open Day in 1978 proved to be very popular.



The cubs at the Jubilee Concert



The YPF The Sunday School at the Jubilee Concert



The Sunday School at the Jubilee Concert

During the 1980s and 1990s the Social Committee continued to be active, organising many varied entertainments. Adverts in the Spire appeared, such as in January 1982: *"Feeling flat and rather jaundiced after Christmas? Come and have a real flip in the Church Hall"*, and another year: *"The Social Committee are planning a special New-Year-cum-Mardi-Gras Party for all the family. Watch for posters nearer the date and get your frying pans ready. it'll be Fun! Fun! Fun!"* Other such activities were planned like the film evening showing 'Watership Down' and 'The Belles of St Trinians' and a mixed age-group Victorian and Edwardian Extravaganza. Parish Parties and the like became popular and often annual events, like the Christmas parties, Harvest Festival Buffet Suppers, summer outings, parish rambles, Barn Dances, Beetle Drives, cricket matches between St James's and All Saints Hampton, 'sporting evenings', theatre outings to top West End musicals, Parish Proms, the parish Christmas party, Tea Dances, 'Pot-luck' suppers with poetry, country and barn dancing and the 'Edwardian Drawing Room', featuring ballads, comic songs, ragtime, recitations, etc. There were also Parish Children's Parties and the Young Families Group's Fireworks Party which drew a large crowd in the vicarage garden.



Victorian Bazaar in 1990



Pancake party in 1982



Victorian Bazaar in 1990



Questers at the 1983 Open Day



A party in 1980



The guides at the 1983 Open Day

After many years without one, a Flower Festival was held in July 1991 to celebrate the Patronal Festival of St James. It was combined with Gift and Open Days and ran for three days. Throughout the three days there were wonderful flower displays, several musical performances, including the Liturgical Dancers, a History Exhibition, a display of church linen and plate, a barbecue with dancing and church bell ringing in the belfry. After the service on the Sunday there was a shared lunch in the vicarage gardens. Another Flower Festival took place in 1995 with *"elegant composition, colour harmony and artistic arrangement of the magnificent floral displays"*. There was a party in the church hall in 1998 to celebrate the Chinese New Year which was a great success, with appropriate dress and food on a Chinese theme.



The cast of Dawnlight in 1992

The production of Dawnlight, written by a member of the congregation, was presented in 1992, describing the Early Spread of Christianity in England in words, song, dance and music.

The following year marked the 130th anniversary of the parish. Celebrations by and for the whole parish were held, including Victorian cricket, drama, music, history talk, quiz, parish splash, parties, treasure hunts, barbeques, beating the bounds and much, much more. The 'Song of the Hill', written specially for the occasion, told the story of 19th century Hampton Hill, and particularly, after 1863, of the



The first Shrove Tuesday parish meal in 2008

influence of St James's Church on the community. The celebrations started with David, Bishop of London, blessing the foundation stone of the new [church hall](#) and presiding at Parish Communion, and were rounded off with an Open Day at the church and a special St James's Day service with the Archdeacon of Middlesex.

The St James's Theatre Club started in 2006 with groups going to Richmond Theatre for an evening out. The social committee organised a new annual event in 2008, a Shrove Tuesday Parish Meal. This was a chance to celebrate together before the start of Lent at the Piazza Firenze Restaurant in Hampton Hill High Street. There was a Family Quiz Night and Supper to raise funds for Christian Aid Week and an annual Harvest Festival Bring and Share Lunch was initiated in 2010. The revival of Ruth Mills' evening, 'Pot Luck Supper and Poetry' was launched in 2011 with people taking along a favourite poem to read and a plate of food to share.

St James's Day continued to be a special occasion, often with a barbeque or picnic in the vicarage garden, children's activities and games with the chance to make their own badge or fridge magnet. The spire was always open for people to see the view and try the bells. In January 2012, a group of volunteers began meeting to plan for St James's 150th anniversary year in 2013. The Bishop of London was invited to come for an [anniversary service](#) on the nearest Sunday (December 8th) to the actual day of consecration (December 11th). The group aimed for an event a month, and except for one month, this is what happened. There were acts of worship: Christingle; New Year's Service; Candlemas; Harvest with the Bishop of Kensington; anniversary Sunday with the Bishop of London. There was much outreach during the year. Read about the [150th Anniversary](#).

After the Anniversary celebrations the Social Committee (renamed St James's Hospitality in 2014) thought it was important not to lose the enthusiasm that had been shown during that year by encouraging church members to become involved in organizing social events.



St James's Day celebrations in the 1990s



St James's Day celebrations in the 2000s

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.