

St James's Sunday School through the years

St James's Sunday School has always been *"a happy band of children"*. The June 1885 magazine reported about the flourishing Sunday School: *"The numbers still continue to increase, and in addition to some fifty older ones who attend classes at Mrs Fitz Wygram's and at the Vicarage, there are now two hundred and ninety two upon the books."*

Annual trips had been started in 1882 to places like Crystal Palace. Some years the trip included nearly three hundred children with the Hampton Brass Band meeting the party at the train station on their return with flags and a parade. The Sunday School excursion to Brighton in 1898 included members of the choir and Bible class and a special train was arranged with the railway company. The following year the excursion was to Southsea and the party numbered four hundred and eighty five. In 1905 it was a *"River Excursion to Windsor where the boats were comfortable and well managed by civil and obliging men, and the changing scene on the banks formed a continuous panorama, pleasant and restful."* During the 1930s/1940s the annual Sunday School treat continued to be an outing on the train, often to Brighton. Each year about one hundred and ten of the younger Sunday School children, the *"Tiny Tots"* who did not go on the outing, were invited instead to the vicarage for games and tea.



The Sunday School in 1908



The Sunday School in 1916

The annual Sunday School winter entertainment and distribution of prizes was very popular. The February 1892 magazine reported: *"There was an exhibition of dissolving views and comic scenes from the Vicar's magic lantern. It would seem that the children never tire of seeing the magic lantern, and although a great majority of the slides are shown year after year, the continuous roar of satisfaction and applause never ceased from the beginning to the end of the exhibition"*. In 1898 there were about two hundred and fifty children present for this, nearly all the teachers and a fair number of parents. About forty prizes were given, consisting of Bibles, prayer books and story books. The annual prize giving in 1917 consisted of prizes and certificates, numbering 210, to the boys, girls and infants attending the Sunday School, with the February 1917 magazine reporting: *"There was a large gathering of parents and friends. After the distribution a short Lantern Entertainment was given, and each child on leaving the room was presented with a bun and orange."*

During the late 1800s and early 1900s attendance at Sunday School grew so much that by 1910 it became impossible to seat all the children in church, so it was decided to have a separate service taken by the teachers for them in the church room at the same time as the service in church. The service was *"short, simple and suited to the capacities of the little ones"*. An appeal went out to the parishioners for help in the Sunday Schools in 1914 as classes had to be joined together through lack of teachers. There were courses of lectures to help the Sunday School Teachers. *"Teachers are recommended to bring note-books and pencils, and to be in their places in good time."* The January 1921 magazine reported: *"The Boys' Sunday School grows bigger and bigger, but the number of teachers does not increase; there is no more important work for God and His Church than this. I want two or three men to volunteer for this work. The Girls' Sunday School is, at present, so Miss Lush tells me, fully staffed, but she cannot afford to lend any of her teachers."*

In 1936 there were three *"departments"* in the Sunday School. The September edition of the magazine reported: *"The real and important work of the Sunday School is done in the morning. The boys and girls departments meet at 10 o'clock at the Parish Hall and Club Room respectively and it is there that the instruction is given by the teachers..... In the afternoon*

the children meet at 2.30 and are taken to Church for the Children's Service. The Infants meet at 10.30 in the morning and at 2.30 in the afternoon at the Church Room in St James's Road."

Betty Stewart was a Sunday School teacher from her confirmation until she retired 45 years later in July 1984. For the majority of this time Betty was in charge. Her dedication was immense and led eventually, when women were allowed to be ordained to her taking up training and eventually being ordained herself in 1993.

In 1952 it was decided to hold the Sunday School classes on a Sunday afternoon so that the children and their teachers could also attend the morning services. Another request for more teachers went out and a new class was started on the Rectory Farm Estate for the "*younger children of the outlying portions of the parish*", with nearly forty children "*on the books*" and Miss Jean Western as their teacher. Then later in the year it was decided that all departments would meet at 2.30. with the infants in the hall, the juniors in the church and the seniors in the club room. More and more children came to the various classes and the older children from the Rectory Farm Estate class began to "*come down to the central schools*". Most of the children from the former afternoon children's service were absorbed into the Sunday School. In 1958 the younger children aged 4-7 met at Wayside, while those at Junior Day Schools met in church. The department in Rectory School continued catering mainly for those aged 4 to 9, too young to go all the way to St James's Road.



Sunday School led by Betty Stewart in c1950



Miss Jean Western, Sunday School teacher



The Sunday School puppet theatre in 1969

Children at Secondary Schools also met in church for the opening worship

and then went to the Vicar's Bible and Catechism Class in the vestry. "*The best arrangement now seems to be that they should stay here for 2 or 3 years, at the end of which time they should be attending the Services in church regularly, and receiving further instruction not on Sunday afternoons, but in week-day Confirmation classes and Sunday evening meetings of the Young People's Fellowship.*"

During 1960 a poll showed an overwhelming majority (98%) in favour of Sunday School in the morning rather than the afternoon. So from May 8th onwards all departments, except the one in Rectory School, met at 9.45 instead of 2.30. There was still no meeting on the fourth Sunday in the month, when "*we expect the children to come to Morning Service at 11.00 with their parents*". A morning's Sunday School session in 1960 began with the children altogether with fifteen minutes worship. This was an introduction to methods of prayer and well known parts of the liturgy. "*The aim of our Sunday School is to train Church members.*" The children were given 'achievement cards' and then progressed to the Cross Bearers' badge. However the Sunday School held in Rectory School during the same period consisted of Bible stories and creative activities for the younger children and the CSSM series of lessons in the Sunday School Magazine for the older children.

After long consideration, in 1964 it was decided to continue the Infants' Department at 9.45 in Wayside with the Junior and Senior Departments meeting in church at 11.00 This arrangement made it possible for the older children to attend both the 09.30 Parish Communion and Sunday School, with breakfast in between at Wayside. Children continued to move from the Junior to the Senior Department, known as "*the Vicar's Class*", at the same time as they went from

primary to secondary day school. This older group met for opening worship with the juniors in church, but then proceeded to the vestry to prepare for confirmation and communion. After a year these children would attend Parish Communion regularly, receiving their final instruction for confirmation in weeknight classes. The Sunday School for the younger children living at a distance from the church in the Hanworth Road and Rectory Grove area of the parish continued to meet in Rectory School. However when there was a monthly Family and Parade Service, a shorter, simpler service at 11.00 , usually on the fourth Sunday, none of the Sunday Schools met.



Jubilee Concert 1977



Hampton Carnival 1979



Christingle Service 1980

Later, in 1973, it was thought that by meeting earlier, more junior children might be able to come, so they started to meet at Wayside at 9.20 for the usual activities and then went over to church shortly after 10.00. The same arrangements were made for the infants and the newly formed over-eleven group, which started in 1977.

From Autumn 1978 the Infants' Sunday School, the Junior Sunday School and the 10 pluses all met at Wayside in St James's Road at 9.20 every Sunday, except the 1st Sunday in the month, which was then the occasion of the Family Parade Service.

As before, the children were able to join the rest of the Parish at the Family Communion Service at 10.20 or were collected from Wayside. A team of experienced leaders taught the children about the Christian faith, through stories, singing, modelling and other activities, at that time following a new scheme of work called Faithquest.

During the mid-eighties, the needs of young people within the parish were considered in great depth. It was decided that the children should play a bigger part within the worship of St James's. It was thought that *"the time is right for the Sunday School to become more of a place to worship, a place to pass on our faith to our children - for they are all our children: they are the church of the future, the Christians of the future. The Sunday School has a place which is not inferior or secondary to that which takes place in church on a Sunday. It is different and is of equal value."* As a result, in 1988 the Sunday School was renamed 'The Jays' - J for Jesus and J for St James *"as a place of worship, of joy, of fun - a place where children want to be. A place of welcome; a place to discover the joy and good news of Christianity and its power to change people's lives."* The Jays met from 9.15 to 10.05 in Wayside and later in the new Church Hall, and any child aged from four to thirteen plus was warmly welcomed.



Revd Betty Stewart,
Sunday School teacher

By around the end of the 1980s the Jays had incorporated all the children in three age-based classes. The group for eleven to fourteen year olds eventually became called St James's Young Church and met at 9.30 for talks, discussions, quizzes and plays. On Sunday mornings during Lent, 1995, the Young Church very successfully acted the Passion narrative.



Around 2000, Sunday School started at 9.30 in the church itself. During the last verse of the first hymn one of the children went up to the altar to receive a cross from one of the clergy. This was then taken into the hall by all the children who then had their usual meeting. The children brought their pocket money for the collection they had which was in aid of the Church of England Children's Society. At the end of the meeting, at around 10.15, they returned to church and one of them returned the cross to the altar along with the offertory. They joined with the rest of the congregation in receiving a blessing or communion and singing the last hymn. This way children were included in the church service itself and felt part of it even though they spent most of the time in the hall.

In the early 2000s the Sunday School started an annual sponsored sleepover, in aid of charity. They also 'sold' breakfasts to the congregation the following day, Mothering Sunday, to increase the sponsorship. Every year they would follow the themes found in the Christian Year.

The children had a great time at the cinema when they went to see Evan Almighty in October 2007. It was thought provoking and increased their awareness of the environment and how precious it is. They created a great collage that decorated the church during October, showing many endangered species. The children put on a brilliant modern adaptation of the Nativity in church in 2009 which proved a huge success). By 2010 the older children had moved on, some becoming servers, others moving away for their education, leaving a younger group in the Sunday School.



During the summer 2011 the name 'Shell Seekers' was chosen as the new identity – this reflected James's roots as a fisherman when he first met Jesus and was called to be a disciple. It also gave a focus to the children (and the adults that lead them) that they were all searching for the meaning of Jesus in their own lives as they read bible stories, undertook activities and reached out to the community in which they lived. In addition, this new name allowed them to identify with the fantastic work carried out by the St James's Ark team and hopefully enable some children to make the step up to become

Shell Seekers themselves. Also, the shell seeking began a little earlier each Sunday church hall at 9.25 and aimed to come back into church in good time to share communion with family and friends. They often provided a 'show and tell' of activities during the notices at the end of the service.

Christmas 2012 was started by the children holding a sale of cakes and crafts, made by themselves. They donated the proceeds to Operation Noah, a Christian charity with a focus on reducing climate change. The children raised enough money from a cake sale to buy 20 Scholar Packs, providing basic stationery to schoolchildren in countries across Africa and in 2014 they raised £282 from their Christmas Crafts Sale which was enough to sponsor 18 olive trees for Embrace the Middle East's re-planting project. The Shell Seekers led the Mothering Sunday celebrations on 6th March 2016 with an interactive talk based on Luke's gospel. Taking their inspiration from Jesus' desire to gather the children of Jerusalem into his arms like a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wing, they wrote their feelings about their mums on the back of some (very brightly coloured!) chicks. St James's Day included a family service at 11.00 during which the Shell Seekers made a presentation all about St James himself. The All Age service at Harvest featured the Shell Seekers and the uniformed groups. The Shell Seekers took the activity which they based on the work they had been doing that term. The challenging theme of 'Good and Evil' was the subject chosen by the group themselves and they decided to base the harvest thanksgiving on the Book of Psalms. During their sessions each member wrote their own psalm and then shared it with the congregation during the service. During their session on Remembrance Sunday, 13th November 2016, the Shell Seekers learned about why remembering those men and women who gave their lives for the peace and freedom we enjoy today, during the two World Wars and all the other wars and conflicts throughout the world, was so important. They discovered that both British and Canadian service men and women were buried in the churchyard and they made each one a named poppy to thank and remember them.

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