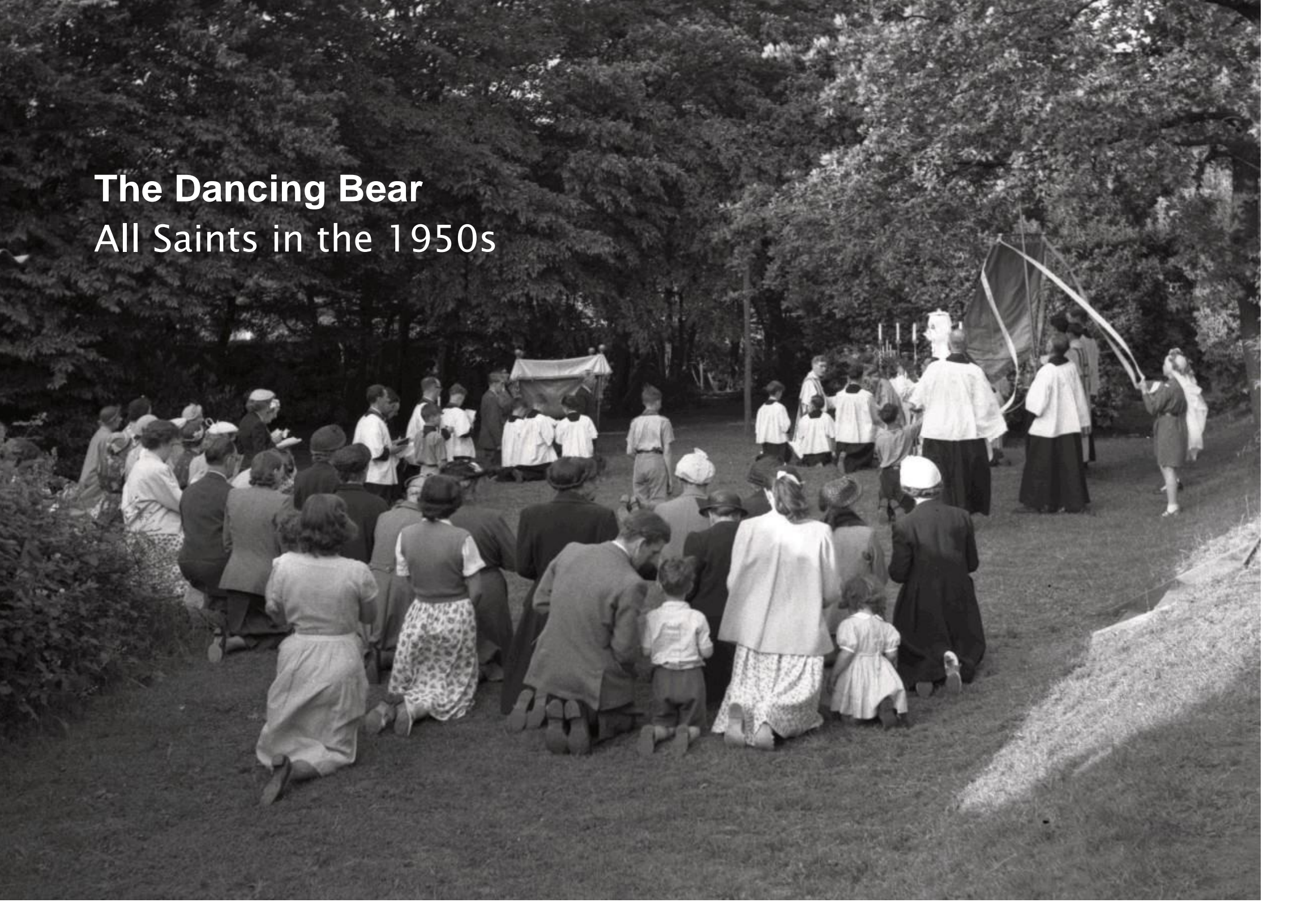


The Dancing Bear

All Saints in the 1950s






In 1952, All Saints' found itself in the national press and strangely it wasn't the witch burning that created the outrage. The cause of the commotion was a medieval fair held in the grounds of the vicarage. It had begun with archery, there was buried treasure, a ping pong shy, apple bobbing, a square dance and between tea and the raffle, a witch burning. So far no one has been able to find any record of ritual slaughter so I think we can safely assume no witches were actually harmed.

However, the event that provoked the ire of Britain's animal lovers was the revelation in The News Chronicle (a long-lost liberal voice on Fleet Street) that there was to be in East Finchley, a march led by a 'dancing bear.'

The man behind the alleged ursine abuse was John Purchase. It had all begun when Anne, John Purchase's wife to be, decided she had had enough of her parents and arrived at the house of the local vet, Mr Nesfield Andrewes.

Anne became a kennel maid and when she married John Purchase they both ended up living with the Andrewes family. The arrival of the Purcheses helped to add ballast to the Andrewes family's already considerable influence in the church. Scouts, guides and innumerable events and committees all show the same names cropping up.



Mediaeval Fair

Held in the Vicarage
Gardens, Durham Rd.

Saturday, June 28th.
from 3 to 6 pm.

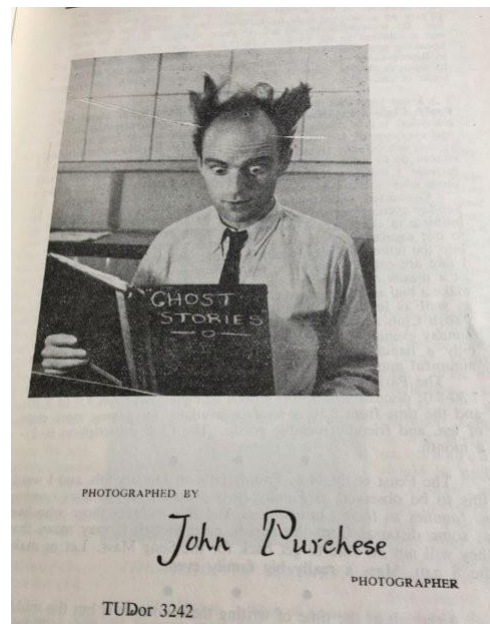
Admission, by this programme, 1/-. (Children 6d.)

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John had worked in the film industry and it was his idea to make a short film to be shown at the nearby Rex (now Phoenix) cinema announcing that the march before the medieval fair was to be led by a dancing bear. The bear, of course, being his wife Anne dressed up in a bear costume. For some reason this little film was later shown to High School students in Little Rock, Arkansas, to help them understand what life was like in England. I'm sure it must have been helpful.

The fair, though, was only one of dozens of social activities at the church. This was the golden age of jumble. Queues would form to rummage through unruly piles of ageing knitwear. You learnt not to put your coat down. Whist drives were extremely popular. The hall would be filled with crowds of women who would in years to come migrate to bingo.



The table tennis team also enjoyed a run of success until they faced some keen new arrivals in 1954, the Spiritualists. They were dab hands at ping pong.

All Saints' was a growing church. On Friday after Evensong, teenagers would gather for a youth club and what were described as 'group discussions.' There were scout groups, guides, brownies and even in 1960 the establishment of a pack of 'Air Scouts' – scouts with an 'aeronautical twist.' Memories of how long that lasted are a little dim.

The Mothers' Union was active and for younger women wanting something a bit more lively there was a 'Young Wives' group. This was an age when 'meetings' were social life rather than work.



Worship also offered a certain spectacle. The Corpus Christi procession was well attended, many of the participants would take the day off work to join in, sometimes it would be repeated a day or two later as the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament used All Saints' for their own event. The procession would snake out of the side of the church and head off down Twyford Avenue. Even in the 1980s it could be seen striding down to Budgens. It must have been a strangely exotic sight for the local community.

Grumbles were limited to trying to discourage the large numbers of children who were once again roaming the streets and playing in the grounds of the church. On one June Sunday 19 children were listed for confirmation. The parish magazine is filled with notices of weddings and baptisms. It was a lively and growing family church at a time when the neighbourhood was a place where working class families could afford to live.

What happened next was the Revd Sidney Allso.

