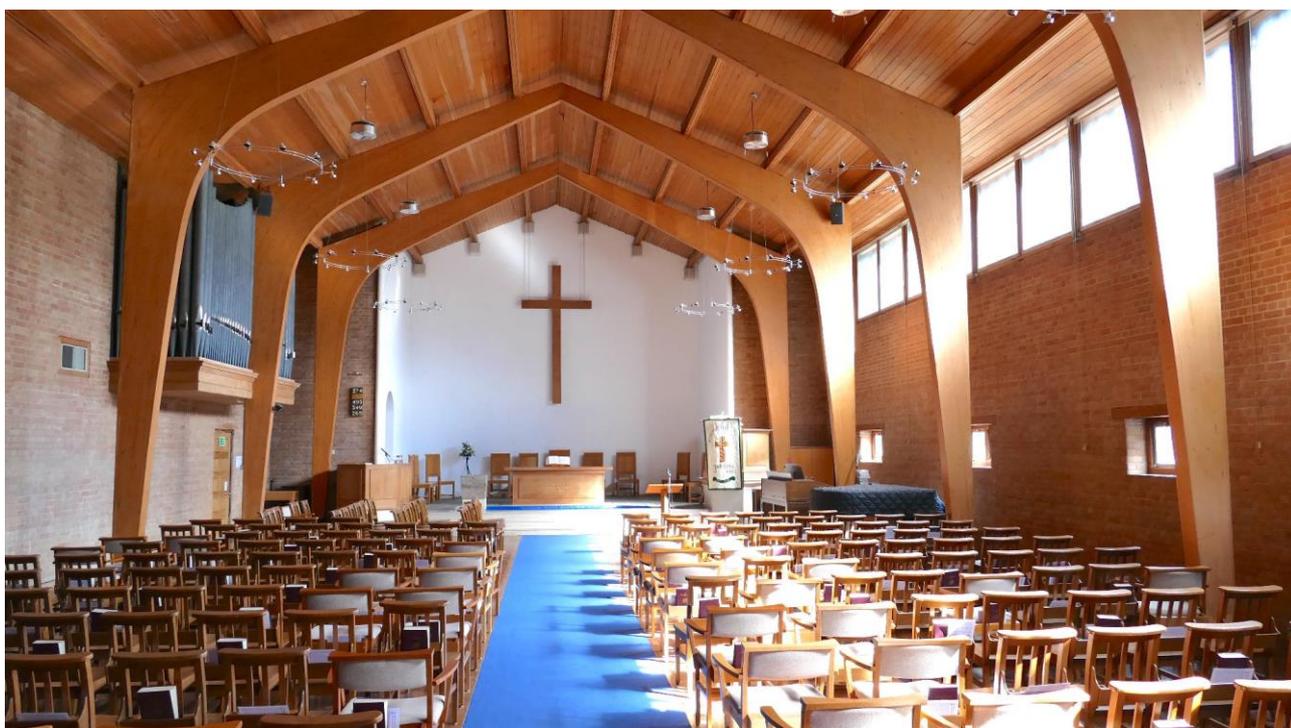


2011— 2012: Ministerial vacancy

Since the untimely death of the Revd Andrew Busby on 1st May 2011, the membership did its best to carry on with the example he set: of loving and worshipping our Lord; ensuring the quality of pastoral care of our members and adherents; to fulfil his vision for this church as 'A Community for The Community'. The Revd Peter Wortley was appointed as Interim Moderator with whom the membership closely worked to search for a new full time minister for Amersham Free Church.

Sunday Worship Services were carefully considered and planned throughout this period of searching and selection. Erna, together with Bryan Long as pulpit secretary, ensured that our Sunday Worship continued to be a spiritually fulfilling experience for members and visitors. Norma Jenns as Church Secretary found herself in a uniquely challenging position as she sought to encourage members and maintain a positive and cheerful presence throughout the vacancy. Erna continued to lead and preach at many of our services and the Revd Gwen Collins (Minister of Trinity URC, High Wycombe) and the Revd Bridget Powell (Minister of Chesham URC) led the majority of our Sunday evening Communion Services. The Revd Diana Glover from St Michael's, was a shining example of the strength of cooperation of Churches on the Hill in Amersham. AFC Worship Teams were also supportive throughout



the vacancy, leading memorable services, including a reflective Good Friday Service.

As Amersham Free Church has been affiliated to both the Baptist Union and the United Reformed Church since 1972, it was necessary for the members to consider both denominations as possible sources for a new minister. After an initial meeting with the Revd Geoff Colmer (Regional Baptist Minister) and the Revd Dr Andrew Prasad, (Moderator of the Thames North Synod of the United Reformed Church) to discuss the vacancy, a Vacancy Committee was set up consisting of Dr. Bob Bradnock, Helen Law, Bryan Long, David Eldridge, Norma Jenns (Church Secretary), Janet Reid, Janette Roberts, and Claire Tandara. The Revd. Peter Wortley proved to be experienced, supportive and enabling in his role as Interim Moderator by encouraging and facilitating the Vacancy Committee throughout the

process of bringing forward an appropriate candidate for consideration as a future Minister of Amersham Free Church.

The Committee met on several occasions to share ideas that eventually developed into a Pastorate Profile, which was sent to both denominations. We were fortunate that this document was favourably met by the Revd Ian Green, who was at that time the Minister of Yeovil Baptist Church. Ian was invited to meet with the Vacancy Committee informally and he was later asked to lead our Sunday Worship on 15 April 2012. Following this service the Elders met with the Vacancy Committee and decided that it was appropriate to recommend to Church Members that Ian should be asked to 'preach with a view', after which he would meet with members.

At a Special Church Meeting on 19 June, members voted unanimously to invite the Revd Ian Green to be our new minister. We were so pleased and felt blessed that Ian accepted our call; and plans for his Induction Service were soon underway. Apart from URC and Baptist Union leaders, AFC's one surviving former full time Minister, The Revd Keith Riglin and all previous Assistant Ministers, The Revd David Simpson and the Revd Alan Kirkcaldy were present at the service.

During Sunday Worship on 28 October 2012, Erna received Ian and his wife Rachel into membership of AFC. Their sons, Matthew and Jonty, were also welcomed at this service.

We are now sharing in, and benefiting from, the experience and wisdom that Ian has gained from his life and ministry at previous churches and we are enormously appreciative of the special qualities that he is bringing to Amersham Free Church and also to our local community.

The Manse was upgraded before Ian, Rachel, Matthew and Jonty moved in. Our treasurer Peter Clark and Bryan Long, wearing his 'property hat', saw that the work was carried out to a very high standard. As Rachel and the boys were all in the throes of completing an important academic year in Yeovil, Ian moved in first whilst the rest of the family got accustomed to travelling regularly up and down the motorway between Yeovil and Amersham. Rachel and the boys finally made the move in the middle of July and the whole family were once again living under the same roof.

2011 - 2017 Ian's Early Ministry at Amersham Free Church

AFC had, by now, been in covenant with St John's Methodist Church and St. Michael and All Angels Anglican church for a number of years; working together to serve and enrich the life of the community of Amersham on the hill. This covenant is named COTHA (Churches On The Hill in Amersham). During Ian's early years COTHA members continued to maintain the events that we had traditionally shared, including the united Walk of Witness on Good Friday and a Lent Course entitled "The King's Speech', led by Erna. Other COTHA events included a Quiet Day at Bulstrode Park led by Hazel Richardson and a new initiative for our local churches called 'Open the Book', which made it possible for a selected group of church members to go into local schools to take part in dramatised Bible stories. We extended invitations to our Covenant Churches whenever the opportunity arose to augment these traditional events; for instance some members of St Michael's and St John's joined us for our Bible Teaching Day on the topic of Ecclesiology, led by Revd Dr Ruth Gouldbourne from Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church. We continue to be grateful

for the active support of COTHA members, who worked throughout these years to main-



tain united worship and fellowship.

In 2011 a branch of the child contact centre (a long standing dream of Bob Marshall's) was set up in the Alfred Ellis Hall and operating on the first and third Saturdays of every month. It offers a safe place for children to meet parents with whom they no longer live after relationships breakdown. In 2019 the Chiltern Child Contact Centre was awarded the prestigious 'Queen's Award for Voluntary Service'. The award was presented by the Lord Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire Sir Henry Aubrey-Fletcher, on behalf of her Majesty the Queen, to Doreen Platts, a long serving volunteer for the Chiltern Child Contact Centre.

The church website gained increasing importance during this time. Ian redesigned the layout and enhanced its content. The internet continues to be an increasingly important tool; not only for making known the activities of the church but for social outreach, and Ian ensures that our website is continuously kept up to date and informative.

Junior Church groups had been following weekly Scripture Union lesson material, but by 2012 the church faced the fact that, because of busy weekend timetables, many families no longer attended church regularly. The successful 11+ youth and study groups, Ichthus and FISH, were phased out as the members moved on to higher education. A rethink resulted in JC Roundabout, based on the Workshop Rotation model; along with the adoption of a monthly biblical or Christian theme or story, with weekly activities led by church members with various enthusiasms. Notable Roundabout projects have included 'Jonah: The

Musical' and two Radio Christmas broadcasts. Roundabout successfully coped, in a way which was a lot of fun, with fluctuating numbers of children in attendance. Liz Waumsley co-ordinated this initiative with a team of 4 leaders and several specially invited workshop helpers. Beginning in 2014, it continued until the Covid epidemic in 2020.

The first phase of the Vision for the Future project, involving the complete transformation of the Alfred Ellis Hall, had been completed in 2010. This was an enormous and costly project but proved to be of significant value to the church by making it more comfortable and adaptable for letting purposes. This led to many outside groups hiring the hall on a regular basis and it wasn't long before planning began on the second phase which included modernising the vestibule, adding an ambulant toilet, and altering the layout of small rooms at the end of the main corridor.

Meanwhile, the problems with the church heating system dominated events at the beginning of 2017, when services had to be held in the Alfred Ellis Hall for a number of weeks whilst the boiler was being repaired.

2017 to 2020

In the Autumn of each year members of the Worship Teams were invited to attend the 'Lay Preachers Course', a three day residential course held at Westminster College Cambridge where tuition is at a very high standard. The Worship team numbers have declined in recent years, but they continue to offer valuable worship leadership at many churches in the local area where there may not be a resident minister. Occasionally, they also contribute to



worship at AFC; often at evening services. In 2021, the Worship Teams celebrated 21 years of local ministry by conducting a service at Amersham Free Church and sharing a spectacular cake with the congregation afterwards.

We have enjoyed the benefit of many different musicians who have enhanced our worship with different instruments over the years and we now have a rota of very capable organists

who are getting to know our church and its form of service well. In recent years, Graham Nash, Anna le Hair, George Orme and Laurence Beard have been regulars but it has been wonderful to see a younger generation of organists playing too. We are grateful to Tom Torley, our own Richard Brazier and Matthew Green playing for us on occasion. Also during this period the church organ (a Willis model) has been showing signs that a complete overhaul would be necessary to bring it up to the required standard. Finances have been arranged and work commenced on dismantling, cleaning, and renovating the organ. This project has not been without its challenges, and the Willis Organ continues to be regularly in need of tender loving care and sympathetic playing styles.

Worship services outside our church have continued with Ian leading services at Rayners and Chalfont Lodge care homes on a regular basis, supported by a faithful band of singers to support the residents. Services at the Croft care home are also much appreciated and we are grateful to Christine Feather for undertaking the task of organising these, particularly at a time when pianists are a dwindling resource. Sadly none of these services has been able to restart at the time of writing because of the COVID pandemic. Our own 'in house' activities continued to thrive. Lunchbreak benefits from Margaret Howard and Ian's ability to produce a varied programme which continues to attract a wide variety of people from other churches and from none. Tea at Three and Friday morning coffee similarly attract people who value the warm welcome and companionship which they find here. Month by month Family News, (skilfully edited by Anne Marshall) keeps the congregation abreast of life at AFC in all its ups and downs.

The Social Committee organised many varied events in the church at this time, including outings to concerts at the Royal Albert Hall; and visits to places of interest, such as Bletchley Park. Safari suppers, New Year's parties and Harvest Suppers contributed hugely to the sense of belonging to a church community which brings in people also from outside.

The Sycamore Club celebrated its 40th anniversary. The club had been established by Dr. Ella Munro in 1978, providing a weekly day of respite care for dementia sufferers and their carers. Weekly activities including crafts, talks and music very ably led by Beverley Underwood at AFC on a Thursday was an example of this where helpers were drawn from all the churches in COTHA. Dr Ella Munro was awarded an MBE in 2011 for her 'services in the community of Amersham'.

Amersham Free Church continues to support a wide variety of charities, both in the UK and abroad. At Christmas, our offerings throughout the month of December are directed to three charities dedicated to children; one local, one national and one international. We have a particular connection with the organisation Street Kids Direct, which seeks to support the poorest children in Central America. This was founded by Duncan Dyason, who began the charity in Amersham many years ago.

In 2018 we engaged in the Toilet Twinning initiative where a church, or an individual, sponsors toilets in the developing world. This initiative has become a global phenomenon and has now been extended to Fridge Twinning, which aims to support the distribution of food in rural areas of the developing world.

Amersham Free Church also supports Liz and Sergio Vilela, who are Baptist Link Missionaries working with pre-school children and pastors in Mozambique.

In 2018 we were pleased to welcome a Time for God volunteer again after several years without one. Hauke Vogel from Germany quickly established himself as a valuable asset in

so many ways; he taught in JC, helped out at Women's Own and Lunchbreak, played the piano during the church services and in concert; talked at length to residents in the various care homes that we attend, and generally was a smiling presence at AFC. A German evening was held to mark the end of his time with us, largely planned by Hauke himself! He was sadly missed when he returned home to continue with his studies, but he regularly stays in touch with us here in Amersham.

For a number of reasons, a decision was taken not to immediately look for another TFG volunteer when Hauke went home. Hauke himself would have been a hard act to follow, but finding suitable local accommodation had become a particular challenge. Moreover, there were other pressing demands on the church finances at the time.

It became increasingly apparent that there was a need to appoint a church administrator to ease the strain of the demanding workload on an ever decreasing number of volunteers. It was also considered desirable to have someone to relieve the Church Secretary and Treasurer from the burden of the day-to-day administration needed to run the church. A small group was formed to steer this process, and job descriptions and person specifications were drawn up for this part time job. We have since been blessed with the efficient services of Laura Sawyer who has now moved on to pastures new. A new Administrator, Swati Nahal, took on this vital role at the beginning of 2022.

Junior Church continued very effectively under the creative leadership of Liz Waumsley. Numbers were constantly fluctuating but there were still children who enjoyed coming when they could, and Roundabout catered for this. One of the recent highlights was a Christmas video scripted by Matthew Green and put together by the children and leaders under the guidance of Michael Autton. Michael's work as the producer of the weekly monitor presentation in the vestibule have been much appreciated, but the Christmas video was the starting point of potentially a new departure for our website. For the first time a video was uploaded for all to see, opening up new possibilities not only for the website but for our mission to spread the gospel to a wider audience.

During this period refurbishments continued inside the Sanctuary with a new aisle carpet and a new, more substantial baptistry cover which made it safer than the previous perspex covering. The balcony was also made safer by raising the height of the rail: and two wooden banister rails were also erected on the steps leading up to the Chancel.

COVID 19: Effects on Amersham Free Church

The arrival of the Coronavirus has had a significant effect on the life and activity of Amersham Free Church, but we have been riding the waves by embracing new ways of worshipping and continuing our outreach.

During the early lockdown it was not possible for our congregation to meet in church on Sundays as usual. We were exceedingly fortunate to be able to adapt by providing online services of worship on our website. These were made possible by the combined teamwork of Ian, Erna, Michael and Sara Autton, Matthew Green and several other church members who volunteered to record Scripture readings and prayers. Matthew's theme tune introducing the services became a much loved feature of those times. were able to use hymns

from services that had been recorded over the years at Amersham Free Church, so that they felt and sounded familiar. We have been truly blessed to have such an archive at our disposal. These broadcast services have been a vital link for our congregation during a time when we have been isolated from each other, and have been invaluable in helping us to retain our identity as a worshipping congregation. We have been glad to be able to offer the use of our premises to host a community COVID 19 testing centre through the pandemic; a facility that has been very well used by many people in Amersham who needed to be able to get tested somewhere local.

During the past year or so, church services have gradually resumed their more normal tenor, though with the necessary precautionary measures in place to protect vulnerable members of the congregation from potential infection.

We are delighted that in early 2022, many of our social groups have been returning to their regular meetings at AFC, and our buildings are buzzing with life again. Precautions still remain, but it is good to see people enjoying each others' company once again.

There have been some inevitable casualties of the pandemic: for example, the Sycamore Club and Women's Own no longer meet; but we are confident that new groups will arise to meet other needs in our community. The Social Committee has also ceased its activities whilst the pandemic is still causing some concern but, at the time of writing, a new social Sunday Light Lunch is being considered as an opportunity for church fellowship in the meantime. Sunday evening services have not yet resumed, but we continue to video our Sunday morning services for broadcast on the website on Sunday afternoons.

The pandemic has affected every aspect of the life and activities of the Amersham Free Church community and we are indebted to our Secretary, Janet Reid; and our Treasurer, Bob Marshall for so ably steering us through this difficult period of our history.

Amersham Free Church in summary:

We worship every Sunday throughout the year, with these services usually led by our ministers Ian and Erna. We celebrate Holy Communion on the first and third Sundays in the month. Encouraged by our ministers, lay people read the Scriptures and sometimes lead the intercessory prayers. Our worship is also enriched by occasional Pulpit exchanges with ministers from other churches.

We are very fortunate in that we benefit from two ministers with complementary gifts who work so well together. In 2022, Ian embarked on a sabbatical where he is taking some Sundays out to visit other congregations at worship. He writes about his experiences in his blog 'View from the Pew' and has already incorporated the welcome at the beginning of our service as an example of good practice from another church. Erna continues to preach at AFC once a month but is also much in demand in her ministry to other smaller URC churches in our area who do not have the benefit of a full time ordained minister. In line with our dual affiliation to the United Reformed Church and the Baptist Union, we practise



both believers' baptism using the large baptistry in front of the communion table and also infant baptism or dedication at the font.

Pastoral care is the responsibility of everyone in the congregation. Elders have oversight of a more formal list of people with whom they try to keep in contact and if necessary report matters of concern to the ministers. It is recognised that pastoral needs vary and some people have very specific pastoral gifts which are used to the full. Much of their work is unnoticed by the majority but is very greatly valued by those who benefit from it.

We are always pleased to welcome newcomers to our church and hold, at least annually, a Newcomers' Afternoon. This consists of a welcome from the ministers and a brief outline of who we are and what we do, supplemented by pictures of past events. If there are many people who are very new, they are given a tour of the premises (which in previous years has even included a scramble up into the organ loft; especially when there have been children present who couldn't resist the temptation!) The afternoon finishes with refreshments where the Elders and newcomers get to know each other better.

There are many opportunities for development of spirituality and Christian knowledge. Apart from the more obvious opportunities seen in the challenging and inspiring sermons week by week from our two ministers, Erna also organises the Life and Faith groups. These are varied in nature to suit different styles of learning and worship. Some meet during the day, others during the evenings but all are well advertised on the church noticeboards and anyone is welcome to attend any, or all, of them. Leaders plan the sessions – some follow the lectionary using art to explore themes further and discuss the sermons of previous weeks. Others follow different programmes of study based on a book of the Bible. The Hands Together group is more practically based and the Friday morning prayer group speaks for itself. There is also a Book Group which meets less frequently to discuss a chosen book, many of which are subsequently available in the Church Library.

April 2022