

## A Potted History of St James

In 1962, building work commenced on the Southlake estate and by 1967 Woodley was growing fast and the Vicar of St John's, Rev Herbert Wilkinson, affectionately known as Wilkie, felt quite unable to cater for the needs of the new area of development around the South Lake, amongst other things parish baptisms were running at 300 a year (6 a week!!).



*Rev Herbert Wilkinson ('Wilkie')*



*David Karsten*



*Richard and Wendy Sutton*

Meanwhile St Mary's Castle Street in Reading was due for demolition due to planned redevelopment in the town centre and was sending people out to Caversham Park Village with a view to relocating the church there. However, the bishop noticed that more development was taking place in Woodley, so Wilkie came to a St Mary's Castle Street council meeting with the invitation to 'come over into Macedonia' to help establish a new church in Woodley. One of these members was David Karsten and another was Richard Sutton.

David wrote a history of the origins and early life of St James Church, from which much of this information comes. Do ask for a copy if you would like to read more.

With David, and especially Richard on board, the "seeds" were sown for a new church to "grow" that would eventually "flower" into St James.

By 1969 it was decided that St Mary's was not to be demolished and so relocation was not needed. But the work in Woodley was going well and in September both Richard and David were commissioned by Bishop Knell of Reading to be 'evangelists' in Woodley. David quotes Hudson Taylor, the pioneering British missionary in 19<sup>th</sup> century China:

*"There are three stages in every great work of God,  
First, it is impossible, then it is difficult, then it is done."*

From the very start, the project was undergirded with prayer and David recorded many amazing answers to prayer.

On Sunday 30 November 1969 the first service in Southlake School took place.

David and Sue Karsten actually missed that service due to injuries Sue sustained in a car accident. But current Church member Margaret Gilham was there and it was at the Gilham house that the first Home Group was held, as were a number of Coffee mornings. Margaret also became our first children's group leader, taking the 5-7s for what became 20 years of faithful service.

So what were the services like? Every Sunday was a Family service, with a communion once a month. As for the format, David tells us:

*'There were no special service sheets or booklets available in 1969. Wilkie had an idea, and it proved to be a very good one. When he took services in the Church of England school, he used a small grey book containing hymns, prayers, psalms and canticles. This is what we readily opted for and we took the bold step of agreeing to vary the service content from week to week, the actual content being decided upon by the service leader: only the Lord's prayer remained a constant. The leading and preaching were always to be shared—no 'one-man bands' - and these tasks were to be taken equally by Wilkie, his curate, Richard and David'*

The service started on time at 10.30 and sometimes before anyone else arrived!

Everybody robed up to lead the services even if not trained or licenced .

Meeting in a school led some people to believe that we were only there for the children. David tells us that we decided

*'that we were categorically a Family Service, that is, all ages in one congregation: we were not simply to be a Sunday School called by a new name. Nevertheless, it was very hard, when parents presented their children and made to go away themselves, to tell them firmly what our approach was. Sadly, I never remember even one set of parents, faced with this decision, turning around and deciding to come together as a family. But, without this approach, there was a very clear danger of making people believe that the new venture was just for children and no full church would ever have been built.'*

From where and how did our new 'members' come to join us? David wrote:

*'Some people saw the posters that were dotted around Woodley, others were members of St. John's living on Southlake, yet others were baptism contacts, others were brought in by visiting or by leaflets put through doors or by word of mouth. The most unusual contacts, though, were through friends elsewhere recommending people to come to share in the new outreach'.*

The Parkers came across from St John's as Irene Parker recalls:

*'At that time I worshipped at St. John's where Rev. Wilkinson was the vicar. Nicola and Ian were baptised at St. John's in 1970 and 1972 and at the time of Ian's baptism Rev. Wilkinson*

*told us about St. James being built in Nightingale Road. He felt that the “young” congregation of this new Church would be suitable for us as a family. From that time we started to attend services at the school and, when the Church was completed, became members of St. James’ congregation. As a young family we became involved in the many aspects of Church life including pre-school and small groups for young mothers. We have seen many changes within the Church, but 52 years later, we are proud to be part of the Church Family.’*

And in 1971 The first baptism was held in the school for our own Jonathan Thomas.

\* \* \*

But we didn’t have a building yet!

The Original developer of the estate promised a site but he died and the promise died with him! However, in November of 1971, a site was found, and, after much negotiation, purchased for £9000.



A church with its own building now needed a name and it was ‘Wilkie’ who put forward the idea that the new church should be called St. James, James being brother of St. John.

In June 1970 the first plans were drawn up, which included a gallery for musicians. We really would have looked up to the music group! But these plans were considered too expensive at over £70,000!

The well named Mr Anthony Monk was then appointed architect and drew up the plans - he also designed an identical church at Dedworth.

But there was another obstacle to be overcome. David tells us

*‘The Lord overruled not long before the first brick was laid, when the Oxford Diocese brought in a ruling that no new church buildings were to be commissioned that were wholly Anglican. Thankfully the local Deanery authorities prevailed by pointing out that the plans*

*were too far advanced and too much money had already been spent for withdrawal to be an option.'*

The final cost was £32,350 and on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1973 the Foundation Stone was laid by Bishop of Reading Eric Wild.

Although the laying of the foundations stone marked the start of this church building, the spiritual foundations of St James had been firmly established from the very beginning, when David and Richard took their first tentative steps into the wilds of Woodley. The church has always been Anglican and Evangelical in churchmanship, taking seriously God's word in scripture and ensuring that every step was grounded in prayer. In his account, David recalls God's great faithfulness in answers to prayer and of Him honouring those who sought to honour Him in their lives and in their walks of faith.

\* \* \*



On 10th February 1974 the 1<sup>st</sup> service was held at St James Church Centre but without our special St James Window, which was made by Mr Farrar, after other offers of windows had fallen through. It was completed just in time for the dedication of our building on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. The bell came from the world-famous Whitechapel Foundry.





On 17th March 1974 the first baptism took place at St James. Appropriately it was for David and Sue's first child: Anna Karsten.



Our Playgroup was set up very soon after the church building was opened and we were very blessed to have a lady in the parish, Gill Green, who had playgroup experience and so she became the first Supervisor.



Later that year the Tiny Tots service for Mums and young children began alternating with Coffee mornings in people's homes.

These activities confirmed the vision for our building to be a centre for the life of the community around and this continues to be a priority today.

\* \* \*

In July 1974 the Rev Wilkinson retired and the Rev John Haywood from St Bartholomew's in Reading was appointed to be senior curate in Woodley with responsibility for St James.

In August, 19 Wallace Close was purchased as accommodation for the Curate in charge of St James However, John Haywood didn't settle in well at St James and in the following year retired on grounds of ill-health.

Meanwhile the Rev John Eastgate took over at St John's and continued the support begun by Wilkie. He is fondly remembered for his encouragement and friendship, particularly by The Rev Anthony Smyth who became the new curate in charge at St James. He remembers John Eastgate *'as an outstanding priest from whom I learned so much'*. At that time the two churches were still working together closely and Anthony recalls:

*'Sundays could be quite hectic. Some Sundays I did 8am and 9.30 am at St John's before*



*hurrying down to St James where David Karsten had already got the services under way.'*

*David standing, John Eastgate seated*

*Anthony and Alison Smyth with Tim, Philip and Ruth*

Services continued to evolve. An 8am Holy communion service began but as Wilkie said: *'the Principle is right but the time might not be'* and the time was soon changed to 9.30!

In July 1977, an informal weekly Sunday evening fellowship meeting started at the Curate's House and in 1978 this moved to the church building. On December 14<sup>th</sup> 1977, the first Confirmation Service was held in St. James (although some members of St James had previously been confirmed at St Johns).

Families continued to arrive, for example the Higginsons:

*'In 1975, our first beautiful daughter Clare-Louise was born. Having been married in Tadworth and having been very much involved in the church prior to moving away, the wish was that Clare-Louise be baptised there. The Vicar there refused the request, saying that we should be joining a church in our area. An approach was made to the curate at St. James and Clare-Louise Mary was baptised towards the end of that year. However, weekends were still often spent away from Woodley.*

*Coming up to about a year later, the doorbell rang and our neighbour from a few doors down was standing there. We had nodded a few times, but never really spoken.*

*'About a year ago, you had a baby baptised at St James, but we haven't seen you since then - have you considered coming to a service?' said Margaret Mayer.*

*(words to that effect anyway!!)*

*We went - and after our four children's baptisms - Clare-Louise, Suzanne, Kirsty and Alex - and four of the grandchildren - Zachary, Annabelle, Samuel and Logan - leading children's groups, children's spots, singing in the music group, and at various concerts in the past, and being Chairman of the Playgroup.....we are still here.*

*Praise the Lord and thank you to all our friends over the years at St James.'* Gwen Higginson

\* \* \*

By 1978, two children's groups were running, one for the under 8's and one for those over eight and in this year Pathfinders for the eleven plus age group began. The youngest children, including the children of the Curate, the Reader and the churchwarden remained in the service and were free to roam at will. Anthony Smyth recalls:

*'In fact, noise was rarely a problem, but rather the issue was of children jumping in and out of the lateral extremes of vision.'*

The presence of children has continued to be a feature of St James. Many of us remember..... *'Creche in the vestibule in the days before the extensions - parents standing around the wall with a pile of children tumbling around in the middle'*

\* \* \*

On January 15<sup>th</sup> 1978 in the Family Service, Rob Goddard and David Karsten were installed as St. James' first Churchwardens (known as 'deputies' because we were still the daughter church of St. John's).

And on February 26<sup>th</sup> 1978, the first elections were held for the St. James' Committee, who had the usual range of practical issues to deal with. Anthony recalls:

*'Petty vandalism was for a time a problem, particularly on Tuesday evenings before and during the Communion service. Fires were lit in the car park and attempts were made to ring the bell. These matters were decisively dealt with when the newly promoted Paul Cook came to Woodley Police Station. He was able to send patrol cars round the estate and have a quiet word with some parents about the behaviour of their youngsters that dealt with the problem.'*

\* \* \*

In 1978, 35 Highgate Road was purchased from Sylvia & Tony Speck as the new curate's house. The three-storey town house in Wallace Close had proved somewhat impractical. Evening meetings were held in the first floor living room, with the children getting ready for bed in the bedrooms above, but the bathroom was on the first floor and only accessed through the living room!

There were then 93 on the Electoral Roll, with 60% under 40 and 17% over 60. It was admitted that these latter were rough figures because of caution about asking some of the

ladies their exact age! - a reflection of our changing demography.

\* \* \*

The new decade of the 1980s began with the establishment of a Mothers and Toddlers' Group which alternated with Tiny Tots. Somewhere around 50 toddlers turned up, filling up the back half of the church, (ie the current pre-school room) and overflowing into the tiny vestibule. We soon realised we had to open up and use the whole church and Margaret Mayer and I had a good few fights with the partition.

In April 1980 Rev Anthony Smyth departed for St Ethelburga's, St Leonard's-on-Sea and in August, Rev David Flagg became curate in charge.



1980 September 'After Eights' youth group started.

On May 1<sup>st</sup> 1981 the first wedding took place at St James when Sadie Barsted got married.

In October 1981 a Portakabin was delivered to the car park for use by children's groups. Explorers stopped meeting in kind people's homes, and it also allowed room for Scramblers aged 3-5 to start which met in the vestry.



In 1981 'Rendezvous' started and has continued to meet a vital need for the elderly of our community ever since.



\* \* \*

The church building was really too small from the very start. The front part only seated 75 and so the back room was usually opened up to create 'the tunnel' and double the seating. In May 1983 plans were drawn up for an extension to the Worship Area, extending the seating to 200 and costing £85,000. People were asked to pledge £15 per month for 4 years to cover the cost. Services continued in the church despite the disappearance of the front wall.



In May 1985 the first extension was completed.

\* \* \*

In 1984 we ran The Good News Down your Street programme which took an introduction to The Christian faith to individual families in their homes.

Also, about this time, the Banner group were formed to make our lovely banners.

The Newsletter started which continued for about 20 years until emails and the website took over. Pre computer production was interesting, involving a lot of cutting and pasting and regular trips over to Father Mortiboys at All Saints in Downshire Square for printing.

In March 1985 St James was awarded status as a District Church and the St James District Church Council formed.

In April 1986 David Flagg moved on to become chaplain at Burrswood, a Christian Healing Centre in Kent.

And during the vacancy in June & July, Mission Woodley took place.

\* \* \*

In August Rev Kevin Roberts became curate in charge and Kevin moved into 35 Highgate along with his wife Anne and children Elise and Adam.



Also in 1986 the Music Group started under the leadership of Steve West.

In 1987 the storm that was NOT a hurricane brought down two of our trees, amazingly missing the church and the portacabin.



On 8 May 1988 Pat Kerbey was appointed first Church Administrator.

\* \* \*

In November 1988 the District Church Council agreed to a second extension, costing £290,000. Fund started by a bequest of £45,000 from church member Frank Saunders.

Fund raising for our new extension got going in earnest.

And at Christmas the 'must have' present was.....the St James Church sweatshirts.

Another of our fund raising efforts continued right up until a couple of years ago with the long-running waste paper collection.

On 21 July 1990 we moved out of the church to hold our services in Southlake Junior School Hall while major work took place here at St James. First we had to say goodbye to our vestry -cum-office -cum Scramblers room.



Then bit by bit our building grew again changing on the outside and on the inside. Church members rose to the occasion to apply the finishing touches, and we exchanged our old kitchen for a lovely new one. By February 1991, our building was complete.



On 3rd February 1991, we processed from Southlake School to the church to resume services in our extended building. A truly happy day!



\* \* \*

On 12 May 1991— Rev Kevin Roberts moved to Holy Trinity, Meole Brace in Shrewsbury.

And more changes were afoot in 1991 when Emmanuel Church was set up as a Church 'plant' with people from St James & St John's. Church Army workers, Richard & Mandy Priestley were appointed to lead Emmanuel.

In September 1991 Rev Paul Roberts became curate in charge at St James.



And the next year St James became a parish within the newly formed Woodley Team Ministry. So Paul Roberts became our first vicar!



Paul was our most musical vicar at St James and during his time here the music group continued to develop and take a leading role in our worship. Paul also instituted All age worship once a month, although we called it Family Service.

In 1994 we celebrated 25 years of St James with celebratory mugs which are still around.

Many people joined St James in the 90s and often brought ministry gifts with them. We also continued to send people on into ordination or other forms of mission.

Viginia and Michael Patterson write:

*'The St James family has been so generous to us, for which we are forever grateful. We well remember the day in late 1996 when Sue Karsten came running out to tell us of the wonderful total which had been raised to help send us back to Argentina! This generous support was enough to keep us helping the Wichi people to get back their sight through removal of cataracts.*

*After 5 years we were wonderfully welcomed back into the family at St James and that was another great day for us; since then so many people have continued to help the Wichi by buying the handmade Siwok Crafts.*

*It is such an encouragement to see that the St James family is still interested in mission both here and abroad, as we continue to support others like Ian Mullens and Liz Hansford who have gone where God has called them. Praise the Lord!'*

We continued to support Mission partners abroad but it was at this time mission developed on our own doorstep in the form of JAC which was started by our own Sam & Yvonne Milligan. JAC has gone on from strength to strength is now celebrating 21 years.

We also enjoyed Sunday services in various different places, Bath, London (All Souls), Cambridge and Brighton, but a firm favourite was the annual July service, picnic and fun day at Bluecoats, which even included baptisms in the swimming pool. These days were made possible by Rev Nigel Bennett the chaplain there and a member of St James.

As the century drew to a close, the Men's walking Group began.

\* \* \*

The new Millenium continued to see new initiatives at St James. These included in 2002 the opening of the Sandwich Bar on Thursdays which later developed into St James Cafe.

And in 2003 the St James Puppet Team 'Hands of Hope' were formed. The puppets have become some of the most popular members of the church!

The women also decided to have their own Walking Group.

But also in 2003, Paul Roberts left to become rector of St John's Coulsdon and a long vacancy followed as sadly our first appointment, Gary Rowlandson, had to withdraw due to ill health.



However, in October 2004 Rev Moira Astin became vicar of St James and she, Tim and Emily



moved into the new vicarage at 23 Kingfisher Drive.

At this time Millie Pullin had also just joined the Woodley team as part-time youth worker on her 3rd year placement from Oasis College. Then in August 2005 Ian Mullens became the part-time youth worker for the three Woodley churches.

Meanwhile Linda Galpin was becoming increasingly involved with the younger age group and at the start of 2006 was appointed as our own Children's Worker.

Finally in 2009 St James became a separate benefice in the newly created Group Ministry of Woodley and we celebrated 40 years.

At this time Jane Lewis was also developing her ministry at St James which led to her ordination in 2013.

In 2011 Moira Astin left to become vicar of Frodingham and New Brumby in Scunthorpe & Area Dean of North Lincolnshire.

In 2012 September Rev Nick Jackson became vicar of St James.



Nick and Pam initially moved into the Kingfisher Drive vicarage but several months later upgraded into the new vicarage at 97 Reading Road where they were able to unpack properly!

By the time Nick joined us, the leaking roof had become a major issue. Imaginative plans were put forward to add a new roof and rooms, but were too costly, so a design for an angled 'kit roof' over the existing roof was pursued. Jeremy Galpin was at the heart of the project and recalls:

*'Another memory is how we put an excellent team together to develop an ambitious plan for the roof and raise the funds. I think it was me Andy and Ian Johnson who travelled all the way to Bristol to present and try and secure a big grant for the roof. In the end of course the simpler solution has proved effective and is keeping us all dry, thank the Lord.'*

Sadly escalating costs and the lack of grants for what was seen as maintenance forced us to abandon these plans, but you will be pleased to hear that we now have a new flat roof guaranteed for 25 years. Watch this space at our 75<sup>th</sup> celebration!

During this time, many of us became early risers on Saturdays in order to attend the Ladies 'Mary & Martha' group (M&Ms) from 2013 and a year later the Men's Breakfast began.

In April 2015 Ian Mullens left to work in DRC with Kimbilio and in July Sam Mutton arrived to be our new Youth Worker and helped us put Moldova on the map by taking our kids on a summer mission trip there.

In June 2017, Nick Jackson retired from the Ministry and returned to the south coast.

Our long vacancy this time was partly due to the ratification of further boundary changes that enabled Emmanuel to become a separate parish., but we made good use of the time running Alpha and embarking on the road to becoming an eco church.

In September 2018 we were delighted to welcome our present vicar Rev Laurence Smith and his wife Hannah to St James.



They set about achieving Church growth by adding baby Nathaniel to our congregation the next month!

Throughout our years at St James, prayer has played a vital part and we have looked to find creative and effective ways of praying together. The last two decades have seen the development of our prayer ministry team and the prayer corner in which at the moment you will find a tree featuring many members of St James past and present. Nick's prayer course and Laurence's sermon series on prayer have helped us all grow in our prayer life. So here we are.

There is so much more to remember so we apologise if your special memory or field of service has been omitted.

There have been and will continue to be challenges and disappointments along the way, but we are profoundly grateful to God for all the amazing ways in which he has blessed us and assured us of his presence with us.

What next?

Come to St James to find out!

**sj50**  
ANNIVERSARY