

ST. JAMES'S CHURCH - ITS PAST, PRESENT AND ITS HOPES FOR THE FUTURE.

Our parish church was inaugurated in 1863 to cope with a specific social problem. The extension of the Thames Valley Railway Line and the building of the Hampton Water Works brought a flood of inhabitants into an area totally destitute of all amenities. Consequently poverty, disease, drunkenness and violence were rife. The Common, as our area was then called, was described as "a miserable area inhabited by an even more miserable band of people" and the little district Chapelry of St. James as "a barn of a church in a wilderness of a parish". Such was the character of the first vicar and his wife, and indeed of their successors, who devoted their lives and much of their fortune in ameliorating the mean living conditions and hopeless prospects of the parishioners that soon the new parish was on its way to becoming a self-helping, self-respecting community.

Before the 1890's, the Vestry, which consisted mainly of church officers, was responsible for everything from a man's soul to his drains - or lack of them. It was the only Welfare there was and it took its duties seriously. In the early days of St. James's with a regular income of about £250 there was a Sunday collection once a month for Poor Relief (£40 a year.) To-day our first concern is still the money we give away in aid of one sort or another.

By the time the 1890's brought in the Local Government Acts our village was a very different place. Its houses were wellfound, its children well taught, its health record good and it possessed "every institution necessary for community life". Seldom can any village have owed so much to any church.

Over the years St. James's has continued its caring vocation. Throughout its history its members have been amongst the inaugurators of many of the institutions formed for the good of the community. In more recent days, a year after our present Vicar, the Rev. Rupert Brunt came to us, his Commission to the Wider Church formed the Old People's Welfare Committee. There were members of our congregation on the first executive committee of the Hampton Hill Association and of the Twickenham Mental

Health Association. The Wayside Monday Centre was opened 4 years ago to cater for the lonely and depressed and to offer an understanding ear and a sense of fellowship. The Community Care Group was formed under the auspices of the Hampton Council of Churches and one of its three inaugural Chairmen was one of our Parish Readers - she has recently been re-elected. Our paper collections have greatly benefited local charities and, on a lighter theme, our Social Committee was co-organiser along with the Hampton Hill Association of the recent Jubilee Celebrations which gave such pleasure to so many people.

In the present, St. James's is striving to be the sort of caring church it was in the past and to do whatever has relevance to current needs of caring, counselling, befriending and to offer its gift of companionship according to the needs of the human spirit not catered for in a materialistic society.

We have great hopes for the future. We know we have a great deal to offer and we also know that there is a great deal of good will towards us in the parish. As more people come, bringing themselves, their individual talents and material resources we have plans for outreach into our evergrowing parish; for mission and increasing pastoral care awakening people to their inherent need for God in their lives and in the lives of their children who are at risk in an increasingly secular world.

We want to bring our buildings into better use for community purposes. We want to serve our community in evergrowing companionship with it. We are one of the fortunate churches, but now that all churches are faced with increasing economic burdens and have become liable for their priests' stipends in addition to parish expenses and Diocesan claims some poor churches may be forced to close without help from the more fortunate ones.

We are confident that St. James's will go on from strength to strength owing to the quality of its priests, congregation and parish. At the present there are not many of us to carry such responsibilities although our regular communicants have doubled in numbers recently. But when Mr. Brunt came here he succeeded in making us see that The Church is made up of People individually and collectively and **by You, and Me, and Us the Church will stand or fall**. Our congregation is growing as more people come and experience the joy and strength which lies in being part of a real Christian fellowship and its worship in a loving, and caring community.

Margery Orton.