

13 The Work of the Church

Introduction

No discussion of a church can be complete without at least touching on why it exists in the first place and what purpose does it serve. This is not intended to be an apology for the church and this is not the right place to discuss the philosophical or theological aspects of church life. However it is felt relevant to discuss some of the activities of the church and its place in society and to see how they have changed over the years.

The Church has, since earliest days, exercised both a religious and a civil role. For many years the clergy were virtually the only literate people and upon their shoulders fell much of the administration of the country, at all levels. Much of the work of the church therefore can be seen as inextricably mixed up with that of the parish

The Background to Services and Sacraments

No records exist of the patterns of worship for most of the history of Purley church. However there was a very high degree of conformity as between one church and another and thus the general pattern of worship in the smaller country parishes will give a good indication as to what happened in Purley.

In the mediaeval church Mass would be celebrated on Sundays and Holy days at around 9 am preceded by a recitation of the office of Mattins. Where the parish priest was a professed monk he would usually recite all the others (Terce, Laud, Prime, Nones and Compline) every day but they were rarely accompanied by anyone else.

The celebration of Mass was mainly a ritual for the priest who would recite the Latin words, often with little or no understanding of them. It was likely he was unable to read hence the words had to be memorised and usually completely mispronounced. It was all pretty well unintelligible to the congregation who milled around waiting for the altar bell to sound to signify the moment of consecration when they were expected to cease their chatter and remain silent until they had received communion. By the mid 13th century it had become the custom to distribute only the bread to the people.

Reading the Bible was virtually unknown. Complete Bibles were a rarity until the invention of printing in the 15th century. Extracts needed for the Mass were provided in the priest's missal but these were also in Latin and generally incomprehensible to the majority of the population. Where there were wall paintings or stained glass windows the clergy were able to illustrate simple stories, mostly originating from the Bible, but often garnished with popular superstitions and misconceptions. The major festivals were marked by short plays in the Miracle Play tradition in which the parts were memorised and passed on from father to son or understudy.

The pattern of sacraments and services was linked inextricably with the whole social fabric. A child would be baptised on the day of its birth in a three part ceremony, the first part at the church porch, the second at the font where the child would be named and the third at the altar rail where the mother would be purified. Marriage too was a multi-part affair at the porch, entrance to the chancel and at the altar rail. Burials had no less than four parts. Starting at the churchyard gate, moving to the porch, then to before the altar and finally to the interment at the grave. Other ministrations such as confession, anointing the sick and dying were conducted privately as required. The parish priest would also be called upon to offer prayers at numerous auspicious times such as seed planting and harvest.



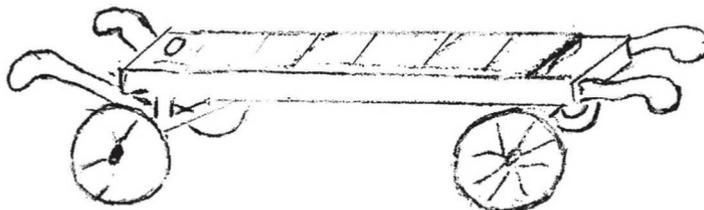
A baptism conducted by Derek Taylor with the font in its old position [M20155] [M20155]

The essentials of the pattern was unchanged by the Reformation although the standards of education for the clergy and the understanding of the people had risen, aided greatly by the services and bible readings being in English rather than in Latin.

Hatches, Matches and Despatches

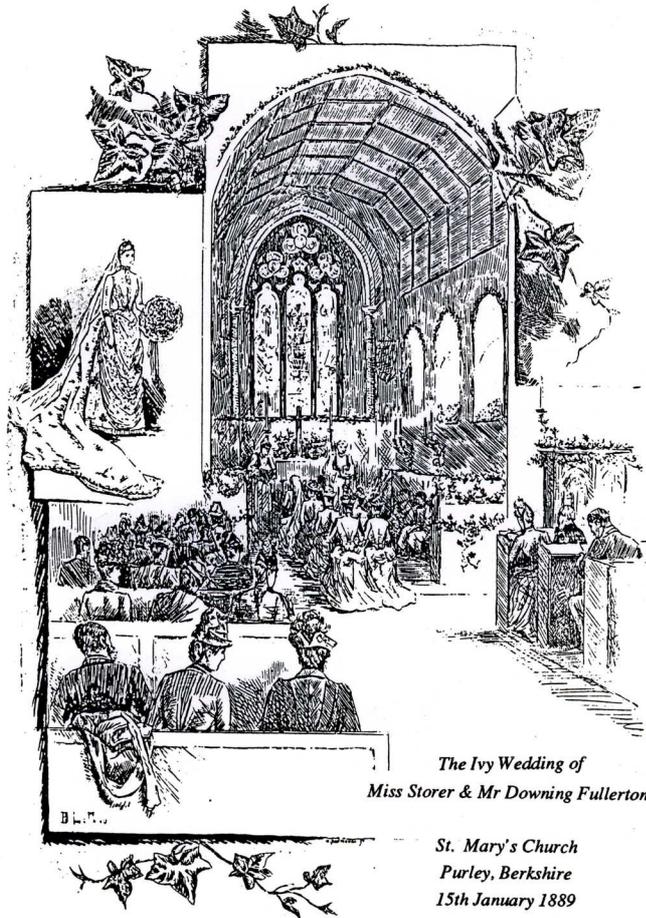
The only church services likely to be attended by the majority of the population nowadays are baptisms, weddings and funerals although these are often now either not bothered with or conducted at a hotel, registry office or crematorium with little or no religious overtones. However all have to be registered in some way. Births must be registered with the Registrar within a few days and baptisms are recorded in the parish register. Marriages in church have to be preceded by the reading of the Banns in both the bride's and the groom's parish church on three Sundays. In the case of the Church of England the actual wedding need be recorded only in the Parish Register although a certificate must be issued. For other denominations the registrar has to be on-site to issue the certificate. Funerals are often held in church even when the body is cremated and are usually entered into the register even though this is not strictly required as it is only burials that must be so recorded.

Parish Registers were required from 1538 and civil registration of births and deaths from 1836 Purley's first registers were lost in the Civil War and so date only from 1661 when Thomas



The parish bier was left in a shed when the Old Rectory was sold to the Listers in 1935. The drawing is by daughter Rachel [M20164]

*The church decorated
with ivy for the wedding
of Major Storer's
daughter Leila
[M20147]*



*The Ivy Wedding of
Miss Storer & Mr Downing Fullerton*

*St. Mary's Church
Purley, Berkshire
15th January 1889*

Blagrave restarted them. There are however a number of entries in the registers of bishops of Oxford dating from 1601 which are transcripts of entries in the then extant registers. The 1661 register mixes baptisms, weddings and funerals in chronological order and often gives lots of other information which the rector felt worth formally recording. The contributions towards Church Briefs are one example (see Appendix 5)

A second register was started in 1755 for Banns and Marriages as a consequence of the 1754 Hardwicke Act which was enacted to curtail spurious marriages. This required both the calling of Banns and their recording. The 1661 register continued recording baptisms and burials until 1773 when a new register was started by Benjamin Skinner. From 1789 under John Cooper however there were separate sections for baptisms and burials until the register was closed in 1813. The 1812 Register Act required registrations to be in specially printed books rather than in handwriting as before, so thereafter baptisms, marriages and burials were recorded in separate registers.

A new marriage register was required in 1838 as the information now required was a little more detailed, however some Purley marriages continued to be recorded in the 1813 register until 1840. This register also continued recording Banns until 1908, the a gap followed by 1915 to 1964. The new marriage register lasted until 1978, but the next ran only from 1978 to 1986, followed by two more running from 1986 to 1994 and 1994 to 2005 reflecting the huge increase in population of the parish. Burials ran from 1813 to 1985, baptisms from 1813 to 1900, then 1900 to 1948 and then 1948 to 1985. The current registers, marriages from 2005, banns from 1964, burials from 1985 and baptisms from 1985 are retained in use by the church, all completed registers have been deposited in the Berkshire Record Office.



The burial of Joan Abery in a corner of the new churchyard attended only by David Evans and the undertakers [M20125]

Some of the registry entries give a lot more information than was strictly required and they form an invaluable source of information for genealogists.

Worship in Purley

It was not until 1783 that we learn of the details of regular worship in Purley, when Henry Wilder, as curate acting for Benjamin Skinner, reported to Bishop Shute Barrington that Divine Service was performed twice on Sunday at 11 am and 3 pm and on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Easter Tuesday and Public Fasts. Holy Communion was celebrated only four times a year at Christmas, Easter, Whitsun and Michaelmas. The pattern was little changed when the report for 1801 was submitted.

Around the turn of the century there was still no lighting other than candles and the evening services were still being held in the afternoon. The earliest preserved Service Register begins in January 1890. There were two services every Sunday, Morning and Evening Prayer with a celebration of the Holy Communion on alternative Sundays. There were very few mid-week services.

By 1933 the service of Mattins was still at 11 am but evensong had moved to 6 pm in the winter and 6.30 pm in the summer. Now however Holy Communion was celebrated every Sunday, Thursday and Saints days at 8 am and on the first Sunday of each month at 12.15 pm. During the war evensong moved to 3 pm to avoid lighting costs and the impossibility of observing a black-out.

By 1965 the pattern of Mattins and Evensong had settled down to 11 am and 6.30 pm all the year round. Holy Communion was still celebrated at 8 am on every Sunday and at 7.15 am on Great festivals, 11.30 am on first Sundays, 8.15 am on Saints days and 10 am on first Tuesdays.

In August 1970 it was decided to try to continue Evensong at the church instead of moving to the Memorial Hall for the winter as had been the custom. The time of the service was moved forwards to 4.00 pm 'to avoid the difficulties of the dark lane' This arrangement had been the

case at least back as far as January 1962. The return to the church had been made at Easter each year.

Mattins disappeared in the early 1970s to be replaced by a Family Eucharist. Evensong retained its place in 1986 at 6.30 pm but was being replaced occasionally by more informal services. A more modern version was adopted in January 1988 which included the singing of choruses. The 8 am Holy Communion had been held only on the first and third Sundays and was dropped in 1985. A very informal Communion service was held at 10.30 am on Thursdays for mothers with small children. A Family Worship Service was started in 1979 at 9.30 am on first Sundays and this was extended to every Sunday in 1986.

Marriages, Baptisms and Funerals continued to be held as required although marriages tended to be confined to Saturdays, Funerals and memorial services to weekdays and baptisms to 3 pm on first Sundays.

Confirmation services have been held from time to time in Purley, the first recorded one was in June 1780 when the Bishop of Llandaff officiated. The general custom had grown up though that candidates from many churches assembled for a large central service at the time of the Bishop's visitations. When Bishop Whitehead came to Purley in 1933 only three confirmations had been held there in the previous 40 years. In recent years confirmations have been held at Purley every two or three years, usually by the Bishop of Reading.

Parish and Community Service

The parish has long been a focus for social action within the community at large although many of the functions originally assumed by or allocated to the parish are now carried out by central or local government agencies.

As well as serving in an official capacity both clergy and laity have had a long tradition of personal ministry and service to the community ranging from visiting the sick to serving as Justices of the Peace, running youth clubs and generally making the parish a caring community. In recent years both Civil and Ecclesiastical parishes have supported the Pangbourne and District Volunteer Centre and the church has been an active member of the Pangbourne and District Council of Churches. The Church has been active in Education and there is still a Church of England School in the village.

The church has had an active Sunday School for many years. It followed traditional lines until around 1973 when, after a dispute a rival Sunday School was set up at the Memorial Hall as the Young Followers of Jesus. Soon after the arrival of the Reverend David Evans the school remaining at the church was reformed, being divided into Climbers and Explorers for the younger children and with Pathfinders and Icthians serving the teenagers. The rival group very rapidly disappeared as the rift was healed.

The Bradfield Deanery to which Purley belongs has had a tradition of Lenten and Autumn lecture series which have proved very popular, covering a wide range of topics. Several have been held in Purley.

Each year the Parochial Church Council draws up a list of donations. Purley has supported a number of causes regularly and many more on an occasional basis. It has also responded generously to both National and International appeals for help, for example when famine swept the Horn of Africa in 1984, parishioners made generous donations to Famine Relief and a Bring-and-Buy sale raised over £750 in one day.

The Church has also been the sponsor for the Parish Magazine. This started life in 1933 as a purely Church Magazine and disappeared during the war years. It was revived after the war by The Reverend Harold Hawkins. Under the Reverend Derek Taylor it was revitalised and is now a lively community magazine serving a wide area.

Central and Diocesan Finance

Following the establishment of Queen Annes's Bounty in 1704 the clergy's stipends were augmented from central funds. Into this fund was paid the various tithes and other revenues confiscated by Henry VIII. Later in 1925 the Tithe Act added all the other tithe charges. These payments were abolished in 1936 and replaced by an issue of Government Stock which is now administered by the Church Commissioners which was formed in 1948 and who now pay almost all of the clergy salaries and pensions.

A Diocesan Quota system was eventually introduced and all parishes had to pay a predetermined sum to the Diocese. Some of this money was retained to provide diocesan administration and some sent to the Central Board of Finance. The bulk is used to subsidise needy and deprived parishes in the diocese. The quota for Purley has escalated sharply. It was £2-12-0 in 1923, was still only £5-0-0 in 1952, reached £369 in 1975, more than doubled to £2263 in 1980 and was at £6109 in 1984.

In 1981 the Diocesan Funds were allocated as follows:-

Expenditure

% allocation

73	Paying clergy
3	Administration
4	General Synod
6	Education and training
6	Social responsibility
5	To reserves
1	Other purposes

Income

%

46	Parish quotas
29	Church commissioners
25	Investments and other sources