

(The following is an abridged version of the booklet originally published to mark the GOLDEN JUBILEE of 1981)

What was Sanderstead like fifty years ago? It was certainly a rural area although many of the men who lived here then travelled to town each day, most of them walking to the station as there were no buses but one at least driving down in his dog cart. From the end of Purley Downs Road the view was open and splendid, Miller's Farm was on the corner on the left with the Glebe lands behind it extending up the hill and the fields in front all down the lane, which was Sanderstead Hill, recently cleared of their lavender which had supplied Mitcham for many years. On the right, just above Hill Brow Cottage, a footpath led up through the woods to All Saints Church and below this the fields stretched away to Fox Farm and down the hill, the outlook only broken by two of the older houses which still stand.



Looking down Sanderstead Hill from Purley Downs Road
early 1900's

But things were changing. Housing projects were in the air and development was already taking place and, in spite of a world wide economic crisis leading to a General Election at home, five men gathered together and convened a meeting for 6th July 1931, when they decided that it was time Sanderstead had a Nonconformist Church of its own.

Sunday evening services were held at first in Sanderstead Memorial Hall, Purley Oaks Road, but by February 1932 the site on Sanderstead Hill had been bought; in 1933 the Foundation Stones were laid and in June 1933 the first stage of the building was officially opened by the Lord Mayor of London. Sanderstead Congregational Church was formed on 19th January 1933.



Original interior of Church



Opening of Church Hall 1939



First Minister and Deacons 1933

In 1938 it was decided to complete the Church with the addition of the apse and to build the Hall and this was finished by May 1939. Unfortunately, in that fateful year, other people were looking for accommodation and in September the new Hall, barely used, was taken over by the military. From 1940 to 1945 many activities were in abeyance. Sunday services continued of course, certain adjustments having to be made, such as some winter evening services taking place at 3.30p.m. and, in an emergency, being held under the stage. With the handing back of the reconditioned building in 1946 it was wonderful to have the use of all the church premises and for a time they were quite adequate, but in 1959 the "new" small hall was opened.

The women were naturally very involved from the first and a Ladies' Working Party was already busy in 1933 making money for church funds and helping in many ways and this was followed two years later by the formation of the Women's Guild. In 1945 the Working Circle was formed from the Ladies' Working Party and the Knitting Circle.

Left to right -

Back Row - Mrs. M Mason, Mrs. Muriel Chesney, Mrs. Kathleen Owens, Mrs. Doris Figgis,

Mrs. Mabel Fisher

Front Row - Mrs. Ethel Newman, Mrs. Muriel Johnes, Mrs. Edith Hooff



First Ladies Committee May 1933

A more recent event was the formation of the Young Wives' Group in 1977 which was an immediate success and fulfilled a real need providing a meeting place for young wives from a wide area, many of whom subsequently become interested in the spiritual life of the Church.

Children's Church was formed in 1932 and developed over the years and changed its name more than once until morning and afternoon groups finally combined in 1956 and met in the mornings only. 1951 had seen an early interdenominational effort when the Congregational Church joined with All Saints Sanderstead, All Saints Warlingham and Warlingham Methodists to open a New Sunday School at Hamsey Green. Junior Church has come a long way since then, with its crèche and four departments, followed by Youth Church for the over fourteens, the highlight of the year being Youth Day with its family breakfast and its floral cross heading the procession of children into morning worship.



Youth Day 1979

Youth Fellowship was originally inaugurated in April 1942, although the young people had met earlier, and since then many groups have been very active: the Senior Fellowship, the Conquesters, the Over 18s and Coffee 'n' Chat. Their activities have been many and varied: listening, discussing, singing, enjoying themselves certainly and also doing social work in a quiet, unobtrusive way. The annual Youth Church residential weekend conferences were always memorable occasions..

The 8th Sanderstead Guide Company was formed in 1936 and the 8th Brownie Pack a year later, although meetings lapsed during the war years. The girls of both groups are always keen and have distinguished themselves in various ways, nine Queen's Guide Awards having been made between 1954 and 1981 while the Brownies won the District Shield in 1980 and did very well in the Division Swimming Gala. A big event for the Brownies took place in February 1980 when their new flag was blessed, a flag which they had been helped to obtain by the generosity of a Brownie of 1921!

The 18th Purley Cub Pack started in 1937 and the Scout Group a year later and, since then, they have gone from strength to strength. Nothing deterred them. If there was nowhere to meet they found somewhere - someone's garden, a room in a house, the tea rooms in the village and even the BR waiting room at Selsdon Station! In 1962 they proposed to build their own headquarters which was finally finished and officially opened in 1973.

The Badminton Club was formed in 1935 and for three years played in what is now the transept of the church; table tennis also being available on club nights— Saturday nights at that time. After the war the club revived and by 1962 a higher standard of play had developed and the club was able to enter the Surrey League. In 1965 the Church League was formed for churches in the Purley and Coulsdon area and this grew into seven divisions and Sanderstead had a team in two of them. In 1975 a Junior Section was formed for the ten to fifteen year olds. In 1979 a 'Thursday Only' membership was formed for members not wishing to play too competitive a game

The Tennis Club was formed in 1933 and, at first, play was on courts at Carlton Road. The ground in Farm Fields was bought and an official opening was held in 1936 with a grand demonstration and exhibition by the Wimbledon champions Dorothy Round and Bunny Austin - and the Davis Cup players Phyllis Konstam and H.G.N. Lee. The new Church Pavilion was opened in 1980.

The Sanderstead Literary Society, was inaugurated on 3rd October 1934. Originally the programme was composed of lantern lectures, debates, mock trials, play readings and other items involving the members themselves. However, in 1961/1962 the programme format changed becoming nearer to the present day arrangement by which guest speakers are invited to talk, with or without slides or films.

The Adult Education Committee came into being, after the first Ashburnham Conference in 1971, with the aim of making the church more aware of current issues of concern both in the local and the world community. After one or two tentative efforts at weekday meetings it was decided to concentrate on what came to be known as the *Forum* which replaced the evening service on the second Sunday in the month. In 1977 the Committee merged with the Committee for World Mission (successor to the longstanding Missionary Committee) to consider the Church's outreach at home and abroad, particularly through the Council for World Mission.

"Community" is our regular church magazine which has been appearing in its present form since 1971. The equivalent of a Parish Magazine, it tries to present wider issues on a local, a national and an international level, issues of interest and concern to all Christians.

United Reformed Church How did Sanderstead Congregational Church come to change its name? Following the conclusion of National discussions on a union between the Congregational Church in England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England in May 1971 a Special Church Meeting in October 1971, passed a Resolution to accept the Scheme of Union and to become part of The United Reformed Church.

The Council of Sanderstead Churches (succeeding the Group of Sanderstead Churches) came into being in September 1972 with two aims: (1) "To provide means for the local churches represented on the Council to develop a deeper understanding of one another." and (2) "To enable the churches to bear a more united witness in the community and to serve it more effectively." - United services for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, public meetings, the Inter-church conference at Ashburnham Place were all part of its work, and, not the least, its Inter-church Visitors Scheme providing a pastoral outreach to the whole community.

There is not enough space to enumerate all the efforts made both within the church and in the community. There was the service provided by the Bookstall which appeared on Coffee morning Sundays, making available Christian literature, both new publications and other matter. There was the Friendship Committee which organised anything from a Frugal Supper to a “visit” to the Holy Land, from a church picnic after morning service to Friendship Teas when new families were welcomed and enabled to meet Elders and leaders of departments of Junior Church.

Abbeyfield In 1968 the Church embarked on a project to provide lonely elderly people with their own homes within the security and companionship of a small household. On 3rd March 1969, No.14 Beechwood Road became the responsibility of our Church. By 1975 it was felt that enough experience had been gained to warrant the setting up of a second project and, with the interest and support of our friends in St.Gertrude’s Roman Catholic Church, South Croydon, it was finally possible to buy No.2 Beechwood Road, which was administered by a joint Management Committee.

Music It may be said that there are two themes running through the years, The second of which is truly a musical one. A choir had begun to form very early and when the church building was opened in 1934 the singing was led by a black gowned Senior Choir, the gowns only being changed to crimson in 1970. The Children’s’ (now Junior) Choir began in 1949 and the Youth Choir, as part of the Youth Fellowship, started in 1966 and all three have made exceptional progress under several organists, choir masters and conductors. In 1971 the church was asked to participate in a scheme to prepare for a supplementary hymnbook, "New Church Praise", which was brought into use in 1975. The first service of Nine Lessons and Carols was held in 1955 and has returned faithfully every Christmas since. On several happy occasions there has been inter-church choir co-operation, both spiritually and musically satisfying.

Worship The main theme, however, is that of Worship which must be an integral part of all we do and in this we have been helped and guided by all the Ministers who have served us down the years. Each has brought his own special gifts and we are continually thankful for all they have done and are doing.

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