

## A History of Christ Church (1862 - 1967)

### Part 1 (1862-1944) - by C. R. BOFF

The parish of Christ Church, Gipsy Hill, began its history as a "District", carved out of the mother parish of St. Luke's, West Norwood, with a temporary structure commonly known as the "Iron Church". This, one of the first buildings on Gipsy Hill, stood on the same side as the present building but almost opposite Camden Hill Road, and was capable of seating 500 persons. It was opened by the then Minister, the Rev. Richard Allen, on December 4th, 1862. When he first knew Gipsy Hill the whole of the left side going down to the railway station was open common with banks high above the road, and a spring of water not very far from where Christ Church now stands.

During the next four years plans were drawn up for a permanent building, and it must have given much joy when the Foundation Stone of the new Church was laid by the Ven. Archdeacon Utterton, M.A., Canon of Winchester and Vicar of Farnham on the 12th July, 1866, on a site bordering what is now Highland Road and opposite Woodland Hill. Christ Church is now in the diocese of Southwark which was born in 1905, but in its early days it stood in the diocese of Winchester, hence the fact that the Lord Bishop of Winchester, the Rt. Rev. Charles Richard Sumner, D.D., consecrated the present building on June 5th, 1867, and on that day Richard Allen was licensed to be the first incumbent.

### "A LARGE RAGSTONE CHURCH"

A brief description of the Church is given in Basil Clarke's "Parish Churches of London" (Batsford 1966). "A large ragstone church, with slated roofs, French thirteenth century in style, with polished granite pillars and foliated capitals. The Architect was John Giles of Giles, Gough and Trollope. The Tower at the North East was completed in 1889 and the vestry and porch were added in the same year." The Rev. Douglas Wollon, present Minister of the Methodist Church, Westow Hill, in an appreciative review of Clarke's book describes the Tower as the "best in South East London".

A note written in 1892 declares: "The Church Clock and Chiming Bells have been generously presented by a member of the congregation at a cost of £300. The clock to chronicle the march of time and remind us of the coming and passing of God given opportunities. The Bells to remind us all within the sound of their voices of the opening of God's House for worship and the ministration of the Word, and inviting them to enter." How thankful many folk still are for the Church clock, especially when endeavouring to catch the morning train to work! The brass lectern was presented by John Green, Church Warden 1867 to 1869.

Long before the church itself was completed work had begun on a building in Woodland Hill and in 1874 what became known as the Schoolroom (Woodland Hill Hall) was built. Various classrooms, a soup-kitchen, library, etc., were all added to the original by about 1880 at the expense of a kind benefactor, a Mr. Sidebottom.

The main parish church was now functioning well, Allen's sacrificial ministry and superb preaching was drawing large congregations. The parish could not have numbered more than a few hundred souls, so many must have been attracted from beyond the parish boundaries. With a fine hall close by, organisations were born, grew and flourished. Even this was not enough however, for at the same time building was going on at two small sites in Berridge Road! In 1880 the Mission Church, St. Jude's, was completed, and consecrated in 1881 it began a long and distinguished work on the lower slopes of the hill. The deeds of the Institute, No. 21, Berridge Road, show that in September 1886 that site was mortgaged "together with the buildings now standing thereon, viz., two halls, workshop, stable, coach-house, offices and buildings described as "Ashburnham Hall". The land for the institute was acquired in 1878.

St. Jude's flourished with its hall nearby and many folk testify now to the succession of fine Curates who under God and their wise Vicars brought together a spiritual, worshipping community. Alas, times change. Men no longer come forward for the ordained ministry in such numbers, the cost of upkeep proved too much, the war years took their toll and sadly the books were closed in 1947. Rented afterwards as a warehouse for many years, St. Jude's was eventually sold in 1965. Memories of many friends bring warm and happy thoughts of "good times" in the church's life and work at the bottom of the hill.

Richard Allen died on the 19th February, 1895, after 32 years ministry here. A much loved pastor and an indefatigable character passed from the Norwood scene: during the time of his funeral every place of business closed in Upper Norwood. The short history related above bears its own testimony to the wonderful achievements under his hand. He was a magnificent organiser and administrator and though he had personal interest on many Evangelical committees, the Church Missionary Society, the Church Pastoral Aid Society, and helped to start the work of the Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A., he was from first to last a pastor of this parish which under God he had helped to create and expand.

## CANON JOYNT INHERITS PARISH FROM RICHARD ALLEN

Canon Joynt came to the parish in 1896 and inherited the fine "plant" and work which Allen had established. Many friends will recall the distinguished and kindly face of Canon Joynt, his wonderful preaching and the excellent ministry which he exercised in the district. Clerical uniform then was frock-coat and silk top hat, and a member of the congregation remembers seeing Canon Joynt on holiday in the Isle of Wight strolling along the sands in the heat of summer so dressed! Gipsy Hill was a well-to-do area in those days, the church was filled and some may recall the horses carriages champing outside waiting to take master and mistress home after divine service.

Soon after they came, Canon and Mrs. Joynt lost their first little girl, and the two brass book-stands for the Holy Table and the large arms dish were given to the Church in memory of her. It was in May 1896 that the present Communion Silver was given in memory of Willington Clark, F.R.C.S., by his wife and daughter. The old Communion Silver was given for missionary work at Mengo in Uganda.

In 1915-16, during the First World War, it was decided to purchase a motor ambulance for the troops. Envelopes were issued to the congregation at Easter and the money so raised amounted to between £600 and £700. This was made up to £800 and two ambulances were purchased! They were driven to the church one Saturday and dedicated before being sent on their way "somewhere in France". In the same year Canon and Mrs. Joynt lost their only surviving child, Irene, at the age of 19 years.

So large was the congregation that Christmas parties had to be held in two sessions, the Vicar dividing the congregation alphabetically for this purpose. (This also occurred under Canon Wilson in 1926.) This proved unsuccessful as friends were divided, and eventually the Grill Room at the Palace had to be hired to accommodate everyone, whenever a party was held.

Canon Joynt was a distinguished preacher and writer (his book "After Confirmation" has remained a 'Classic' until just recently) and a real father to the many fine Curates whom he trained and helped. The growth and expansion of the work testified to the quality of his character, not least the interest in missionary work. The decorated scroll still hanging in the church records the number of 57 who have been sent out into various parts of the world from Christ Church, some of them being subsidised by the congregation. Not a few of these were thrust forth in Joynt's time.

## "GOLDEN AGE" OF CHURCH GOING

To anyone who lived in the district prior to 1944 the name which comes most easily to mind in connection with the church is that of Canon Wilson. He is remembered still with much affection and high regard by all who knew him. The 20s and 30s, of course, were the "golden age" of church going here as elsewhere. A Christian community whose whole life was concerned with some aspect of God's work found under the umbrella of the church not only spiritual sustenance of quality from a real man of God and his excellent Curates, but their social life as well. From Men's Services, Ladies' Bible Classes, and Sunday Schools to badminton, cricket and football teams-this was the life to lead and Christ Church was the place to be-would that it might now be so! Yes, still the chin goes that little bit higher and the glow enters the voice of those who spoke of their younger days in this era. They were not easy days, there were hard days for the average man, but there were happy times to remember and occasions and people to be recalled with pride. All the work begun by Allen, increased by Joynt, was strengthened and expanded under Canon Wilson. Add to this the hall-mark of any man's ministry - the calling out by God of full-time workers. Men such as Canon Max Warren of Westminster Abbey and Canon Douglas Webster, Professor of Mission, Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham; Canon Bryan Green of Birmingham and many others spent boyhood and early days in the pews of Christ Church.

The parish itself was expanding, too, in the form of the Bloomfield Estate developed by Lambeth Borough Council, and the church rose to help meet the needs which a growing population brings. On November 25th, 1925, Archdeacon and Mrs. Joynt returned to lay the Foundation Stone of the Whiteley Road Hall, the entrance to which lies near what was formerly Sir Ernest Tritton's kitchen garden. The builders of the Hall were Messrs. Akers and Co. of Norwood and the joint architects Messrs. J. B. L. Tolhurst and J. M. Colvin.

The Diamond Jubilee of the church was celebrated in 1927 and was marked by the erection of new oak panelling in the Chancel, new oak Communion rails, and a new oak Holy Table, all at a cost of £750. This oak panelling of the Chancel was later extended in 1949 in memory of James Flint, Churchwarden from 1918-1946 and Harold Edwards Flint, Christ Church's own Medical missionary at Ranaghat, India, 1912-1934.

## THE BIGGEST CALAMITY

The biggest calamity to the whole area of Upper Norwood during these years was the destruction of the Crystal Palace by fire on the night of November 30th, 1936. Canon Oakley, then a Curate, took many photographs and retained several newspaper cuttings picturing the fire and its result. "A gaunt skeleton...of the Palace where, over more than 80 years, Londoners had played at holiday in their millions". The glare could be seen over 50 miles away and was so intense that a photo of the South Tower was 'snapped' as if on ordinary daylight photograph. How many who were working in the Woodland Hill Hall that night preparing the stalls for the Annual Winter Sale the next day remember running out into the road to watch the flames?

Canon Wilson, as his predecessor Joynt, before him, was appointed Rural Dean of Dulwich, a mark of the respect in which he was held by local clergy. It was he who with the Rev. H. Shergold, Minister of St. Aubyn's Congregational Church, forged the first links of ecumenicity in Upper Norwood and began a very close friendship between our two churches, which continues to the present day. Wilson retired in 1944, leaving behind a wonderful record of achievement in a ministry lasting 26 years. The Communion kneelers in the Chancel were given in memory of him by his children.

It has been impossible in this brief outline to do more than mention one or two incidents and happenings in the ministries of these three great men. No parish could have had a more wonderful foundation laid than the sacrificial work which these men did here for God. Truly "our lot has fallen unto us in a fair ground. We have a goodly heritage". These men, however, would be the first to say that it was not they but God, who by His Holy Spirit working in them had accomplished anything at all, and it is to God that the glory must be given. They, too, would be among the first to say that no leader, however good, can accomplish anything without loyal, firm, faithful, hard-working friends and lay people who sacrifice themselves, their time and their goods in the furtherance of the Kingdom of God, and Christ Church has never wanted for such people as these. It is not possible here to describe the work done by Church Wardens, such as the Flints, nor the work of Sunday School Superintendents, such as Mr. Ilsley, nor the interest in young men and sport, such as "Pa" Poirin gave; nor can the effect be calculated of the interest of such men as Gilbert Goodliffe.

Who can tell the effect of such faithfulness as 35 years at the organ of St. Jude's by Miss Sheldrick? Not to mention the hard and loyal work by such as Mrs. Knight, Mr. Jacob Hitchcock or Mr. A. Chambers. None will begrudge these names a mention

here, but these and hundreds of others with them comprise the saints anonymous which in every era of the church form the mainstay of the work of the Kingdom.

## Part 2 (1945-1957) - by S. R. LONGES

Twelve years at Gipsy Hill have left a lot of memories. People, unimportant incidents and big occasions, all come crowding into the mind, and, of course, there is the Hill itself. After twelve years of going up and down one seemed to develop a permanent angle which was never 90 degrees from the ground, but 70 or 110, depending upon which way one was going. "That hill," people used to say, and how we wished that a bus would have run up and down it.

I suppose my main recollections are four in number, and I mention them as they occur to me. Those of you who shared the years with me will not be surprised if I say that one of my most vivid recollections is of building and buildings. We never seemed to stop repairing the buildings, largely due to the ravages of war, and all of them were pretty major jobs. Christ Church and the Vicarage were both out of action when I arrived, so we had to live at Beckenham and travel to and fro until the first-aid repairs were carried out at the house, and my Institution took place in St. Jude's Church (with flying-bombs still going over) followed by a procession up Gipsy Hill so that I could unlock the Church door and toll the bell.

### RETURN TO CHRIST CHURCH

I've lost all account of dates, but I recall that we returned to Christ Church in the summer when the winds that blew through the gaps where the roof and the windows should have been was not too biting, and the rain was reasonably warm. From then on, until the final restoration of Christ Church on 19th September, 1951, we were in and out of the place like a jack-in-the-box. Sometimes we used St. Jude's, sometimes we turned the Woodland Hill Schools into a temporary church, but only for the last five years of my time at Gipsy Hill were we regularly, and comfortably, established in Christ Church. Then we started on the Vicarage!

It was an expensive time, and I seem to remember that we had to raise something like £10,000 in the parish during those years to supplement the payments by the War Damage Commission. People were wonderfully generous.

This leads me to my second main recollection which is the missionary enthusiasm and giving in a parish where there were so many other demands. Previous years of faithfulness in this regard continued to bear their fruit.

Thirdly, I remember especially the Youth Parade Services, when all the uniformed organisations turned out in force, and they were very strong. They were great Services, and the church music was of a very high standard, with choirboys galore (not to mention newspapers by the million!)

Fourthly, sales of work! I can savour them still. The hectic preparations, the hard work, the stallholders competing with one another (in a friendly way, of course! ), and if I close my eyes now I could be walking round the Schools again. I can see the stalls, and the stallholders, and I'm still wondering whether anyone else will be coming in, or whether we can call it a day and make the final count! They were hard but happy times, and I have never ceased to be grateful to the people of Gipsy Hill who gave me twelve enjoyable years in a wonderful parish.

NOTE: The Re-dedication of Christ Church took place on Wednesday, 19th September, 1951, by the Lord Bishop of Southwark. The beautiful West Window was unveiled by Mrs. G. Goodliffe and dedicated on 17th July, 1955.

## Part 3 (1957-1960) - by JOHN BATES

The Vicar has kindly asked me to record some of the chief happenings in the Parish during my short incumbancy.

I shall never forget the impact of day-to-day parochial life made upon me, after fourteen years as Secretary of one of our overseas Missionary Societies. My predecessor had tackled with considerable success an almost impossible task in getting the Church life under way again after the dislocations of war. My first concern was to get to know the people and, as far as I know, every house and flat was visited.

The Council agreed to start a new Parish Magazine with a guaranteed circulation of 1,000 copies per month. A magazine fund was set up and those interested contributed to this. The remainder was used for distribution, area by area in turn, so that at least twice a year every house or flat received a visit through the help of a faithful band of distributors. No one could plead that they did not know where the Church was, or what it was doing!

### NEED TO RENOVATE ORGAN

We soon discovered that the organ was in a serious condition due to exposure during the war period. With the help of many friends and the response from the whole of the parish we managed to get the job done, and once again this splendid organ was in full use.

The next development was the setting up of a Cradle Roll for all our children received by baptism into the fellowship of the Church. Each child received a card every year up to five years of age. Then their names were passed on to the Infant Sunday School for follow up.

The Woodland Hill Hall gave us a lot of trouble. It was a "sick" building and I am so glad that the Parish now has its new hall.

In my third year we raised sufficient funds to renew all the Choir cassocks and surplices. and not before they needed it! Several other renewals and improvements were made here and there, but my memory lingers chiefly around the spiritual fellowship we enjoyed in the various organisations, the many friends we made, the privilege of ministering the Word of Life, and the joy of pastoral visitation. We had our disappointments and problems, but what parish has not?

Christ Church, which I had known for years in Canon Wilson's days, has left its mark upon my life, and the work there has been remembered in prayer every day since I had to leave. May God graciously continue to bless and prosper its ministry and its people.

## The Parish at Play - by H. BOWTHORPE

What little news of any sport there was before the turn of the century has been passed down from one generation to another, and stories are recalled of the annual journey by horse-bus with local gentry making up the XI to play football at Godstone each Easter. On one occasion the crossbar was broken by a tremendous shot and the Christ Church goalkeeper never forgot the shock, and the story improved with age. Cricket was played at Norwood Park and the large oaks were cleared with regularity.

The older of the present generation were fortunate to share the years when "Pa" Poirin gave so much of his time organizing sport for the boys. From about 1910 and after his death in 1933, Christ Church (Gipsy Hill) was really a force to be reckoned with in local football and cricket.

The younger teams regularly played St. Joseph's College, Jews' Orphanage, Elder Road Schools and similar local opposition and even travelled as far as Brockley to play St. John's.

As the club developed and the lads grew, so stronger fixtures were sought and three XI's regularly turned out. The football section entered the Thornton Heath and District Football League and records show Christ Church (Gipsy Hill) as winning:

1924/5 & 1935/6 The Sportsmanship Cup

1921/2 Third Division Winners

1932/3 First Division Winners

1938/9 Second XI. Winners Third Division

Tuesday was gymnasium night for boys and Fridays for girls, each winter season ending with a display and the girls with their clubs and skipping ropes worthy of the Royal Tournament.

Mr. Poirin often arranged an early Saturday morning swim at South Norwood Baths, and to make certain that some lads did not miss the Gipsy Hill train, string was tied to their beds and hung out of the windows as an additional "reveille".

These events were augmented by camping at Frensham Ponds where a Miss Harmer was the host, and not only did Christ Church win at cricket but made up their minds to outsing the local choir on Sundays.

Perhaps in those days we had to find our own enjoyment, for transport was difficult and many of to-day's so-called amusements had not been thought of. Norwood had few, if any cars. Most of the youngsters had empty roads on which to cycle and perhaps the only hazards were the cows up and down Gipsy Hill, guided by the cow lady with skirts trailing the ground.

In those days many of the ideals of life were impressed upon us, for all those hovering around us taught with patience and good humour and guided us by their example.

## The Organ

The first record of an organ is an instrument by Hill & Sons, which the then Vicar describes in 1897 as being in a state of "crumbling to pieces"! A new organ by Messrs. J. W. Walker & Sons Ltd., was installed in 1898, the Grand Opening taking place on July 6th when a recital was given by Mr. E. H. Lemare, F.R.C.O. The organ consultant at this time was Mr. E. J. Eyre, Organist to the Crystal Palace and it was on his recommendation that Messrs. J. W. Walker & Sons were approached for an estimate. The cost was £1,070 and at the same time new choir stalls and chancel furniture were added. An electric blower was installed in 1910 The organ thus remained, except for casual maintenance, until 1925, when it was thoroughly cleaned and renovated.

In 1936, at a cost of £500, electric stop action replaced the original pneumatic and adjustable pistons were added.

During the 1939-1945 War years, the organ suffered badly and by 1958 was in an almost derelict condition. In 1959, through the efforts of the Rev. John Bates, some £800 was raised for a comprehensive overhaul of the organ and apart from one or two minor repairs and adjustments, so it remains today.

It is an exceptionally fine instrument of superb tone and considerable power and is laid out on two manuals and pedals with an adequate supply of accessories.

## FORMER ORGANISTS

1867-1887: No trace. It is thought a Mr. (later Dr.) was organist.

1887-1897: Mr. F. Shinn.

1897-1902: Mr. W. T. C. Mould, M.A., A.R.C.O. (*The present organ was installed and opened on July 6th, 1898, by Mr. E. H. Lemare, F.R.C.O., Organist of St. Margaret's, Westminster.*)

1902-1915: Mr. E. Victor Williams.

1915-1917: Mr. C. Fishwick.

1917-1918: Mr. Dillon.

1918-1925: Mr. A. B. Choat, A.R.C.O.

1925-1926: Mr. C. D. Ashley, F.R.C.O., L.R.A.M.

1926-1927: Mr. J. S. Corrin.

1928-1929: Mr. W. H. Gabb, F.R.C.O., A.R.C.M.

1929-1939: Mr. F. H. Dunncliff, F.R.C.O.

1939-1940: Mr. G. W. Hoare.

1940-1946: Mr. E. L. Paterson, A.R.C.O.

(*Acting Organist during the absence of Mr. G. W. Hoare on Active Service.*)

1946-1958: Mr. G. W. Hoare, A.R.C.M., L.R.A.M., F.T.C.L.

1958-1960: Mr. V. Moon, A.R.C.M.

1960-1962: Mr. A. E. Kemp.

1962-1964: Mr. B. J. Walter.

1964- The present holder of the post is Mr. G. W. Hoare, formerly organist from 1939-1958, at present also Director of Music and Organist of Archbishop Temple's School, Lambeth and Organist of St. Saviours' College, West Norwood.

Mr. W. H. Gabb, Organist from 1928-1929, is now Organist and Composer to H. M. Chapel Royal, St. James', and Sub-Organist of St. Paul's Cathedral.

## "Others Also" - by B. DEVONISH

"The Church that lives to itself will die by itself"; this warning was given by the Archbishop of Canterbury during the Toronto Congress 1963. After a brief glance at some of the lists of Missions supported by Christ Church 50, 60 and 70 years ago, one is convinced that the members of those days were determined to live for others. In 1904 gifts were sent to 45 different funds, including Christ Church Soup Kitchen, London City Mission and many Overseas Missions, and the total was £6,148 8s. 5d. In 1916 two Ambulances were given for the Soldiers wounded in France. All through the years, missions, hospitals, schools and children's homes have been helped in their work because of those who prayed and shared the good news of the Gospel. A letter from Canon Douglas Webster gives a vivid impression of the time when he was a young member of Christ Church.

"Thank you so much for your letter about Christ Church and its missionary interest. I am immensely sorry that I am not able to take up the Vicar's invitation and be present on the occasion of the centenary but I suppose that my inability is a direct result of all that Christ Church has stood for in laying such stress on missionary responsibility. Apart from that I would not be in my present job, nor would I be at a meeting in Ceylon during the week of the Centenary. My own memories of Christ Church are so many and my spiritual debts far more than I can repay. Canon Wilson's sermons, which even as a boy gripped and stirred me, the Sunday afternoon children's services, the Guild of Young People, friendship with a succession of curates, and above all the inspiration of so many visitors: all these things come back into my mind. When I was about 13 I remember being profoundly moved by a missionary from South America, the Rev. R. J. Hunt, and as a result of his sermons I went off the following week to the lady who acted as secretary for S.A.M.S. and asked for a missionary box. That is how it began for me. But there were the great Sales of Work in the Summer, and I always hoped I would be able to get off cricket at school on the Wednesday afternoon to be there, and these of course were to support C.M.S.

## AFRICAN CLERGY IN PULPIT AT CHRIST CHURCH

" 'Our own missionary' (as the phrase went in those days) was Archdeacon J. S. Herbert. We were always hearing from him and about him, and on his furlough he visited the parish and excited us with stories of the growing Church in Uganda and all that God was doing there. At other times we were directed to Persia and India and China as preachers and speakers from C.M.S. came, and to the Missions to Seamen, Missions to Jews, Bible Society and Christian literature. The first African Clergy I ever saw were in the pulpit of Christ Church. Again and again when I had been doing organ practice or giving out hymnbooks at the children's service I used to read through that unique list of missionaries who had gone from the parish which hung on the wall near the tower porch. I wonder if it still does? I hope so.

"In some ways this challenged me more than anything else. As it turned out, God did not call me to be a missionary in quite the same sense and I do not qualify to be on that roll of honour, but He gave me the great privilege of serving the Christian mission in other ways?first on the headquarters staff of C.M.S., and now in the teaching and training of missionaries in the ecumenical setting of the Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham."

We know that Canon Webster has been used by God to strengthen the Church in many Dioceses throughout the world by his visits and lecture tours and the many books he has written are a constant strength to those who are endeavouring to obey Christ's command "To go into all the world".

'Mission' is still our responsibility and we have two members, John and Christine Claydon and their baby boy, Timothy, at present in training at Liskeard Lodge for overseas work with C.M.S. We are privileged, too, in this Centenary year to welcome to our parish for six weeks, the Rev. Joseph Mwangi, Vicar of Mutira in Kenya, who is doing further training in this country for two years, to help him in the huge task he has at home. Please pray for these people.

Christ Church has had many dedicated workers for God and still has those who are giving much of their time to 'mission' in Upper Norwood.

## Our Parish in 1867 - by A. S. BERRY

In the middle of the last century, most of the people who worked in London either lived there or in the immediate neighbourhood. They had to, for road transport to the regions beyond was slow and limited.

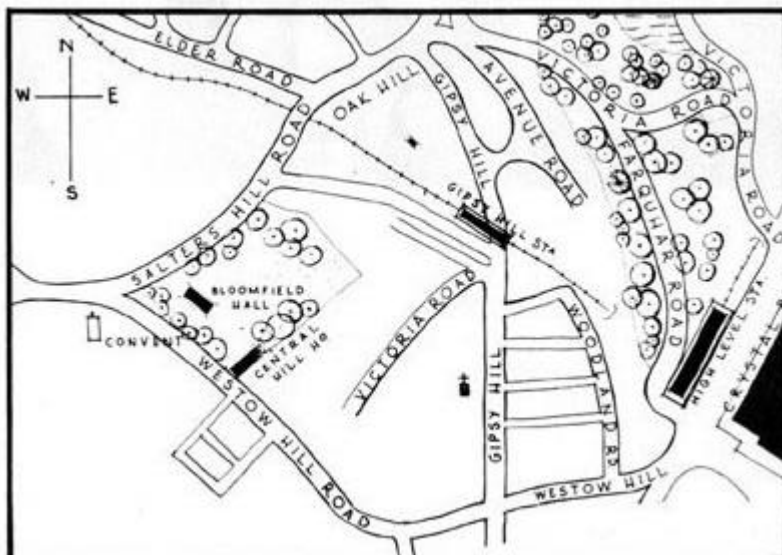
Then the railways began to build their suburban network. In 1854 Queen Victoria opened the Crystal Palace on Sydenham Hill, after it had been transported there piece by piece from the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park. The West End of London and Crystal Palace railway soon followed, with many intermediate stations. One of them, Gipsy Hill, opened in 1856.

For centuries Londoners had gone on outings to the neighbourhood to enjoy the good clean air, the wonderful view of London, the woods, gorse, fine oaks and bluebells. They also visited the gipsies who had lived on the hill for a long time and given the place its name.

One of the most famous of gipsy fortune tellers was Margaret Finch, who died in 1740 at the age of 109. It was said that because she had sat in the same position for so long, her limbs could not be moved, so she had to be buried in a deep square box. Old Bridget, the last Queen of the Gipsies, was buried in Dulwich churchyard in 1768.

As the railways stretched out into the suburbs, builders were quick to see development opportunities near the new stations, enabling business men to travel from the City to their new homes in less than half an hour. Gipsy Hill was no exception.

In 1867 Christ Church was built and the Reverend Richard Allen was preaching to a congregation of well over one thousand souls and within ten years the area bordered by Woodland Road, Gipsy Hill and Westow Hill was built on. To the West of Gipsy Hill development was slow, because the Tritton family lived at Bloomfield Hall and much of the land belonged to them. In fact, C. E. Tritton was M.P. for Norwood from 1892 until . . .



But the rural atmosphere remained. As late as 1893 Percy Fitzgerald, in his book on the City suburbs wrote: "This district is about the fairest and most 'winsome' of all the suburbs. Covered as it is with villas and terraces, it still maintains its sylvan aspect. Crowds of busy men hurry up to Town for the day's work. Their houses are built in substantial and sometimes elegant style, and overgrown by luxuriant ivy."

Wherever one lives in the parish today, the map shown here, dated 1867, tells a fascinating story. By then there was some development to the west of Gipsy Hill. You can see the unfinished Victoria Road (now Crescent); five houses in Alexandra Road (now Drive) and the fine Victorian houses running along Central Hill from Salters Hill to Gipsy Hill. Many remain today, although they are shortly to be pulled down.

Gipsy Hill itself had only been developed above the station, including the shopping centre in Westow Hill.

In 1867 the four roads to the east of Gipsy Hill were called Camden Hill, Woodland Hill, George Street and College Street. The lone occupant of George Street was a beer retailer, Mrs. Harriet Wickenden, whose husband was a carman. By 1869 Mrs. Wickenden was the proud landlady of the Railway Bell - still there, although George Street has become Cawnpore Street. As neighbours she had seven private houses, and Malta Cottages. There was no Paxton School, named after the great architect of the Crystal Palace, Sir Joseph Paxton.

In College Street in 1867 - it is now a continuation of Woodland Road - there were only two occupants - Mr. Wright, a carman, and Mr. Harris, a chimney sweep (who must have viewed with pleasurable anticipation of business the sight of houses - and chimneys - springing up in the district!) By 1869 there were nine houses in College Street.

Green's Directory of that period mentions Woodland Hill, containing Percy Villas and Surrey Villas, but Kelly's Directory of 1869 places Percy Villas, with Westbank Villas and Willow Terrace, in Woodland Road. After Willow Terrace the directory states "here is Woodland Hill" and lists Surrey Villas.

Farmer's Directory of 1869 also includes both Hill and Road, with Victoria and Corner Cottages added. Camden Hill Villas had become Camden Hill by 1868, and contained a dozen private houses.

## AROUND GIPSY HILL STATION

Now let us look at Gipsy Hill Station itself, as it was in 1867. Mr. Bellatti was the Station Master, and his house is still there today. Below it is the old entrance to the station, where the carriages waited for the City gentlemen to arrive by the evening trains. Even today the outside wall of the station contains a letter box with the initials VR, and the old railway crests.

Just above the station, where today we find the K.M. Garage and Gould Court and Forbes Court flats there were, in 1867, only two small shops and French's Dairy. Then came George Street. There were no houses below the station although Kelly's mentions a Cobby Road, with G. Jones, Analyst, at No. 5, and Mr. S. L. Waring at The Oaks, and the Old Gipsy House.



On the opposite side, though, was the Gipsy Hill Hotel (still there today) and, on the site of today's Victoria Mansions, Mrs. Sarah Jane Halifax's Orford College. There were also Woodside Villas, named after Woodside House, which stood behind the hotel and is said to be the house Dickens had in mind as the home of Dora Spenslow, David Copperfield's sweetheart.

If one looks on the wall of 2 Victoria Crescent today the date 1863 still be seen. In that year this was one of the few houses there. Further up the hill there was a small wood and the Woodside Nurseries. Then, beyond a few shops, we find the directories quoting: "Allen, Reverend 'Richard M.A. the parsonage" with Christ Church just beyond.

Above the Church no houses are mentioned, and certainly not Highland Road or Lunharn Road, but there appears to be a track behind the vicarage leading to Central Hill.

The rest of the west side of Gipsy Hill was meadows and common. There was no Sainsbury Road, only a track known as Station Road, and it is easy to imagine Victoria Road and Alexandra Road ending in fields, waiting hopefully for Mr. Tritton and others to give way to development.

Besant's Survey of South London, even in 1912, says: "The Old 'Oaks' mansion facing the Paxton Inn still stands, but the grounds, though not yet covered, are in the builder's hands... Salters Hill, which rises abruptly to Central Hill, is still mainly open fields... Gipsy Road is well settled and contains a Board School. In striking contrast to the bright, clean buildings are the tumbledown thatched cottages standing in the fields."

Besant also refers to Westow Hill "covered with residences". This is of interest because our map of 1867 gives Westow Hill Road, which is known today as Central Hill, so Besant's "covered with residences" really refers to Central Hill from Salters Hill to "the lights". Even as the older residents in Gipsy Hill today still talk of Victoria Road so did Besant still think of Central Hill as Westow Hill.

## THE TOP END OF THE PARISH

We have now described the whole of the parish as it was in 1867, except for that part of Gipsy Hill itself which today we know of as from "the lights" at the top and down the right-hand side to Woodland Road.

At Number 2 there was a Mr. Midland, cheesemonger, and a few more shops and then the Police Station - still easily discernible today - then a little lower down the Wesley Chapel followed by several lodging houses and private houses including Sunnyside, where Mrs. Henry Wood, authoress of "East Lynne", lived.

So to a grocer, W. Ferrier, on the corner of George Street (now Cawnpore Street), and it is interesting to note there is still a grocer's there today. Between our present Cawnpore Street and Woodland Road are two landmarks. The two cottages and Messrs. Court, the Builders, on the walls of which can be seen "Estd. 1851".

Although Courts were indeed established in 1851, they did not move into Gipsy Hill until 1948. The building itself occupied the site of French's Dairy, whose cows used, in living memory, to meander up and down Gipsy Hill to and from the pasture which is today the fenced-in triangle below Gipsy Hill Station. The cottages could be the last of a small cluster known as Brunswick Cottages. Both Brunswick Cottages and French's Dairy are mentioned in the Directories of one hundred years ago.

French's cows are no more; the Police Station has moved to more sumptuous quarters; Bloomfield Hall and estate to our postman today only means Bloomhall Road, Durning and Whiteley Roads, Gibbs Close and Square, and Roman Rise.

Our Vicar can now move in all directions from his Vicarage, and as he visits his parishioners he cannot fail to notice how more and more old places are rapidly coming down, even whole roads, and he knows that within ten years from now a story of his parish in that one decade would be almost identical in nostalgia and reminiscence as this story of one hundred years ago.

## 1967 Looking Forward . . .

You will have read and seen in this book a small part of all that God has graciously done in and through the members of this church down the years. The records, the achievements, the successes can never tell a full story and written into the past here, as in all our lives, are the mistakes and the failures and the disappointments. There are many 'strengths' in a Christian community, one of them surely is the ability to contain all who feel they are failures, those who find life hard and lonely; in fact, the sharing of the love God gives to each of us different gifts and talents and of God. through His Spirit sees fit to emphasise in each of us different aspects of the Christian life.

During six years it seems that my task has been to emphasise 'family life'. He has given me a large family of five girls! Our home has always, and always will be, 'open' to all who come. A Family Service was begun in 1962 and has grown to be something which many enjoy and would not miss. We embark this year on our third Family Houseparty. The word 'family' is, as I understand it, the key to the work in this parish at the moment.

This is the point we have reached and from which we move off into the future. A great part of the parish is being re-developed. Many families have moved out in recent days but shortly there will be an influx of many hundreds of family units. We welcome them and shall seek to serve them and hope they will take their place in the family of Christ Church. A new chapter to this book will then begin.

## Vicars of Christ Church (1867 - 1967)

1867 - 1895	Rev. Richard Allen, M.A.
1895 - 1918	Rev. Canon Robert Charles Joynt, M.A. <i>Rural Dean of Dulwich and later Archdeacon of Kingston-upon-Thames</i>
1918 - 1944	Rev. Canon Charles Edwin Wilson, M.A., B.D. <i>Rural Dean of Dulwich</i>
1945 - 1957	Rev. Stanley Richard Longes
1957 - 1960	Rev. John Bates, B.Sc., A.K.C.
1961 -	Rev. Charles Roy Boff, M.A.

## ASSISTANT CURATES

Rev. Issac Price	1868-1872	Rev. O. St. M. Forester	1913
Rev. W. W. Archer	1873-1877	Rev. E. F. F. Bishop	1915-1917
Rev. J. Walker	1878	Rev. J. Seaver	1915
Rev. J. A. Bell	1867-1879	Rev. A. Taylor	1916
Rev. J. Tanner	1879-1884	Rev. E. O. Hughes	1917-1919
Rev. P. H. Collins	1880-1883	Rev. W. P. Cartwright	1918
Rev. H. W. Wright	1884-1886	Rev. F. St. Clair Goldie	1919-1923
Rev. F. C. Butler	1884-1889	Rev. R. N. Sharp	1922-1924
Rev. H. J. W. Astley	1885-1889	Rev. T. A. Coulson	1924-1927
Rev. J. R. Edwards	1890-1896	Rev. W. H. Oswald	1924-1926
Rev. H. R. Alexander	1890-1892	Rev. F. H. Pickering	1926-1930
Rev. E. J. Palmer	1894-1895	Rev. F. R. L. Brooke	1927-1929
Rev. Frank W. Cobb	1896-1899	Rev. J. M. Cartwright	1929-1934
Rev. Canon S. H. Clark	1897-1900	Rev. G. Glanville	1930-1931
Rev. H. Gouldsmith	1900	Rev. J. F. D. Trimmingham	1930-1933
Rev. T. H. Senior	1900-1902	Rev. C. C. Wolters	1933-1937
Rev. J. L. Cobham	1900-1904	Rev. H. R. Oakley	1934-1939
Rev. J. K. Quarterman	1902-1903	Rev. A. R. Fountain	1937-1941
Rev. W. J. Abbott	1904-1906	Rev. G. Maclaren	1941-1945
Rev. W. T. C. Mould	1904-1907	Rev. H. E. Brown	1949-1951
Rev. A. R. Whateley	1906	Rev. M. G. Hewett	1954-1957
Rev. H. L. Birch	1906-1910	Rev. C. E. N. Brown	1957-1961
Rev. W. L. P. Float	1909-1912	Rev. J. E. N. Elliston	1961-1964
Rev. T. G. Edwards	1911-1919	Rev. J. B. Richie	1963-1966
Rev. C. J. Morton	1912-1913	Rev. R. A. Leaver	1964