

THE STORY OF CHRIST CHURCH, LEATHERHEAD

A. S. Cairns, 1 November 2020

This history owes a great deal to the booklet by past Church Secretary, Duncan Smith, 1947-1972. Church Secretaries who have brought wisdom to the church's affairs over the years include Cecil Whitehead, and his son Cyril Whitehead who followed Duncan Smith; John Henderson, our present Treasurer; Dorothy Poulton, Jeanette Chamberlain and Mike Essex.

In 1829 several friends, who had been meeting for worship in a barn somewhere in Leatherhead, invited the Revd John Harris of Epsom to "come over and join them into a church". The sacrament of the Lord's Supper was first administered on Sunday 27th December 1829. The first Minister was Revd Thomas Barker who served from 1832.

In 1844 a new Congregational chapel seating 250 was opened in the centre of the town. The envelope system of giving was adopted in 1891. In 1898 the church joined the Reigate and District Federation of Free Churches, later transferring to the Epsom and District Federation. In 1915 the chapel was insured against damage from air attack for £1,000, at a premium of £1. In 1916 it was agreed to provide refreshments after the evening service for soldiers attending the service.

Mr R. D. Pearson, a Deacon for 52 years from 1922, wrote of his early days: "Leatherhead in those days was a small country town. I can remember herds of cows coming down the High Street to go into the 'Swan' yard to be milked. The stagecoach from London to the coast used to pass through twice a week, changing horses at the 'Swan'. The Town Clock came from the old Congregational Church, who gave it to the town because they could not afford to pay the tax that was imposed on public clocks in those days..."

In 1919 the congregation purchased Claremont House in Reigate Road as a manse for the Minister, the Revd H. E. Sumner. Lord Beaverbrook opened a church bazaar which raised £178 towards the cost of the manse (about £800), and he and his daughter promised £350 if the congregation could raise their contribution to £300.

"About 1930 there was an influx of 'City' people who moved [out of London] and settled in Leatherhead. They put new life into the Church .. and it was decided to build a new Church. The old buildings were .. dilapidated.. Rats used to run about in the back pews during the evening Service. It was lit by gas and there was a slaughter house next door."

In 1933, during the ministry of Revd A. E. Snashall, a Church member purchased a house in Epsom road called Newlands, now Downsends Lodge School, and sold the grounds to the Church. The old chapel in the town became a shop, now Chimes Coffee Bar, which now bears a commemorative plaque. Leatherhead Methodist Church offered to share their building with the Congregational Church while they were without a building to meet in. Christ Church (Congregational), Epsom Road, was designed by Percy Meredith FRIBA, Deacon and Church Secretary. The present font was purchased in his memory. The church was built by W. H. Gaze and Sons of Kingston, who also specialised in tennis courts, and they added the two tennis courts which are still in use. The Church was dedicated in May 1935.

In December 1935 the Church installed a small house organ from Deepdene House, Dorking. The Choir stalls in the chancel held thirty singers, and the Organist was Dr Edith Bathurst, F.R.C.O., widow of the first headmaster of Downsends School, and one of the first women Doctors of Music. Her renderings with the Church Choir of Stanford's *Te Deum in B flat* and Mendelssohn's *Elijah* are remembered to this day. The Choir wore black gowns, with Dr Bathurst at the organ in her doctoral hood. In 1970, then in her nineties, she attended the dedicatory service for the new organ, commending its great variety of sounds, but adding: "I don't know anything about the insides of organs."

Revd Robert Paul was appointed in 1945. He represented the Congregational Union and the English Presbyterian Church at the World Council of Churches in 1948, and gained his Oxford Doctorate of Philosophy in 1949. The manse was completed in 1952. The Young People's Fellowship and the Children's Church were restarted, and the membership grew from 90 to 260. Dr Paul went on to direct the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey in Switzerland, and later followed an academic career in Austin, Texas, USA.

Revd David Geddes became Minister in 1955. During a visitation campaign in Fetcham, four hundred houses were visited by thirty people. Revd John Bates transferred from Epsom and in 1962 became the minister of a new Congregational church set up in Cobham. Three Christ Church members, W. M. Lewis, Duncan Kelly and Anthony Tomlinson, decided to enter the ministry. The membership exceeded 300. In

1961, the Leatherhead Council of Churches was formed. History was made that year when the vicar of Leatherhead, Revd Kenneth Ball, preached in Christ Church. Mr Geddes's preaching was widely admired, and services were broadcast on ITV in 1959 and on BBC radio in 1961.

Revd James Todd was minister from 1962 until his death in 1977. A new youth group was formed under the name "19-40 Group". One of their regular activities was to plan and lead worship in the village of Charlwood. In 1965 the new Junior Church building was paid for with the help of a Christmas Market which raised £1700. Membership at this time reached 330. Mr Todd brought to the congregation an "expanding awareness of the Faith, and the social and ecumenical claims which Christian witness entails". Anthony Cairns was appointed organist and choirmaster in 1965, following Edgar Sutcliffe and Ruth Probert, and held the post for 54 years. A Junior Choir was formed and grew to thirteen in number, and a new Hill Norman & Beard organ in 1970 greatly enriched music in worship, including special choral services on Palm Sunday and at Christmas, to be held every year until 1985. In 1969 one of the Deacons, Dr G. N. Box became Chairman of the Leatherhead Council of Churches. James Todd was a leading expert on liturgy and his services are remembered for the scholarship and reverence he brought to them. The church played an active part in discussions towards formation of the United Reformed Church in 1972.

Revd Brian Treharne was appointed in 1977, and stayed for the next twenty-five years. He ran a Bible Study Group. This was a time of stability and spiritual growth, during which three members of the choir, Tom Bush and Hazel and Ernest Yu, went on to ordination. On the practical side, £10,000 was raised for a necessary repair to the roof of the hall. In 1977 the church supported the new Leatherhead Night Hostel (later renamed LeatherheadSTART) established by the Leatherhead Council of Churches. In 1987 a choir member donated new blue gowns. The hymn book *Rejoice & Sing!* published in 1991 was eagerly welcomed and has been an inspiration ever since. The organ was extended into the nave in 1995 to lead hymn-singing better. This also made it excellent for organ recitals, of which 109 have been given since 1970. Evening anthems were sung until 1998 and evening worship continued regularly until 2002. All Brian's family served in the choir.

Revd Dean Tapley became our Minister in 2004. Dean and Lydia both sang in the choir. Church life included an annual sponsored walk for charity organised by John and José Henderson, and the vestibule was enhanced with a new toilet for the disabled. The church pews were replaced with red chairs, for flexibility and a less formal atmosphere, and this also provided Surrey Philharmonic Orchestra and local choirs including Leatherhead Choral Society with rehearsal space and a concert venue, including 18 concerts by Anthony Cairns's chamber choir Antiphonia.

The formation of the Pastorate of five churches in Leatherhead, Cobham and Effingham in 2009 made it possible for Revd Ian Howarth, Minister of Leatherhead Methodist Church (LMC), also to become Minister of Christ Church. When Ian moved on to his present life in Birmingham in 2013, Revd Lynda Russell was appointed jointly to both churches. This was a time of discussions between Christ Church and LMC with a view to possibly joining together. This developed valuable friendships between the two congregations, but in the end both churches held back from full unity.

Revd Jan Hofmeyr was welcomed as Minister of both churches in 2018. Margaret Dodds-Ely's house group started in 2019. Our membership now stood at 33. By this time the ages of the congregation and falling numbers indicated that Christ Church could not long continue as an active fellowship in Epsom Road. Until this year we still had lettings to thirty community groups, including the ARK toddlers club, Muslim Prayer Group, choirs, orchestra and exercise groups. Our outreach has included participating in the Covenant of three churches in Leatherhead, and in Churches Together in Leatherhead, support for Trinity School, for Leatherhead Youth Project and for our Youth Workers, hosting the Holiday Club, various Churches Together events and Pitstop drop-in centre, and organising house-to-house collections for Christian Aid.

We are greatly indebted to Revd Kim Plumpton of Cobham United Church for the times when she has led worship for us, and for her helpful support of the elders in planning for closure. We are incredibly grateful for all the ordained and lay leadership of worship during interregnum and when our own Minister has not been available, particularly the Revds Robert Blows, Donald Finnan, Darlene McCarley, Bruce Stuart and Stephen Thornton, and our elder Heather Ward who is a URC Accredited Lay Preacher.

Our 1935 premises have served the community well for 85 years, as they have also served the Christian fellowship which started in a barn somewhere in Leatherhead 191 years ago.

**MINISTERS OF LEATHERHEAD CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH 1829-1935,
CHRIST CHURCH (CONGREGATIONAL) 1935-1972
and CHRIST CHURCH (UNITED REFORMED) 1972-2020**

	1829-1832	Pulpit mostly supplied by students
1.	1832-1835	Revd Thomas Baker
2.	Apr-Sep 1835	Revd Joseph Freeman
3.	1839-1842	Revd John Barker
4.	1842-1846	Revd Frederick Perkins
5.	1846-1851	Revd John Morris
6.	1852-1865	Revd Edward Waite
7.	1865-1871	Revd William O'Neill
8.	1872-1879	Revd Joseph R. Rosoman
9.	1880-1883	Revd William B. Macwilliam
10.	1883-1886	Revd Lachlan T. Maclaine
11.	1887-1899	Revd William J. Loxton
12.	1899-1902	Revd R. H. Noble
13.	1902-1908	Revd William B. Tucker
14.	1911-1914	Revd John C. Easterbrook
15.	1915-1918	Revd Walter E. Morgan
16.	1919-1925	Revd Henry E. Sumner
17.	1926-1929	Revd Stephen E. Mowforth
18.	1931-1936	Revd A. E. Snashall
19.	1938-1942	Revd G. Oswald Bainton
20.	1942-1944	Revd A. Allon Smith
21.	1945-1954	Revd Dr Robert S. Paul
22.	1955-1961	Revd David P. C. Geddes
23.	1962-1977	Revd James Moody Todd
24.	1977-2002	Revd Brian D. Treharne
25.	2004-2009	Revd Dean E. Tapley
26.	2010-2013	Revd Ian Howarth
27.	2013-2016	Revd Lynda Russell
28.	2018-2020	Revd Jan Hofmeyr