

## SUNDAY MORNING SERVICE

10am

With Junior Church and Crèche



This service is suitable for all ages including families with children. Everyone worships together for the first twenty minutes then the children and young people go out to take part in their own activities in groups organised according to age.

The service normally ends by 11.10 am

## COMMUNION

Communion is normally celebrated at the end of the service on the first Sunday of the month. All who seek to follow Jesus are welcome to share in the bread and wine whatever their age or background.

**'Join us and receive a warm welcome'**

Reigate Park Church, Park Lane East, Reigate, Surrey RH2 8BD  
Registered charity 1130103

[www.reigateparkchurch.org](http://www.reigateparkchurch.org)



# The History of RPC 1662 - 2015



# THE HISTORY OF REIGATE PARK CHURCH 1662-2015

Reigate Park Church has a history going back to the 17th Century. It started as an Independent Chapel and then as a Congregational Church. It is now part of the United Reformed Church which was formed in 1972 by the union of the Congregational Church and the Presbyterian Church in England which were subsequently joined by the Churches of Christ and the Congregational Union of Scotland.

The Church believes that it embodies the essentials of the Church Catholic and Reformed and is committed to take further steps towards the unity of the whole Church of Christ. United Reformed Churches share their concerns and develop their life together through the local Church Meeting, the Area Synod, Synod Together and General Assembly. Through its national organisation it is a member and plays its full part in the Council for World Mission, the Council of Churches in Britain and Ireland and the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The Churches thus express their links with the events of the Reformation and believe it is essential for the life, organisation and doctrinal statements of the Church to be reformed continually under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with Scripture.

## Seventeenth Century Persecution In Reigate

There were tremendous difficulties for nonconformists in the 17th Century. The Corporation Act and the Act of Uniformity were followed by the Conventicle Acts which prohibited meetings of more than five people not of the same family for worship unless the Prayer Book was used. In 1664 a number of people were brought before the magistrates for offending against this law, so in Reigate it appears that meetings were held secretly until 1687, when they were allowed to worship openly.

In that year the Rev James Walters was appointed as the first Minister.

## The Twentyfirst Century

The congregation grew and there were a large number of families whose children attended St Bede's School which moved to welcome children from Free Church families as well as Anglicans and Roman Catholics. Local Free Churches are represented on the Governing Body, making them the only "officially" fully ecumenical Church school in the world and the only educational establishment to be formally recognised as a "local ecumenical project" by Churches Together in England.

Reigate Park became a very busy church, heavily involved in fundraising initiatives for overseas aid as well as care in the community. In 2000 an extension called The Park Room was built which would facilitate a larger congregation more comfortably on a Sunday morning but with a partition also enabling it to be used as a separate room for meetings. The kitchen was completely re-furbished to comply with new regulations for the provision of Sunday lunches for those living alone. A church website was created in 2004 to provide easy access to information in the community. David Skitt left at the end of 2007 to take up the post of Synod Pastor.

The hopes of the congregation while awaiting a new Minister centred around proclaiming the relevance of Christ for the 21st Century and building on the foundations and bricks of the past, reaching out to the community with the Gospel of Christ in action and words. In this endeavour they set out confident that the Spirit of God, which had sustained the Church thus far, would lead and inspire it into a fruitful future.

After a vacancy period of nearly three years The Rev George Watt was inducted as Minister at a special service on September 12th 2010. Revd Watt has been a minister with the United Reformed Church since 1992 and his last post was at St Andrew's Church, Cheam where he served for 12 years. With a background in IT, George has overseen the installation of a new vision system in 2012 bringing facilities in the church up to modern day standards.

In 2014 the car park was re-surfaced in readiness for the Ruby Anniversary celebrations which took place in 2015 to mark 40 years in Park Lane East.

*We acknowledge David Buckland as the major contributor to this history.*

In 1972, the site in Park Lane East was found, and eventually purchased after the High Street site was sold. For nearly three years the Church was without a building of its own. The Methodist Church premises were shared and there was a great deal of cooperation. A private Act of Parliament was promoted to enable building to take place over the old burial ground. During this time, in 1974, the South Park Congregational Church joined with us.

The Rev. David M. Owen became Minister in 1964. He served the first part of his ministry in the old High Street Church. In addition to its normal work, the Church was deeply involved in making plans for the new Church.

The second part of David Owen's ministry was based in new, more spacious premises where there was a larger congregation coming from various traditions. When the congregation moved into the new building in October 1975, it seemed appropriate to take as the text "Behold, I make all things new," This presented a challenge which had to be faced over the following years - the challenge of building the increasing numbers into a real committed fellowship. The official opening of the church took place in Nov 1975.

During his long and caring ministry at Reigate, David Owen wrote and published books and hymns, broadcast and organised and led trips to the Holy Land and Oberammergau. He strove for greater co-operation with other churches and established our Church Family Weekends. He also studied and obtained the Doctor of Divinity in 1980, and moved into a new, purpose built Manse in Priory Drive in January 1984. For two year, 1988 - 1990, he had the assistance of an Auxiliary Minister, the Rev. Helena Lady McKinnon. He returned to his native Wales in 1992,

The Church has always benefited in its worship by the contribution of its organists over the years. There was a period in the 1980s when there was no regular organist, but with the appointment of our present Musical Director Phillip Down, music came to the fore once more. The choir was re-established, music workshops with other local churches were introduced and an orchestra, consisting mainly of young people, was formed. All this has enhanced the musical life of the Church.

The Rev. David Skitt became Minister in late 1993. He expanded our House Groups and Youth Work and introduced Easter Workshops for local children. He started innovative evening services including healing services, and his concern for sick and bereaved people, extended beyond our own Church, and was much appreciated.

The early meeting place was Blatts Barn in Reigate High Street. Later a chapel was built on the west side of the barn, which was then demolished.

During the 18th Century it seems that services (in Congregational or Presbyterian form) were held spasmodically. The chapel is mentioned in Bishop Willis' Visitation in 1725 and the names of Ministers are quoted for 1715, 1736 and 1763. The chapel was in a ruinous state by the end of the century.

### The Nineteenth Century

The great missionary movements were started at this time and this included the Surrey Mission which helped to build a new chapel in Reigate in 1801 and a larger one in 1831. This was made possible by the generosity of Thomas Wilson who purchased the orchard on which the barn formerly stood. At this time there was violent opposition from a faction of townspeople who tried, by rough horseplay, to interrupt the services.

The first Sunday School was established in 1803 in the Reigate Chapel by Miss Apted and two other ladies. This was considered positively dangerous by the local magistrates who sent a letter to the teachers saying they had discussed the fact that they were teaching reading and writing as well as religious knowledge, and they "begged to inform the ladies that such proceedings were most dangerous, and the magistrates would not be answerable, for the peace of the town if they continued!" Nevertheless they continued in their work, and the Sunday School grew and flourished. There were 112 scholars attending in 1852.

In 1833, Thomas Rees of Highbury College, was invited to the Pastorate. He formed a Church of 11 members. He came at Midsummer, but was not ordained until 1835. He resigned in 1856 as he had lost his voice.

The Rev. George J. Adeney commenced his ministry in May 1856 and retired in 1897. The congregation rapidly increased under his leadership, and this necessitated extending the church at the rear, and the addition of transepts. Also, the number of children in the Sunday School increased, and reached 355 in 1882. Branch churches were set up in South Park, Kingswood and Mogador. Further extensions to the building were completed to accommodate the children and the growing congregation. Mr Adeney introduced the short address to the children in the morning worship.

In 1895, the Rev. G. Currie Martin was appointed as Co-Pastor and then successor to Mr Adeney and he ministered for 8 years. The next Minister was the Rev. Selwyn J. Evans, who started his ministry in December 1903.

### The Twentieth Century

In the next few years there was a great deal of theological unrest in the churches, and a number of people left the Church. The younger people felt that Mr Evans was perfectly sincere and honest in his views, and was preaching a message more relevant to their needs. Many of the people of the Church helped to organise and run a Saturday night "Penny Pops", to provide an entertainment for local people in the Public Hall adjacent to the Church.

Mr Evans emigrated to Australia in 1911. He was succeeded, in 1913, by the Rev. C. Bentley Jutson from Brighton. He soon had to face all the turmoil caused by the First World War. The War was supposed to be the "War to end all wars", but in 1920, Mr Jutson was preaching sermons asking why it was necessary to go on building bigger and better guns. As a result of the war, there were fewer young people in the Church. Mr Jutson died in 1930, just before his son, Howard, was ordained for the ministry.

The next Minister was the Rev. L Neville Martin, who came from Whitley Bay. He was young and very enthusiastic, and a number of the older people looked forward to a period of growth, particularly as the work among young people took on a new lease of life. A new Manse was acquired in Waterlow Road at this time.

Mr Martin's preaching was often controversial, which younger members found very stimulating and challenging. They were encouraged to take part in the preparation for worship, particularly in the monthly Young People's Services.

The Second World War then disrupted Church life, although the normal services were well supported by the troops stationed in the neighbourhood. As in the First World War, the hall was used as a canteen. Mr Martin became an Army Chaplain. He later joined the Church of England and became the Vicar of St Marks in Reigate.

The Rev. Edward W. Nicholas was inducted to the pastorate in 1944, and had the doubtful privilege of arriving in Reigate at the same time as the first flying bomb. He was a most methodical and conscientious visitor to members of the congregation. After the War it was realised that there was a great need for members of the congregation to meet and get to know one another after the separation of the war years. The Wednesday Fellowship, which was a social evening for all the Church family, was inaugurated, and this fulfilled the need for a number of years. Mr Nicholas took a great interest in the needs of the District and took a leading part in launching the Ridgeway Homes for the Elderly. He left for Whitley Bay in 1954.



The Rev W. John Bremner became the Minister in 1955. He provided a very thoughtful and prayerful ministry. At this time, more thought was given to the pastoral care of the congregation, and this was made more effective by the creation of area lists, so that the Deacons had a clearer area of responsibility.

The state of the Church buildings became an increasing concern, as it became clear that the maintenance of the very old structure would become an impossible burden for the financial resources of the Church and congregation. A Rebuilding Advisory Committee was appointed and did a tremendous amount of work over the next few years. Discussions had taken place with other local churches on the possibility of a joint venture, but nothing materialised.

By 1963, outline planning consent had been obtained for the rebuilding of the Church on vacant land at the rear of the existing Church, but advice was received that the time was not opportune, and it might be preferable to rebuild.

When it became apparent that the Church was facing major redevelopment, on another site, Mr Bremner felt he would be unable to see the whole project through, so retired in 1963. The Church provided him with a Dower House in Staplehurst.