

## Beginnings

It all began with sheep dip! In 1852 William Cooper set up the factory on the east side of Berkhamsted which was to become famous worldwide, producing sheep dip. It required an ever-increasing workforce, and by the 1880s a number of new cottages, shops and small businesses were built on the land between the canal and the railway along what is now George Street and Ellesmere Road. This newly developed area, which we know as Sunnyside, lay outside the urban district of Berkhamsted and consequently outside the parish of St Peter.

At that time the ancient parish of St Mary, Northchurch encircled that of St Peter' s to the north and east. People living at this new eastern extremity of Berkhamsted, therefore, had a long walk to their parish church. (Canon Siddans wrote in his diary in 1887 that many of his flock visited it for the first time in their lives that year to celebrate Queen Victoria' s Jubilee.) In 1855 St John' s Broadway had been consecrated to serve the villagers of Bourne End and, increasingly, the inhabitants of Sunnyside. But even this was a long way on foot for the people living in the area. There was a growing need for pastoral care in Sunnyside. So in 1881, after the Revd A F Birch became Rector of Northchurch, a converted barn was leased as a Mission Room in George Street. On Good Friday 1881 the first service was taken there by Birch and his curate.

Two years later, Mr G H Siddans, at that time a lay reader, was appointed to guide the development of the new congregation through its early years. It rapidly outgrew its premises and Siddans, ordained priest in 1888, became curate-in-charge of a new 'iron church' , constructed on land donated by Earl Brownlow just to the north of the railway (where the Cedars flats now stand). The Iron Church, or 'Tin Tabernacle' as it became affectionately known, was a prefabricated construction of corrugated iron. It housed the congregation until 1909. It was dedicated on Michaelmas Day, September 29th 1886, and so was called St Michael' s. From 1909 until 1983 it survived as a Church Hall.

Plans were soon afoot for a new, 'permanent' church. The architect appointed was Philip M. Johnston FRIBA. The style of the building and its fittings throughout were to be thirteenth century, the materials mainly local; flints partly dug on site and Totternhoe stone for the interior. Sussex marble was used in the Chancel. The new church was built on land just to the north of the Iron Church, once again donated by Earl Brownlow. Parishioners enthusiastically raised money, prepared the land and foundations, and found some of the flints. The Foundation Stone was laid on July 25th 1908. And on June 30th 1909, St Michael and All Angels, Parish Church of Sunnyside with Broadway, was consecrated. Its first vicar was the Reverend Richard Cattell who had succeeded Canon Siddans in 1906.

1909 was also an important year for Sunnysiders because they became full Berkhamsted residents; the links with St Mary' s Northchurch were finally severed with the formation of the new parish. It is interesting to note that until this time all weddings and funerals had to take place at St John' s Bourne End. Residents of Sunnyside visit their grandparents' graves there to this day. In 1916 a new, separate parish, St John' s Bourne End, was formed.

## Features of the new church

Some of the items in the new church were transferred across from the 'Tin Tabernacle'. These include the carved chair in the chancel and the Altar, which originally came from St Mary's, Northchurch.

The **east window** shows scenes from the life of Christ, and to the north, St Michael. The other windows were added later as memorials and show saints.

A stone **font**, replacing a wooden one from the original church, was installed in 1934. It was moved to its present position in 1988.

A **Screen and Rood**, marking off the Chancel, were erected as memorials to Cannon Siddans, William Dwight and Charlotte Webster in 1934.

The **Organ** was designed and finished in 1914, and overhauled and revoiced in 1989.

The **Lady Chapel**, created in the South Aisle, was given by the Mothers' Union in 1954. It houses a Book of Remembrance.

In 1912 the **Vicarage** was completed.

## More buildings

By 1983 the church hall - which had been in regular use for 96 years since being constructed as the 'temporary' Iron Church - faced enormous repair costs. It was demolished and the land sold for flats (the Cedars) to help fund a modern hall. Plans had already been drawn up for the new church hall. Again great efforts were made by parishioners, both with fundraising and some interior finishing. The new hall, with facilities for large or small meetings, consultations and catering, was dedicated by the Bishop of Hertford on March 3rd 1984. A large lobby connects it directly to the church.

Soon afterwards, by the late 1990s, more space was needed and the courtyard between church and hall was transformed into the new Breukelman Room. The rood screen was moved to reveal a more open and adaptable chancel. The screen now stands inside the main entrance and the rood (the carving of Jesus on the cross with his mother and John) over the North Door.

## Changes in worship

But Sunnyside continued to grow. To make the church more adaptable, and to accommodate more people, the pews were replaced with 178 chairs. By 2005 all but the dedicated oak pews were replaced. These pews now stand at the back of the church, and the names on them, in some cases dating back 70 years, are a catalogue of some of the lay people who worked towards the Sunnyside we know today. The last sixty chairs were bought by members of the congregation and their names, or those for whom the chairs were dedicated, are listed in the lobby. That list, too, is becoming part of Sunnyside's history.

Innovations of many kinds have been going on over many years. An informal choir and band now lead the singing, and a modern sound system and overhead computer presentations are used in worship, most of which now takes place in the nave. The chancel is still used as a chapel for small mid-week services and early morning Holy Communion. The lady chapel is used for Morning Prayer. A Communion Table and kneeling rail are set up in front of the North Wall, and the seating is arranged to face it, forming three sides of a square, bringing the congregation closer to the table, and to each other. And so in 2007, the '**North-facing Church**' became the next development in Sunnyside's history.

The following year provision was made for those who wished their ashes to be interred in Sunnyside's lovely churchyard. The **Memorial Path** was dedicated on Easter Day 2008.

## Vicars of sunnyside

In 1909 the Ecclesiastical Parish of Sunnyside and Broadway was formed. Its first vicar was the Revd R H B Cattell, who had succeeded the Revd G H Siddans.

In 1916 the new separate parish of St John's Bourne End was formed.

### **Incumbents to date:**

1883-1906 **Revd Canon G H Siddans**

1906-1923 **Revd R H B Cattell**

1923-1931 **Revd G Lister Sunderland**

1931-1938 **Revd T F Yule**

1939-1965 **Revd T A Hawes**

1966-1974 **Revd Lionel Clare**

### **1966 Sunnyside and Bourne End were linked once more under the same incumbent**

1974-1989 **Revd Canon Malcolm Scott**

1990-1997 **Revd Stephen Breukelman**

1998- **Revd David Abbott**

Whereas most incumbents moved on from Sunnyside, either to retire or to serve elsewhere, 1997 brought a particularly hard and unexpected loss for Sunnyside. Steve Breukelman, aged only 41, had been diagnosed with cancer in autumn 1996 and died just a few months later in February 1997. The Breukelman Room was dedicated to his memory.

## **Sunnyside today**

These days about two thirds of those on the Sunnyside electoral roll live outside the parish. The obstacle of distance described by Canon Siddans in 1887 is, thanks to the motor car (and a much improved car park), no longer a problem.

This parish has always been characterised by the enthusiasm and devotion of its parishioners. Outward appearances may change but the open door of St Michael and All Angels, Sunnyside, does not change. For 100 years it has welcomed us into the house of God. Our prayer is that it will continue to do so through this next century, and for a very long time to come.