

St. PAUL'S UNITED REFORM CHURCH

Harmans Water Bracknell



History:

Around 1800, “The Bracknell Independent Church and Congregation” began in the village of Bracknell. At this time the nearest churches were Warfield or Easthampstead. Meetings were originally held in someone's home. From small beginnings a Congregation grew and on July 5th 1813 a meeting was held to formally form a church. The first church was of wood, but in 1823 a more substantial building plus a burial ground was completed. By 1858, that had deteriorated and a more substantial building was built in the High Street (almost opposite what is now Peacocks shop).

This building lasted until the 1960s when Bracknell expanded as a new town. Bracknell Development Corporation offered the church new premises on the High Street above the new Banks' buildings being erected opposite the Post Office. Church members decided that the town centre was unsuitable, because of the new site and the lack of footfall in the evenings and on Sundays. At this time, discussions began with the County Union Secretary about uniting with the Presbyterian Church.

In 1967 the offer of land at Harmans Water became available which promised a better catchment area (Harmans Water, Crown Wood, Martins Heron etc.). The Church left its old building in the High Street on September 10th 1967, two pieces of this old church, the gates and lamp above, were given to the Church at Spencers Wood. Meetings began in the Harmans Water Community Centre whilst building began, the Foundation Stone being laid on June 14th 1969. A ballot was held to

choose a name and St Paul's was selected over Christchurch and Harmans Water Church.

It was then a Presbyterian/Congregational Church that held separate meetings. Finally in 1971 both churches agreed to unit and the United Reform Church began. It has a Mission Statement that says; "A family of faith, sharing the love of Christ with each other, the community and the world".

Extract from "A Short History";

The following is transcribed from the Church's own leaflet:

THE EARLY YEARS

Situated as it is on the road from Reading to London, the village of Bracknell was the trading centre of the parish of Warfield. According to the Church Minute Book of 1813, "Bracknell was proverbial for wickedness, previous to the introduction of the Gospel into it". The village had no place of worship of its own, the inhabitants having to walk to Warfield or Easthampstead to attend church.

The Minute Book records how Bracknell's Independent Church and Congregation came into being.

"About the year 1800, Mr. Foster, a shoemaker, came to settle in the village and commenced a prayer meeting in his house, at which Mr. Burgwin, a Baptist Minister, occasionally gave an exhortation. From this circumstance, Mr. Burgwin was induced to take a house in the village, and appropriate a room adjoining as a place for Public Worship. In this pace he preached for seven years, when his lease expired, and his landlord, refusing to renew it, he was compelled to leave the premises, and the preaching was given up.

Some time after this, Mr. Marlow fitted up the present place of worship, and let it to some of the friends of the cause, but as these were principally Baptist, they thought it would be best for the cause, and their own comfort, to obtain a Minister of their own persuasion. They accordingly applied to Reverend M. Douglas of Readin, who wrote to Hoxton Academy, and obtained supplies (ie: pulpit supplies – ministers) for them for the first twelve months. Mr. Andrews of Romford, Essex was the first student that came and supplied them for a month. At the end of the twelve months, the committee of the academy wrote them a letter stating that it was not convenient for them to supply them any longer, as there was no immediate prospect of their being enabled to raise a sufficient sum to maintain a stated minister.

About this time, Mr. Joseph Walker, son of the Reverend Mr. Joseph Walker (Peppard, Oxon) was recommended to the friends at Bracknell, and as his probationary services were acceptable, they invited him to become their stated Minister, but as his health was in a declining state, after labouring among them about three years, he died.

During Mr. Walker's illness, Mr. George Newbury of Henley-upon-Thames, Oxon, occasionally supplied for him, and as his services were generally approved of by the Congregation, after Mr. Walker's death they wished him to take the charge of the Congregation which, after some deliberation, he agreed to do."