

Julie Stamford

Julie Stamford's memories of St. Mary's youth club, the worship music group 'Bethany', and the Cuddington Players

In 1968, Julie moved with her parents and her sister and brother from Edmonton in north London to Ravensfield Gardens in Stoneleigh. As a family they first started going to St. John's Church in Stoneleigh but started going to St. Mary's after being invited to attend by Helen Bisset.

Julie has always been attracted to the Church and immediately started going to Sunday School,



which was then run by Helen, and she became great friends with Helen's daughter Gillian. The choir at St. Mary's was at that time all men and boys, and Helen fought strongly for girls to be admitted. Julie and Gill were the first girls to join the choir.

Being a member of the choir entailed attending Church three times on Sunday at 9.15 a.m, 11 a.m. and Evensong, as well as weekly choir practices. The choirmaster then was Vic Hoad, who was a real tyrant, making sure that everyone turned up regularly, sang properly, stood properly, and woe betide you if they didn't.

It was a great discipline and was very enjoyable.



Sisters, Lynda and Julie singing in a Gospel concert 1974

The youth group was started up when Julie was about 12 or 13.

The Vicar

at the time was John Atkins, and Gavin Gledhill was the Curate. Gavin and his wife Sue started the youth group, which used to meet in the Curate's house in Thorndon Gardens for Bible study. Members included Julie, Andrew and Gillian Bisset, Carol Hillier and Anthony Hulatt. Yvonne Daoud helped to run the group too.

There was also a larger youth group meeting in the old hall every Friday evening where everyone played games and had refreshments. There were about 30 teenagers who belonged to this group,

not all Church-goers. All this was in addition to a very large Sunday School of about 30 to 40 children, who used to be taught in groups of their ages. Helen's older group used to meet in the Vicarage. The Vicar subsequently was Harvey Pentreath. His daughter Libby was also a member of the youth group, and Harvey was happy to let the youth group 'run riot' in the Vicarage.

Julie remembers going up to the Albert Hall with Helen and Gill for a Christian rally and being amazed by it. This was in the late 60s, early 70s, when the 'Smile Jesus Loves You' revolution was in full swing and people wore badges and had slogans all over their bags. The youth group also took part in the annual Easter pilgrimage to Guildford, amongst other activities.

It was a very vibrant and active group of young people, and out of this came the worship group 'Bethany', started by Carol Hillier and Anthony

Hulatt. The group of about 8 or 9, all guitarists (of varying ability) and singers, used to meet at the Hilliers' house to practise. They would sing worship songs and then visit other Churches, lead the worship and give out their testimonies. 'We were really on fire,' said Julie.



'Bethany' group in 1974. Julie is in the front row, 3rd from the right

This particular cohort of the youth group broke up when everyone went to University, training or to work.

Julie stopped coming to Church for a while after her early marriage broke down. However, she was then invited by Margot (Allan) Evans to join the Cuddington Players, an amateur dramatic company who would meet in the large hall, and she had a very happy time there.

The company put on at least three performances a year – a play (sometimes two), a musical and a pantomime. David and Norma Allen were very active in the Players, which had been started in the 50's by members of St Mary's and they also attended St. Mary's, as did many of the company. Sue and David Mortimer were also instrumental in setting up the company.

David Mortimer was very good musically and would play the music for the performances, then latterly Robert Leach would write and play, with his band, for the musicals and pantomimes. Pauline Price, a semi-professional dancer, did all

the choreography for the dance routines. There were the two Johns (Wood and Taylor) who originally wrote the pantomimes, which were performed at the Adrian Mann theatre at Nescot. John Taylor was always the dame and he had his own collection of incredible dame outfits. Maxine Buchelle used to do all the backdrops and scenery, helped by Julie and Roger Twyman.

Julie took part in many musicals, and was Secretary of the Players for a time. Amber, her daughter, also took part when a child, and her sister Sarah. A few years ago, the Cuddington Players celebrated 50 years together, but unfortunately they had to wind the company up when there was no one to take on any leadership role.

Julie returned to Church after Amber was born. There was a great overlap between Church and the Cuddington Players, with many members

belonging to both. Julie re-joined the choir and remembers going to Greenbelt on a couple of occasions with John and Andrew Nowak. There was also Sunday School, but with much reduced numbers by then. There used to be designated youth workers – Rich, and then Marianne, and our last youth worker, who was Linda Staff, who used to hold pram services with puppets in the Church once a week, amongst other activities. But finances at the time meant that these posts became impossible to sustain.

Julie feels very much a part of the Church family at St. Mary's. Vicars have come and gone, youth workers have come and gone, groups have closed down, and Sunday School is nothing like as busy as it once was. However, for Julie, and for many, many others, St. Mary's is her family.