

THE 'GREAT TENT' OF PYRFORD'S CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

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In 1901 the population of Pyrford had been 528, but by 1931 it had almost doubled and it was clear that the little Norman Church of St Nicholas' on the hill overlooking the Wey Valley was much too small to cope with the growing congregation. Fortunately, unlike many neighbouring villages, the Victorians had not found the need to 'improve' the old building with the addition of extra aisles, and by the 1930's the villagers were more enlightened, and decided instead to build a new church, a little closer to the new village centre with its school, memorial hall, cricket pitch and shop, in the 'Coldharbour' part of the district.

On the 5th April 1938 a plot of land in Coldharbour Road was purchased from Lady Lovelace (one of the main landowners in the village) for £300, but unfortunately the Second World War intervened, and it was not until the early 1960's that the idea of building the church could be revived.

Fundraising for the new building began in earnest in June 1960 when a 'Stewardship Campaign' was launched and every house in the village visited to try to raise the estimated £50,000 needed for the church and hall.



By the 1930's the centre of Pyrford had moved to the Coldharbour Road part of the village.

£13,500 had been raised by early 1963, with a further £8,500 as a gift from the diocese, and £500 promised by the parish. It was estimated that £25,000 would be raised by the end of the

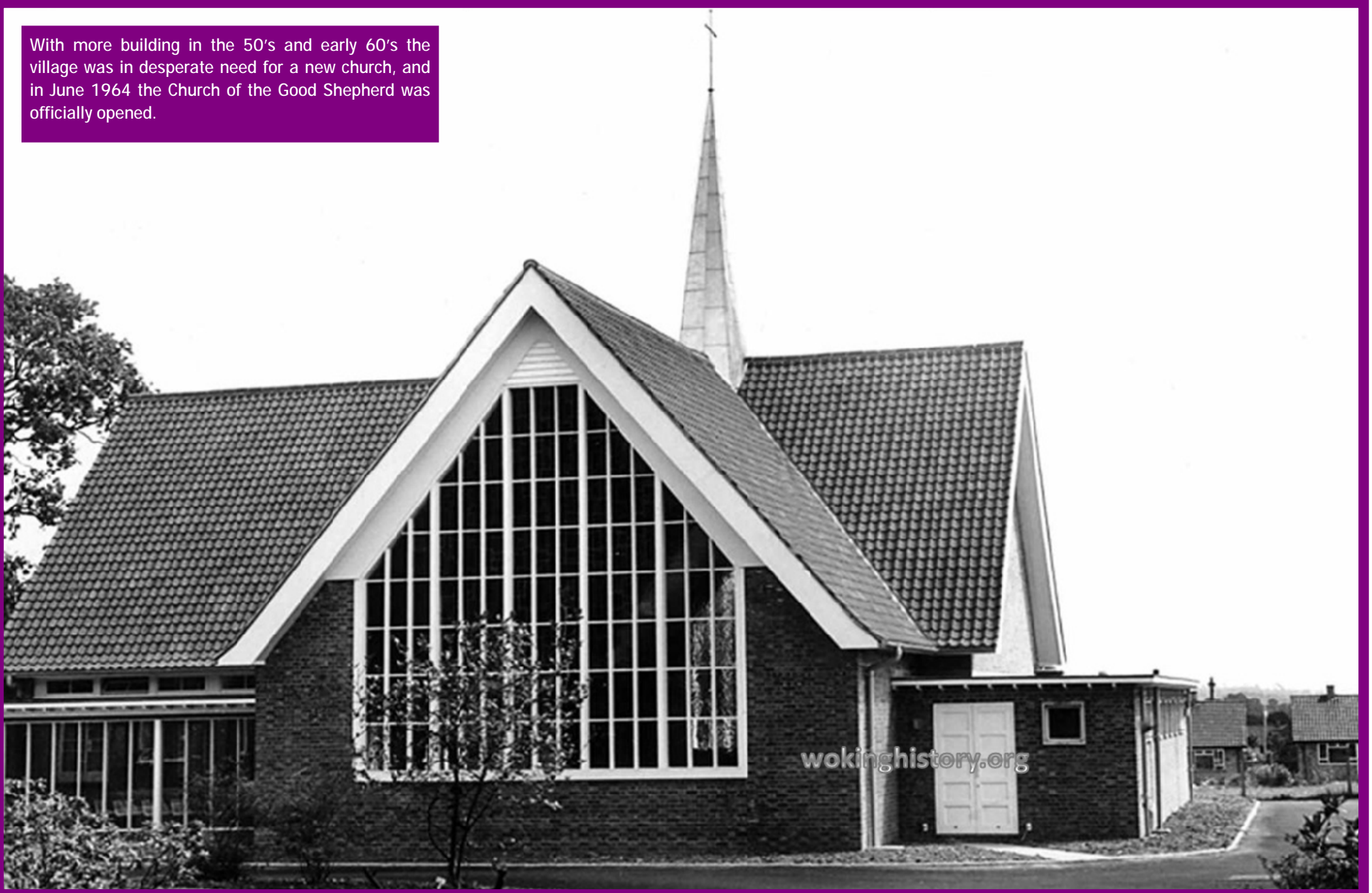
year – enough to pay for the church itself minus the 'hall, kitchen or toilet', which would follow afterwards, and with a loan of £2,500 work began on that first phase.

At a parish meeting held in early February 1963 it was reported that because of the weather,

The old church at Pyrford was thankfully never 'improved' by the Victorians.



With more building in the 50's and early 60's the village was in desperate need for a new church, and in June 1964 the Church of the Good Shepherd was officially opened.



work was delayed, but that a start was to be made shortly with the foundation stone due to be laid on the 1st June 1963.

In May 1963, the architect, David Evelyn Nye, told another parish meeting that the church 'will be cruciform in plan. The steeply-pitched roofs are to be supported on parabolic laminated timber arches. As a result, there will be no walls as such, but mainly a series of clear glass panels, which should make the interior of the building a flood of daylight', and 'from the tiled roof will rise a spirette of aluminium surmounted by a cross'.

'The nave and transept, built of silver-grey bricks' he said 'will be basically one cell with a tall roof' - later describing the structure as 'the building, dropped as it were, like a great tent' around the altar.

A report in the local press at the time noted that 'to avoid the duality of focal points there will be no side chapels. To direct attention further towards the sanctuary, the architect hopes that the colour scheme will be austere generally, with colour concentrated around the altar - free-standing from the east wall, which will be made of ribbed plaster to give a feeling of light and shade'.

Part of the floor was to be laid with greyish-green slate, with the rest linoleum tiles, and as the guide-book to the completed church later noted, the coloured glass in the windows was designed to 'convey the idea of green pastures and still waters' - entirely apt for the still

largely rural community that the new 'Church of the Good Shepherd' was to serve.

The Bishop of Guildford was apparently to lay the foundation stone on the 1st June, but due to a car accident he was unable to attend the ceremony, so in mid-May it was reported that Viscount Elveden (the grandson of the Earl of Iveagh, patron of the parish of Wisley with Pyrford) had agreed to lay the foundation stone instead.

I don't know what happened to the good Viscount in the couple of weeks running up to the ceremony, but on the day the stone was actually laid by Bishop T Sherwood Jones, who was 'handed the trowel for the laying' by Mr Kevin Bell, the builder of the church.

This was preceded by a pageant from St Nicholas' Church to the new site, whereby about thirty people, some on horseback, all dressed in costume, processed up Church Hill, down Upshot Lane and Coldharbour Road, telling the 'long history of Pyrford' as they went.

The parishioners really got involved in the fitting out of the new church, with the pews assembled and polished by forty men 'working together in the long summer evenings in a borrowed garage', and the kneelers 'worked by over one-hundred men, women and young people, throughout the winter of 1963-64'.

The completed Church and Annexe, was finally dedicated by the Bishop of Guildford, Dr George Reindorp on the 12th June 1964.



The architect described the building as being 'dropped' - 'like a great tent' around the altar.