

History of St Peter's Church

For centuries, West Green lay in the parish of Ifield. There was a small church dedicated to St Mary Magdalene in Alpha Road. As the parish expanded in size, a larger church (St Peter's) was built in 1892 to replace the old church building which then became the church hall.

In 1955, St Peter's was united with St John's church to become the Parish of Crawley. The parish was subsequently enlarged in the 1970s by the incorporation of three more churches (St Richard's, Three Bridges, St Elizabeth's, Northgate and St Michael and All Angels, Lowfield Heath). This large parish continued until 2017 when it was divided and St Peter's and St Richard's left to become separate parishes.

The church was constructed in 1892 using local materials and the work was undertaken by Richard Cook and Son, a local builder who also built houses in West Street and Springfield Road. The contract price for the church was just £2,800! The foundation stone was laid on St Peter's day, 29th June 1892 and can be seen in the wall beside the entrance door. The church was completed and consecrated by the Bishop of Chichester on 31st May 1893.

The walls of the building are clad in warm sandstone, presenting a solid yet friendly appearance. Along the south wall, tall windows let in the sun and light whilst along the north side, the roof crouches low to provide protection from winter storms. Overall, the building gives the appearance of a tranquil haven set in a village-green like island.

In the first seventy years, the church was protected by a thick hedge and iron railings but increased traffic led to the removal of some of the hedging in 1957. The eastern corner was sold to the Council in 1961 to allow for improvements to the Horsham Road/Ifield Road junction and the hedges and remaining railings and memorial gates were finally removed in the late 1960s giving the open aspect that can be seen today.

Whilst the church building was unscathed during two world wars, the same cannot be said for the members of the church who, like every other family in the land, were affected by tragedy as well as the triumphs that followed. The names of servicemen from the parish were collected for a Roll of Honour and the east window (behind the altar) was dedicated in

July 1919 to the church's faithful congregation and to the dead of the Great War.

Over time, the interior of the church has been changed and adapted to meet both liturgical and congregational needs.

In 1954, the original altar in the North aisle chapel (the Lady Chapel, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary) was removed and replaced with altar and reredos from the old church of St Richard's, Three Bridges.

Changes to the chancel were made in 1973 through a generous bequest from Ernest Stanford CBE, deputy chairman of the Development Corporation which built the New Town of Crawley and a faithful worshipper at St Peter's since his early childhood.

The most recent re-ordering scheme was completed in 1991 when the interior was divided into separate worship and social areas providing a hall and committee room. This project was achieved as the result of much hard work and many years' fundraising effort by the congregation. Some of the pews that were removed were given to the Swan pub opposite the church – they are still there and continue to be used as do those inside the church!