

## ST. MARY'S WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

Over the years Chaddesden has witnessed the creation of numerous special interest groups, societies, etc., catering for various sections of its population. The majority of these groups have had a limited life-span but others continue on down the years, one such example being St. Mary's Women's Fellowship which celebrated its 86th anniversary in October 2023.

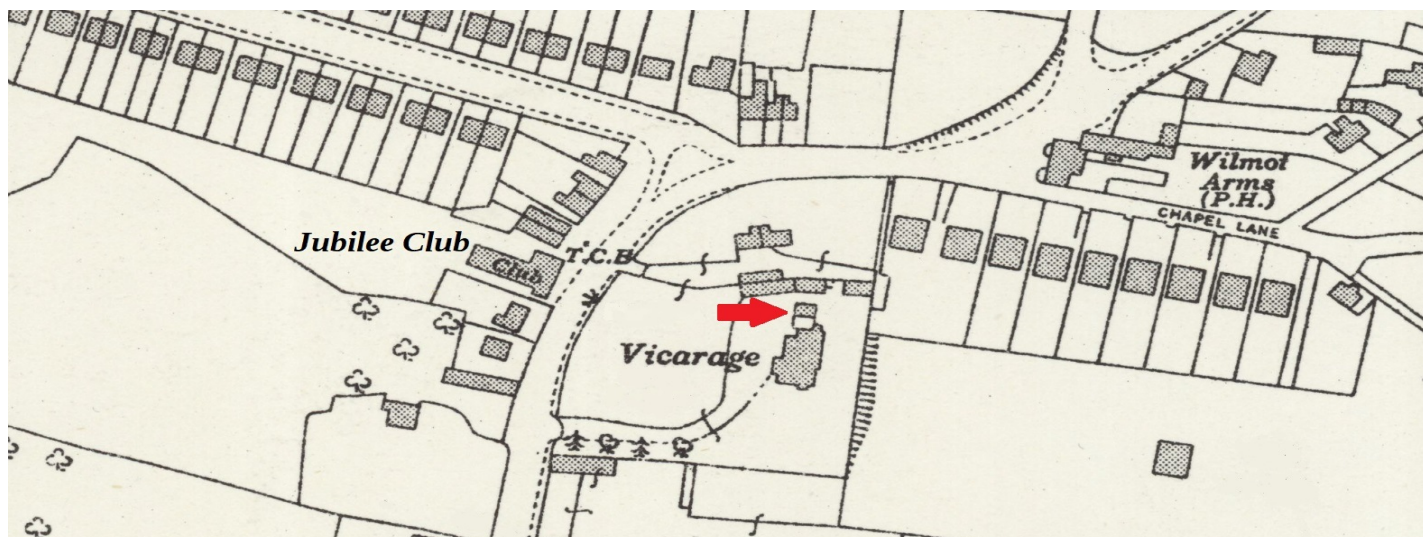


In March 1937 a new vicar, Rev. George Rivers (pictured right) arrived in Chaddesden to begin his ministry at St. Mary's Church. A widower, he must have found the accommodation afforded by the large, rambling Victorian vicarage (pictured on the left) rather overwhelming. Situated where Vicarage Drive is today, the vicarage stood in an acre of ground and included numerous outbuildings such as a coach-house, stables, and a fairly large wooden hut approximately 16ft x 11ft, rather grandiosely called the Church Room,<sup>1</sup> which was occasionally used for church meetings instead of the Memorial Hall a short distance down the lane.



Rev. Rivers had only been in Chaddesden a few weeks when he suggested to the ladies in his congregation that the Church Room in the vicarage garden might make a good place for them to meet on a regular basis, and so after two or three months' preparatory work the Women's Fellowship came into being.

The section of an old 1942 Ordnance Survey map reproduced below shows the location of the Church Room marked with an arrow a few yards to the north of the Vicarage itself.



Fifty years after the start of the Women's Fellowship, founder member Mrs. Shaw of Stoney Flatts Crescent wrote this short account of its origin in the November 1987 issue of St. Mary's Parish Magazine:

*When the Rev. George Rivers came to be our Vicar the old vicarage was still standing in its own grounds off Chaddesden Lane. There was quite a drive from the Lane up to the house and this drive curved, so that the house was not visible from the road. On the left side of the house was the kitchen and a short distance from that was a building which*

<sup>1</sup> It also went by the alternative name of the Parish Room.

seemed to have been used to house anything not wanted in the house ... A few people got together and cleaned it out and a gas-ring was fixed after lino had been laid to cover the floor. One job which I did was to clean the window and frame, then paint the frame white. Mrs. Wainwright and Mrs. Lewsley went to the Mart and bought a lot of odd chairs so that we could sit down. Mrs. Arnold gave us an organ. We actually had two organs, but I don't remember who gave the other one. We used Mrs. Arnold's (whose son, Eric, went in to the ministry); they lived on Chaddesden Lane, opposite the Memorial Hall. We also had a large cupboard given to us, which was cleaned and the shelves covered with white paper. We each paid for a cup and saucer, which were kept in the cupboard. The room was used for other church meetings, and the young people had two tennis courts in the vicarage grounds.

The Vicar thought it best to bring someone from outside the parish to be our Women's Fellowship leader, so he introduced Mrs. West, whose husband used to preach at the Queen's Hall. They lived in the Duffield Road area of Derby. After a few years she resigned and for years Mrs. Wainwright was our leader.

The oldest surviving membership register of the Women's Fellowship covering the period 1959–1974 has this informative inscription on its first page:

*St. Mary's Church Chaddesden  
"Women's Fellowship"  
Inauguration October 19th 1937 (Tuesday)  
at 2-30 p.m.  
In the Church Room  
The Vicarage, Chaddesden  
(Present) The Rev. Geo. Rivers (Vicar)  
(President) Mrs. West (Speaker)  
& 17 Members  
Mrs. Wainwright – Vice President  
Mrs. Lewsley (Sec. & Treasurer)*

The meetings were usually held on a weekly basis and as the number of members increased, special bus trips were sometimes laid on to visit places of interest such as Newstead Abbey, Southwell Minster, etc. This photograph must have been taken on just such an occasion, probably in the 1960s.



The Fellowship's 25th Anniversary in 1962 was marked by special events held at the Memorial Hall and in the Vicarage garden, as can be seen in these two pictures:

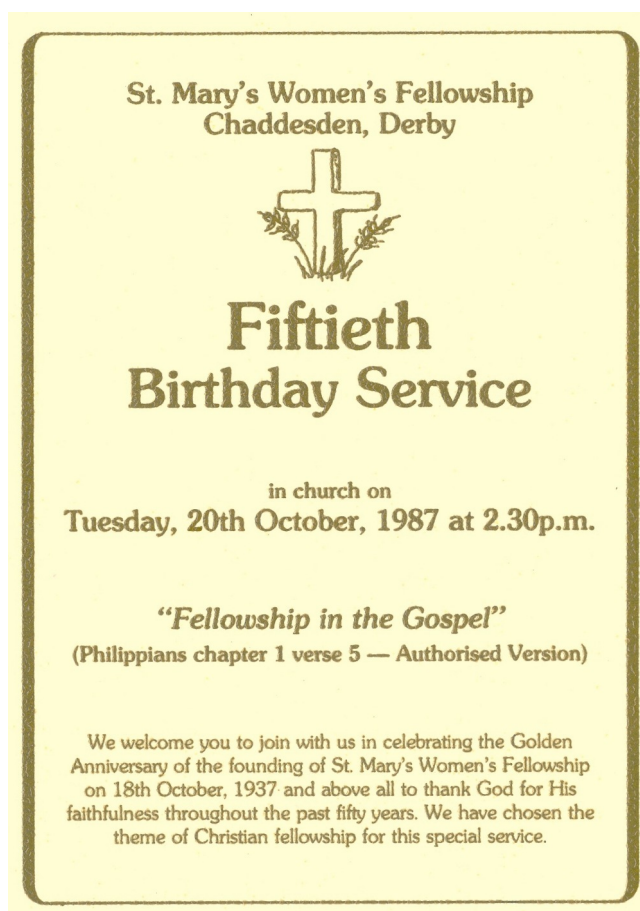
The Memorial Hall party. Names from L – R: Mrs. Barlow, Mrs. Shaw, Rev. J. S. Parry, Mrs. Holland, Mrs. Parry, Mrs. Smith, –?–, Mrs. Haywood, Mrs. James (?), Mrs. Lancaster, –?–, Mrs. Livesey, Mrs. Flinders, –?–.

Note the cake with its 25 candles!



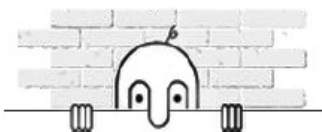
Here some seventy or more members of the Fellowship posed for a group photo in the grounds of the old Vicarage. The young children at the extreme left-hand side were probably wondering when the refreshments were going to be served! More than sixty years after this picture was taken, some of the faces are still familiar – Mrs. Avinall, Mrs. Border, Miss Bowins, Mrs. Bucknall, Mrs. Daisy Chambers, Mrs. Sybil Denton, Mrs. Gregory, Mrs. Harpur, Mrs. Kathleen Hogg, Mrs. Hudson, Mrs. Ellen Lee, Mrs. Sally Orchard, Rev. J. S. Parry, Mrs. Joyce Parry, Mrs. Phoebe Oldershaw, Mrs. Frances Ratcliffe, Mrs. Hazel Watkins.

The next major landmark in the Women's Fellowship's history was the celebration of their 50th anniversary in 1987, an event for which they had this gold-coloured programme printed.<sup>2</sup> A special service attended by over 150 people was held in the church, followed by tea at the Memorial Hall. Once again, a celebratory birthday cake was a central feature of the proceedings and at the end of the tea two of the Fellowship's founder members, Mrs. Shaw and Mrs. Fearn (both then well into their eighties), blew out all the candles. It is interesting to read that the speaker at the service was Rev. Teresa Binley from Sale in Cheshire, who five years later would become St. Mary's curate.



To some degree, the 1950s and 1960s probably marked the zenith of the Women's Fellowship here in Chaddesden, with the attendance register frequently showing between fifty and sixty ladies attending the meetings. As the years progressed there were sometimes concerns over falling numbers, but nonetheless it has managed to survive and still holds its weekly meetings in the Memorial Hall in much the same way as its founders who first met in the tiny Church Room in the Vicarage garden back in 1937

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<sup>2</sup> Note that the programme incorrectly gives the date of the founding of the Fellowship as 18 October 1937, whereas it was in fact the 19th.