

Jermyn Street Association

St James's Piccadilly - "a part of London Life"

Standing between Piccadilly and Jermyn Street, in the heart of Mayfair and St James's, is probably one of the best known City Centre churches in Britain - St James's Piccadilly. At an Open Evening on 26th April business people from the surrounding area, including members of the Jermyn Street Association, were given the opportunity to see and hear about this famous Christopher Wren church and meet the organisers of the many activities that centre on the church and that make it so special.

The Wren Church

In welcoming everyone and talking about his mission at the St James's, where he has been rector for 15 years, Rev'd Donal Reeves said he felt that a remark made by Peter Jaye, BBC Financial Editor and late Ambassador to Washington, that St James's Piccadilly was 'a part of London Life', summed up what he had been trying to achieve. He said that he was proud to have

helped create an environment that served all aspects of the local community, that was a living spiritual centre in the deepest sense of the word, that had a large worshipping congregation, was a hive of activity for 7 days of week and which is now held up as an example in this country and throughout Europe of how a City Centre church can be used.

The church itself came to be built when Henry Jermyn, Earl of St Albans, obtained the lease on the area of land which is now St James's, and started one of London's first building developments which included St James's Square and Jermyn Street. As a focal point he commissioned Sir Christopher Wren to build the church.

In speaking of the church building itself Donald Reeves regretted that the interior bore little resemblance to how it would have been when built by Wren 1684. Then it would have been filled with box pews each belonging to one of the great families from the area, who would attend church, hidden from the general gaze, with their footman sitting on a chair in the aisle outside. These, like so much else, would have gone with the four direct hits that the church received during the war. Only the superb Grinling Gibbons carvings behind the altar and on the organ case show some of the glories that would have part of the original interior. After the war it was seriously debated as to whether the church should be demolished, however, in 1954 Sir Albert Richardson was commissioned to supervise its restoration - "so what you see here" said Donald Reeves, "is not so much Wren as 1950's 'Richardsonesque' ". What he wanted to

do when he was established as the Rector in 1980, he said, was to 'bring the church to life'. "This I feel I have done".

The Sculpture Garden

Those attending the Open Day were then taken to view the beautiful garden with its majestic plain trees that are so much a landmark of that part of Piccadilly and Jermyn Street. Through the generosity of RTZ and the Rebecca Hossack Gallery, which also has a gallery beneath the Rectory, this has now been converted into a sculpture garden in which a series of exhibitions have been mounted by internationally known British sculptors such as Howard Bowcott, Chris Drury, Shaun Brosnan and, currently showing until the end of July, Julienne Dolphin Wilding's intriguing exhibition "An Outdoor room". In addressing the gathering Rebecca Hossack said that this was one of only two City Centre sculpture gardens in Europe and she was very grateful, as should the local community be, to RTZ for making this possible.

A Centre of Activity

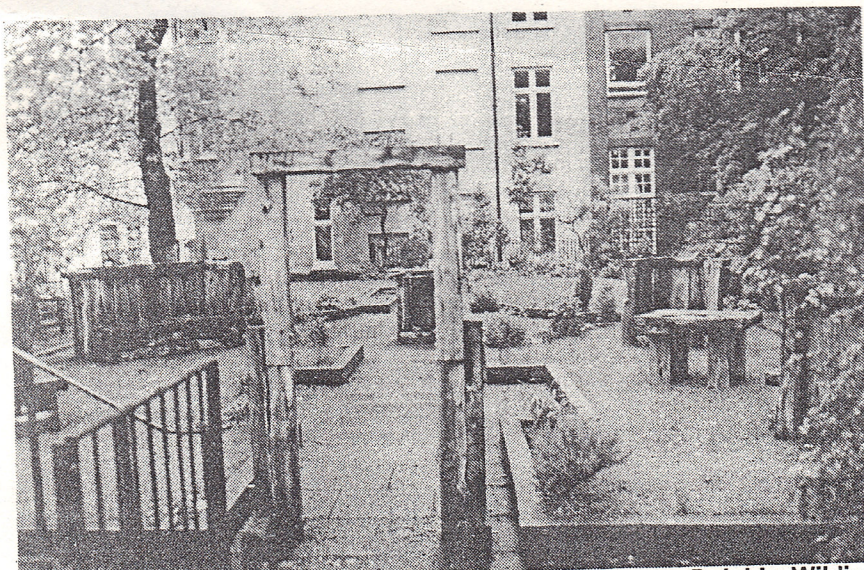
In addition to a regular and growing worshipping congregation, St James's Piccadilly is host to an amazing range of complementary activities and the leaders and coordinators of these various activities all addressed the assembly.

Music

Music is a major feature at St James's. Probably the best known event being the St James's Festival of Baroque Music, sponsored by Lufthansa, a highly regarded annual event which is broadcast on Radio Three. However, as the Church's Musical Director Tony Goodchild explained, "it is my brief to fill the church with music on as many occasions as we can - this includes two or three lunch time concerts every week, and frequent evening events. St James's makes a superb musical venue."

Alternatives

Organisers of Alternatives, William Bloom, said that Rev'd Donal Reeves had been courageous in allowing this area of activity, which included a number of New Age events, circle dancing, inter-faith discussions and talks by contemporary, and often controversial, speakers, to be carried on in the church. However, they had now become a major feature of the activity within the church, often attracting 200 or 300 people. This has interfaced very successfully with the regular worship in the church, many people drawn to the Alternatives meetings had now become regular worshippers at the church, and regular worshippers now attend the 'Alternatives' events.



"An outdoor Room", a sculpture exhibition by Julienne Dolphin Wilding organised by the Rebecca Hossack Gallery (071 409 3599) and sponsored by RTZ.