

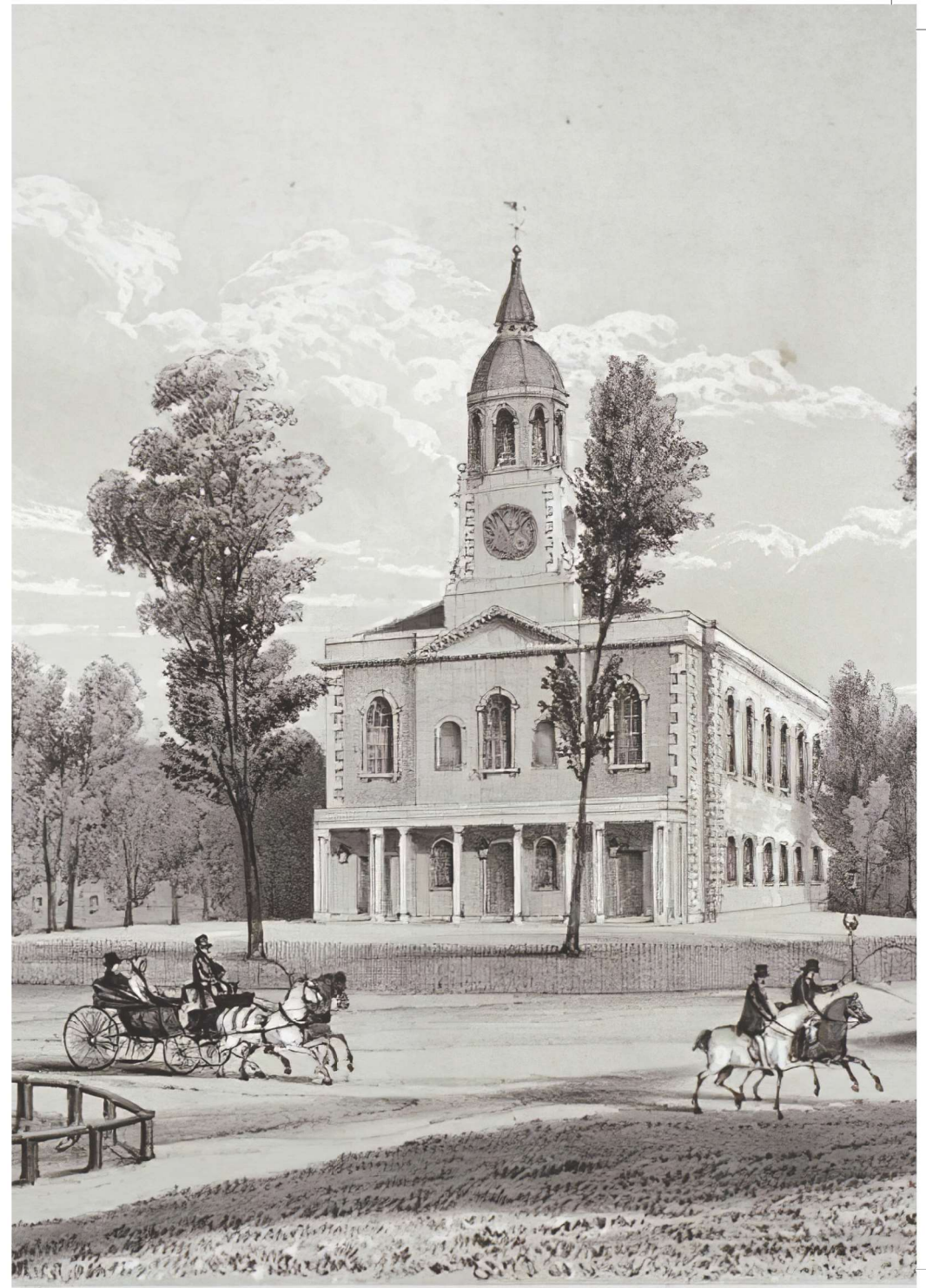
Holy Trinity Clapham

An inspiring past and
an exciting future

A short history of Holy Trinity Clapham,
the people and the building



www.holytrinityclapham.org



The People in the Past

In the New Testament, a church is not the building, but the people.

This church is most famously associated with William Wilberforce and the group of friends known to history as, “The Clapham Sect”.

They lived around Clapham Common and were a part of Holy Trinity Clapham. They fought for religious and humanitarian causes, most notably the abolition of the slave trade.

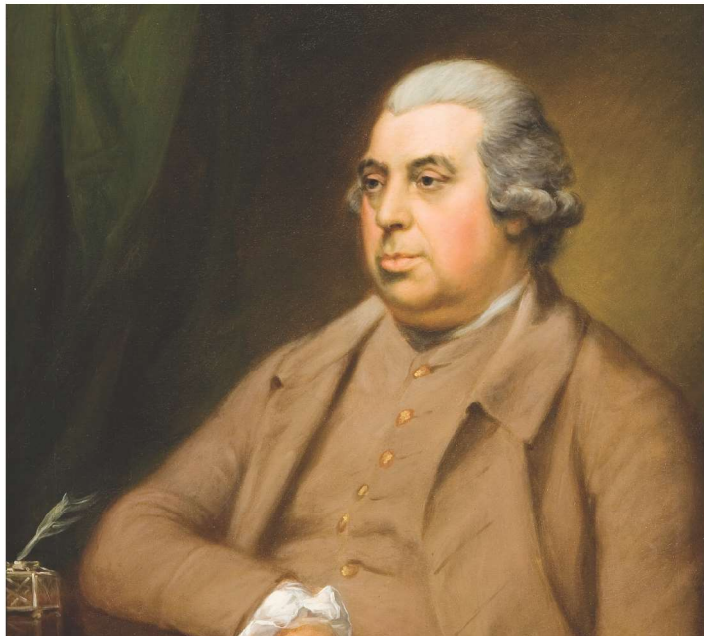
But they took up many other causes; the heritage they have left us includes the Church Mission Society and the Bible Society.



William Wilberforce

Their standards of integrity left a lasting stamp on this country’s public life. They threw down a challenge to their times.

The eighteenth century was a sceptical age. Formal religion was accepted as necessary, but after two centuries in which Europe had torn itself apart in religious strife, anything approaching religious enthusiasm was distrusted. But a revival was beginning.



John Thornton

The Clapham Sect were a key part of this Evangelical Revival, what some historians call the Great Awakening.

The story of the Clapham Sect starts in the 1750s with John Thornton. The Thorntons were Russian merchants, trading from Hull with the Baltic. They prospered, came to London, and bought a country retreat on Clapham Common South Side.

John Thornton was a man both of great wealth and of great Christian faith. He became a close friend of Revd Henry Venn when the latter was Curate at the old parish church in Clapham in the 1750s.

Thornton used his wealth to support poor clergy, to finance clergy training and to buy the right to appoint to parishes clergy who were passionate about the gospel. It is to Thornton we owe not only the building of Holy Trinity Clapham in 1776, but the appointment as Rector of Henry Venn's son John in 1792.



John Venn

John Venn was not only a great preacher, but an assiduous worker for the health and well-being of his parishioners. Venn once said the following in a sermon at Holy Trinity Clapham: “Religion is not merely an act of homage paid upon our bended knees to God; it is not confined to the closet and the church, nor is it restrained to the hours of the Sabbath;

it is a general principle extended to a person’s whole conduct in every transaction and in every place. I know no mistake which is more dangerous than that which lays down devotional feelings alone as the test of true religion...

“Religion is not merely an act of homage”

Till our Christianity appears in our conversation, in our business, in our pleasures, in the aims and objects of our life, we have not attained to a conformity to the image of our Saviour, nor have we learned his Gospel aright”.

The impact of the Christian gospel in all of life was perhaps best evidenced through the work of the Clapham Sect in their opposition to the slave trade. Prior to the eighteenth century, few Christians had questioned the ancient institution of slavery.

But gradually, concern and opposition started to rise against slavery in the most vicious form ever known, the Atlantic slave trade. The first organised group to voice opposition was the Quakers, in America and then in Britain.

They allied themselves with Granville Sharp and with Thomas Clarkson, a young Cambridge graduate convinced by his studies that slavery was wrong, and in 1787 an Abolition Committee was formed. To campaign effectively, they had to have a champion in Parliament; so they approached a man who had the drive, skills and sympathy - William Wilberforce.



Thomas Clarkson

Although Wilberforce had been strongly influenced by the faith of his aunt and uncle, he turned his back on the Christian faith as he entered adulthood and spent most of his time at Cambridge University gambling and drinking.

It was only through time spent together with his friend Isaac Milner on holiday to the French Riviera that he “reached intellectual assent to the Biblical view of man, God and Christ”.

Reading the New Testament with Milner, Wilberforce declared that his “intellectual assent became profound conviction”.

He realised “what infinite love, that Christ should die to save such a sinner and how necessary it is”. It was as a result of this that he was transformed, and he referred to this as “the great change” in his life.

“God Almighty has set before me two great objects”

Wilberforce famously said “God Almighty has set before me two great objects, the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners”.

By the reformation of manners, he meant that every individual needed to have a real faith in Jesus which made an objective difference in how they lived their life.

Wilberforce made his first speech in the House of Commons on the subject of the slave trade in 1789. Shortly afterwards, he moved to Clapham to share a house overlooking the Common. Others came to Clapham to join them. James Stephen, a lawyer, had been horrified by what he had seen of the brutal treatment of slaves in Barbados.

Zachary Macaulay came to Clapham after serving as Governor of Sierra Leone, a new colony founded by Granville Sharp and others as a refuge for freed slaves. In Clapham he set up an African Academy, a school for boys from Sierra Leone who could be educated as future leaders of their country.

Outside Clapham, information about the trade was provided by Clarkson and by John Newton, Wilberforce's mentor and himself a former slaver (and author of the hymn "Amazing Grace").

To sway Parliament, the campaign was taken to the country. Olaudah Equiano, a freed slave and a talented writer, toured the country promoting his book, which described the horrors of the slave trade. Clarkson had an engraving made, showing how slaves were packed together - a picture with a power to horrify us today.



Olaudah Equiano

“Am I not a man and a brother?”

Wilberforce had a model made of it, which he demonstrated to Parliament. Josiah Wedgwood made a ceramic medallion, of a kneeling slave with the words “Am I not a man and a brother?”

Petitions against the trade poured into Parliament. However the times were against the campaigners.

The French Revolution had overthrown the established order in France, attacked Christianity and plunged Europe into a series of wars, in which Britain found herself isolated. The reaction in Parliament was to resist all change. It was not until the Battle of Trafalgar had removed the threat that the tide turned.

Despite a last resistance from the West Indian plantation interests, led by George Hibbert of Clapham, in early 1807 Parliament passed the Act which made the slave trade illegal.

Unfortunately, this was not the end of the story.



Wedgwood Medallion



The Slavery Abolition Act 1833

(3 & 4 Will 4 c. 73)

10. *An Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies
(28th August 1833)*

The short title was given to this Act by the Short Titles Act 1896, Northern Ireland. This Act applies in so far as it applies to the United Kingdom as a whole.

(Whole Act, except s. 12, rep. by the S.L.R. (No. 2) Act 1890)

12. *After 1st August 1834, all slaves in the British colonies shall be emancipated, and slavery shall be abolished throughout the British possessions abroad*

14. *... All and every the persons who on the said first day of August one thousand eight hundred and thirty-four shall be holden in slavery within any such British colony as aforesaid, shall upon and from and after the said first day of August one thousand eight hundred and thirty-four become and be to all intents and purposes free and discharged of and from all manner of slavery, and shall be absolutely and forever manumitted; and ... the children thereafter to be born to any such persons, and the offspring of such children, shall in like manner be free from*

The illegal trade continued, with the Royal Navy doing its best to stamp it out. Wilberforce and his friends campaigned for the British Government to persuade other countries to follow our lead.

It was not until 26th July 1833 that William Wilberforce received news that the Slavery Abolition Act had passed its third reading in Parliament.

Three days later, aged 73, he died. He was buried in Westminster Abbey and the inscription reads as follows: "In an age and country fertile in great and good men, he was among the foremost of those who fixed the character of their time, because to high and various talents, to warm benevolence and to universal candour, he added the abiding eloquence of a Christian life".

The People in the Present and the Future

Holy Trinity Clapham (HTC) has not only an inspiring past but also an exciting future.

It was the good news of Jesus Christ that led William Wilberforce and the rest of the Clapham Sect to work for the abolition of the slave trade.

They encouraged every individual to have real faith in Jesus which would make a difference in all of life. It is the same good news of Jesus Christ that shapes all that we do at HTC today.





Trinity House Clapham - The home of HTC's staff offices, hall and Community Outreach

Our vision is to see every life bearing fruit for Jesus. This vision finds its inspiration from Isaiah 27:6 which says that God's people "will take root, they will blossom and put forth shoots, and fill the whole world with fruit".

We realise that we must have deep roots in Jesus, plus wide shoots in society to see abundant fruit in people's lives.

The church has grown considerably over the past few years. There is now an average Sunday attendance of around 600 adults and children as well as a wide range of ministries taking place in the church during the week.

If you are interested in finding out more, it would be wonderful to see you at one of our services on Sunday at 8am, 9.30am, 11.15am, or 5.30pm.

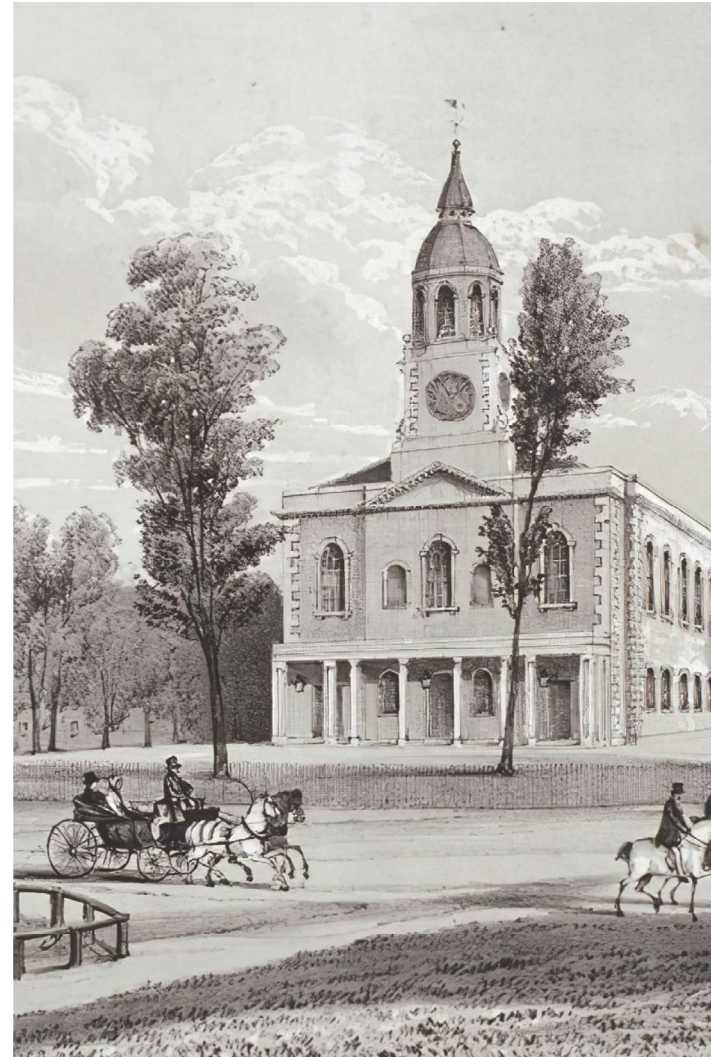
We would love you to join us, letting the same good news of Jesus Christ shape all that we do in all of life today, just as William Wilberforce and his friends looked to do before us.

The Building in the Past

The building of Holy Trinity Clapham was opened in June 1776, replacing an older church, also called Holy Trinity, that stood in Rectory Grove on the site now occupied by St. Paul's Church Clapham.

The old church had existed since the middle ages and had grown over the years in a haphazard sort of way, and by the mid-eighteenth century was in a poor state of repair and far too small for what was by this time one of the fastest growing villages around London.

The centre of the village had shifted, and the emphasis was now on the area around the Common, where rich Londoners had their new mansions.



After much debate, the parishioners decided to build a new Church on the Common. An Act of Parliament was obtained, to allow the land to be bought from the manorial family and to set up a Trust to manage the construction.

The leading trustees, headed by the Speaker of the House of Commons and by John Thornton, met at the Plough Inn (still at the centre of Clapham by the Tube, but renamed) and in 1774 set the work in hand.

The Trustees chose as their architect Kenton Couse, who was employed by the Office of Works, the body responsible for Government buildings, and whose best known work is the front of 10 Downing Street.

He provided a very simple design - a rectangular brick building with three doors at the west end, leading to the ground floor and galleries.



The Church on Clapham Common

There was a stubby tower, with a large clock from Thwaites of Clerkenwell, and four bells. When John Venn became Rector in 1792, ever larger congregations were attracted by his preaching. New vestries were built at the east end, and at the west end a new porch was constructed, to give shelter to those alighting from their carriages.

*Hunter Organ*

A big organ was installed in the west gallery. The seats in the nave were high box pews, for which their occupiers paid rent (that was how the church was financed in those days), while the poor occupied plain benches in the middle. Communion services were infrequent - Venn introduced the reform of holding them once a month.

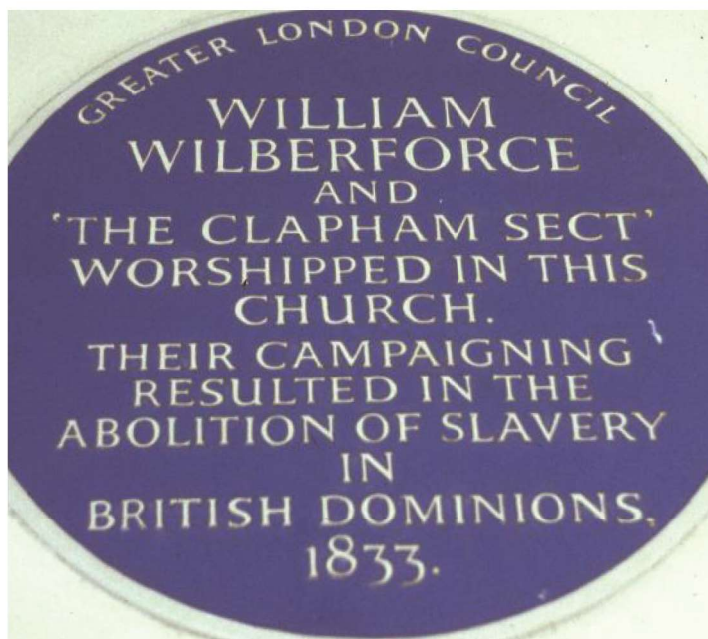
The few who took Communion gathered at the east end in front of the beautiful mahogany table, made for the Church in 1776, which we still use today.

In 1875, the old box pews, dismissed as “horse boxes”, were changed to be the present bench pews. The big three decker pulpit was cut down and all that survives from it moved to the north side of the church, to allow room for a choir.

There was a new font at the west end - the novelist EM Forster was one of the first to be baptised in it. Those changes left the overall shape of the church unchanged, but by the late nineteenth century it was seen as ugly, and not looking as a church should.

There was even a move to pull it down and replace it by a Gothic Revival building.

Fortunately that did not happen; but in 1903 the east end was reconstructed and considerably enlarged. The architect was a distinguished scholar, Professor Arthur Beresford Pite, who produced a scheme which was in sympathy with the classical plainness of the original building,



Plaque placed outside the Church

but also brought the richness the Edwardians preferred, and included the installation of a Hunter organ to replace the original organ in the west gallery.

During the Second World War, the Church suffered serious damage; all the windows were destroyed, the Lady Chapel gutted, and the main roof near to collapse.

For a few years, the congregation had to sit under the galleries for safety. Restoration was completed by 1952, bringing the Church back to its early twentieth century appearance, but with new windows on the east end and Lady Chapel.

More recent changes were made in 1991-94. At the west end, the screened area under the galleries provided a meeting area and a small room known as the Thornton Chapel.

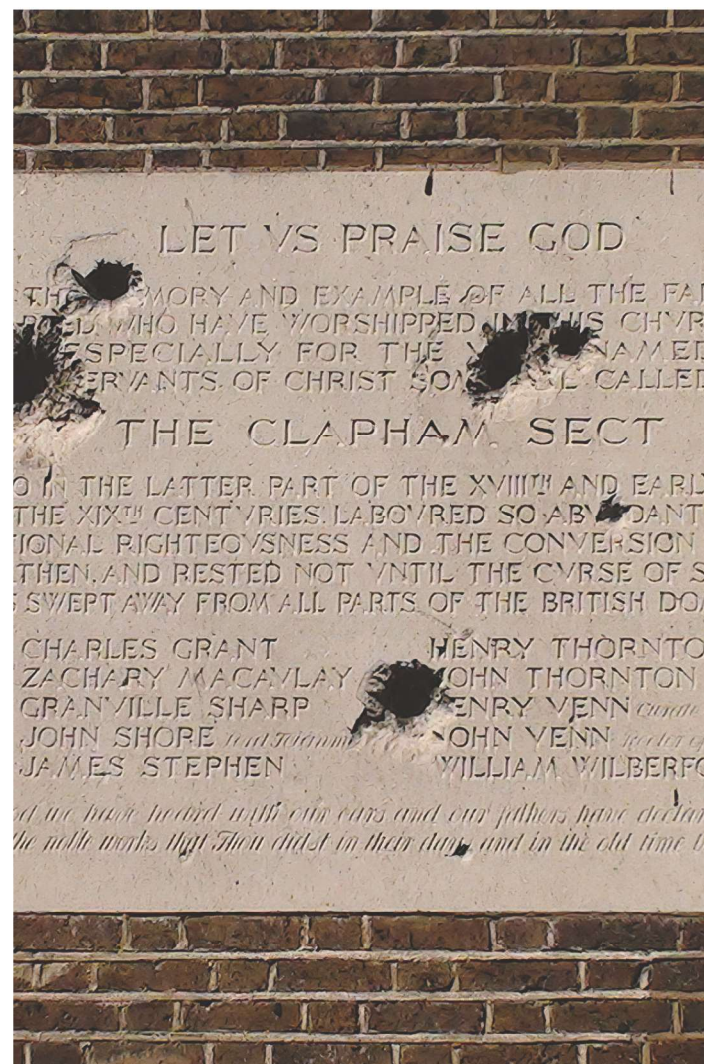


The Victorian font was replaced by a smaller font on a wooden base. The Lady Chapel was converted into the William Wilberforce Centre.

The Chapel was divided horizontally, creating a large meeting room upstairs, with a smaller room, kitchen and toilets below.

In 2012, we wanted to install a retractable screen in the centre of the church for song lyrics and video projection.

On investigation, we discovered that there was already such a screen in place in the roof of the church, that had been included in 1903 to show magic lantern slides.



The Clapham Sect stone memorial

The Building in the Present and the Future

Holy Trinity Clapham is Grade 2* listed, so any changes must be made with sensitivity to its architectural qualities and historic past. But just as it has been adapted over the years, so it needs to be adapted for the future.

As HTC grows as a church, our needs are changing and it is clear that the building is no longer 'fit for purpose'. There is already not enough room to house all the children in their children's groups on a Sunday. Currently all 7-14 year olds have to go to a different building in Clapham (Trinity House Clapham) for their groups at the 11am service.

During the week, many of the courses we run such as Alpha and the Marriage Preparation Course are compromised because there is no large flexible space within the church.

Our desire is that the church building supports our vision of seeing every life bearing fruit for Jesus, including the size of the church congregation growing further still.

As such, the Parochial Church Council ('PCC') have agreed to instigate a reordering project with the aim of developing the church building to meet the church's needs for the years and decades ahead.



Our vision is to see every life bearing fruit for Jesus

Our vision is to see every life bearing fruit for Jesus. We want to see this happen through trusting Jesus, transforming lives and growing the church. Our four Sunday services and our many events throughout each week all have this vision in mind.

Jesus is the driving force behind all that we do today at Holy Trinity Clapham. If you are interested in exploring faith and finding out more about the good news of Jesus that inspired William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect, we would love to invite you to one of our four services on a Sunday. For more information please visit our website, www.holytrinityclapham.org.



Each service has its own distinct feel, whether that is the small Book of Common Prayer communion service at 8am, or the 5.30pm service which has more time for worship, applied biblical teaching and prayer ministry. Both the 9:30am and 11.15am services have groups for children aged 0-14, with coffee and pastries available between the two services.

However, what unites all of our four services is the focus on high quality biblical teaching

and worship, alongside a desire to be part of an authentic, loving, prayerful community.

We also run a course called Alpha in which you can explore the claims of Jesus for yourself. Please visit our website for more information, or go to alpha.org.uk/try to find an Alpha course near to where you live.



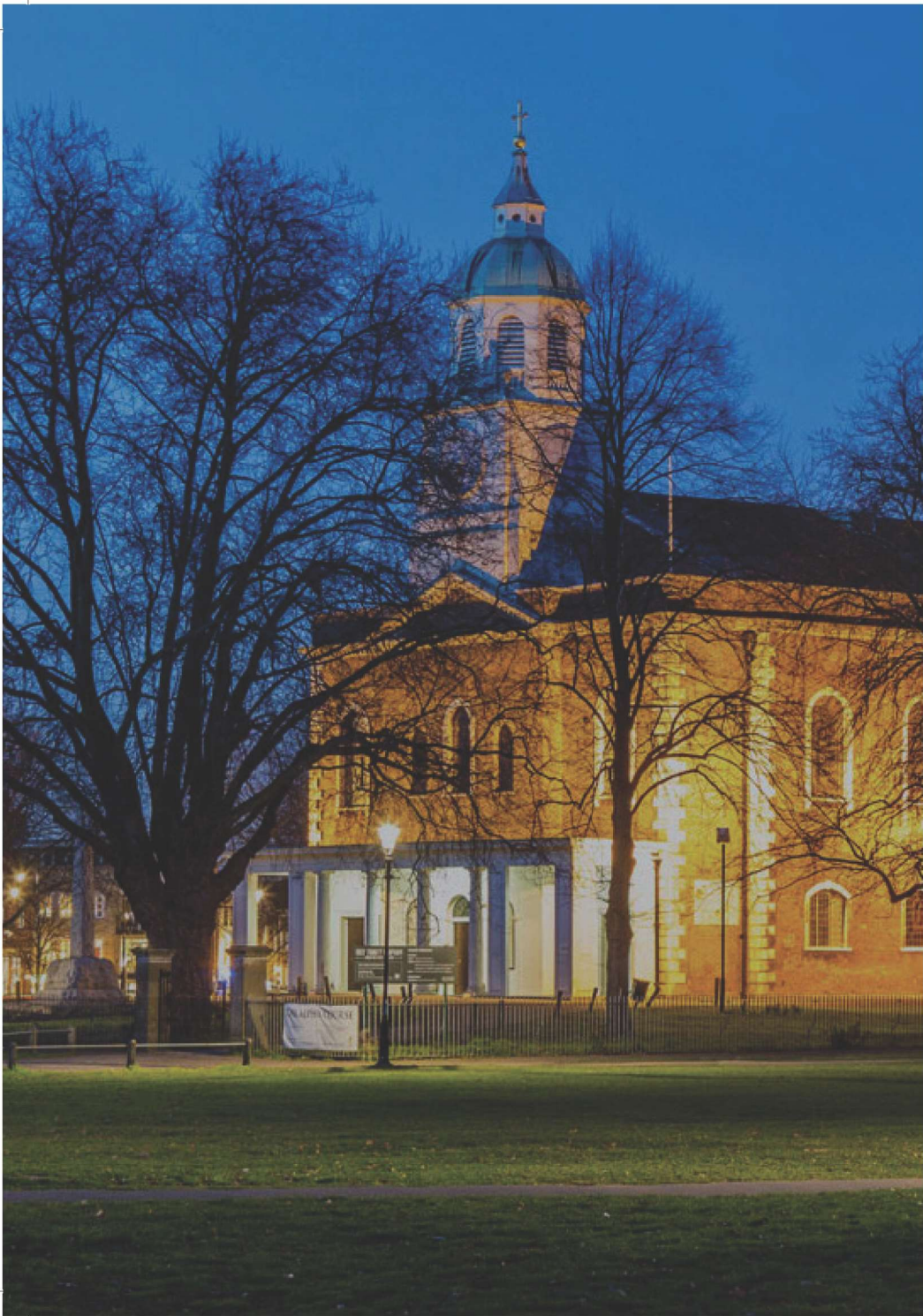
WE HAVE SERVICES AT THE FOLLOWING TIMES

8am

9.30am

11.15am

5.30pm



We'd love to see you



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