

# THE VIRGER

The Official Magazine of the Church of England Guild of Vergers

Winter 2020 | Issue 309

## MEET OUR FELLOWS ANDREW PAGE



## The St Marylebone Verge

[www.cofegv.org.uk](http://www.cofegv.org.uk)



# FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR



**A**s I write on the evening of the Second Sunday before Advent I sit surrounded by packing boxes, listening to a beautiful streamed Choral Evensong from Winchester Cathedral, sung by the Lay Clerks. One of our previous Curates jokingly accused me of being addicted to CE, but I have to say that, as I mentioned in the Autumn edition, I have found that live streaming and "virtual" services have been one of the best things to come out of the current situation. Whilst I personally still find "virtual" Holy Communion less than optimal, the daily opportunity of hearing the wonderful choirs of so many of our cathedrals and larger churches really has been sustenance to me in what has been a difficult few months.

My husband and I are in the process of re-locating to the beautiful Scottish Borders. By the time this edition hits your doormats we will be busy unpacking the aforementioned boxes and searching out a new church (in person as, if nothing changes in the next weeks, churches the Borders are currently allowed to be open for worship). It is so exciting to be on the verge of a whole new chapter in our lives, and to be closer to both our families as well as to some CEGV friends. I must also admit to looking forward to having my first quiet family Christmas in several years, with no services to prepare for - although I will miss being able to sing Advent and Christmas carols as currently Scotland's choirs are silenced. We are wondering what God has in store for us... I am absolutely certain that He will have something new for us to do, we just don't know what it is yet.

**Jane Gorrie**  
Editor



Please note that all submissions for the next edition should reach Jane via email, [CEGVMedia@gmail.com](mailto:CEGVMedia@gmail.com) no later than the date here:



How should you do this....  
Submissions for all editions of The Virger should reach me before the set deadline. If they miss this date, they may be held over to the next edition. All articles should be sent in MS Word files only and photographs in JPEG format. Please attach text and image files separately in one email.

## Cover Picture

The Verge recently commissioned for St Marylebone Parish Church, London. Silversmith: Roger Doyle.

**J & M SEWING SERVICE LTD**

High Quality Church Robes - Made in England  
and Individually manufactured to order  
in our Workshop in Newcastle-upon-Tyne

**CASSOCKS & SURPLICES**

ALBS & COTTAS

CLERICAL BLOUSES

CLERICAL SHIRTS

**STOLES & VESTMENTS**

CHOIR ROBES

VERGERS ROBES

BANNERS & FRONTALS

Order on-line at [www.jandmsewing.com](http://www.jandmsewing.com)  
or ask for our free Catalogue  
Tel: 0191 232 9589 Fax: 0191 230 1215  
email: [jandmsewing@btconnect.com](mailto:jandmsewing@btconnect.com)  
1 Charlotte Square, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 4XF

Established by Joyce Davison & Maureen Waterston in 1980

Badges, Lanyards, Medals, Enamel Badges,  
Name Badges, Name Plates, Engraved Signs,  
Printed Pens, Mugs, Awards, Rubber Stamps.

ALL AVAILABLE FROM THE GUILD SHOP



# FROM THE DESK OF THE NATIONAL CHAIRMAN



**A**t the time of writing, England is back in a state of lockdown, our churches are closed, except for private prayer, and services can only be streamed. Congregations are shut out, yet again. During the service on All Souls Day, we remembered with love and affection, all those who have died, and we rejoice with all the Saints as they rise in glory. This year has a certain poignancy due to the current situation. In the Guild we remember, especially, all those who have passed away this year and when we have been unable to get to their funerals. There has been much human suffering with family losses, a cost on the mental health of many, and the continued hardship of our economy. Hope is on the horizon with the announcement of a vaccine to help stem the spread of Covid-19 and a roll out programme is being created to get this to as many folks as possible in the next few months.

Sadly, as we move towards the Festive Season, our Advent celebrations will be very different. However, it is hoped that Christmas will be as normal as we can make it. I do hope so, as every other major event in the churches calendar has been far from the norm. Can I ask that all members around the country who know of anyone who has passed away or who are ill, to let your branch officers know and, in turn, make our National Welfare Officer aware.

Many vergers have had to learn new skills in using technology for streaming services and uploading them on to the web using a variety of medium. To many, this will be all very new to vergers up and down the country. Our congregations are now missing the familiarity of our church buildings and reverting to the computer screens for worship. In addition to this, the work of the Guild also has had to change. The Executive Committee held its first meeting using Zoom. It is important that life goes on and we manage to continue the work of supporting members and ensuring that we do not stagnate. We were able to welcome our new Chaplain, Rosemary Durward. Branches are also embracing this new technology to keep our members together. Some are having social gatherings and others having business meetings. It is important that we continue to keep to our usual timetable of holding AGM's and completing our Annual Returns.

I would like to end on a positive note. It is my hope and prayer that 2021 will be a better year for us all. It would be so good to see as many of you as possible at either a Festival in May or at our Annual Conference in August. In the meanwhile, cameras and computer screens will have to suffice. I wish you all a prayerful Advent and joyful Christmas and may you all stay safe and sane for a wonderful New Year.

**John Kirby-Shearer**  
Chairman

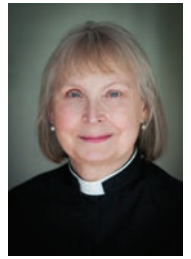
**November 2020**

**CHARLES FARRIS**  
CHANDLERS 1845  
LONDON

For secure on line ordering, browsing new products and seasonal offers visit  
[www.charlesfarris.co.uk](http://www.charlesfarris.co.uk)

**Tel: 01747 861839**  
Charles Farris Limited, Quarry Fields, Mere, Wiltshire BA12 6LA

# FROM THE DESK OF THE NATIONAL CHAPLAIN



Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2020



William Dyce (1806-1864), *The Madonna and Child*, 1845



Raphael (1483-1520), *The Small Cowper Madonna*, 1505

I wonder how many of us are contemplating Christmas with some anxiety. At the time of writing, plans for socially distanced services in Advent have been put on hold. There is still little clarity about how families are going to get together on Christmas Day. If only we could go back to how things were. In such circumstances, the practice of counting our blessings is a good one. Taking counsel from Isaiah, we might think not so much of things past, as of what God is doing in the present (Isaiah 43 vv. 18-19).

I woke to this truth unexpectedly, between lockdowns, while viewing an art collection that belonged to Prince Albert, Consort of Queen Victoria. Showing at the Lightbox in Woking and entitled, Raphael: *Prince Albert's Passion* the painting had, by all accounts, disappointed early critics. I was curious.

*The Madonna and Child* (1845), shows Mary holding Jesus at an angle where

both are clearly visible. Painted by a Scot, William Dyce (1806-64), art critics noted its similarity to Raphael's painting of the *Small Cowper Madonna* (1505). Yet, with over 300 years between these artists, was there snobbery about a painting that contemporary critics thought a poor substitute for a Renaissance master? That would require an art critic to answer.

Setting aside technique and form, if you are someone who likes to spot the mistakes in TV historical dramas, you will enjoy the fact that Dyce's Madonna is holding a red Bible. There's no mention of the Bible in Scripture! Nevertheless, the Victorian artist was a member of the Church of Scotland, steeped in the Protestant tradition. It is likely that the Bible chimed with the churchmanship of Queen Victoria, who preferred the simplicity of low church. That might explain her reaction on seeing Dyce's painting in Buckingham Palace, describing it as, 'quite like

an old master, and in the style of Raphael, so chaste and exquisitely painted.' Were the critics won round because the Queen and Prince Albert were patrons?

Looking more closely, we can see that the pages of the Bible are open at Isaiah 11, at a passage that foretells the birth of a Messiah from the stock of Jesse, father of David, Shepherd boy turned King, laying the ground for the greatest story ever. On those grounds alone, we should enjoy the painting on its own terms. Indeed, we might even be open to the idea that copies can sometimes be better than the original.

Enjoying things on their own terms, could be a useful *credo* for the coming months. Importantly, both paintings prompt us to look beyond the Annunciation, the Visitation and the Nativity, to remembering Mary, Mother of God, as she received news from Simeon of Jesus' destiny as Saviour. With the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary so prominent, it is hard to ignore the prophesy of the sword piercing Mary's heart and, on a spectrum of suffering that any parent would know, how she and Joseph lost the boy Jesus for three days, only to find he was asking questions in the Temple.

Those events together take us well beyond Advent and the Christmas season in the Church calendar, deepening our relationship with the Mother who shares our struggles and offers maternal comfort and love. In Christ, Mary's first love, Jesus, Son of God is shared with us generously and extraordinarily, as a gift.

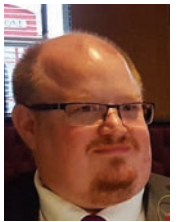


Wouldn't we be amazed if we were to receive the gift of a priceless painting on Christmas Day? The gift of the Christ child is even more precious as the image of God himself. So, I pray that, whatever the challenges ahead, our hearts will be filled with merriment; and that we will discover afresh, comfort, hope and joy in the Son of God, exalted on earth as in heaven, who is our light and our salvation.

With every blessing for Advent and Christmas,

**Mthr Rosemary**

# FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY



**W**ell as I write this, the country is still in lockdown 2.0 and life as we knew it back in January is so different. However, as with many of you, this Pandemic has changed how we live our lives but life, as they say, goes on. Over this time, we have continued to meet as the Standing Committee over virtual meetings and a very productive Executive Committee.

We talked, at length, about how we move forward. While we hope that this Pandemic has become a thing of our past, soon, and we take solace in the latest news that some of the planned vaccines are getting closer to reality.

Our Annual Training Conference is still being planned to go ahead, and during this conference we will, as a Guild, give thanks for the ministry of Canon Maureen and to welcome, formally,

Rev'd Rosemary as our new Chaplain. This year's conference is a lift from last year, with Canon Maureen being the lead of this conference. It would be wonderful to see as many of you there to say farewell and welcome.

However, we may not be out of the woods by the end of our financial year. Having been in contact with our legal advisor we still need to have complied with our Constitution. At the beginning of the financial year, 1 January, Branches must still fulfil their obligations and collect their subscriptions, so that they are able to pay the National Capitation, as required. We allow, as always, a grace period of up until the end of March for this to be done. Branches must still hold their AGMs and elect the Branch Officers, which can be done via Virtual Meetings, if needed. If your Branch is unable to do this, you will need to pass

a written Branch Resolution to enable the current Branch Officers to hold their office for a further year. If you have any questions, or have any doubts about procedure, please do contact me.

***"This year's conference is a lift from last year, with Canon Maureen being the lead of this conference."***

Finally, your Branches and I need your help! If you move, change email address, telephone number, please ensure that your Branch Officers have been informed. They, in turn, can pass on the correct information to me so that I can update your securely held details so we can issue you with your new membership cards without delay.



# THE ST MARYLEBONE VERGE

**900th/200th Anniversary Verge in Memory of Dr Derek Cope, Crown Warden**

**Silversmith: Roger Doyle, <http://www.rogerdoyle.co.uk>**

**Materials: Silver, Silver, Gilt and Perspex**

Born in 1947, Roger Doyle is one of the world's leading designers in precious metals. Roger took a pre-apprentice course at the Central School of Arts & Crafts before becoming an apprentice at Cartier 1963-8.

He worked with Louis Osman on Prince Charles' Investiture Crown in 1969 and designed and made the Dragonfly Clock in 1976 now in the V&A. (Delicate wings by Malcolm Appleby) Malcolm worked with him again on a silver gilt carriage clock commissioned by the Goldsmiths' Company. Roger now lives and works in Spain.

Roger says, "I like to explore textures, colours and new materials and the challenges they create. My main sources of inspiration are organic forms and their complexities, architecture and engineering."

In 1969, Doyle came to international prominence when he helped to create and construct the crown worn by HRH Prince Charles at his investiture as Prince of Wales. Doyle worked on all the platinum, diamond and emerald work, and constructed the orb which surmounts the crown.

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| 2009        | National Metalwork Competition Sheffield in the final 12 (winner to be announced in October)                               |
| 2004        | One of the U.K. winners of Diamond Trading Company Nature's Miracle design competition                                     |
| 1996        | Only U.K. winner "Diamond International Award"   |
| 1979        | Awarded a bursary by the Crafts Council to study at the Royal College of Art the use of glass with jewellery and ornaments |
| 1974 & 1976 | First prize "Diamonds Today"   |
| 1974        | First prize "Diamond International Award"  |

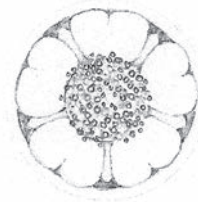
The Verge draws inspiration from Thomas Hardwick's (1752 – 1829) well-known cupola surmounting the tower of St Marylebone Parish Church, London, NW1 5LT. The tower of Hardwick's monumental parish church of 1813 -1817 is a familiar London landmark. The gilded caryatids are by Felix Rossi (1762 – 1839).

Dr Derek Cope (1922 – 2015), a distinguished anaesthetist, lived within the shadow of the cupola for decades and, for many years, was the Crown Warden of the Parish Church.

The parish church, at the time of the commission, did not have a Verge. It now does and it is well used and well loved.



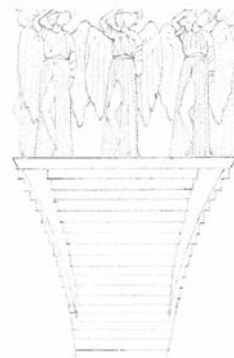
*Detail of top of Verge in engraved silver*



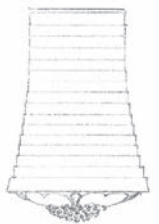
*Detail of bottom of Verge in engraved silver and silver gilt*



*Detail of Verge shaft in Perspex and in silver*



*Detail of head of Verge in silver and silver gilt. Concave reflecting surfaces behind angels*



*Detail of bottom of Verge shaft mounting in engraved silver and silver gilt*



# EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ROUND UP

**W**e have, on your behalf, been working over this last year to help the Guild move forward and embrace the new restrictions placed upon us. It was saddening that we were not able to meet at Conference this year, and so we have moved onto Zoom to continue the Business of the Guild.

With the newly formed Executive Committee we have tackled some long-standing aspects of the Guild to bring them forward.

Over the years we have had multiple bank accounts that have served us well in the past. However, with practically no interest being earned on your money, and can cause more and more difficulties and extra work in transferring monies. We are looking to streamline our systems, having fewer accounts (however keeping more than one Banking Company, just in case one were to face a financial problem) and bringing in charge cards for certain officers, so that no officer should ever be out of pocket up front to do the business of the Guild. This will also allow us to pay and accept bank transfers a lot easier and able to check quicker rather than awaiting bank statements each quarter.

We were approached by one of our President's offices to ensure that we have a Safeguarding Policy in place and to check what we needed of our Presidents (some organisations require much more involvement and sometime assisting in fundraising). In order to fulfil their request we set to work to ensure we have a Policy, with the National Chaplain taking the lead role, to ensure that when we meet in person together we are compliant – this is not to impose a Guild policy on a person within their own workplace – the biggest difficulty that we faced with this is that we have no attachment to a single diocese. We therefore placed a notation that should anything arise while at a National Meeting we would inform the local diocesan safeguarding team where the National Meeting took place.

The biggest paper we worked on was subscriptions, in the past we have had two levels of membership and equally two levels of subscription, it had been noted in the past that the only difference between the two levels (in practical terms) was that a Full member may vote and an Associate may not. And therefore, the reality is that a Full member pays for the privilege to vote. The levels of membership were not altered, as these are encased within the Constitution. A Full member is a Verger, by any name and position, and does any part of the role of a Verger, no matter the time commitment and remuneration (or none), and an Associate member is a person who supports the aims of the Guild (for instance a spouse or

partner). It was agreed that we would bring the two levels of subscription in line with each other, and while we appreciate that the Associate membership has slightly increased the Full membership has lowered. If a Husband and Wife are members (as an Associate and Full member) then they would be better off.


And in other news, the Executive Committee agreed to bestow upon George Cook – National Life Membership. George has, in the past, been our Guild Chronicler and Shop Manager. Following the death of Doreen, it was noted that George was not even a member, when asked about this, he commented that 'a certain person wouldn't allow it!' This award was bestowed upon him for his continual support and his historic time that he gave. When George was told about this he commented on how humbled he was to receive this.





**HAYES & FINCH**  
ESTABLISHED 1883

One of the World's Finest  
**Manufacturers & Suppliers of Church Furnishings**



0845 450 5593 sales@hfltd.com  
**www.hfltd.com**

# BRANCH DIGEST

## LONDON, SOUTHWARK AND CHELMSFORD BRANCH

### Verger Umbrella

**W**hen our Church Warden offered my husband and I, Charity School Hall, a historic listed building near our church and our son's school, it was a gift. The downside being, we had to consider, it was a tied cottage and came with the duties of hall bookings and management, cleaning and working with Joe and Jane public!



A big curve to our lives, but having a mortgage that had been struck by Miras, which meant our tax benefit was removed and Edward, my husband, was our sole wage earner and us having adopted a child, I was not allowed to work and had resigned from working with a fabulous dress designer off Regent Street in London as a sample machinist, beautiful work but poorly paid. Edward was a packing manager for Fred Perry sportswear.

So, the decision was made and in the early 80's at New Year we moved into The Teachers House adjoining The School Hall built in 1778 for the education of girls. Girls were not

taught before the school opened in this part of North London. Boys had their school, and the boys would come and teach the girls maths and reading skills. Pupils could only attend the school if they were commended by a Church Parishioner. The girls were given shoes and clothing. A statue of a girl wearing the uniform can be seen in the photo. Many people waiting for buses outside would think it was Mary Mother of Christ and the building a Chapel, but I called her Elizabeth from the start.



The Teachers House used to be a farm workers hovel. One up, one down to the farmhouse next door, now a Solicitors Office, but later it became 2 up 2 down the bathroom outside across a courtyard down some steps and under the Hall. The school hall had ceased to be a school in 1904 when The National Schools were opened and the hall became a Hall for hire. My predecessor in her 80's wanted to retire but she was a big help in guiding me through the bookings that were in the diary, from Children's parties to Weddings and all events between. Over the years waiting for Joe public to arrive proved

a hazard to my time management and clearing up after party events meant my bed was waiting for me at 3am and litter picking the Churchyard at 8am.

By this time my husband needed a Care Home and our teenage son and I, with God being our helper, did best effort in our lives. I heard about The Guild of Vergers and joined The London, Southwark and Chelmsford Branch in 2006 at St Martin Ludgate, John Kirby-Shearer, The Rev'd Tom Cameron and Stephen Haude being my guiding lights ever since. I never knew that what I had been doing for years was so Vergeresque, even at my Church, I became more confident and still their only Verger. I also gained an M.B.E. for Service to the community and starting a Mother and Baby Project at Holloway Women's Prison in 1992 via The Mother's Union. I was also the flower arranger at Church for 40 years.

By 2008 I was diagnosed with Rheumatoid arthritis and already had a lung condition not helped by the hall before the NO Smoking ban. My son was working overseas by now and I took the decision to Retire. The Damacles weight that had always been there, changed into, where can I live? The Council said let us know when you are evicted. So I applied to an Almshouse Village but my friends said I wouldn't fit in! I had no choice but to apply to The Almshouse Charity in The Churchyard and here I am for 8 years now. Still Verger and still very handy, still litter picking, still serving the community; though I would like to run away now. Both my husband and son have now gone to our Lord's nearer presence





and I am currently shielding again. My family, being The Guild of Vergers, has enriched my life beyond measure giving me fellowship, support and encouragement, trust and the opportunity to travel both in England and America and Canada with the Episcopal Guild.

It's been 12 years since I left my beloved home at Charity Hall and it has remained empty ever since I left, finally falling into disrepair when attacked by squatters last Christmas was the final nail. The good news is that the Vicar has installed 'Live in Guardians' and 3 Charities are now on board to save it for the future Heritage Fund. The Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF) Transforming Heritage and London Historic Buildings Trust are now researching its future use. When ideas were sort, 26 A4 pages of interest came flooding in. Currently I have applied to be a Trustee, skills needed are Legal and technical. Not up my street it has to be said but no one loves it more than I do, and I am currently awaiting a zoom interview. If it does not pan out, I have done best effort and my prayers for my former home for 30 years have been satisfied, I can do no more.

This article owes its production to the encouragement of Denise Mead, Branch Secretary and Guild Headquarters Membership Secretary and Stephen Haude who magically found the photo of Charity Hall with his IT skills that are far beyond mine and taught me how to Zoom. Overall I believe that Vergers can achieve all things with God being our helper.

**Irene Money**  
Branch Chair and National Welfare Officer.

*"When our Church Warden offered my husband and I, Charity School Hall, a historic listed building near our church and our son's school, it was a gift."*

## PRAYER REQUESTS

If you know of someone for whom prayers would be of benefit, or someone who has been prayed for and has recovered shown improvement, please inform the **National Chaplain** or the **National Welfare Officer**.

Prayers for our Vergers during this time of half-open churches, for those who feel alone, are furloughed, redundant or struggling in new, unfamiliar and uncertain times.

### **Oxford Branch**

Lynnette Derry, Rev'd Marie Jackson

### **Somerset & Avon**

Marek Barden, Mary Holway, Roger Lawrence, Trevor Llewellyn

### **York Branch**

George Cook

### **St Albans Branch**

Peter Hudson

### **East Anglia Branch**

Val Pizzey

### **Blackburn, Chester & Manchester Branch**

Patricia Platt, Margaret Scott

**And all people facing hardship and difficulties and who are facing uncertainties.**

## **In Memoriam**

### **Liverpool Branch**

George Walker

### **Somerset & Avon Branch**

Joy Stevens

**And everyone not specifically mentioned who needs the love, counsel and grace of our Lord.**



## OXFORD BRANCH

**"God is not a God of disorder, but of peace."  
(1 Corinthians 14 v. 35 (NIV)).**

In these difficult times and with further restrictions to cope with, it can be somewhat difficult to acknowledge this teaching; even more so, as most of us have been unable to fully perform our respective ministries in our places of worship especially now when we would be preparing for Advent and Christmas and all that is relative to these seasons, of reflection, great joy and celebration.

We here in the Oxford Branch, have not been without our limitations and adjustments, dependant on our local circumstances. For the College Chapels – Leah at Merton, Oxford, and Simon at Eton, there have been limited services during term time. Within our parish and local churches, involvement has varied but undertaken wherever feasible – Audrey, Maidenhead; Thelma and Dave, Warfield/Bracknell; Joan and Jean, Lorna and Rebecca, Mortimer;

Bill, The Lee; Margaret, Lacey Green; Judy, Frieth; Lynnette, Burford; Lorna, Woodley; Hazel and Gerry, Cookham; Molly, Gerrard's Cross; Heather, Betty and Michael, Booker and our clergy, Marie and Peter.

The power of prayer has been paramount throughout and it is the wish of us all (including those not mentioned above but whom form part of our Oxford family), that you remain well and that your Christmas, in whatever form, is one full of hope and blessings and that the time will soon come when we are once again able to fulfil our ministry, as Vergers, in His service, without disorder but in peace.

**Michael Golby**  
**FCEGV – Chairman**

# FOR YOUR DIARY MEMBERS

### **Monday 9 – Thursday 12 August 2021**

Annual Training Conference Elim Conference Centre, West Malvern. Anyone wishing to come should contact Margaret Burston on [CEGVConference@gmail.com](mailto:CEGVConference@gmail.com)

We are pleased that, subject to further restrictions, we have booked next year's conference and we look forward to welcoming you to this annual meeting.

If your Branch has any events that you wish to have advertised on this page please contact the Communications Officer  
[CEGVMedia@gmail.com](mailto:CEGVMedia@gmail.com)

# FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS

In August 2021 we have elections for the following posts:

**National Chairman** (3 years), currently held by John Kirby-Shearer (who may be elected for one further term). This post is now open to every full member of the Guild, rather than only being elected from the Area Leaders (as previously).

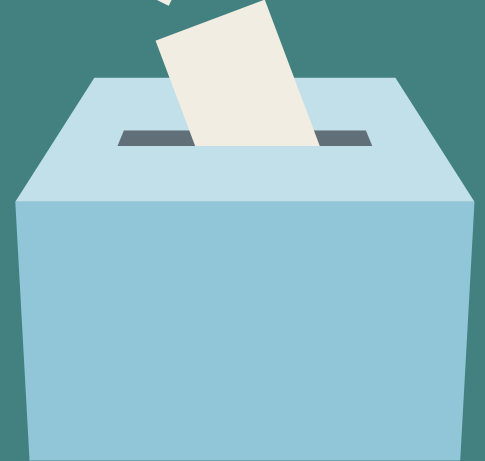
**National Treasurer** (5 years), currently held by Robert Beattie.

**Training Officer** (3 years), currently vacant

**Overseas Membership Officer** (3 years), currently held by John Campbell.

**Legal Advisor** (5 years), currently held by Timothy Wigglesworth (this is an appointment, rather than election).

If you are interested in standing for any of these roles please do not hesitate to contact me **CEGVGenSec@gmail.com** for a job description and further details. All candidates are asked to submit a brief biography for inclusion in the next Virger Magazine.



## HOLY NAME EMBROIDERY

New Commissions, Restoration, Conservation,  
Repairs etc... Undertaken  
Welsh Marches Based

**Dee Caulton-Ball**  
Ecclesiastical Embroiderer

TEL: 01547 220000 or 07890514888  
E-Mail: deecb@hotmail.com



# MEET OUR FELLOWS

## ANDREW PAGE

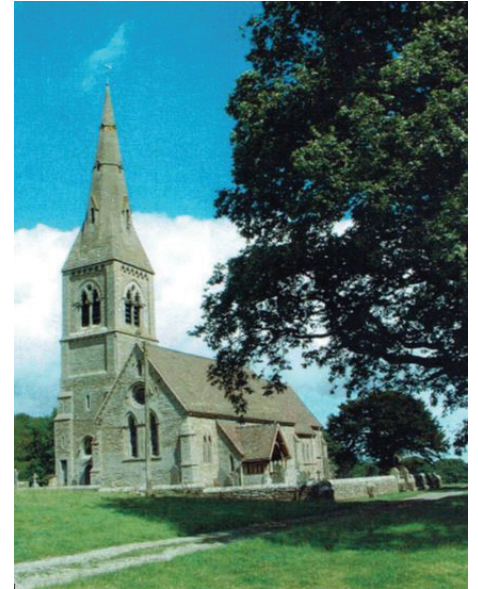


I must begin with a confession. I have never been a vergers. However, in the course of various posts in various churches I have fulfilled a number of roles often performed by vergers and was admitted to the Birmingham Branch of the Guild as a full member in 2005. More of that later.

I grew up in Surrey in a conventionally Christian family with irregular visits to church but regular attendance at a Sunday School. Later I was recruited by the local curate, who lived opposite us, into the Covenanters (anyone remember them?) a Church of England youth group and imbibed basic levels of biblical knowledge and simple theology while enjoying the cricket, sailing and camping trips that it came with.

As I got older and my interests broadened the more evangelistic side of the movement began to lose its appeal and I held back from the routine Confirmation which was a nearly automatic rite of passage for many at the time. I was fortunate to gain a scholarship to Oxford and there I encountered the highly evangelistic Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union, OICCU, (not to be confused with the OGPU though the mistake would be understandable). I was visited by a representative and we talked through the night (at least he did) and as a result it was nearly ten years before I went inside a church again.

I managed to spend six hugely enjoyable years based at Oxford and including research in London and South Africa but the time came when I had to get a real job and I joined the Ministry of Defence and moved to London. For reasons which are still unclear to me I began to feel an increasing pull back to the church and in particular to sacramental worship (which I had never attended). I went to discuss all this with my local vicar in Chiswick and in due course was finally confirmed at about the age of thirty. After an interesting two years in Belfast in the late 1970s where the ecclesiastical scene was rather different (one of the churches I occasionally attended was the Martyrs Memorial Church in Belfast run by a Presbyterian with a strong voice and strong opinions – chap called Ian Paisley, I often wonder what happened to him) I became a more regular communicant at my local parish church first in Hounslow, St Paul's, then, once again, in Chiswick.



In Chiswick I became a server and began to be inducted into various liturgical mysteries involving colours and the folding of linen (though I'm not sure Father Tom will believe that I was ever taught – or perhaps ever learned – anything about either), I also began to become enmeshed, at the lowest level, in the workings of the Church



of England becoming a member of the PCC, Deanery Synod and then downhill all the way to Parish Treasurer. It all proved useful experience when in 1996 I moved to Birmingham to become Administrator and Chapter Clerk at the cathedral.

It was a fascinating job and, even in such a small cathedral, much busier than at first appeared. I was responsible for all the lay staff (except the organist, of course, always a law unto himself), the finances and accounts, the investments, the payroll and the maintenance of the fabric of the cathedral and the clergy houses round the city - there was no cathedral close. I also found myself the secretary of the Residentiary Chapter, the Cathedral Chapter, the Chapter of Canons, the Fabric Advisory Committee and the Stewardship Committee. This combined with "such other duties as the Provost may from time to time require" was usually enough to stave off boredom.



As a parish church cathedral we combined services for a regular weekly congregation (albeit a gathered congregation as the population of the geographical parish in the heart of the city was virtually nil with the area full of civic buildings, offices and hotels)

with the grander occasions such as ordinations, services for judges, police, armed forces the universities and so on. The cathedral also served as a centre when national events particularly obtruded into people's lives.

This was dramatically demonstrated following the death of Princess Diana. The Provost quickly opened a Book of Condolence and invited anyone who wished to come and sign and light a candle. Within hours, following a report on a local radio station, queues four deep and stretching for hundreds of yards had formed along the main street outside the cathedral. Mounted police were called to control the crowds but soon went away again as the queues were completely orderly and eerily silent. We rapidly opened a second book and then a third. Eventually we had twelve stations within the cathedral and begged and borrowed additional pricket stands so each book had its own. The cathedral was kept open from eight in the morning until midnight for over a week until the funeral and the queues never slackened. We used more candles than Westminster Abbey that week (according to our suppliers who also supplied the Abbey) and it was often two or three in the morning before the heat and smoke dissipated sufficiently for the fire alarms to be turned back on so the building could be left.

People not only wished to sign the book, they brought flowers to lay at the foot of an oak tree in the churchyard which the princess had planted some years earlier. The resulting wall of flowers grew to about six feet high and seventy or more yards long and those brought first naturally began to rot (and smell). The City Council agreed to remove those that were decayed during the night but the workmen were abused and accused of stealing them by some passers-by and refused to continue unless cathedral representatives were on hand deal with the public. For the next few days the Provost and I came

to the Cathedral at five each morning to provide the shield. We also discovered that many people had left cuddly toys with the flowers. These were retrieved and collected in the cathedral (they eventually filled 65 dustbin bags) and distributed to children's hospitals around the city.

Another interesting time was the refurbishment of the cathedral churchyard, one of the few green spaces in the city centre. This was a £3 million project with grants from the Lottery Fund and the EU. Although apparently simple it required the agreement of (among others) English Heritage, the Georgian Society, the Victorian Society, the Royal Fine Arts Commission and the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England. As they seldom agreed with each other this complicated matters. There were requirements to maintain the original ambience and to provide up to date security. It proved surprisingly difficult to find an authentically Georgian CCTV installation. When we finally got the go-ahead there were always new problems. On one occasion digging to plant new trees turned up half an ancient skeleton. Work was halted and the police were called. It is part of their standing orders that, not being medically qualified they are not allowed to pronounce anybody dead. Before anything else could be done they therefore had to summon a doctor. He decided it would take more than an aspirin.

I quickly discovered that what actually kept the cathedral running smoothly from day to day was the unobtrusive work of the vergers. They were always there, (almost) always calm and always ready to put the kettle on.



# OBITUARY

## GEORGE WALKER 1934 – 2020 NATIONAL LIFE MEMBER

I was 12 years old, in the church choir and member of the 5th St Helens Company of The Boys' Brigade when I heard that we had a new verger at our church and his name was George! He, his wife and two children were going to live in the new house that had been built in the graveyard. 'Who would want to live in a graveyard', I thought? Over the following 25 years I came to know the most gentle of gentlemen; the most wise advisor; the most tolerant BB officer; simply one of the best examples of a man living out his Christian faith day by day as he worked and served his Lord as a verger.



George Walker was born on 28 September 1934 in Windermere, Cumbria. In 1957 he was married to Jean and for three years he was verger at St Martins, Bowness. Here they had their first two children, Vivian and Brian. In 1960 George came to be verger at Christ Church Eccleston, St Helens and here, for the next 25 years, he was to minister to the parishioners of, and visitors to, this rapidly expanding

parish. The Walker family soon settled into life in Eccleston and it was not long before their second son, Stephen, came along. Whatever was happening in the parish George was always there in the background making sure that everything did indeed happen, a verger through and through. He became an officer in the BB and with three children of his own he knew how to be a steadying influence on the boys as they passed through their formative years. He did have a firmer side to his nature as I well remember when he unceremoniously turned half a dozen of us young teenagers out of the shed used to store Rose Queen equipment. We insisted that we weren't doing anything wrong, but out into the rain we were sent. I am sure that I saw a twinkle in George's eye as I looked back! Many a time we would walk through the graveyard to find George hard at work digging a grave, we would sit and watch and chat with him as he worked. His patience was unlimited, he never told us to go away but listened to our incessant babble and smiled as he dug deeper and deeper. It was many years later before I realised just how much physical strength was required to dig out a grave, and to have to sometimes do it three times a week. George the strong gentleman.

In 1985 George and Jean moved to the Liverpool suburb of Woolton to take up the post of Chauffeur to the Bishop of Liverpool, one David Shepherd. George was much more than a chauffeur he was gardener, and he redesigned the garden at Bishop's Lodge. I also believe that during his 15 years at Bishop's Lodge he became the most informed member of all of the Diocesan staff, his integrity was unquestionable. He knew the best routes to any church in the diocese, and he knew the vergers at those churches. It was always a pleasure to chat to him at the West end Cathedral when his boss was busy doing something at the East end, we would catch up on old times.

After 15 years of looking after Bishop Shepherd he decided to retire, he and Jean moved back to their beloved Lake District.



George was not one to hang up his verge and so he became verger of Warton Parish Church near Carnforth and he continued to take an active part in the Guild. George's 63 years with the Guild is a thing most wonderful, and his service was duly recognised when he was made a National Life Member. Reflecting on such service it is interesting to recall how he first came to join the Guild; the vicar of St Martin's Bowness suggested that his new verger should join the Church of England Guild of Vergers as soon as was possible and that George should visit the verger at Lancaster Priory to find out more about the CEGV. George duly got on his motor bike and travelled from Bowness to Lancaster, some 40 miles, where the verger of the said Priory arranged for George to be admitted into the Guild.



Some four years ago George and Jean moved back to Eccleston to be near their family, and indeed it was good for us Ecclestonians to see them back. Prior to the first lockdown George and Jean had been worshipping at Christ Church once again and I know that the congregation were more than pleased to see them both back in that family.

George shared his faith with all who he met. He wasn't a preacher or an "up front"

man, rather he showed his faith in how he lived, in the way he dealt with people, in the kindly way he treated everyone. I never heard him utter an unkind word. He had the perfect temperament for a verger, unflappable, understanding, firm when necessary, ever helpful and always encouraging. Most of all he had a never-failing sense of humour.

George Walker died on 4 November 2020 and we hold Jean and the family in

our hearts and in our prayers. We thank God for the life of George for all he did for the congregations he served, for all he did for the Guild he represented, and above all for all that he did for the Lord he loved.

May George rest in peace and rise in glory.

**Gratten Williams**  
**CEGV Liverpool Branch - Chairman**

## OBITUARY

### JOY STEVENS

**W**hilst I was Head Verger at St Mary Redcliffe, an opportunity to reshape the Verger team. Prior to my arrival, the lunch hours were covered by a number of paid helpers during the week. Also, a few hours were utilised to give cover to the two full time vergers on a Sunday. In consultation with the Priest-in-Charge, The Rev'd Dr Simon Taylor, we amalgamated these random hours to create a part time substantive post. It was obvious from the start, who the ideal candidate would be to fill this role.

Joy Stevens had been a faithful member of the congregation for most of her life and lived in the Redcliffe area of Bristol. A large part of her life was caring for her mother, who did not enjoy good health. After her mother died, Joy applied to live in Fry's House, a set of six flats under the Almshouse scheme. Joy was the youngest resident for many years. Fry's House was situated on Colston Parade and overlooked her beloved church. When she was approached to become a verger, she was humbled, overjoyed and tearful all at once. It was the greatest honour that she had ever had. She really could not believe that anyone would allow her to work in the church, get paid, for a job and role that she took to like a duck to water. It didn't take her long to learn the ropes as she was such a willing

and eager sole. With a little support from some of the congregation, she undertook the Foundation Unit of the Training Course and was successful in passing. It is hard to convey just how proud she was of her role and being able to serve in the church that she loved so dearly.

It came as a huge blow when she was diagnosed with a brain tumour, but her determination and fortitude, she recovered from the surgery with the main aim to return to work. Sadly, she this was not to be, but she would help out on the Welcome Desk whenever she could. Over the past few years, the tumour returned, and poor health slowed her down. In the latter days,

friends rearranged her bedroom so she could see her beloved church as she approached the end of her life. It was my privilege to have known such a kind and willing person and I am only too pleased to have been in a position to have helped her work in the church that she loved so much. I can still hear the Bristolian accent telling me just how proud she was for doing the job she loved so much. She will be much missed by all that knew her at St Mary Redcliffe.

**John Kirby-Shearer**  
**Former Head Verger**





# NATIONAL CONTACTS

## National Chairman

Mr John Kirby-Shearer,  
MA, Dip GV (Honoris), FCEGV  
**Mobile:** 07891 168133  
**email:** CEGVNatChair@gmail.com

## General Secretary

Mr Stephen Stokes, Dip GV Hons  
**Mobile:** 07968 111240  
**email:** CEGVGenSec@gmail.com

## National Treasurer

Mr Robert Beattie, MA  
**Tel:** 01905 619429  
**Mobile:** 07968 290319  
**email:** CEGVNatTreas@gmail.com

## National Chaplain

The Rev'd Rosemary Durward,  
MLitt, MA, BSc (Econ)  
**Tel:** 01932 860223  
**Mobile:** 07740 825802  
**email:** CEGVNatChap@gmail.com

## Liaison Officer

Mrs Denise Mead  
**Tel:** 020 8688 5971 (Home)  
020 8688 8104 (Work)  
**email:** CEGVLiaison@gmail.com

## Training Administrator

Mrs Susan Ansell, Dip GV  
**Tel:** 01483 548980  
**email:** CEGVTrainReg@gmail.com

## Conference Administrator

Mrs Margaret Burston, Dip GV  
**Mobile:** 07947 347000  
**email:** CEGVConference@gmail.com

## Media Officer

Mrs Jane Gorrie  
**Mobile:** 07866 401469  
**email:** CEGVMedia@gmail.com

## Welfare Officer

Mrs Irene Money, MBE, Dip GV  
**Tel:** 020 8807 0232  
**email:** CEGVWelfare@gmail.com

## Overseas Membership Officer

Mr John Campbell, BEM, FBGU, FCEGV  
**Mobile:** 07733 276335  
**email:** CEGVOverseas@gmail.com

## Mailing Address

Mr Stephen Stokes, Dip GV Hons  
General Secretary  
The Church of England Guild of  
Vergers  
Kemp House  
152 – 160 City Road  
London  
EC1V 2NX

## The Guild Prayer

Almighty Father, from whom every family in heaven and earth is named,  
who has called us into the fellowship of your Church,  
grant, we pray, that in all our churches we may fulfil the duties  
and enjoy the privileges of our spiritual home.  
And on those who offer themselves for service as vergers in the house of God  
bestow the fullness of your grace,  
that, united in love to you and to one another,  
we may show forth your glory and hasten the coming of your kingdom.  
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



[www.cofegv.org.uk](http://www.cofegv.org.uk)



Find us on

<http://bit.ly/CofEGV>