

# THE VIRGER

The Official Magazine of the Church of England Guild of Vergers

Autumn 2022 | Issue 316



## TRAINING CONFERENCE AND RETREAT 2022

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# FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR



**G**osh - what a Conference! If last year's was still flavoured with COVID, this year definitely was back to "business as usual" as far as was possible. It was wonderful to see new faces and old all gathered together in such strong fellowship - to hear stories from churches across the country of how they are adapting (see John's letter) and endeavouring to thrive in their new technological ventures.

The apposite theme of "Wellness" certainly seemed to strike a chord with many delegates and the chance to spend time appreciating being in Nature, and using the outdoors for and as a pathway to prayer was very warmly embraced by many of us. Up here in Scotland Autumn appeared to have arrived whilst I was away and I am now often greeted by mists rolling through the trees and hills as I open my bedroom curtains - I love my view! Autumn will inevitably roll into Winter and our thoughts will turn to Harvest Festivals and then to Advent. Please do let me know your plans and any seasonal anecdotes in good time for the next edition.... the closing date is just that - you can send things in earlier if it helps!

**Jane Gorrie**  
CEGV Media Officer

Please note that all submissions for the next edition should reach Jane via email, **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.



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# FROM THE DESK OF THE NATIONAL CHAIRMAN



## To stream or not to stream – that is the question.

Do you all remember the start of the Covid-19 pandemic? Suddenly, we were instructed by the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, that from a given time, that we were all to stay at home and those who could, to work from home. Walking the streets during the day was eerie and strange. Bustling cities were quiet, with few busses on the streets, hardly any cars and all shops closed. Our churches closed for worship and life took on a new meaning.

The first Easter, the Archbishop of Canterbury celebrated the Eucharist from his flat at Lambeth Palace, on the kitchen table. This started a new phenomenon, streamed services from churches and cathedrals as buildings started to open. The advent of this new service was slow and patchy, with vergers videoing services using their mobile phones and trying to get shots of clergy celebrating their individual services as best they could. Vergers had to come to terms with the technological age very quickly and as best they could. This was seen as ensuring that congregations who were not allowed to travel could partake in some way with their parish priest.

Steadily the practice grew, and more and more churches and cathedrals invested in the necessary equipment to ensure that respective churches were still in operation albeit in some small way. Many of the congregations were and some still are, very grateful for this service. It enabled them to worship with their local priest, or even tune in to other places to sample their style of worship without leaving the sofa. With the advent of the new on-line pay/donations systems that also appeared, we were invited to make our regular contribution to our churches by clicking a button and money left your account without opening your purse if you so wished. What a cracking idea, congregations could sit in comfort, with a steaming hot mug of their favourite blend of tea or coffee, watch the service being streamed from a virtually empty church, be Covid free, click a button and hopefully make their weekly donation, all without leaving the house, getting cold and wet on a dull rainy day in the winter.

Gradually, the churches started to open and get things back to normal and welcome folk back to the pews. They also continued to stream the services, as they had invested so much money in the equipment, and the Verger was now thinking he/she was heading towards to new career as the next cameraman on the 10 o'clock news. But wait, all is not going well. Congregational numbers are not what they were pre-pandemic. Folk were not leaving their houses and coming to sit in a draughty church, pay huge parking fees, as the local council have introduced charging on a Sunday to boost their coffers. Church coffee was not the same as that warm tempting mug at home. Congregations could sit at home, watch the service on Youtube, scroll past the hymn that was being sung because they found it too long. They started listening to the choir singing the anthem and because it was either modern or boring, they would scroll past that too, oh and as for the sermon, well that went on way too long, so we will just miss that out. The upshot would be that an hour service in a church had given way to a 25-minute service where the congregation had control with their fingertips.

*“They also continued to stream the services, as they had invested so much money in the equipment, and the Verger was now thinking he/she was heading towards to new career as the next cameraman on the 10 o'clock news”*

I have a great fear. If something is not done to control this new phenomenon, our churches and cathedral buildings will not survive. There will be no money coming in to pay for their upkeep and they will simply close. The Church of England will be heading for the iceberg and before they wake up to the reality of the situation, it will be too late. I think the question should be asked, “To stream or not to stream!”

**John Kirby-Shearer**  
Chairman

# FROM THE DESK OF THE NATIONAL CHAPLAIN



Not so long ago, I heard The Rev'd Canon Bruce Ruddock, new Branch Chaplain to the Chichester, Guildford and Portsmouth Branch affirm his great gratitude to vergers in the Chapel of Lancing College where he was installed. Is it ever possible to tire of hearing thanks?

I don't think so. Thankfulness and a desire to give back something of all I had received from vergers, motivated me to answer the Guild's *Church Times* notice for a National Chaplain long before lockdown. Now, as National Chaplain, I find myself even more in debt. Similar expressions of thanks were reiterated by Conference guests, The Rev'd Canon Bruce Kinsey, Chaplain and Welfare Officer, Balliol College, University of Oxford; from Canon Dr Roly Riem, Vice-Dean and Canon Chancellor of Winchester Cathedral; and his wife, Sophie Hacker, artist in residence at Winchester Cathedral. Sophie's national and international reputation for Christian art and witness is principally through the medium of sculpture, oils and stained glass windows.

Vergers serve faithfully in different settings, but always with a willingness to deliver professionally, to maintain high standards and ensure that worship is the best it can possibly be. No two vergers' jobs are the same. Borrowing an analogy from Fr Bruce concerning Jesus Christ and the Christian symbol of the anchor, the Guild diploma helps anchor vergers, even while allowing flexibility and freedom to respond to their particular circumstances.

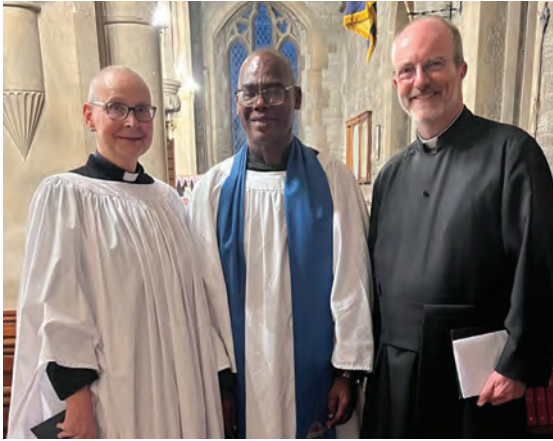
This conference gave me my first experience of awarding foundation unit certificates and a diploma. Congratulations to all for their success. It was my first experience of admitting new national Branch Office Holders. They will join a team of hard-working colleagues. When we pray for them, we are asking for God's heartbeat in their lives.

I felt gratified when, in this conference on *Well Being*, I heard someone say that we were floating through, by the grace of God. So many came carrying heavy burdens. Yet, immersed in prayer, worship, contemplative listening, with a good deal of laughter as well as tears, these burdens were lighter because they were shared.

In part we had the location of the Elim Conference Centre to help, with St James' Church, West Malvern nestled in the background and spectacular views.



I hope that delegates will feel inspired to notice the beauty of holiness in the changing seasons.



Canon Roly Riem preached at the healing service, with humility and tenderness (*Mark 14: 32-38; James 5: 14-16*). He began from the realistic stance that we will not all return to full health. We are not immortal, but he found hope in the resurrection of Christ because resurrection is what is promised. It is what we believe. He stands in this photo with Levison Kandi and me, following the laying on of hands and anointing.

I should, at last, like to pay special tribute to my Assistant Chaplain, The Rev'd Tom Cameron. Fr Tom was unstinting in his support to me throughout the conference as well as going about his own duties with dedication. In his homily, in a new combined Morning Prayer and Eucharist service, he asked the question, 'Who is the wealth in my life? Who and what are my riches?' Even if we struggle with finance, and there surely will be difficulties ahead, he urged us to name and give thanks for the people who enrich our lives with their presence, care and love. Fr Tom stressed our need to value life itself, urging us to give thanks for the beauty of the planet, for laughter, for children, flowers and anything else that brings us joy, peace, or pleasure. The value of thankful hearts was a constant theme throughout Conference. As Fr Tom said, whatever our financial circumstances, "We are rich!". Indeed, the Revd Canon Emeritus and Guild Fellow, Dr Maureen Palmer made a special visit to Malvern to deacon at the Closing Eucharist. We give sincere thanks to her, for her continued care and affection for the vergers.

**Mthr Rosemary**  
National Chaplain

## 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.

### Somerset & Avon

Marek Barden, Mary Holway, Roger Lawrence, Trevor Llewellyn

### York Branch

George Cook

### St Albans Branch

Peter Hudson, Heather Ringrose, Molly Payne, Audrey Ashby

### East Anglia Branch

Val Pizzey

### Blackburn, Chester & Manchester Branch

Patricia Platt, Margaret Scott, Freda Murphy, Frank Woodward

### Oxford Branch

Hazel Knight

### Durham and Newcastle with Carlisle Branch

Jimmy and Margaret Guy

### Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester Branch

Margaret Burston, Paul and family

### Salisbury Branch

David Hall

## RIP

Gerry Knight (Oxford Branch)  
Jean Milner Headley (Oxford Branch)  
Claire Lunney (East Anglia Branch)

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

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

# ATTENDING MY FIRST CONFERENCE

I came to Conference feeling a little nervous as I wasn't sure what to expect. However, I came with an open mind, an open heart and a willingness to get totally involved in every service and event throughout the time. I found the conference incredibly fulfilling and restorative: spending time in communion with other vergers; gaining knowledge from a range of backgrounds, and learning new skills. If you are unsure about attending Conference, then I would encourage you to do so because you will be welcomed in as an equal. The Conference Centre is set in the beautiful Malvern Hills which helped me appreciate the beauty of creation once more.

I learnt a lot from all the sessions put on and from the other vergers there with me. I found that the subjects have helped me begin to heal the damage of the past two years. I have really enjoyed getting to know other fellow vergers and am really looking forward to returning next year. I am also beginning further learning about the role of a Verger within the Church of England through the Guilds Diploma. It will be good to get my teeth into this to give me something else to focus on.

**Ed Haynes**  
Verger at Chelmsford Cathedral  
since 2020



# A BENCH OF BISHOPS

I have been asked to write a few words about the opening service of the 15th Lambeth Conference, which took place in Canterbury Cathedral on the 31st July. This ceremony was the result of days, weeks and even years of hard work behind the scenes.

A few days before it took place around 650 bishops and their spouses from across the world began to arrive in Canterbury for the pre-conference retreat. A huge team of volunteers worked in shifts to greet and escort all the delegates as they were ferried between their University of Kent lodgings and the Cathedral in a fleet of double decker buses; one volunteer told me that there was a positively unholy scrum amongst them to gain seats on the upper decks, especially if they were unused to double deckers in their own countries!

As everyone converged in the Cathedral Precincts, last minute preparations were under way in the building. Here in Canterbury we are certainly not novices at organising large events. As the Mother Church of the Anglican Communion, the Cathedral plays host to the Primate's Conference and the Enthronements of the Archbishops of Canterbury, besides fulfilling all the usual roles of a diocesan cathedral. As a centre of pilgrimage, we daily welcome international pilgrims, worshippers and visitors of every faith and none through our doors, but the Lambeth Conference truly brings home the colourful and international nature of Anglicanism.

It took approximately an hour for every bishop to process through the West Doors and to be guided to their seats. In the dim and distant past, I remember at some large services, there have been more virgers than virges, so that, after solemnly leading part of the procession into the Nave, gowned figures could be seen bolting back into the Cloisters and



running to pass on their virge to the next person, like a baton relay! On this occasion, however, apart from a few of us coming in twice, thankfully there was no need for such energetic shenanigans, and once we'd processed in the virgers, along with the servers and stewards, were lucky enough to have reserved seats in the Quire aisle, where we had a good view of one of the many television screens.

Anglicanism is, by its nature, inclusive, and the ceremony ensured that every liturgical tradition was represented, with songs from the worship band fitting seamlessly alongside music from the organ and the Cathedral choirs. The translation booths in the Crypt relayed running commentaries to large numbers of headphones, and the readings and prayers in many languages ensured that everyone felt included.

Of course, a few little things went wrong (the BBC's brand new cables, set up carefully the night before, were found to have been chewed through by a peckish rodent much to the astonishment of the technicians) but far more things went right, and there were three highlights of this wonderful morning that I will always remember: the joyful singing of



the Zimbabwean choir as they danced through the Cathedral; the great susurrant of voices as every person in the building was invited to utter the Lord's Prayer in their own language and, afterwards, crowding around a happy bishop's telephone to greet and wave at his relations in India.

**Sally Such**  
Assistant Verger,  
Canterbury Cathedral

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY



### Wednesday 14 September 2022

– A Semi-Lite Festival, St Edmundsbury Cathedral (provide you own lunch BUT Robes are welcome to be worn (hence the 'Semi'))



### May 2023

– A Festival has been offered by the York Branch for Sheffield Cathedral. More details to follow.



### July 2023

– The Rev'd Thomas Cameron has offered to lead a pilgrimage to Walsingham. More details to follow.



### Monday 7 until Thursday 10 August 2023

– Annual Retreat and Training Conference



### Wednesday 27 September 2023

– Croydon Minster has been offered by the London, Southwark Branch for a Festival. More details to follow.



### 2027

– The suggestion of returning to Leicester for a Festival to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the Leicester Branch of the Guild.



### 2032

– The 100th anniversary of the Guild. The proposal is that this might take place in York Minster as many of the previous major celebrations (75th & 80th) have taken place down South. There would be only one Festival this year and there will be both financial and logistical work from the National Guild.

## Branch meeting dates for your diary

There is a forthcoming **Oxford Branch** event – our Quiet Day at Douai Abbey, Upper Woolhampton, Berkshire - when the speaker will be a representative of Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF); the date is Tuesday 20th September, and proceedings commence from 1000 thru. to 1530 hrs. Contact Michael Golby, Branch Chair for details ([mikegolby@yahoo.com](mailto:mikegolby@yahoo.com))

Please can you circulate that the **Blackburn, Chester and Manchester Branch** are having a Choral Evensong at Christ Church, Timperley, on Saturday the 15th October.

We don't have final details as yet but if anyone wishes to join us for this, please contact me and I will let them have them details when they are available. I can be contacted by email or phone.

Freda Murphy, Branch Secretary  
07483 832349  
[freda.m.murphy@btinternet.com](mailto:freda.m.murphy@btinternet.com)

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)



# E RICHARD BICKMORE ESQ

13TH JUNE 1938 – 9TH JULY 2022

**R**ichard died peacefully in the care of the staff of Stones Place, Methodist Nursing Home, Lincoln, a place he called home since 2016.

A native of Boxmore, Hemel Hempstead, he was educated at Heath Brow and Berkhamsted Schools. Articled, Richard entered the Law Profession and as a solicitor he majored in family law for many years.

He moved to Lincoln in 1991 and quickly settled into living in a cathedral city.

The only child of Bert & Marjorie Bickmore, he embraced the arts, opera, and ballet which all excited him on every level. He was no stranger to Covent Garden and Glyndebourne. Richard, in his time was a great traveller. The Alps, the Rivière & St Tropez, Rome and Florence were all great favourites of his. In later years, closer to home, he enjoyed trips to London and steam train journeys to Yorkshire, Edinburgh and beyond - all were much enjoyed. A great lover of things 'fine', Richard introduced the writer to Fortnum & Mason's Champagne Truffles – among other things for which I am grateful.

Richard embraced life living in the Cathedral City of Lincoln and quickly became an active member of the Cathedral community and congregation. Although an aficionado of the Book of Common Prayer, he embraced modern liturgical initiatives as well as having an involvement in the Friends of Cathedral Music. Among his many voluntary positions he was a member of the friends of Lincoln Cathedral Executive Committee, served on the Cathedral Community Association, as well as volunteering in the library & treasury. Richard was an ardent Royalist and traditionalist. As a cathedral guide his tours had an interesting constitutional bent. Richard was for many years Honorary Bishop's Verger, and as such he was delighted to be involved in the Royal Maundy Service in 2000. He was honoured and humbled to be invited to a dinner in the presence of HRH the Earl of Wessex hosted by the Friends of the Cathedral. As a verger, he was a great supporter of the Church of England Guild of Vergers both Locally and Nationally, he was a regular attendee at the National Training Conference. In the city, Richard had many civic and social interests, becoming Chairman of RELATE [Lincoln] and Chairman of Lincoln Community Larder. He also supported NOMAD, a local charity serving the homeless of Lincoln. He was a collector for Christian Aid as well as a supporter and a 'church sitter' of St Mary Magdalen Church, on the Bail, Lincoln.

His health deteriorated in 2016 and he was no longer able to stay in No 14 Minster Yard, although supported by friends, staff of the Cathedral Refectory (who offered social care as well as

meals) and the staff of Café Zoot (where he ate nightly). Wisely, he moved into Stones Place, Methodist Care Home where he eventually settled into his new life with what he

considered his 'family'. He was grateful for the companionship of fellow residents and staff alike and considered himself indebted for their professional care and support.

In his final days he bore his fate stoically and with dignity, never losing his faith. He was ready to meet his maker. After a brief smile, and a gentle wave & 'with a waft of immortality he now lives where life is real'.

**John G Campbell** – a friend of a gentle gentleman.



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# EXECUTIVE & AGM NEWS

Just prior to this year's Annual Training Conference and Retreat the Executive Committee met on your behalf. Some of the details were then passed on the Annual General Meeting the following day.

## Legacies

Over the many years we have been left some substantial legacies for the bettering of the Guild. The majority of this goes to assist towards Conference but we have purchased some items in memory of those who have died and left us the money.

- A humeral veil was purchased in memory of Peter and Alison Young of the Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester Branch.
- A Thurible was purchased in memory of Stephen Haude of the London, Southwark and Chelmsford Branch.
- We have also invested £78,000 with a company called Suckling Waddington & Partners, the profit of this investment will be set to offset some of the Conference Costs.

## Admission to the Guild

A long discussion was held about admitting members into the Guild, it was felt that as we are a Lay-Led organisation the person doing the admitting should be the Branch Chairman (as opposed to the Chaplain as was) and the Branch Chaplain would then bless them into their ministry.

## Election of Officers

At the AGM the following roles were confirmed:

- Welfare Officer (3 years) Irene Money
- Conference Secretary (3 years) Denise Mead
- National Membership Officer (3 years) Andrew Wynn-Mackenzie
- Guild Chronicler (3 years) James Armstrong



It was also reminded to members when the following roles come around for election:

- 2023 Training Administrator (three years)
- 2023 Media Officer (three years)
- 2023 Regional Reps (three years) – change from Deputies to Regionals
- 2024 National Chairman (three years)
- 2024 General Secretary (five years)
- 2024 Training Officer (three years)
- 2024 Overseas Membership Officer (three years)
- 2025 National Chaplain (five years, via Presidents)
- 2026 National Treasurer (five years)
- 2026 Legal Advisor to Executive Committee (five years) [appointment]

With regret we have not yet been able to appoint a Shop Manager, any person who is interested in this role should contact the General Secretary for more details [CEGVGenSec@gmail.com](mailto:CEGVGenSec@gmail.com)

## Constitution

Following notification to members the Constitution has been updated, sections 2.8 and 6 should now read.

- 2.8 Only members of the Guild shall be entitled to stand for election to any Office of the Guild specified in clause 3.1. The National Chaplain need not be a member.
- 6 The Executive Committee may initiate Statutes to govern the operation of the Guild and the performance of its Officers. These must be ratified by an Executive Committee Meeting and will be binding on the Membership.

All these, and many others documents are available from the downloadable publications page of the website [www.cofegv.org.uk](http://www.cofegv.org.uk)

## Bursaries

The biggest aspect we looked at was Conference Bursaries. It was agreed that we would offer any first time attendees a £100 bursary, and that any member attending Conference may also apply for a bursary (should they be paying for it themselves) and they would be offered at least a £50 bursary – please contact the National Chaplain for more information [CEGVNatChap@gmail.com](mailto:CEGVNatChap@gmail.com)



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## A PIECE OF BREAD - CONFERENCE HOMILY



**F**r Tom Cameron, a former master baker, presented us with a fresh loaf of bread. He then spoke far more deeply about the bread itself. The simplicity of its ingredients, from the grain back to the soil, the rain, the sun, further back to the planting, the harvest and further back still to the beginning i.e. God. He talked about the complexity of the rising and finally the cooking process, measuring cups, warm ovens etc.

This bread represented the unfolding of the Story of Creation, the power of transformation and knowing God in a piece of bread, something deeply profound.

He didn't let on that he needed the loaf as a prop for his sermon so some of us naughtier delegates broke it and shared it. It was far too tempting and was absolutely delicious. I rarely eat bread!!

A little later, Tom came to collect his loaf. We were given the Fr Tom 'look' and he said: 'I wanted that for my sermon'. Oops!

The larger piece still being a good shape, it was useable on the pulpit to illustrate his sermon, although we were given a repeat Fr Tom 'look' as he placed it there.

One of our members couldn't clearly see that it was a loaf of bread and thought Tom had placed a tortoise on the pulpit...!

**Denise Mead**  
Verger, Parish & Music Administrator  
Croydon Minster

## JUST THINKING OF YOU ALL GIVES ME PLENTY OF VITAMIN F

A friend shared this article with me and I want to share it with you.

Why do I have a variety of friends who are all different in character?

Some of them can even be considered marginal?

How do I get on with them all?

I think that each one helps to bring out a "different" part of me...

With one of them I am a polite, good girl. I joke with another friend.

I sit down and talk about serious matters with one of them.

With another I giggle at every silly thing.

I have my wine with one

And dance with another.

I listen to one friend's problems and give her advice

Then I listen to another advising me.

They are all like pieces of a jigsaw, When completed they form a treasure box. A treasure of friends!

They are my friends who understand me better than myself, who support me through good days and bad days.

They are like colourful anti-depressants that I take on different days.

Doctors tell us that friends are good for our health and call them Vitamin F (Friends) and count the benefits of friends to our well being.

Research shows that people in strong social circles have less risk of depression and terminal strokes. If you take Vitamin F constantly, you can be up to 30 years younger than your real age. The warmth of friendship stops stress and even in your tense moments, it decreases the chance of a cardiac arrest or stroke by 50%.

I am so happy that I have a stock of Vitamin F!

In summary we should value our friends and keep in touch with them.

We should try to see the funny side of things and laugh together, not forgetting to open our mouths big to swallow the floating vitamin F

Thank you for being one of my vitamins!

**From the Editor**, shamelessly lifted from the internet...



## EAST ANGLIA CELEBRATION

On July 15th the East Anglia Branch held a BBQ at the home of our Chaplains Revd Alan and Revd Catherine Forsdike. Earlier in the day Revd Alan and Revd Catherine attended St Mary's Church, Walton, Felixstowe where Ian and Pam Cobb renewed their wedding vows, 50 years to the day and at the exact time of their wedding in 1972. The East Anglia Branch Vergers did not know anything

about the occasion until they attended the BBQ. Thanks to Alan and Catherine for everything they did for us on the day and for hosting the BBQ. A family celebration was held two weeks later.

### Ian & Pam Cobb



## YORK BRANCH

On the 4th July the branch met for our first meeting outside of York since before the pandemic. The venue was Beverley, where 12 members were in attendance. The day started with a Eucharist at St. Leonard Molescroft celebrated by Reverend Chris, from Beverley Minster, with our Branch Chaplain, Reverend Marian Gardner preaching. After the service and group photo, we headed off to the Minster to view the flower festival and then to our members', Kevin and Andrew, house for lunch. The branch were invited to view the flower festival at St. Oswald Flamborough in early August.

August is Conference month and it was a great honour that the branch's youngest member, and Publicity Officer, Ben Elliott-Hill, received his Guild Diploma certificate and hood at the opening Eucharist on the Monday. The mark he got was Diploma with Distinction.

The photos are the group photo from the Beverley meeting and Ben with National Chairman John Kirby-Shearer following the Guild Conference Opening Eucharist where he received his diploma certificate and hood.

### Ben Elliott-Hill Publicity Officer



# TRAINING CONFERENCE AND RETREAT 2022

I was pleased to meet both Ben Elliott-Hill and Callum Brittain at this year's Annual Training Conference and Retreat, West Malvern. If like me, you keep your copies of our magazine *The Virger*, please take another look at Autumn 2021/Issue 312 pages 12 and 13. As these two ambassadors for our Guild are younger than me, I thought I would give you my impression of the 2022 Conference.

I am attempting to complete the Vergers Guild Training Course having been a Verger at St Saviour's Parish Church, Westgate-on-Sea for about 2 years. I completed the Foundation Unit (do please take a look at this course – it really helps both new and experienced Vergers; highlighting why our role is so important) and I thought it was time I attended a Guild Conference.

Taking advantage of the Early Bird Rate, I booked after Christmas and arranged to put aside £50 per month to cover the expenses, plus at the last minute, paying extra to arrive on the Sunday to avoid the M2, M25, M26, M40, M3, M4, M5 traffic on a Monday morning! Yes, I'm about as far southeast as one can live.

The week before departure wasn't great. Tracey my wife was poorly the week before and my employee decided to give me my redundancy notice (effective December 30th 2022) which after 35 years with the company, really was a blow to my confidence. However with prayer and a very supportive incumbent and encouragement from my wife and 2 sons, I thought...let's go for it.

As motorways go, the journey to West Malvern was trouble free, however the temperature was 35C (according to my cars display) and the air conditioning was

on for two thirds of the trip. It's great after a long trip to not have to worry about car parking, as ample space is provided. The conference centre staff couldn't have been more helpful and the check-in went very smoothly.

**Day 1** – free tea/coffee plus biscuits is always welcome and then the AGM commenced followed by an Open Forum. We then stopped for lunch and being rather fussy, I will admit the food was definitely good quality. We all attended the first workshop and the standard of speakers really is first class. Then we walked a very short distance to the church next door which we have access to throughout the Conference week. St James Church, West Malvern is a lovely Parish Church – similar to my Victorian Church on the Southeast coast. The sort of church you feel at home in as soon as you enter.



It was only the first day, however I'd met a new friend Alan and we both agreed to put our names down for Acolytes at the Opening Eucharist. I'd highly recommend volunteering...the more you participate the more you learn and really feel involved. We walked through the rehearsal and got some excellent coaching – thanks Les! This service also recognised those people who have achieved part or all of their Vergers Diploma; I had successfully completed my Foundation Unit so thank you for the certificate.

**Day 2** - free tea/coffee plus biscuits and Danish pastries. This was after a large full English breakfast (cereal/toast and fruit readily available too). Workshop 2 was excellent; the guest speaker really knew their subject. Afterwards we had a break and then into Angelus and Midday Prayers, outdoors amongst the trees and birdsong. Workshop 3 and the Rev'd Roly was both entertaining and thought provoking (note to self – must get back to Bible Studies). After a super dinner we were invited to St James for a Healing Service. It was a lovely evening and the perfect way to end a busy day.

**Day 3** – Morning prayer, breakfast and then free tea/coffee plus biscuits and Danish pastries; have you tried the raspberry filling?! Workshop 4 was lovely. Sophie spoke to us about Stained Glass windows and how she designs new ones. Her latest project is a window dedicated to Florence Nightingale – a true role model then and today. Midday prayers was followed by Mother Rosemary's excellent presentation regarding the beauty of holiness outdoors. I can highly recommend prayer walks. After a break we attended St James for a Choral Evensong with Benediction. A first for me and again a wonderful experience. As in previous evenings the day ended with Compline, a chance to stop and reflect with friends and colleagues.

**Day 4** – free tea/coffee plus biscuits and Danish pastries – were the lemon curd or custard ones the best?! You know you have had a good time, when you realise – today is the last day. After a farewell breakfast we all attended a mop-up session before the Final Eucharist. Another rehearsal and then a Eucharist, that was very befitting for our last day together.

I write this a couple of days after returning home. Was it value for money? Did I learn anything new? Was I welcomed and encouraged to join in with activities? Did I

have fun and enjoy myself? Were people genuinely helpful and friendly? Would I recommend the event to other Vergers both young and old?

Yes!

I have tried to be open and honest... and although I was apprehensive about attending, I really had a relaxed and enjoyable time at the Annual Training Conference. Everyone whether new or experienced offered to help and support me. Full Payment for the 2023 conference is due 23rd June 2023. I'll be putting aside some money each month so I can save towards the costs of attending next year. Did you know a bursary is available if you would like help with expenses?

And before I go, I haven't once mentioned the scenery. I'm a country walker and each day, time is allocated to allow you to relax and do whatever you wish. If you fancy a hill climb or leisurely stroll in the countryside – this is the ideal venue.

Maybe I'll see you next year?

God bless.

**Stephen Short**  
Verger, St Saviour's, Westgate-on-Sea





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### 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.



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