

THE VIRGER

The Official Magazine of the Church of England Guild of Vergers

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The boss, a mentor but most of all a true friend


A personal reflection on James Armstrong, by Revd Canon James Wilson, National Life Member





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I met James 6 months after he became head verger at Carlisle Cathedral 34 years ago. I had just become a voluntary guide, and he said we have tea at 11 and there will be cake. I don't know if it was the cake but three months later, I was on the payroll of the chapter as an assistant Verger. I also did not realize until years later that I was James' first trainee verger he had picked and that training was to be for life. I loved being part of his team. He being known as the great James, due to his position and height and I was more than happy to be known as James the less.

As anyone who knew James, his attention to detail was extraordinary, he could spot a cobweb at 50ft and would score churches and cathedrals on the number of webs he found! He often would tell me unless you clean a church from top to bottom you will never understand it. I used to presume he meant that simply in the physical sense but now I know he meant that in every sense.

His greatest skill was his understanding and care for people. His pastoral work in the Guild, what he called "service", is known by many. He would keep in touch with those that had been ostracized and make sure that they were ok. He would mix and make new members welcome at the Guild conference, encouraging them to be active both at the conference and in the Guild widely. Everyone in his view was important in the Guild and the Guild is important in that it connects those isolated who serve (often without appreciation) their Parishes and Cathedrals.



It was James who put my life in order, he helped me accept who I was, and I was so lucky as he shared everything with me as I did with him. He gave me the courage to move to Bristol and take a verger's job at St Mary Redcliffe, he encouraged me to go forward to ordination, He took in my pet cat Tabetha "temporarily" whilst I trained, she lived with him for 20 years! We went on holidays and when I went back home, his flat was my first port of call. James was trustworthy and shrewd in his judgments. If someone new came into my life, they were dragged to Carlisle for James' approval or not..... he was always right!

James, like for many in the Guild, was like an older brother to me, something I will always be grateful for. I remember his stern words at my induction into the Guild in a chapel of the Cathedral. He was Chair of the Branch, the Dean Henry Stepleton was the Branch Chaplain, it was on a cold, dark winter morning Eucharist. "Remember to support the members of the Guild, even those you do not like and in that way, everyone will support each other, in that way we serve"

When I became seriously ill and had a series of operations that led to my early retirement, James gave me strength not to give up, as many kind vergers did in the Guild, he would ring with news and share plans for the Guild, he made me feel at the lowest point and hardest part of my life, valued. He encouraged me when I was mending to come to training conference, as he said to find some healing amongst friends,

Our last real conversation a month before he died during which we laughed and cried. He spoke about his funeral in depth and that of its theme of service, For James, that was his goal, to be known for his service, his many achievements were in service to this Guild and to his Cathedral. He handed me his last gift to the cathedral to hold, the Trinity Verge, which he had designed. At first glance, it looked simply made, yet it was nearly impossible to have been. It was perfectly balanced, it was utterly beautiful and spoke simply of the truth and mystery of the Holy Trinity. Just like his life. Goodbye dear brother in our Guild, thank you for your life of service. Now may you rest until you rise in glory.

Canon James Wilson, National Life Member

James Armstrong Memorial Fund

As you will have read earlier in this magazine, earlier this year we lost a dear friend and stalwart member of the Guild, as well as holding to role of National Chairman four times and Guild Chronicler.

We are looking to raise money to have a memorial stone placed in Carlisle Cathedral, where he was Head Verger for 35 years, to honour him. The Cathedral are on board with this although there is a lot of red tape and formal permissions still to be sort.

The Cost is likely to be about £3,200 for making and installation.

If you would like to make a donation there are a number of ways to do this:

- **Bank Transfer:** Church of England Guild of Vergers; s/c 30-98-97; a/c 69064163 ref: JA Donation. Please email the National Treasurer to advise of payment
- **Cheque:** payable to The Church of England Guild of Vergers, please write JA Donation on the reverse of the Cheque and send to the National Treasurer: 4a College Green, Worcester, WR1 2LH
- **Card Payment:** please make contact with the Shop Manager, as he will need to create a payment link for the amount you wish to donate – please note that we are charged card handling fees for all payments via the shop

Should you have any questions please do contact any of the National Officers listed on the back page for more information



The Ven Dr David Jenkins, National Chaplain writes...

Dear Sisters and Brothers

Once again, I am writing this summer letter only a few days after my return from this year's national training conference and retreat. I am always conscious that most of our members never get to experience these events first hand so if you have never attended a conference and are pondering whether to do so I would warmly encourage you. It is an excellent opportunity to make new friends, learn new skills, and enjoy the beautiful countryside of the Malvern hills. The facilities are first class and this year the numbers at conference were the best we have enjoyed for a few years with a lovely mix of young and old, new and more experienced, parish church and cathedral, and with a growing number of overseas participants from Canada and the USA.

On that note I do also want to remind all of you that there are bursaries available to help with the cost of the conference. These bursaries are open to all UK vergers who want some assistance. Our Bishops are very generous each year in donating towards a Bursary fund that we want to use! In addition, each first-time attendee will also get a discounted first-time price! Please also be assured that the application process is confidential.

So, why would you want to come to conference and what are you missing if you don't? The theme this year was *The Ministry of Music* and so we focussed on the role of music both in worship and in our personal spiritual lives. We enjoyed some excellent talks and acts of worship. These included a lovely address and sermon from Philip Banks, the Canon Precentor of St Paul's cathedral. However, the undoubted highlight was the talk by John Rutter which received a standing ovation, a first in Guild conference history!

What are the abiding memories for me from this conference? The weather was kind, so we were able to enjoy the beauty of the Malvern hills at their very best. The fellowship was as always so enjoyable and one of the real gifts of conference. For me the real magic of the conference is the space it provides for friendships to be formed and for conversations to be had. The standard of the worship was, as always, very high. We were joined for Evensong by the choir and organist of Pershore Abbey which was very enjoyable, and we were also blessed to have such a fine musician and organist to accompany our music throughout the week; thank you Phil.

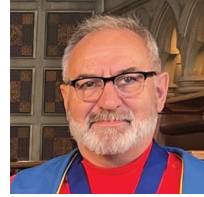
Of course, the conference this year was acutely aware of the recent loss of one of its leading members, James Armstrong, the Head Verger of Carlisle Cathedral. James died earlier this year after a short battle against cancer which he fought with courage and dignity. James's presence was much missed, and he was fondly remembered throughout the conference and especially at the Requiem Eucharist. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

Already we are planning for next year so do think about joining us. As I said last year, I am optimistic that we have a Guild that remains full of potential. We have had to make some difficult decisions about our governance and structure, and we had some challenging conversations at our standing and executive meetings. However, it is clear from the conference that there is a cohort of younger, intelligent, and very motivated vergers coming up who want the Guild to flourish and are prepared to help achieve that. It is always especially pleasing to see younger vergers stepping up into roles of national responsibility. Please do pray for the guild and for those who are seeking to determine a way forward.

Once again, to all who organised the conference this year a huge thank you from me and from all the members. My thanks especially to Denise for all her work in administering the conference. She does a wonderful job. Thank you also to John, Stephen, and Robert for all their hard work as they lead us. Thank you also for your kindness towards me as I seek to serve the Guild as its National Chaplain. This was not the easiest conference for me this year due to family issues, and I was deeply touched by the kindness shown to me and my family. I am deeply grateful. I hope you all get a chance to have a well-earned rest over the summer period and return to your branches, parishes, cathedrals, and chapels, refreshed and enthused. Please remember if you have a celebration or occasion at which you think my presence might be an asset (!) then please do contact me giving as much advance warning as possible. I will do my very best to make myself available. Until then every blessing to you all.

Yours in Christ
Venerable Dr David Jenkins
National Chaplain to the Guild of Vergers

From the desk of the Chairman



At this time each year, those who have attended our Annual Training Conference and Retreat and are back in our home churches and cathedrals. We are all buzzing from a fabulous few days together, saying that this year was the best yet. The weather was on our side, enabling new attendees to enjoy the wonderful surroundings of the Malvern Hills and the Worcestershire countryside. As to the content of the programme, well, this year surpassed all expectation. The Ministry of Music was the theme, but perhaps a different wording might have been appropriate. The first speaker was Sir John Rutter who kept us spellbound from the rising of his baton. For the duration of his talk, the room was in awe of this humble composer. At the end of his talk, John received a standing ovation, which was a first in Guild history. My anxiety levels increased because I was worried about the speakers who were planned for the rest of the week. Mercifully, my fears were allayed. Different in tone and delivery, each one educated and entertained us with aspects of their work and how music plays an integral part of their lives.

Apart from the talks this year, the business side of the Guild continues to flourish. I was delighted to award Fellowship of the Guild to Denise Mead. Denise has been a member of the Guild for well over 20 years and has been a stalwart member and officer of the London, Southwark and Chelmsford Branch, held two posts at national level and joining with Irene Money and the late Stephen Haude were often found representing the CEGV across the pond and attending the VGEC at their annual conferences all over the United States. The forging of links with many of the membership in the USA, has seen a steady attendance from some of their members attending our conference in

the UK. Due to Denise and Irene, those links have maintained the bond between the two Guilds and strengthened the ties that Fr Tom Cameron and John Campbell started many years ago. Life Memberships were also awarded to Sue Ansell, Stephen Holland and Oliver Harcus for their unstinting work to the Guild over many years.

Two members, Anne Marie Goddard and Martina Sadouska were awarded their certificates for passing the Foundation Unit. It was a delight that George Toone was awarded his Diploma with Distinction. It is always a joy to make these presentations to members who have embarked on a period of study. There are still some others who are currently in the system working their way to competition and I look forward to awarding them with the full Diploma in due course.



The slight shadow this year, was the absence of our dear friend and colleague James Armstrong, Head Verger at Carlisle Cathedral for 35 years and a member of the Guild for over 40 years. He was a good friend to many and always gave a cheery welcome to everyone he met each year at our conference and festivals. He was the only member who held the post of

National Chairman twice. His devotion to the Guild, who he regarded as his family, was truly remarkable.

As a son of a farmer, James grew up in Wooler, Northumberland and after school, worked as in Berwick on Tweed and then became a verger at his parish church in Wooler. Having been in the choir, his calling to work for the church grew stronger. His first full time job as a verger was at Hexham Abbey. After a few years there, he applied for the role of Head Verger at Carlisle Cathedral, succeeding John Campbell and at the time was the youngest Head Verger in the country. James moved into 2a The Abbey, which was his home within the Cathedral precincts. In his early years, James found time to link with NHS Cumbria to support young gay men. The group met at his flat as he felt strongly that a 'normal environment' would help those in the group to feel relaxed and supported. He maintained links with many of those who were part of the initial group over the 35 years and one or two were present at his funeral.

During his time at Carlisle, James worked for four Deans and two Bishops, and a good handful of residentiary Canons. He was delighted that one of the Canons he worked with, was The Venerable Canon David Jenkins, now our National Chaplain. When I mentioned Fr Davids possible appointment to James, his face lit up and said 'Hmmm, a good choice! When he was made a Fellow of the Guild, on a recommendation from his peers, he was humbled and overjoyed at the same time. James was always keen to maintain the highest of standards for vergers at all levels. There were some things he approved of and some he was very much against. His main aim in life was that vergers are there to serve, a theme that ran through the eulogy at his funeral.

All photos © John Kirby-Shearer

James' death came a huge blow to staff at the Cathedral and to his friends. Four months prior, he was his usual self. James enjoyed good health for nearly all his life and a doctor was not a person high in his life to ever visit. His diagnosis of Cancer knocked us all sideways. He did not wish a huge fuss to be made, saying he would only have a small funeral as he did not want folk to go to any expense on his behalf. A handful of friends and colleagues worked very hard in persuading him that the service would be held in the Cathedral. He gave in and started to work on the order of service. He wished to be brought into the Cathedral the night before, so he could lie beneath the stars during the night. (If you are not aware, the roof of the Cathedral is painted blue with gold stars). As you can imagine, it was done with great precision, taking care that those who were not church goers were looked after, and notes in the service paper to explaining what was happening. He also ensured that his family were looked after and that they were not stressed with the proceedings. In his final wishes were that a) there will not be a guard of honour by vergers as he leaves the building and b) no crowd of mourners standing around to wave him off the premises'. His coffin bearing the former Head Verger out of the Cathedral as a mark of his service to the institution.

As testament to James, the Cathedral was full of family, friends and colleagues, over 450 in total. Vergers travelled the length and breadth of the country to say farewell to a much respected and loved member of the Guild and the verger profession. Some businesses closed so that the staff could attend. Such was the love and respect they had for James. I am proud to have known him and play a part on ensuring that his send-off was a the very best that we could do in carrying out the wishes that he had prepared.



Fellows of the Guild, who robed and processed during the funeral service as per his instructions.

John Kirby Shearer

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From the Executive Committee and the AGM



We are delighted to announce that the AGM elected the following people into the vacant roles this year:

- Welfare Officer
Miss Dee Caulton Ball, for a period of 3 years.
- National Membership Officer Mr Andrew Wynn-Mackenzie, for a period of 3 years.
- Conference Secretary
Mrs Denise Mead, for a period of 3 years.

The AGM also confirmed the update of the Constitution, that moved the Local Administration section to be moved from the Constitution to the Statutes.

The Executive Committee also agreed to continue the work of the Way Ahead Group and has committed to committed itself to engage with the current diploma course. To enable this to be more easily accessible and remains relevant to Vergers who undertake it. This will involve a 24hr meeting to discuss this in a small working group.

The Executive also looked at updating the Statutes of the guild under section 4 (Election) to give the executive committee's involvement in the appointment greater clarity and to confirm that election of officers are made by the members.

With the 100-year anniversary soon upon us in 1932 it was agreed to form a separate committee to plan the Centenary Celebrations with John Campbell, Fellow, sometime National Chairman and General Secretary, to chair this committee.

Over the last number of years, we have been engaged in seeking to rectify our tax situation, where PAYE needs to be paid on honorariums and we need to pay corporation tax on our investments. It is hoped that we will have significant movement on this over the forthcoming year.

The following roles fall for re-election in 2026:

- National Treasurer (5-year term of office)
- Training Administrator (3-year term of office)
- Training Officer [still vacant] (3-year term of office).

Along with the following appointments:

- Legal Adviser to the Executive Committee (5-year term of appointment)
- Guild Chronicler [still vacant] (3-year term of appointment).

Following the death of our dear friend, James Armstrong, a recommendation was passed to form a memorial fund in his name to raise money for a memorial stone to be placed at Carlisle Cathedral. The idea was ultimately approved by James prior to his death as long as it was not brass as he didn't want another thing for the Vergers to have to clean. The COO of the Cathedral is on side, however permissions would need to be sort, if permission is not granted then the money raised would be used for something befitting James. The estimated cost of the stone, including fitting, is £3,120 which includes VAT.



Cantuar Festival Lite 2025

Following the very successful Cantuar Festivals in 2024 at Sheffield and St Georges Windsor. I feel it very disappointing that we haven't had any offers for a Spring venue for 2025 as yet. As MRR I was talking to the Lichfield team at Windsor, two longstanding members and two new vergers who are not yet admitted to the guild are very interested in the activities of the Guild and are hopping to attend Malvern in August.

Katherine Sargent has recently been appointed Head Verger and is also very keen that her team are actively involved in the Guilds events, and recently visited Leicester Cathedral for a day out it was at this occasion I mentioned about the Festival lite held twice a year and that this year we were struggling to get venues. Katherine then came back to me offering Lichfield as a venue but said they needed help in organising it and as I have already organised a festival at Leicester a few years back I offered to organise it with her.

Outcome

Cantuar Festival Lite 2025

Thursday 2nd October 2025

At Lichfield Cathedral Staffordshire

As advertised in The Verger issue 326
Spring 2025 Save the Date

Lichfield's history shines through its mediaeval Cathedral and the pilgrimage site of St Chad's shrine. It is the birthplace of Samuel Johnson creator of the pioneering English dictionary. The Cathedral close, its cobbled streets, Georgian architecture and a lively market, create Lichfield a Picturesque English Gem to explore.

Transport Access

Easy access from North and South Provinces

RAIL to Birmingham New Street to Trent Vally change for Lichfield City 15mins walk to Cathedral

ROAD Birmingham M6 Junction 14 A38 Lichfield.

PARKING at Long Stay Sandford Street SW13 6TU

Proposed Programme Timetable,

Arrival

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| 10—10.30 | The Old Stable Rooms (our base for the day)
Refreshments available on arrival Tea Coffee and Biscuits . |
| 10.45 | Welcome from Cathedral Clergy and Head Verger. |
| 11.00 | Tour 1 Tour of Cathedral with Guide two groups
Tour 2 Tower and Roof with Guide. |
| 12.30 | Lunchtime Eucharist at the Shrine of St Chad, |
| 13.15 | Lunchtime Option of lunch in Old Stable Room @£12.00 or Find own in Town . |
| 14.00—15.00 | Free time to discover Lichfield. |
| 15.00 | Exhibition's in the Chapter House and Behind the Scenes Sacristy and Treasury. |
| 16.00 | Tea & Cakes, gathering around The Table of the Nation 13m Bog Oak Table |
| 17.00 | Guild Photo |
| 17.30 | Choral Evensong vergers not robed |
| 18.30 | End of an enjoyable day together. |

Lichfield have offered to host the cost of the day to include Drinks and Cakes along with Guided tours

The Cathedral Catering Co are willing to offer Lunch in the Old Stable Rooms at a cost of £12 per person for a hot Meal on the lines of a Tray bake pasta dish with suitable accompaniments with a Vegan/Vegetarian alternative . Awaiting Suggested menu

Alternatively there are a great range of places around to find own lunch in Town.

Accommodation

Near by Hotels

The Cathedral Lodge Hotel (no connection with the Cathedral) but have arranged a special Discounted room rate. It is close to the Cathedral but a 15 min walk to the Town Centre.

The George (Best Western) in town centre a 15 min walk to Cathedral

Premier Lodge Hotel is also 15mins to Cathedral

All Hotels have Parking.

In a conversation with John we propose the following costs for the Day

Photo	£ 5.00
Meal	£ 12.00
Donation	£ 8.00

	£25.00

Please fill the enclosed slip and contact Les Mitchelmore

Les Mitchelmore
Midlands Regional Rep.

The Church, The Bell, and The 700th Birthday Party

In the sunny afternoon of Sunday 18th May, myself and a few friends headed not to the beach, or to the pub, but rather to St Dunstan's Church in Canterbury, Kent. You may think we were going to look around the church, or even to attend a service. The eagle eyed among you will have noticed that the 18th May is the day before the feast of St Dunstan. Instead, we headed for the belfry.

The afternoon of the 18th May was in fact the culmination of a weekend of celebrations for the church's patronal festival. This year was a special year for the church because the 'fifth' (the fifth bell to strike when the bells ring in rounds (highest to lowest musical notes)) turned 700.

The bell was cast in c.1325 by William de Belyetere (William the Bellhanger) not far from the church. The bell is the oldest bell still rung for change ringing in Kent, something the band is very proud of, and something I was told the very first night I ascended the tower to learn to ring.

If you've ever been up to a ringing chamber, you will usually find at least one, but often many more, 'Peal Boards' which detail peals that have been rung for special occasions. You can often trace the history of the tower, the local area, and the ringers who have rung in the tower. It was while reading these peal boards one practice night not long after I started, one of the ringers spotted me and said 'We'll ring one of those for the old girl in a couple of years time.' as he affectionately grabbed the Sally of the five.

The first time I rang the five, I was exceptionally nervous and somewhat irrationally concerned that I would break it. For those who have ever tried change ringing, and especially for those who haven't, it is exceptionally hard to 'break' a bell – about the worst that can happen is the ignominy or breaking the wooden 'stay'.

For those who don't know, the whole point of change ringing is not as one might suppose, musical harmony, but rather mathematical perfection. The aim is to ring all of the possible permutations (changes) only once, without repeating any. On five bells, this is 120 changes which takes about five minutes, on six bells this increases to 720 changes, which takes about half an hour, on seven bells this increases again to 5040 changes which takes somewhere in the region of three hours, on eight bells, the number is 40,320 which takes around 24 hours. Believe it or not, this has been done twice on tower bells, the last time was in 1967 at Loughborough bell foundry. If one were to ring the total number of changes on twelve bells, it would take over thirty years!

The rules of a peal are simple:

1. You must start and finish in 'rounds'.
2. On peals of seven bells or less, you must ring 5040 changes (on five bells this must be 42 extents of 120 changes, and on six bells this must be seven extents of 720 changes, and on seven bells it must be the full extent of 5040). Anything over eight bells, the total must be over 5000 changes.
3. Each bell must be rung by the same person (or persons if a bell is too heavy to be rung by only one ringer) for the duration of the peal, and no person who is not ringing in the peal may offer any assistance.
4. Each change must be rung only once (on peals of less than seven bells, only once in each extent)
5. The ringing must proceed without interval.

In other words, it is the ringing equivalent of a marathon! This was not my first peal, and as such I was fully prepared to stand in one position for three hours straight, ringing a bell that weighs more than three times what I do. However, there is a certain amount of trepidation going into a peal. It can 'fire out' at any moment if a ringer strays from their 'blue line'.

It is often said by bellringers that going to 'sleep' in a peal is perfectly fine, so long as you don't wake up!

We duly began the peal at 13:25, a symbolic gesture to the year the bell was cast, and the peal passed without any major incident. Once completed, it marked a milestone for the ringer of the tenor bell – he had now rung a peal in every ringable tower in Kent! There are over 240 ringable towers in Kent, so this was no mean feat. For myself, it was only my second peal, and I have since decided that I shall only ever ring them for really special occasions!

Below is a picture of the band, and a screenshot of the entry on 'Bellboard' the online repository for ringing.



The band anti clockwise from front left. (Image: Dickon Love)

Kent County Association
Canterbury, Kent
 St Dunstan
 Sunday, 18 May 2025 in 2h 55 (13–2–15 in Fe)
5040 Plain Bob Minor
 Composed by Seven Different Extents
 1. Cathryn M Hills
 2. Dickon R Love
 3. Charles J Maggs
 4. Jake P Reid
 5. Andrew M Hills (C)
 6. John B Keeler
 Rung as the conclusion of a weekend festival to commemorate the 700th anniversary of the casting of the 'Great Bell' (present fifth) in the Parish by William le Belyetere.
 First inside - 3.
 First of Minor - 4.
 Completes Kent rings of five or more to peals - 6.

Charles Maggs,
Overseas Membership Officer

Photos from Conference 2025





Rev Canon Graham Lyall

24th July 1937 – 14th February 2025

Branch Chaplain – Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester Branch 1983 – 2017.



On Friday 4th April 2025 in a most fitting and beautiful Requiem Mass, family, colleagues and friends said goodbye to the Rev Canon Graham Lyall, affectionally known to all as Father Graham, at St. Stephen's Church, Barbourne, Worcester, where he had once been priest-in-charge and vicar. With characteristic attention to detail Father Graham had planned the entire service himself. The Venerable Robert Jones, former Archdeacon of Worcester, officiated assisted by the current Priest-in-Charge the Rev Lindsey Coulthard.

Several members of the Guild attended and following the Requiem Mass those who had robed formed a guard of honour as Father Graham left the church for his final journey.

Father Graham grew up during the Second World War and did National Service in the Royal Airforce before going on to study at St. David's College, Lampeter. It was there that he was drawn to ordination studying at Queen's College, Birmingham before being priested in 1964.

Following two appointments as curate, in 1972 he moved to Dudley, in the Black County, to serve as vicar of St. Augustine's, Holly Hall. He was appointed priest-in-charge at St. Stephen's, Barbourne, Worcester in 1979 and subsequently served as vicar from 1981 to 1993. From 1981 to 1993 he also served as Rural Dean (Worcester East). In 1993 he was appointed team rector at St. Mathias with Cowleigh - Malvern Link where he served until his retirement in 2004. He was appointed an honorary canon of Worcester Cathedral in 1985 and was very proud of his seat in the Cathedral quire.

"Amongst his many interests Father Graham had a lifelong interest in the Royal Air Force (RAF) and at one time considered becoming an RAF Chaplain"

In 1983 he was appointed branch chaplain, for the then newly formed Worcester (subsequently Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester) branch of the Church of England Guild of Vergers, a post he was to hold for a remarkable 34 years until he retired from it in 2017 and was appointed an honorary branch life member.

Amongst his many interests Father Graham had a lifelong interest in the Royal Air Force (RAF) and at one time considered becoming an RAF Chaplain. For many years he was involved with the RAF Air Training Corp rising to the rank of Wing Commander being responsible

for the West Mercia Wing based at RAF Cosford.

He was a much loved branch chaplain and a hardworking, dedicated priest who served faithfully in the diocese for virtually all his ministry. He diligently cared both spiritually and pastorally for all those in his care. Although he retired from full-time ministry in 2004, it is true to say he never really retired. He continued to care for any who required his support and prayers within Worcester as well as offering his services to any Worcester City churches who were short of priests. He was still taking services up to the point that he went into hospital in February this year. Both he and his late wife Sue (a long serving branch secretary) were great supporters of the Guild and our branch in particular. Members of the branch, current and past, often say how much they appreciated his care for them and their families.

Although always a priest he was also a much loved husband, father, brother-in-law, grandfather, uncle and friend to many.

Rest well, O good and faithful servant.

David Anwyl-Hughes
Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester Branch



Oxford Branch (Management Team) – Spiritual Nourishment

Our Branch Treasurer, the Revd. Peter Viney, suggested recently that a visit to some of the churches in a local Deanery within our Diocese, be arranged, a sort of 'church crawl'. This eventually came to fruition on the 22nd July, when a convoy (of four vehicles!), set off from High Wycombe. Travelling westwards, we were soon into the countryside, driving down narrow lanes, passing through small hamlets and villages – all forming part of the Hambleden Deanery, consisting of seven churches.

During the day we visited four of these – the first being St. Mary the Virgin at Turville; the second, St. Bartholomew's at Fingest; the third, St. John the Evangelist at Frieth, and the last (in the afternoon), another St. Mary the Virgin at Hambleden. All these churches are many centuries old; each having their own story to tell and special characteristics, and some appearing in film/T.V. productions. At each we were greeted with warmth and hospitality (as time and resources permitted). Between churches three and four, we had our lunch break at St. Katharine's Retreat Centre, Parmoor, previously the convent for the Community of the Sisters of St. Katherine of Alexandria but now managed by the Sue Ryder Prayer Fellowship. (See N.B. below). Our thanks to Peter and his team for arranging the day and for maintaining a complex timetable; to our various hosts, for their enthusiasm and dedication, and for making us aware of the uncertainty of the future role these establishments have in an ever changing environment.

Back in May, the Branch held the first of its Quiet Days at Douai Abbey, Upper Woolhampton when we were led by Canon Maureen Palmer with the theme for the day being "Thrown in at the Deep End" – thought provoking as to how we pray. In the afternoon we celebrated Holy Communion in the separate Chapel led by our Branch Chaplain, the Revd. Marie Jackson.

N.B. The date and venue for the second of our Quiet Days has had to be changed and will now happen on Tuesday, 7th October 2025, at St. Katharine's Retreat House, the home of the Sue Ryder Prayer Fellowship, Parmoor. For full details please contact our Branch Secretary, Heather Ringrose at heatherringrose8@gmail.com

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.

Alan Gardner
York branch Treasurer

Marian Gardner
York branch Chaplain

Kevin Hara
Verger at Molescroft

Andrew Hancock Church
Warden at Molescroft

Rev'd Stephen Dunton
Chaplain to Blackpool, Chester and Manchester

For those who have died

Jim Folwell - Lincoln and Southwell

**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.**

They ring church bells down in Pershore...



All photos © Ben Elliott-Hill

*They ring church bells down in Pershore
And the bells they ring are Pershore's, I'm sure
And if they ring church bells down in Pershore
Then I'm sure they ring Pershore's bells!*

Every year at The Church of England Guild of Vergers Annual Training Conference and Retreat there is always the option for free time one afternoon. For the first time since I've been attending the Conference (2021 was my first) an option was given to visit somewhere in the local area. That suggestion was made by the Guild's Shop Manager, Geoff Izzard, to visit the church where he is Verger: Pershore Abbey (ironically I had thought of visiting Pershore Abbey before heading back to Sheffield, so this was a welcome offer. I had visited once before, albeit a number of years ago). The trip also included, for those willing and able, a trip up the tower.

After sampling the delights of the Pershore Abbey choir and organist at Choral Evensong on the Tuesday evening it was time for those of us who were going, the following day, to make our visit. On arrival we were greeted by Geoff in an aptly titled t-shirt saying "Fear the Verger" (perhaps we all need one??!!) and then we headed through the stand-alone gate (there probably was a churchyard wall at some point).

The Abbey Church of the Holy Cross Pershore (to give it its full title) was founded as a Benedictine monastery, initially in the Anglo-Saxon period but then it was re-founded by the Normans (there is still plenty of Norman work to be seen). It became a place of pilgrimage in the 12th century when some of the relics of the granddaughter of King Alfred, St. Eadburh (Edburga) of Winchester were acquired. The Abbey was dissolved in 1539 and during the demolition of the monastic buildings the townspeople decided to purchase the remaining part of the building (the central tower, transepts and the choir) as their parish church. This seemed unusual considering that, to the east of the Abbey, was the church of St. Andrew. However, that church belonged to the tenants of the Abbot of Westminster, and the townspeople wanted their own. In the present day the Abbey is still the parish church and St. Andrew's is now the parish hall having been made redundant and deconsecrated.

On entering the Abbey we were treated to a mini organ recital which was rather apt given how the theme of this year's Conference was "The Ministry of Music". Whilst listening to a bit of Elgar (also apt because the talk earlier that morning had been





by the chairman of the Elgar society) and Widor's Toccata we had a little walk around the building before being summoned to join our guide, Tony Jones. Firstly he showed us around the outside including the site of the chapel where the relics of St. Edburga had been kept, before we headed back inside to prepare for our trip up the tower for those of us who signed up. The trip up (roughly 200 steps in total) had three stopping places. The first of these was the roof space in the South Transept (after passing some graffiti on the way up saying "West Ham" – no accounting for taste!) that led to the triforium level, which looked down over the west end.



The next stop was the belfry where we saw the 8 bells, and the carillon (the latter not currently usable). The final stop was the tower roof from where we saw views over the site of where the rest of the monastery originally stood, and other views such as the Malvern Hills and over the town of Pershore. We were also told that we were standing on top of the oldest and, at one time, largest building in Pershore and then were pointed to what will be the newest building – a Lidl... to which a certain voice said that it would be a Lidl building in comparison! After walking around all four sides of the tower roof, avoiding a pigeon carcass, and a pottery one as well (pointed out by the same person who made the Lidl building comment...) we began our descent back to ground level.

All in all, I'm glad this trip was offered because I certainly saw more and had a better experience than I would have done had I gone under my own steam. Pershore Abbey may be a fragment of what it was but it still serves the purpose for what it was originally built: the worship of God. On a final note Tony, our guide, knowing from Geoff that I was going to write this article, wanted it to be known that he is Tony Wright-Jones: Head Verger! Well at least Geoff can tell him that I wrote it!

Ben Elliott-Hill
York Branch
Regional Representative - North



York on tour June to August



All photos © Su Graves

Harry F, Pauline H, James W and myself attended James Armstrong's funeral in June at Carlisle Cathedral.

The bells were tolling guiding us in. James was one of the good guys, kind, thoughtful and an outstanding Verger.

The cathedral was full. The robed choir sang hymns James had chosen. He chose a box coffin and it was printed to match the beautiful paintwork on the ceiling.

James prepared his own funeral and had definite views about what he wanted. Iain Howel from Leeds was asked to Verge James in and his erstwhile colleague John Arthur had also been asked. Sadly John had a family funeral and couldn't attend. Our National Chaplain the Rev'd David Jenkins gave the address, having known James for many years.

Most of the Guild fellows were in attendance. We met up with the retired

National Chaplain, Canon Maureen. She asked fondly after the York branch members.

Outside I caught up with Oliver from London. He told me how James had invited him to Carlisle for training and advice. They often met up at conference. It was a very moving service.

June. Vergers on tour in Hull.

We went to Hull in June and took part in the Minster's midweek communion. We were greeted by Dave, Verger emeritus and Julia, refreshments were provided and we got to know some of the congregation. Hull is quite an impressive place of worship. The Font was used to baptise William Wilberforce. The front and sides of the building are open plan and there is a well-run café which opens out into the square.

The main part of the church, where we took Communion is still original medieval. The Reverend Irene included us in the

service and in her homily told everyone how much she relied on the Vergers and reminded people that Vergers did all the hard work behind the scenes. She appreciated their work and hoped our incumbents felt the same way.

I was invited to join in with the intercessions to pray for Vergers. We remembered James and how sad people felt at his departure. We prayed for the Rev'd Marian and for Alan Gardner. We also prayed for all those who could not attend.

Ann Wilkinson was presented with her Guild Certificate by the Rev'd Irene who invited Jon Major the Head Verger to come forward for a photo for their church magazine.

Ann, alongside her Verger duties, is the Cathedral's representative for people with diversity and young people.



The church is affectionately known by locals as St Olive's

Sadly our Treasurer Alan was not able to attend. The Treasurer's report was read out before the service. The good news is we are no longer paying banking fees. Julia, on behalf of Hull Minster presented Rev Marian with a prayer scarf.

August

St Oswald's Flamborough had their Flower Festival.



July. A lovely day in York listening to the Minster bells strike midday.

Good fellowship at the Eagle & Child in High Petergate.

At our lunch meeting we discussed forming an online art exhibition.

We held our service in St Olave's and admitted our newest member Michael Dennison, from Bradford Cathedral. Michael is currently mending and replacing altar linens at the Cathedral. He has a keen interest in sewing and embroidery.

The service was led by the Reverend Kingsley.



St Olave's is our adopted church. Built in the Hamlet of Marygate just outside the City Walls. It backs into the Museum Gardens which houses the ruins of the Abbey.

St Oswald's is situated towards the South Landing. They have close ties with the Lifeboat and a special annual service is held there to give thanks for those lives saved and to remember the lives lost.

Pauline the Verger and Harry the Churchwarden welcomed visitors which included several of our Branch members.

Su Graves
Chairperson
CEGV - York branch

'The Many and the Few' they came from Near & Far



Members gather at Holy Trinity, church, Old Cleve, Lincolnshire, to meet (verger) Helen, (centre) for the first time.... Such is the commitment of the branch that one member travelled through 3 counties (and diocese's) to be with us. Her journey was not in vain, we were introduced to this Saxon (foundation) church dating back to c1050. We were also introduced to the 'old man of Cleve' and many other ancient and modern facts.

The church, founded by St Hugh of Lincoln, stands strong and bold, and despite its sloping walls, has a lively presence in the town.

With thanks to Helen for hospitality and enthusiasm.

From John G Campbell – Fellow and Member of the Lincoln and Southwell branch.

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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First time conference

A WIND is brushing down the clover,
It sweeps the tossing branches bare,
Blowing the poisoning kestrel over
The crumbling ramparts of the Caer.

*Extract from On Malvern Hill by James
Masefield*

Conference comes but once a year – and
when it comes, it brings a cheer.

Now then – hat off, hat on. As any vergers
knows, we're jacks of all trades: one
moment it's a cassock, the next a hard
hat, sometimes a flower arranger's apron,
and occasionally a referee's whistle. For
once, at conference, I could just wear the
"first-time attendee" hat – though I'm sure
someone would still have found me a job
if they'd looked hard enough.

This year was my very first Guild
conference. Having attended many other
professional gatherings over the years, I
can say that this one felt different from
the very start. At industry, other than
ours, conferences you are a competitor
to be outshone, a problem to be solved,
or simply a target for sales pitches. But
here, among fellow Vergers, there was
no such undercurrent. You are not in
competition, not regarded with suspicion,
and not cornered by people eager to sell
you something you don't need. Instead,
you are welcomed into a room of peers
who truly understand the rhythms,
challenges, and joys of your work.

It was refreshing to find myself in
conversations and put faces to names I
have only heard in the last year, where I
didn't have to explain the basics of what
I do – the language, the quirks, and the
unique pressures of our vocation were
already understood. Instead of guarded
networking, there was an open exchange
of ideas, encouragement, and the odd
shared grumble about candle wax or
storage space. Discussions ranged from
liturgical practice to tales of unexpected

mid-service mishaps; all wrapped in
good humour. And sometimes, those
conversations went on until well past
midnight – 1 a.m., in my case – because
when you finally meet people who "get
it," you don't want to stop talking.

The daily programme was thoughtfully
balanced between structured activities
and space for our own reflection. The
rhythm of services gave each day a
steady spiritual anchor, while the variety
of talks and group discussions kept
minds engaged. It was heartening to see
attendees from across the country and
even from overseas – a reminder that our
calling connects us far beyond our own
parish boundaries. My sincere thanks go
to Denise for orchestrating such a well-
planned, well-paced, and welcoming week.

This year's theme was **the ministry of
music** – a subject explored with insight,
humour, and personal conviction by
each of our speakers. Every talk was
unique: some shared how music had
shaped their own faith journeys; others
reflected on its role in the wider Church.
We heard perspectives stretching from
the grandeur of *St Paul's Cathedral* to the
familiar strains of *Songs of Praise*, and
from the legacy of great composers to
the living tradition of church choirs and
congregational singing. What united them
all was a deep passion for the way music
can lift hearts, deepen worship, and bring
people closer to God. It was a reminder
that music is not just an ornament to our
services, but a ministry in its own right –
one that transcends words and connects
us in fellowship.

That word *fellowship* stayed with
me throughout. In its later Middle
English form, it meant companionship,
comradeship, and partnership –
especially among those united by a
shared purpose. In a way, it is the
lifeblood of the Guild: the coming
together of individuals whose paths

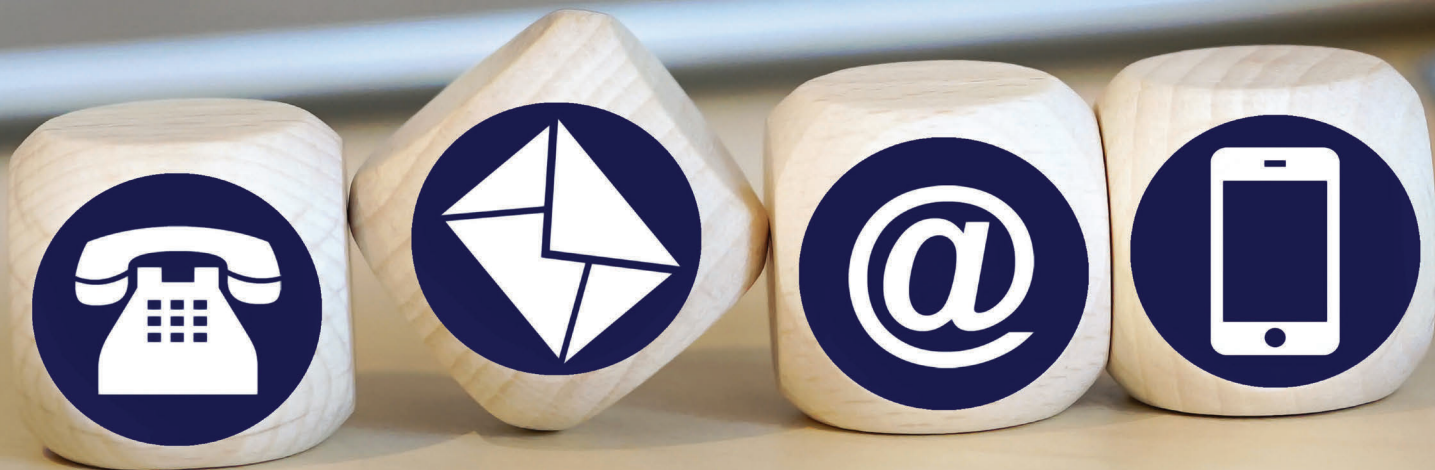
might otherwise never cross, yet who
share the same deep commitment to
service in the Church.

I am still a relatively new to my parish as
verger, work as a computer technician,
and hold responsibilities within the Guild.
At the Minster, while I was away, day-to-
day life was held together by our curate
– newly ordained just the month before
– and one churchwarden. Between
them, they navigated a range of issues,
some resolved before I returned, others
requiring more technical solutions.
Thankfully, nothing too major arose, but
it was a reminder of the intricate network
of people and skills that keep a parish
running.

What struck me most at conference
was the reassurance that, no matter
where we come from or what our local
circumstances are, there is a network
of colleagues ready to offer advice, lend
a listening ear, or share opportunities
for experience in new settings. It is a
comfort to know that, in a role that can
sometimes feel solitary, there are others
ready to stand alongside you – even if
only over a cup of tea at the end of a long
day or early morning.

If you have never attended a Guild of
Vergers conference, I can wholeheartedly
recommend adding it to your bucket list.
It is not only an enriching professional
experience but also a restorative
personal one. You will return not just with
notes from the talks, but with friendships,
encouragement, and perhaps a renewed
sense of purpose in the work to which we
are all called.

Jason Stevenson
Taunton Minster Verger



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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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