

The Parish of St George-in-the-East with St Paul



Newsletter for September and October 2014

Rectors come, Rectors go...

When a bishop pressed one of his clergy, in his 90s, to retire, he replied 'My Lord, when I was appointed to this parish forty years ago I was not given to understand that it was a temporary appointment'. In the past, many clergy overstayed their welcome and became ineffectual – though others, particularly in the East End, stayed because they had devoted their lives to the local community, and remained valuable fixed points in a world of change. Until a century or so ago, retirement was not an option for those without means, or somewhere to live: pensions were rare, since they were a charge on a successor's stipend! Nowadays, except for the dwindling number of clergy with 'freehold' (of which I happen to be one), retirement – currently between 65 and 68, and 70 for bishops – is compulsory, and church pensions are relatively generous, because they are seen as 'deferred stipend', and there are also provisions for buying a house in later life, which is not easy.

Our website chronicles the lives of over 300 clergy who have served in the churches that make up our present-day parish. Almost none were local men (Fr Joe Williamson being a notable exception): they came from all over the country (including the north-west!) to 'serve their time' among people who, even if they too were not originally local, tended to become lifelong Eastenders, staying in the area and embracing its ways. That pattern has changed: congregations as well as clergy come and go. Although our congregation remains about the same size as when I came seven years ago, well over half have the faces have changed.

In its early days, St George-in-the-East had some long incumbencies – the first three covered no less than 114 years - plus many very short curacies; but over the last century or so Rectors have tended to stay for anything between 5 and 15 years. A few found the stresses (particularly financial, and health-wise) too great; a few moved to 'higher things'; but most seem to have found fulfilment here.

So what of me? I fit into this pattern – an 'outsider' who has relished the challenge of the very different patterns of London life (both in the churches and in the make-up of their local communities), and now returning, by way of retirement, to my northern roots, to be closer to family. (I will continue with a couple of my national commitments for the time being.) Jan will become 'Team Vicar (house for duty)' in the Turton Moorlands Team – a part-time, unpaid post with house provided, and she too will continue for a time with some national consultancy work. Parish-wise, I'll keep in the background, as I'll no longer be her incumbent! Our address from the beginning of October will be *St Maxentius Rectory, Bolton Road, Bradshaw, Bolton BL2 3EU*. (It's actually, as Jan's job title indicates, a Vicarage – it only became a Rectory for a time when the previous Team Rector lived there. But as we know from trying to sort out addresses on the site here, it's hard to change entries in the postcode finder, so we can expect the same sort of postal confusion, especially since the 'Old Vicarage' is just down the lane, with the same postcode! Since I have only ever lived in rectories rather than vicarages, this will be a new experience for me.)

We have both enjoyed our time here, and there are things – and more importantly people – that we will miss greatly. It has been a delight to serve a wonderfully varied congregation, and we could not have wished for better support from our wardens and administrator. Of course, there are other things we won't miss....

My last Sunday will be 28 September, and it's very appropriate that the morning service will include two baptisms from the Ramanoop family. The wardens are arranging an evening farewell event, to which all are welcome, and they'll be sending out details soon.

Rectors come, Rectors go but the most important thing is that the life of the church continues; and that does not depend on having a resident priest, as some of you know from the previous vacancy, when everyone rose to the challenge and St George's flourished. Rest assured that it will not be anything like five years this time! Conversations with Bishop Adrian, Archdeacon Rachel and Andy our area dean have already begun, and a consultant experienced in working with churches has been appointed to help discern the way forward, with the intention of staffing the parish appropriately within twelve months.

The 10.15am Sunday service will continue, with visiting clergy (some of them regular, to provide some continuity), though the Tuesday 12.30pm Eucharist will be discontinued for the time being. All queries about parish matters will be dealt with by the office (Fiona Lawrence, our administrator, is normally there from 10am-2pm or later on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays) or by the wardens. They, together with the area dean, are what are technically termed the 'sequestrators' – i.e. they are responsible for financial and other parish affairs. They will work with the Parochial Church Council on the way ahead.

Other dates and events to note in September and October

The Rector is not the only cleric hereabouts who is retiring! **Pat Wright**, who lives on Royal Mint Street and has been a good friend to our parish, is leaving St Mary Cable Street for the south coast. She has 'retired' once already: this is the real thing! A nurse who was ordained deacon and, after various parish and hospital chaplaincy posts in our deanery, did pioneering work on HIV/AIDS in Swaziland (for which she was given an MBE – and, maybe dearer to her heart – was last year honoured guest and liturgical adviser at the consecration of Ellinah Wamukoya as Africa's first woman bishop, despite the conservatism of the tiny kingdom of Swaziland), Pat has carried the banner for the 'distinctive diaconate' in London – those ordained to a ministry of enabling service rather than to priesthood – and will be much missed. Her last service at St Mary's will be at their Patronal Festival on Monday 8 September at 7.30pm, to which all are invited.

Prebendary **Alan Wynne**, Rector of Poplar for 20 years and former Area Dean of Tower Hamlets, also much-loved, is also retiring this autumn.

Three Sundays in September have a special focus. **Holy Cross Day** on 14 (kept by Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Lutherans too) is linked to the tradition of the finding of fragments of the cross by Helena, mother of the emperor Constantine, on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist on 21 marks both the former-tax collecting disciple and the gospel writer (whether or not they were one and the same – which is unlikely!) And although **Michael and All Angels** falls on a Monday, the Rector will be invoking the protection of his namesake – not just a saint, nor a mere angel, but an archangel! - on his last Sunday the day before.

20 September sees **Ride+Stride**: an annual event inviting cyclists and walkers to visit churches, and sponsor their upkeep and restoration. Since our church is open daily anyway, we don't get significant numbers of extra visitors for this, but they will be welcome, and there will be organ music, and use of the loo, to greet them!

And then comes **Harvest**: the first Sunday of October, with an all-age festival service (and St Paul's School service the previous Friday) – as usual, we'll be asking for harvest gifts suitable for Whitechapel Mission.