Churchwardens

Before I start this blog properly I just want to give you an update on the fund raising that has been taking place so I can be made safe. I will be so glad when that big blue sheet is removed from my corner and I no longer look like I have one of those food safe plasters on me!

The Tower Appeal was able to successfully apply to the National Lottery Heritage fund for a grant, however to receive this grant we needed to raise a similar amount of money. We are almost at that target but there is still a way to go and there are many more events planned to help raise this final amount of money to reach our target.

 At the end of August there was bucket collection at the Film in the Park organised by the Parish council. Nearly £350 was collected on the evening. That is an amazing achievement so please let me pass on a big thank you to everyone who helped.

Upcoming events in September and October

On Saturday 14th September 2019 I and my sister churches at Wychbold and Upton Warren will be open to people taking part in Ride and Stride. This is a sponsored cycle ride or walk (or run or use public transport or any other practical method of transport) to visit different churches across the country. The event is organised by The National Churches Trust to raise money for churches all over the country.

They have a website and more details can be found at:-

<https://www.rideandstrideuk.org/>

From 13th September to 22nd September 2019 is Heritage Open Days, I will be hosting a display of wedding dresses through the ages and local World War Memorabilia. This event is free to enter so please do come along and have a look.

More information on this can be found at:-

https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/

Looking forward to October; if you are feeling flexible then why not come along to a Yoga afternoon on Saturday 5th October from 2.00 to 4.00 pm. This will be a relaxing afternoon of yoga suitable for everyone. There will be tea and cake at the end. There is no need to book but you will be invited to make a donation of at least £20 at the end of the session.

We also have a Barn Dance on Friday 18th October 2019 at the Stoke Prior Village Hall from 7.30 to 10.30 pm. Tickets are £10 including supper with tea and coffee.

If you would like to make a donation to the Stoke Prior Tower Appeal then a cheque can be sent to Gary Stokes, 15 Bredon Road, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, B61 7HD. Cheques are made payable to the Stoke Prior Tower Appeal.

With all this fundraising I want to tell you a little bit about churchwardens and the great job they do in looking after old building like me.

The role of churchwarden can be traced back to the 13 century and has always been a lay position. It is probably the oldest lay position in the church. Ideally there should be two churchwardens for each parish as the duties of the churchwarden are quite extensive. Churchwardens are elected each year; although in some places this has been extended to every two years.

In the past the two different churchwardens were elected in different ways. One of the churchwardens was known as The Peoples Warden and was elected by the congregation. The second warden was known as The Rectors Warden and was chosen by the Priest. Today this distinction no longer applies and both wardens have equal status.

Many people think of a churchwarden as the caretaker of the church and that is definitely a part of the role but there is so much more to this job than just caretaker. Different churches may have slightly different needs but the churchwarden is responsible for making sure the church is presentable. This includes having clean alter cloths and the correct colour of the cloth for the correct time of year. It is the churchwarden’s responsibility to order any supplies for the church such as candles and the wafers and wine for communion. In any walk of life you never seem too far away from bureaucracy and this applies to the role of churchwarden as well. The church has its own form of planning permission called faculty and this can be the responsibility of the churchwarden. This process seems to send a cold shiver down the spines of churchwardens but apparently there is now an easier system to get essential repairs done to the church with the permission of the archdeacon.

My current churchwarden is Mrs June Crofts; the previous churchwarden was Greta Hedges who was churchwarden for 26 years. Mrs Crofts told me the that when she was elected to be churchwarden the advice given to her was by Greta was to think of the job as having another house to look after. Just one that is bigger and a lot more expensive to run!

Trivia Alert

The poet T S Eliot was a churchwarden for 25 years at St Stephen’s church in South Kensington, London.

Churchwardens are also responsible for the church yard as well and in the case of Stoke Prior this also includes the bier house as well. There is a picture of the bier house below:-

A bier is the stand on which a coffin is put on and can also be a frame to help the pallbearers carry the a coffin either in to church or to the grave side.

The Lady Chapel and Edward Gittus

If you have a look in my small Lady Chapel also known as the Chapel of St Mary, there is a plaque to one of my former churchwardens Edward Gittus. This chapel was re-ordered in 1982 and is dedicated to the memory of Edward Gittus.

Charles Steer

Charles Steer was churchwarden at the time of Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee in 1897. He was also the first Chairman of the firm GKN. GKN was formed when the companies of Guest, Keen and Nettlefold amalgamated in to a single company. GKN is still going strong; it is now a multinational company and still has its headquarters in Redditch. The choir stalls were given in memory of Charles Steer by his wife after his death in 1906.

Just before you walk in to the church there is a cross on the right hand wall and if you look at the plaque on the side you will see that this used to be the cross that marked Charles Steer’s grave.

My thanks to the current churchwarden, Mrs June Crofts, for her help with some of the information for this blog. I hope you are feeling better soon.