

Churchwardens have vital role to play



Julia Hodgson

Caring for the church family

JULIA Hodgson knows her duties as the churchwarden at St Saviour's Church, Shanklin, includes pastoral care of both the clergy and congregation.

"Loyalty to your vicar is number one," she said. "We are very, very blessed with the most wonderful couple who both ensure our spiritual needs are met in everything they do."

The Rev John Davies is the priest at St Saviour's and both he and his wife Vanessa are one of a number of points of focus for Julia and her churchwarden colleague Steve Gollop.

"I think our vicar and his wife could be quite lonely from one point of view," said Julia.

The spirit of pastoral care towards John and his wife stretches to the rest of congregation and the parish too.

"Pastoral care is a really vital part of what we do," Julia said. "If someone is ill and we know about it, or they may have lost a partner, then we will do what we can to help them."

A Lancastrian by birth, Julia worked in

Yorkshire before retiring to the Isle of Wight 11 years ago.

She lives in the old vicarage – "It's like living over the shop" – and is often asked by tourists in the summer for a guided tour of the church.

She has recruited her husband Paul as her deputy churchwarden and she said it was important to have a hands-on deputy to ensure the role did not become onerous.

"It would certainly encourage more people to come forward as churchwardens if there was always that option of having someone who was hands-on who could step in if you needed to be away," she said.

The role isn't for everyone: "You have got to like people for a start," said Julia. "And you have got to be a good listener and understand the differences and quirkiness of human beings."

"But I really enjoy doing it because we are a flourishing church that is growing and getting bigger. You feel part of a family."

CHURCHWARDENS Margaret Evan-Hughes and Ann Lloyd can barely hide their pride as they survey their newly refurbished church.

They are the two churchwardens for St Mary's Church at Hayling Island where they can now sit back in the individual oak chairs and survey a magnificent place of worship.

As the churchwardens they have been closely involved in the process of getting an enormous amount of work done at the church in recent months – it was finished just before Christmas.

"It has been a long time coming," said Margaret. "We always wanted to have the ability to use the building in a greater variety of ways but in the past it was filled with pews."

Ann and Margaret are, as churchwardens fulfilling a role that dates back to the 13th century. Churchwardens are officers of the bishop and their loyalty is to him. At the same time, they are chosen by the people of the parish, so their responsibility is to the parish as a whole and not just to the church congregation.

Terms of office vary from one parish to the next, although it is a three-year term for St Mary's parish in Hayling. The role includes keeping the bishop and archdeacon informed about the life of the parish, welcoming visiting clergy, and exercising pastoral care of the clergy, especially the incumbent.

And they are required to maintain the fabric and content of the church, keep the inventory up to date, to ensure the smooth running of services and to ensure that the PCC meets its financial obligations.

The refurbishment of the church has been one of the biggest projects either of them has had to oversee as part of their role. And both admit they have relied heavily on their project manager Alan Hoad.

Duty of being the eyes and ears of the parish

TEAMWORK is the order of the day for Carol Allington and Paul Moseley as they look after the running of St Paul's Church at Sarisbury Green.

The church is celebrating 175 years this year so there is lots to do maintain the building and manage the administrative tasks and finances.

The churchwardens recognise each others' strengths by managing the tasks between them, with Paul mainly looking after the fabric of the building

and Carol the administrative functions.

They are appointed annually and can serve for up to six years. Paul, whose father is a former incumbent, is in his second spell as a warden while Carol has been in the role for three years.

"We provide a lot of pastoral care for the vicar," said Carol. "We are like his eyes and ears in the congregation and we make sure that we all know what is going on."

"The role is very much about serving the church

and its people and making sure that everything is running smoothly.

"It is about being a part of the church family – we are all part of that family and we all have our bits to do."

"We all work together for the church and the people and the community."

One of the big projects looming at St Paul's is some major work to the organ – the full extent of what is needed is being assessed now. As a listed building, that brings its own adminis-



Above: Churchwardens Margaret Evan-Hughes (right) and Ann Lloyd admire the refurbished church; above right: Margaret by the font; and right: married churchwardens Charles and Jane Sprinks at Langrish Church

An intimate chapel has been created at the front of the church and a new dais allows for services to be conducted in the middle of the aisle and its ornate decoration stripped back to its Saxon original, and there is a new pulpit and organ.

The former pulpit was removed from a pillar leaving that area as an untidy mess – but the stonemason decided to carve some intricate figures at its base to match the other pillars and have made that a feature of the church.

Underfloor heating adds to the appeal of the church, with its space-age

pipework and boilers tucked away in the former vestry but adding to the warm and welcoming air that St Mary's carries with it.

Bishop Christopher will be at St Mary's on March 27 for a service of thanksgiving for the refurbishment. He will preach, celebrate the Eucharist and bless the new parts of the church building.

Ann said: "We are just so lucky and it is absolutely thrilling to have the church opened up as much as it has been. We want to prove that it is a very welcoming place."

Margaret, who is also a lay minister,

has been associated with the church since she moved to the area in 1972.

She is currently coming to the end of her second term as a churchwarden, having previously carried out the role between the departure of Canon George Royle, the previous vicar, and the arrival of the current incumbent, the Rev Paul Ginever.

"The role has involved working with the vicar, pastoral care for the congregation and caring for the fabric of the church, although there is a fabric committee as well," she said.

"Being a churchwarden in the interregnum was an enormous challenge, and

trative tasks.

Carol said: "Even for something like that we have had to put a notice outside the front of the church for 28 days so anyone can object if they want to."

Paul added: "The role has changed in recent years with many more rules and regulations now but I really enjoy doing it. It is very fulfilling."

Paul Moseley and Carol Allington



this refurbishment too has been a tremendous test. Everyone has been very enthusiastic about the work that has been done but there was a lot of upheaval and we were, for quite some time, worshipping in the church hall across the road.

"The work is still ongoing too – we have not finished what we want to do yet and there is more to come hopefully."

But Margaret will always have a reminder of the church as it used to look when she looks out of her window at home.

The church sold off its Victorian pews when it started the refurbishment – and Margaret snapped up one of the £100 stalls and has it in her garden, protected from the elements.

Ann supported that position: "We are only half way through what we want to achieve here," she said. "This work has demonstrated a tremendous amount of community spirit and we are looking to build on that and look further into the future. There is an enormous sense of community here and in this church."

Both Margaret and Ann have faced tough times in their position as churchwardens but

they now have something they can reflect on, in the refurbishment project, as something with which they were involved and which has made a significant difference to worship in this part of Hayling Island.

Up the road at a church in Langrish, married couple Charles and Jane Sprinks have been dedicated churchwardens for a combined total of 23 years.

The retired pair remain committed to their roles at St John's Church by delegating jobs for each other to do – Charles looks after the external parts of the church, while Jane maintains the internal fabric.

Charles, 82, has been a warden for 12 years. One of his jobs is identifying gravestones. Fees raised from this help fund the church.

"Some people think it must be difficult and it is sometimes because we overlap," said Jane, 71, who has been a warden for 11 years. "The secret is we divide the jobs and therefore try not to tread on each other's toes."

She organises and prepares the church services by liaising with the vicar and the 15 people in the parish.

She added: "You feel as if you're doing something for the community. I like the contact with the people, as well as my own faith in the church of course."

Cathedral service will honour role of wardens

BISHOP Christopher has asked for a special service to be organised to honour the role of churchwardens.

Our cathedral will host the special Evensong at 6pm on Sunday 25 September, and churchwardens from across our diocese will be invited. It will include music from our Cathedral Choir.

The service will be preceded by tea and cakes and the chance to chat to the bishop and archdeacons.

Bishop Christopher said: "Churchwardens play a cru-

cial role in the Church of England and perhaps we don't say that as often as we should.

"This will honour their commitment and ministry, help to forge links between parishes and the cathedral, and reinforce their role as bishop's officers."

Churchwardens also get together with others from the same archdeaconry each spring, when they meet their local archdeacon to talk through any issues they face at archdeacon's visitations.

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