Heather Jasper

1941

My family’s association with St Margaret’s began at least as far back as 1931 when my parents, Kitty and Ernest married there on Boxing Day, though I don’t know how long they were involved before that.

My sister and brother-in-law were married there and so were my husband and I on August 4th 1962.

Our weddings, both weddings had to be in the afternoon as Mum was in the dairy bottling milk and Dad was out delivering which they had to do every day, all the year round.

I don’t think, apart from meeting with the Vicar to make arrangements, there were preparation classes for weddings as you might have now-a-days.

I was teased by my friends about the wedding as we had the Vicar, Howard Marks, to marry us, the Curate, John McDougall, to lead the prayers and the Reverend Donald Smith to give the talk.

Smithie had been curate a few years before at St Margaret’s and leader of the youth club which I belonged to. My friends thought it was probably an insurance on my part as if anything had happened to one of them, the other two could have taken over and Bernard wouldn’t have escaped!

Even funnier, though my father didn’t think so, was the Vicar looking Bernard straight in the eye and saying “Will you Heather Elizabeth take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife?” and Bernard said “yes”.

Dad asked the Vicar, while we were signing the register, why he hadn’t corrected himself but was told it wasn’t done! We waited until our Golden Wedding day to ask David if we were legally married. He assured us that we are, as Synod passes a law or a rule every year to cover incidents like that.

But to cap it all, at the wedding breakfast, in his Father of the Bride speech, Dad reminded everybody that August 4th was the anniversary of Britain entering the First World War! I don’t know what he was implying!

Q What is your earliest memory of being at St Margaret’s?

My own earliest memories are of Sunday School from about the age of three. Unlike nowadays, Sunday School was held in the afternoon at three o’clock in the Church Centre. The infants were led by Miss Agnes Wood, Sunday School Superintendent. I’m glad to say that by the time I was leader, the title ‘superintendent’ had been dropped. I wouldn’t have liked that at all.

The infants met upstairs in the small hall and I remember sitting on those little child-sized chairs which were arranged in a circle, and when we were nearly old enough to go up, the bigger boys and girls sat on the ordinary chairs – by going up, I mean going up to the juniors.

I don’t really remember much about the lessons apart from the fact that they were Bible stories which seem to have been in my memory for ever. But I can still sing a few of the choruses which we used to sing from week to week. Actually, there a few others in the congregation who can still remember some of them too. Two or three of us have been known to burst into song on the odd occasion!

The older children met downstairs in the big hall, the Garratt Memorial Hall. The lady in charge down there was Miss Gertrude White. I can picture her now wearing a very big hat which I suppose was quite the thing in those days. I can’t remember any of the other teachers except Miss Wood and Miss White.

Once a year, we had an outing – we went on a bus which was very exciting – not many people had cars in those days. We had games and a picnic as far as I can remember. I think some parents came as well but otherwise it would be the teachers organising the games. I believe the picnics might have been provided by the people we visited. They always seemed to be in places in the countryside – possibly they were at a former curate’s parish.

Another annual thing was the toy service in church. We were asked to bring a favourite toy which we no longer played with but was obviously still in good condition. I remember, one year taking a child-sized wooden kitchen dresser. All the toys, and usually there were a lot, were then given to children’s homes in time for Christmas.

We also had annual prize-givings which were held in December. I won a prize every year except the year I was in hospital for five weeks. I came across some of the books recently, packed away in our cellar. One said presented to Heather Caddick for Regular Attendance and Good Conduct December 1950. It was called ‘The Camp at Sea View Meadow’, it was about the girl guides. I was proud of those books and whoever chose them I think made good choices.

We had regular Sunday School services throughout the year but I remember there was one special one each year. The Vicar, Canon Batterby, would give a talk, from the pulpit and then the older children were asked to write their own version and to give it in for the Canon Williamson Memorial Prize. There is still a tablet on the west wall in memory of this Canon Williamson and I think he was Vicar from something like 1905 to 1922. And he must have left some money as a bequest for this prize. I won it in December 1953. But since, I can’t help wondering how many people entered that year – did anybody else bother?

Looking back, I feel sorry for the children who didn’t get prizes. In our family, we always went regularly to anything we belonged to but maybe other children weren’t able to do that. I’m glad to say, that practice had died out by the time I was involved as a grown up. It would have been a terrible choice to make sometimes.

I remember annoying Mrs Batterby once. There was a Bazaar or a Sale of Work in the Garratt Memorial Hall. Another Brownie and I were walking down the corridor chatting away not realising that the opening speeches had started. We walked in still chatting and Mrs Batterby was heard to tut loudly and say “Oh those Brownies!” Mum and Dad were there and told me about it afterwards. I don’t remember being embarrassed or anything, I just shut up!

I was a Brownie from about seven years old. The only other name I can remember of anybody else being in our Brownie pack is Margaret Osborne. We used to play together and I think she was Brown Owl’s niece. Margaret and I sang ‘Oh no John, no John, no’ on the stage at one of the annual garden parties. These parties were held at the Moat House or, I’m not sure, whether it might have been called Moat Farm, between Cemetery Lane and Tuddenham Road. It’s not there anymore and there are several houses on the same area now.

Another occasion years later when I was older, the Girl’s Friendly Society did a Maypole dance there and not long ago I came across a photograph of it. I think the Girls’ Friendly Society was originally founded to look after working class girls and to run hostels. But by the time I joined at St Margaret’s our group focused on crafts, country dancing, studying the Bible and we even entered a speaking competition. I think I had to give the vote of thanks at the end of our particular presentation.

I went on about three holidays with the GFS and the one that I remember mostly was at Leiston Abbey though I have got photographs of the others.

The lady who taught us craftwork there was a Mrs Millar who was the widow of Canon Millar who married Mum and Dad which I thought was a very small world! To this day, somewhere, I have a tatty grey rabbit made of felt. He didn’t really come up to standard but I loved him.

The thing that made most impression though was the Chapel. If my memory is correct it only had an earthen floor and was candlelit. We sang Compline there by candle light and I can still remember what we sang. ‘Before the ending of the day, Creator of the world we pray,’ etc.

That short service, which we had every night, made a deep impression on me.

Our group at St Margaret’s was led by Dorothy Taylor, someone who was important to me at the time and obviously was quite helpful in my formative years. Sadly, she died very young not long after she and her husband moved away from here.

On Coronation Day, we watched the Service at home, my sister, my grandfather and I, on a black and white television, very small. Trouble was, you couldn’t get the picture *and* the sound so we listened to the radio broadcast and watched the pictures. But of course the sound didn’t match up what we were seeing on the screen.

Mum and Dad weren’t at home because Dad had won tickets at the Civil Defence for seats on one of the stands. They had got to London overnight and were seated on the route back to the palace. I remember them being very impressed by the Queen of Tonga.

After the Coronation was over, there was a procession of floats through the town to Christchurch Park. I was on the St John’s Ambulance’s float, in the rain, very wet of course. When we got to the park I had to find our GFS group and change into suitable clothes as we were going to do a display of Scottish sword dancing. To my embarrassment, it was so slippery on the grass that I fell on my swords twice! Fortunately, they were only wooden but I was mortified!

I was never a Girl Guide but I did help with the cubs. My friend’s Mum was Akela at the time so she roped me in. Later when she left I became Akela. My poor husband and I spent our first anniversary at camp with the cubs. He has always supported me in whatever I was involved with.

When our eldest son was about 18 months old, he and Bernard came to camp with the cubs twice that year, I think. I can picture Ian now in his high chair while we were all having breakfast. I don’t know if it had an effect on him but he never joined any organisation as a child – we must have really put him off.

Our daughter though was a Brownie and Guide and our younger son was a Cub and a Scout. By then I was no longer involved myself but I was glad they were. Come to think of it my husband never ever wanted to camp again either! Not surprising really.

About two years ago, David, our Vicar, sat down beside me in church one day and said “Have you ever thought of being a Churchwarden?” I just said “Me?” It had never crossed my mind, mainly because when I was younger the then Churchwardens seemed so important – upright pillars of society. And probably younger than I am now, but they did seem old at the time.

The first ones I remember were a Mr Gould, a local businessman – I think he had a builders’ yard in Bolton Lane - and Mr Gladwyn, something equally important thought I can’t remember what. They each had marked pews labelled ‘Churchwarden’ and a warden’s staff on each one to make them visible to the congregation. But a lot of people had named pews in those days, but I’m glad to say that stopped many years ago. Mind you, most of us sit in much the same places each week just through choice and habit so nothing has changed really.

Phil Hall, the other Churchwarden and I, are on the Parochial Church Council and together with David we are responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the parish. I don’t suppose the responsibilities of Churchwardens has changed that much but I do think maybe we have far more volunteers doing a lot of background work than maybe there were years ago. I wouldn’t really have known that, being a child, but I do get the impression we have many more helpers nowadays.

We are there to be supportive to the Vicar and, I believe, to keep order and decency in the church!

The congregation doesn’t give us too much trouble in the main though one day I was returning the Beadle’s staff which is very ancient and I can’t remember why it was out, but I was returning it to the vestry and I said I would poke anyone who gave it any trouble. I don’t think they believed me. I didn’t try it!

St Margaret’s has always been a very important part of our family life. My sister and I were baptised there and so were our three children. They were baptised by the Reverend Christopher Gane when he was Vicar here. Our daughter’s two Australian children were baptised by David only a few years ago so that is three generations of the family.

There have been several changes to the church building over the years. I remember the organ being on the other side of the church where the Lady Chapel is now.

I love the Lady Chapel. When we have services there it has such an intimate feeling. It’s a much smaller area. You get a greater feeling of togetherness and closeness than when we sit dotted around the main body of the building.

Earlier this year, a chandelier in the Chapel, was dedicated in memory of my Father. He was Verger for several years after he retired from the milk business. A light’s very appropriate for him as he always had to have good lighting wherever he was and didn’t like subdued, soft lighting at all.

There is also an Aumbrey Light in memory of the late Gillian Sellgren there. She was very involved with church life, the Sunday School when she and I were working together and a group called Mini Mums, flower arranging and we did, at one time we were having children’s church services before the main service.

Years ago, we used to take Holy Communion at the far end of the church, at the east end, at the main altar there, but now we have a Nave Altar just by the clergy desks and a communion rail there. It seemed very remote at the east end. The Vicar or person presiding over the service would stand right at the end of the church, sideways on. But now the President faces the congregation and we all seem much more part of it, to me anyway. When you think about it, it is the Church family meeting for a meal and you should be close together as you would be with your family at home.

I have known five different Vicars in my life and many more Curates, and I could name several of those, too. Each one had something different to offer, different ways of doing things, but each had so much to give us. Our Associate Ministers and Lay Readers too are different again so we have quite a varied worship life at St Margaret’s. It is a privilege to be part of it.

end

*Highlights 3.53 mins*