

30 years as a Reader at St Paul's A personal story from Margaret Ives

On being appointed to a lectureship at Lancaster University in 1973 I first of all lived on campus and attended services at the Anglican Chaplaincy. Then, in 1975, I bought a house in Bowerham and my mother moved from Lincolnshire to live with me. Mother didn't feel at home among the students at the Chaplaincy, and we started coming to St.Paul's. We were warmly welcomed by the congregation and the Vicar, Revd. Canon Gordon Bellinger, and his wife Sheila.

At that time St. Paul's was known throughout the Diocese as "that church with six Readers" as well as a Vicar and curate.

Readers (with a capital R and later called Local Lay Ministers) were licensed lay ministers authorised to lead services of Morning and Evening Prayer and to preach sermons. The six Readers at St.Paul's were John Fidler, Peter Gedge, Tony Guenault, Stephen Jeffreys, George Pythian, and Lawrence Walker.

There were no women Readers, as women had only been admitted to the Office of Reader in 1969. Early in the 1980s, however, Canon Bellinger sought to remedy this and Margaret Wallis and myself began our training in 1985. Reader training consisted of four modules (Old Testament, New Testament, Church History and Church Doctrine) over a period of four years.

We had to write four essays per module, which were then submitted and marked by the Central Readers Council in London. Our first tutor was Peter Gedge, but we later went to Revd. Anthony Clegg, the Vicar of Morecambe Parish Church, who supervised our studies until our Licensing in 1989.

By this time, it had been decreed that Readers could now also administer the chalice at Holy Communion. I remember that Margaret Wallis and myself were very nervous about doing this, and Mr. Clegg organised several of his own parishioners to come into church one Saturday afternoon and kneel at the altar rail so that we could practise (with ordinary water.....) . Margaret Wallis died in 2003, by which time the Reader team at St.Paul's had been augmented by John Whitaker, who came to us from the Diocese of Manchester.

While continuing at St.Paul's, I served for a while at Christ Church, Over Wyresdale and as a Reader tutor when Reader training began to be carried out in conjunction with Carlisle diocese. This was sometimes at Whalley Abbey and sometimes at Rydal Hall. Grace Illidge completed her Reader training under this scheme, and it was while driving her to Rydal for a tutorial one evening that I inadvertently drove at 53 mph in a 40 mile stretch of road and subsequently got a letter from Penrith Constabulary.....

Grace was licensed (along with her guide dog Holly) in 2016 and we subsequently took Services of the Word at Hala and Evensong together until the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. We are both now Reader Emerita , but continue to worship at St.Paul's.