

Maureen Leach: a personal story of family connections with St Paul's

My memories and family connections of St Paul's go back a long way. Though not born in Lancaster I was christened here when 4 months old, over 70 years ago.



My great grandfather, Anthony Fearing was organist and church warden for many years. My mother Elsie Doggett (nee Slinger) remembers assisting with the bellows when he was playing.

Tony Wadeson, my mother's cousin also played the organ at St Paul's for a short while. Tony's mother Elsie Wadeson was a long-standing choir member - as was my brother Christopher Doggett for a short time.

My grandmother Jessie Slinger was married at St. Paul's in 1919. She was in the Mothers Union and ran lots of coffee mornings and 'white elephant stalls' for the church. I remember helping her with them on the vicarage lawn when Revd, Birney was vicar.

After Rev. Birney's death Mrs Birney moved to the bottom of Coulston Road across from what is *Mighty House* and I believe she was a chiropodist.

My mother, Elsie Dogget (nee Slinger) was christened at St. Paul's and attended Sunday School and Guides before becoming a Sunday school teacher before the war. Many years later she started the Morning Sunday School. I had to go along with my brothers plus a couple of other children and support her in church for the opening. We all fitted into one pew at the front. Over the years the Sunday School became so successful that at one point there was a waiting list to join.

In later years I occasionally helped her by taking a Sunday School class.

Some of the teachers I remember were Lawrence Walker and the Robinson sisters, Marjorie and Joyce. The big event was prize giving. Mother took this very seriously and our house was always full of books to give out, for months before. She only retired when she could no longer climb upstairs in the Parish Hall.

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Mother was also a keen member of the Mothers Union, the Church Missionary Society and ran many Jumble Sales. She became booking secretary for the Parish Hall when she was no longer very mobile, suffering from arthritis and unable to walk unaided. On the occasions when she was taken into hospital, I remember having all the paper work for the hall bookings scattered all over her hospital bed so that she could give me instructions to take over temporarily.

Sunday School played a large part in my early church life attending first the afternoon session run by Mr Whittle who was the superintendent and later the morning session as well.

I took part in the annual Sunday School concerts run by Betty and Tom Hodgson who also ran a youth club and concert party (SPARC) for the older teenagers and young adults. Youth club members were expected to attend church monthly and we always went on a Good Friday hike after attending the morning service and had an annual trip to Blackpool lights. It was here that I met my husband, Stuart. His father used to have the butcher's shop at the top of Wakefield Drive.

I was in the Brownies when Joan Hirst was Brown Owl and Catherine Smart was an assistant. When Joan was married, we made a guard of honour for her outside church. Our Guide captain was Mrs Smart and we used to often go across to the vicarage to learn how to make beds correctly with 'hospital corners' for our housekeeping badge. All the camping gear was kept in one of the vicarage outhouses and had to be loaded methodically onto a furniture van before setting off to camp.



Though confirmed at St Thomas's at Whitsuntide we had our weekly confirmation class at St Paul's taken by the Revd. Smart. I can still remember my dress made out of broderie anglaise and my grandmother gave me a prayer book.

I ran Discoverer's, a youth CMS group, with my friend the late Anne Crowther under the guidance of Tom Barnes, our first curate. He had lodgings with a lady on Roseberry Avenue. I later became joint secretary with Kathleen Rankin for CMS. We often held Jumble Sales to raise money for CMS.

There was always a big clearing up operation afterwards of the leftovers which was usually done by George Phythian and myself. Encouraged by Mr Phythian I went on to

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the PCC for my first stint when I was 18. That was in the days when we gave over £12,000 p.a. to various charities.

In January 1968 I was married at St Paul's. Donald Smart had died the previous October while on holiday in Ireland and the Rev. Green took the service.



My sons were both servers and enjoyed several very happy years in cubs and scouts. Meanwhile I became guide leader for the Wednesday Guides after the Revd. Gordon Bellinger asked me as I was leaving church after morning

service and ended up running the company for about 15 years. We were involved in lots of fund-raising events one of which involved placing coins round the church path to help with the Tower Fund.

I remember 'stewardship' starting to encourage church members in regular financial giving and the sharing of talents. Every few years a renewal event was held in the large hall at St Martin's. This involved all of or as many parishioners as possible sitting down to a very convivial meal after lots of inspiring talks by various members of the church hierarchy to give generously your time and/or talents to the church. The women at this event were allocated the job of being hostesses.

I later became one of the first female Stewardship Visitors. All this was in the time of Gordon Bellinger who was our vicar for over 20 years. Gordon and his wife Sheila always held an annual strawberry tea on the vicarage lawn. On the day he announced that he was retiring, he had difficulty getting the words out - as a tooth fell out! Valerie Fox was his office secretary and she used to arrive at the vicarage on her bike. The parish office in those days was in the vicarage.

While Andrew Clitheroe was vicar, we became linked St James Church at Lower Darwen. Andrew had met the vicar from there at a clergy conference. They had got talking and one thing led to another. About this time the vicarage at Over Wyresdale had become empty and we started to use it for joint retreats. This was much appreciated by the people from Lower Darwen. There were many enjoyable times

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spent there as well as trips to Lower Darwen where we were always made very welcome.

There have been so many curates over the years that it is difficult to remember them all clearly.

However, I can recall some of them. Janet Heil was with us when female clergy were first ordained. Her service took place at the Priory and then we had a big celebration in the Parish Hall. I remember first seeing Rosemary Priestley appear in the chancel and she looked so young and petite. Stephen Pye was always very popular. In one service, while tasting various foods and one of them was an extremely strong pepper and his eyes couldn't stop watering for the rest of his sermon.

Brian, who rode a large motor bike, helped us with Guides while in Lancaster. Lars Simpson who came as an Associate Priest and then became vicar introduced lots of different musical events to the parish and he was responsible for obtaining the piano. I was fortunate to go on an amazing trip to Iona he organised for the parishioners. Then of course there was Olaf who will never be forgotten. Food played a big part in his ministry and he made exceptional puddings especially for our safari meals when we went from house to house for a different course. Doris was a great help in the church gardens and developed a real interest in gardening. Sharon, I will remember, for her laughter and hugs.

I have plenty more memories but I think that is enough from me.

Maureen Leach