

INTERVIEW ONE

How long have you been a member of the congregation?

Since July 1964

How would you describe a typical service at the church?

Joyous, very friendly, interesting because the services – I go to the nine thirty in the morning, the family service - and it's always slightly different. So we read from our pieces of paper we're given so we know exactly what's happening and I like the way that the children are encouraged and looked after.

What significant events have taken place in the church while you've been a member of the congregation?

I think one of the two of the significant events, I would say, one was the starting of the parish weekend, when people signed up and paid a small sum of money to go to a retreat place, probably run by the nuns. There's a lovely one in Kent where we've been. And all the children play games and the families are there, and that was started in Canon John Oates's time but I can't tell you a date really on that one, but certainly we're talking about the 1970s.

And the other one is the Richmond May Fair which has a great impact on the church, people getting together and using their talents. As much money is made as possible and in the first years it all happened around the church and it was very church orientated, and now it's got larger and larger, and lots of stalls and organisations and charities have stalls on the Green and there's a fair and competitions, so it's huge now.

Do you take part in any other social activities associated with the church?

My husband died eighteen months ago and since then I haven't so much done so much within the community of the church. I've read the lessons, I've helped in any way I can – Christian Aid leaflets delivering and that sort of thing.

And have you held any other position within the Church?

Not in the church, no.

What do you value most about going to St Mary Magdalene?

Friendship. Being widowed, being enfolded into a group of people who are in similar circumstances, and seeing your friends. But I suppose most of all is a chance to pray, which I'm afraid I don't during the week unless there's some catastrophe in my family. And quiet, and just peace and worship.

And what do you like most about the building itself?

It's so well known to me, after all these years. I just find it friendly, happy, beautifully looked after, and I think the new work at the end when it's all done is going to be absolutely amazing.

And how do you think the building and the atmosphere itself has changed through the years?

I seem to remember in 1964, the old days, that it was – I was of course twenty-four then, much younger, and we, my husband and I and our three little children, we were a young married couple with children. Now I'm just older, much older, and I look at couples and that was us all those years ago.

So I think really as we've had different vicars over the years each one has put their mark in a very good way, we haven't had any mistakes. And it's a glorious place.

Do any services stick in your mind?

I think we've had several vicars in my time – I'm trying to remember how many I will in a minute – and I think the very special service is when they are, I'm not sure what it's called, it's called the, when they are licensed and they come and have their first service and of course everybody is very anxious to see who's going to look after them pastorally for the next few years. Those are special services.

Also, the christenings. The christenings are just lovely, and when parents and godparents are given the candle and we clap the baby as it comes down the aisle, and they're very special.

What is the church like at Christmas?

It brings in lots of people who you really you might meet in the street shopping, who you have never seen in church, and it's a completely different atmosphere, you feel that people are suddenly deciding, yes we must go to church it's Christmas day, and it's a huge service and its beautifully done and very very special with an enormous congregation, particularly at the Midnight Communion which is very special.

How much do you know about the history of the church beyond your time there?

I do feel that it's got history, tremendous history when you walk in there, you can see it all round with the monuments on the walls, and they're very ancient a lot of them and a lot of amazing people lived in Richmond who worshipped in that church and are buried here.

INTERVIEW 2

How long have you been a member of the congregation?

I became a member of the congregation after this concert which I gave as a benefit for the organ appeal in February of 2001, but I've lived in Richmond since '97.

And how would you describe a typical Service at the church?

Well the church has gone through many changes since I've been coming to it. We've had three successive vicars and of course I knew Julian Reindorp, was the one who invited me to join and who attended to me on the night that I performed and was very welcoming, wanting me to join the church. And then after that we had Robert Titley, whose wife Caroline accompanied me. We gave performances together at the church and at the church retreat. She played the piano for me. And now we've have Wilma for a couple of years, so its evolved.

What significant events have taken place at the church while you've been a member, including your own performances?

Ah, well, we've had a lot of musical events, there's been a concert series that was formed just in the last few years which is ongoing.

How many people take part in that?

I'm not really sure how it's done because it's really been organised by the music director who has recently changed as well. We had two or three performances of a Passion Play which I was involved in the first two. I sang solo of Amazing Grace [laughter] the first time around. And of course it changed according to who was directing it, but it was mainly Peter Cregeen who put that together so that was quite interesting to work with him, see how he staged something in open air.

Do you take part in any other social activities associated with the church?

Well I did go on one retreat. Near Hillsbury, there's a priory that the church goes to – it's not every year, it's every two or three years.

What do you value about going to St Mary Magdalene?

Well it's an historic building. It seems to attract a good level of people, the congregation is very congenial. Initially, I just came for special events like Christmas and then when I was invited to do this concert with Peter Gellhorn I became more directly involved.

You mentioned the building, what do you like about the building itself?

Well it's a historic parish church and of course that was the focus of this concert was the fact that Edmund Kean was a Shakespearean actor of the 1800s, early 1800s, up until his death in 1833, and he was performing in Richmond actually in the last two years of his life but he was an alcoholic so he eventually died from those causes and his son, also a Shakespearean actor, put a plaque in Richmond church here because that was really the only place that kind of really accepted him as a person – he'd had a very chequered career because of his drinking so he knew great success and then he was also dragged through a messy divorce [laughter]. So I put together a recital that honoured that period of the 1820s and 30s with Maria Malibran, who had appeared simultaneously to him at Drury Lane theatre. We called it the Muse of Song.

How much do you know about the wider history of the church – you mentioned Kean, is there anything else?

Well, I think there has been a lot of interest in what was done in the past. There have been tours going around the building and showing the different periods of the church, which happens generally for the period in the Spring time when there is the May Fair, which is also beautiful, a picturesque event, where there's a crowning of the May Queen in the church. It's very nice to watch.

What is the church like at Christmas?

Well, it's quite enchanting when they have the carol service which is by candlelight and what I also like a lot, this room where we're speaking here, is where St Marys hosts the Easter sunrise service. This is where people come for breakfast after the sunrise service. That is also quite beautiful. You go into the church in the dark and then it gradually becomes light. The sun, rather the fire is lit out in front of the church, so that's quite beautiful.

Do any services in particular stand out in your memory?

I guess Julian's farewell was quite a moving service.

And if there anything else you would like to share?

Well, I wanted to share, what I just showed you, the album of the twelve years that I worked with Peter Gellhorn and he lived in East Sheen and he first came to the area before I was born, but I certainly would not have known Richmond and I probably would not have sung a performance at this church if it hadn't been for coming out here from Convent Garden where I lived before, running into Ronald Bond who had been in one of his choirs. So it was really that connection, and I used - before I lived in Richmond - I used to come out once a year and hear his recital because he gave a recital in the Parkshot Centre every year. And I thought the area was just very beautiful. I've always felt very much at home here.

INTERVIEW 3

How long have you been a member of the congregation?

Just over 40 years.

How would you describe a typical service at the church?

Well I sing in the choir and I have done for the forty-two years since I joined in November 1976 so for me a normal service is about the rehearsal before it and then the ceremony of the service, if you like, with the whole – we have a vestry prayer to start with and we go out and process singing a hymn and then you know we're very much, the choir is very much, part of the whole liturgy as well, so singing the Gloria, anthems and hymns etc. But the congregation are really good, they get stuck into singing. So yes, that's what it kind of means to me, it's all about singing.

And what significant events have taken place at the church while you've been a member of the congregation?

Oh my goodness. Ok so, I've sung under five, no six, six different Directors of Music, all had different styles, some have been shorter than others but in terms of – also playing the organ and taking choir practice – when there's been gaps in Directors of Music I've covered so for me that's quite significant, covering, being in charge for probably two or three years in total.

Some significant people, I know that's not an event, but significant people. One was the Director of Music from 1980 to 1988, yes that's correct, and he was lovely. He was called Michael Stuckey. And he used to be the Head of Music at King's House Richmond and unfortunately he died in his sleep whilst he was in his mid-thirties but he did so much, not just for the church choir, so he really built a junior choir up, but also for the community. So it was a real shock when he died.

But there are also some really significant people in the choir. So there was – I didn't know this person because he died before I joined – but he was the Director of Music from 1914 to 1962, so that's quite a long time! And so he kind of was in post but his sons were in the choir, in particular a guy called Reg Johnson who was in the choir from 1924 to 2002 when he died. So he'd had quite a significant part of my life, and then Reg Frary and I don't have his dates so much but he was still working in his 90s, going up to town on the tube and he sadly passed away in the I would say 2010ish, 2008-2010 something like that. So they, it's not really significant events but significant people from the choir.

Significant events, there have been so many, I can't count. I remember the church being repainted in the late 70s. Have you been into the church? So the pillars are that pink, that happened in the 70s and it was like...interesting!

And there have been some fantastic services over the years with all the different vicars that I've known from John Oates through to Wilma now.

What's it like from a choir perspective for holidays, for Christmas or Easter?

It's quite tricky sometimes because people go away. So you don't necessarily have the resources in the choir that you have through the term. Nevertheless, people do make an effort and especially services like the carol service where the church is absolutely packed. Christingle services where there is absolutely no standing room and it's a bit chaotic but good fun. It's quite sad actually that services on Christmas day aren't as well attended as they used to be which is a bit of a shame. Christmas Midnight Mass is always well attended but the numbers aren't as great as they used to be. But the

choir always makes a real effort for the big services especially at Easter but it's not just that. We're doing a special Evensong for Advent Sunday, we're doing a special Evensong for Remembrance Day, so there are other things that go on but the big services are great.

Do you take part in any other social activities associated with the church?

Yes, I went to the quiz night on Saturday evening, the choir team won! [laughter]. Sorry going back to the choir again!

Under Julian Reindorp he had a system of having deputy church leaders. And I was one of those people, there were three or four normally, and we had meetings on Saturday mornings, so I've been a little bit involved in the leadership. So the deputy church leader wasn't a formal appointment but it was a, it's quite an honour. In the 1980s maybe, I was quite young when I did this so maybe the 80s, possibly the 90s, I was on the PCC for three years which was interesting because I was quite young when I did it and young people didn't really volunteer for that sort of thing so yes, I've been involved with things every now and again.

And what do you value most about going to St Mary Magdalene?

For me, a lot of it's about the singing. I used to be a bellringer as well but I don't do that anymore because it's too scary. So part of the singing is being part of a group that's making really good music, so I really appreciate the companionship, it's not quite the right word, but the friendship of a group of people trying to make great music. But through all of that I've made great friends also in the congregation, so yeah, it's about friendship for me.

And the building itself, how does that make you feel? What do you like about it?

Well it's just, there are a couple of things. It's an old building with a lot of traditions and I quite like my traditions. So I always feel quite proud when I'm walking up to think this is my church.

Inside, the church is really beautiful. Well it's not really at the moment as you'll probably know [laughter] but it's a beautiful building both outside and inside and it's an absolute pleasure in going every week.

What changes have you witnessed over the years?

Oh wow. In a lot of ways, musically, it hasn't changed at all. We're still singing the same hymns, the same anthems, the same music, but having said that I think the church has become more inclusive. We do sing a much wider range of music than we used to but you would kind of expect that. And so looking back, a lot of things are very much the same as they were back in the 1970s but in another way they're completely different but it's quite difficult to verbalise exactly what it is.

INTERVIEW 4

How long have you been a member of the congregation?

Difficult to say, it's probably about, probably about 30 years. Sorry, it's probably less than that, it's probably about 20 years.

How would you describe a typical service at the church?

A typical service at the church. Well, the shape of it hasn't really changed since we've been coming here and that has been under three different vicars. We tend to go to the nine-thirty, we sometimes go to Evensong but not very often. We like the fact that it's very much a family service and over the years we've got to know so many people there. So it's very much a shared family experience.

Do any services stand out in your memory?

Do any services stand out? I can remember a service a few years ago when, it was in the round, it was all about the world sharing things and it had been put together at that stage by one of the youth leaders. I can remember services that we've had, which weren't in fact on the Sundays, but which were to celebrate somebody after they'd died. The service of commemoration for Adam Ridley which was only a couple of years ago was fantastic and said something really about the church as a whole. The church was absolutely packed because everybody loved him and it was very important to everybody to be there.

What significant events have taken place at the church in recent years?

Well obviously when Wilma joined that was a very special occasion, not just because she was being inducted but a lot of people from her previous job had actually come, it's sort of a tradition that you back up your vicar, supporting them as they move on to another church. It was great, absolutely great. There was such enthusiasm for her that we knew that we were going to enjoy having her with us, although they were obviously really sad to have lost her.

The Passion Play, that happened first of all either four or five years ago. David Gardner, who was the Vicar up at St Matthias, was taking a service that Sunday down in St Mary Magdalene and I'd hardly met him before and he said to me have you ever done a Passion Play here in Richmond and I said not to my knowledge. He said we did do one where I was before I came here, perhaps you'd like to think about it.

So we thought about it a bit, I talked to Robert Titley who was the then vicar who said you need to talk to Christians in Richmond about this which is a sort of organisation that has members from all of the different denominations in Richmond. So we spoke to them and initially they said well we couldn't possibly do that it'd be too much of a big undertaking. But we invited David to come and talk to us further and there was then also a minister at the United Reformed Church and she was determined that it should happen so we all spoke to Robert again and he really got behind it in supporting it.

And we first of all held a meeting in St Mary Magdalene saying please come along if you're interested and I think ten people turned up. But we tried again, we were encouraged a little bit later to try again and we held the next meeting down at St Johns and that time eighty people turned up and we made a list of people who wanted to be in it, people who wanted to be working backstage, musicians, and singers. Gradually it grew and it was, we staged it down by the riverside out in the open air on Good Friday and we did it again the following year. And then we took a year off and then we did last year, no we did it this year, we did it the beginning of this year on Good Friday. But we're

not doing it next year, we take a year off every time, and we're see if we can do it again in 2020 or not. The activities are so busy in 2020 it may be that we have to leave it another year but we'll see.

Every year you do it, new people volunteer, other people have moved on so it really is whether you can get enough people involved. Robert got really involved as far as participating in it in the crowd, but he also came to every rehearsal and because we improvised it there was never a script. The scripts slowly locked off and Robert came down to most of the rehearsals, took notes of everything and recorded some of it, then finally put together a script because obviously since all of the main cast had to be on microphone so they were all moving around, the sound engineers needed to know who was going to speak next, they actually needed a script. We sometimes caught them out I'm afraid, but generally it was a very exciting occasion, the first time we did it we'd no idea how many people would come. It started at twelve and I think at half past eleven with the cast all there and the musicians all there, we had I think five different stages down in different sites, it was a promenade where people moved around, culminating in the crucifixion, so we were all round the initial stage, and then round about twenty-five to twelve there was a flood of people who came in and initially we didn't do it on that occasion after the first year, it started off in Heron Square and it was absolutely packed by five to twelve.

Just before it started we had all of the centurions walking out from St Johns through the town and then we had Jesus arriving on a donkey and all of the disciples walking up to arrive at twelve o'clock. That was the entrance into Jerusalem if you like. Well, when they arrived there were another two hundred to two hundred and fifty people behind them. It was quite amazing the sort of excitement that there was there, most of the audience had never seen anything quite like it before, certainly not in Richmond.

That year we reckon there was probably about two thousand people who came to it. The following year there were about two and a half thousand. The weather, particularly on the second year, was phenomenal, and it was great to see when the crucifixion happened - even though the audience had moved around, up until then you know some people arrived, other people were in a hurry and couldn't stay for all of it - absolute silence there, absolute stillness. Even on the second time the boats on the river stopped, extraordinary.

The third year though it rained and we still did it but I think there was marginally under a thousand that year. Quite understandably because it rained really from beginning to end. The cast got very wet.

I think that's probably been the most extraordinary event that I've been involved with.

Are there any other social activities associated with the church that you take part in?

Well for the last two years I've been on the church committee. It's a very non-denominational church really in some ways because neither my wife or I are officially members of the church of England, I'm actually a Catholic and my wife belongs to the United Reformed Church, but neither of us go to either of those churches now. We go here and subsequently people I've spoken to have said we don't mind at all if you receive communion, it's open to everybody. So that's fine. I did resist when Julian asked me would I like to give out communion, and it didn't seem to be to me quite right. But a lot of people know that I'm a Catholic but they might be such staunch members of the Church of England that they thought this isn't quite right so I don't do that although my wife does give out communion now and everybody seems perfectly happy with that. She also does laying on of hands on the eight-thirty on a Sunday quite often. We both read, we both do the prayers at times, and we

both do the welcoming. We like the welcoming when we get there but it does mean we have to get there earlier in the morning on a Sunday. So we're pretty deeply involved there.

What is it about St Mary Magdalene that you value most?

Well we sort of initially found it by accident. We lived in Ormond Road at the time which is the other end of the Vicarage and when we first moved here we had for a long time gone to Catholic churches. What actually happened was that we had moved my parents-in-law who lived over near Bromley, moved them over to Teddington because they had got much older and getting over to Bromley was not easy all the time and they were quite happy, they moved over to Teddington. And then my father-in-law about three months after they moved died. And their vicar over in Bromley was away on holiday and we contacted Julian Reindorp who was absolutely wonderful with my mother-in-law. And we got to know him, and my youngest daughter said I want to get married in that church, I like Julian and I like the church. So we gravitated towards going to St Mary Magdalene and initially it was Julian who was just a fantastic vicar there. He knew absolutely everybody when he gave out communion and he gave it to you by name. We got to know him pretty well. He was a neighbour as well as a vicar. And we just grew into belonging to that church and got to know lots and lots more people and it's just so warm and friendly there.

It's not nearly so easy now because we don't actually live in Ormond Road any longer. So we have to come in from Petersham now and initially I think some people thought they'd go to the church down in Petersham but as I'm sure you've realised from talking to other people a lot of people travel quite a long way just to come to this church because it's so special.

What do you like most about the building itself?

What do I like most about the building? Well it's going to be difficult to tell with it all changing. I'm very pro the idea of it, well I'm very pro the idea of it having under floor central heating because sometimes in the winter it can get very cold.

I don't share the view of everybody that it's such a pity that the pews have gone although one of my daughters is really cross that the pews are going and hates all the changes there.

But I like the idea that it's going to be far far more adaptable and it's hopefully going to be even more of a church in the centre of the town that it has been because so many other activities that can actually happen there. Charles has planned so many events for the 800th anniversary year that I think that's actually going to show the church in its full glory as far as flexibility is concerned.

What changes have you witnessed at the church over time?

Well obviously changes have happened with different vicars. Some of them to do with the service and some of them to do with, not so much geography as what you do during parts of the service. We did have one bit of the service where we all used to kneel and Robert said I don't want that to happen. Well he didn't quite put it like that he said shall we try this that we all stand for this central part of the service so it's as though we're not kneeling down praying but we're actually offering it up to God. Well, we tried it and it stayed all the time.

Wilma brings a caring warmth to it, that is a real joy, particularly to a lot of older people I think, particularly during the cold spell, you know she was talking very much about at the very beginning of the service, I hope you're all wrapped up warm and it is very important that you don't get cold you know and the older people if you feel you can't kneel don't worry about it. As far as the children were concerned you know, so and so is crying, don't worry too much about it, if you want to take

him or her out for a while please feel free to do sp. She has great great compassion and warmth for everybody which is great.

Is there anything else that you would like to share?

No, I think it's evident to people, the great warmth in the church.

INTERVIEW 5: (JOINT INTERVIEW)

Interviewee one:

How long have you been a member of the congregation?

I find it hard to remember precisely. I've lived in Richmond for about 40 years so probably about 35 years, something like that.

Do you take part in any social activities associated with the church?

Yes, some of them, I do, yes. I live quite a busy, involved life in the community generally and a family life, so I'm not always able to come to the church social events.

What sort of social events are there?

Well, you'll have to help me here.

Interviewee 2: Well sometimes at lunchtime after the service we have events that are social because they're connected with a special service we've just had. And occasionally we have a harvest supper type thing or last Saturday we had a quiz which was very well attended.

1: But actually after the service, patronal festivals and that sort of thing, we often have a lunch, and I've been involved very often in coordinating that lunch and that sort of thing. I'm involved in lots of rotas – the prayer rota, the reading, and involved in safeguarding and all sorts of other things that I get involved in. You're never short of a job to do in a church [laughter].

And have you held any other more formal positions in the church?

I have actually been on the Parish Council but I suppose the most formal, I'm on various committees, like the fabric committee for the renovations and I'm also responsible for safeguarding, which is a big issue, to make sure that we act responsibly if caring for all the young people in the church and also for any older vulnerable adults as well.

Interviewee 2:

For how long have you been a member of the congregation?

I've been a member of the congregation forty-one years tomorrow because I got married forty-one years ago tomorrow and that's when I started coming because prior to that I belonged to another church.

Do you take part in any social activities?

Yes, possibly a little more because on Saturday night I have nothing else to do [laughter].

Have you held any formal position in the church?

No because I'm very anti-committees [laughter], I don't like to join in anything like that but I do lots of things in the church. I've helped with the May Fair for many many years and still do the music in the church when schools come and visit and sing for us and so on. And at the moment I'm the rota queen, I write rotas galore for welcomers and other people that have to do duties. So I would say I'm quite involved.

1: Very involved. And actually neither of us have mentioned the pastoral care group we're involved with because we do like to think that we are very involved in the pastoral care group. It is a caring

church but we're always concerned that we're reaching out rather more than we do. And you've always been very involved in some of that reaching out haven't you.

You mentioned the May Fair, could you tell me a bit more about that?

2: Well the May Fair was started in 1971 I think it was by the then Vicar's wife. And it was just around the church and in the church in those days but then it was so successful it then went on to the Green, I don't know if you've ever been to it on the Green, but it's a massive event now and it's been going for all these years.

1: Also, well I'd just say, that it's the biggest fundraiser for charities in the borough as far as I'm aware. There are individual ones elsewhere, but this is the biggest fundraiser for charities.

2: So over those years we've had local schools making music all day in the church and then a poetry competition for many years and an art exhibition or competition with an exhibition up here in this room actually, and then around the Green are stalls and so all the members of the congregation run white elephants and home produce and so on and, so a lot of money is raised just by us in the church but each individual stall sends money to their chosen charity.

What was it like in the early days before it was on the Green?

2: Well it was obviously not as big because we have a smaller space here but stalls were built and you know people came down early in the morning and put them up and then various members of the congregation would decide what sort of stall they would have and it was really very successful. But sadly since it's gone onto the Green that's where everybody thinks the May Fair is and we have difficulty sometimes getting people coming up to this side.

1: But the May Fair is still crowned in the Church. 2: The May Queen. 1: I mean the May Queen. 2: Yes, The May Queen is crowned on the Green and then comes to the church at the end of the morning with her princesses as they're called.

1: But of course things have changed because I remember being on the white elephant here and we raised thousands of pounds but that was in the days when people bought things at white elephant stalls they don't do that anymore and the whole thing needs revamping probably now.

2: Well you ran a book store for many many years. 1: Absolutely, for years and years. 2: It's a huge amount of work, physically. 1: But it's fun. There is a good community spirit. You meet so many people. It's either really wet or lovely, you either get your first tan of the year or you get soaked through to the skin...you know, it's just one of those days isn't it.

2: Then we have a jazz group at lunchtime playing, children from the borough schools who have a jazz group with them. Wonderful Roger Perren, yes.

And what other significant events have taken place at the church while you both have been members of the congregation?

2: Well we're honing in mostly on the dates 1990 to 2002 [laughter] because my late husband, he became a teacher after he'd originally been an engineer and he was a very gifted man as most people will tell you.

1: He certainly was, yes.

2: In all sorts of areas really and one of them was drama and also art and design and so on, so it started in 1990 with a performance of Murder in the Cathedral, we had three nights and at that time

in our team church St John's, yes, they had a most wonderful choir which was directed by a lawyer actually who happened to also be a member of the group called the 16 which is still going today and is one the top choirs in the country. So he organised all the play's songs and all that, I remember we got a stretcher, and old fashioned stretcher from somewhere to carry Thomas Beckett out on. And then we had various other people taking part and then throughout the rest of this time up until 2002 he produced all these other things here.

So the Murder in the Cathedral they have four Knights and we had four very burley men as Knights and one of them has written to me to say that his vivid memory is of the complete contrast between the rather loud and stentorian voices of the four Knights and all the still much quieter and hushed tones of Thomas Beckett. And he says here, 'Quite brilliant casting by Arthur' in fact. And the lesson he learnt was rather like the Old Testament story of Elijah on the Mount, Mount Horeb, listening to the still small voice. It's not necessarily the loudest or most vociferous who win the day.

And then other people for the Murder in the Cathedral, a teacher actually in our community, what she says, 'walking into the church in a costume that made the language feel real and appropriate'. And then we had a very feisty elderly lady who must have been in her eighties by that time with a very deep voice and this person writing is comparing her deep voice with her daughter's voice and she was only about twelve then. And these are a group of women in the play called the Women of Canterbury, so Arthur wanted to have as many age groups as possible so it actually ranged from eighty down to twelve or probably more than that. And then I remember this person's son, he must have been about fourteen, he was a Messenger, I remember he running madly from the back of the church to give some message to one of the people up at the top there. So yes.

1: It was a good production but it was also fun and my daughter actually sent a recollection that 'Arthur brought each production to life but made the study [and there was lot of study] of words and meaning sometimes close to transformational for the readers and performers.' And he did, he extended, Arthur was one of those people who drew out from people things that they didn't know they had in them. And that was a very interesting experience to see people flowering.

2: Another person says it was the highlight of her life and she loved every minute of it, even all those rehearsals [laughter] and he, Arthur, taught us how to project our voices, divided the chorus up – it's a chorus of women so they are generally speaking in chorus obviously – but he wanted them to have a line or two each you see and one them is 'living and partly living' and she said that that's a much used quote still in her household. Living and partly living [laughter]. And then Thomas Beckett's memorable sermon which he preached on Christmas Day, this is a fact going back all those years, and the person playing Thomas delivered that in a very memorable way.

And then of course it involved a lot of other people with the props and the lighting and I remember one lady who was a very good knitter, Arthur made huge knitting needles, the diameter of which was absolutely enormous, and she knitted all the chain mail with these knitting needles [laughter]. So it was a huge success.

And I think also performing it in the church, I remember one of the priests at the time sitting next to me on the front row and loving all the colours that the lighting was making on the stones, so you know it was a wonderful setting rather than in a theatre.

1: Are you going to go on to the four quartets...

2: We must call them four quartets though.

1: What did I say?

2: Not the four.

1: Sorry [laughter]. Because again my daughter said this began a lifelong relationship with a poem that has provided a kind of spiritual sustenance ever since. 'St Marys became a stage, a workshop and a place for the community to share in something special, moving and challenging, thought provoking and life-affirming, that left everyone a bit richer.' And I think, you know, she really did feel that it, so she was very young at the time, and it gave her an insight into Elliot that she hadn't before. But for most of us we had read Elliot before but it was very difficult and because Arthur himself was a very spiritual person but thought outside of the box the way he encouraged us to think about it and gave insight into it increased our understanding enormously and I think that for every one of us who took part phrases do come into our minds throughout the rest of our lives as a result. And you my dear have actually learnt it by heart [laughter].

2: Well I'm a pianist so I took part in that because Elliot was inspired by Beethoven piano sonatas, one particular one, or quartets, Beethoven quartets, in the writing of the poems. And so I played a movement from four different Beethoven sonatas in between each of the quartets. Having said that I was also in on the discussion of what the four quartets meant and it could have been in a foreign language at that time for me. I've never experienced anything like it, I didn't have a clue what it meant at all, and it was only after he died that I determined to learn some poetry by heart because he knew huge amounts of poetry and Shakespeare.

1: On his 90th birthday he stood up and recited poetry.

2: Yes, he was a lot older than me [laughter]. And so I set about eventually learning four quartets and I now know the whole thing off by heart and it's just part of me now and it's made - it has - and there's a quotation for every moment and I went with the church recently on a trip to Iona and we came to the back of the, the bay at the back of the ocean it's called looking out to the Atlantic with all the wonderful geology and all the stones and so on and I immediately had a quote. So it's meant a huge amount to me.

1: Because Elliot was an incredibly spiritual man so actually to explore faith through poetry and drama and music, and your contribution to all of these productions has been very significant too.

2: Well it has because we also after Murder in the Cathedral in 1995, that's five years on, he produced another of Elliot's plays, called the Family Reunion. That was not so easy because the main character who was the man cast as the main character found that he wasn't able to continue so we decided then to do a what do they call it a rehearsed reading so we'd have the script and so on. But his person again says 'I remembered little of the play' - this Family Reunion - until she'd re-read it just now after I'd written to her and 'one line I did remember from the opening scene, I played Amy and I had to say 'will the Spring never come again, I'm cold' and she said I quote this quite a lot to myself in February [laughter].

But thinking about the music as well, I was teaching at Teddington School at the time and I'd got four superbly gifted boys who were then about thirteen and they came to the school when they were about eleven, and I'd already worked with them quite a lot and so wrote the music for the play, incidental music for the play, which they then came and performed. So that was also very special.

1: I think quite a lot of people who came to listen to that were surprised that the church had bitten off such a difficult thing to do actually.

2: So the performance of four quartets, the first was in 1997 and then we did another one in 2002, and had slightly different readers I think then in that one and then in between that we did some

poetry readings because one person reminded me that the vicar of the time Julian Reindorp played in the Importance of Being Earnest we did a scene from that because this was in February 1992, an evening called 'From the Sublime to the Ridiculous', and it was music and drama from the nineteenth century. And then in 1998, 'Brickbacks and Bouquets' which was about Sitwell, so this person is saying Edith Sitwell wrote a piece called Façade, her poems with William Walton's music, and they're absolutely wonderful because the person doesn't sing them, they recite them. And they're very difficult to do. And this person remembers doing the Polka 'see me dance the Polka said Mr Wag like a bear, with my top hat and my whiskers that tra la la la trap the fair' [laughter].

1: Yes, I remember we tried to do some of these for Arthur's 90th. FW: Yes, we did, she says this here actually, yes. Lilly O'Grady, silly and shady, longing to be a lazy lady. And then the other one was a Tennyson and Hopkins evening, yes, which brought together different styles of admiration to the musicality of Tennyson's poem, this person wrote. And both are poets who should be spoken and heard and not only read and specially Hopkins I think. That's true of all poetry but the phrasing and the language needed to be heard. And she says as always we got much out of the preparation and the rehearsal. And this person was obviously in the Tennyson, Lady of Shallot, she remembers Arthur ensuring me that 'although I didn't really understand the meaning I could follow his instructions on how to say them' [laughter].

1: But I think it's important that it was so intergenerational. And that felt good.

2: It's interesting in a way that, I suppose another word for Arthur was galvaniser, you know and if you have a galvaniser it's wonderful what can be got from the congregation you know and you think now, would we ever do that, but of course it has been done a little bit with the Good Friday play hasn't it?

1: That's right the Passion Play. Actually that's not just St Marys but it's with all the churches in Richmond, but it's very important to have that. Actually what is good is that you tend to have a different group of people involved, I was thinking actually I'm not sure that anybody that was involved in these drama productions was involved in the Passion Play. So there's a constant stream of people coming through exploring and looking and finding different ways for that expression and seeking I think. And I think the church very often does draw together people who are looking for that kind of expression and it's a very, can be very vibrant can't it?

Because actually, the other thing that Arthur did every year again, and I don't know if anyone has spoken about this, is at Christmas, the children's production of doing the Nativity every year and that was, you were intimately involved in that, doing the music and everything. And of course for children that's quite magical actually. They still do it now.

2: But with him he had to turn it into a West End production [laughter]. It was a dramatic affair.

1: But the church decoration with everything, stars, and things that he had made as well.

2: That's right, all the Christmassy decorations were homemade. Geometrical model type things like dodecahedrons [laughter].v1: There was no end to his talents.

2: But in a way I was keen that this shouldn't be a sort of Arthur, you know, it's about what we've done.

1: No, but I think what we've done, a lot of other people were involved and it gave them an opportunity for expression, but on the other hand he did play a very significant role in the church and there is a place within the church for individuals who do guide and enhance people's lives.

The church has always been a place where you get old and young coming together and I think it's one of the, almost unique things, about belonging to a church which you seldom get if you belong to any other group or organisation, and I've always found that very enriching. I've actually been involved in marriage preparation class if a couple if getting married with the Team Ministry for a long time, I did it with two different vicars. And you get to know the young people and they come and they bring their children to be baptised and the older people go.

You know the research does show that if you come to church you're more likely to live longer as well? [laughter] There's a very close correlation between people coming to church and long lives, and it's something about living an active life, not feeling lonely and not feeling isolated. And we have incredible role models of people over ninety who are fully involved, acting as welcomers and that sort of thing as well as babies of six months or younger being baptised and it is definitely a family feel to it I think as a result.

You've spoken a lot about what you value about the church, what about the building itself, how does it make you feel and what do you like about it?

1: It does hold so many memories, and the fact that people have come for 800 years or more on this site to worship does mean that it has an atmosphere which is indefinable but it is there, it is palpable I think.

It's a bit of a hotchpotch of architecture and bits and pieces as far as I'm concerned but I've always felt it dresses well, so for special occasions when the flowers are there and everything. So it is an important place. Other churches don't feel, it's got so many associations I suppose it gets in the end. But people will come in, it is open every day, people are coming in when it's open to pray and so it does have a prayerfulness about it but it lends itself to other fun activities as we've been saying. And with the changes that we're doing now, hopefully this will become more so, so that much more music will be able to be performed, more drama will happen and other activities so that it can become more the centre of the community again because that's what churches always used to be and perhaps ceased to be over the years. A locked church is not a church.

2: I agree with all that. I mean although I always feel like it's in the centre of the town, in a way a lot of people don't know it. So that's one slight drawback for its position in a way, but then we have the big banner on the road don't we for people to see what's happening, and you know I just look forward to this new renovation a being a place for lots of people who don't usually come to services, not with the idea of asking them to come to services but just to come to lots of events that will be on there.

And what changes have you witnessed at the church over the years?

1: I think there have been a lot of changes, but if you lived through them perhaps it's difficult to really identify them. I think St Marys has always been quite a liberal place and Richmond itself is quite a liberal town, so it is inclusive.

Is there anything else you would like to share?

1: I think St Marys has been important to us, the friendships that we've made at St Marys have been essential. And it is a place where you can go on asking your questions as far as faith is concerned so it is a place of exploration.

INTERVIEW 6

For how long have you been a member of the congregation?

For 38 years

Please describe a typical service at the church.

For me I've always gone to Choral Evensong because when I was working I enjoyed the atmosphere and it's a fairly quiet service with time for contemplation and when I was working I felt it set me up for the week.

Perhaps I should explain the way I got involved in the church was that we moved to Richmond in 1974 when my daughter was six, she's Caroline, and at the Vineyard School her best friend was another Caroline, Caroline Frary, who like her parents was in the choir at St Marys. When they got to eleven they went different ways so they weren't at the same school and so Caroline got into the habit of going on a Sunday morning to meet Caroline Frary and she'd sit in the Vestry while Caroline was singing in the choir and then one day she came home and said that she wanted to join the choir. And I said well if you do that you mustn't mess them around you've got to go regularly and she did, she went three times every Sunday until she left for university. So anyway that started me going basically to initially to keep an eye on Caroline and I sat in a seat towards the front on the north side and I was still sitting there until they closed the nave this year and immediately I felt comfortable there and at home there, it was the sort of service that I'd been brought up to.

And so I've been going there for thirty-eight years. After I'd been four or five Sunday evenings in succession the churchwarden, one of the churchwardens, approached me and asked me if I'd be a sidesman, to carry out the sidesman duties and I've been doing that one a month ever since.

Have you held any other formal positions in the church?

Well yes I was fortunate in being able to take early retirement when British Railways was nationalised at the end of 1993 and we'd got a fairly new vicar a year or two before, Julian Reinhorp, and after I got retirement from my full time job for about five years I did consultancy work for some consultants on a diminishing scale and then when I gave up work completely full-time I told Julian that he could have a tenth of my time. And then fairly quickly I found myself on the Church Committee and the PCC - the Parochial Church Council - and then a deputy warden for two or three years, and then churchwarden for eight years.

And so I saw a fair amount at the time, the internal workings of the church, and understanding of what was involved, who did what and so on and the special terminology that you get in the Church of England.

Tell me about some of the big events that you've seen over the years.

Right, well one advantage of getting early retirement is that I also had time to get involved in the other things that go on outside the normal services. For example, the last twenty-four years I've been going to the Parish Weekends, which take place every other year in November, which are an away weekend from Friday afternoon to Sunday afternoon. And in more recent times that's been held at the Priory at Aylesford, in Kent. So you get away from everything and it attracts I should think some hundred people from the three churches and there is a theme to the weekend, somebody leads the weekend and there's a theme which is on something related to usually a theological or an ethical theme. But it's low key it's not high pressure stuff, there are talks on theological or ethical subjects and discussions and there's a communion service every morning or evening but there's also

time for relaxation and there's an evening entertainment on Saturday evening where members of the congregation get up and display their talents.

So I've been doing that and the advantage of things like that is that you get to know people in a way that you don't just by going to services. And in 1995 Valerie and I went to in a group, I should think there were about thirty of us, to the Holy Land which Julian led. And we made some very good friends during those, it must have been a couple of weeks I think.

And then that directly led to us being involved in the May Fair because we got to know Dot Harrison who for a number of years had run the white elephant stall outside the church in the churchyard. And Valerie volunteered to help her with that at the next May Fair which we duly did and Dot disappeared at lunch time, left us in charge of the stall and then she came back with a bunch of red roses for Valerie and said you're competent to take over from me, you can do it, so we that for about ten years. And we generally made four or five hundred pounds a year for different charities.

Of course it was the church, the vicar's wife who started off the Richmond May Fair, it originated around the church and then spread to the Green and when we first came to Richmond we were – and our children were small and involved in may pole dancing and all the activities that go on at these sort of occasions. So we were very much involved in that way as a family. Valerie used to always make appropriate fancy dresses for them. I think for one year they went as Queen Elizabeth and Mary Queen of Scots.

So yes, all the time we've been here that's been at feature of church life, as I say it was Mrs Oates who started it, probably about 1970 I think it hadn't been going long before we came.

So those are probably the things that stand out in my mind but there's been many series of lectures and other activities that have gone on here with sometimes national and sometimes local speakers on different, usually with a theme. And because we've travelled widely in the middle east and we lived for three and a half years in Pakistan, so I've been much involved in the past with inter-faith activities, in Richmond itself we're limited to the synagogue but we've also had quite a lot to do with the mosque at Kingston and still do. So that's where I focus my attention.

What do you value most about going to church?

Well I, yes, I think that my immediate response to that would be, I really look forward to and enjoy the sermons, characteristic right from the beginning is that we get intelligent, thought-provoking sermons that are relevant to life today and give you something to think about, rather than just them going over the bible stories which you can get in some churches.

But St Marys and St Matthias, the term that it applied to them is liberal catholic, in other words the thinking of people is liberal, and then St. Johns the Divine is Anglo-Catholic, so the style of worship is different which I'd not come across before. And the process of bringing the three churches together as a team, I think it changed the views of many people I think, like me. It was something new and interesting and stimulating. So when we came that more or less coincided with the vicar, our vicar, being asked to take over under his wing St. Johns because that was then struggling a bit, it was quite a small congregation. So the three churches, (St Mathias has always been a daughter church, it's never been a separate parish), the process of putting it together as a team, there are legal hurdles. The Queen has to sign the Order in Council or is it her secretary, anyway it comes down from the Queen and it took from about when we arrived in 1974 to 1995 to organise that, partly because initially there were some suspicions. By the time it got going I was churchwarden, there was a feeling amongst some of the congregation, particularly those that had been very committed to that church

and had been going for a long time, thought that it might end up with the closing down of that church. But as I say I was involved at the time and I know that that was never a serious proposition at all, it was never discussed in any meetings. But myself from St Marys and one of the churchwardens from St Johns, Martin Bracknall, we had to work quite hard to reconcile this, it took a little while. But it sorted itself out and yes I don't think are any problems at all now and I think everybody would recognise that we're all better off and have a wider view of things than if it hadn't taken place. That's been one of the changes that have occurred while I've been going to St Marys that has had a major impact on us all I think and a beneficial effect.

The other big change of course is women priests. I can't remember when, we got one almost immediately as soon it was permitted. And I'm sure we've all benefitted from that as well. I think people here recognised it was not only the right thing to do but it was necessary.

What do you value about the building itself?

Well I would say its acoustics because if the loudspeaker system goes you can read from the pulpit and make yourself heard right through the main body of the church which you can't in the other two churches, the Victorian churches. They built them too high and they reverberate and you can't get away without a loudspeaker system at the other two churches but you can at St Marys. It'll be interesting to see whether it's made a difference, the alterations have made a difference.

The other thing is, and this has changed quite remarkably, is how it looks inside when the sun is shining. And of course since we had the glass in the windows changed to plain glass instead of frosted glass that's even more so. When the church is fully open, if you go up into the ringing chamber where the bell ringers are, which is first floor level and look down you can get, if the sun is shining, a wonderful photograph of the inside of the church. When I was churchwarden when couples were getting married I used to tip off one of them to take their camera up there and take a photograph of the wedding from up there.

It's a manageable size, it's big enough but it's not too big.

What about special occasions, weddings, Christmas, Easter?

Our daughter Caroline was married there and the sort of clergy that we're able to attract know how to run these events, particularly funerals, I would say. Julian, because I got to know Julian pretty well working alongside him for all those years, and his pattern which his successors have taken up. He always tried to arrange it so that three people spoke. One knew the person at work, one was family/knew his family, and one knew what he did with his leisure time. And it's a good model.

Baptisms, what amazes me is how well behaved babies are at baptisms. They seem to know where they are and how they ought to behave, or perhaps it's just they like looking at candles. The atmosphere I think is something that they can appreciate and enjoy.

Churchwarden duties

When I was asked to become a churchwarden, my fellow churchwarden was Jenny Powell-Smith who had been appointed a year or two earlier, and our skills complemented each other because she looked after matters theological and ethical and pastoral and so on and I dealt with matters pertaining to the building and its contents. So my routine responsibilities were largely to do with heating and lighting and I learned quickly that if you don't provide a warm church you don't get congregations. And it hasn't been a very sophisticated system, it doesn't have much in the way of automatic features so you have to do a bit of prediction about what the weather's going to be like

because it takes two hours to warm up the church so you've got to predict how cold the weather's going to be and then adjust the starter time accordingly and you get used to it but it does mean that every time the season changes a bit you have to think about how this affects the temperature inside the church because there's no good turning up for a service thinking you can do something about it because as I say it takes so long. The way that the church is heated at the moment until the under floor heating is being put in is that the heat comes through radiators and goes straight up to the roof and it takes all that time to come down to floor level.

So the routine as I say was all to do with heating and lighting and programming the boiler, ordering the deliveries of heating oil, changing lightbulbs. Because in those days we had no verger, the last verger had retired not long after I started and the vicar had managed many years without one. And then I was also involved from time to time in arranging for maintenance and repairs to the church. We had a parish administrator, Theresa Cross, who did so much and she had some of the contacts. She knew an electrician that she'd been to school with she used to call upon when necessary and also Peter Bowyer whose still our architect and has been our architect for quite some time.

The problems which occurred were the roof leaking, boiler maintenance – we had to call out the boiler firm perhaps a couple of times a year – and blocked drains. So they were recurring problems.

But when we wanted to do something to the structure that went beyond maintenance and repairs it fell to me to apply to the Southwark Diocese for a faculty which is the CoE equivalent of civil planning permission, we do that, we don't have to go to the council for planning permission. And so examples of the faculties that I arranged were the removal of pews at the west end - the back end of the south aisle - to create a carpeted children's corner and then another one was conversion of the north porch into a kitchen and flower room.

And then outside the two things that come to mind, one is the collapse of the Croyley memorial, the big one. The council's lawyers didn't seem to know that they were responsible for maintaining the church yard and therefore it was their responsibility and I had to go to National Records Office to get a copy of Order in Council which proved this. But once they accepted that it was their responsibility they did a very good job. They got in a very good team to work on it and it ended up in them getting a commendation from the Richmond Society, for their annual awards ceremony. And a copy of that's pinned up in the Vestry. But it was a bit of a learning curve for me. First thing I had to do was go out and buy some of this yellow and black hazard tape.

And then the other thing was the rats...we had this invasion and they must have come up from the river and other people must have met the problem but they suddenly started appearing at dusk, particularly when it was a nice warm evening they'd come and perform outside and it got so that people were commenting on it frequently so they got in the ratcatcher and that was when he told me that he estimated there were two thousand rats and if we didn't do something after 4 months or after six months it would be six thousand. But anything he sorted it for us and I don't think we've had the problem since.

So those are the sort of things that I got involved in as churchwarden. Another thing that was important in the life of the church, though I should first explain the Parish Church Council is responsible for the church and the land but the churchwardens are personally responsible for the moveables within the building so it's a requirement in English law that the churchwardens have to do an annual inventory of you know obviously the silver things, candlesticks and crosses and the communion vessels and so on. But so anything that moved, we used to have to count the hymn books and so on.

And then that was done just in advance of the annual visitation of the archdeacon, in our case the archdeacon of Wandsworth, because he is responsible for the conduct of what does on in the churches in the archdeaconry. Another thing I learned is that archdeacons are in many ways more important to the Church of England than the Bishops, they are very practical people and if you've got a problem in a church, it's their job to sort it whereas the Bishops I think are much more ceremonial. So the archdeacon comes once a year and he inspects the church registers, marriages and so on, and initials them and initials the inventory and log book. I had to keep a log book which keeps a permanent record of the faculties that have been obtained and contracts that have been let to contractors for repairing or altering and then also the annual safety check of the lightning conductor of the electric system. So he kind of comes and makes sure that you're running those affairs properly.

But also he makes it an opportunity to raise with him any issues any concerns that you've got, so he was on one of these visitations shortly before Julian was due to leave, because their license these days is for seven years, and his seven years are coming up, and I asked him if there was any reason why we shouldn't ask him to stay on and I thought that there might be diocese policy that they wanted to move people around but anyway he was in favour of the idea so that's how Julian stayed until he retired, for fifteen years.

I think that the position of churchwardens goes back a long way and they appear in the statutes and so when you've been appointed and then annually you're invited to go to a special service where your churchwardens of the area or district go and then the archdeacon takes your oath to the Queen and that you will perform your statutory duties and so on. And I think this goes quite a way back in history and for me it's quite an interesting aspect of the job.

INTERVIEW 7 (JOINT INTERVIEW)

Interviewee 1:

How long have you been a member of the congregation?

We started going to church in 1960, no it's when my first daughter was born and we got involved with St Marys at the time we wanted to organise her christening and we've been going ever since.

Have you held any positions within the church?

Not very officially but I've done a lot of the treasurers work for quite a number of years and that was all in the days of cheques and money being paid in but now it's all done online and been taken away from me although I did enjoy doing that and I sorry to sort of lose that in a way.

Do you take part in any social activities associated with the church?

Anything that is going. We have a lunch here periodically at Jean's house. That's called the Jolly Actives [laughter]. I don't feel very active now. I used to do flowers and coffee and I'm afraid I've rather slowed down on that side.

Interviewee 2:

How long have you been a member of the congregation?

We arrived in Richmond in October '89 and sort of tried a few churches and I suppose I didn't really start going regularly to the church until probably '91-92 something like that. More or less when Julian Reindorp came.

And what made you decide on St. Marys?

Well it was conveniently near [laughter] because we just lived up the road. And, I don't know, it just has a nice feel and I liked it. We liked the look of the new Vicar.

Have you held any positions within the church?

Well I'm part of the sacristans team and have been since about '93-94, early on when we were in the church and I enjoy that very much.

What do you enjoy about it?

The group really, we're a little group, a little team, and we are a real team. We prepare everything for the Sunday service. We usually work in twos but other people come along because we have coffee afterwards and chat so it's very sociable. It's fun. And at Christmas and things like that when there's lots of work to do and candles to prepare and all that, then we have another little party when we've done all the work so it's quite fun.

Do you take part in any other social activities in the church?

Yeah, anything that's going really. I like when we go to quizzes and, I don't know, anything that's, sort of lunches and that kind of thing.

Do any particular activities over the years stand out in your memory?

I mean I remember very much when my husband became a churchwarden and when we had anything we always ran the bar which was always quite fun. I always enjoyed doing that.

How would both of you describe a typical service at the church?

2: Oh gosh.

1: It's a feeling of doing things together, isn't it? With singing, with hymns, and listening, and then the social getting together after the service is to me just as important a part of it. 2: Very important, yes it is.

2: And as I came from a non-conformist background because I grew up as a Methodist I find the ritual, if that's what you might call it, about right for me. It's not too High Church and it's not evangelical. It's just the right tone I find.

1: It's a comfortable service. 2: It is a comfortable service, yes. 1: You don't feel, well I don't really believe that. I try to believe I suppose would make more sense.

Do any services stand out in your memory?

2: Apart from the things like Christingle services which are always so well attended, the church gets absolutely packed for those, all the children. 1: And the carol services. 2: The carol service yes, that's a lovely one.

1: Well of course we've all been to funeral services, some of which are very important. We remember that.

2: And the one we've just had the memorial service is always good isn't it?

1: Oh the 11th November. Oh yes we had a very good service and a nice gathering the evening which was readings. 2: And music. 1: It was beautifully done. Lots of interesting readings.

What significant events have taken place at St Mary Magdalene?

1: Well we have the May Fair, we started the May Fair. That was Sylvia Oates who was the Vicar's wife, back in early 1960s because my small daughters were dressed in lovely Victorian dresses. That was quite a small event, it's mostly on the Green now but then it was very much in the church. And they still do that.

2: They have the May Queen don't they?

1: They have the May Queen, yes. She's crowned on the Green and then she goes to the church. And through the morning people from schools locally come in to sing and that's all organised by one of our members and that's beautifully done.

Have you had a stall?

1: Oh yes, lots [laughter]. I used to do home produce and help with the white elephant which was a very busy one but quite good fun. I'm sure I've done others. 2: I don't know I was just always a floating floater I suppose, which ever stall needed a hand. 1: Handicraft, one time we had.

2: You and I always collected the money in the church after the children's concerts. 1: We did, yes, yes, that's always quite satisfying to shake a tin at the back and see what people would like to give.

1: It's difficult to remember. It's just been a very important part of my whole life and it's not always easy to remember the specific parts.

2: Well I was thinking about people you remember and its connects with my joining the sacristans team because the person who recruited me sat just in front of me for weeks and we did nothing except smile and say good morning and then suddenly one morning after the service she turned around and said I want to speak to you and I thought goodness what have I done. And she said that I've decided that you'll be a good person to put on the sacristan team, meet me in the Vestry and I'll show you what we have to do and bring a pen and you can write down what the drill is. 1: And that was that. 2: But she was wonderful, they were a wonderful couple.

Have you both made good friends at the church over the years?

2: Oh I think so.

1: Yes, definitely. My best friend I remember seeing when we went into the church. I don't know it was just before Jane my eldest daughter was baptised we just went in to sort of sit down and get a feel for it and there was this lovely lady doing flowers and that was my friend Betty who sadly died last year and I thought oh! You know, what a lovely welcome. I think people are welcoming when you go there. And I always try to meet anybody afterwards and say hello and where do you come from, and then it turns out they've been coming for ages! [laughter].

2: It is a friendly church.

1: People do say there's a lovely atmosphere in there.

2: It's special isn't it?

What do you value most about going to church?

2: The people. Definitely for me.

1: Yes, I would say so too. The service is important, the structure of it. And I suppose we're all doing something together that we believe in and that's a nice feeling.

2: I don't know how you feel, it happened to you earlier, but when Barry my husband died I think the church was a wonderful I felt. I felt I couldn't have done without the people at church.

1: They are sort of deeper friends there somehow. You can talk to them.

2: But everybody seemed to know what to say, you know, knew how you felt.

1: Or else we've been there.

2: Exactly. It was great. Wonderful.

1: Basically, the feeling, the atmosphere I get in there, I can just go in quietly and sit down and get a feeling of peace.

2: It's a nice church and I just find the building, yes I just find it warm and a kind of friendly building, that sounds silly, but it does somehow have a feel somehow, don't you think?

1: I think so, yes. Well you know that a lot of things have gone on there for so long.

2: That's true, it's got history.

1: We've had some lovely vicars. And I think the bereavements that I've have gone through would have been much harder had I not had that support so that does form a very important part of life.

What changes have you witnessed over the years?

2: Windows. They were opaque glass for years weren't they...and I think it's made such a difference that we can see the light and see out.

1: And there was somebody who said me oh we don't want that we'll look out and see the buses, it'll be distracting [laughter]. And I always enjoy seeing the buses going by.

2: There are always people who don't want you to do something but I think generally people have been pleased.

1: I think so yes, somehow it feels like more of the outside world, you don't feel shut in.

2: That was partly it, wasn't it? The feeling was that we were going to be inviting people in, not sort of closed off in here and it's all secret you know you can't see in.

1: Well we're having a lot of work done there at the moment and it's going to be interesting to see how it is when it's all done but it's taken a long time. 2: Yes it would. Major isn't it really? 1: Very much so.

1: What I also love very much are the bells because both my daughters were bell ringers. My younger daughter is now bell ringing where she's living up in Northamptonshire. And I think we are going to have the bell's refurbished. I hope so.

Oh and we made hassocks, do you remember embroidering those kneelers? They're all rather put away at the moment but hopefully they will reappear.

What about changes to the sermons themselves?

1: It depends on the people giving them, I think, some people are easier to follow than others.

2: I think that one of the differences for me is that you can get them online so if you've particularly enjoyed once and would like to read it again or hear it again, you know, you can do that or if you haven't been paying attention [laughter] if you really wanted to you can go back and read it anyway.

1: You don't take it all in, you enjoy what you're hearing.

2: Well it's easy I'm afraid, I suppose we're not used to being read to in the same way. You know, sermons came about because people couldn't read and so somebody had to speak to them and talk to them. I think we're not used to it so much and I find my attention wandering quite easily. I start concentrating and then suddenly I find I'm thinking about something else. I quite like to get it online if I'm really wanting to know what they were saying.

1: We had a lovely service on Remembrance Sunday and a very good member of the congregation who spoke, gave the sermon. And I'd like to hear that again.

What about special services at Christmas or Easter?

2: Oh well they're always good.

1: The Christmas service was lovely. The midnight service was really really lovely. The church has always been packed. And we have lovely carol services.

Is there anything else that you would like to share?

1: Being a member there means a huge amount to me.

2: My husband, when he was a warden he was a bit naughty and bought huge bags of sweets.

1: Oh it was lovely, it was lovely.

2: He always gave them to all the ladies as well as the children and after he died I had people say I put on my winter coat and I found a sweet in the pocket that Barry had given me.

1: I think something like that is lovely. Remember him by it.

INTERVIEW 8 (JOINT INTERVIEW)

Interviewee 1:

How long have you been a member of the congregation?

Well I first came to Richmond and went occasionally to St Marys, probably way back in the early 60s, and then I've been probably going to St Marys pretty regularly from about the late 60s.

Have you held any position in the church?

At one time we had deputy church wardens and I got roped into that and then after we had a real character, a strong lady, you used to organise the flowers who was well into her 80s, and eventually decided it was getting to much for her. I got landed with it [laughter]. So I was the flower lady with a lovely team and then I managed to lose that for a little while but I seem to have got it back but the team works so well on their own that they don't really need much organising.

Do you take part in any social activities?

Yes, I join in with anything that's going on.

What sort of things?

Well, we've got a contact with one of the military bands and we have an annual concert which is always very well attended and is a happy event. Recently, in the last two years, we've had a quiz evening which one of the members of the parish's parents have organised which have been great and supper afterwards that's been very nice. So there are quite a few community things. We have a parish weekend probably about every other year usually and I've been on many of those and you do get to know people even better than when you just sort of say hello on a Sunday morning.

Where is the weekend?

It's been at Aylesford which is a convent down on the way to Canterbury, the Pilgrim's route. The first one I went on, I can't remember where it was actually, but it was quite a chilly weekend and the central heating wasn't working and I thought oh dear is this part of the parish weekend that you have to suffer this cold weather [laughter]. Anyway, it was still nice warm spirit.

Interviewee 2:

How long have you been a member of the congregation?

About 87-88 something like that.

Have you held any positions in the church?

No, I haven't, my husband did. He was PCC secretary for seven or eight years and it certainly kept him very busy. In those days I think there were about forty-two people he had to notify every time there was a PCC meeting but as that was his world when he was working he was pretty good at it. At least the vicar of the day thought he was.

As far as I'm concerned, I always joke, I have a certain facility with my hands and I always joke that I don't think anybody else at the church knows how to thread a needle which perhaps covers, well, it covers aprons for the caterers, it covers piano cover when the commercial one was stolen, it covers extra pockets in the vicar's cassock and oh I could go on and on. Oh and altar frontals which really is

quite interesting. I was asked if I would take part in that and as after retirement I had gone to college to do the first part of design, my tutor of the day was very willing to have the commission and is responsible for designing and making two of the altar frontals at the church.

No for years, we have these children groups and the at St Marys was called the ABC group on a Wednesday morning, so for years I went along the ABC group which was wonderful, the children. And there's quite a lot, one felt one could be useful with the young mothers. My background, career wise, my experience came in useful.

In the last two or three years, there was a hope that we could do more with pastoral care, particularly for older people or people who are living alone or had ill health, and it was proposed that we should have a lunch. And as I have a house which adapts quite well, every two months we have a lunch which is called the Jolly Actives, thinking about it I thought we are all a group of geriatrics but thought we can't call ourselves that so we're the Jolly Actives. So obviously I up-end the place a bit every two months but I don't do the cooking.

Do you take part in any other social activities associated with the church?

Oh lord all of them, yes. As has been mentioned, the military band, the quizzes, the members, now we have such a lively musical talent, excellent Director of Music, every month we have one of the scholars – be it Organ, Vocal – who give us a little concert. And so I've been to all but one of those which are very good to see the young people gathering experience and gathering strength. So yes if there's anything going I support it.

How would you both describe a typical service at the church?

2: Oh that's interesting. I would have said the phrase uplifting. Warm.

1: Well attended. 2: Well attended.

2: A family, a true sense of family. I can only say, I had a husband with dementia for ten years and without that church family I think that says it all.

Do any particular services stand out in your memory?

1: Well we both go to the family service, the nine-thirty service don't we in the morning. Partly dictated by the time factor, as opposed to getting up even earlier and going to the eight o'clock [laughter].

Then there's a small loyal group that enjoy the eleven-thirty, which now only once a month is sung. And similarly the Evensong, again for its music. The nine-thirty is the best attended, but there's a small loyal group that go to the other three services. And then in addition there's also a service on a Wednesday morning which again is a loyal small group.

2: I think, also you say services that have stood out in the mind, well maybe it's worth mentioning because it's a family service we had a christening and the wonderful sight of the little two-year-old sister being lifted by the rector to make sure that the water in the font was warm enough for her little brother to be christened will always stay with as a memory because I think that's what a real family service is all about.

But I think the other service that will always stay in my mind is the one that we had only recently which is Richmond Remembers. It was mostly hymns and some prayers and some very telling readings of differing quotes from people who'd been in the First World War. And one that I think came over incredibly heart rendering was a nurse who behind the lines in the First World War had been nursing German soldiers who'd been injured. It's something not to be forgotten.

Do any significant events stand out in your memory?

2: Well the May Fair. I mean the May Fair was started by a vicar's wife all those years, was it twenty-five years ago?

1: More.

2: It was started by the vicar's wife around the church and then it grew and I think very few people who are now coming to the May Fair realise, albeit until all the building work went on, we still had stalls around the church. I think very few people realised, they sort of felt the May Fair's on the Green and there's a little bit up round the church but it really and truly was the other way. That really has been quite something hasn't it? The tremendous amount of support and some very good stalls. People getting up at the crack of dawn to go off to the flower market so they could have a plant stall and the cooks came out and did their bit and the marmalade makers.

1: And music in the church in fact. The local schools.

2: Absolutely. If you were on a stall outside at the church door, I mean, they'd be the parents of the children outside, then they'd be music inside, and then they would flow out and another school would flow in, it just went on, seemed to be all day didn't it? It'll stay in the mind.

What changes have you witnessed in the church over the years?

1: Well I can remember when it was decorated the last time - we're going through very big things at the moment - and going into the church and to my utter surprise we've got this red and green ceiling and we've got these pink pillars [laughter] which was quite a surprise at the time.

When was that?

1: I suppose that was probably back in the 60s actually.

2: It may well have been because we moved to Richmond for the first time in 1959 for the first time around and stayed here nine years and we looked, we went in to St Marys and I'll always remember all of the pews were the most dark of dark browns you could think of but there were two pews over in the North Aisle which had obviously been stripped, obviously waiting for people's approval so it must have been around a bout a follow on from that time that they stripped the pews and redecorated.

What about the nature of the services themselves, have they changed over time?

1: Well they're probably more everyday language as the years have gone by obviously. It's not as liturgical.

2: The whole tone and the music it's hopefully more welcoming, more understanding. Hopefully people that are new don't feel, oh my goodness this is such a holy place I can't come here again. I'm constantly saying it, not to the approval of some people, that we're not doing these things for ourselves. We've had our day. We're doing it for the young that are coming on.

What do you most value most about going to the church?

1: Well a time set aside basically for a very big thank you.

2: Oh a very big thank you, I think. The blessings that we've got living here, having a church which is so all inclusive in such a wonderful place and a wonderful town, one could go on endlessly about the joy of being able to live here. As I often say, I count my blessings every morning. It's quite phenomenal really.

What about the building itself, what do you value most?

1: I suppose the fact that it's been there for so long and occasionally when one stops to look at the monuments and some of the interesting people that have passed through....

How does that make you feel, seeing the monuments?

1: Well yes I mean, well, just thinking probably about the fact that such a cross-section of people have been involved in it if you like. I mean one of the most interesting memorials we've got is the Paxton one and then we've also got Kean of course the actor.

2: It's makes one realise what a speck we all are, let's face it. We have our short run and those all memorials inside and out and of course when they were excavating for the floor when the rector said one day she was off to take a service over a box of bones which she'd never ever done before. It really brings home to you that we all have our short spell but let's hope we make a bit of a mark on the thing whilst we're there.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

2: I sometimes feel a little bit concerned that we are so, as I've said already, so fortunate in Richmond, I wonder, hopefully we're fully aware of those who are less fortunate. There are quite a few people in Richmond who are less fortunate financially and health wise in every way. I just hope that as a church we are really doing as much as for them as we should be.

1: I think it's quite interesting actually, the number of people that do probably on quite a regular occurrence come into the church, either because they just want the peace or I know one or two people were looking because they want to see what the flowers look like and so there are some who regularly come, there are others who pass the door and thought they'd just have a little peep in. And more recently we've started having someone in the church all the time so that if they want to talk to anybody there's somebody there.

2: The idea of people being the church is so valuable.