

Our Years at St Andrew's *Shirley & Jim Paton*

It was almost 20 years to the day that we arrived in St Andrew's – end of June 1997. We had stayed for a couple of long weekends in the area whilst we looked around at properties. We fortunately found a house quite quickly. It was while we looked around Devizes that we saw St Andrew's and on the noticeboard the preacher for the next Sunday was Revd Ray Adams. We were sure there were not two of them and we knew Ray well as he had been our Minister in Purley, Surrey, before he came to the South West Synod. We knew that we must go and hear him and at the same time were able to meet up with many of St Andrew's folk. The upshot was that when we moved, we were able to join a church which had links for us. We were made very welcome. This has been the hallmark of St Andrew's all the time we were there.

We joined the church a month or so later and soon found ourselves drawn into various areas of the church where we were able to use what skills we had. I had been an Elder in Purley and soon was asked to join the church council, at that time under the leadership of Revd Tom McMeekin and Pam Hillier. Jim took part in property matters as well as the sound system. It took a while to get used to different preachers each week and the workings of the church but we soon got used to it.

Hilary & Hugh Burn introduced us to the delightful Avebury Chapel and we both got fully involved there. I as Church Secretary and Jim as Treasurer. This was a time of joy for us both and with our St Andrew's commitments and Avebury we seemed to have a very full life.

Outside the church Jim joined Probus and I joined Calne Choral Society. I had many happy years being part of that.

Soon after our arrival at St Andrew's we were invited to the monthly lunch, which was run by members of the church and soon got roped in as part of the team that made the lunches. It was great how many folk we got to know.

After Tom left our church we had Revd Darcy Gritzmacher from the USA as our minister. What a breath of fresh air that was! Under her guidance, the foyer was built which made such a difference to the whole look of the church and, I believe, was instrumental in bringing new blood to St Andrew's. We were very sorry to see her return to the USA but it brought us Revd Chris Cory and his wife Barbara.

During their time with us the church seemed to grow in stature and we were able to welcome a number of new members. It was great to be part of that. One of the biggest parts of their ministry was the complete renovation and refurbishment of the Sanctuary. For four months while the work was taking place, we held our Sunday Worship in the hall. I well remember the first Sunday of that. I was duty elder and as such introduced the preacher. Regretfully, I cannot remember who that was but I vividly remember welcoming the congregation to "St Andrew's in the Hall". It seemed to have a ring to it. Everyone mucked in, sorting the hall to get it ready for the service the following day. Whilst the work was in progress, some of us met for a short prayer time on the slope from the hall to the main part of the church. I remember on one occasion looking across to the door to the vestry and there was a cross on the wall. This was made by the outside lights and the angle of some of the scaffolding. Somehow, this meant something to me, I shall not forget. It seemed as if I was being told of the on-going mission of the church.

It was a great day when we had the rededication of St Andrew's. Revd Darcy Gritzmacher was invited to lead the worship and we had an augmented choir of churches in our area. I was part of this and so enjoyed being part of the choir. It was a most joyous occasion for everyone. The church was packed with members and visitors alike who all liked and admired our very comfy chairs.

We also celebrated the Diamond Jubilee of the Queen and had a "street" party in the church. We could now use the space for so much – including meals.

Inevitably Chris & Barbara had to move on. We then were able to welcome Revd Gary Gotham and Marie. Another great change but bringing his own way of worship – and technology – to the congregation. Gone were the pieces of paper with the order of service and sermon written on them – just a hand-held "mobile" or some such instrument. This was different.

By this time, we were winding down. Old age and sickness crept up and we had to re-assess our personal position. After much prayer and discussion with our four children, we decided we should be nearer to one of them. They lived in very diverse areas but we decided on East Sussex as it was nearer two of the four. Our daughter is only 20 minutes away by car. In the end, we moved quicker than we anticipated owing to sickness.

We will never forget our 20 years at St Andrew's. We spent most of our retirement there and we were able to do things we had not been able to do before retirement.

We send our love and fond memories to you all