

## NEWSLETTER FOR APRIL 2011

### Edith Wyeth

*The Rector writes:*

By the time you read this, you will probably have heard the sad news of Edith's death, at 4.45am on Saturday 19 March, in the Royal London Hospital, with her family beside her. She was 87. Edith had been in church the previous Sunday - though she was far from well, she was determined to be with us. She had been in and out of hospital all winter with multiple problems, and was finally taken in on the Tuesday (appropriately, during a PCC meeting). She suffered a series of further heart attacks, and all her 'systems' began to fail - apart from her mind, which remained as sharp as ever as she surveyed her visitors with undimmed eyes and gave them detailed instructions about unfinished business! On the Thursday, when the end seemed very close, I anointed her and gave her holy communion (she uttered the 'Amens' confidently), but - fighter that she was - she kept going for another 36 hours.

There are so many things we shall miss about Edith. She had been a constant presence in and around the church for longer than anyone can remember, having lived in various places on site for nearly all her life, seeing everyone come and go and keeping tabs on everything. She loved St George's in each of its three phases - before the Blitz, during the 'St George-in-the-Ruins' period, but especially in its post-1964 rebuilding, and was part of its fabric - quite literally, for her name, along with that of her late husband and fellow-churchwarden Jimmy, are carved into the stone to mark its rededication. For nearly three quarters of her life she was churchwarden. Church legislation now forbids more than six continuous years of office unless this rule is disapplied - which we were happy to do in Edith's case, for unlike some long-serving wardens who become a millstone, she remained active and alert and useful, with a long memory of how things had been (on which we relied), but always open to the future. She never tried to stop any of the clergy she served with from trying something new!

Edith was also for many years a governor of St Paul's School (for which we was well-equipped, having been a school secretary and occasional stand-in teacher at Harry Gosling School. Had she been a young woman today she would certainly have gone to university, but for most in her generation that was not possible then). In assembly on the Monday after she died, the children remembered her, and Terry Bennett, the headteacher, described her as a true, perhaps the greatest, friend of the school. Her fellow-governors have paid tribute, remembering how she was often the one who cut to the heart of the matter and asked the tricky questions.

For all of this, Edith was made a member of the Order of St Mellitus in 2007 - the special award given by the Bishop of London to people who have given exceptional service to the church and the community in London.

But it is for her human qualities that Edith will be most missed. She loved being with people - it made her come alive, even at moments when she was struggling for breath (naughtily breaking off from her nebuliser to join in the conversation) - and remembered every birthday, every detail, down the years. As a result, she was in touch with an astonishing number of people all around the world. She told me that the Christian faith came alive for her in Fr Groser's time as she came to understand that the gospel was about building community, and ministering to people in practical ways, and she took every opportunity of doing that, and in so doing mirrored the love of Christ. Never pious or judgemental, she was a true disciple, and one of the saints of the East End.

Each of us will have a particular range of pictures of Edith and her life: the faithful worshipper belting out the alto line from the back row; the organiser whose notes and reminders and little boxes of carefully-accounted money fill the vestries; the inveterate bargain-hunter who made long bus journeys to save the church a bit of money; the dogged battler against lifelong ill health; the guest at family parties, taking an interest in everyone present; the sender of letters and cards and

maker of phone calls (which often ended abruptly, mindful of the phone bill, when she had said what needed saying!); the eagle-eyed parking attendant; the commentator on church politics (I shall miss her well-informed observations on the latest ecclesiastical gossip); but above all, the friend, who always put others before herself.

I'm resisting the comment that this is the 'end of an era', even if it feels like that, because Edith was absolutely clear that the life of St George's continues, as an unbroken thread (Ecclesiastes 12 was not a favourite chapter!) We share with the three generations of her family in giving thanks for a full life bravely lived, and in mourning her passing; and we commend her to the Saviour with love and confidence.

### *Funeral arrangements*

- ◆ Friday 1 April: at 4.30pm Edith's body will be brought to church (with brief prayers at 5pm); the Funeral Eucharist will be at 7.15pm, and followed by 'bring and share' refreshments. Her body will be transferred to the panelled room so that any who wish can sit with her there for a few quiet moments.
- ◆ Saturday 2 April, at 11am, after brief prayers, Edith's body will be taken to the City of London Crematorium for committal at 12 noon in the South Chapel (to which all are welcome). In due course her ashes will be interred in the grave with Jimmy at Ashingdon in Essex.
- ◆ Flowers (no wreaths please) can be brought to church after 6.30pm on the Friday, and will remain in church for Mothering Sunday; donations are invited for Richard House Children's Hospice, London E16 3RG, for which Edith was always seeking to raise funds.
- ◆ Clergy and Readers are invited to robe (alb and white stole); please let us know beforehand if you wish to do so.
- ◆ For those who are unable to attend, the order of service and address will be available electronically on request from <rector@stgite.otg.uk>

### **Mothering Sunday, 3 April**

It's appropriate that Edith should be laid to rest the day before Mothering Sunday, for both mother church and mothering her family and friends were a source of joy to her. Her flowers will remain in church for the all-age service, at which flowers for mothers will be distributed.

### **Annual Vestry & Parochial Church Meetings**

The **Electoral Roll** has been revised, and is on display in church for checking. No new names can be added until after the Annual Meetings.

Nomination lists for Churchwardens, Deanery Synod representative and Parochial Church Council members are also on display - please fill them up before the meetings.

The **meetings** will be held after the morning service (and a very brief coffee break) on Sunday 10 April, and will last about 45 minutes. All church members are urged to stay for the meetings (which form our response to the Word of God and replace the sermon on this particular Sunday), to show their support for our hard-working church officers and to elect the PCC. They will feel more affirmed in their responsibilities if they know they have your active backing!

Following the meetings, we shall have a '**bring and share**' lunch, to express our fellowship as a church and bring to a close this phase of our Lenten observance - which also began with a shared meal. We hope you are finding the **Lent book**, provided by the church, helpful and there will be opportunities to discuss it in the next few weeks. Please also remember to support our **Lent charities** - WaterAid (by cash into the big black bucket at church) and ALMA, the diocesan Lent project to resource our partner churches in Angola and Mozambique (by Gift Aid envelopes, at church).

### **Holy Week and Easter**

**Palm Sunday** this year coincides with the Marathon, so we shall have to have our service at 9am. Normally no-one sees our procession round the church, but this year, by having it at the end rather

than the start of the service (as explained last month) we can remind the gathering crowds that this is a holy day for us. (There will also be bellringing later in the day.) We then need as many volunteers as possible to serve refreshments. This year, however, we are not making our toilets available - 'for health and safety reasons' - there will be portaloos at the Texaco garage across the road.

On **Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday** there will be a eucharist, with brief address, each evening at 7pm (as well as the usual Tuesday lunchtime celebration).

On **Maundy Thursday**, we gather to mark the Last Supper at 7.30pm, starting around the table in the panelled room by sharing readings and songs (but not a meal, this time) that reflect the Passover traditions before moving into church. After the service, once the altar is stripped, we shall keep a watch of prayer for as long as people are able to stay.

On **Good Friday** we hope to have a good number joining in the ecumenical Walk of Witness at 11am, this year taking the 'southern' route, which goes through Wapping and comes by St George's. Route and timings will be advertised later. The solemn Liturgy of the Day is at 2pm, ending with hot cross buns (available in the shops throughout Lent, but really belonging specifically to this day only).

This year there will be no **Easter Vigil** here, as we shall be joining our candidates for Baptism and Confirmation at St Paul's Cathedral at 7pm. Maisie and Alfie Clements-Jones will be presented to be baptized and confirmed by Bishop Richard, and Thomas Ramanoop to be confirmed. This is the most important service of the Christian year, preparing for our celebration of Christ's resurrection and ours with a sequence of readings that trace the whole story of our salvation from the creation of the world, the lighting of the Easter fire and paschal candle, proclaiming the light of Christ in a dark world, and culminating, after the rites of initiation, in the first Eucharist of Easter. Not to be missed - be there to support our candidates, and please pray for them as their preparation continues.

### **St George's Day - our patronal festival**

The world around us may keep St George's Day on Easter Eve, with patriotic events of one kind or another, but the church majors on Easter and so transfers saints' days (Mark, and Philip and James as well as George) to dates outside Easter Week. Because the weekend of Low Sunday is also the royal wedding weekend and has the May Day bank holiday, we are opting for a low-key patronal festival this year; but the material mentioned next month about St George will be launched the following week, and we may make use of it in the coming months.

### **Looking further ahead**

Our Worship & Nurture committee has been planning a series of social and spiritual events spaced throughout the year, and here are some dates for your diary:

- *Sunday 22 May*: service marking the 70th anniversary of the blitzing of St George's
- *Sunday 12 June*: '1711 walk' to mark the tercentenary of the Act which led to the building of new churches in London, of which we are one - more details in church
- *Saturday 18 June*: day trip (by coach) to Elstow Abbey in Bedfordshire, by kind invitation of the Rector, who is Susan Crocker's brother
- *Sunday 17 July*: Anniversary of Consecration and Parish Barbecue

### **Congregational and other news**

Congratulations to **Gary and Claire Mason**, married in style at St George's on 19 March.

**Michael Saward** has been home for a time, and is making good progress. **Olive Wagstaff** remains largely housebound - but see below. We continue to hold **Rodney Sawers** in our prayers.

Saturday 27 March saw the **centenary of The Ringing World**, a weekly publication for bell-ringers, and churches all around London - including our own - marked the event with peals and open-tower sessions and a range of other activities, including a service at Westminster Abbey (with

a beer tent!) and tours of Whitechapel Bell Foundry.

The same day was the fortieth **Independence Day of Bangladesh**, and Sottyen Sen provided a special programme in church of songs, dance and drama.

We have a **peregrine falcon** nesting high up on the outside of the tower (by the half-round windows above the bell chamber). So far no-one has managed to photograph it, but it can be heard from time to time.

### **Royal Foundation of St Katharine**

**Her Majesty the Queen**, who since the death of the Queen Mother has been the patron of St Katharine's, visited the foundation on 24 March to mark the 60th anniversary of the dedication of the chapel. Among those invited and presented to the Queen were Olive Wagstaff, who was one of original members of the community (and 40 years ago showed the Queen round Toynbee Hall), and the Rector (perhaps because he is a successor of Fr Groser, the first Master of the Foundation after it relocated from Regent's Park - having, of course, begun its life locally when it was founded by Queen Matilda in 1147). The sun shone and it was a marvellous occasion.

The next in the Foundation's series of **seminar suppers** is on Wednesday 6 April, with supper at 6.30pm (£15) and seminar at 7.30pm (free), which will explore initiatives to support NEETS - young people who are not in education, employment or training, of which Tower Hamlets has one of the highest numbers nationally. More details from the Rector, or on St Katharine's website.

### **And finally.....**

... the next Bishop of (or is it for?) Stepney was announced recently, ending the long wait. **Adrian Newman**, currently Dean of Rochester, will be consecrated on 22 July to serve our area. Before his cathedral ministry he was Rector of St Martin-in-the-Bullring in Birmingham, and prior to that worked in Sheffield joining the Diocesan Team. An evangelical, he has spent some time studying developments in inner-urban church life in the years following *Faith in the City*. We look forward to welcoming him. Now all we need is an Archdeacon!