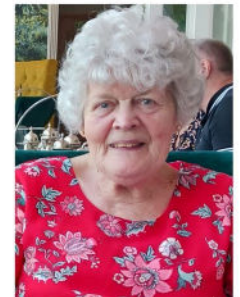


Mrs Doreen Evans

in her own words:



All my life has been wrapped around, interwoven and shaped by St. George's Church.



I have always been here. I lived upstairs in a house in St. George's Way and was brought to Church to be christened three weeks after I was born. That was in the old church, the one on the bridge in Wells Way. It was in 1939, just three months before the start of the Second World War. It means that I remember nothing of my baptism and not a lot of the war.

I remember sleeping in a damp shelter in the back garden and being very worried when we came back from shopping to see men cutting down the metal railings outside all the houses. There are not many current members of St. George's who worshipped in all three buildings – just Karen, Eric and me, I think.

We left the old building on Advent Sunday 1970 because we could not afford the replacement of a cracked beam or the spiralling costs of heating. So, for longer than we thought, we set up the Church in the school hall every Sunday for 11 years until the new building was ready.

I came to Sunday school with my brother, who was two years younger. He was baptised by Fr Alec Solomon, a curate from Africa. Then in December 1946 we had twin brothers, who could not go out for a couple of months, because the twin pram was in a queue in a fuel-starved factory and the snow was piled up in the kerbs. We did not have a hot water tap and had a bath once a week in a tin tub in front of the fire. We did not have much; hardly anybody did and there was not much to have just after the war.

The church provided a lot of activities to improve the bleakness. There were youth clubs, uniformed organisations



which had hikes and camps, bank holiday outings to Box Hill and a fortnight long all-age parish holiday, tents for the younger ones and more solid accommodation for older people. There were visits to Trinity College Cambridge, with football and cricket matches.

I went to the temporary St. George's School in New Church Road for just one term. The walk involved passing a very smelly hoof and horn fertilizer yard and after the summer holiday I was sent to Gloucester Grove, now known as Angel Oak. I remember feeling sorry and sad for other

pupils who were scruffy and had runny noses and always seemed to get into trouble. The glimmer of compassion may have emerged years later in being guided to be a SPA (Southwark Pastoral Auxiliary). Two teachers, who were ex-Mary Datchelor pupils, said that it **must** be my grammar school when I passed the 11-plus. It was the grand building (now flats of course) which runs from the bottom of Camberwell Grove through to Grove Lane. It had its own swimming pool but even we agreed that Grey Coat Hospital was probably posher.

My mum cashed in an insurance for £11 for most of the uniform but I had a blazer out of the second-hand cupboard, and I knitted my not quite regulation cardigan and scarf. I was surprised to be top at the end of the first year.

The school motto was 'My Trust Is In God Alone'. School had a daily religious assembly then so there was a thread of prayer and worship through the week.

I was a Brownie and a Guide and then a Brown Owl for more than 40 years and saw many local girls promising to think of others before themselves and do a good turn every day. Some now have bus passes and ask if I still recognise them.



I was confirmed when I was 13 in St. George's. I know that you do not need to nag God, but I prayed fervently that I would know that I was confirmed. In those days, girls wore a white veil, and candidates went up the chancel steps and knelt before the Bishop two by two. I am absolutely sure I heard a rushing noise (the Holy Spirit) as he laid hands on my head. I've never told anybody in case they say it must have been ringing in my ears because the veil was too tight.

Being a Guide and being confirmed had a downside. The Guide Captain said that we should attend church on saints' days. I can tell you that getting up for the Feast of St. Paul in January for the 6.30 am service was no more appealing to teenagers then than it would be now. The time was to enable adults to go to church and then straight to shift work.

Belonging to St. George's has given me all sorts of experiences I would not have had. We went to a dinner at Trinity College Cambridge when King Charles III was there as a student. He once came to Camberwell to paint a wall at the old Trinity College Mission. There was a Eucharist on the Centre Court at Wimbledon when Mervyn Stockwood retired as Bishop of Southwark and Joan Denne and I were given tickets for the Millenium service in Southwark Cathedral which Queen Elizabeth II attended.

We do not think of arranged marriages as being part of our faith or national culture, but I think ours came quite close. In Coronation year 1953 Cyril Evans and Doreen Manning were chosen as the parish representatives to go to the Royal Garden Party at Lambeth Palace. Princess Margaret was the royalty, and she looked very small and pretty in white broderie anglaise. I was 14 and he was 18 and when he asked if I wanted to stop for beans on toast at the Lyons Corner House afterwards, I said I didn't think so. Years later, when he had done his National Service and graduated from Trinity College Cambridge, we led together the youth discussion group. When a new vicar came in 1965, we were both invited to supper - on the night Rhodesia became Zimbabwe. I was late because the traffic in Whitehall was terrible.

By 1967 sponsored walks were all the rage and Cyril had arranged one from London to Brighton. He and I were two of nine people who managed all 53 miles. To celebrate the refurbishment of the Mission in New Church Road, we had a dinner for about 100 and I led the catering crew for the menu very typical of the time: grapefruit starter, duck a l'orange and a dessert trolley. I'm not sure if that was when he thought I could be the mother to his children.

Cyril started inviting me out and our engagement was announced in church in the notices. The Vicar said that Vi, one of the many 'old ladies' had said to him that she wishes

‘those two would get together’. The wedding was wonderful with lots of previous vicars and a Scout and Guide guard of honour. Karen was a Brownie and gave us a lucky horseshoe.



Most young marrieds had to move out of London, but Cyril found out about a ground floor of a house in Rainbow Street while we were delivering parish magazines.

We were able to reward Vi by having our first baby on her birthday.

We were very happy in our marriage made in heaven. Nowadays, we could have speeded up the process with computer dating, we were such a match. Our parents were first generation Londoners, both Dads were blue-collared skilled manual workers, all the children went to grammar schools, our family values were the same and Cyril and I were already involved in so many activities at St. George's.

Of all the wonders of creation, a baby must be the very best. We had four and the third was Graham. When we were told he had Down's syndrome, I cried every day for a fortnight and thought my life would never be the same.

Well, it wasn't. It was much better. We learned more about the education system, about the world of learning disability, the kindness of the congregation and being proud of having him in our family. Graham had a wonderful life and had a wide circle of friends and acquaintances. If he had been merely 'normal', I would not have had the gift of his caring companionship for at least 20 years after the other children 'flew the nest'.

His adored sister Hilary had always been there for him at every stage. The sympathy of the whole congregation when he died suddenly last year and the tributes from his brothers, Andrew and Richard given at his funeral were so sensitive and perceptive. The church gave him a spectacular send off!



Last year, when I was 84, I noticed that passage in the gospel where Anna and Simeon recognised the infant Jesus as the Messiah they had been waiting for in the Temple for long years. It said Anna was 84, which was very old then, at least twice as long as the average life span. Although people are quick to say 80 is the new 60, I think you should wait to decide. The bible also says that she had been married for

only seven years and a widow ever afterward. It does not say whether she had children, arranged the flowers, or got grumpy if the biscuits were on the wrong plate! I was married for only 14 years and have been a widow for more than 40.

My husband became ill with a terminal brain tumour and died in 1983. When he was in a wheelchair, I took him to a Lambeth Palace Garden open day, and we found that it was exactly 30 years since we went as teenagers.

I have always liked marking time by the seasons of the Church's year; Advent, Lent, Easter; and the rhythm of the weeks Sunday by Sunday. Over a long lifetime, I have done nearly all the possible Church jobs: Churchwarden, Diocesan Synod representative, the Newsletter - many of them not very well. I burned the altar linen and crashed the minibus. I have made a long list, and I think there are enough different roles for everybody in the congregation to try at least once.

About three years after my husband died and when all four children were at secondary school, I grabbed a leaflet which was being passed around at PCC, advertising training to be a Southwark Pastoral Auxiliary. We had had two at various times and I wanted to do more that put glaze cherries on cakes for God. The training was interesting and had modules on bible study, listening, confidentiality and thinking

theologically. It was good to spend time with a wide range of people from other parishes and to have residential weekends at Wychcroft. A minibus full of St. George's people came to the authorisation service at the Cathedral. I completed 30 years, in part as a SPA with a car, using it to give lifts and do shopping for elderly members of the congregation alongside baptism visits and home communions.

The most lasting difference I have made at St. George's arose from ignorance. When the building first opened, there was only one stained window - the round one from the Lady Chapel of the old church. After ten years, and with some bequests, we had the rare privilege of choosing the artist and design for the stained-glass windows to replace the four long plain windows. The theme running along the bottom of them all was living water, and it was obvious that we must have one of St. George.

It was suggested that the other figure should be Aaron as he had a window in the old church. I said, "Who's he?" The Vicar sighed and asked who I thought would be better. Out of the blue, I said the Woman at the Well, and then realised how good it was; Camberwell for the well, a woman from another country who had a conversation with Jesus about Living Water and then she went off to tell people. Carried unanimously.



I have seen so many members of the clergy come and go, working very hard for St George's and it has been an honour that they have shared their gifts and faith with me. At this stage of my life, I inevitably wonder if there are things that I have left undone, that I ought to have done: spent more time with my children, opportunities to be bolder about being a follower of Jesus, all the things that I could have done better or more kindly. I think I just have to keep carrying on, tutting about some modern hymns that have soppy words or feeble tunes but believing that St. George's can grow and recover some of its place in the community, in a world very different from the non-technical, less complicated world in which I grew up.

*Written to share in the Sunday service,
25th August 2024*

*Recipient of The Lancelot Andrewes medal.
Awarded by Bishop Christopher Chessun,
Bishop of Southwark 15th December 2024.*

