

MY WORK AS A VERGER

Talk by John Meredith, 8th September 1990

John gave an extremely informative, interesting and amusing talk, to which it is difficult to do justice in notes. He told us firstly that as verger for 21 years and Head Verger for 10 he had learnt that the three main requirements for the job were:

- patience;
- a willingness to work without set hours;
- a good memory.

Meaning of the title VERGER: One who walks in front of a cleric or procession with a rod or mace to clear a path, i.e. to keep people on the verge.

He showed us his mace, presented in 1664 by Canon Thomas Wren, cousin of Sir Christopher. Traditionally in Southwell, the mace is carried on the shoulder: not sloping forward as in most other places and has been at least since 1730.

Uniform: Black cassock for everyday wear;

'Black gown for official occasions with velvet trim, the amount indicating seniority, and badge based on the ancient seal of the Minster.

Head Verger's duties;

Verges(leads) the Provost. The 2nd verger verges the senior residentiary canon, the 3rd the others, but this is not always adhered to for practical reasons.

Head verger is also the parish clerk, responsible for the parish registers, baptism, wedding and funeral arrangements, and the placing of graves.

Responsible for all fees coming in and going out, eg. bellringers etc.

Counts collections and pays into bank; also donation boxes emptied every evening.

Orders and looks after all materials, eg. wafers, wine, candles; cleaning materials, loo rolls etc.; laundering and dry cleaning of surplices, cassocks etc.(done by June Meredith).

All vergers:

Take parties round, give talks, clean the building, polish brass and silver, set up for services, both on special occasions, eg. Bishop's enthronement, Royal Maundy, when June made history as the first woman to verge the Royal Maundy procession; and daily services: light candles, ring bells, set out vestments, mark service books.

Responsible for all seating arrangements, both planning and fixing numbers, and MOVING CHAIRS - a very demanding and time-consuming part of the work, esp. on Saturdays when may be working until 11.00 pm and back early on Sunday. Nave chairs usually moved 2/3 times a week. Security - a big worry nowadays: daily check on alarm system, on call 24 hours if alarm goes off; locking and unlocking the Minster - and ensuring no one is locked in.

Also: handling bookstall deliveries; rubbish disposal; controlling heating and lighting. All this includes the Trebeck Hall and until recently the Great Hall.

Above all, you have to be nice to everyone, give a good impression of the Minster, and SMILE!

Away from Southwell;

Head Verger accompanies clergy and choir, eg. Three Choirs Festival, Songsof Praise from Lichfield, with choir to Portland College for the Queen's visit.

National Guild of Vergers: has two annual conferences, one for cathedrals.