

# On the vine



## So you have been asked to be Churchwarden, now what?

*Gary Hepburn, a Churchwarden from Wyke Regis, dispels the myth that only those with lots of skills and experience can be a churchwarden.*

Churchwarden is an ancient lay office holder within the church, in a role dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, who used to have all sorts of responsibilities including the compliance with Bishops' and Ecclesiastical Courts' requirements such as collecting parish tithes, presenting moral delinquents to the ecclesiastical courts, and moving the altar from the east end under Edward VI (1547-1553), and moving it back under Mary I (1558). And yes, the power of arrest for riotous, violent, or indecent behaviour in the church or churchyard (and other offences), a power still retained today under the provision of Chapter 32 of The Ecclesiastical Courts Jurisdiction Act 1860.

But today the role is much simpler, but probably even more important.

Many people asked to be churchwarden in their church will be worried that they don't have the skills, experience or time, but what is really involved and could you do the role?

As a churchwarden who has been doing the role for a long time (I won't tell you how long) I can honestly say the most important skills are people skills. The ability to listen, give people time, understand, empathise, and often to arbitrate and bring those with different views together, are some of the most important skills.

Most important for the churchwarden to remember is they are there for the parishioners and for the incumbent.

So firstly they are there for parishioners, and note I particularly use the word "parishioners". As churchwarden you have to be there for and represent the congregation (those who attend church) but also everyone else in the parish, "the parishioners" who don't necessarily attend church, but who may wish to be in touch with the church from time to time about all sorts of things.

The second – and equally important – role is to be there for your incumbent (eg Rector, Parish Priest, Team Minister, Vicar) to support them. Sometimes this will be as a listening ear to hear their ideas, worries, or concerns. It may be to relate to them the view of the congregation or parishioners, and yes sometimes to be an honest critical friend and tell them how it is.

But I guess you are thinking, 'Surely having knowledge and experience of legal matters, building maintenance, applying for faculties, who can get married in your church and a myriad of other things are important for you to know if you want to be a churchwarden?'

Well actually the answer is No!

Most churchwardens will come to the role with little or no experience of these things, and you don't need to know about them to become a churchwarden.

All of this knowledge and skill can be gained on the job – there is training available, books to read, internet sites to browse, and a great team of people to support, teach and help you.

To give you an idea of some of the help and support available, here are some of the sources of help I have found most useful:

- **Diocesan Registry** – to help and advice with legal matters.
- **Diocesan Advisory Committee** – to help with issues of maintenance and faculties and their range of specific advisors on organs, clocks, heating etc, who can assist you on specific matters.
- **Archdeacon** – An experienced minister who will be able to answer many questions on all sorts of things.
- **Other churchwardens** – support from outgoing churchwardens in your church, or from other churchwardens in your parish, or deanery.
- **Online resources** – Ecclesiastical Insurance, the Parish Resources website, the Church of England website.
- **Books** – books specifically for churchwardens, and the annual Churchwarden's Yearbook that, as well as being a diary, has a whole range of useful information in it.
- **Churchwardens Facebook Group** – Quick and immediate support (moral and technical) from 100s of other churchwardens through a Facebook Group specifically for Church of England churchwardens who will help each other with information requests, problems etc.
- And much more...

So, whereas back in history as a churchwarden you may have had a lot of responsibility but been isolated with little support, today it is a highly fulfilling and important role within your church and community, with a wealth of information, central support from the Diocese, and most importantly peer support from other churchwardens.

For me it was a great honour when I was first asked to be Churchwarden, and it continues to be each time I am asked to continue. I get great personal satisfaction from serving my church and parish. It remains an important role that I hold with pride, knowing that in my church I follow a line of churchwardens going back over 500 years. Most importantly I have never felt out of my depth and have always had resources or people to turn to for support.

So if you are asked to consider being churchwarden in your church, do consider it, knowing you won't be alone, you will have a lot of support and you will not only be fulfilling a historic role, but one that is still very relevant and important in church life today for your congregation, incumbent and the whole parish.

If you are considering becoming churchwarden in your parish and have any questions or want to discuss the role further, please do get in touch with me: email [gary@parishofwykeregis.org.uk](mailto:gary@parishofwykeregis.org.uk) or telephone 01305 778169. I will be happy to hear from you and give you some time.

**Gary Hepburn**

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## Online resources

Churchwarden's Yearbook – <http://churchwardenbooks.co.uk>

Churchwardens Facebook Group – <https://www.facebook.com/groups/churchwardens>

DAC (Diocese) – <https://www.salisbury.anglican.org/parishes/dac>

Registry (Diocese) – <https://www.salisbury.anglican.org/whos-who/contacts/registry>

Church of England website – <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare>

Ecclesiastical Website – <https://www.ecclesiastical.com/risk-management/church-warden-checklist>

Parish Resources – <https://www.parishresources.org.uk/buildings>

Building Conservation, Churchwardens and Churches –  
<https://www.buildingconservation.com/articles/churchwarden/churchwarden.htm>

Ecclesiastical Courts Jurisdiction Act 1860 – <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/23-24/32/enacted>

## Books

Churchwarden's Yearbook – <http://churchwardenbooks.co.uk>

The Churchwarden's Handbook – <https://www.kevinmayhew.com/products/churchwardens-handbook-1500347>

Churchwardens, A Survival Guide – <https://www.eden.co.uk/christian-books/the-church/church-life/churchwardens>

Rotas, Rules and Rectors: How to Thrive Being a Churchwarden – <http://www.beingachurchwarden.com/>

A Handbook for Churchwardens and Parochial Church Councillors – <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/a-handbook-for-churchwardens-and-parochial-church-councillors-9781441154743/>