

PEACH Slice Extra – Charles Usher Visit



I first met Charles Usher, now in his nineties, a few years ago at Ball Copse Hall when he was visiting Brent Knoll from Yorkshire. As he was a former pupil at Brent Knoll School, I arranged a school visit for him during his stay here. We have corresponded and met since. In October, Charles and his wife paid a visit to the church.

Charles was a choirboy, and he recalls how he used to help pump the organ with air.

The choir used to sing in the gallery and then later they sang in the chancel. Charles had told me on a previous visit to Brent Knoll that like many of the other choir boys he carved his initials in the boards surrounding the organ. Despite earlier searches I had not been able to find his name but Charles's son on this visit located it. Other graffiti on the wooden slats include a picture of a war plane.

Charles described his most frightening experience as when he was asked by Harry Hayward - the chief organist - to open the singing at the Easter recital of excerpts from The Messiah. He had to reach a high G note which was very challenging. At a previous visit Charles shared photographs of a play performed at the church in which Frances James also took part.

Charles noted an entry in the Book of Remembrance for October - that of Dorothy Chubb. Charles recalled that Dorothy's father lived in Brent Street not far from the Post Office and his job was a cheese factor. This meant that he examined the cheeses to determine whether they were ready for market.

Charles also spotted a dedication to William Gillingham. Charles said that he lived in the end house in Church Lane. Charles met him when he was home on leave with his friend Douglas Bishop. Sadly, William died a few days later.

There is a plaque in the Lady Chapel dedicated to Brigadier Wheeler who used to be in charge of the British Legion. The HQ of the British Legion was The Red Cow. The Members of the British Legion marched with other organisations to the church and back from the Red Cow for a Remembrance Service.

We looked at some of the photos of past vicars of the church. When Charles was born, the vicar was Rev Schofield. Charles, however, was baptised in Selbourne. Later in life he recalled how the vicar, Theophilus Wingfield Heal changed his life when he started a village youth group. This led Charles in the direction of joining the RAF. After leaving the RAF in 1949, Charles continued to run the Youth Group. Another vicar, Charles Mar was not interested in the youth group and was a High Church priest. The choir boys then wore an amice and a girdle, and they prayed in

the south vestry. They would : "Sing to God with joy and gladness, Hymns and psalms of gratitude, With the voice of praise discover, That to worship God is good".

Charles made the following entry in the Church Visitors Book:

"Amazing to visit with Rosemary and Ged. I now know much more about my home church!"

Rosemary Keele