

The Rector's News Letter.

This letter has as its main subject Powderham Harvest Festival on Sunday, 26th September. The Services on that Sunday will be as follows:-

8.30.a.m.

Holy Communion.

11.00.a.m.

Morning Prayer.

3.30.p.m.

Harvest Festival Evensong.

Please make a special note of the time of the Harvest Festival Evensong - 3.30.p.m. - and not as in times past 3.00.p.m. This is to accommodate the Bishop of Exeter, to fit in with his other engagements on that day. This will be the first visit of the Lord Bishop of the Diocese to come to a Service at Powderham Church. It is a very great honour for us, and I hope we can make it a memorable occasion and give him a great welcome.

The Collections at the Harvest Festival Services on Sunday, 26th September, will be donated to the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution. Powderham has supported this Society for many years, and they have always been most grateful for the help we manage to give. I have spoken in previous letters about R.I.B.A. - what it stands for, what it does, what are its future aims. Their successful work depends largely on the help they receive from the Churches up and down the Country. These things you know, for the essential factors have not changed. But their difficulties, like our own, have increased through inflation. It is this thought I would convey to you if they are to continue to give that much needed help to the Agricultural Community.

Decorations for the Harvest will present some problems after the long dry period the country, especially Devon, has experienced over recent months. Fruit, vegetables, flowers have all suffered through lack of rain, but I am sure we shall be able to make that little extra effort in order that we do not fail in our two main objectives of Harvest Decorations. To make our Church look as it should, worthy of the regard that we, an agricultural community, have for it. To provide those little extras to the diet of those in Dawlish Hospital, which we have always managed to do at this time of the year. Would you bring what you can for the decorations

for the Church on Friday morning, 24th September, so that the decorators may have plenty of time in which to do their good work. At the same time, if you can help in the decorating, your help will be most welcome.

Once again the Choir have offered to help with our Harvest Festival Evensong. An offer I most readily accepted for not only is it a delight to have them with us, but also their lead helps us to render a quality of Service worthy of the occasion.

You will remember that in our budget for the year it was estimated that a great effort would have to be made just to meet our normal commitments and remain solvent at the end of the year. This call has been answered in a way that does great credit to so small a parish, and if we can continue in this vein we shall not find ourselves in the financial difficulties too easily foreseen. For this we must thank those who have organised and run the various functions, with such enthusiasm, which have already been held.

A Coffee Morning was held at The Rectory on the 1st April at which £26.60 was raised for the Church Funds.

Mrs. Price and Mrs. Ravensheare held a Garden Tea Party at Exleigh House on Friday, 25th June. In the most wonderful Summer weather for such an event it proved to be a tremendous success. Such an event requires a lot of preparation over a long period beforehand, as well as on the day itself. We owe a great debt of gratitude to them for all the hard work of preparation of their garden and for their efficient organisation that ensured the success. Through their effort £68.55 was made for the Church.

Miss Hacon held a Coffee Morning on Thursday, 22nd July, at South Warborough House. This also proved worthwhile for the Church profited by £28.59. Thank you Miss Hacon.

The Annual Wine & Cheese Party was held at Exleigh House by kind permission of Mr. & Mrs. J. Brewer, on Thursday, 12th August. This annual party is always such a happy occasion, and the acceptance by so many to

the Invitations sent out shows in what regard it is held. Our thanks are due to Mrs Brewer for providing such delicious cheese items for our palatable enjoyment, and to Mr. Brewer for the attractiveness of his garden and the exquisiteness of the 'lay-out' for our general comfort. The Church profited, through donations and a draw held on the evening, by £245.18, and although the cost of the wine must be deducted from this figure, it still leaves a very substantial credit for the Church.

It is by these efforts that we progress towards that minimum income in order to keep ourselves solvent. Indeed, with the coming events listed below, it is hoped that we may be able to add a little to our Deposit Account having met all our commitments for 1976.

Mrs Valerie Clemson Young is holding a 'musical evening' at her lovely home at Torquay on Wednesday, 22nd September. From my own experience of past events held at Mrs Clemson Young's home this will be a most enjoyable Evening. It is most kind of Mrs Clemson Young to help and keep alive the interest in Powderham in distant Torquay.

Through the kindness of The Commodore, Mr Gordon Mortimer, and the members of the Starcross Fishing & Cruising Club, they will be holding at their Club House in Starcross a Wine & Cheese Party to help Powderham. Invitations will be issued sometime before that date which is Tuesday, 9th November.

It had been hoped to hold a Christmas Concert Party by the Devon and Cornwall Police Choir at Powderham Castle sometime in December. However, the Inspector of Police in charge of the Choir, while agreeing to the tentative invitation, felt that he would have to consult his Committee in regard to a suitable date and content of the programme to be given. Unfortunately they found that their present programme differed so much from that which would be suitable to the type of Christmas Concert envisaged that it would require extra practice time which just could not be fitted in. They felt, therefore, that to do justice to the concept of a Christmas Concert as such that 1977 would be more suitable from the production side. Regretfully this must be a pleasure postponed.

The Annual Church Draw closes on the 30th September. It would be the greatest help to me if all counterfoils could be returned to me by that date, so that the actual date of the Draw might be fixed as soon as possible after the closure.

At a P.C.C. Meeting held on Monday, 6th September, the Archdeacon of Exeter came to outline the plans of the Diocesan Pastoral Committee within the Diocese of Exeter, and in particular as they concern the Parish of Powderham. He explained that through shortage of clerical manpower and funds to pay realistic stipends, amalgamation of Parishes had become imperative. He then told us of the plans drawn up as they effected Powderham. These plans would be sent to the Church Commissioners to be finalised in detail. The detailed plan would then be sent back to us to be posted on the Church Notice Board for thirty days, during which time any member of the Parish could make representation concerning the plan or any detail thereof. It would also be published in the local papers. At the end of the thirty days it would be returned to the Church Commissioners who would consider any representations, and then draw up the plan in legal form for presentation for the Royal Assent. After which it would become operative. The plan is that Mamhead, Kenton and Powderham should be unified under one parson and that he would reside in the Vicarage at Kenton. In the case of the Parish of Mamhead it would be swallowed up by the Parish of Kenton, and to all intents and purposes would be a single parish with one P.C.C. to look after its administration. Mamhead Parish Church would become a "Chapel of Ease" attached to Dawlish College. Powderham, however, would continue as a separate entity or parish, having its own Parochial Church Council, but it would come under the Vicar of Kenton who would assume total pastoral responsibility. Powderham would have no Rector. This to me is sad, for it means that I am the last Rector of Powderham after an unbroken line since 1258 A.D. I suppose it must come under the heading of "The inevitability of modern progress". It also means that the house and grounds you have always known as The Rectory will be placed in the hands of the Church Commissioners Land Agents for disposal. But on this latter point there are certain loose ends to be tied up before it can become effective. When will it become effective? One month after the next "avoidance". This is a legal polite term meaning my death or retirement whichever shall come

first. To be part of progress in this manner may fill some with enthusiasm, but for me I take rather a grim view.

But this is my Harvest Letter, yet even here one cannot avoid or close ones eyes to advancement, for it is happening to Harvest as to everything else. Looking back over the many Harvests one has known those of my youth can scarcely be related to those of to-day, save that they have a common objective and a common end. While one cannot disagree with the speed and efficiency of to-day, yet to me the romance and happiness of harvest-time is no longer quite the same. I can remember as a small boy helping to place sheaves in stooks, whose long and straight lines across a big field in Shropshire has been for me one of the glorious pictures of long forgotten harvests. The great flat waggons, drawn by friendly Shire Horses, loaded in the fields seemingly mountains high wending their way to the stackyard there to await the coming of "thrashing day". The skill and accuracy of the pitchers as they used their pikels (there's a word one seldom hears to-day, I suppose most people would call it a pitching fork) that long handled two pronged fork, without seeming to tier through -out the long day of harvest. The lunch and tea breaks, which were really picnics, when those working in the field would gather together amid the sheaves, laughing and chatting as they enjoyed the food and hot tea from huge containers brought from the farm house, or slackening their thirst with harvest-beer cool from the great stone pitchers which one rarely sees to-day. Those days in memory were always hot with the sun blazing out of a cloudless sky. Then when the last load had left the field for the stackyard would come the Harvest Festival in the village Church. That was really something for everybody was there. And with what gusto they sang "For all is safely gathered in" for that meant something to them also, and it was all part of Harvest. Other things have changed also. The building of hides with sheaves of corn to shoot the pigeons before they could do much damage. Flushing duck into the barley fields on a warm autumn evening. Walking up partridges over the stubbles and into roots on a fine September day. Watching well trained flatcoats, whose work was a delight to behold. And at the end of the day its success was not measured by the brace but by the enjoyment of good companionship that had made the day for us. Now all that remains are memories and dreams by the fireside on a cold winters

night. The binders have gone, the waggons and horses have gone, and practically all the men have gone. In their place comes the combine-harvester, driven by a figure, goggled, masked and dust covered, who clears the wheat field in a fraction of the time taken of old. Closely followed by the bailer which picks up the mushed up straw into neat packets to be gathered by the automatic fork-lift and quickly removed. So that where waving corn stood one day a gleanless stubble field stands the next leaving nothing for the diminishing partridges slowly disappearing from the scene.

This is progress, if by progress we mean speed, efficiency and a quick turn-over. And what has it brought - a fertile field for breeding materialism! Which now effects all, even the running of Church affairs. And the benefits - most of them have been lost by inflation, and we are really no better-off nor happier. How many long for holidays in the sun. Certainly all those who have spent their holidays in glorious Devon this year must be pleased or are they? True, we have had "glorious weather". Now we must pay for it with stand pipes in many places, a lowering in the yield in everything from our land, with a prospect of shortages in those commodities by which we live. Maybe there is still "Someone" who has the last word in a much needed lesson for modern times. I have my memories to live through such times, and I feel for those who have none. Among those memories are a few lines

Have you ever thought, my friend,
As you daily toil and plod
In the noisy paths of men,
How still are the ways of God?

Have you ever paused in the din
Of traffic's insistent cry,
To think of the calm in the cloud
Of the peace in your glimpse of the sky?

Go out in the quiet fields,
That quietly yield you meat,
And let them rebuke your noise,
Whose patience is still and sweet.

J.W.J. Steele.

Rector of Powderham.