

# CONVERSATIONS WITH FREDA



During the early part of 2018, the Ecclesiastical Insurance Group ran a nationwide competition – “Little Deeds, Big Difference”. As a PCC we nominated Freda for her long period of dedicated service to our church of St Mary & St John here in Lamyatt.

We were delighted that Ecclesiastical agreed with us and there followed a time of excitement with a radio interview, photo and video shoot, which culminated in a chauffeured trip up to St Martin in the Fields in London, where, after a delicious lunch, Freda was presented with a cheque for £2000 for the church.

Although we did not win the overall top prize, we are delighted that Freda’s long service has been recognised.

What follows is a conversation with Freda about what she remembers about the Lamyatt she has known during her years in the village. It has been a work in progress since July 2017!

## Gibbons nominated for national volunteer award

EIGHTY year old community champion Freda Gibbons has served her community steadfastly for 60 years and been nominated for Ecclesiastical’s Little Deeds, Big Difference national competition with the chance to win £10,000 for their church.

Despite suffering from rheumatoid arthritis since she was five, she has remained a cornerstone of community support.

“Every church NEEDS a Freda,” Jennifer Richards, treasurer for St Mary and St John’s, wrote in her nomination letter, adding: “She is the face of the church in our community, the one you can rely on to be there. National treasure? Maybe not, her influence doesn’t extend that far. Parish treasure? Definitely.”

This year is very important for Freda as she will turn 80 in September. For the past 21 years she has

been church warden at St Mary and St John’s in Lamyatt and she has been a member of its PCC (Parochial Church Council) for 60 years. Freda is always ready to make the tea or wash-up afterwards, supply a cake or her speciality very-sherry trifle, administer the chalice if needed, and welcome anyone who comes into the church. Her voluntary activities are not confined to church though. She has also been on the Almshouse committee in the village for 30 years, taken part in a large range of village activities, and provided an important link between the church and its community. She has also been a friend and shown support to many villagers when they needed it most.

The Little Deeds, Big Difference competition is open to Anglican churches who are able to nominate volunteers until August 31.



Freda Gibbons has served her community steadfastly for 60 years



National treasure? Maybe not, her influence doesn’t extend that far. Parish treasure? Definitely

**Jen.** Would you like to tell us something about your early life?

**Freda.** I was born in the bedroom of the Post Office. Nurse Harrison cycled over from Evercreech on her bike. Soon after that the war started.

**Jen.** So you were very young during the war. Can you remember anything about that time?



**Freda.** I remember The Pound had lovely railings all the way round with an iron gate.

**Jen.** For those who don't know, the pound is the triangle in the middle of the village, isn't it?

**Freda.** Yes. I can remember people coming along with acetylene to burn them off. I must have been about 3 and sat in the window down there. They took them off to go for use in the war effort. When we rented the Post Office, The Pound came along with it. Had Dad realised they were coming, he always said he would have put some hens or something in there and they wouldn't have taken the railings. But he didn't know they were coming. They took the railings from Montgomery too. You can see where they were. They didn't take the ones at The Lodge though.

**Jen.** Who lived at Montgomery at that time?

**Freda.** That was Ella and Lottie Shepherd. Ella kept rabbits and used to take round an old pram to collect food for them. Ella went to live in what is now Old Rectory Cottage. It was two then and she lived in the lower section. Mrs Sharp was in the other side. They were very small; just one room and back house downstairs.



**Jen.** Yes, I know that Miss Sarah Harding, then George Harding, then a Captain Trask lived at Montgomery before that. Can you remember some of the other people who have lived in the village?

**Freda.** Well, a Mr and Mrs White were at Speeds Farm. Mr and Mrs Hampshire were evacuees and rented a couple of rooms there. Then Bob, their son, went into the Almshouse and his brother, Freddie, worked at Poplar farm for Ray and Poppy Jackson. They were brother and sister, not husband and wife. The Alice's used to live at Speeds Farm too. They used to do the chickens, plucking them by machine.

After that Harold and Margaret Longman lived there.

**Jen.** Yes, I remember them. What about the Old Rectory?

**Freda.** When I was young, the Deanes lived there. They were the book people, published children's books. I remember they used to come to the Post Office and at Christmas they would give me one of their books. Then Another Mrs Jackson lived at the Old Rectory. She held a 50/50 sale for the church.



**Jen.** Yes, I have seen newspaper cuttings about that. Anyone else?



**Freda.** Then there were Colonel and Irene Perkins. They lived at the Lodge. They went to Lovington for a time and then came back to the Old Shop. They kept and showed Old English Sheepdogs.

Colonel Bury Perkins

That was before Christopher Booker and his family lived there.

The Perrots lived where the Goodhews and Martin live now. That was one house then. The Padfields lived where Miss Van Plugh does now.

Myrtle Cottage is where Dr Dimmock and Cathy lived for a long time. They moved away and Cathy died just short of her 107th birthday.

**Jen.** Yes, she was on the news for joining the Green Party aged 100!

**Jen.** Then there is Batch Farm.

**Freda.** That's where the Hunts were. Harry was a churchwarden for a number of years and his son Francis made the block of wood in the church under the cross.

**Jen.** When I was growing up, I can remember that George Walters kept chickens in a couple of big barns at Batch Farm. There were so many flies. It was terrible, drove the Whites in Orchard View mad. There is a newspaper cutting about that. There was a lot of mud on the road from his cows going up and down the road too.

**Freda.** We used to drive our cows to 10 acres too. (10 acres is past Taddywoody on the way to Bruton).

**Jen.** What about the other end of the village?

**Freda.** Well, the Manor was always known as Church Farm. It was all open up there, a bit like Milton Clevedon, you went through the farm to get to the

church. Mr Warren was the gardener up at what is now the Manor. He lived at Rose Cottage. He was a little chap, can't have been much more than 4 foot. His wife was tall and used to put her hand on him like he was a walking stick! Now of course, the Ffooks place is called Church Farm.

The Candys owned the piggeries up by the church. And didn't it stink in the church, if the wind were the right way. They were converted into houses in the 1990s.

**Jen.** That reminds me of the sign that Candys (Alan and Jack on the right in 1981) put up on a gate up the hill past the old school: Trespassers Will Be Shot! That caused a lot of talk. I don't know how long it stayed there.



**Jen.** Your bungalow, Nami, and the one next door, Craignure, were built in about 1970.

**Freda.** Yes, on land that belonged at one point to the Old Shop. It had a high wall round it then.

**Jen.** We moved to Craignure from Wyke and dad drove his tractor back to Wyke to his work on Clothiers farm there, every morning till he retired.

**Jen.** What can you remember anything about the war?

**Freda.** The Home Guard used to meet up by The Pound and go off up Creech Hill. I don't know what they did up there. Mr Snell was the "captain". My dad, (Harry Gibbons) was in it, so was Bill Moxom and Eddie Shepherd.

During the war there was a complete blackout. You couldn't have a crack of light showing. The Home Guard made sure of that. There were even shields on the headlights for driving. Good job there wasn't much traffic about. There was no electric then. That came when we went to Lower Batch.

**Jen.** Do you know if there were any evacuees?

**Freda.** The Richards at The Old Shop had a boy called Lazarus, and another boy and their mother. They were Jews. We weren't allowed to have any at the Post Office because it was a government thing. When we were at Home Farm we had Mrs Flint. Bert and Mary Stone went into the Post Office when we left. I can remember June pushing David in his pram.

**Jen.** You went to Lamyatt school, didn't you? What can you tell us about that?

**Freda.** Yes, I went to Lamyatt School when I was 5. Mrs Carew, the teacher, used to cycle over from Evercreech. Mrs Sharp was the caretaker. Some children came from Milton Clevedon, The Newtons and Leah Dowell. Olive Whitty came from the council houses in Wyke. Then we went to Home Farm in Westcombe for 3-4 years. That's where my arthritis started. After that we came back to Lower Batch. Dad bought it by auction at the school.



**Jen.** Can you remember how much you paid for it?

**Freda.** Oh yes, £3500. It had 26 acres of land with it. This must have been in about 1947. That was a lot of money on those days.

**Jen.** So you went back to Lamyatt school then?

**Freda.** Yes. Then I left at 11 and went on to Bruton. Of course King Arthur's wasn't around then; it was the Council school up by Tolbury Mill, where the Primary school is now.

**Jen.** Tell us about Lamyatt school.

**Freda.** Meals were brought in a van. Then after lunch we all had to lie down for 10-15 minutes on a piece of cocoa matting. Don't know what the idea of that was. Perhaps to let the dinner go down! They got milk from Mr Hunt at Batch Farm - great big jugs of it! We took our own tins of ovaltine or cocoa, whatever we wanted, with our names on it? They heated the milk on big stoves.

**Jen.** What can you remember about activities in the village?

**Freda.** We had whist drives and beetle drives.

**Jen.** Yes, I can remember those. They were great fun except when people took the whist too seriously!

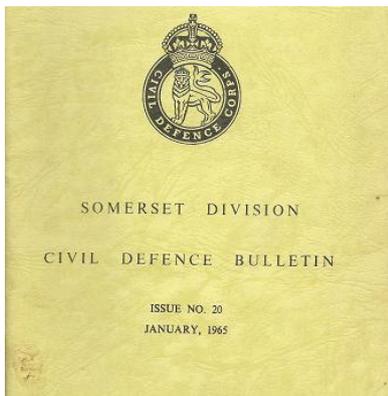
**Freda.** Socials and dances. Jack Cooper and his wife came from Castle Cary. He was the Mc and organiser. She played the piano. Then we had the plays up in the village hall, organised by Mrs Grafton from Taddywoody and Mrs Kirkham. She lived at Knowle Cottage. They were great fun. There was no

exit door. We had a bit of the cloakroom to change in. The fellas went outside to change behind a sheet put up by Ivor Grafton.

Drink Up  
Thee Cider  
with Ivor  
Grafton



At Christmas we used have Ivor Grafton's lorry and put some hay bales up on it. We dressed up in what we wore for the plays. Mrs Fern who lived where Pam Paradine lived (Ambergate) used to play the piano. We used to lift the piano up onto the lorry and go off carol singing. We went up through the village to Milton Clevedon, to the Ilchester Arms, down to the Royal Oak in Bruton, then to the Castle and the Sun. We were singing at the top of our voices when we got back to Lamyatt coming through Wyke. That was the first night.



The next night we went to Natterjack, or the Railway Inn as it was called then, then back down round Ditchat. It was hilarious. Then back to Cyril and Mary (Richards) in Brook House to finish off. We raised some money for charity but I can't remember how much or where it went.

I got a certificate for collecting for poppies for 20 years, then Audrey Brunt took over.

We had the Civil Defence too. I was in that. I remember we built a fire in the school yard. We went to Batcombe for First Aid. And we went to

Fairford to the airfield. We had to be casualties and had a meal in the hangar.

**Jen.** What about the church? When did you go on the PCC?

**Freda.** I was 18 when I went to the AGM for the Church. I was put on the PCC and I haven't come off since. I took over as church warden from Eddie Shepherd. I remember his funeral was on the same day I was sixty.

Mrs Ogden used to play the harmonium which was up under the pulpit. I can remember the church getting the organ but I can't remember when; it will be in the minutes. Mrs Perrott used to play too, then of course Grace Shepherd played for many years.

**Jen.** Do you remember the trains running here in Lamyatt?

**Freda.** Oh yes. Mrs Lockwood would come out to shut the gates when a train was coming. There was one time when Dad was going to have our car sprayed. Theo Matthews said to get it really clean so dad gave it a good wash. I then drove it to get the spraying done but when I got to the crossing the gates were shut. My brakes weren't working then and I went straight into the gates. Norman Lockwood came out and got the car off the crossing but the gates had a big hole in them. A railway detective came up to see me about it but that was it. We had to have new gates.



You had to stop for trains at the Natterjack and at Wyke. Imagine that now. Of course there was a lot less traffic then. Then of course Mr Beeching stopped them. I didn't go on the last one.

I remember turning hay up 10 acre, you could see the trains. You could pick up big lumps of coal which they used to throw at the rabbits. The Boxes

(who lived at Wyke crossing) had no water of course – that was brought up on the Pines. That was the train that went to Bournemouth.

**Jen.** Did you have any holidays?

**Freda.** No, we didn't have holidays. We had a day trip to Weymouth from school. One year it was to Weston and it rained all day! You got so excited; you didn't sleep the night before!

**Jen.** What do you remember about the shop?

**Freda.** I remember the Brook Bond tea was delivered in a van. A lot of things were loose like soda, which was used for washing in a copper with a fire lit underneath. There was a creamy stuff to black the grates which you then buffed off. Traditional jars of sweets. Crystals for making lemonade, weighed and scooped up. It wasn't fizzy of course. A lot of tinned stuff and cigarettes, 5, 10 or 20 woodbine a in a packet. Craven A and tobacco – a lot smoked a pipe. They didn't sell bread.

There was a salting room in the Old Shop where sides of bacon were salted in a big lead container. They made cider there. It was nice when just pressed.

The toilets weren't inside. They were out and round the corner. You had to empty them into a hole in the garden.



**Jen.** Thank you, Freda. That's a fascinating insight into what our village was like years ago.

MONDAY 1A

LAMYAT AMATEUR DRAMATIC SOCIETY

present

'COURY FARE'

SONG "WIDDIGBE FAIR"

SKETCH "GREENFINGERS"

Characters :

Mrs Butt	_____	Nancy Grafton
Mrs Benn	_____	Audry Brunt
Miss A.	_____	Barbara Smith

The scene is a piece of rough ground beside some allotments

SKETCH "THE FIRST DIVING LESSON"

SKETCH "MISTAKEN IDENTITY"

Characters :

Emma, a patient	_____	Tonic Richards
Florrie, a ward maid	_____	Freda Gibbons
Nurse	_____	Olive Lock
Ada, Emma's Friend	_____	June James
Mrs Ray	_____	A new patient

*MARY STONE*

The scene is a woman's ward in a Hospital

SKETCH "ROO 29"

Characters :

Mary, Hotel maid	_____	Judith Allis
Miss Cordelia Johnson, proprietress	_____	Margaret Shylan
Anastasia, Char Lady	_____	Freda Gibbons
Algernon Carstairs, Colonel retired, late of the 207th Africa Camel Corps	_____	David Shylan
Miss Hope Polorn, a Woman's Magazine Columnist	_____	Mary Cole
Harry Perkins, Plumber's Mate	_____	Ernest Richards
Lady Penelope Popjoy	_____	Nancy Grafton

The scene is a bedroom in the Walfarar's Arms Hotel, somewhere in Somerset

SONG "DRINK UP THE CIDER"

The Queen