

St Peter's Church, 1910

by Aimee Hester

I am the stained glass window at the heart of St Peter's church in Bishopsworth, the main view in and out of the church. Over the years I have seen it all.

The heart of the church.

The heart plays a big part in a church, this church especially. Birth, marriages and death. It all happens here.

The church is in a prominent position in the village, at the bottom of the hill, it is still very popular and most of the villagers attend on a weekly basis, at least.

We are lucky to have a lively much loved church, a beautiful choir, dedicated congregation and clergy.

I am going to tell you about one of my favourite days here and why I feel lucky to be a stained glass window in my prime position.

Mr and Mrs Wyatt to be are one of our regular visitors and friends of the church, the lady bakes cakes for tea after the service and Mr Wyatt tends to the grounds. I am going to tell you about their wedding day.

The year is 1910, a warm June day.

The sun rises like the perfect egg yolk from the ground, round, yellow and wide. The lead that keeps my glass in place creaks like old bones as the sun starts to heat up the coldness left over from the night.

The colours from the glass shines across the church, gently touching each pew like a rainbow. The greens from my detail bounce through the nave, bringing with it the hope of life eternal. The red making your thoughts turn to blood and fire, the ultimate sacrifice made by Jesus and the white colour having the opposite effect of innocence and peace, waking the church up with it's bright snow like colour making you squint as if looking directly at a torch. Beams catching the bronze of the cross hung before me.

The day is here.

The alter underneath me shows the sacred table, the table from which the faithful receive the blessed sacrament. Today the table holds a bible, pages marked with chosen readings and prayer.

The vicar places everything within reach, touches the papers on the lectern to make sure they are in order, checks matches for the candles. Sips the sacramental wine, just to make sure.

The choir hustle in, fussing over seats and preparing the flowers along the aisle. Freesias in the bouquets making the whole place smell fragrant. I can always remember this smell like it's still at the back of my nose.

In the background, the organ sounds drift up as it is being finely tuned, the organist lightly touching the foot pedals making the empty space vibrate as the noise grows.

The quiet is appreciated before the hustle and bustle are due to arrive shortly.

The church bells ring to mark 11am, the bell ringers jumping and pulling, jumping and pulling in time to make the bells swing back and forth. The ballad far reaching up the hill so everyone can hear.

Outside the guests are starting to arrive, greeting the vicar with pleasantries. Walking into the church like a line of ants. The pews start to fill up from left to right. The ladies sitting and adjusting their hats and the men shaking hands and fidgeting with their extinguished pipes.

Soon all the families are here, mother of the bride in blue and looking radiant, sits proudly at the front wringing her gloves through her hands.

The groom stands tall at the front, takes a glug of his hip flask, checks his pocket watch and turns to face me, the stained glass window, head high and hands behind his back.

This is when the church is at it's best, in my opinion. Filled to the brim, flowers and hymns, people singing, smiles and tears of happiness. Loved ones together for an important occasion. The warmth staying with me long after everyone has left.

Everyone stands when the organ plays the wedding march, 'Here comes the bride'. The bride looks majestic and other worldly, her dress homemade with bits of fabric saved up but beautiful none the less. Clinging onto her fathers arm to steady herself as she makes her way towards the groom. From my position, I see the groom close his eyes in anticipation and the guests eyes are all on the bride. People coo and put their hands to their chest in awe. The veil covers the bride's blushing cheeks, flushed from excitement and nerves. She is soon to be a wife, what women aspired to be in those times. The bride meets the eyes of the groom and a smile as wide as a bus spreads across their face.

For hundreds of years women have been viewed as their fathers property to be given away, sometimes even for money. Thankfully, although the words may stay the same the sentiment changes in time.

'Who giveth this woman?' asked the vicar,
'I do' states her father

A couple of other very important 'I dos' are spoken and hymns of 'Amazing Grace' and 'Love divine, all loves excelling' are sang, the choir like these and only sometimes need to glance at their hymn books. A prayer read from Corinthians 13:4-8 by the vicar,

'Love is patient, love is kind.
It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud...

...Love never fails.'

All traditional and in keeping with its time and done as it should be. I have seen some funny weddings in my time but you can't beat the originals I say.

Couples held hands, heads bowed in prayer, knees cushioned by the knitted pads the church knitters have made over the years, using pictures from bible stories. Children played at the back around the font, running in circles. Jesus on the cross watching as intently as me.

Rings exchanged, hers a thin gold band and his much bigger but titanium for his grafting hands and modern for the time. The vows read and commitments made 'I now pronounce you husband and wife, you may kiss the bride.

A big cheer and claps, the new Mr and Mrs Wyatt hold hands and turn and walk together back down the aisle, away from me, the stained glass window. Everyone piling out behind them, hungry for the wedding breakfast with cake not baked by herself but a lemon cake lovingly prepared by her mother in law, her son's favourite naturally.

Off they go, husband and wife, first day of the rest of their lives. What they wouldn't know at this point but in just under a year they would be back and I would be witness to their baby girl's christening. Lovely that was too. Nothing could have prepared them or me for another big event here, Mr Wyatt's funeral, died suddenly many years later leaving poor Mrs Wyatt and their three children devastated. It was his heart they said, must have been from overuse, plenty of love in that heart, that's for sure. Emotions were high again that day.

For now, I remember the happy times, the happiest time as the sun begins to warm me again and my colours flow through the church like a wave, readying us for another day.