

## **OPENING OF THE ST ANDREW'S CENTRE Saturday 12 October 2013**

**You may wonder why I am standing here today dressed somewhat unusually (certainly for me!), so here is a short explanation!**

**Although I have been one of many enthusiasts and fundraisers for the St Andrew's Centre over the years, I am a Chartered Secretary by profession and am privileged to be Master of one of the City Livery Companies, the Worshipful Company of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators, or as my wife Debbie calls it, "The Worshipful Whatsits". This is a one year role and this is my last week! I then become a past master!**

**In the Middle Ages, Livery Companies were Guilds supporting trades, crafts and more recently professions. In 1515 the order of precedence of the 48 Companies in existence was settled by the Lord Mayor in terms of wealth, with the Mercers being designated No 1. The twelve wealthiest, known as The Great 12, include Mercers, Grocers, Drapers, Fishmongers, Goldsmiths, and Vintners.**

**Over the years the number expanded and by 1926 there were over 70 Livery Companies, including Butchers and Farriers. Since then, Modern Companies have been formed to reflect businesses of today, including solicitors, surveyors, accountants, information technologists, builders' merchants and, most recently, the Educators. Interestingly, Tom Stuttard's father is its Master. There are now 109 companies.**

**If you watch the Lord Mayor's Show on 9 November, you will see most Livery Companies taking part, dressed in all their finery. Incidentally, the Lord Mayor elect (a solicitor) is the second female to hold that post in 686 years.**

**Each Livery Company has a Court (a bit like a board of directors, with the three or four most senior being the Master and Wardens). In most Companies, each Master serves in that role for a year.**

**So I have been fortunate enough to have this role as my day job for the past year. It has been a huge privilege.**

**Underneath it all, however, I am still Charles Ledsam, like many of you a member of this church, a former Church Warden and enthusiastic fundraiser for the St Andrew's Centre.**

**Looking back for a moment, when we first joined St Andrew's Church in 1977, there was a group called the Forward Planning Committee, which used to meet in John Blanchard's sitting-room.**

**As I recall, this group had come up with four recommendations, which over the next 20 years were achieved through prayer, fundraising, generous giving, grit and determination. These included:**

- 1. Glazing in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel as a place for private prayer**
- 2. Installing a Central Altar**
- 3. Installing a toilet at the back of the church and a small kitchen**
- 4. Creating a church office**

**There was also a plan to form a better link to the Church Hall and to improve the church heating. By this time the Hall itself was deteriorating, it was getting damp, the kitchen was becoming unhygienic, Sunday School and Toddler Groups were expanding and there was a desire within St Andrew's for more outreach and involvement with the local community.**

**When I took on the role of Church Warden in 2008, I think I had one of those "prods from God" and felt that if I could do one thing in my three years it would be to "Build the Centre". Not literally though! We had seemed to have talked about a new Centre or Hall for many years and my hope was that this project would be completed by 2011, so that we could get on and do God's work. The timing has slipped a little!**

**Richard Threlfall, our Church architect until recently, told me that over the last 25 years or so, he thought he had prepared eight to ten different designs for a better use of church space.**

**These included screening in the back section of the church, installing a balcony, installing a glazed porch which extended down the main path from the church, creating a parking space, forming a better link to the Hall, using the Hall as a hostel for the homeless, building a first floor, knocking the existing Hall down and starting again.**

Alan Stewart has quoted Archbishop William Temple several times in the past: “The church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members”. Gradually the idea of a “Centre for Well-being”, for use by the wider community, took shape.

I recall speaking to several people, including Alan Nicholl, Henry and Joy John and others, who told me that nothing would happen until we were really listening to God and praying as a church. A small group of us first began to meet with the Centre in mind in May 2009, initially under the leadership of Barry and Jill Parker. After about a year it seemed right that the Breathe Saturday group should begin.

I also recall Alan Stewart saying in a sermon a few years ago that, after years of waiting, he now had a vision: “Build it and they will come. Build it and see what God can really do”.

Gradually through prayer, a picture appeared, not just of a new community Hall (of which there are quite a few in the area) but of this “Centre for Well-being”. Financial appeals began and, through sheer hard work and determination, a plan emerged.

Andrew Goodman took over the baton from Richard Threlfall, others became involved costing this out, including Jim and Viv Thornton, Michael Cracknell, Mark Overton, Rod Willis and others, and the building plans were submitted. The idea of forming a Trust to manage the Centre once completed took shape.

A launch of the project with the theme “Caring for the Well-being of our community now and in the generations to come” took place at Hertford Castle in June 2011. Today that vision for St Andrew’s has become reality.

Looking at the finances in December 1980, the accounts showed £3600 set aside for the Hall repairs. By 2000, some £72,000 had been raised and set aside. Through generous one off and regular donations, events, auctions, coffee mornings, sales, grants etc, that sum has increased to an amazing £340,000.

Today is a very exciting one for our Church as it now sees the formal opening of the St Andrew’s Centre. The building has been handed over by the

**contractors, Borrás, and I should like to thank them for all their hard work and dedication in getting us to this stage today. Not easy!**

**Money is still needed for fitting out and purchasing items. The brick path or patio has yet to be constructed, but the bulk of the work is done and I understand that the Centre is to be blessed by the Bishop of Hertford on St Andrew's Day.**

**So, after over 20 years and three Rectors, on behalf of us all, I extend my grateful thanks to especially to the current Church Wardens, Peter and Catherine, and to every single person who has prayed for the Centre, given money (sometimes anonymously), the grant application and fundraising teams, all of whom have given their time, talents and energy to this most exciting project, which will serve the well-being of our community and our church, old and young, healthy and frail, for many years to come.**

**As Moyra Hope has said to me in 2009: "I do not think this Centre will be built in my lifetime". Moyra this is for you!**

**I declare the St Andrew's Centre open.**

*Charles Ledsam - Master of the Worshipful Company of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators*

*12 October 2013*