

Village Echoes

THE MARTHAS OF THE CHURCH

Lockdown has given an opportunity to look through some of the documents acquired and stored in the Goudhurst and Kilndown Local History Society archives. There is a huge variety on myriad subjects. One is highlighted in this article.

During the Covid crisis our Churches have been subject to closures or partial access. As well as social distancing having to be observed, the need for additional cleaning has also been necessary. In normal time the Church Conservation Trust recognises this and mundane but vital task and published a fourteen page guidance on the subject. It begins -

We hugely appreciate any help that local people can give, and cleaning our churches is a very important part of looking after these wonderful historic buildings. We hope that as supporters clean they will discover more about the interesting fixtures and fittings inside each of the trust churches, and so their vulnerabilities. Regular care and cleaning helps to identify problems before they become serious. We rely on volunteers to help us achieve and maintain high standards of presentation and conservation.

I speak from experience that it is a chance to get up close to all the details of the building that can so easily be missed, even if you are a regular service attender. In larger Churches and Cathedrals organisation of a cleaning routine would be the duty of a sexton but in most local parish Churches this task would fall to the Churchwarden and delegated to an organiser and her team. Yes, it is usually women who are sometimes given the title of Marthas.

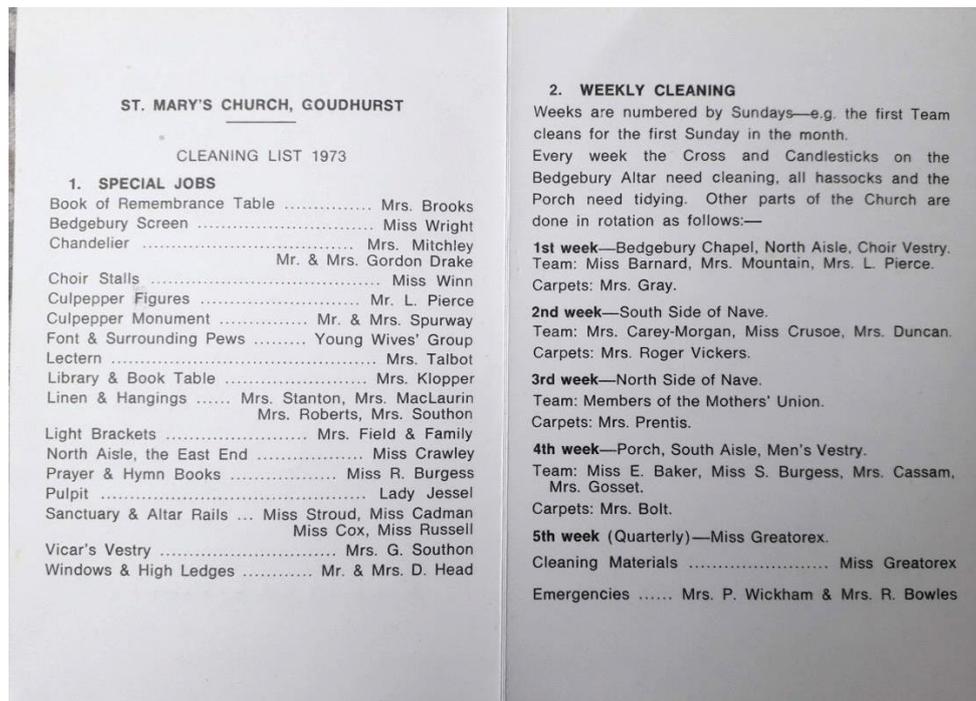
This title comes from a story in the Bible about two sisters who were visited by Jesus. One, called Mary, was happy to stop everything she was doing to hear what he had to say whereas Martha was worried about abandoning the housework.



Christ in the house of Martha and Mary, Johannes Vermeer, 1654-1655

To be asked to clean a Church would, at first glance, seem daunting given the size of the building and the intricate details everywhere. However, this can be simplified by breaking down the various

areas. This leads me to the subject of this article which came to light after being filed away for years.



The cleaning list for 1973

They are cleaning cards dating back as far as 1966 with examples intermittently up to 1994. All the tasks are clearly laid out and allocated accordingly. In addition the front covers of the cards have designs hand drawn by Len Pierce, a past Secretary of the History Society for thirty-three years. They are a charming example of treasures that are being kept for future generations.



Four examples of the front covers

Nowadays the bulk of the cleaning is undertaken by a professional company but there are still a few dedicated members of the Church congregations who still quietly take it upon themselves to 'do their bit' for the Community.

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