

Know your Neighbour

Our couple this month need no introduction; they are John and Pam Elliot, our friendly Minister and his wife. John is responsible for the churches of the Ringmore, Bigbury and Kingston.



Sixty-ish years ago John was born in Kent during the last V2 air raid on London, an immaculate sense of timing as ever, and some time later Pam was born in the Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire (not actually in amongst the trees, but a village within the forest). John moved around the country as his father gained work promotions, and as he grew developed a love for sport, first swimming and then cricket, rugby, surfing, squash and golf. He wanted to be a PE Teacher specialising in swimming but an allergy to chlorine stopped that: so after 'A' levels he joined Lloyds Bank, the start of 35 years with them. Pam's family stayed in the Forest of Dean where she enjoyed school, learned the piano and went regularly to the local Baptist Church where she became a Sunday school teacher. She enjoyed singing in school choirs, and cycling with

friends in the Wye Valley, and at age 10 had decided to be a teacher. With Mathematics as her main subject she trained at Redland College, Bristol.

Forty years ago when John was working at Lloyds in Loughborough, he went to a party in Leicester where Pam was living in a flat with other college friends, all having started teaching in Leicester. From that first meeting in January 1968, engagement followed in April and the wedding in October, a fairly hectic 10 month courtship with a life long result. They made their first home in Birstall, Leicester, and in 1972 daughter Sonya was born. Promotion to Lloyds Inspection staff in London meant a move to Knaphill, near Woking in Surrey, and it was there that Andrew was born in 1974.

During these years holidays were spent in Cornwall and North Devon where John loved to surf. One day at Woolacombe in an offshore breeze sitting outside the break waiting for waves he saw incredible rainbow effects from the setting sun in the spray blown back from the peak of breaking waves. He found himself thinking that there must be a creator designer who made such beauty, so the first stirrings in his then agnostic lack of belief began pointing to the possibility of God. Then back at work a colleague, knowing John was a keen member of the Bank Debating Society invited him to the local Church Hall where there was to be a debate on the existence of God. John went as an unbeliever, but after a week came a visit from the local Vicar. Pam whose churchgoing had completely lapsed, was reluctant to be involved but brought in the coffee and was told what they had been talking about. She had an overwhelming personal sense of the presence of God which led them both to make a prayer of commitment to believing in, and following, Jesus. They both know that since then there has been an amazing extra dimension to their lives.

Soon after John was promoted to be a Manager at Lloyds Aylesbury branch, where they moved, and then lived for 24 years. They went to a lively modern Anglican Church and as a family became very involved with Pam helping to run the Parents & Toddlers group, jointly running the youth club and John studying to become a Lay Minister. In 1996 he responded to many folk who said "you ought to be an ordained Minister" and started training whilst still working for the Bank. In 1998, John took voluntary early retirement (posh name for friendly redundancy), he subsequently became ordained and was asked to run the local church pending a re-structuring of the south side of Aylesbury Parishes, two years into this demanding task, previously the responsibility of two full time staff and a part-timer they took a much needed holiday in Cornwall.

Whilst relaxing and catching up with reading national Church publications they saw an advertisement for the Minister's post in Bigbury, Kingston and Ringmore. It said the candidate would need a Sense of Humour and be open to the Holy Spirit, adding that the natives were friendly. Drawn by this unusual text, Pam and John travelled home via Ringmore and peeped into the Church where Alice was practising on the organ, they also looked at Church House. The rest, as they'd say, is history.

In 2001, John and Pam moved into the Church House in Ringmore—five days later they were hosting the cream teas in the garden at the Church Fete, whilst in the house chaos prevailed from their move—however, they found the natives friendly as well as welcoming, hospitable and accepting. In the eight years John has been at the helm he has successfully managed to combine the modern and the traditional, taking care of the spiritual needs as well as the "hatched", "matched" and "despatched" demands of the three churches. Life is very busy and they are quite often torn between accepting invitations to events at the three villages—feeling they are spreading themselves thinly but not wanting to let anyone down.

John is due to retire in 18 months and in preparation for this memorable event has over the last few year taken on new interests such as fishing and playing more golf. Pam has taken up Art classes and is in the local Photography club. They both enjoy travelling, having visited New Zealand earlier this year, and with the hope of many more trips around the world, seeing a lot more of their grandchildren are looking forward to retiring. Even though John will no longer be Minister, they will be still very much involved with the Church, if not in Ringmore parish initially—certainly in the local area.