

Tony Wright talks about Revd John Linford (vicar 1970-1977)

When our second son was ready for baptism Revd Linford came to see us at our house on the Brownswall Estate to discuss the arrangements. I got on very well with him - I found him very down-to-earth person who didn't at all conform to the unworldly 'vicar' stereotype!

Soon after that a friend of mine whom I worked with, who sang in the Joseph Lucas male voice choir, asked if he could come and sing at the church. I set up a choir evening one Saturday and my involvement developed from there – I got more and more active on the social side of the church.

In 1975 we formed a committee to develop an arts and crafts festival - a complete week consisting of a flower festival, and events on every night of the week. We had a variety show on the Saturday night and the late Dolly Allen performed at it – it was one of her early gigs. John put on a play, and acted it 'in the round' with his wife and another couple. We also had Giggetty (a local folk group active at the time), a barn dance and lots of other things too.

We developed the Social Club around this time – John wasn't too keen because of the bar and the drinking part of it so it wasn't till Revd Bernard Harris came that we developed it fully. It's now been going for well over thirty years. We also developed the '200 Club', a dining club that was very successful for many years.

John introduced us to walking and we did our first walk on Easter Monday. He took us out by coach to Offa's Dyke - he had a small property in that area. We walked a small section of the Dyke, the ancient boundary between England and Wales. That was the start of me getting into walking and rambling and we now have a group in the social club that goes once a month.

The following year I remember sitting with him in his office one day and he said he had a proposition – he was thinking of doing a walk along the complete Offa's Dyke path (170 miles). He asked me what I thought of the idea, to raise sponsorship money for replacing the church bells. He said he had one sponsorship already - his father who would contribute £400 if he completed the walk.

I remember we went on our walk on Easter Monday that year – he waved us off from the vicarage. Then he began his sponsorship walk the following day – he was walking in two feet of snow! His brother accompanied him.

On leaving All Saints' John went over to Cannock. He was the son of the owner of the Cannock-based Linford Construction Group who did a lot of work restoring old churches.