

## Parish People - Claire Peyton Jones

If Claire Peyton Jones lives in London, how can she be a 'parish person'? The answer is that she has been a familiar figure at many of the services at Apuldram and Fishbourne church during the past five years, and has been especially noticed this last year, when accompanied by her amazingly well behaved and delightful puppy, Freya. Claire and husband Jeremy moved their boat to Dell Quay from its previous location in Totnes! The idea came to Claire whilst they were sailing in the Channel Islands the summer before as their son Patric was about to start at Dulwich College and she realised that they would have many more free weekends as he would be leaving Southwark Cathedral, where he was a chorister, so Chichester would be more convenient than Devon.



Brought up in Esher, Surrey, Claire had thought she might be a Philosophy lecturer or head teacher but, obtaining her degree at York University, returned to the south to work in London in Radio Features for the BBC, where she stayed for 10 years until her daughter Miranda was born.

In 2009 Claire formed her own company - Portraits in Sound (check out [www.portraitsinsound.co.uk](http://www.portraitsinsound.co.uk)). The idea came about when she made a recording of her grandmother in the 1980s, which has given much pleasure to the family. It occurred to her that of the interviews she didn't sell to Radio 4, that they would be wonderful for their families to enjoy. This has proved to be the case, and Claire records people's reminiscences for their families, organisations or archives. She takes time off in the summer, but is always under pressure before Christmas because people want Sound Portraits for family gifts.

Claire can vaguely link interviewing people with her original hopes, as she encourages people to think and reflect. She is quietly proud that even the people who had been hostile or anxious beforehand have all enjoyed their interviews in the end. She has found her work to be a privilege, and a wonderful way of encouraging people to record their testimonies of faith, to pass on to and encourage future generations.

Although Jeremy had been a near neighbour for a few years, it took a mutual theatre designer friend who was working on a show at ICA (Institute of Contemporary Arts) for which Jeremy had composed the music, to get them both to the same party. Later, Claire and Jeremy were to return the favour by introducing their friend to his future wife and, extraordinarily, both couples have sons in the same class at Dulwich.

As well as being a composer, Jeremy loved to sail, so the couple's wedding cake was created as a boat coming out of the sea, with the sails being of the same material as Claire's dress! Jeremy is now Deputy Head of Music at Goldsmiths (University of London).

When their youngest child Lois (now 14) was born, they bought 'Moonlight', their present yacht. Considered mad by their family, but with extra help aboard, the family enjoyed their sailing. Patric is now 18, and his 18-year-old sister Miranda is currently doing a foundation course at Camberwell College of Arts.

Although brought up to attend church sometimes, Claire didn't become a Christian until her early 30's. She had made a programme for the BBC's Religious department on Isaac Tigrett, founder of the Hard Rock Café. Tigrett told her that God was an Indian Avatar called Sai Baba! Making the programme made Claire realise that she had 'sat on the fence' spiritually all her life, so she decided to find out about Baba. One night, when reading a transcript of one of his sermons, Baba said that one should pray the same prayer over and over again. Claire's response was 'How ridiculous. God hears the first time'. Her discerning mind was in rebellion with her desire to believe in Baba, and she remembered how accounts of Jesus' miracles were not just contrary to the basic laws of nature, but they all had a valuable purpose, i.e. healing. Baba's miracles were simply tricks. Claire threw down the manuscript in disgust and picked up her baptism Bible. It fell open as if a torch was on the text at Matthew 6 v. 7 when Jesus was exhorting people not to make vain repetitions when they prayed because God knows what people need.

Claire became enveloped with an experience of love, light, power and weightlessness. A voice said Jesus was the one she was looking for and that everything the Bible said about Him was true. She later realised it must have been the Holy Spirit. She knew then, unequivocally, that Jesus was the answer, but it didn't immediately occur to her to become a Christian. Her brother was a member of a Pentecostal church and she didn't wish to be like him! However, Claire began to experience some unpleasant spiritual attacks when she tried to pray, and she went to her brother whose pastor reassured Claire that God wanted her to be herself and not like her brother or anyone else, and he led her to Christ.

Claire initially attended Holy Trinity, Brompton (HTB), because she was looking for the ministry of healing for a friend but, 5 years later, during a sabbatical in Brisbane, Australia, she enjoyed the Anglican church there. Returning home, much as she had liked Holy Trinity, she felt she should be attending her local church and joined All Saints Peckham where the remarkable Rev. Frog Or-Ewing was the youngest incumbent in the country. His writer and theologian wife, Amy, started a Women's Group, which Claire joined. However, when Patric became a chorister at Southwark Cathedral, Claire felt bound to support him at Sunday services, but remained part of the Women's Group in Peckham for many years.

Since Patric has been at Dulwich, however, the family have returned to HTB, which the children love, and where Miranda was confirmed. Claire has completed training to be part of a team taking the Alpha Course to Holloway Prison. She is also a server at Southwark Cathedral, and, wanting to clarify her thoughts on the subject for herself, is involved in Southwark Feminist Theological Group, which has many radical Catholic members! She also still attends her local church sometimes in Telegraph Hill. She likes the 'down-to-earth sincerity' that she finds here in Fishbourne and Apuldram and feels that Moira really knows and loves Jesus, and puts people before the trappings of religion.

She is especially inspired by the Sermon on the Mount because 'one can never get to the depth of its meaning.' She loves the book of Daniel and stories about David. King Nebuchadnezzar put Daniel in an alien position and, like him, today, as Christians we are in a spiritual warfare and cannot be complacent. One of the great figures in the Bible, David had an unwavering passion for God in spite of sinning greatly. He accepted forgiveness and moved forward in faith as we all need to. He was also a good example of how not to parent! He was over-indulgent with some troublesome sons, yet his experience shows that children must be responsible for themselves. However hard they try, parents cannot ultimately be responsible, as children have choices to make, which Claire finds fascinating and insightful and particularly helpful when interviewing people who have struggled with their own children.

It is impossible to keep Religion and Politics separate, Claire believes. If you think you can, you have no understanding of history or the moral foundation on which all our legislation is based. Everything is informed by Christian values. The 'raison d'être' of Law rests upon Church teachings.

Thinking about a life lesson she has learned, Claire recalls Psalm 30 'Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning'. The bad times don't last or have dominion.

When asked what her hope for the future is, Claire has one word - 'Jesus'. Whatever difficulties she has had or will encounter, she believes there will be a plan. Jesus is her hope for today, tomorrow and the future.