

Roy marks 60 years as a churchwarden

HE'S been a churchwarden for longer than most of his congregation can remember.

Roy Westmore OBE celebrates 60 years as churchwarden at St Olave's Church, Gatcombe, this month. He'll retire after a celebration of his achievement on April 21 at Chillerton School.

He's also served the Isle of Wight community in countless other ways – as parish councillor, county councillor, funeral director, school governor and local businessman. He was a lay canon of our cathedral for 30 years and also served on deanery and diocesan synods.

And the motivating force behind his desire to serve others is his Christian faith. Born and bred in Gatcombe, he's been going to St Olave's Church for his whole life.

"I started very young as churchwarden, as most people are in their 40s before they think about standing," he said. "But my Christian upbringing has taught me to help others, and I'll carry on attending church for as many services as I'm able to attend."

Roy, who is now 81, served in the Home Guard during the Second World War, and then started working with his father in the family business in Blackwater, just south of Newport. It included a carpenter's shop, funeral director and wheelwright.

His father died in 1952, leaving Roy to enlarge the building contract side of the firm. Over the years, they've been responsible for renovating many of the island's most important buildings, including churches, banks and building societies.

In 1949, he pulled down an aircraft hangar and rebuilt it next to his offices to create a new workshop. In the 1950s, he added a petrol station to the firm, but that closed in 2000 with competition from supermarkets. He also diversified into car dealership in the 1960s, selling BMWs and Isuzus from his forecourt and offering car repairs. But he started to wind things down over the past 10 years and only the funeral directorship remains.

He had also busied himself in he political life of the Isle of



Roy Westmore today (left), meeting the Queen in 1968 (top right) and after he was presented with his OBE at Buckingham Palace in 1991 (bottom right)



Wight. He joined Gatcombe Parish Council in 1949 and is still a member – he's currently the chairman. Again, he was following in his father's footsteps. His dad was parish clerk for 25 years

1998. He was the leader of the Conservative group from 1977, leader of the council from 1977 to 1980, vice-chairman in 1980-81, and served as High Sheriff from 1988-89. He was presented with

free water supply for Gatcombe, and another was the sewerage. The sea defences at Totland was another thing we had to sort out, and you always had to fight for your share of housing in your own parish."

Roy has been helped in his business and political commitments by his sister Dorothy, who

is now 83. They have shared a home in Chillerton for many years, building a new bungalow on the site and moving into it five years ago. And his involvement with the church has seen him outlast seven different rectors in his time as churchwarden.

"In that kind of job, it comes naturally to look after the ministers," he said. "My building background means that I've also got some expertise when it comes to looking after the church building. It's an interesting job, particularly when there's a vacancy and you are technically in charge of the parish.

"However, the new regulations that are coming in about churchwardens mean that I won't be able to carry on – and neither will any other churchwarden be able to spend this long in the job. There may never be another churchwarden who does 60 years!

"One of the things that I'm proud of is that we achieved an extension to our churchyard which was opened a couple of years ago by Bishop Kenneth. The land was actually given to us in 1928, but had just grown wild, and it was a battle to prove that we owned it.

"But St Olave's has a good fellowship and gives you strength for the rest of the week. And I hope I'll continue to serve on the PCC once I've stepped down as churchwarden, and perhaps I'll have some things I can contribute from my experience."

my faith

Roy Westmore has given a lifetime of devoted service to his church, as well as the Isle of Wight's political, civic and business scene. His devotion stems from his faith.

before being elected as a member.

Roy was elected as a member of the Isle of Wight Rural District Council in 1955 and stayed as a member until reorganisation in 1974. He was chairman of that body in 1965, when the Queen visited the island – the first royal visit to the Isle of Wight since Queen Victoria.

"The Queen is actually the same age as me," he said. "It was a real pleasure to show her around Yarmouth, and she was very interested in the castle."

He was also elected onto the Isle of Wight County Council in 1968 and served as a member until

the OBE by the Queen in 1991 for his political service.

"I thought it was important to try to make a difference for the people I was representing," he said. "I didn't expect any pay and I didn't claim any expenses for attending council meetings – in fact I probably lost money by attending so many meetings! I used to spend two and a half or three days a week on council business. But as I see it, you're there to serve the community because you're interested in it.

"There are lots of things you have to fight for in local government. One problem was with the

Tributes flood in for major achievement

TRIBUTES have been paid to Roy from across the Church as he marks 60 years as churchwarden.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, has sent him a special message of congratulation which will be presented to him at the celebration at Chillerton School on April 21.

Bishop Kenneth has also paid his tribute to the veteran churchwarden.

"I am inspired by the dedicated service of Roy Westmore, who has devoted 60

years of his life to being a churchwarden – which isn't an easy job," he said. "Loyal servants such as Roy are the backbone of our diocese, and their experience is invaluable. I thank God for him and pray that he enjoys his retirement."

Ironically, as Roy celebrates his anniversary, the Church of England is implementing new measures that would allow churchwardens to serve only for six consecutive years. They would then have to take a break before standing again.