

Golden couples are in harmony

THERE must be something about being in the church choir at Blendworth.

Five couples connected to the choir at Holy Trinity Church celebrated their golden wedding anniversaries this year – making a combined total of 250 years of married life.

Both the husband and wife of two of the couples are choristers, the wives of two further couples also sing in the choir, and the wife of the fifth couple is the organist.

This remarkable achievement was celebrated with a special service at Holy Trinity Church which included the chance for all five couples to renew their wedding vows.

They gathered at the chancel steps, each couple facing each other and joining hands, while the Rev Rosemary Donald led them through the moving ceremony.

They each took each other by the left hand and touched each other's wedding rings to renew their significance, after which wedding blessing acclamations were said.

"The ceremony was a truly inspiring part of the morning's service," said one of the husbands, Michael Hicks.

Sheila and Mike Martin,



(l to r): Ernest and Carol Monnery; Sheila and Mike Martin; June and Brian Wakeford; Avril and Bruce Pinkney; and Joan and Michael Hicks at Holy Trinity Church, Blendworth

who are both choristers, were the first to marry.

They met in 1957 at Lovedean Village Hall and were married on Easter Sunday 1959 at St Mary's Church in Portsmouth. On their 50th wedding anniversary, their children organised a surprise party in the hall where they first met.

Choir member Carol Monnery met her husband Ernest at a tennis club dance at Merchistoun Hall in 1957. They married at St Mark's Church, North End, in April 1959.

June and Brian Wakeford, who are both choristers, met as badminton partners at a youth club in Cosham, and then had

dancing lessons together. They also married at St Mark's Church, North End, just three months after Carol and Ernest.

Avril Pinkney, the choir director, met her husband Bruce when they were both pupils at Purbrook Park County High School.

They were conductors of opposing house choirs at the annual music contest in 1953, and were both principals in *Iolanthe* in 1954. They were married at Holy Trinity, Blendworth, in August 1959.

And church organist Joan Hicks married Michael in the same month at St Mary's Church, Portsmouth. They were

both Southern Grammar School pupils in the city, though were taught in separate schools nearly two miles apart. They got together at joint socials in 1953 and 1954.

The five-fold golden wedding celebration happened on Trinity Sunday, and was followed by lunch in the church centre. Friends from the neighbouring churches at Idsworth and Chalton joined the Blendworth congregation.

Golden balloons floated above the tables and a gold-coloured theme was in evidence throughout the hall. There was also a 50th anniversary cake and glasses of bubbly.



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Roberts Centre celebrates independence

IT was originally created by Christians and continues to be supported by many of our churches.

Now, after 20 years, the Roberts Centre in Landport has become an independent charity.

It was the former Bishop of Portsmouth, the Rt Rev Timothy Bavin, who was originally persuaded to spend a large bequest from the estate of EC Roberts on the new project. Mr Roberts was a Portsmouth man who had emigrated to the USA and left a large amount of money to spend on the poor of Portsmouth.

City priest Bill Sargent

created what was originally known as the Phoenix Centre as a day centre for families, under the authority of Portsmouth Housing Association, which he was also heavily involved with.

It had temporary homes at St John's RC Cathedral and St George's Church, Portsea, before Bill negotiated with the vicar of St Mary's, Fratton, to use a former mission building in Crasswell Street, Landport. After extensive alterations to the building, the Roberts Centre was opened in 1991 by Diana, Princess of Wales.

Eighteen years after Bill's death, it offers a unique

range of child-focused services to those with insecure housing and family difficulties.

Now the centre has taken the next step, and become an independent charity, separate from Portsmouth Housing Association, which is now part of First Wessex Housing Group. The move allows the new charity to expand its work into other areas of the region.

Roberts Centre manager Carole Damper said: "It may not appear to be the best time for a charity to become independent, but we feel the time has come for us to step out on our own."

"We have restructured the way the organisation is managed and strengthened our senior team, to make sure we have all the necessary expertise in house."

And the links with our churches also remain. Among those who support the centre with donations of goods, services or volunteers are the parishes of St Mary's, Fratton, St Peter and St Paul, Hambleton, St Saviour's, Stamshaw, St Alban's, Copnor, the Church of the Holy Spirit, Southsea, St Faith's, Havant, and St Mary's, Portchester. For more details, see www.robertscentre.org.uk.

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