

AN Isle of Wight church organist was one of 15 church stalwarts to be given a special award by the Bishop of Portsmouth.

**John Cheverton** was thanked for a mammoth 63 years as PCC secretary at St Peter's Church, Seaview, and 54 years as the church's organist. Apart from holidays, he has hardly missed a service there since he joined the choir as a seven-year-old in December 1941. He was also organist at the neighbouring St Helens Church for several years, and served as choir director in St Peter's, Seaview.

His wife, Molly, also received one of the St Thomas Awards – the annual award given by Bishop Christopher to faithful churchgoers who have spent years serving their church and local community. Recipients were presented with their lapel badges during Evensong in our cathedral.

**Molly Cheverton** was responsible for starting Community Friendship Lunches, which linked lonely and bereaved people together for 20 years. She also ran a youth club, was the mainstay of the local Mothers' Union, assists with catering at many church events and volunteers as a Communion assistant.

John and Molly, who are both 84, also ran a community call system with CB radios for 20 years, to bring comfort each morning to elderly members of the community.

"I think I must have some built-in loyalty that has kept me with the church – but of course it is also that I like doing everything that I do," said John. "My faith is a strong part of that too. It is what keeps you going on through everything."

When John and Molly were married at St Peter's Church back in 1959, the choir stalls were sparsely filled and there were only two children. John made it his ambition to get a thriving choir back in the church.



The St Thomas Award recipients after the presentation: (top, left to right): Brian Hay, Rupert Bennett, Graham Johnson, Peter Short, Brenda Ellison, Roger Sutton, David Lougher and Jim Palmer; (bottom, left to right): Susan Jones, Shirley Tamcken, Bishop Christopher, Molly and John Cheverton, Joan Cozens and the Rev Mike Pye. Below: David Tamcken and Kay Lancaster

Initial visits to Nettlestone Primary School involved him recruiting good singers to join the junior choir, and they soon became one of the larger church choirs on the island.

**'They are unsung heroes and it is a privilege to honour them'**

Another recipient of a St Thomas Award was **Peter Short**, from the Church of Our Lady, Warnford, near Petersfield. He has been churchwarden there for 50 years, and also volunteers as treasurer, sacristan and server. He does everything from preparing the church for services to mowing the grass outside.

Peter, who is now 85, started as churchwarden in 1968 and has also been treasurer for a number of years. He also serves on deanery synod and finance committee, is

treasurer of a local charity, the Coles Trust, and for many years was chairman of the West Meon and Warnford Garden Club.

He said: "I've lived here for 60 years. It's a small village and the church is an important part of village life. It is a peaceful, quiet, wonderful place and I've loved taking care of it – it's like my second home. I get a lot out of being involved, and I've worked alongside some very good clergy over the years."

This was the third year that the bishop has awarded St Thomas Awards to faithful stalwarts. He said: "They are genuinely unsung heroes and it is truly a privilege to draw them out of their humility and honour them, along with the countless more who serve the gospel so faithfully in our communities, parishes and chaplaincies."



Two of those who were due to receive an award sadly died before the service took place, though both knew they would be honoured.

**David Tamcken** from St Catherine's Church, Ventnor – a Reader, confidant, churchwarden and energetic supporter of links with Ghana – had rung the bishop a week beforehand to say how "gobsmacked" he was to learn of the honour. He died suddenly the next day. His wife Shirley and other family members attended the service to receive the award on his behalf.



The bishop also told the congregation that **Kay Lancaster** had died after a long illness – the day before the service took place. He had already presented an award to her, as she knew she wouldn't be able to attend. Her quiet efficiency and care in serving the parish of Alverstoke and its daughter church of St Francis, and in working in our diocesan offices for more than 20 years, was honoured.

## Long-serving stalwarts given bishop's honour

OTHERS to be honoured as recipients of the St Thomas Award included:

**Roger Sutton**, who brought his Christian faith into his work as a GP in Havant. His patience, generosity and thoughtfulness are legendary and he has served the parish of St Jude's in Southsea, where he was churchwarden for six years.

**The Rev Mike Pye**, who retires soon after 11 years of vicar of All Saints Church in central Portsmouth. He has served the most deprived community in the diocese with commitment and dedication, contributed hugely to the mission of churches in central Portsmouth, and been a thoughtful contributor to financial discussions.

**Jim Palmer**, churchwarden at St Columba, Fareham, who has combined fabric care, the parish's IT needs, and preparation for GDPR with a heart for the community. He chairs the committee running the Highlands Hub café, which is a meeting place, internet café and much more.

**David Lougher**, who is the go-to person for queries in Blendworth about maintenance, supply and upkeep to keep things running, and is hands on cleaning floors and doing maintenance jobs. He has served as treasurer, churchwarden, hall bookings secretary and also ran an arts and music festival.

**Susan Jones**, who begins each day with the morning office and from that moves into unobtrusive cleaning, decorating, organising, coordinating and leadership

in the parish of Shedfield. She is verges, sacristan, a Ride and Stride enthusiast, committed to baptism ministry and – after teaching locally for 20 years – knows most couples who marry at the church.

**Graham Johnson**, who has lived and worshipped in Hawkley for many years, serving on the PCC and as churchwarden. He has been responsible for the fabric of the church, often carrying out maintenance jobs himself.

**Brian Hay**, who was a member of our diocesan education team for many years, and also a school governor at Charter Academy, carrying out a crucial voluntary role, supporting the Christian ethos in our only mainland C of E secondary school.

**Brenda Ellison**, who is central to much ministry at St John's Sandown – running services such as Food for Thought, hall bookings, PCC coordination, fund raising, baking and cooking. She is churchwarden, but her role is much more than that.

**Joan Cozens**, who is parish warden in the North End Team Ministry. She is also involved with many community groups and charities including amateur dramatics, driving, toy library, the Buckland Park Play Association and more.

**Rupert Bennett**, who has been a pivotal member of St Andrew's Hayling from its founding. He is cherished for his decades of quiet humble service, integral in the running of the church, ensuring the liturgies run smoothly and being a uniting presence in the congregation.