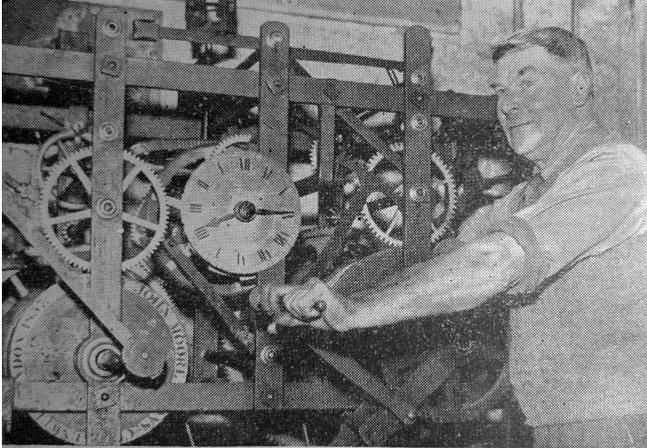


Harry Marshall

C.T. 1958

By Carl Whiteley



Mr. Harry Marshall is pictured winding the Priory Church clock—a job he has carried on practically every day for the past 27 years.

WHEN Mr. Harry Marshall retires in a few weeks' time, the Priory Church will lose one of its most faithful workers.

As sexton and groundsman, Harry has been quietly and conscientiously carrying out his duties for the past 27 years.

He will be greatly missed, not only by the clergy and parishioners, but by the many people who have made his acquaintance while passing through the Priory grounds.

The sight of Harry pushing his wheelbarrow, sweeping the paths or mowing the lawns is part of the old Priory setting.

Thousands of people all over England know him and there is hardly anyone in

Christchurch who does not know of him. He is a character in himself and one of the few remaining old Christchurchians.

But the time has come for Harry to down tools. He mopped his cheery weather-beaten face and explained in his soft Hampshire burr: "I'm 70 in October and I feel it's time I gave up and made room for a younger man".

He was silent for a moment, then he scratched his greying hair and added: "I love my work because I have always been interested in it. I shall miss it".

ANOTHER REASON

There is another reason for Harry's decision. His wife is ill in hospital and he feels that when she comes out again he will be needed around their home at 13, Mill Road.

His chief responsibility is the upkeep of the churchyard and as the surroundings of the Priory are not the least part of its beauty this is very important work.

"When I came to the Priory 27 years ago, the churchyard was a wilderness," he said. "Now, I don't care who looks at it—I'm proud of it."

He also keeps the three stoves in the church going in the winter months—Sundays and weekdays alike—and it is no small feat to keep such a large building so pleasantly warm.

Harry has another very important job. For the past 27 years he has climbed the 100 steps in the tower daily to wind the weights of the clock and chiming mechanism.

There has been only two exceptions to his daily climb. They were in 1952 and 1954 when the clock was out of order.

"I know the ins and outs of that clock," said Harry. "It's going to miss me when I go. I wind the hour chime 74 times, the ¼-chimes 96 times and the main spring has 12 winds."

He is proud of the old clock—the traditional timepiece for countless thousands who pass through Christchurch every week.

CLOCK DETAILS.

He gave me more details: "Dial of the clock is 12ft. in diameter, the big hand is 5ft. long, the hour figure measures 19 inches and the minutes 2½ inches".

Harry spoke with the ease of a seasoned guide. I could have asked him anything about the

old Priory and he could have answered without hesitation.

"The clock," he continued "was installed in 1837 and the chimes were added in 1906."

I could visualise Harry in the middle of a sight-seeing crowd, all clamouring around him, anxious to hear more. His stories would be told with pride, but even so, he would be anxious to get away because he had work to do.

As we strolled across a newly-cut lawn he said: "I don't have much time for telling stories nowadays, I just stick to my normal jobs".

I asked him which was the oldest tombstone in the churchyard. "Over there—1641," he said, pointing towards an old grey stone close to the main drive. "But they haven't buried here since 1854 when the cemetery was opened," he added.

How did you learn all this? "Well," said Harry, "the old ones passed it onto me, you know. And I daresay I shall pass on what I know to the youngsters."

At all times he is ready to give help and do odd jobs about the church in all sorts of ways. At Christmas time he takes pride in constructing the beautiful Christmas crib and erecting the Christmas tree.

He is known to be remarkably accurate in weather forecasts and is often consulted before church outings and other outdoor events. He can also make interesting comments on current events.

Harry, who was christened Henry Charles, was born at Pokesdown, which was then in the parish of Christchurch. His father, Mr. Harry Marshall, was a plumber.

WAR SERVICE.

He started work at the age of 13½ as a gardener for Col. Brander at West Close, Wick, and served for three years in France during the 1914-18 war. He returned to West Close before moving to the Priory.

Very soon, Harry will climb the tower for the last time. He will put away his wheelbarrow, tidy the coal house, put on his coat and stroll away.

A TRIBUTE.

His Vicar, Canon R. P. Price, pays this tribute: "The frequent comments of visitors on the well-kept state of the churchyard is an eloquent tribute to Mr. Marshall's devoted work. For this alone our whole community owes him a debt of gratitude.

"Harry is so much a part of the Priory that we shall miss him sorely when he retires. But he has earned a rest and multitudes of people will wish him well."