

THE PRAYER BOOK SOCIETY

The Prayer Book Society

In the later part of the twentieth century, new books of services were authorised in the Church of England: the Alternative Service Book in 1980 and Common Worship in 2000.

These new forms of service did not replace or supersede the Book of Common Prayer; but unhappily they led to some hostility to the traditional services. This meant that, in some parishes the BCP fell out of use, or was relegated to 'off-peak' times such as 8.00 a.m. and Evensong. It remains a sad fact that very few parishes now use the BCP for their main Sunday service, so most churchgoers, especially young people and newcomers to the Church, never have the opportunity to experience it.

A number of people who were disturbed by this tendency came together to form a group for the protection of the Book of Common Prayer, which led to the establishment of the Prayer Book Society. Through speaking, writing and representation, often at the highest levels, its early officers and members worked to restore the respect which was in danger of being lost.

The aim of the Society is still to ensure that the Book of Common Prayer is still used and honoured, available for worship wherever it is desired. It has a Branch in every diocese of the Church of England, and it is through the Branches that its members are represented and find their principal activities in meetings and services.

The Society also works from its central organisation, notably through journals sent to all members with articles on the history and present use of the Prayer Book, and by publishing books and pamphlets to make it more widely known and understood. There is an annual residential Conference with distinguished speakers and an opportunity for members to meet one another.

An important activity is the annual Cranmer Awards competition, with prizes for recitation from memory by schoolchildren of a passage from the Prayer Book. To make the traditional words known to the next generation is one of the principal aims of the Society.

The Society is a Registered Charity and is honoured to have the Prince of Wales as its Patron and the former Bishop of London, Lord Chartres, as its Ecclesiastical Patron.

The Society is not hostile to new forms of service but seeks to ensure that they shall not come to be regarded as the norm for the Church. Antagonism to the Book of Common Prayer has decreased, largely through the work of the Society, but there is still need to protect and affirm our traditional services

The Prayer Book Society was founded in 1972, in the heyday of liturgical reform in the Church of England, when it appeared that the 1662 Book of Common Prayer was in danger of being outlawed altogether. Happily, the Prayer Book was saved and continues to be used in a number of flourishing churches and most cathedrals, and the Prayer Book Society today continues to promote the worship and doctrine of the Church of England (and other churches in the Anglican tradition) as enshrined in the Book of Common Prayer. We aim not only to defend the continued use of the Prayer Book, but also to secure an increasingly significant role for this sometimes neglected treasure at the heart of the worshipping life of this and future generations. We are especially keen to ensure that ordinands and new clergy become familiar with it, and that young families and newcomers to the Church have an opportunity to encounter it.

The Society has a Branches in every Diocese of the Church of England, as well as Branches in Wales and Ireland, and a Branch

for Overseas members. There are also Prayer Book Societies in Scotland, Canada, Australia and the USA, which are separate organisations with whom we enjoy friendly relations. The Society holds a variety of Branch and National events every year, including an Annual Conference in September and the Cranmer Awards competition for young people. We publish two regular high-quality magazines, The Prayer Book Today (which is a full-colour, glossy magazine), and the more scholarly Faith & Worship (with longer, more in-depth articles).

The Prayer Book Society is a Registered Charity and a Company Limited by Guarantee, and is largely run and managed by volunteers, with just a small handful of part-time paid staff. The Society has over 4,500 members representing a wide diversity of background, tradition and churchmanship, and including clergy, laity and organisations (such as PCCs) which have signed up for collective membership. Our Patron is HRH The Prince of Wales and our Ecclesiastical Patron is the former Bishop of London (both keen supporters of the Book of Common Prayer).

The Charity is established for the advancement of the Christian religion as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer; and, in furtherance of this Object, for the promotion of the worship and doctrine enshrined in the Book of Common Prayer and its use for services, teaching and training throughout the Church of England and other Churches in the Anglican tradition.