

If, like me, you're interested in social history, you might have watched on television the documentaries 'A House Through Time'. If you didn't, a historian chose two bigish town houses, one in Liverpool for the first series and one in Newcastle for the second, and did detailed investigations into the people and families who'd lived in them over the past two centuries. Such fascinating stories were told about the residents; some who prospered for a while and then were made bankrupt, some who died of diseases of the time like typhoid, stories of domestic abuse, and orphans. And accounts of how the houses had been divided up at various times, sometimes into bedsits or flats, and also used as boarding houses – the one in Newcastle at one time was a boarding house for the performers of novelty acts in the music halls of the city. It also had a period of being a refuge for homeless girls and later a resource for the Salvation Army. Both houses are now fully restored homes for modern families.

All of this makes us realise how much buildings matter because of the stories that they hold – stories that don't usually make the national headlines but that describe events that are dramatic for those experiencing them and that take us through a range of emotional responses.

And buildings hold the stories of those who built them too, and of those who've cared for them and worked on them through their lives. In one of the houses I've lived in I stripped some wall paper and found a signature from 1908 – I assumed it was the signature of the man who had done the plastering. I carefully painted round it and left it as a little memorial to 'Fred whoever it was'. Sadly, when we employed a decorator to paint it again a few years later, he wasn't so sentimental, and he painted over the little bare rectangle with the pencil signature. I really felt the loss and still do. I wonder about the life story of that man who did the plastering – who were his family? Did he get called away to war? If he did, did he come home again?

Because if apparently little things like that don't matter then we don't matter either, and not mattering is probably the worst feeling that a human can experience.

Dorcas, in our first Bible story (Acts 9:36-end), mattered. She wasn't rich or famous, but she helped where she could, showing love by sewing tunics for the poor in her community. Her death was experienced as a terrible loss by those who'd been close to her. And Peter, as a sign of how much the everyday giver, the kind carer, the unsung angel, really does matter to God, was able to restore her to life and to her works of love in the community.

Today we're privileged to accept the carefully studied and compiled record of this building and its ornaments and contents. It's been a labour of love by the Arts Society

Guildford who've spent countless hours here meticulously noting, photographing and describing the details of everything that's around us – there are probably things that most of us have never noticed that they've studied and researched. And the end result of this painstaking labour is a beautiful book that can be kept for the future, as a permanent record of St Mary's Church Shackleford in the early 21st Century, whatever its future might hold.

Today I pay tribute to their careful and thorough recording – and I thank them for what they've achieved. In turn, their work pays tribute to the people who designed and built this church with all its decorations and embellishments, those who've cared for it over the past 150 years and those who, even today, keep it swept and garnished.

Today, whilst Sir Gilbert Scott is the name that gets remembered, we celebrate 150 years of ordinary people whose lives, whose professions, whose skills and whose actions have mattered here.

And revealed in these ordinary lives and this building that those lives have touched, is a God who is quite extraordinary. The small every day creativity, work and chores that each of us undertakes are all human ways of expressing something too big to ever be contained in any building, however beautiful; whilst they're an expression of humans' love and awe for God, they are but poor imitations of God's magnificence. The people Jesus was talking with in our second Bible reading (John 10:22-30) were struggling to believe that Jesus was the messiah in spite of all the amazing things he was doing; their struggle was perhaps to do with their belief that they had God sussed already and that Jesus didn't match up with their idea of what God would be like. Jane Williams writes in response to this, 'Thinking that you know God and have got him where you want him is the best possible inoculation against really catching God – the full blown raging fever of his reality.'

What we do in small ways to glorify God through our actions really does matter, and it matters that we create inspiring spaces in which to encounter and to worship God. And then it matters that we continue to glorify God beyond the building by working for justice and peace in our communities, in our cities and in our world.

So after we've marvelled over the work that the Arts Society Guildford have done in creating this record of this building, we'll put it away somewhere safe to be kept for future generations to enjoy. And our response to it must be to take ourselves out into the unsafe places in the world to be God's light in every dark corner.