

The Odds Are You Didn't Know ...

By Mike Trippitt

I CONFESS THAT during my 33 years in St Ives, 'Bible Dicing' had escaped my attention.

But on the corner of North Road and Ramsey Road a walnut tree stands alone as the remains of "Bible Orchard". It owes its existence to one man and a fascinating tale. Richard Carter, Museum Assistant at The Norris Museum explains:

"In the seventeenth century when religion rather than politics dominated social attitudes, Dr. Robert Wilde, a Puritan, was unhappy with the practices of the high church, particularly of having the altar, or communion table, at the east end of the church away from the congregation. He planned to do something about it.

"Upon his death in 1679, his Will stated that land in St Ives be bought and the income from it be used each year to buy six bibles. "Bible Orchard" was created to be let out, and to grow and sell produce, to raise the money needed.

"Dr. Wilde stipulated that each Whitsuntide, twelve children should roll dice on the communion table in St Ives church, with those achieving the highest score being awarded one of those bibles. Wilde hoped that this activity would keep the communion table at the centre of the church. Bible Dicing was born."

Mr. Carter, who won a bible in Bible Dicing as a ten year-old back in the sixties, says that although Wilde's ambition of keeping the communion table at the centre of the church ultimately failed, he did achieve one aim:

"In the seventeenth century few families had access to books. The only book in many households was the bible. Dr. Wilde believed that children's literacy would improve if he could provide bibles for them to read."

Although rolling dice in church (the Church of England has remained opposed to gambling for centuries) has not continued without interruption since Wilde's death, the custom has been carried out continuously in living memory.

St Ives' vicar Reverend Mark Amey says that the days of the tradition being controversial are long gone: "The dice are rolled on a table in front of the altar, and this seems to satisfy any sensitivities.

Mike Trippitt is a freelance writer living in St Ives. His blog is at www.miketrippitt.com and you can follow him on Facebook.



"This year's Bible Dicing is likely to take place on Tuesday 22nd May in St Ives Parish Church. We invite year six pupils from St Ives schools to take part, although all are welcome to watch the activities."

Sadly, more will attend McDonalds' opening day than will attend the Bible Dicing. More attended Morrisons' opening day than attended the Norris Museum's re-opening.

But in order to work out where we want our town to go, we are helped by understanding from where it came. Arguably, the history, traditions and customs in our midsts are of greater community value than the next superstore, retail park, or fast food outlet.

ALL SAINTS PARISH CHURCH, ST IVES. PE27 6DG

BOOZE IN THE PEWS BEER FESTIVAL

June 28—30 5—11pm
Entry £5 including souvenir Pint Glass
(Three night pass £12)

Also on Saturday 30 June
Family Fun, with free entry, from 11am—4pm
Live Music from 'Elements' starting at 7pm

at least 12 Real Ales
Live Music (Saturday night)
Homemade Hot Food
Cider
Wine

For further information contact:
office@stivesparishchurch.org.uk