

May 4<sup>th</sup> is often known as Star Wars day, and in church circles there is a bit of liturgy that goes alongside it – ‘May the 4<sup>th</sup> be with you.... **And also with you!**’ This year on May 4<sup>th</sup> I used a rather different form of liturgy as I formally closed the marriage registers for both Cudham and Downe after the 10am service in St Mary’s. What’s going on – are we no longer doing weddings? No: Covid permitting, weddings will take place in both churches, maybe to full houses, with singing, bells, dresses, nerves, ... and the rest!

What is changing is the way that marriages are being registered; churches have been registering marriages since the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and you can visit the records office in Bromley and see our church registers which began in 1654! This is what is stopping, and it was a sad and poignant moment as I said some prayers and closed the registers which are now in the hands of Bromley Register Office (but that’s another story!). Barbara, our parish administrator for Cudham and Downe was there, as was Helen – I want to thank both of them for the way they’ve filled in Marriage Registers so well, with ‘proper’ registrar’s ink, over many years.

Replacing the filling in the of the registers is a new marriage document – mainly produced online, but still signed by the couple, witnesses and vicar or curate on the day. It’s not so pretty, but couples will still pause for a photo as they ‘sign the marriage document’ – just doesn’t sound as good as ‘signing the register’, but I’m sure it’ll still be an important moment as is that a few minutes before as I declare them ‘husband and wife’ and pray God’s blessing on them.

We still want to encourage you to ask about getting married in your parish churches – it might be easier than you think, and will be as wonderful and beautiful as ever – see [yourchurchwedding.org](http://yourchurchwedding.org)

As I closed the registers, the final prayer I said was this:- Loving God, we pray for those who will come to our churches to declare their love in time to come; for those planning weddings here in coming years, those whose love is yet unkindled and the generations still stored up in your bounty that they may live and love in the freedom of your creation. May these churches be to them a sign that their earthly love is a sign of your eternal love, the love that raised Jesus Christ from the dead and that holds us in life until we come to the kingdom prepared for us in him. **Amen**

Rev John Musson