

# The Story of a fire in 1964

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**By Cyril Brown (aged 90)**

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Boxing Day 1964 was a day I can never forget, my family were all at my parents house in Vicarage Walk enjoying Christmas.

At about 6.00 pm my brother rushed in to the house saying “the church is on fire”. At first I did not believe him. Being a churchwarden it was a terrible feeling entering the church full of smoke and water everywhere.

The fire brigade had been called and had put the fire out; when I arrived they had done a good job as the fire had been confined to the organ area, however all the walls and ceiling were black with soot.

The fire had been caused by two young children, who with their parents were visiting their grandparents for Christmas. They managed to get into the church and into an area beneath the organ, this was a large open space containing large cupboards, draws and church object, priest’s clothing, oil for the sanctuary lamp and unfortunately matches to light the floating candle in the oil, the cause of the fire, and spread to the rest of the church at its east end.

The smoke had caused a situation in which you could write your name in the soot on all the walls. Stained glass windows were broken; the finest was adjacent to the organ and was destroyed.

It took three years to restore the church to its pre-fire condition with some alterations; a new vicar had been appointed in the mean time with new ideas.

The wooden screen had been removed as it had been damaged by fire; a semi-circular altar rail was installed. This gave a clear view of the crucified Lord to all in church, it being fitted on the east wall.

During the three years of refurbishment St Giles congregation joined with St Mary’s for all its services, we were made VERY welcome by all sections of its church.

This is the story of the fire 50 years ago (1964).