

The Parish Church of Saint Laurence

## USE OF INCENSE

### **Theological Context**

In the Old Testament it was clearly a normal part of Israelite worship e.g. Exodus Ch. 30. It was therefore still part of the worship in the Temple in New Testament times. We are all well aware of the gift of incense to Jesus by the Magi. In Revelation Ch.5 v.8 it denotes the prayers of the faithful. The earliest Christian use in worship dates from a funeral in 311, but by the 5th century it appears to be a general practice throughout the Christian world. There seem to be three strands of usage at that time – a) as a way of honouring places, people and things, b) as a way of warding off evil, c) as a way of making an offering to God. By the early Middle Ages it had become more usually simply a symbol of prayer, although (a) is obviously part of censing the altar and Gospel Book.

In the Church of England it was commonly used in the 17th century, disappeared largely in the 18th century and was re-introduced in the late 19th century. In very recent times protestant antipathy to such a 'Romish' practice has much reduced. Ironically, in current Roman Catholic worship, incense is generally optional. In the Eastern churches the Eucharist is never celebrated without incense. Incense can occasionally be found used in some other reformed traditions.

### **Use of Incense at St Laurence**

When John Baulch was Rector in the late 1980s there was a Requiem at which incense was used. About twenty years ago, a retired Priest asked Brian Curnew and the PCC if he could purchase a thurible in Memory of his wife, the PCC agreed to this donation, and it was decided that initially it would be used at the High Altar on All Soul's Day. After that it was agreed to use incense at Major Festivals, although still not at that stage at the Nave Altar.

At least 12 years ago on one Ascension Day evening service, an ecumenical event, it was used at the Nave Altar, with no complaints. That appears to be the time from which our current practice of use on a few major Festivals dates. In recent years, at the request of the Methodist minister, incense was used at a further ecumenical service.

To mitigate those who find it produces allergic reaction, warning is given that it will be used in advance through the parish notices.

Our current pattern practice is therefore:

1. All Souls Choral Eucharist
2. Advent Carols
3. Nine Lessons & Carols at the blessing of the crib
4. Epiphany 9.30am Parish Eucharist
5. Candlemas Evensong
6. Ash Wednesday Choral Eucharist
7. Maundy Thursday
8. Holy Saturday

Updated Nov 18