



The wonder of Derek

Description



Mixing Wesley with Presley sounds like the work of a clever DJ. But itâ??s just what MMHS resident Revd Derek Aldridge did in becoming chaplain of UK fan organisation [Strictly Elvis](#).

Derek was all shook up when he retired â?? as this nationwide network of Elvis devotees became his parish.

Brought up in Cardiff, Derek was five when his father left the family home. A new male figure was about to take centrestage â?? the king of rock and roll.

A cultural bomb went off in his heart.

Like many other kids in the 50s and 60s, 13-year-old Derek heard an Elvis record. It wasn't *Hound Dog* or *Blue Suede Shoes*, but a sentimental ballad *Old Shep*.

A cultural bomb went off in his heart just as it did for countless other teenagers. As John Lennon said later, "Before Elvis, there was nothing". Derek was hooked.

Derek went on to enjoy other key influences, such as a set of drums, Boys' Brigade which gave him a grounding in faith and a local preacher's daughter called Janet.

They were different creatures. Janet was part of the [Welsh National Opera](#). She sat and listened with her classically trained ear while Derek spun raw Elvis LPs on his Danette record player.

The couple attended church, but Derek wouldn't sing. Janet's father was the preacher one Sunday, he recalled, and one hymn he chose was *And Can It Be*. On the verse "My chains fell off" I burst into song. And that was it. It was a religious experience for him.

Derek and Janet married at age 20 in 1968. They started a family and had two children, Andrew and Clair.

Derek was working as an accountant in the city treasurer's department. But family and friends encouraged him to consider becoming a minister. The idea grew into a "it's now or never" calling.

He became a local preacher in 1975, linking his sermon points with Elvis songs. Derek studied for ministry at [Wesley College, Bristol](#), in 1976. Finances were tight. Derek found a job to pay his way in a brewery! "The college was very understanding," he recalled.

Derek was a hit!

He was ordained in 1981. Derek led churches in Wales and North-east England, completing nearly 40 years of local ministry until retirement in 2012.

Derek met David Wade, head of Strictly Elvis, at an event in Cardiff. David invited Derek and Janet on a trip to ["Graceland", Elvis's former home in Memphis](#). They followed that dream as pictured.

While in Memphis, David told him, "I've been looking for a vicar like you for 30 years". Wanting a little less conversation and a little more action, he invited Derek to lead a Sunday gospel service at the annual Elvis Festival in Great Yarmouth. Derek was a hit!

The full version of this article can be found in [the Spring 2021 edition of Roof & Roots](#).

Category

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