

Jason and Erica Gray

Jason had been to the UK and Europe many times, and Erica had been all around Australia with a previous boyfriend before they met each other on a bus tour going to a wine tasting event in Kent.

Jason was born in 1969 in Redcliffe, a suburb of Brisbane in Queensland, Australia. He grew up with one sister and went to the local Catholic school from year 3. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in business and accounting and worked for the Queensland Auditor-General, and also did his CPA studies and qualified. He then did a couple of other financial management roles in Queensland Health but really enjoyed travelling so he made several visits to the UK and Europe. In April 1996, after a couple of years of working, Jason took a one year leave of absence and came to the UK. He only intended to stay for a year before returning to Australia, but Erica and her friend were sitting behind Jason and his two friends on the fateful bus trip to Kent and they got chatting. Two years later, in March 1998, they were married in England in the Church that Erica had attended when growing up. And six months after that they went to Australia for a wedding blessing with Jason's Australian relatives. There her ex-boyfriend's father was Erica's 'dad for the day' (she had stayed



with the family in Melbourne for some time on her travels and she is still in touch with the family). Jason's work as an accountant has taken him all over the world. Far from being a boring profession, accountancy has taken him to war zones, earthquake disaster areas, and places of great conflict. Jason first worked at the British Council for 12 years, then at the Welcome Trust for a short time, followed by Tear Fund for over 6 years, and he is presently working for the Red Cross. Now settled in the UK and with an English wife and three children, Jason regards England as home (although he still supports Australia in the cricket!). He has got accustomed to the dark,

cold winters although he, along with many of the English, is climbing the walls by the end of February.

Erica was born and brought up in Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire, with her parents and sister, who had Down's Syndrome. It was a very happy upbringing. She went to Brownies, then Guides, and would play with the children in her street. Erica went to St. Mary's, her local Church primary school, where they would be frogmarched up to the Church once a week during Lent and had a half day on Ascension Day. She then went on to the local comprehensive school up to O' levels. Erica had always wanted

to be a nurse, but she could not start her training until she was 18, so in the meantime she did a pre-nursing course, spending one day a week in a local hospital, and she did a couple more O' levels. She also worked in the menswear department of Marks and Spencer over Christmas, and for Kodak, where her father worked. In May 1982, Erica started her nursing training at King's College Hospital in Denmark Hill. She was intending to either specialise as a midwife or a children's nurse but couldn't understand why the mums were all teary after giving birth, and opted for being a children's nurse. When she qualified, she continued to work at King's on an adult ward for a year before moving to Taunton in Somerset to train as a children's nurse, working on the special care baby unit for a year once qualified. In October 1988, Erica went to Australia for a year, travelling all the way up the East coast and through the centre, climbing Ayers Rock (Uluru). On her return to the UK, Erica worked in Bristol Children's hospital on the cancer ward, where the children were amazingly strong, and the parents not so much. She remembers buying an Amazing Ninja Hero Turtle toothbrush as one of the stocking-fillers for a 4 year old boy who was in hospital over Christmas, and his huge delight that it was the particular Turtle he liked – it was his best present. Erica then moved to Addenbrooke's hospital in Cambridge, where she did a neo-natal course, and stayed for a year after completing the course. In April 1992, Erica moved back to London and got a job at St. George's, Tooting, working between the neo-natal and children's intensive care wards. She originally intended to stay for two years, but she ended up working there in the special care and neo-natal unit until she retired at 55. Erica now works part time in Sparrow pre-school in Stoneleigh, which she enjoys.

Jason was baptised an Anglican. His parents were not churchgoers, but they sent Jason to the local Catholic school where he attended school masses, had RE, and really took to it, unlike many of the children from Catholic families. Erica's parents, similarly, did not go to Church regularly, but they attended once a month for Church parades when the Brownies and Guides were present in very strict uniform. Erica went to the Church youth club in Rickmansworth, and the Curate of the Church lived in her road and would come out and play tennis with the children. Erica became a bell-ringer, went to youth club, got confirmed and then married in her local Church (where people still remembered her and made the Church look extra special for her wedding).

Jason and Erica first lived at North Cheam and started attending Christchurch with St. Philip's, though never quite settling there. They attended a Harvest Festival at St. Mary's, when the Vicar at the time, Bryan Owen, walked down the aisle with a spade over his shoulder. This appealed to Erica as there had been a slightly wacky Vicar where she grew up. Bethany was christened at St. Mary's at about 10 weeks old, when Jason's parents were visiting from Australia. Jason is now a Licensed Lay Minister at St. Mary's and contributes greatly to the running of the Church. As a couple, they are an integral part of the life of the Church.