

Get collared for your big day!

It's not just the vicar that wears a dog collar to a wedding...

Congratulations! You are getting married... the biggest day of your life! Now for the checklist: venue (yes), rings (yes), bridesmaids (yes), best man... Well, it has to be your most trusted companion, who is always there for you, whatever time of day; the one you know always puts your happiness first... Your dog!

It is your big day, and your most trusted furry friends must be there to enjoy the celebrations with you. At Cotswold Ceremonies I provide a unique ceremony written exclusively for each client. The ceremonies include all family, friends and, of course, the dog.

Ceremonies can take place in a garden at home, aboard a steam train or, if funds permit, on a private jet. The sky really is the limit!

For many years I worked as a Deputy Superintendent Registrar and had the pleasure of conducting many wedding, civil partnership and baby naming ceremonies throughout the Cotswolds. Often, rules dictated that dogs were not allowed to be a part of the ceremonies, or even to be in the ceremony room, which was disappointing for both me and for the couples.

As a lifelong dog lover, and

now with my own company, I can indulge my love of dogs with my work - the perfect job!

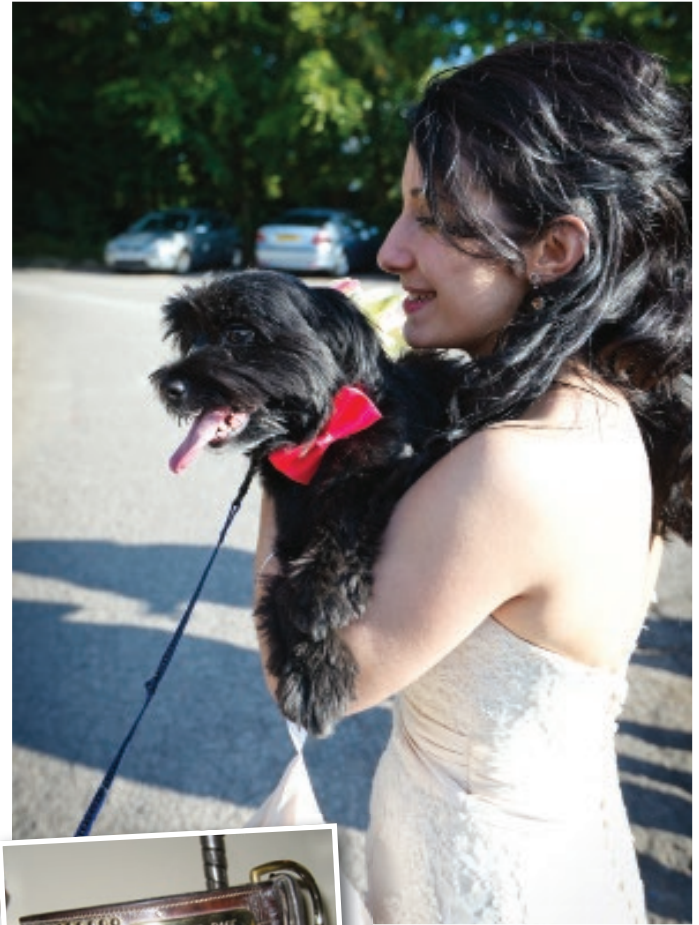
My love of dogs led me to start collecting antique dog collars. I now have a small collection, including a huge leather and brass studded collar with a plaque on it showing that the dog's owner was Edmund Page, who lived at Ivythorn Manor, Street, Somerset. Another one in the collection is a small brass, leather-lined collar, engraved with the name 'Lord Avonmore'.

Sidehead

Some of the collars are almost 200 years old - it seems that we pampered our best friends then just as we do today! A normal person would have their dog's collar engraved with their name and address, but an important or titled person was only required to have their name engraved upon it.

My collars were featured on *Antiques Roadshow* where one in particular, which still has the original leather lining, making it comfortable to wear, impressed the lovely Adam Schoon.

While they were watching the show, the Page family, who used to live at Ivythorn Manor, saw the huge collar from



Bride photo © Jonathan Watkins (Photoglow Photography)



Somerset and they kindly got in touch with me and sent a photo of the dog they thought used to wear it - his name was Nubby. The current owner was also kind enough to get in touch with me and to send photos of Ivythorn Manor - it's a small world!

For hundreds of years our dogs have worn collars. Some look terrifying with spikes to protect the wearer from vicious competitors, and some are beautiful brass or silver with soft leather linings.

At Leeds Castle in Kent (www.leeds-castle.com) there is a dog collar museum, which contains a wonderful selection of magnificent collars, a large number of which were donated to the Leeds Castle Foundation

by Gertrude Hunt in memory of her husband, John Hunt, the distinguished medievalist.

The collection, which really has to be seen, even contains Sweep's collar from *Sooty and Sweep!*

Around 1718, poet Alexander Pope had a beloved dog (well, bitch) named Bounce. On one of his visits to Alexander Pope, the Prince of Wales took a fancy to Pope's dog, and a puppy from her next litter was sent to The Prince of Wales at Kew, and on her collar was engraved: "*I am His Highness' Dog at Kew; Pray tell me Sir, whose Dog are you?*"

Needless to say, I would be thrilled to hear from anyone who would like a ceremony of any type that includes their dogs. I am based in the Cotswolds, but am happy to travel if necessary. Visit www.cotswoldceremonies.co.uk for more information. ■

