

Bishop Cuthbert Bardsley

Cuthbert was a mighty man. He was charismatic, he was powerful and he was the ideal Bishop to lead the Diocese in the 50s, 60s and 70s. He came from an evangelical background, but he also practised the sacrament of penance which meant that he had the catholic wing on board right from the beginning. They were heady days indeed. If you wanted to learn about the Holy Spirit, there was no need to buy a theological text book because all you had to do was to stand in the presence of Cuthbert. He absolutely exuded the Holy Spirit in all its various manifestations. His height must have been close on 6ft 6inches and he towered above everyone else. Most people thought it was great that he got himself married before he retired. The rumour was that Miss Michell might have taken on more than she could chew, but it was a loving relationship and I reckon that marriage was just what Cuthbert needed. They were married by Bishop Daly in the cathedral and I had the job of ferrying BJ there, but nothing was said and I only found out when I picked up BJ later

I remember when I was away from theological college and working with Bishop John Daly, the old boy reckoned it was high time that I returned to my studies despite the fact that I had failed the exams and also the essays. He told me that he had written to Bishop Cuthbert, who was an old friend to see what could be done. The next morning, the phone rang and I was told the Boss wanted to have words with me. "I am covered in dust and ashes" said Cuthbert because it transpired that my file had been lost by the Diocese, "do come and see me", "when", I asked, "tomorrow" was the reply! So, I arrived and was ushered into the presence by Betty Priddis (as she was then). "Now", said Cuthbert, "I want to see you in the cathedral on June 29th" "Why" I asked somewhat naively. "I am going to ordain you", said Cuthbert. "What about A.C.C.M"? I half protested, what will they say" And then the immortal words from a Diocesan Bishop. "I am the Bishop of this Diocese, I make these decisions, never mind about A.C.C.M. I will deal with them. And now my Dear David, you need a title parish and as it happens Fr. Anthony Rowe of St. Mary Magdalen's, Hearsall Common, is looking for a curate, you must go and see him" When", I asked, "tomorrow was the reply!!!!" That was Cuthbert.

Bishop John McKay

Bishop John was a delightful Australian who like nothing better than to have a good talk about cricket and rugby, which suited me when I went to see him for that final episcopal blessing before going to college. We got onto to matters theological and spiritual for just the last five minutes. I liked him immensely. He was happy to speak his mind, which endeared him to quite a few people (me included). It appears that he was chaplain to a school out in Australia which was for young ladies from wealthy families and some of us understood that he married one of the sixth form, although presumably, he would have left by then. He was a terror when at the altar, especially if it was a Solemn Mass, because he had this habit of sweeping all before and behind him. He knocked into incense and charcoal containers and sent smoking incense and red hot charcoal all over the place and to compound the felony he left the altar looking like a second hand book stall., He ordained me priest and I remember Canon Poole the precentor scowling vigorously when the cathedral High Altar was left in a mess and Canon Poole had to clear up in more ways than one. He also had this habit of going for a walk while he was preaching. My boss, Fr. Anthony put me in charge of trying to contain him when he visited, so I sat at the foot of the pulpit and boxed him in. It made no difference because he became a little agitated, pushed past me and started patrolling the aisle as he went on with his sermon."I can't stand this" he was heard to say. He was greatly loved by the clergy.

Bishop John Daly

Bishop John (known as BJ) was the youngest Bishop in the Anglican Communion back in the 30s. He was consecrated in Barking All Hallows by the Tower and went out to Africa to become the first Bishop of the newly created Diocese of Gambia and the Rio Pongas. He only had four clergy and his episcopal residence was the strong room of Barclays Bank D.C.O. in the capital. His sister Barbara used to come out when it was necessary to entertain at a government level. They were both single and there was plenty of money left to them by their father who was a stockbroker in the city. Ultimately, he was translated to become Bishop of the Gold Coast (as it was then) and then finally to be Bishop of Korea, before coming back to England and being given the parish of St. Chad, Bishop's Tachbrook.

Having failed miserably at College with my academic pursuits, it was suggested that I attach myself to BJ. It was an inspired decision and I learnt so much. I also met some fantastic people, as you never knew who might just happen to be passing. Tubby Clayton turned up once and left his pipe in the toilet. Michael Ramsey was another visitor when BJ celebrated 40 years as a Bishop, mind you, there were about 20 Bishops in a procession to church and local bobby looked somewhat bemused.

I remember BJ telling me that the definition of mission was quite simple really! It was just making friends for Jesus! That ought to put many a theologian in his or her place. To my mind, simplicity is the essence of good scholarship. I learned from BJ about the enthusiasm for mission, for looking for any opportunity, even if it was inconvenient to witness to the Faith. However, I did appreciate that for some people (Bishops included) there was a very big difference between the C of E as we know it and the far distant missionary imperative. The two don't normally sit comfortably together and BJ experienced the frustrations of this particular problem. But he was a loveable person and I owe him a lot. It was a great joy for both Hilary and myself that He and Barbara came to our wedding.

Canon Poole

Canon Poole was precentor of Coventry Cathedral, having been previously precentor of Canterbury Cathedral. In some ways, you could not have two completely different situations where you might practice your liturgical skills. He ran a tight ship and had a reputation for not suffering fools gladly! When he retired he set himself up as a Rent-a Precentor!! I am not sure if he ever had any business, but he certainly knew what he was doing and had the opportunity at Coventry to experiment.

I had to write to him just before my ordination to ask if it would be possible for my mother to sit near to the front as she was registered as being blind, I also mentioned that Harbury RFC was coming (I was skipper in 1970). No problem at all, he was delighted to arrange for excellent seating for my mother and the Rugby Club. During the ordination service I was accorded the great privilege of reading to gospel. Normally this goes to the top academic who had proved themselves by essay. I was told it was a sweetener to me by the diocese as they had not just lost my file but they had done nothing when I had been put on the wrong course at College! Having read the gospel and in front of a packed cathedral, the precentor shook my hand and audibly said, "Well read". Later that same week, I wrote a letter of thanks to him. Back came a reply. This is the first time that anyone has written to thank me for making the arrangements at an ordination. Do come and take a glass of sherry with me. I felt that I was now well and truly in the Church of England.

Archdeacon Eric Buchan

Also known to all and sundry as Father B. He gave the impression of being very mighty and powerful and some clergy were frightened of him. I certainly made sure that I did not cross his path from the

wrong side. He had served in the R.A.F during the war and being single man had camped in the vestry of St. Mark's Church when he was appointed as its parish priest. He did not seem to understand that married priests did have certain responsibilities, such as a house with a roof over it and some comforts, even if they were very basic. He crossed swords with Pat Morgan, whose husband Alan went on to become Archdeacon of Coventry and then Bishop of Sherwood. He seemed to think that she could cope with a hole in the roof and made the mistake of making a derogatory remark about the Welsh language. She absolutely flew at him.

He used to preside at Diocesan Meetings of the USPG. It was voluntary of course, but if you were of the more Catholic persuasion, attendance was obligatory! The same treatment was meted out by those who preferred the CMS. I arrived late at one meeting and slipped in to the back row, hoping that I not been seen. No such luck! Do come and sit on the front row purred Fr. B. I was caught.

On another occasion I had been asked to celebrate at Earlsdon as they were in interregnum, but it was BCP and I had not done that before. No problem except that Fr. B had decided to be present. I suggested that he might like to celebrate. No such luck. You do so, my wayward son, said he.

My favourite story about Fr. B is when I went down to London for a USPG meeting in Tufton Street. It was coming up to lunch and I had made friends with a young chap who came from the more charismatic persuasion, so we set off and then I froze because I heard a familiar voice, "My Wayward Son". I was going one direction down Tufton Street, the next moment, I was going in reverse and five minutes later I was sitting down for lunch in the Church Commissioners Restaurant! At least Fr. B paid!

John Allen was Diocesan Secretary for much of my time. Not everyone got on with John, but I did and he was very kind to me, especially when I took time off due to exhaustion and he sent me complimentary tickets for a ride on the Severn Valley Railway; I even drove an engine! John and I had crossed swords on the matter of the assignment of Clergy Fees, a matter which I felt very strongly about and I knew for a fact that the Church Commissioners were encouraging all dioceses to bring in the scheme, whereas John felt that he had more important matters to attend to. I raised the matter at DBF, which rather spilt the beans, but John was the first to phone me when the decision was made to go ahead.

As well as steam, trains, John was an expert campanologist and phoned me to ask if he might bring over the Lichfield Cathedral Bell Ringers to ring the bells at Alcester. I was delighted and made sure that the Captain of the Tower was happy. The group turned up, rang the bells superbly, made very complimentary comments, stuffed a lot of notes into the bell fund box and went down to the pub for a liquid lunch. Then they went off to Bidford to repeat the process. When asked where they had come from, they innocently said that they had been ringing the bells at Alcester! Don't be daft was the reply, they are a miserable lot at Alcester and have always said "no" when we asked them. I found out about this in a very long letter which John sent me a few days later, it certainly pays to be Diocesan Secretary. It is interesting that later on when I felt that John was badly treated by the diocese and manoeuvred out from his job, he had rather more support in the parishes than he might have thought. One of my parishioners who crossed swords with him, time and time again said to me that the Diocese was very foolish to get rid of such a competent administrator. Praise in deed.

Archdeacon Ted Taylor was a self-confessed Prayer Book Catholic. He used to write under the pseudonym of, Canon Fodder which was a good summary of him. Ted could be grim and was known to scowl if he was not happy, but he also went to great lengths when he fixed the venue for his Archdeacon's Charge! He made sure that there was a decent pub nearby and if an assistant curate

happened to be passing by, he got a free pint! Yes! The service was a bit boring, but on the other hand, there was always a hint of a smile and Ted could be good fun after any service, especially if there were refreshments. I went to see him once about relationships with a certain parish. Ted scowled as Ted always did and then he lent forward and said, "I kid you not mate" etc etc. He was also unhappy about this particular situation. It was not long after, that Ted died quite suddenly and we all realised what he was all about. Sadly missed.

Fr. Henry Hughes was the Vicar of St. Luke's Holbrooks. He was known for being very talkative, in fact you could not get a word in. He was also ubiquitous and popped up at all sorts of functions. Having said that he was a first-rate parish priest in the very best of that tradition and needless to say he was quite prepared to tell the hierarchy what he thought of them. He trained many curates including my own training incumbent (Fr. Anthony Rowe). I was told that on one occasion when they were both summoned to appear at the Archdeacon's Charge, Fr. Henry was not in a good mood and declared the matter to be a complete waste of time, but he had to go. In those days you were signed in. When your name was called out you had to stand and answer in the affirmative. To add insult to injury, the Archdeacon referred to him as Mr. Hughes. After that insult, Fr. Henry said to Fr. Rowe that he was not waiting any longer and it was time to go! So, without further ado, both clergy got down on their knees and crawled out. The Archdeacon never realised what had happened.

Fr. Robin Noise claims credit for being the only priest in the diocese to be thrown out of a pub for swearing. For the curious, it was the Antelope at Lighthorne. He was also thrown out of his own church when he mistakenly turned up for the rehearsal of the institution. He was told in somewhat icy tones by the Archdeacon that his presence was not required and he need not come until the evening service. He claimed that he had himself told an Archdeacon to leave his church, but I never found out which archdeacon! Mind you it was always an interesting experience to visit the vicarage at Alveston because there was a preponderance of bottles taking up a lot of room. Some were full, some were half full and some were empty, but the hospitality was always most generous.