



ANGLO-CATHOLIC HISTORY SOCIETY

Message from the Chairman

The death of our President, Bishop Geoffrey Rowell, a few days before our June meeting was a shock. I had been in touch with him only a few weeks before. He told me then he was feeling unwell and was undergoing tests. Alas, unbeknownst to him, cancer had spread widely and he went downhill rapidly. I was able to attend his funeral in Chichester Cathedral which was exactly as a traditionalist Anglo-Catholic bishop would have wanted. There was a strong ecumenical presence, especially of Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox reflecting his important role in ecumenical dialogue. Bishop Rowan Williams preached and the Cathedral was packed. He was buried at Boxgrove Priory. There was a memorial Service at Keble College on 21st October.

I first met Geoffrey when I began my doctoral studies in Oxford in 1970 and he was assistant chaplain of New College. He later moved to Keble where he enjoyed a long and fruitful pastoral and academic ministry before becoming a bishop, firstly as +Basingstoke, in the Winchester diocese, and latterly Bishop of Europe. That post suited him down to the ground with its opportunities for ecumenical contacts and travel, which he loved.

Our society owes so much to him. When Brent Skelly and the late Michael Farrer approached him with the idea of creating an Anglo-Catholic History Society he was fully supportive. He realised his duties would preclude much active involvement and so asked me if I would become involved. And so I became Chair with the primary brief of finding speakers. Geoffrey gave the inaugural lecture at St Mary's, Bourne St, on 26th June 2000, choosing as his subject *Prejudices and Perspectives: Anglo-Catholic*

History Reconsidered. We kept regularly in touch about the Society's affairs and it seemed fitting to invite him back on our 15th anniversary when he spoke to us about Father Benson of Cowley. He will be sorely missed in his many different roles: scholar, bishop, ecumenist, pastor and friend to so many. His passing, as some have remarked, was in a way the passing of an era. I cannot imagine another Tractarian scholar don from an Oxbridge College being elevated to the episcopate. May he rest in peace or, as our Orthodox friends would say, Memory Eternal!

I will end by quoting the final paragraph of his inaugural lecture as I think it is suggestive of his approach to scholarship and remains pertinent more generally. I am not sure how many of us who heard that lecture guessed then that we would still be in business seventeen years later and with some creditable achievements behind us!

There is a rich vein to be mined (and is already being mined) in the study of Anglo-Catholicism. It must be concerned with the religious impulse that is at its heart, sacramental piety, liturgy and devotion, and service. In that sense it may legitimately have a dimension properly described as hagiography, but it must also be critical, analytical and perceptive, understanding the movement against a wider canvas, and so making a contribution to Church history as a whole, but also to theology and the doctrine of the church. I wish this new society well.

Best wishes to you all for Christmas and the New Year. I look forward to seeing some of you in 2018.

Fr Perry Butler, December 2017