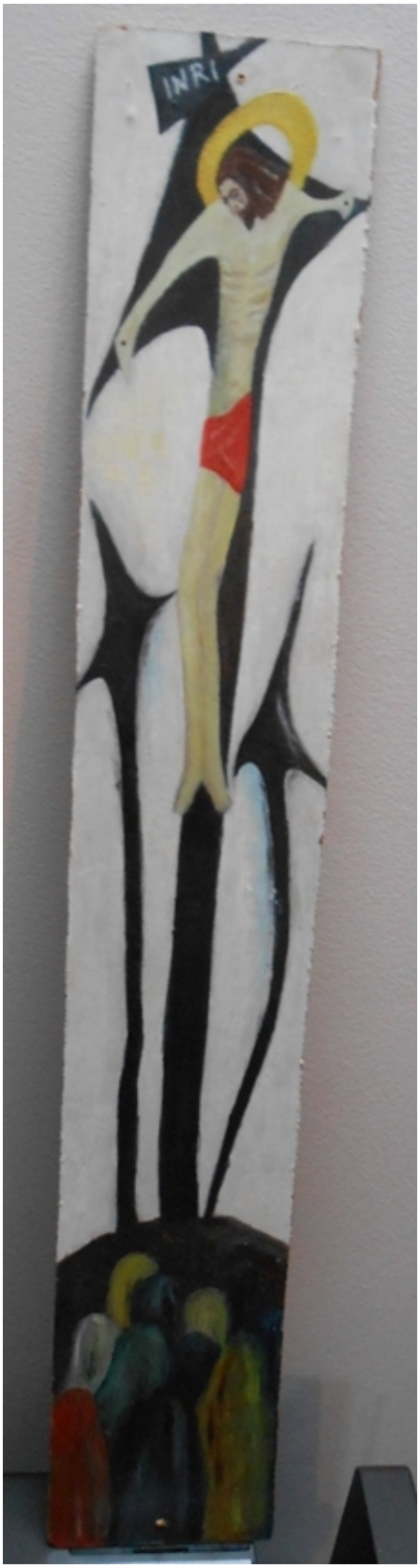

Priesthood and Ministry

Reminiscences of Fr John Baggley

Poplar 1966 to Oxford 2016

In Memoriam
Arthur and Joan Royall
Fr Gilbert Shaw

Note about the front cover: The Crucifix image on the front cover was created by a young woman who was a member of the South Poplar Youth (SPY) Club and whose name is Jenny Clare. It was early in the autumn when the club had opened again after being closed for the summer. As the club members were leaving the premises, Jenny pushed a piece of paper into my hands saying, 'Have a look at that. What do you think about it?' 'That' was a biro doodle on a piece of plain paper. After looking at it for some time, I said, 'I think you could make something from that.' She took the piece of paper from me and I have not seen her since. However, the following Christmas I received a narrow package two foot long and six inches wide, containing the Crucifix. My guess is that Jenny came across this piece of scrap board and decided to work from there. She seems to have had the capacity to work within the restricted dimensions of the piece of board to make a truly remarkable image. It is Christ alone that is the focal point of our attention. The other two crosses are pointers to the central figure. The group at the base of the image could be grieving disciples or devout pilgrims. The arrow-like crosses help to move our attention to the Lord Himself – an expression of our desires to live in close contact with Our Lord Jesus Christ.

My Faith looks up to Thee, Thou Lamb of Calvary
Saviour Divine
Now hear me while I pray, take all my guilt away
O let me from this day, be wholly thine.
(Ray Palmer. *The Mirfield Mission Hymn Book*)

This Crucifix has been in my possession for about forty years. It 'disappeared' on two occasions due to furniture removals and the problems of moving on to new appointments. It was a great relief each time it was recovered.

I keep the Crucifix in my room in the nursing home where I now live, on the top of a bookcase. There is a framed photograph on either side. On the left, is one of my favourite photographs taken in 1930 by the Hungarian photographer Martin Munkácsi. It is a silhouette image of three black boys running into Lake Tanganyika. The whole picture is full of vitality. One of the great French photographers said of this image that it was the best photograph that he had ever seen. On the right, is a photograph I took on a pilgrimage in Russia. We were staying on the island of Solovki in the arctic waters of northern Russia. The Solovetsky Archipelago attracted a variety of hermits to live in these remote areas. Eventually a large monastic settlement was established. At the time of Peter the Great (and later) it was a place of exile for opponents of authority. The Soviet authorities closed down the monastery and established a prison camp, which developed into one of the early gulags in the 1920s and 1930s. The churches were desecrated and often the sanctuaries used as latrines. In the post-Stalinist era, some monasteries and churches were restored, and monastic communities began to live in the mediaeval buildings. My photograph shows a group of pilgrims standing around a large Cross erected close to the area where many prisoners were sent to their death. This stands on a high level area above a steep descent to a stream that runs into the sea. The woods on this descent had been cut down leaving tree stumps protruding above ground. The victims to be killed were tied to parts of trimmed tree trunks and then rolled down over the tree stumps to the bottom of the bank. It certainly is a sadistic form of killing. The final item placed at the foot of the Jenny's Crucifix is a book by Dr Mads Gilbert – *Night in Gaza*. This doctor has devoted huge amounts of time in many dangerous parts of the world, linking up with medical teams wherever he is needed. The book is open to display photographs that are a vivid testimony to the horrors that have to be endured by Muslims and Christians in Gaza and other parts of the occupied West Bank.

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FOREWORD

Grateful Memories of Ordination, Priesthood, and Ministry from 1966 in east London (and in particular in Poplar) to 2016 in Oxford

'Why are you writing this book?' several people have asked. My reply is that it started with jokes and funny stories which had been heard by various people, including Peter a parishioner at Corpus Christi, Headington, where I had the privilege of being parish priest from 2000 to 2015. Peter thought the stories were worth telling. We gradually moved away from the roles of raconteur as we realized more serious issues were involved and the lives and ministries of other people had to be honoured.

During the early stages of the text, it increasingly dawned on me that Arthur Royall's ministry had achieved a great deal in a period of rather drastic changes. He trusted his colleagues and we all had a wide spectrum of priestly ministry to fulfil. There were also some women staff members, whose ministry was valued

Also, I must mention Joan Royall, Arthur's wife, and his four children Robert, Richard, Elizabeth, and Margaret, and Mrs James the cook at St Michael's Presbytery. Arthur was also the area dean and was involved in local schools. He did his best to get his curates involved in the local schools as well, often as elected governors. The Rectory was not only a home for the Royall's it was also the place where staff meetings were held and where Arthur and Joan were hospitable to parishioners and others.

The different sections of this work all have a variety of loose ends. I don't think that matters because the people, subject matters and issues involved are part of a complex spectrum of how human life can be experienced. I hope people will pick up a few interesting strands that will inspire them to live and work Glory of God and the well-being of human existence.

Thank you to Pam Coote for editing the text and others who helped this to come into existence. Please remember in your prayers the areas mentioned in this work and the great variety of problems in society and human relationships.

As the end of my life approaches I have great gratitude for friends and others who have inspired me.

Deo Gratio,

John Baggley.

INTRODUCTION

It may help readers of this booklet if I give you some idea of my own spiritual and pastoral experience in the priesthood.

I was born on 21 February 1940 in the Lincolnshire market town of Alford, about six miles inland from the east coast. I was baptized in our parish church dedicated to St Wilfrid. The whole of Lincolnshire is mainly agricultural land, with some larger towns with industrial centres. Two main chalk ridges have good grazing land, while the coastal plain is good land for wheat and cereals, potatoes, sugar beet, and kale. The population of Alford has only in recent years exceeded 3,000. The schools in the town were the county infant and junior school, the secondary modern school and Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School (an Anglican foundation).

The parish church of St Wilfrid was in the centre of the town on the highest piece of land. It is a good large mediaeval building, which had been well cared for. There was a large Methodist church and a Congregational chapel; an independent Wesleyan chapel had passed into secular use as had two other religious buildings. One was the old Church primary school which was used from time to time by the small Catholic population in the town. One small road came to be known as Ranters Row owing to the collection of independent chapels that had existed in the area. On the whole, relationships between the churches were amicable and co-operative. For the size of the town there was quite a lot of cultural activity – drama groups, church choirs, music recitals, the town band, evening classes, local education programmes, badminton, etc.

My father, also, was born in Alford, and his father was a tailor. Dad left school at an early age and, after a series of part-time jobs, was appointed as a clerk at the local brewery. Grandad Baggley and the family moved to Boston after the First World War, where he continued to work with the tailoring firm. Dad stayed in Alford in lodgings with some good family friends, and later was taken into Mr Carnley's solicitor's office and continued there until the 1970s. He enjoyed the work enormously, especially when he had to go with the 'the Boss' to proceedings in the County Court in Lincoln. Much of the routine work was to do with work at the local magistrates courts.

My mother was born in the village of Nettleham, and came to Alford as a primary school teacher in the 1930s. My parents married in 1932 and managed to get a council house which they lived in until the late 1960s. I was born in that house and my midwife was Nurse Ada Tweedle, a retired district nurse, who had only two teeth – one upper and one lower. I reached the conclusion that she chewed with her gums. She spent a large amount of time looking after elderly and disabled people.

As far as religion was concerned, my mother was a devout Anglican and regularly went to the 8 a.m. Communion Service on Sunday. Dad's family were a blend of Salvation Army and Congregational Church. I was baptized at St Wilfrid's and was taken to church from quite an early age. When I was 7 years old I joined the boys' choir under the organist and choir master Mr Frank Graves ARCO ACTL. He came from a family of passionate musicians. Franky, as we called him behind his back, was a good musician. Our singing was not just hymns and psalms but also anthems, which had to be rehearsed, and music for special occasions such as Holy Week, Easter, and Christmas. Choirs from other Churches joined in for some of these occasions. My first opportunity to sing Handel's *Messiah* was a performance to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Franky's appointment as organist and choir master in 1895, or thereabouts. Franky taught me to play the organ and used me if he needed help.

I grew up with music. Mother played the piano and the violin. She met up with friends to play once a week. I began to play the piano when I was about 8 years old. Dad had been playing a bugle and

cornet from childhood, and had been sent to the privy at the bottom of the garden to practise where the family could not hear him. Dad could play almost any of the brass band instruments. The ones he would admit to not being able to play were the trombone, French horn, and tuba. Within a fifteen-mile radius of Alford there were five or six local brass bands, with many people playing in each other's bands when they needed help. Although I never learned to play the brass band instruments, I enjoyed watching and listening to the concerts, especially the occasional brass band competitions in Nottingham.

Another musical dimension was the Church events in Lincoln Cathedral, when lots of local choirs were gathered together. A lot of work went into preparing for these events. They were always inspiring and invigorating occasions. A musical highlight for me was in 1951 when we went to London for the Festival of Britain, staying with some family friends. We managed to get into the Albert Hall for the Friday night Promenade Concert. It was the Philharmonic Orchestra with Solomon playing two Beethoven piano concertos. What an experience! I became a real fan of Solomon.

When I was 11 years old, I got a Saturday job delivering meat for our local butcher – my first paid employment! I enjoyed it very much, but the butcher's bike was not easy to handle. I occasionally had the bike fall over and sometimes meat had to be taken into a trusted customer to be cleaned up. There were about four 'safe houses' where my problem could be solved. The meat round also gave me a lot of contacts that I would otherwise not have made. One awkward old lady used to complain about the bone in the last week's joint and would tell me to take it back to the butcher. Eventually, the butcher said, 'Tell her that you can't grow beef without bones.' Response: 'Sarky, you don't get that from your father.' Mother could see the funny side of it. I was surprised to get a tip at Christmas; the poorer customers were the most generous.

My mother's family were devout Anglicans, and Grandad Parker had been a church warden for many years: Will and Minnie Parker were mainstays of Nettleham parish church and very devout. When we stayed at Boston for a visit with my father's family, it involved going to Congregational chapel or the Salvation Army Citadel where the music was quite good.

Looking back, I realize what a lively and light touch was involved in my spiritual development. Goodnight prayers were normal and not a problem for me. Being in the choir and then being an altar server meant contact with some lovely people. Some of the adults in the choir were real characters with quirky habits. One man had problems with his false teeth, while another had problems with throat tablets, especially Meloids, which shot all over the place after the top of the tin had been removed.

Our life of prayer is essential, it needs to be nourished and we need to give time to it. If we don't pray, we put a distance between ourselves and the Lord. I grew up in a parish where the Eucharist had become the central act of worship for me by the time I was 15 or 16 years old. Family holidays often included the exploration of churches and cathedrals and their history. From an early age, I grew up in familiarity with the Celtic saints of English Christianity. In the 1950s we had a parish mission led by a remarkable priest and team of lay people. With hindsight, I came to realize how formative it had been for me, and how it remained in my consciousness throughout my time at Durham University, where I studied modern history.

At Durham University I lived under the increased influence of saints Cuthbert, Aidan, Wilfrid, and Bede. Professor Christopher Evans was Lightfoot Professor of Divinity. He was a great teacher and preacher, and I am greatly indebted to him for his inspiration and influence. A sense of vocation to the priesthood developed during my time at Durham and was reinforced when my friend David Bland said, 'If you are thinking about ordination, you must go to Kelham Theological College. All

the best priests I know were trained there.' So I made contact with the Society of the Sacred Mission (SSM) at Kelham and began my studies there.

During the next four years my spiritual and ecclesial horizons were broadened enormously. Brother George Every, the Byzantine scholar, taught patristic theology and opened up enormous quantities of knowledge to me. It was at Kelham that I became a devotee of St Gregory of Nysssa and began to take a serious interest in the iconography of the Eastern Churches. There was also the whole spectrum of biblical scholarship, which was equally enjoyable and demanding.

Towards the end of one summer term, the Prior of the SSM received a letter from a priest in east London asking for help. The letter was passed to me and I was asked to select eight to ten volunteers to go with me to help with a parish visitation in North Woolwich in the docklands. The priest in question was Fr Robert Coogan, who had been a curate in the area for some time and was affronted by the way a parish was being run down by the new incumbent. His anger had led to him being made parish priest and told to do what he could to redeem the parish's future. Carrying out that visitation was new territory for us, close to the heart of the London docks. It was also an area where unusual variations of the English language were found – back slang, rhyming slang, etc. It was good to be able to go back the following year and see the progress that had been made in the parish, including plans for a new church.

I also had two summer placements at Morton Hall Borstal between Newark and Lincoln. This rather odd placement was one of the regular options SSM offered its students. It was tough but well worth the pain. We shared the life of young offenders in their dormitory communities, in their physical labour in the grounds, and in relaxation periods. The first challenge I had to face was when a large tough and rather thuggish youth asked, 'Do you play chess?' 'Yes,' I said. 'Play me,' he said. So the game of chess began and I wondered whether I should play to win or to let him win. I decided to play to win, and it gained me more 'street cred' than I could have imagined.

When the four-year course at Kelham was coming to a close and choices had to be made about where we would go, I received a brown paper envelope with my name on it containing a single piece of paper which simply said 'Go to Poplar'. I did and had no regrets whatsoever. I was ordained in St Paul's Cathedral in 1968 and spent eight years in Poplar in east London. The Poplar team ministry was a good place to be in – good experienced colleagues as well as newly ordained people.

From Poplar I was asked by Bishop Trevor Huddleston to go to St Peter de Beauvoir Town in Hackney as parish priest. I was delighted to find a congenial group of parish priests and curates in the area of the Hackney deanery. Here again the process of change and formation were powerful and positive. It was my first experience of a largely Afro-Caribbean community.

My next move was to Bicester in Oxfordshire as team rector there. It was not an easy parish, rather a group of parishes and priests. One of the positive assets of the parish for me was some Serbian parishioners, whose liturgy was celebrated monthly in the parish church. My Serbian friends used to call me in for a nibble and tipple from time to time. In some respects I felt almost as displaced as they had been. However, another displacement loomed on the horizon – the sense of being drawn to become a Roman Catholic.

This next expansion of diversity took me into full communion with the Catholic Church. The process of transition was less traumatic than I expected. The Archbishop of Birmingham, Maurice Couve de Murville, was very supportive and helpful, and there were lots of good things about the seminary at Oscott. I was surprised that so many people accepted the choices I had made with great respect. I continue to pray for them and I am sure they pray for me.

After ordination at St Chad's Cathedral in Birmingham, I had placements at Solihull and Bloxwich, before being appointed parish priest to the Sacred Heart parish in Blackbird Leys in Oxford. I was then transferred to Corpus Christi in Headington, Oxford with Our Lady of Lourdes, Wheatley for fifteen very happy years until my retirement. Corpus Christi is a very mixed community, which is remarkably at ease with a great diversity of races and nationalities.

Flashback to 1739

In 1739 the Revd Samuel Caswell was appointed as the incumbent of the small parish of Cold Ashton, near Bristol in Gloucestershire. He had graduated at Trinity College, Dublin, and was the incumbent from 1739 until his death in 1791. The village now is very small and looks west towards Bristol and south from the edge of the Cotswolds towards Bath.

A few years ago I arranged to visit the parish, and the priest was pleased to be able to give me information about the Caswell family. Samuel had two wives (in succession) and several children. Entries in the parish registers were frequently witnessed by Mrs Caswell or the adult children.

In the village there are three large buildings: the parish church, the largest house which was probably occupied by the Lord of the Manor and, slightly smaller, the vicarage occupied by the priest and his family.

Unfortunately I have lost some of the details of the following action taken by Samuel in the church. He erected a monument inscribed as follows:

Sacred to the memory of ……
Former patron of this living
What his next of kin have failed to do has been done by
Samuel Caswell Rector 1740

I suspect that the relationship between the occupants of the largest house and the smaller house were probably tense. After all, Samuel had been appointed to the parish by the previous Lord of the Manor, who was by then deceased. The monument was originally over the door inside the church, so that everyone leaving became familiar with the inscription. At a later stage, the lower part of the inscription was defaced and, later still, the whole monument was re-located to a side chapel. Fortunately copies of the full inscription had been made before it was defaced.

My interest arose because my maternal grandmother was descended from the Caswell family. She trained as a teacher at St Mary's College in Cheltenham. She moved up to the Lincoln area and married William Robert Parker. They lived in Lincoln for a short time before moving to the village of Nettleham where my grandfather was a church warden for about 40 years. They were a very devout couple and served the Church well.

CHAPTER 1

THE SOCIETY OF THE SACRED MISSION

The Society of the Sacred Mission was a monastic community founded by an Anglican priest, Fr Herbert Kelly in 1893 in Kennington, south London, to train people for missionary service in Korea.

Fr Kelly was convinced that provision had to be made to train for the priesthood men who did not come from aristocratic or academic establishment backgrounds. He devised his own 'policy' on how to help boys from working class homes to grow into a life of prayer and worship and to live together an ordered community life which encouraged theological reflection.

After one or two re-locations, the community acquired the use of Kelham Hall, near Newark in Nottinghamshire. It was a large High Victorian Gothic mansion, built in 1863 by George Gilbert Scott for the Manners-Sutton family. The Society bought and extended the property, adding a magnificent domed chapel – the spiritual heart of the community life. The chapel was ordered in a manner that easily accommodated the solemn liturgy of the Mass and also the regular communal celebration of the Divine Office – Morning and Evening Prayer, Compline, and the minor offices. It was a magnificent place of worship. Many Anglican parishes in the Midlands and beyond had regular pilgrimages to be present for Solemn Evensong or for a Solemn Mass for Pilgrims.

Kelham Theological College was established by the Society of the Sacred Mission around 1903. It was conveniently placed with easy access for people from north, south, east, and west. Academic links were established with Nottingham University, with the medical profession, and with Nottingham Social Services. The dismemberment of this network was truly tragic.

One of the key people at Kelham in my time was Fr Gregory Wilkins, the director of the Society. When he was appointed to this post the *Church Times* described him as the seventh son of a London postman. He was in fact the seventh son of a Poplar postman. Fr Simon Mein was the warden of the theological college and supported the request to help in Poplar. We had eight volunteer students in the project for two months.

In 1972 the Church of England authorities ceased to sponsor young men to be trained for the priesthood at Kelham and applications and admissions fell to less than forty a year with the college closing in 1973. It was a wicked and foolish decision in the eyes of many people. Moreover, the Church of England authorities had never in fact paid anything towards the training carried out at Kelham.

The crisis the community now faced was traumatic. There were various options for the future but making decisions was difficult. Some work continued in the North West where the Society had acquired a property which enabled them to undertake chaplaincy work with Lancaster University. Several people were keen to get involved in the new town developments at Milton Keynes and a priory was established at Willen. Several priests were released from monastic commitment and resumed priestly ministry elsewhere.

After the collapse of the integrated community of SSM it was very difficult for outsiders, i.e friendly colleagues, former students, and members of the Society to know what was happening. It is also worth mentioning that the Society was made up of several provinces in the UK, Australia, South Africa, and North East Asia (i.e. Japan). It was a long time before it became known that Fr Ralph Martin SSM, a Canadian priest who had joined the community at Kelham in the 1960's, was

responding to requests to work in various parts of the world. This effectively kept SSM in a position of some credibility along with much uncertainty. A selection of Fr Ralph's work was published in 2015 by Darton, Longman & Todd as *Towards a New Day*.

Borstal Placements

When I went to Kelham as a student, the college football team had regular games with local teams including the team from Lowdham Grange Borstal. When the team and their supporters were made aware of our lifestyle, we usually heard lots of comments such as, 'Bloody hell, it's worse doing time at your place than it is at ours.' They thought that our regime of cold showers was cruel, and eating off a metal plate was poor style.

I do not know how or when the idea of Kelham students 'doing time' at borstal began, but by my time it was a well-established option for the summer holiday. For each visit there was a senior student who had done this before and a junior student who could become a senior in a subsequent year. On arrival at the borstal gates we were taken to reception to be processed, giving our personal details and surrendering all our personal possessions for safe-keeping. Then we changed into prison clothing and were escorted to the block that we had been allocated to. It was up to us to pick up the routine from the lads in our dormitory or the communal room. The only 'concession' we had was that we wore cassocks and a girdle after supper, and on other 'free-time' occasions. One of the benefits of this was that we did have some time to talk to prison officers.

The borstal connection would almost certainly have begun through Sir Almeric Rich, who was governor of Huntercombe Borstal, south of Reading. Descended from the Richard Rich who lived in the 16th century and figured in the drama 'A Man for All Seasons', Sir Almeric was a regular visitor to Kelham. Through his many visits he became part of the life of Kelham seminary and I will have heard him speak to the students and to the whole community. He was a very committed Anglican, with a very developed theology of incarnational living. To his friends and colleagues he must have seemed beyond belief. He took the reality of Jesus Christ, Son of God as true - and not only true but the basis for living a Christian life. He also translated this into his working life. Whatever was to be done with and for the youths put in his care had to be based on a relationship that was integrated with this fundamental Christian concept. Needless to say, his talks were illustrated by sundry anecdotes.

Sir Almeric was one of the pioneers of 'open borstals', where more freedom was granted to the inmates than in the 'closed borstals'. We saw the fruits of this enlightened approach. Compassion for people whose lives had gone wrong was a positive approach in the prison service. Sir Almeric made a point of spending time with the prisoners in the punishment block and sharing in the chores which were part of the punishment. As Louis Blom-Cooper recounted in his 1987 lecture 'The Penalty of Imprisonment', 'At Huntercombe Borstal Sir Almeric would punish boys by making them pick up flints from the field – and he did it alongside them to show that he shared responsibility for their misbehaviour.' The same applied to some of the scrubbing chores – especially those involving the use of a brick to scrub concrete floors. 'If he put a boy in a cell overnight he would stay in the next-door cell, to give moral support if needed. '(*The Tanner Lectures on Human Values 1988*, Cambridge University Press).

Sir Almeric was not the only eccentric in the prison service, as Blom-Cooper observed: 'Another borstal governor, John Vidler, didn't exactly punish boys for not working: he said that work was a privilege and the boy wouldn't be allowed to work until he changed his attitude. After three days in a cell with as many books as he wanted, the boy decided he would rather work.'

I had two summer placements at Morton Hall Borstal that gave me a great insight into the prisoners' lives 'inside' and also the life of the prison officers. On the second occasion, when I was the senior student, on the last Saturday evening we were walking through the wide open courtyard space. I realized that our path would take us face-to-face with the officer in charge of the punishment block. We had heard a lot about him from the boys. As we stood facing each other, the officer started the conversation by saying how pleased he was that another Kelham group had come. He said that they always looked forward to our coming. He went on to say that we probably had no idea how important our visit was and the impact it made on the boys. He then said, 'You have heard a lot about me from the boys. I would like to tell you a bit about my job and how I go about it.' He stressed the importance of knowing the boys and their behavioural patterns and problems and how it was important to know their physical health and strength. Some punishments involved team work breaking up the concrete bases of the old Morton Hall airfield runways. He stressed the need to be able to observe the work and not to create undue stress. I remember him addressing one group who were looking very tired. 'Okay,' he said, 'I think that's enough concrete for the moment. Go and polish the chapel floor and then go to recreation.' One of the final points that he made was that of the twenty dormitory leaders, nineteen had spent some time in the punishment block. It was a time and place for learning discipline and responsibility as much as anything else. In much of what he said, I could not help sensing that there were echoes of the training of Sir Almeric Rich.

I was impressed by many of the prison officers, several of the older ones having done National Service or other forms of military service. Some of them had a wonderful sense of humour in dealing with the boys. Getting things done was often a comical procedure for the officers as well as the boys, resulting in a jocular approach to some aspects of life in the borstal. Older officers seemed to have a well-refined sense of balance in their relationships with the boys. Some of the younger officers would sometimes try the older men's tricks but without real success. Sometimes the inexperienced ones tried too much humour, which did not work well. Overall though, I thought that the quality of relationships between staff and boys was good.

On two occasions I caused a great deal of mirth for the boys in my dormitory. The first occasion was the evening of the first day we arrived in the borstal. When it was time for bed and sleep, I did not expect any formal rituals of night prayers, so I decided to kneel down and pray. After a very short time one of the boys started to sing 'Hush, hush whisper who dares, Christopher Robin is saying his prayers', which led to peals of laughter. My night prayers were said in bed after this experience.

The second occasion was during a Sunday morning dormitory inspection by the governor and his entourage. I had remembered from the previous year that it was a formal occasion but I could not remember whether we saluted the governor. I decided to give the governor the benefit of the doubt by standing to attention and saluting him. This also led to a great explosion of laughter. Fortunately the governor did not take offence or assume that I was trying to create trouble.

CHAPTER 2

WHY REMEMBER POPLAR?

History is always on the move somewhere in the world. Some movements we welcome, others we disdain. Some we are involved in, some beyond the margins.

Some friends have suggested I retell my experiences as a priest in east London in the 1960's.The story is set in Poplar in London's East End, just above the northern bank of the Thames and in the area of the new Blackwall Tunnel and Balfron Tower. It was a time of drastic demolition and rebuilding. People, communities, and Churches experienced great changes in their lives and calls on their generosity and charity. In the early 1960's notices appeared in London: 'London has too many churches'. Churches were becoming a matter for discussion – what is the problem? – what should be done about it? Possible options included closure of churches, amalgamation of parishes with sale or demolition of church buildings. This was a big shock to many people. It was clear that change was happening and that it affected not only Christian communities and church life, but also schools and other educational bodies, and social and leisure centres. There were also those who were prepared to discuss the alternatives and to seek creative possibilities for the future.

One of the solutions was to create joint benefices or new parish centres at different focal points. In the Poplar area there were a number of Anglican parish churches. The historic church of All Saints was well placed along East India Dock Road, one of the great arterial routes to the docks. The mid-19th-century St Michael's Church was architecturally sound, good for liturgy, and well-supported by the congregation within the neighbourhood. From a slightly later period, there was St Saviour's with its primary and secondary schools. This was further north-west of East India Dock Road and was a fine piece of Victorian church architecture.

During the extended process of consultation, it soon became clear that All Saints, St Michael's, and St Saviour's would have to be retained as viable communities with the existing buildings. Therefore, in 1964 the parish of All Saints, Poplar was established as the first team ministry in the Diocese of London, combining nine different parishes in an area recognized as one of the poorest in terms of overcrowding, unemployment, and multiple deprivation. There had been a rather nervous and protective ethos in the parishes and also a spectre of the horrors that might befall the parishes involved. I believe that Arthur Royall, the team rector, handled these issues honestly and openly. There were difficult issues and loyalties that needed to be honoured. Although the staff had particular connections with different parts of the new parish, they worked across the whole parish. This helped to avoid scaremongering and to create a cohesive entity from these previously separated churches or parishes.

Many of the priests in the team had been influenced by religious communities, especially Kelham and Mirfield. Some of the women members of staff also had had experience of religious community life. A significant percentage of the staff were married. All this and the solid marital experience of the Royall family gave a sense of security which was not illusory. Many people had frequent contact with the Royalls as well as with other ministers.

The main polarities that were preserved in varying ways included All Saints Church, St Michael's Church, and St Nicholas' Church. Halls and ancillary buildings were used by several community groups. There was a weekly staff meeting on Monday mornings attended by Arthur Royall, Michael Butler, Michael Stevens, David Berry, Andrew Tuck, David Huelin, Norman Woods. Pat Bush, Pat Perkins, Daphne Jones, and myself.

Spectrum

The pastoral work that was done within the amalgamated Poplar parishes was enormous. Much of this was through schools and the individual churches. We were all involved in some sort of hospital work and, although this took a lot of time, it helped to create a network of information that kept us in touch with many more people than we might have expected to be dealing with.

Limited benefices and joint parishes can create their own problems – much depends on the temperaments of the individual participants. The Poplar pattern seemed to work well for various reasons. There was an internal 'heritage' of mutual respect and cooperation. Arthur Royall was able to build on this. Also the fact that there were three or four women colleagues, whose ministry was greatly valued, helped. There was also the Royall family. Arthur and Joan gave a lot of support to the parishes and people and their input was a major factor.

I joined the staff team from Kelham as a deacon and after twelve months was ordained priest for the London diocese. I lived with other members of the team in St Michael's presbytery next door to the church at the top of St Leonard's Road. Every morning we would set off like storm troopers walking to All Saints Church for morning prayer and Mass. Good exercise especially on cold days.

The spare room in the presbytery was rented by Robert Broadway, an artist who worked in a series of grey tones. He was pretty adventurous setting up his easel and canvas on the pavements, and painting local scenes around Poplar. He taught at a local school, though it was a difficult clientele to work with. He would set up to paint outside the school, and he said you got to know the children as they left in their hordes. The boys would tease the girls by asking if they would like him to paint them naked. He was very dead pan when painting – he didn't say much.

I bought some of his paintings and remember one in particular that was a study of brickwork at the corner of a house, with the variety of shades resulting from weathering of the brick. When I was first at St Michael's, he was doing a series of studies of fruit. There was always a group of fruit bowls on the dining room table which moved around depending on the stages of paintings in progress.

Robert added something to the group at the presbytery in an off-beat way. He was engaged to a girl who was herself rather artistic. I think he met her at a Baptist Church meeting and they remained very devout Baptists. In fact she was a Filipino Baptist, so theirs was a Filipino wedding. Even now, my first Christmas card each year is from Robert, along with a long letter. They have both been connected with human rights issues in east London and the Philippines.

Also at the presbytery for a short time was R. D. Hacking, who later wrote a biography of Fr Gilbert Shaw, a priest who was involved in missionary work in Poplar in the 1930's. Gilbert Shaw's grandson, Michael Trend, was the only participant in the Adventure Playground project, described later, who had actual experience of involvement in a similar project, and this was a great asset.

Many of the street names in Poplar have an interesting history, reflecting the origins of the area and the wide variety of occupations and people, both famous and not famous, who lived and worked in the area. For those interested in exploring this history, Revd. Arthur Royall published two articles detailing the results of his extensive research, entitled 'The Streets of Poplar' and 'More Streets of Poplar', which can be found on the Internet at http://www.royall.co.uk/royall/poplar1.htm and http://www.royall.co.uk/royall/Streets-of-Poplar-2.php

All Saints Church, Poplar

All Saints staff

JSB with bride and groom

There was an interesting spectrum of people who used to drop in for long chats now and again and there were many offers of help for work being done in the parish. The fact that we walked all the way from St Michael's to All Saints every morning meant that we saw lots of people and frequently caught up with news about sick and elderly people. Down the road from St Michael's lived an enormous man who just sat in a chair all day long with the only movement being an occasional twist of the neck or lift of the eyebrows. If asked if he was okay, the answer was a monosyllabic grunt or groan that one could not work out whether it meant yes or no.

I was well into my time in Poplar when Arthur Royall, the team rector, wanted me as team vicar and as a consequence I moved into a flat in Mountague Place. I was much more domestically based there although I could go to St Michael's for meals. I remained in that flat for the rest of my time in Poplar. It was small and cosy, close to the shops and Woolmore Street Primary School, and one or two people would drop in from time to time. These flats had been occupied by Catholic nuns, and, when they decided to move, Arthur Royall acquired some of the flats for the parish. The parish was well blessed with property, either by endowment or purchase. It was relatively well-off. I would have thought that the Mountague Place flat was not cheap property: it was very elegant and in the heart of Poplar, with East India Dock Road to the north, Newby Place to the west, and the Isle of Dogs to the south.

Destruction, Clearance, and Rebuilding

As mentioned already, the scale of clearance and rebuilding in Poplar was enormous. Most of the roads from old maps were obliterated. The old Victorian tenements to the south had been replaced in the 1950's by redbrick three-storey blocks put up by the Greater London Council. The 27-storey Balfron Tower, the work of the Hungarian-born architect Ernö Goldfinger, was a major block of flats, plus an enormous separate lift shaft with a series of galleries that connected the main block and provided laundry facilities for the tenants. At least one person made the comment that 'no self-respecting Londoner would share laundry facilities'. It seemed to me that Goldfinger's work reached up to the sky and seemed to function as a symbolic counter-balance to the subterranean creation of the second Blackwall Tunnel. Long live the spirit of Isambard Kingdom Brunel!

It was possible to get some wonderful pictures from the top of the flats in the Isle of Dogs, as one looked down to where the barges were being loaded with London's rubbish. There were also some terrible families in those blocks − one in particular, with seven children, who stank a great stink. I remember visiting them one winter. I was invited in, sat down, and offered a cup of tea. I wondered what I was in for: there was a lot of excited chatter in the background from the children, but there was something odd. I kept my eyes alert looking around to try and identify what it was, but couldn't think what it could be. Then I suddenly realised that the whole flat was alive with bluebottles and I had visions of maggots and other forms of wildlife – I didn't stay too long!

It happened that an officer from the local authority came to inspect this block and, on counting up the number of flats, found he was one short. He couldn't understand how there could be one less flat. Further investigation was called for. It transpired that a certain family had taken down the wall between their flat and the one next door when it had been empty. Without anyone realizing, they had doubled their living space for the same rent. They were finally moved on elsewhere.

Then there was a family who lived in the basement of one of the tenement blocks, who seemed to know everything about the other tenants. I was visiting them one Sunday when it sounded like world war three had broken out in one of the flats at the top of the block. Apparently this sort of extreme-volume rowing was quite common between the husband and wife, who I thought sounded as if they

were on the point of killing each other. I was assured, however, that they had a very close relationship and were a ‘well-matched pair’.

Yet another unusual state of affairs arose when the housing officer visited to check over a flat that was due to be let out to new tenants. Furniture had been removed, but other things were littered about the place. When he went into the second main room, he discovered that all the floor boards had been removed and use for firewood!

Significant Changes – Architecture and Landscape

Many changes had been implemented in the Isle of Dogs to the south of the Poplar parish, and Poplar itself was to face many more changes. The development of Crisp Street Market had changed much of the area to the north of East India Dock Road. Moving further east, the bulldozers cleared away swathes of Victorian domestic architecture. The streets and their urban culture changed dramatically.

The two main new developments were the Brownfield estate including Balfron Tower and the Robin Hood Gardens estate. Balfron Tower was the work of the Hungarian architect Ernö Goldfinger. His domestic architecture has had a significant impact on the London landscape and that of other cities. Goldfinger and his wife lived for two months in one of the top-floor flats to experience the results of his creativity.

Somewhat ironically, a former priest living at St Michael’s presbytery had glued a rather splendid poster of ‘a hundred years of English architecture’ to the toilet door. This could be viewed leisurely from the toilet seat. The catalogue ended with an entry headed ‘the new Brutalism’. Peter and Alison Smithson, the architects of the Robin Hood Gardens estate, were identified as exemplars of this Brutalist phase. However, most of the people living in this development enjoyed the spacious level areas where people and pushchairs could move easily through the domestic areas.

The origins of street names in Poplar compiled by Fr Royall in his articles ‘The streets of Poplar’ and ‘More streets of Poplar’, is a wonderful indication of the international connections that existed between Poplar and many parts of the world. (ref: www.royall.co.uk/royall)

One significant feature of redevelopment was the large number of pianos needing new homes. For several months people would come to St Michael’s church hoping to give the church the ‘best piano in the neighbourhood’. On the other hand, there were pianos highly cherished by people who were being moved to somewhere their piano could not go. Our response eventually had to be ‘we have two pianos already in the front room of the presbytery; we have four in the church hall, and two more in the church. We have no space for any more.’

Pianos and Music

The piano is a truly remarkable creation, technically it is a masterpiece – be it grand or upright. I learnt to play the upright piano in our front room. In my teenage years I explored the antique shops on the steep hill in Lincoln where lots of second-hand sheet music could be bought for knock-down prices. Over the years I became amazed at the amount of music that had been available by mail order both weekly and monthly. It was not just ‘learner’ pieces but included some of the ferociously difficult works by Beethoven, Mozart, Liszt, and others. There must have been a great reservoir of

expertise that nourished musical performances in English society between the 1920's and 1950's. Sadly much of that heritage has ebbed away.

Many of the people who wanted to give us pianos in Poplar were offering us much-loved family items that had given great enjoyment on special occasions and also a certain amount of irritation when children were learning to play. Long live the piano!

Youth Displacement

About the time that the 19th-century Abbott Road estate was being swept away, two significant changes in the law applying to children occurred. One was the raising of the school-leaving age to 16. This obviously put strains on the local secondary schools and a sense of frustration in some of those who 'missed the boat for school-leaving'.

The second was legislative changes concerning tenants and letting of vacant rooms in the wake of the Rachman scandal. Previously, young people who had a family row could easily find a room somewhere to stay for a few nights until things calmed down. However, anyone providing such 'escape' routes was henceforth breaking the law and could be prosecuted for having unregistered tenancies. We saw many more displaced young adults after these developments. However, subsequently the homelessness of the young did seem to spur on various charities to provide temporary relief for homeless youths. Among these were the Centre Point, YMCA, Crisis, Shelter, and De Paul.

Significant People in the Church

The Revd Arthur Royall

After military service during the Second World War, Arthur Royall enlisted for training for the priesthood in the Church of England. After training he was ordained and served in the ministry of the London Diocese. He was happy to be working in the City with which he was quite familiar. He and his wife Joan had been born in East Anglia near Swaffham. In retirement they returned to live near Swaffham and their funeral Mass was in Swaffham parish church.

After serving as a curate, Arthur was asked to become Rector of All Saints, Poplar, with responsibility for some local churches as well. There was a prospect of establishing a team ministry for the area, and this was fulfilled during Arthur's period as rector. Joan taught mathematics in one of the local secondary schools, and like Arthur was very much involved in educational issues. They lived in the rectory opposite All Saints church with their growing family of four children. The rectory became a major focal point of the life in the parishes of the team ministry.

Bill Florey

Bill Florey was the lay bursar and was one of Arthur's Royall's early and wise appointments. Bill lived in Blackheath and travelled to work through the Blackwall Tunnel. Bill and his wife Sybil had two children, Peter and Jill, and normally worshipped at their parish church in Blackheath. Bill had many gifts: he was very good with practical matters like buildings, legal matters, administration, and in addition was remarkably perceptive and shrewd. He relieved Arthur of a lot of administrative work. His sudden death was a big shock to the parishes as well as to his family.

CHAPTER 3

SCHOOLS AND YOUTH WORK IN POPLAR

Bert Ilet's Explosion

Woolmore Street Primary School was the main primary school serving the area around All Saints church and its churchyard. There was a mixed population: families who had been there for many generations and others who had come into the wider area served by the school. Many families had transferred from other London boroughs. There were at least three blocks of flats where the population changed rapidly. Many seemed to have lots of family and social problems to cope with. We were contacted by social workers from time to time to give what help we could. Some families were divided or dysfunctional, whilst others seemed to have some quality that enabled them to transcend the burdens they had to bear.

In 1968 we had some behavioural problems in the school which were quite serious. There had been several meetings of staff, governors, and others concerning some children who were virtually uncontrollable. Their class teacher had managed to establish a pattern of responses to troubles when they flared up. The trouble would start with one or two children whose behaviour was almost beyond control; some would operate a 'heads down' policy; others would do a 'clear the deck' job. When the main group of disturbed children had burnt out their energy, things would calm down, but one or two would head for the teacher, virtually attacking her. This obviously could not be allowed to continue.

Things came to a climax at a meeting in early summer of the governors, including myself, the head teacher Bert Ilet, staff, and representation from the Local Education Authority. After a period of general discussion, going round in circles, repeating the problems, and with various suggestions without arriving at any decisions, Bert Ilet stood up and exploded with an impassioned speech that I shall never forget. 'Here we are again – again we've gone around the usual circles thanking the staff, thanking the work of Mrs Cramp and Fr Baggley – and we *are* grateful, but something dramatic has to happen to shake up the school and what we do, and the community within which we work. There has to be something that will get some changes now – we can't keep going around the old circles. We need something that will bring about some fundamental changes.' He sat down and there was a fairly long silence.

The silence was broken by the young man from the Local Education Authority. He very quietly said, 'I wonder if you could consider planning for an adventure playground project, not on school premises and not run by the school.' This was discussed and thought to be a good idea but who would take it on? Silence. After a pause, I volunteered to raise the matter with Fr Arthur Royall, the All Saints rector, with the idea that the parish might take it up as a parish commitment to the families of the neighbourhood. All voted in favour, breathing a sigh of relief, and the meeting came to an end. At a parish staff meeting the following day it was agreed that the parish should undertake this project for the local community.

The parish contributed generously to the project, as did other donors. During the project many people prayed for those involved, asking for God's blessing on this major undertaking and on the ordinary family life of local people.

The First Adventure Playground - 1968

We gained permission to use a derelict site which Balfour Beatty had used during the construction of the second Blackwall Tunnel. It was littered with debris, and much of the clearance had to be done by hand. Volunteers were recruited from various secondary schools and the Police College also sent volunteers. Fortunately, one key area consisted of more soil than rubble and this emerged as the heart of the site we could work in; and it was here that the most constructive building work took place. The scale of the site meant that areas could be assigned to different activities, while the periphery was appropriate for some larger structures.

I wrote to Kelham Theological College to ask for eight to ten students to volunteer to commit themselves to help us for eight weeks. They would be housed in parish accommodation or with parish families. There was a good response and many came back for the second year's project.

One obvious requirement was a supply of used telegraph poles to construct rope-walks and other major climbing structures. The telegraph poles arrived very quickly and men who were familiar with handling them helped with their erection and the fixing of ropes. Supplies of hammers, saws, chisels, nails, axes, shovels, spades, and forks etc., seemed to come from all sides. These had to be carefully guarded and even more carefully monitored when used by children. Many children were taught how to use hammers and other tools creatively. The gift of some small shelters enabled the tools to be cared for with some degree of security.

We knew that the site was potentially dangerous, and some local councillors tried to get the project stopped. Fortunately they were not successful. Poplar Hospital was not far away and any scratches, cuts and bruises could be dealt with quickly. On the first day the hospital's supply of anti-tetanus injections was used up. After that their supplies were quickly increased.

The best part of the site soon became a building site where a shanty-town sprung up remarkably quickly. Various adult volunteers added to the work force, helping the children to construct shacks, complete with house names and inscriptions such as 'Home Sweet Home'.

At 5.00 p.m. on the first day we closed down and locked the gates of the site, delighted that we had got off to such a good start. However, the following day was a shock to the system and to everyone involved. The whole of the 'shanty' buildings had been completely destroyed by vandals. There was much weeping and lamenting over the damage. Some of the adults began to tidy up some of the mess, but two boys I will never forget saved the day and the whole project. David Beezley was about 14 years old and Tucker Mahon was 8 or 9, and they simply got on and re-built their shanties. They were both compulsive builders and other children began to follow their example. By the end of the day, the site was almost as it had been on Monday evening. Sadly, there were swathes of destruction on Tuesday right through to Thursday with yet another reconstruction on Friday.

The second week of the project was not trouble-free, but we were spared the spate of destruction that had marred the first week. Some older youths constructed their own meeting place. Some of the children were deeply upset at the quantity of destruction that had taken place – reacting almost as if it were an act of sacrilege and desecration of 'their own home'. One boy even spent the night in 'his' house to defend it against vandals.

As things began to settle down, we moved into a more leisurely mode of existence. More family groups appeared and the more relaxed ethos made it easier for younger children and their parents to meander through the site. Parental help was useful. A group of people from the children's library service set up in an area, which looked the most civilized on the site, with tables, tablecloths, chairs,

and books. Despite the rough terrain, families brought supplies for a picnic. The social mix was considerable with some inevitable tensions over behaviour.

Once the initial destructive impulses had been restrained, constructive action continued for most of the summer. Paint supplies began to arrive. The shanties were decorated, and murals appeared on the boundary walls of the site. There were some really good paintings that survived for several years. I never expected to become the subject of a wall painting!

For many families life was not easy. Some children had been taken into care by the social services, sometimes for medical reasons, sometimes for behavioural reasons, such as non-attendance at school. One boy in his early teens was taken into care, and later the same day the family were told that he had died on a swimming trip from the place where he was in care. There was another child who was a rather attractive character but very unreliable. With his friends he had discovered how to get into the lift shafts in the tower blocks and how to operate the mechanism. Sadly he died caught up in the wires of the lift system.

At the same time that our adventure playground project was taking place, the Catholic Church had a holiday project on a smaller scale, partly linked to studies of behaviour patterns. I met with the priest involved with this project to compare notes. I remember him telling me that he had realized that the pattern of delinquent behaviour was a 'vertical subculture', whereby one pickpocket learns the art, and shares it on and on until others are well and truly 'schooled'. Once this had been explained, we could see that this was the pattern of many of the children on the playground.

One of the important aspects of our project was that it created a very large space which was effectively open to all. It also seemed to develop into a self-policing entity, and there was a growing respect for what had enabled a level of creativity to take place that we could never have expected. When the project came to a close and school activities recommenced, the site remained relatively safe for children to use.

We also managed to rent a building belonging to the Gas Board for about six months. We gave it the name Gilbert Shaw House in memory of the ministry of Fr Gilbert Shaw in that part of Poplar and Blackwall. It was like having an office down there in the Blackwall area, and it was used for the kids now and again when there was something special. This site did not have many major problems except the proximity of a rather large oil refinery. The only real problem was on the final night. We had planned a fireworks display but the man who was looking after the fireworks dropped the boxes. As result, fireworks got spread around and were going off all over the site in an uncontrolled way. I got rather anxious when Fr Bob Coogan said to me, 'I can see it all in the *Sunday Times* "East London curate destroys oil refinery'". I took the precaution of seeking advice from the Fire Service, asking when would be the best time to phone. The reply was, 'You'll be okay governor – we don't take pre-booked call-outs'!

We were cautious in handling the expectation that there might be another project next year. We needed a breathing space. We would also need a different site as the 1968 one would no longer be available.

1968 Blackwall first adventure playground

What a site!

Building in progress

Various structures / shanties

Successful re-housing

Nail collectors

Spectators

Mothers and children

Serious construction

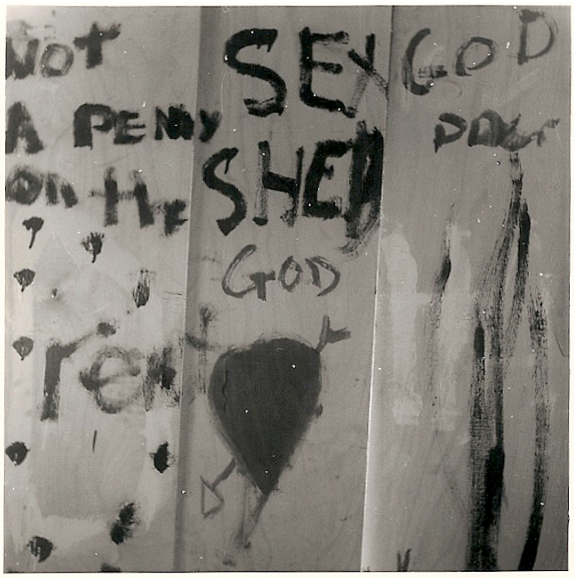
Help and advice provided by JSB

Swing time – boys and girls

That was good!

Everybody smile

Different activities



Some examples of art

After the First Adventure Playground – Gilbert Shaw House

At the end of that project there were very mixed emotions among the children, mainly a let-down as they had to get back to school for the autumn term. After all the excitement, normality became rather boring. On one part of the site the large slide was safe and secure and available for use. Sadly a lady who lived close to the site decided it should be dismantled and got various people to destroy it. She had to face the wrath of the children.

One possibility to keep something going in the area was to rent an unused building belonging to the Gas Board. They let us have it for a peppercorn rent. We had some willing carpenters who set to and improved the interior. It was possible to use the resulting space for some music and drama, some dancing and needlework and carpentry. It had a rather civilized ethos compared to the rough terrain outside.

We named the place 'Gilbert Shaw House' in memory of the priest who had lived and worked in two parts of the Poplar and Blackwall area from 1932 to 1940. In the Woolmore Street area he established a centre in a disused pub which sported a canteen where cheap and nourishing food was available (three courses for four pence ha'penny). Boot-repairing, carpentry, reading, and physical recreation facilities were also provided. The other place was close to the Thames as it sweeps around the Isle of Dogs towards the Thames estuary. Fr Gilbert was a reputable spiritual director and a prolific writer. Two of his books, *The Face of Love* and *A Pilgrim's Book of Prayers* are still in print (SLG Press, Oxford). He was also chaplain to the contemplative Fairacres Sisters (The Sisters of the Love of God) and was influential in the establishment of their former House near Staplehurst in Kent.

The Second Adventure Playground - 1969

The 1968 project had been an enormous act of faith. Thank God that we were rash enough to put our faith into action. In 1969 we had expertise to help us in the person of Shaun, who was in charge of the site project. Using timber left over from building the Blackwall Tunnel, he constructed a fabulous climbing frame and slide.

The 1968 site had been enormous. The 1969 site was large, with railway sidings and war-time buildings. The whole site was scheduled for development but it had to be cleared, raised by many metres, and levelled before we could use it for our summer playground. This took a long time to complete. One war-time air raid shelter survived for quite a long time as no-one seemed to know how to get permission to demolish it. After a period of impatient waiting, Shaun told one of his men to accidentally reverse his bulldozer into the building, which rapidly solved the problem.

The original site level was several metres below the road level and when the filling process was finally completed, a reasonably level surface came into existence with a soil dressing which was much softer than the 1968 concrete rubble.

The pattern of activities was very much like the previous project, without the destruction that had to be dealt with in 1968. As I remember it, there seemed to be a relaxed feel to the project. The 1968 memories were there with all who had been involved in the first playground. There was less of a frenetic atmosphere than in 1968 and behaviour was much better. The library team were a civilizing influence which was much appreciated. There was also more activity in painting: pictures and painted letters to me on the lines of ‘Dear Fr Baggley, don’t let them close the playground down.’ There were a few addressed to God, such as ‘Dear God, don’t let them close the playground.’ This was because there were some local councillors who, for some reason, were hostile to the project.

I learned a great deal in 1968 and 1969 about all sorts of people. Some were poor and deprived, some were confident and positive. The age range was considerable. Some had family burdens of illness and disability. Some had serious behavioural problems. But it was amazing how creative they were, given the opportunity. Some of my photographs show an intense level of concentration in construction and creative work.

Reflections on the Adventure Playground Projects

In the summer of 1968 and 1969 the Blackwall area of Poplar became a hive of activity for many people, from infants to grandparents, lorry drivers, building contractors, and others. The demolition sites became new do-it-yourself construction sites and a shanty-town and playground soon emerged out of the rubbish.

Many of the children learnt to be creative and we made sure that the tools that we had would only be used when the children had learnt what they were for: hammers for nails and construction, axes for firewood and wood-trimming, chisels for wood carving. Then there was paint – for decoration, pictures, and in some cases face paint, and murals on the boundary walls. Some young children learnt about woodwork and carving for the first time and were proud of their creations.

The 1968 project emerged from some very specific problems being faced by Woolmore Street Primary School. The project served the local community very well. It was important that parishioners

in the All Saints parish were urged to pray for the project even if they could not directly help in the site.

There was a very varied group of helpers including senior school students on holiday and the group of seminarians from Kelham Theological College. These formed a reliable core group. The fact that people 'seeped into' the place and became helpers was a good development and broadened the spectrum of the event.

The sites in 1968 and 1969 were rather 'porous': there was no absolute security. In both years the land had already become de facto play areas. Both children and parents were already familiar with the sites and the wider locality.

In addition to the gifts of tools and other objects there was a growing generosity of spirit, of time, and of energy – also of patience, sharing space and skills. Among the materials that just 'turned up' were timber, rope, tools, nails, sacks, storage huts, and paint.

There was very little organised play but there was a lot of playfulness, mischief, and comic humour that occasionally got out of control. One mother had become an object of ridicule and mockery. We had to train her not to respond to the taunts she had to endure. She soon realized that it was better to ignore the taunters and mockers – they soon got tired.

Creativity was one of the prominent aspects of the whole period of the projects. It gave time and space for parents to be with their children and for the children to inter-mingle with people of various backgrounds and ages. It was a joy to see the children's pride in their work. For many of the children it was a change from destructive activity to patient creativity.

At the end of the 1968 project I received a letter from the police.

> 'Dear Mr Baggley,
> I thought you might be interested to know that during the period of your
> Project in Blackwall Way, the crime rate was reduced by 80 per cent.'

Give the children the chance to be creative and they will be less destructive.

Five Oak Green

Five Oak Green is a village in that part of Kent where the hops used in English beer-making are grown. There was a very strong tradition for Londoners to go hop picking in the summer. Between the world wars and afterwards, hundreds of families headed into Kent for a chance to escape the heat of London, have a holiday, and get paid for it. In the 19th century a charity was established to make provision for the hop pickers, especially for medical help. At Five Oak Green there was a fairly large stone building used by the hop pickers. Another building was constructed to provide further facilities at the back of the space behind the original building, creating a large courtyard. Sadly fire destroyed part of the new building.

After each of the Adventure Playgrounds there was pressure for something else to happen. The charity at Five Oak Green let us take groups of children to stay in the main building. It was a good experience of rural life for these urban children coming from well-lit streets. We also had night

walks in Bedgebury Forest where they had to learn to walk in the dark – without a torch! Only staff had torches. When they got used to the dark the children were amazed at what they could see. Bill Florey, the All Saints parish bursar was the great expert with night walks and he did a lot to help the children to enjoy themselves without any accidents. These night walks became a highlight of the visit. We were occasionally asked by the children's department of Tower Hamlets Social Services to take children to Five Oak Green to give their parents a break.

1969 Playground

Clearing the site – manually ……

and mechanically

Shaun, JSB, and helpers

Team meeting

Poplar see-saw

Early version of a zip-wire

A variety of swings

A maxi swing

Shaun’s slide

Construction in progress

Fixing the sign

Fry-up

Painters at work

David Beazley's memories of the playgrounds

I remember living in Blackwall Way in the East End of London and I would have been between 9 and 10 years of age. I made the acquaintance of Fr John Baggley through All Saints church where he was one of the priests, and I was also introduced to Bill Florey who was the church treasurer. After my first introduction to John and Bill, some friends and I would meet with them at least two or three times a week at a youth clubhouse that they used to organize, which was situated on Blackwall Way. The purpose of the clubhouse was to give children of my age a chance to try out various activities such as woodwork, boxing, and painting.

There was an area on Blackwall Way that was part of the old rail network that led into the docks and had been destroyed by bombing in the Second World War. During one of the summer holidays John had secured permission to use this area for the purposes of recreation for the children off the Canada Estate; there was very little Health and Safety in those days! I remember a type of mock fort had been constructed (like the ones you see in a western movie) through donations of materials from the local residents and businesses. Many of the children could play here and even have a go at building their own camps with hammers and nails should they wish. I can also recall that we were sometimes given tinned tomatoes, potatoes, or peas.

The following summer holiday, John has secured further permission to use more of the same area across the road. On this site I remember an enormous (or so it seemed at the time) slide being created from wood and telegraph poles and various other bits and bobs. (Note: this became known as Shaun's slide, Shaun being the site foreman who was responsible for building the slide). There was also a temporary clubhouse on this site. At the end of the summer holiday the site was handed back to the authorities and the new clubhouse also came under threat. I recall myself and the other children barricading ourselves within the structure in some form of youthful protest! Suffice to say we didn't stand much of a chance against the adults who owned the land and we were swiftly ejected.

Sometime after these events John and Bill asked the parents of twelve children (of which I was one), if they would like to go on an excursion. This took us to Kent and a little hamlet called Five Oak Green. We stayed in a very old building, which I can only describe as an inn. The inn was split into a main building and an annexe and I remember staying in the latter. John and Bill would take us on midnight walks around the local area, which involved entering the local forest where both John and Bill took great amusement in scaring the life out of us. One should remember that all of the children had never been outside of the East End and its urban environment; to experience woodland was of much excitement to us all. It was customary of an evening for the children and I to go to bed while John and Bill would retire to the main building and have a drink; I believe John used to smoke a pipe.

The children and I used to be quite unnerved at times by our new surroundings, which was understandable given our age. I remember John and Bill used to play tricks on us late at night; this would take the form of them flicking the lights on and off in the annexe and also tapping on the windows. These events bring back fond memories and I had the time of my life.

David Beazley

Integration

We came to a point in the autumn of 1969 when we felt it was worth trying to bring together the various children and youth activities in a tableau or drama or some joint Christmas act of worship and witness. We had about six to ten different groups which seemed to provide potential. A major tableau was created together with a text for spoken parts. All Saints church was ideal for such a performance. Roles and text were allocated and all seemed well, but some switching of parts was needed. The parts in question were those of shepherds and readers. It worked easily enough on paper, but our potential young shepherds would not accept the change.

On the first evening rehearsal one boy had a ready-made chant that was designed to cause problems. He stormed around Gilbert Shaw House in an incandescent rage chanting at the top of his voice, 'I am not going to be a b… f… shepherd in b… f… Baggley's nativity play!' People began to laugh at this, whereupon he stopped and demanded to know what we were b… f... laughing at – 'You,' we said. This of course set him off again even louder and, as the chant and laughter reverberated around Gilbert Shaw House, we had to accept defeat and the need for a change in the Christmas plans.

Despite this upset the formal tableau, which was a large-scale project, was successfully staged at All Saints church without any disasters or upsets. The title Fr b! f! Baggley still reverbates in my brain to this day!

Music and Drama

In 1939 Fr Mark Hodson, then Rector of All Saints Poplar, had established the SPY Club (South Poplar Youth Club). It continued to exist into the 1970's. Its activities were supplemented by several musical or dramatic presentations.

A Passion play was one such item, but there were many others. The local printer, Sydney Langley, encouraged drama on the small and large scale, and this engaged many people both young and old. Many young people found their way to the stage as a result. Poplar was a very creative parish in many ways and was quick to spot young talent.

One of the drama teachers at St Saviour's primary school persuaded a friend to apply for a vacant music post. The two together were a formidable force. When music and drama were in full flight, there were hardly any absentees. Everyone in the school seemed to be involved in some form of theatrical activity. The sacrifice made by Colin Tarn was to give up playing on cruise liners in the Caribbean to work with the reluctant pupils of St Saviour's school. In the post Easter and pre-Christmas periods a lot of work was done by children for the stage set of whatever performance would be taking place. A lot of energy went into the stage set, and during this period the truancy rate was almost down to zero.

School People

Bert Ilet

Bert Ilet was the head teacher of Woolmore Street Primary School. He was a larger-than-life character with an explosive sense of humour. As we have seen, he played a large part in getting the

first adventure playground project to happen. He was generous in the way he helped me and in the way he encouraged newly trained teachers, and he could be patient in dealing with parents with difficult children.

JIM TELLIS

Jim Tellis was the head teacher at St Saviour's Church of England Primary School. He was able to deal with difficult parents when necessary. On one occasion, at a rather difficult public meeting for parents and staff, he got a massive round of applause from the whole gathering for his skilful handling of a difficult situation. He was advised by one of the English teachers to take on Colin Tarn as a music teacher.

COLIN TARN

Colin was a freelance musician who in the summer would get employment in sea-side locations, and in the winter would perform on some of the cruise ships in the Caribbean. He was remarkably good with music and drama.

MRS IRENE BOWTHORPE

Irene Bowthorpe was one of the outstanding teachers at Woolmore Street Primary School where she taught the lower juniors. Her classes had included some very lively and ill-disciplined children displaying an excess of energy. One child in particular when in a tantrum would hurl items around the classroom with ferocity. Irene had trained the class to put their heads on their desks covered by their hands to avoid any missiles until she had calmed the child. The rest of the class could then restore order to the classroom and continue with their lesson. Several children in fact had huge amounts of energy but little idea of how to use it constructively until they came under Irene's influence. The playground was an area where children could use their energy to be creative and constructive without leaving a trail of wreckage. Irene's was a unique contribution to the school. The fact that she resigned from her post after being successful in many respects is an indication of the energy she devoted to the children in her care.

MRS BRIDGET CRAMP

Bridget was a larger than life character, big-hearted with a great sense of humour. She had a lot of experience working with people in a great variety of situations, to the extent that she was virtually unshockable.

I first met her when she had taken over the post of schoolchild care-worker at Woolmore Street School from her friend Lady Elizabeth Cavendish. Bert Ilet introduced us to each other and said 'You will be doing a lot of work together.' How right he was! As we walked out of the school, Bridget said, 'Have you time to do a visit today?' I said, 'Yes, I'll make time for it, let me have the names and address of the family.' So later in the day I visited the family where there were four or five children. They were all very welcoming and keen to talk. The following morning the phone rang at 7.30 a.m. I picked the phone up to hear Bridget saying to me, 'Oh! Thank God you are still alive!' 'It's okay,' I said, 'they were very welcoming.' 'Oh,' said Bridget, 'I was having second thoughts about asking you to go there. Tell me more when we meet up again.' Bridget was a wonderful colleague to work with - helpful, encouraging, and a very good mentor to have in this sort of work.

Bridget was working at Langdon Park Secondary School as an education welfare officer. She saw that the pupils needed a level of support that went beyond the classroom, to be able to fully engage in

learning and achieve their potential. Working with the head teacher and others, she began building relationships with the families of pupils, and often this meant visiting them outside of school hours in order to understand how their home lives impacted on behaviour at school. They soon realized that other schools too needed the service they were providing. By 1989, the charity she had created five years previously as the Langdon Park School Fund had become the East London Schools Fund, supporting this work across east London. I believe that Sir Geoffrey Howe also gave his support to it. By 1994 the Fund was operating in twenty-eight schools across Tower Hamlets. In 2003 the East London Schools Fund officially became School-Home Support UK, delivering services in fifty-nine primary and thirty-six secondary schools across nine London boroughs. Today School-Home Support UK also delivers a variety of services in many areas outside of London

CHAPTER 4

HOSPITALS AND MEDICAL PEOPLE

Hospitals in Poplar

Poplar Hospital for Accidents was opened in 1855 to provide accident care for dockers. It stood on the East India Dock Road just across the road from the entrance to the East India Dock. It was later expanded and developed into a general hospital serving the local community as well as the dockers and sailors. It was destroyed in an air raid during The Second World War and subsequently rebuilt with more functional buildings. St Andrew's Hospital at Bow started life as the Poplar and Stepney Sick Asylum in 1871 with 572 beds. In 1920 it was renamed St Andrew's Hospital after a local church which had been destroyed in the First World War. In 1948 it joined the NHS in the Bow management group which also included the Poplar Hospital. The Poplar team ministry had corporate responsibility for ministering to people in both Poplar Hospital and St Andrew's Hospital.

Although smaller than St Andrew's, Poplar Hospital was considered one of the great institutions in Poplar, and rightly so. It was a symbol of medical and nursing care for Poplar and beyond. There seemed to be a closer sense of community at the Poplar Hospital. From before the war, the matron had been Miss Lyon, a doughty matron of 'the old school' who devoted her life and work to the people of the area. She was a formidable character, a devout Anglican, and grateful for the ministry we provided. She or her assistant matron always attended priests who were administering Holy Communion to patients in their beds. Fr Royall was careful to keep in touch with Miss Lyon, informing her of any new priests visiting and any local issues that had come to his notice.

Doing our ward rounds could be enjoyable, but at times rather formidable. One soon realized that some consultants acted a bit like a god: other staff in the ward would flee and let the consultant reign supreme. There was one very notable exception, Michael Ward, the orthopaedic consultant. My first contact with him was when entering a ward with him already present. I quickly stopped and turned to leave and Michael Ward placed a hand on my shoulder and said, 'It's alright, you don't have to leave – I think there is room for two of us.' Some years later, after baptizing a child, I was talking to the child's father who was packing up skiing equipment before leaving for Nepal for a mountaineering holiday. He then explained that Michael Ward had been the main person planning the ascent of Everest that took place in 1953, to mark the Queen's coronation. When Michael Ward died many years later in 2005, all the obituaries stressed what a marvellous person he was and a remarkable surgeon. They emphasised his commitment to the NHS and that the only other work he would take on would be for family and colleagues.

We never knew what to expect when doing the ward rounds. Sometimes it was simply a matter of 'Hello' and seeing what followed that. I remember one conversation which was a lengthy tale of woe. The patient had had a very bad time and seemed to want to talk about it. I eventually said, 'Would you like me to say some prayers with you?' The answer was quite clear, 'Nah! Never seen the need for that sort of thing.' On another occasion I had to visit someone who had been badly burned. As I approached the ward, I could smell burnt flesh and my stomach stared to heave. I silently said a prayer, something along the lines of, 'Dear God, please do not let me sick when I get into the ward.' Fortunately nothing went seriously wrong.

The children's ward was an interesting place to be in – often very lively with children and parents. It could also be a place of sadness if a child was seriously ill or had died. On another occasion, I went

into the children's ward, and found the nurse with a doctor and a baby screaming the place down. I rather flippantly with a smile said something like, 'Have you lost your touch?' The nurse simply thrust the little person into my arms and it stopped crying immediately. We had quite a long discussion about diagnosing the cause of crying. It was a useful learning opportunity.

Significant Medical People

CONSTANCE PRELL

Constance Prell was the elderly medical social worker in Poplar Hospital. She was Australian, having come to the UK to work in an area where the death penalty was no longer part of the penal system. She was shrewd to an amazing extent and a wonderful colleague to work with. On one occasion she went and stood in front of the new Hospital Secretary and, when asked what she wanted, said £100! Hospital Secretary: 'What for?' CP: 'To buy a horse.' HS: 'You must be Miss Prell. Why do you want a horse?' CP: 'Joe Bloggs is a totter and his horse has died. He won't work again unless we can get him a horse.…'

On another occasion, in conversation with the Hospital Secretary and me, Miss Prell said: 'Well, Father Baggley, I think this is a classic case of the Poached Egg Syndrome!' I responded, 'I have never heard of the Poached Egg Syndrome.' She replied, 'Well it's like this. You can get the egg out of the water, but whether you will get it onto the toast is another matter.' 'I don't see the connection' I said, and the Hospital Secretary. With a shake of her head Miss Prell explained, 'Well you can get the patient out of the hospital bed, but getting the patient to be taken on by Tower Hamlets Social Services is a different matter. Many get lost in the transfer.'

DAPHNE JONES

Daphne Jones was from a cultured family in Gloucestershire. She trained at St Thomas Hospital and was proud to have been involved in general district nursing and midwifery. Fr Mark Hudson, the Rector of All Saints parish in the 1950's, added Daphne to the pre-war and post-war staff of the parish. She was very 'hands on' in her profession; nothing was too dirty to merit her attention. She was outgoing and generous, spending long hours with lonely people, the sick, and the housebound. She was a powerful source of help and strength to many people with profound problems. Daphne's period of activity in east London was very close to the period publicized in the 'Call the Midwife' books. During the war Daphne had the awesome experience of witnessing a German doodle-bug descending onto the roof of All Saints church at midday. Fortunately the priests were not in the line of fire but much damage was inflicted.

Daphne's charity flowed generously from her to many beneficiaries. For example, Jimmy Matsuoka was an abandoned Japanese sailor whom she befriended. He was fascinated by this woman out on her bicycle doing lots of visiting. His curiosity led to Daphne preparing him for baptism, the other sacraments, and reception into the Church. How she did this still remains a mystery as she never spoke any Japanese. Jimmy's funeral Mass was in All Saints with myself, Daphne, and one other person present.

On another occasion Daphne dived right into a massive street brawl, concerned that they would all be killed at the rate they were fighting. She picked up a large cap from the floor as she launched herself into the melee shouting, 'Has anyone lost this cap?' Calm descended on the embattled contestants.

In the 1960's Daphne worked very closely with Fr Joe Williamson in the fight against prostitution, and was not frightened of physical interception if she felt someone was at risk. Fr Joe was a force to be reckoned with: hated by those profiting from prostitution but also not all that popular in the higher reaches of the Church. His crusade, however, got good publicity, partly because of Fr Joe's quick turn of phrase. A major protest rally against prostitution climaxed on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral where the Bishop shouted out, 'We're with you Fr Joe, we are right behind you.' To which Fr Joe replied over his megaphone, 'Yes, fifty bloody light years behind us!!'

Dame Cecily Saunders and the Hospice Movement

During my time at Kelham radical changes were taking place in the treatment and care of the terminally ill and dying. Among those who were influential in these areas was Cecily Saunders. She passionately believed that terminal care practice and its location needed to be radically changed for the better. Dr Saunders called in to Kelham from time to time and her illustrated talks were very refreshing. At the time we had very little experience of work in hospitals and felt very privileged to learn about the philosophy and practical aspects of hospices and how they function.

Shortly after being ordained and while still trying to find my way around Poplar Hospital and its different departments, I was asked by Miss Prell to attend a meeting to discuss the future treatment of a patient. The patient had been an east London boxer, and his brain had been badly damaged. His wife was almost at her wits end with anxiety. The hospital beds were all occupied so he would have to be transferred somewhere else and they asked me if I had any suggestions. All I could do was to say that I had met Cecily Saunders at Kelham and had been very impressed by what I had heard of her work at St Christopher's Hospice in Sydenham, south London. A series of phone calls took place and we discovered that there was a bed available at St Christopher's.

The patient was transferred and made good progress, and his wife was greatly relieved that there was some hope for the future. I remember her conversation after she had seen her husband in St Christopher's. Confident that he was in safe hands she said, 'And I could walk down stairs, I haven't walked down stairs for weeks.' The anxiety about her husband had reached such a pitch that she had been virtually paralysed. It was only a few weeks before we had to get another Poplar patient into St Christopher's, the mother of a large family I knew well.

Later, when visiting St Christopher's, I was invited to join a meeting to assess various aspects of the work at the hospice. One question that was being explored was in connection with how terminally ill patients begin to talk about what they were going through, and how they faced the prospect of dying. They had discovered that most patients felt confident to talk to the 'after-school girls', young girls from a local school who volunteered to look after the flowers in the wards, changing water, dead-heading, etc. These young girls were obviously not 'official' or 'professional' and it was realized that their non-threatening role was important. I wonder how many of these girls subsequently became nurses.

Having seen the influence of Cecily Saunders' work at St Christopher's, I was pleased to witness similar transformations in terminal care in other hospitals when I was moved to work in other parishes.

Nursing Sisters of St John the Divine

When I began my time in the parish of Poplar, the Nursing sisters of St John the Divine were very much in evidence. Their blue habit or uniform was distinctive and could be recognised from a considerable distance. As they dealt with a lot of general nursing as well as midwifery, they were well known and well-remembered by local families. The priests in the parish were occasionally asked to celebrate Mass in their chapel and they often came to Mass at All Saints Church. I think the community must have had an amazingly deep network of contacts in the Poplar area.

I remember receiving a telephone message from a family where the father had died. When I got there Sister Dorien had already arrived and was chatting with the widow. Very soon, Sister said, 'Father have you ever laid out a dead body?' I said, 'No'. 'Well' she said, 'Now's the time to find out how to do it. Come with me.' So we went into the bedroom and Sister said, 'We start with the prayers for the dead. Here's the book you can deal with that. We do everything else in silence. I'll give the instructions and you follow what I do.' When we had finished laying out the body we sat down in the living room for tea and cakes.

The Community of St John the Divine is an Anglican religious order of nuns founded in London in 1848 to carry out nursing activities. During the Crimea War they trained many nurses to go and work alongside Florence Nightingale. In the 1930s they established midwifery schools including one in east London. Author Jennifer Worth wrote about her work with the order in Poplar in the 1950s in her *Call the Midwife* trilogy. In 1966 the Local Authority took over full responsibility for nursing in the borough and the midwifery school was closed. The nuns, however, continued their nursing work in Poplar. In 1976 the community relocated to Birmingham, where they now exercise their ministry of hospitality, rest, retreat, spiritual accompaniment, and renewal.

The community's move away from Poplar was greatly regretted by local people as they had become very much a part of the community and of the Church.

CHAPTER 5

AFTER POPLAR

De Beauvoir Town

When the bishops in the London Diocese were planning changes in pastoral responsibilities, Bishop Trevor Huddleston, then Bishop of Stepney, asked me to consider being moved to the parish of St Peter de Beauvoir Town. At the time, I had never heard of the place. After looking at the area and talking to the parish priest who was retiring, I could think of no reason to reject the idea of being the parish priest there.

De Beauvoir Town is an area south of Balls Pond Road and west of Kingsland Road in Hackney, north London. It was an early-to-middle 19th- century urban development, undertaken by the land holders, the Benyon de Beauvoir family. As a housing development it was very attractive. The roads were quite wide, as were the pavements. Most of the houses were on a lower ground level plus ground floor and upper floor. The height of the houses was relatively low compared with later developments in that part of London. Most of the houses had good gardens, front and back, and some also had good orchards. In the heart of the estate was de Beauvoir Square, a very attractive development of large houses with Dutch-style frontage. The parish church of St Peter's was at the south western corner of the square. A large tree had grown up since the dedication of the church. My first discovery was that this tree was hollow down into the root area. We had to have it removed before it fell and caused a lot of damage.

The church had a west tower, a short chancel and sanctuary, a central aisle, and two side aisles. There was a spacious crypt beneath the church and a gallery over the back and side aisles of the nave. The seats at the back of the gallery must have been designed for small children, with very little leg room and no concessions to the desire for comfort. The gallery did give us scope for decorations through the full length and breadth of the nave, as it was easy to tie strong string to and from the sides.

The congregation included a number of Afro-Caribbean people. Their loyalty to the faith and their loyalty to the parish community were very encouraging. Some of them had experienced dreadful rejection when they had gone to their local parish church. Many came from Antigua where they maintained strong family links. One lovely man who was very loyal surprised me when I asked him if he would be help in some particular capacity. He said, 'No, Father. You see we are only sojourners, we are only here for a time.' However, his loyalty to the Mass and his regular worship were constant.

The housing on the estate belonged to the Benyon de Beauvoir family and tenancies were generally leasehold. Early in my time there, the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 was passed, which made it possible for tenants to purchase the freehold of their property. Another group of changes was also important. The Labour-led local authority had proposed and supported a major plan to build a new high-rise de Beauvoir Town. Some of the demolition to make way for this had started, but the local politics swung in a new direction. The Conservative party won the next election and they rejected the demolition and rebuilding plan. Preservation orders were placed on the Victorian houses. Although some of the 'new de Beauvoir Town' had been built, the best of the estate was fortunately preserved. It was one of the most pleasant Victorian developments I have known.

It was not surprising that these developments had knock-on effects. Many people were able to buy the freehold and modernize their homes. Others bought the freehold and then sold the property to developers and bought a new house elsewhere. This led to quite a lot of action by the builders and people who could assist in the improvement process. One man had the initiative to buy up many of the Victorian fireplaces being removed from vacated houses. When the 'renovation' process was completed, he went around to the new owners asking if they would like a nice Victorian fireplace for their renovated home. Of course most of them were a perfect fit. The parish treasurer and his wife bought a large fireplace for the front room of their newly acquired renovated house. The only defect was a large chip that had come off one of the main supports for the mantelpiece. Several months later while digging in the front garden they found a piece of marble that was a perfect replacement for the chip!

The population of the parish changed rapidly. Being relatively near to central London, houses in de Beauvoir Town were very convenient, and inevitably very expensive. Lawyers, dentists, bankers, financial advisers, surgeons, etc. were delighted to be able to buy attractive houses so near to their workplaces. A significant number of these people became involved in St Peter's and their initiative helped to enrich the life of the community. One couple who became very good friends were Richard and Heather Schilling. Richard had been head of a university department of occupational health and hygiene and was passionate about getting compensation for victims of industrial accidents. Mrs Thatcher closed down his department. His wife, Heather, established a very successful lunch club in the church crypt.

At my induction as parish priest a lot of rain water came through the roof. The pans, buckets, and bowls distributed through the church were not very efficient, and it was clear that some serious work was needed. We had a very good architect who soon got on with plans, etc. The work went ahead without any major problems. At the end of a week when the scaffolding was due to be taken down, one of the scaffolders (as I thought) came and asked if I could open up the back entrance to the churchyard for them to remove the scaffolding. I told him what to do, i.e. lift the gates off the wall hinges, and he got on with things. The following morning a group of scaffolders arrived asking what had happened to the scaffolding. At the time I had never anticipated the theft of scaffolding but, unknown to me, it was apparently endemic in London and other cities. Mercifully the owner of the firm was rather laconic about the loss.

The vicarage at St Peter's was a modern building. It had a lot of large windows at the back making it very vulnerable. On an occasion a youth got into the house, grabbed a defunct TV, and escaped through the kitchen window. Two gentlemen of the road were regular visitors. Seamus was keen on gardening and had an amazing capacity to know whether I owed him money or he owed me working time. He was a delightfully innocent man. His friend and companion, Alf, was not so reliable and sociable.

During the time I had been living at St Michael's Vicarage in Poplar I began to indulge in some wine making. This began because I was the only person there who took an interest in gardening. Apart from the grounds around the vicarage there was an item of interest growing around the front door – masses of lengthy foliage. I cut it back drastically and the next year there was a modest crop of white grapes. We warned the children that this fruit was poisonous. The next year there was a very good harvest of grapes. Various people turned up to initiate me into the art of viticulture which led to successful wine making.

At St Peter's I stupidly left some bottles of my wine on a window sill at the back of the house. When Alf 'went off the radar' for about four months I was ready to deal with him when he returned. He

knew that he could not lie his way out of it, so he admitted that he had broken in but he was convinced that the liquid was poisonous!

Some of the wine I made was a very palatable drink. The nature of the liquid was recorded on small labels with appropriate abbreviations. When Bishop Trevor Huddleston stayed for lunch after a confirmation, he saw the bottles and labels. His eyes alighted on the bottle labelled MAG. He immediately said "if it's called Maggie it must be pretty bitter"! Actually it was marrow, apple, and grape wine and very palatable.

During the time I had been at Poplar I was aware of students who were preparing for the priesthood. Most of them were studying at King's College, London and several were lodging in vicarages or parish houses. At St Peter's someone put me in touch with two young men who were at King's. It was good to have company in the house and they were pleased to be involved with parish activities. There were other students in parishes not far from St Peter's.

During my time at St Peter's I worked very closely with Fr Michael Shrewsbury, the parish priest at Holy Trinity, Dalston, and Fr Frank Clark, parish priest at All Saints, London Fields. Michael's church was known as the 'Clowns' Church', where the annual Clowns International service was held on the first Sunday in February in honour of Joseph Grimaldi and deceased clowns. Michael was proud to be chaplain to the clowns and linked this to the 'clowning' theology that emerges in the Church from time to time. Without any formal links, these three parishes worked closely together – in a sort of Dalston group. This type of arrangement was also true of other neighbourhoods within the Hackney Deanery.

I was parish priest at St Peter's for ten years.

Out of London to Oxfordshire

In 1982 the Oxfordshire bishops were looking to fill a vacancy in the Bicester team ministry. The geographical extent of the united churches was considerable and included the town parish of Bicester and the rural parishes of Launton, Bucknell, and Caversfield. Caversfield had already amalgamated with St Edberg's, Bicester. The variety of housing estates and the scale of the housing meant that pastoral work had to be shared between the priests in the team. The team rector lived in the vicarage in Bicester, and the curate lived in a house in the south-western housing area. The priest responsible for Bucknell lived in a house on the western housing estate. All the priests were involved in sacramental preparation and pastoral care. The Revd Arthur Royall had been appointed by the Archbishop to help in finding appropriate priests for various appointments. Fr Royall suggested me for Bicester and, after being interviewed, I could think of no valid reason to say no – so I accepted the appointment.

The move from de Beauvoir Town to Bicester was more traumatic than I could ever have imagined. By that time, both of my parents had died and my closest friends were not easily contactable. Some of the colleagues on the staff at Bicester were very helpful and I was able to keep in touch with some of my London contacts. There were some tense moments over liturgical matters. Two house groups seemed to be almost totally anti-sacramental. The liturgy and the sacraments had been at the heart of my faith from well before my ordination. I had never had to face such hostility in a parish community. The staff team included priests who were not of the same theological position as me, and this meant that we could accommodate a fairly broad spectrum of styles of music and worship.

The time when I had to deal with the upheavals and moves from London, coincided with a time of considerable upheavals in the Church of England, especially on the issue of ordination of women to the priesthood. Within the Oxford area there were several gatherings to discuss the issues. Meetings in the parish were relatively calm, but there were lots of anxieties. In one meeting someone said to me, 'Well you could never become a Roman Catholic,' to which my response was, 'You will have to wait and see.' At that stage I had not made a decision.

A group of priests agreed to meet regularly at Douai Abbey for informal discussions and some solid input from Catholic priests. I cannot remember how long this group stayed together; there was no pressure or urgency about making decisions. There was a great sense of respect for the process of individuals coming to their own conclusions.

There came a time when one of the Catholic priests suggested that perhaps a 'day of discernment' would be appropriate, led by a Jesuit priest. This was agreed. The day was relatively relaxed, with talks and breaks for reflection and/or food. The Jesuit emphasized that his work was to help each of us to make appropriate discernment. He gave us a collection of notes for us to use in our own prayers. That bundle of papers was one of the most important I have ever received. It was remarkably liberating – piercing through anxieties and fears of accusations of betrayal and disloyalty.

By this stage I had got to know the local Catholic parish priest in Bicester, Fr Aldo Tapparo, very well, and his friendship was a great help. I knew that I needed to become more familiar with Catholic liturgy, so I began to attend the 6.30 p.m. Mass on Saturday evening at St Aloysius Church in Oxford. This was a said Mass and it was easy to come and go, in and out, without attracting too much attention. After a few weeks I decided to go to the Saturday evening Mass at St Anthony of Padua in Headington. This was a bit tricky as there was a very sociable ethos and I did not want to get engaged in conversations. So visits to St Anthony's were only occasional events.

I had got to know Fr Denis Egan, parish priest at Corpus Christi in Headington, through my friendship with Fr Aldo, and also I got to know Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB. I asked Dom Henry if he would be willing to prepare me for reception into the Catholic Church. He was willing and it was not long before I wrote to the Catholic Archbishop of Birmingham, Maurice Couve de Murville, and arranged to meet him. Archbishop Maurice explained the necessary procedure and training for me to join the Catholic priesthood, and suggested that I contact him when I was ready to make the move.

I was not without friends in the parish and there were kindred spirits. My perseverance in the parish was helped significantly from a rather surprising quarter. After the Second World War many displaced persons settled in the Bicester area. There were many from Poland, Serbia, and other parts of what was then Yugoslavia.

There was an agreement for the Serbian Orthodox Liturgy to be celebrated on the second Sunday of each month in the parish church of St Edberg's. Bicester Town fell within the large Serbian Orthodox parish. Sadly a split within the Serbian Orthodox Church led to local divisions as well. The first Serbian priest that I knew had a business which enabled him to keep his family cared for. When he resigned from this appointment, a new priest came from Yugoslavia. Many of the older generation were rooted in the past and deeply suspicious of priests trained in Yugoslavia during the Communist era. In spite of the Communist regime there was still some Orthodox worship in Yugoslavia. The new priest could not have expected what he had to face. He needed money and he was used to various parish provisions not found in Bicester. He kept to the tradition of not cremating bodies after funerals. I had to go to the crematorium on a couple of occasions to perform the committal for a Serbian funeral.

I was very fond of some of the Serbian people, especially after my first Easter in Bicester. I had decided to talk about the Easter greeting 'Christ is risen', with the response 'Indeed He is risen'. I said that, in the Greek celebration of Easter, the priest says '*Christos Anesti'* to which everyone responds by saying '*Alithos Anesti'*. I then said that in the Russian and Serbian tradition, the priest loudly says '*Christos Voskresi*' and, before I had a chance to explain the response, one of the Serbian men stood up on a bench at the back of the church and loudly declared '*Voistinu Voskrese'*. It was a bit of a shock for some people. One regular parishioner said to me on the way out, 'That was a good trick you had up your sleeve today, Father.'

The proclaimer of the Resurrection was a much-loved man, well-respected in various Christian places of worship. He was a great support for me and a good friend. Many Serbian and English people were saddened at his death.

Bicester is a place that seems to have had a continuous process of change. The town has had many programmes of expansion, new estates, new routes and roads, and new people coming to live there. I was once taken up in a glider to see the town from on high. The son of one of the church wardens was a professional glider pilot. It was an interesting experience in lots of ways. I could not imagine how we would be able to land on a very short runway. I was also surprised at the angle at which we were leaning as we ascended in a rising spiral of warm air. This flight took place during the final stages of the construction of the M40 motorway. Looking down, it was as if a great giant grab had scratched away a huge quantity of earth that would be replaced by concrete.

Once the motorway was completed another spasm of changes took place. When I began my time in Bicester I was frequently told something like 'We used to live in … but we could not afford to stay there, so we came to live in Bicester.' Time and again Bicester was third or fourth choice. Once the M40 was completed, Bicester became a first choice for many people for the simple reason that the motorway and road routes enabled people to get jobs in other places without uprooting home and family.

It is hard to quantify the effects of domestic and environmental changes, but there certainly is great pressure and anxiety. For families it raises issues about schools, medical services, and the nature of the neighbourhood. Getting settled into a new environment can drain our nervous energy. There are a lot of good things about Bicester. It has a good tradition of community care through schools and health centres. Recreational and cultural facilities are good. Access to other parts of the UK is relatively easy by rail or road. The local Churches are positive and hospitable.

During the 1960's my interest in Orthodox Christian art and liturgy increased greatly. I had the privilege of a remarkable visit to Turkey and subsequently to Russia. Further visits to Russia have reinforced the impressions gained earlier. I have more to say about my interest in a later chapter.

At the same time I also had contact with some Catholic monastic communities in France and some of the priests at Chartres Cathedral. This also was a great privilege and inspiration. I remember saying to various people that it is easier to believe in the communion of saints in France than in the UK. I still believe that this is true.

Throughout this period there was considerable turmoil in the Church of England. I had also become familiar with Catholic life and worship in France. I increasingly found it perfectly natural to believe in the communion of saints as an integral part of Christian worship. Back in the UK faith in the communion of saints seemed a bit like ploughing a lone furrow.

When I went to see the Bishop of Dorcester, Rt Revd Anthony Russell, the area Bishop for Oxfordshire, to say that I was seriously contemplating reception into the Catholic Church, the Bishop

was very gracious – sad at my decision, but not trying to get a reversal. We also agreed the period in which I would continue to be in my post before my resignation took effect.

When I spoke to the Archbishop of Birmingham, the Most Revd Maurice Couve de Murville about the possibility of being received into the Catholic Church and serving as a priest, he was most encouraging. He said it would involve a period of study at Oscott, the diocesan seminary, and then if all went well, ordination as deacon and then to the priesthood.

I enjoyed my time at Oscott. There was a good mixture of seminarians from various parts of the world. On one side of my room, my neighbour was Chinese and on the other Vietnamese. We have remained good friends and travelled together to Rome after Christmas one year.

It was to Oscott that Br George Every SSM had moved from Kelham, after being received into the Catholic Church. I was glad to resume contact with him, a remarkable Church historian and teacher. His death in a motor accident in 2003 was the cause of great sadness. His funeral Mass took place in Oscott Chapel and it was a privilege for me to be one of the four bearers who carried his body to its final resting place.

Now a Catholic Priest

My first parish appointment as a Catholic priest was to Sacred Heart, Blackbird Leys in Oxford. I was not the first to take this step. Archbishop Maurice seemed to regard it as a good starting place for former Anglicans. In many ways it was a very wise and good decision. It is a remarkable parish with lots of devotion, loyalty, and concern for the community, Christian and secular. The first thing I had to do was to go to visit Josie Malony, who had keys for the church and the parish flat. I got a good welcome and was told to sit down and prepare for instructions! These included the denial of many of the evil reputations that had been projected onto Blackbird Leys. Josie was a great character and another was Maisie, who knitted a black pullover or cardigan for each new priest who came to the parish – all hand knitted!

Blackbird Leys did have a rather negative reputation in its early days. There were drainage problems and the road layout was ideal for displays of road racing with stolen cars and motorcycles. Major changes were made to make racing more difficult for trouble-makers. It had also been used by people from outside the estate to dump abandoned cars. When a parishioner drove me back to the presbytery after a meal one evening, we passed a burnt-out car not far from the church. He said wryly, ‘I think someone is trying to make you feel at home.’

In the time between my appointment as parish priest at Corpus Christi, Headington and actually taking up my responsibilities there, some dramatic changes took place. The NHS had recruited a large number of male and female nurses from the Philippines to make up for the failure of sufficient UK personnel to accept a vocation to serve in the medical and nursing spheres.

A Filipino Sister came to Oxford to help the immigrant Filipinos to integrate into the life of the hospitals, schools, parish churches, and local communities. Sister Clare-Jo worked alongside Fr David Hartley, the Catholic Chaplain at the John Radcliffe Hospital. Together they were very successful in helping the immigrants to integrate. The fact that the Filipinos spoke English helped to ease the integration.

Corpus Christi parish had a good mixture of people and nationalities and the newcomers were made very welcome. We soon benefitted from this influx with a variety of liturgical music and the delights of Filipino cooking at parish events. A second influx of immigrant nursing and medical staff soon arrived from Kerala state in south India, where there is a strong Catholic Christian heritage. There

was also the Syro-Malabar liturgy which was celebrated from time to time if a Syro-Malabar priest was available.

Corpus Christi parish, which includes the church of Our Lady of Lourdes in Wheatley, seems to have an instinctive capacity to make people welcome and to help new parishioners to contribute to the worship and work of the parish community. Long may it continue.

CHAPTER 6

HOLY ICONS

It was while I was at Durham University that I first became aware of the Holy Icons that are an integral part of the liturgy and worship in Orthodox churches. I was reasonably familiar with mediaeval Christian art in Europe through reading and through visiting English cathedrals and parish churches. St Chad's College at Durham was in the Anglican Catholic tradition and from time to time visiting orthodox priests would be present. The lectures on orthodox theology and iconography were very illuminating and inspired me to do more reading on the subject.

When I began my ordination training at Kelham with the Society of the Sacred Mission I was greatly influenced by Brother George Every. He was a lay brother in the community who taught a lot on church history and liturgy. He was also an authority on the Eastern and Oriental Churches. There were icons in the main chapel at Kelham and in the 'domestic chapel'. It was there that I first saw true icons from the Orthodox tradition.

In the western and eastern tradition, art has a role in illustrating biblical scenes, saints, holy men and women, and Christian history. Where the eastern tradition is different is in the use of panel icons where the image is presented to us in a wooden panel where the central area has been carved out. This helps us to focus on the image as an aid to our praying. For Orthodox Christians it is a way of one coming into the presence of God, or the Mother of God or the saint depicted. The icon provides for a 'two-way traffic' of spiritual energy: presenting in the image a central truth or saint and his or her significance on one hand and on the other a focal point to help us address our devotion to Christ, the Mother of God, or the saint.

It was only when I was ordained and working in east London that I became familiar with icons by visiting the Temple Gallery, founded in 1959 by Richard Temple. It was here that I had the opportunity to see a collection of Holy Icons. It was like entering into a new world. I had some friends who were more familiar with Orthodoxy than I was and they took me to the Russian Orthodox Cathedral in London for their Easter liturgy. The liturgy was celebrated by Metropolitan Anthony Bloom. It began at midnight and ended around 6.00 a.m. The Easter greeting was sung frequently, the Bishop singing 'Christ is Risen' in a variety of languages, with the heartfelt response coming from the Russians. When the English version was sung the response was rather tenuous. The Metropolitan very seriously said, 'The English never seem to show any enthusiasm for the Resurrection of the Lord!' We left at 6.00 a.m so that I could get back to the parish for the early Mass.

Some years previously, Richard Temple had organized tours in Russia and Eastern Europe to see this rich heritage of Christian art, life, and worship. After a break of some years, Richard resumed the tours organized by the Gallery. The first one to Turkey was not just to the main centres of history and art but also to many places much further east. It was amazing to explore the cave churches in Cappadocia, treasures well off the main tourist routes. I think we all began to recognize a consistency of themes and styles of iconography in church buildings and in the cave churches. Even where caves had partially collapsed, we could still discern the main motif in the imagery.

About two or three years after this experience, Richard Temple planned a similar excursion to Russia. I had been given a study grant to help with the Turkish trip and asked for help again to travel to Russia. I was grateful for the help for both these visits. On both of these trips, I indulged my hobby of photography, and as a result collected a sizeable library of slides of icons. It was a great

privilege to have the experience of both these tours and it broadened my spiritual horizons enormously. At a different level, I had already been influenced by a book on the 20th- century Orthodox saint, St Silouan the Athonite. He came from Russia and spent the rest of his life in the Russian Orthodox monastery of St Panteleimon on the holy mountain of Athos in northern Greece. I was also influenced by the writings of Archimandrite Sophrony, who compiled the works of St Silouan, and by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, who was based in Oxford.

A few years after this I became aware of a charity founded by Metropolitan Anthony Bloom called the St Gregory's Foundation. The foundation supports projects in three main locations in St Petersburg, Karelia in northwest Russia, and Tbilisi in Georgia. These provide life skills and vocational training and skills to disabled teenagers, graduates from orphanages, and vulnerable young parents, with the aim of helping disadvantaged children and families participate in improving their own lives. This work was viewed with great suspicion by the St Petersburg civic authorities, but eventually the value of the work being done was recognized and the civic authorities adopted the training programme that St Gregory's had developed. There was also quite a lot of work among elderly isolated people.

I joined a visit to Russia organized by the St Gregory's Foundation. It was outstanding not only for the range of places visited but also seeing the new parish life in the town of Kondopoga in the republic of Karelia in Russia. The previous priest had been shot in 1930 and his successor did not arrive until 1990. Being in this new community was the nearest thing to New Testament Christianity that I had experienced. In Kondopoga, the Church did a great deal to develop work with young children, especially during the holiday period – not without vigorous Communist opposition! The priest at Kondopoga had been profoundly influenced by the Orthodox theologians at St Vladimir's seminary in New York.

I gradually found myself being asked to give illustrated talks about icons and their place in the worship and spirituality of Orthodox Christianity. By this time I had moved to Bicester in Oxfordshire. Kenneth Baker, a director of Mowbray Publishing Ltd, one of the main church and religious publishers, was a member of the congregation. One evening at a parish harvest supper, Ken and I found ourselves together in the queue for food. Ken had been at a conference that day on Christianity and the arts. I asked him whether there had been anything about icons at the conference and the answer was, 'No, but everyone seemed to think that there should have been.' He then asked whether I was interested in icons. I said, 'Yes, perhaps if I write a book you could publish it.' It was a rather flippant response, but twenty minutes after I got back to the vicarage Ken arrived with forms of contract between author and publisher. He soon realized that it would be a long time before the book would be completed, but eventually it was completed with the title *Doors of Perception: Icons and their Spiritual Significance*. It was published in 1987 in the year of the 1200th anniversary of the Seventh Ecumenical Council at Nicaea, which established the use and veneration of Holy Icons as a means of expressing adoration and devotion.

Festival Icons for the Christian Year was published in 2000 and provided extracts from liturgical texts related to the appropriate festival, and illustrations for the major feasts. This was completed during the time I was studying at Oscott and I am grateful for the encouragement I was given. Another strand in this part of the story is Mount Athos in Greece. When I began my training at Kelham, a small group of students had been to Greece for the 1000th anniversary of the establishment of monastic life on Mount Athos in the 9th century by St Peter the Athonite. In the 10th century the Great Lavra monastery was established by St Athanasios the Athonite. From that time onwards the monastic life expanded and more monasteries were built, sometimes facing opposition, and with an

awareness of the powers of darkness. Many monasteries were established for Orthodox Christians from other countries.

After hearing accounts of student visits to Mount Athos, I agreed to go with a South African student, Arthur Trent. He was well travelled and this was my first journey outside the UK. The first leg of the journey got us to Frankfurt railway station. We slept on the benches for some of the night and wandered around for the rest. We hitch-hiked out of Frankfurt, and eventually reached Munich. Here, we got train tickets for Belgrade and had time for a look around part of the city. Unfortunately, the tickets we had purchased were not adequate for the journey and an interesting shouting match began between Arthur and the ticket inspector, who certainly did not understand Afrikaans. We had to pay a surcharge and then an additional sum to get us to Thessaloniki. We had been given some information about what to do on arrival at Thessaloniki, but actually getting to the right place in the right order was not easy. We did end up with the right travel documents, and accurate information about which bus to take to the point where one embarks for the crossing to Athos. The crossing was magnificent and nerve-racking, with most of the Greeks crossing themselves frequently. Once on dry land, we had to pile into an ancient bus for the ride to Karyes, the administrative centre for the Holy Mountain, where the administration was rather slow. Once issued with a *diamonitirion* (visitor's permit) for each of us, we were guaranteed one night's free lodging as we moved from one monastery to another.

The only means of transport apart from one bus route was *me ta podia* (on foot). It was not only on foot but also up and down hills and cliff tops, looking down on the Aegean Sea. The scenery was magnificent and the hospitality was good. Our participation in the liturgy was in silence, but it was a moving experience to be present among the monks as they sung the offices. The food we received was good and there were quite a few monks with a good sense of humour and some command of the English language.

At one of the monasteries the guest master was keen to introduce us to the one monk who spoke English. He was nearly 100 years old and was keen to speak to us. He told us how they had welcomed an injured English soldier during the Second World War. He had managed to escape capture by the Nazis and worked his way down through the Athos peninsula. Sometime later I realized that this soldier's story had been one of the set books we had to read in grammar school. It is called *Dare to be Free* by W. B. Thomas, and is a good read. The soldier eventually 'borrowed' a boat to row off the peninsula to an island or a piece of the mainland to get away from occupied territory.

The following year I went to Athos again with another friend and, after a long gap, I made two more visits with a robust Greek-speaking friend. On the second of these two visits, we not only explored some of the terrain at the southern tip of the peninsula, but also managed to climb to the summit of the mountain at 6,000 feet. Athos is the most beautiful place I have seen on earth - the mixture of the natural beauty of the landscape, the forests and the rock faces, sound of the bees and the rattling bay leaves, and the marvellous colour of the walls of vetch at the edge of the mountain tracks. It is not surprising that it has become a remarkable Holy Place.

One significant experience on the first visit to the Holy Mountain was an encounter with a Greek hermit. We had been on a long trek along the eastern edge of the Athos peninsula and then climbed up the edge of the peninsula. As we climbed over the ridge, we looked down on a series of buildings huddling together down from where we stood, looking west from the ridge. As we began to trek down we found ourselves entering the territory of a hermit monk. He welcomed us into his cell and showed us his chapel. Before long coffee and nibbles were produced. He prayed with us in his chapel

and then gave each of us a black knotted prayer rope and told us the words that should be used. I was partially familiar with the Jesus prayer and knew enough Greek to be able to work out the words he was giving us – 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner'. This prayer is embedded in the consciousness of Orthodox Christians. It is a statement of faith as well as a petition and the final words can be extended or changed if necessary.

The prayer rope I was given by this monk Panaretos has almost disintegrated and the one I have now comes from a Russian monastery.

The Great Monastery – Mount Athos

Christ in Majesty

Panaghia

Monastic temptations

Ladder of Perfection

Christ in Majesty
Christos Pantocrator

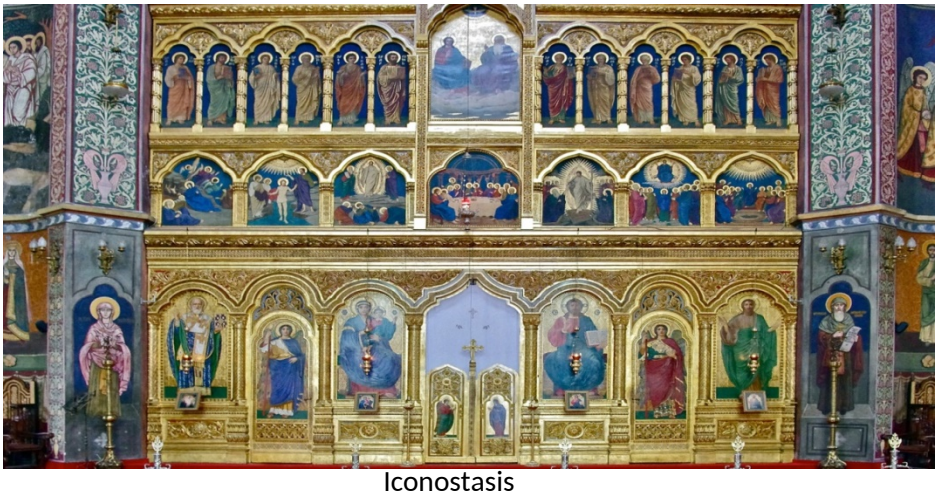
Mother of God
Hodigitria

St Anastasia

'I Am the Living Bread'
John 6:48-51

Peter denies Jesus
Matt. 26:69–75

'Feed My Lambs'
John 21:15–17



Iconostasis

These icons are in my room

The Presentation

St Boris and St Gleb
Before being murdered by their brother Sviatapolk

St Seraphim of Sarov

CHAPTER 7

FATHER GILBERT SHAW

My first awareness of Fr Gilbert was when one of the Kelham priests, who was my chaplain, lent me one of Gilbert's books on prayer. It was a great help and I soon accumulated several of his published works. Without being aware of it I was being nourished by a tradition of spirituality which went back to St John of the Cross and beyond. This was a great supplement to the main liturgical life and worship in the community.

When I had begun to settle in Poplar I gradually realized that Fr Gilbert had spent some of his ministry in Poplar, but it seemed rather difficult to gather up the details. The first of the adventure playgrounds served as a catalyst. I discovered that Bill Florey lived in Blackheath, south of the Thames, and persuaded Michael Trend, whose family also lived in Blackheath, to help with the playground. I discovered that Michael was Fr Gilbert's grandson. I gradually got to know Michael and his parents, Lord (Burke) and Lady (Patricia) Trend. They sometimes suggested that I should take some of the youths on a visit to their home where they were made very welcome.

I gradually began to realize that there was some sort of connection between Fr Gilbert and the Community of the Sisters of the Love of God (SLG), otherwise known as the Fairacres Community in Oxford.

The link between Mother Mary Clare and Fr Gilbert was created when Gilbert followed a friend's advice to call in to see Mother Mary Clare on Waterloo Station. They seemed to understand each other from the beginning of their contact. Fr Gilbert became very much involved in their life and devotion. The SLG acquired a redundant oast house near Staplehurst in Kent, which was away from city life. Over the years a lot of Gilbert's papers were collected and stored there. The sisters welcomed parish groups from both All Saints, Poplar and from St Peter's, de Beauvoir Town including post-confirmation groups. In addition to the devotional side of things, there was the great attraction in the autumn of picking apples in the orchard – some to be eaten, some to be thrown at each other.

Gilbert Shaw and 'The Sidney'

This section is a piece of work written in May 2000 by Fr Arthur Royall, the rector of All Saints Poplar in the 1960s.

Father Gilbert Shaw came to Poplar in July 1932 to work among the unemployed, he came because of his conviction that he was called to commit himself to work among the unemployed in east London. His aim was to discover what the Church might do in a poor area beset by un employment in a time of increasing economic and political crisis, a time when the Church was being increasingly disregarded by the people of east London. He was not a theorist seeking to make a sociological study; his desire was to become personally involved.

Gilbert had sought the help of the then Bishop of London who twenty years before had officiated at his marriage. Educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, Gilbert was a barrister, married, and the father of three children. As a schoolboy he had had the opportunity of spending some time in east London at the Eton College Mission House in Hackney, and he was greatly shocked by what he had

seen. After leaving school he had had spent the summer of 1905 in Hackney working for a charity organization concerned with testing for TB those who wished to emigrate to Canada. He was horrified to discover that the disease was rife in the area and that children were dying for the want of basic medical care. Gilbert was injured during army service in the Great War, was seriously ill for many months as a result, and was invalided discharged as unfit for further service.

When in the summer of 1932, Gilbert who had been ordained in 1925 approached the Bishop of London, he asked for nothing more than the Bishop′s blessing upon his desire to be a Christian presence among the unemployed of the East End. Despite the ill-defined nature of what he wished to do, the Bishop gave Gilbert his blessing. Bishop Arthur Winnington Ingram had himself worked in East London in Bethnal Green, as Head of Oxford House and then as Rector of Bethnal Green.

Gilbert was licensed in a vague and unspecific way to the Parish of All Saints, Poplar. The incumbent was far from welcoming and made it clear that he did not regard him as a member of his parochial staff. Father Moline the Rector no doubt considered Gilbert to be unorthodox and in no way had he chosen him as a colleague. The relationship between the two men was an unhappy one from the start. Some other local parish priests were equally unwelcoming; a notable exception was Father St John Grocer the outstanding and radical Vicar of Christ Church, Watney Street. There is no doubt that Gilbert was treated by many of his fellow Anglican Clergy with very real suspicion.

He began his work from a single basement room in a house in Woodstock Terrace owned by Father Essex. a retired priest. It did not take him long to get to work or to discover what form his work should take. His single room was soon filled with boots, shoes, and clothes, and men in need of them. Providing for such needs was, he realized, essential for men who often tramped miles each day in search for work and he appealed far and wide for boots and shoes. The basement room became multi-purpose, serving as a canteen in which simple food and drink could be served to those in need. At night it often served as a dormitory with several men sharing the floor space with their host. This basement room imposed great limitations on the work that Gilbert could do and he began to search for alternative accommodation. He was fortunate in finding some disused school rooms which, with the help of parties of unemployed men he began to clean and paint. An appeal in the *Church Times* raised £100 and in January 1933 he opened the rooms as the Poplar Deanery Unemployed Centre. The choice of name was due to Gilbert's desire and determination, that the work should be seen not as a purely personal enterprise but as an expression of concern by the whole Church.

In a very short time the centre had a membership of more than two hundred. It had a canteen where cheap and nourishing food was available (three courses for fourpence ha'penny). Boot-repairing, carpentry, reading, and physical recreation facilities were provided. The members were encouraged to become involved in the daily running of the centre.

The running of the centre was not without problems. Facilities for the unemployed in Poplar were virtually non-existent until Gilbert began his work. Groups of idle men standing around on street corners were easy prey for the recruitment agents of extreme political groups. Some of these groups were potential trouble makers, R. D. Hacking in his biography notes that 'from time to time rival gangs managed to secure an entrance and more than once the police had to be brought in to restore order, though it was soon discovered that one of the most effective deterrents to trouble was the sight of the hefty Gilbert in his cassock standing in the doorway.'

Although no longer a practising barrister, Gilbert′s legal training came in useful when he represented families before The Public Assistance Committee. This work in particular made him realize the limitations of first-aid work and reinforced his belief that deep-rooted social change was needed.

From the very beginning of this work, Gilbert was determined that the Centre should not be used for proselytism or the holding of services. The Centre was to be an expression of a practical love and concern which asked for no commitment to the Church or a political party.

The work continued to expand, his basement room in the house of Father Essex was inadequate as a location for interviews, and the Centre was overflowing with people. Someone suggested that he might be interested in 'The Sidney', a disused pub at 6 Woolmore Street. Gilbert immediately realised its potential for his work, but the cost was beyond his available resources. He set to work writing to contacts from his previous work seeking their help. Within a short time, the necessary funds were provided, and in February 1935 'The Sidney' was re-opened, the facilities it provided being somewhat different to those offered in its previous working life! The day-to-day running of the new Centre was in the hands of Bill, an ex-police sergeant, who was also a borough councillor.

The legal work of 'The Sidney' was an expansion of what had been carried on from the old premises and several local campaigns about housing and education were run from there. In Gilbert's view, three of the four local schools provided little more than 'child minding facilities'. He did everything he could to draw public attention to the appalling state of affairs that he was uncovering. A weekly 'Poor Man's Lawyer' session was provided.

Gilbert was a life member of The Athenaeum, the West End club. Its members included many who were influential in Church and state, and many such were invited to visit 'The Sidney'. At this time it was estimated that twenty percent of the population of the borough of Poplar were living below the official basic poverty level of bare subsistence.

The local housing stock was in an appalling condition and serious overcrowding was commonplace. To help those suffering from the activities of unscrupulous landlords Gilbert and Father Grocer set up a Tenants' Defence Association. In Poplar the association recovered over £2000 from bad landlords. Such success, of course, increased the demand for its services. Gilbert played a leading part in the Hanbury Street rent strike of 1939. Gilbert together with a young social worker Jack Barker led a two-month-long struggle and secured an outstanding victory in the County Court. Barker wrote, 'To Hanbury Mansions came the Reverend Fr Shaw to take charge of the strike. To him was owed the successful outcome. His eloquence in the witness box on behalf of the defaulting tenants undoubtedly swayed County Court Judge Thompson, who granted a stay of all rent due and for the following eighteen months'. Barker elsewhere commented that 'the high church Anglicans and the Communists were the only active people in the East End'.

Gilbert would have been among the first to acknowledge how little he and his associates achieved in the limited field of their endeavours; however in Poplar they were a major influence for good, and some hundreds of unemployed men and their families had good cause to be grateful for the work based on 'The Sidney'.

His critics accused Gilbert of being over-concerned with social and political questions. However, mission work was not neglected. He was quite clear that the work of 'The Sidney' and its predecessor was only a first step towards the important work of evangelism 'the work of compassion is an evidence of true religion'. He did not allow the unemployment centre to be used for evangelism, but he did himself engage in direct mission work and open-air preaching. In 1937 Gilbert wrote to Father Ashcroft, the Rural Dean of Poplar and Vicar of St.Michael and All Angels, suggesting the formation of an Evangelistic Committee.

In 1938 the Bishop asked him to take charge of the church of St Nicholas, Blackwall Stairs in Yabsley Street, five minutes' walk from 'The Sidney'. This lofty redbrick building built in 1902 was the mission church of All Saints. In view of the tension that continued between himself and the parish church he was glad to accept this appointment, but he never lived in the Church House in Prestons Road. Built in 1900 to provide for a population that was expanding as a result of the Blackwall Tunnel scheme, it was described in the 1920s as a struggling mission church with but a few keen communicants. In 1964 an elderly communicant who had lived in Blackwall Way all her life, averred that when she was a girl, 'anybody who was anybody went to All Saints, if you weren't anybody you went to St Nicholas'.

The coming of the war brought Gilbert's ministry in Poplar to a close. St Nicholas church was badly damaged in September 1940, and was never to be restored. The evacuation of children and some mothers had taken place and the unemployment that had brought him to the East End had virtually disappeared. There was, he felt, nothing to keep him in Poplar and he left at the beginning of October 1940. His departure was in part due to the advice of his doctor.

In 1984 the GLC mounted an exhibition at the Royal Festival Hall featuring various 'makers of modern history' in London, a stand being devoted to the part played by Gilbert in the rent strike of 1939.

I find it strange and sad that Gilbert Shaw's pioneer work undertaken at great personal cost is rarely mentioned in post-war studies of east London.

Other Aspects of Fr Gilbert's Life and Ministry

Fr Gilbert's life spanned an interesting period of English and European history, from 1886 to 1967. Fr Royall's article gives us a good insight into the sociological and political state of affairs in east London, and the impression Gilbert made.

Much of Gilbert's early life was overshadowed with sadness. His health was not good; he was often in the care of aunts and governesses. In 1900 he gained entrance to Eton where he was bullied. In this period his mother was seriously ill, which increased his sense of loneliness. He did enjoy some of the visits to parts of Yorkshire with his father, experiencing the open countryside, riding, fishing, and learning about photography from his father. In 1902 was confirmed at school and through school contacts he gave up time in the holidays to help with the various mission centres in east London. In 1906 he went to Cambridge to study history and also received elocution lessons.

He was not impressed with university religion, but on Ascension Day 1906 at Holy Communion in the college chapel he experienced something that made him aware of the reality of God. He began to attend the college chapel and investigated the Christian societies. In the autumn of 1907 John How, the priest who later established the Anglican community, the Oratory of the Good Shepherd, became the new precentor. This led to visits to the Trinity College Mission in Camberwell, and to the practice of making his confession. Political involvement had become integral to Gilbert's understanding of Christianity.

In 1908-9 the Hulsean lectures were given by John Neville Figgis, a member of the Anglican monastic Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield, and formerly a history don at the university. The series of four lectures were given under the title *The Gospel and Human Needs*. Later in life

Gilbert remembered the lectures as a prophetic insight into the failure of the Church to speak effectively to the 'over-ripe civilization of the pre-First World War days before its autumn luxuriousness of romantic idealism was brought to judgement'. Gilbert was moved by Figgis's opening call: 'Christ calls not for peaceful days and quiet nights, but to the heights and depths of sacrifice.'

Another element in the religious culture and ethos of this period was a revival of interest in ancient religions, and in the occult and paranormal, and in witchcraft and theosophy. In Cambridge, C. W. Leadbeater was a quasi-leader and Aleister Crowley was a 'high priest' in such matters, regarding himself as '666' the 'great beast' in the Book of Revelation. Although all this was of interest to Gilbert, he kept himself clear of Crowley and pursued his own studies of primitive Greek religion.

Around this time when he was about 23 and was considering ordination, there was more pressure from his father to study for the Bar. An invitation to visit a cousin in New Zealand took him away from Cambridge for a while. On his return home he was called to the Bar and gained a good reputation. He married Sylvia Mary Smyly who came from a family also involved in the law. Sylvia's great-great grandfather was also great-great-grandfather to Gilbert.

When Gilbert and Sylvia were living in Newbury, Gilbert was recruited for war service. However, he was thrown from his horse and kicked in the head, leaving him with serious problems of dizziness and mental disorder. Family life was not straightforward as Gilbert was often away for long periods and was not well enough to work until 1916. Sylvia is regarded as the 'saint' of the family because of her stability and devotion to her family and her devotion to the Church.

In the latter years of his life and ministry, Gilbert's work was largely engaged in the life of the religious communities he was involved with. There was also a lot of reading and sorting out of accumulated talks from previous years.

There is a very good biography of Fr Gilbert Shaw by R. D. Hacking (*Such a Long Journey: a Biography of Gilbert Shaw, Priest*, Mowbrays 1988). Although this book is now out of print it may well be available via various second-hand book dealers. The life of Fr Gilbert Shaw was remarkably complex, largely because of the broad spectrum of his interests and achievements. His experience on Ascension Day 1906 gave him a living sense of the presence of God. Neville Figgis's statement about vocation seems to be something lived out whole-heartedly.

'Christ calls not to peaceful days and quiet nights but to the heights and depths of sacrifice'

Gilbert Shuldham Shaw, 10 July 1886 to 18 August 1967 – RIP

AFTERWORD

What you can expect to see in a Catholic church

The ground plan may well be a square or rectangle. Standing in the building, you may instinctively find yourself looking towards the east end of the church. There will be blocks of seats for worshippers to use and there will be aisles for people to walk about within the church. It is possible that there will be a door at the west end and in the north and south walls. Not all doors are open all the time.

Within the church the altar is one of the most important and conspicuous items. Depending on the ground plan of the church, the altar might be at the east end or in front of the steps that lead to the chancel. The baptismal font is often located near one of the doors of the church, which symbolizes the entry of the newly baptized Christian into the Mystical Body of Christ. The lectern is a stand on which is placed a large Bible. Somewhere in the chancel or sanctuary there will be a tabernacle in which the Blessed Sacrament is 'reserved'.

Other items in the church often include statues, sculpture around the inner opening of a wall in which there is a stained glass window. There may also be an icon of Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, or of other saints. These are visual aids for the people who are praying. We can allow God to speak to us through who or what we see in the icons.

Within the life of the Catholic Church there is a 'framework' which involves people who have been ordained to serve as archbishops, bishops, priests, and deacons. This ordained ministry was established by Jesus Christ and has been preserved and perpetuated throughout the ages in the life of the Church. In Catholic parishes the parish priest has responsibility for pastoral work and administration as well as responsibility for the liturgy. There may be a parish council and there will certainly be a finance committee.

Living with the Bible in the Catholic tradition

The Holy Scriptures, as we have them in the Biblical tradition cover a long period of history, about three to four thousand years. The geographical area where these historical events took place was mainly in the area we now refer to as the Holy Land, together with places in Egypt, Turkey, Arabia, and Italy. At the heart of this tradition is the revelation of God's activity through the leaders, prophets, and priests of the people of Israel. The main leaders include Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and several others.

In our worship, the Catholic Church uses a lot of readings from the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. These texts are often referred to as the Word of God, or the Word of the Lord, because they convey information about what God has done, or revealed through his prophets. If you are not already familiar with the Holy Scriptures, you could use some of the booklets that are available to help link what we learn from the Scriptures and how to apply it to our own daily lives. Some people read the Bible from the beginning, some will give up after a short time, and others may be able to keep going. Reading the Bible is not meant to be a marathon contest. Give yourself time to digest what you read. It is a good idea to read one of the gospels at the same time as it is being used at Masses in church.

Growing up in Faith and Hope and Love and Service

The Church is a community of people who through Baptism and the other sacraments are enabled to grow in faith and seek to live out the faith. The Lord calls us to bear witness to the love of God in our daily lives and through the communal activity of the local parish church community. Regular worship as part of the Body of Christ involves taking part in the celebration of Holy Mass on Sunday and other days. Many people go to Mass every day if there is a celebration at a convenient time.

Most parishes have provision for the preparation of children to receive the sacraments. Young children are often glad to sing in the choir or to become altar servers.

Just as we grow physically and emotionally, we also grow spiritually. Spiritual growth means that we become more aware of the love of God and of the ways in which we can help other people. In one of his letters to his congregation, St Paul says, 'Pray without ceasing.' This implies that we can be aware at all times that God is present with us. In the gospels we read how Jesus went away to a lonely place so that he could pray to the Father. That is how Jesus discovered the strength to fulfil his ministry. We all need to give time to prayer. It brings us close to God and helps us to face the problems that come our way.

Sacramental Preparation

This is a very important aspect of parish life and includes preparation for the sacraments of Baptism, Confession and first Communion, Confirmation, and Marriage. How these are dealt with will vary a great deal from parish to parish. In a large parish there may well be resources of people with educational skills, trained catechists, or a religious sister who would be competent with some aspects of this work. They may supplement the work of the parish priest or in some places have full responsibility for the programme.

For the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, the sacraments are a central part of our faith and practice as Christian people. We talk about 'Apostolic succession' as part of our heritage. In the gospels we read about Jesus training the apostles to spread the gospel and to build up the life of the Church community, which St Paul in particular refers to as the 'Body of Christ'.

In the Acts of the Apostles and the writings of the other apostles, we can see how the life of the Church developed:

1. Through confession of faith in Jesus Christ, and Baptism
2. Through communal prayer and worship
3. Through belonging to the Christian community in various centres. We have letters from the apostles sent to particular communities, e.g. Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Galatia, and an anonymous letter to the Hebrews.

It is within the community of the Church, and by the grace and influence of the Holy Spirit, transmitted by the laying on of hands by bishops and the ministry of priests, that we are spiritually strengthened. We often refer to this process as receiving the grace of God.

We need to prepare families for the baptism of their children, helping them to see the significance and importance of this sacrament, and explaining the details of the baptism rite. When parents bring their children into the church for Baptism they are acknowledging that their children are a gift from

God. The parents and godparents promise to bring the children up as Christian people. From quite an early age children can begin to learn how to pray. They can join in family prayers and can be taught some basic simple prayers.

The preparation of children for first Confession, first Communion, and Confirmation is another major task. Here again there is an interaction between priests, catechists, etc and parents and children. Some children may be in Catholic schools and will have learnt a lot through school worship and Masses. Those from other schools may need more encouragement and information. This process or programme can be quite creative, leading to a deeper life of prayer and realization of the place we have in the Church community. This may lead to some children wanting to become altar servers or members of a parish choir. Many friendships may develop during the programme for children and parents. During these processes we hope to develop our love for God and our openness to that love in the circumstances of our lives. The sacrament of forgiveness, usually referred to as Confession or Reconciliation, is always available for any Catholic who wishes to receive God's forgiveness through the ministry of the priest.

The sacrament of Confirmation reminds us of the gift of the Holy Spirit to the apostles on Pentecost Sunday. In this sacrament the bishop lays his hands on those being confirmed, anoints them with holy oil, and says the appropriate prayer.

The sacrament of Marriage is usually celebrated during a Nuptial Mass. A man and woman pledge their devotion and fidelity to each other and seek God's blessing on their life together. In Christian marriage it is worth remembering that there are three people involved in the marriage; the bride, bridegroom, and Jesus Christ, and we pray that Christ will continue to be present with them in their family life.

Some priests will undertake the whole of the marriage preparation work themselves. In many deaneries, however, a planned programme of sessions for marriage preparation will bring together couples from different parishes. It is important that couples contact their parish priest at least six months before the proposed wedding to ensure the date wanted is available. Where couples are of different nationalities there can be complications and the need to contact embassies for reliable information. Couples should beware of weddings as part of a holiday package, as they discover they are not in fact legally married.

In the Sacrament for the Sick, the priest anoints the sick person with holy oil consecrated by the bishop during Holy Week. It is an important means of grace and anyone who is seriously ill should ask to be anointed. In most hospitals, staff will be able to contact a Catholic priest to administer the sacrament. The 'Last Rites' is a phrase often incorrectly used to describe the Sacrament of the Sick. The Sacrament of the Sick is intended for any person who is ill, and not only those who are on the point of death.

On Call

Most parishioners expect that if they call out the parish priest for help there will be a positive response. We might be late occasionally, but most priests will respond as quickly as possible.

Hospital calls vary in frequency and seriousness and most priests will respond quickly. These can be related to serious illness, bereavement, or disasters. I was called to a hospital to see a newly admitted male patient. The patient was very direct and he said, 'Father, I have been told I have a very short

time to live, can you help me?' I said that I would do my best and asked if he would like to make his confession. I gave his time to think about things and he then made his confession and received absolution. He was truly reconciled to God and the Church, and had a strong faith in spite of all the natural anxieties of his circumstances.

When the Ronan Point Tower disaster occurred in Canning Town in 1968, I was called to Poplar Hospital where a number of the injured were taken. A gas explosion caused the collapse of the south-east corner of the block but fortunately the remainder of the tower was unaffected. Four of the 260 residents were killed and seventeen were injured. It was amazing that there not more casualties but not all the flats were occupied and the explosion occurred in the morning when many residents had left for work.

Other calls are to the home. On one occasion the caller asked me to visit a friend who had just arrived home to be told her husband had collapsed and died at work. One Saturday afternoon I received a phone call, 'Please, Father, can you come round? I don't know you, but I need your help.' When I arrived I was welcomed by a middle-aged man and invited into the home. We all sat down, mother, father, and a son. The father said simply, 'Until this morning we had two sons; now we have one, the other was murdered this morning.' In situations like these you feel completely useless and you have to rely on your own inner life of prayer. We have to rely on the grace of God and keep on praying.

Accidents and illness involving young people can be particularly distressing and can have an enormous emotional effect on family and friends. I experienced involvement with the family of a teenage girl killed in an accident while crossing the road. The family were well known in the town and this tragedy left an impact on young people and much of the town community - as did the sudden and unexpected death of an 11-year old suffering from juvenile arthritis. When I was called to the hospital, he was seriously ill and it was not long before he died. This was another tragedy having an emotional effect on school friends and peers.

On another occasion I had a call from a hospital asking me to visit the wife and two young sons of a terminally ill patient. Within a couple of days after my visit, the wife rang me to tell me that the older boy wanted talk to me. He got on his bicycle and came to the presbytery. The conversation started with him saying, 'Well, Father, it's a bit like this: I keep on praying and my dad seems to be getting worse.' I cannot remember exactly what I said but I tried to help him make some distinctions such as: 'You obviously don't want to lose your father, so you can pray that he won't die. You love him and want him with you and the rest of the family. But, if the illness is very serious and looks like getting worse, you might have to pray something like: Oh God, I don't want my dad to die. Please help me to help my mother and my brother because it is hard for them as well.' You can imagine how impotent I felt trying to guide a 12-year old into the threshold of bereavement. All I can say is that we have to trust in the power of prayer, and I believe that the Jesus Prayer is like an internal source of grace and strength. Without that I would be lost.

A friend and experienced school teacher has written the following about the effect of the sudden death of a young person on their friends and peers.

> Young adolescents do not expect to lose their friends through death in accidents. Sadly this happens all too often and the consequent impact has a long lasting effect on their lives, as well, family and close friends within the community.

Frequently, much assistance is given to the bereaved families by a host of supporting bodies including the Church. Schools have to find ways of supporting shocked, and frequently, very emotional teenagers. Reactions to the immediate news of death vary from hysteria, tears, anger, disbelief, fear, and remorse to quiet shock. Naturally, schools want to be as supportive as possible to pupils in these situations, but at the same time need to maintain the 'normality' of everyday life.

From my experience in dealing with the aftermath of the tragic death of a 14- year- old girl, the following ideas emerged and proved helpful.

Initial Impact
Shock and disbelief is the initial reaction. The person who has died quickly takes on a 'hero' status. Suddenly there are youngsters declaring that the deceased was their greatest friend. This may not have always been the case. It is really important that they are given the opportunity to talk about the deceased and to understand that this is good, and a normal thing to do. So often, people find it hard to talk about death because of fear of releasing their own emotions.

Support
When dealing with the situation in school, it has been important to maintain normal life while acknowledging that there has been a great tragedy. Opportunities for sensitive talking need to be available, but not at the risk of disrupting every activity. Bereavement counselling may need to be arranged for some pupils, but, in my experience, the opportunity to talk about the deceased with a sensitive adult within the school community can help. Care needs to be taken to be aware of the reactions of **all** pupils. Sometimes, the more extrovert and emotional pupils require a lot of attention but often those who are more reserved also need help.

A Book of Remembrance
Pupils had access to a Book of Remembrance through the Head of Year and were encouraged to write down all the good and funny things they could remember about the deceased. This proved to be a very cathartic exercise. Youngsters thought very hard about what to say, and treated writing their entries with great seriousness. It seemed that it gave them something practical to do and to focus their thoughts.

The Book was available for several weeks and was given to the parents of the deceased after it had been established that everyone who wanted to, had written in the book.

The Funeral
Many young people have never attended a funeral. For those who have, it has often been that of an elderly grandparent where death had been expected. The sudden death of a peer is a very different matter. It was stressed to pupils that the wishes of parents and close family are paramount and need to be respected. Many youngsters attended the funeral held in the local church during school time. Wherever possible the school urged that they be accompanied by a responsible adult to give comfort and support and to help prevent the outbreak of mass hysteria which would only add to the parents' anguish. Many parents accompanied their children to the service. After several conversations with staff, pupils accepted that the parents' request for a private burial must be respected. A return to school for a cup of tea and a biscuit helped.

The Aftermath
Grief continued for a long time but the daily routines of school life continued as usual. In many ways this gives comfort and the message that life does continue, although it feels rather different after the loss of a loved one. Youngsters continued to talk about the whole incident and their sadness. There were always adults to whom they could turn and it was important that the whole thing could be talked about rather than 'hushing up' of death. A memorial garden was planned and some close friends were involved in the planning and execution of this. A group of pupils, with the Head of Year, visited the parents and gave them the Book of Remembrance.

Many pupils continued to visit the grave for months, if not years, afterwards out of school hours and of course by their own decision. They felt they were 'talking' with the deceased and would spend many hours at the graveside. It seemed to help them and maybe they felt they were doing something positive.

Finally
These reflections are personal. The initial shock is very hard for pupils and staff to cope with but the emotional health of pupils is vital in these circumstances. Openness, practicality and routine are vital and life within the school community has to go on, if a little differently, for a while.

In a different vein, I was called out to a mother and daughter who were anxious about the daughter's sense of other 'presences' in the house. I celebrated Mass in the house and blessed the occupants and sprinkled the living rooms with Holy Water. About four years later, when I had left the parish, I had a call from a man who had some family connection with the house. 'We never felt at ease in the house,' he said, 'and I am glad that the trouble has been dealt with and the current occupants are happy there.'

I was once called out by a neighbouring priest who was in a house in his parish where several people were highly excited and/or terrified. They had been involved in the use of an Ouija board, and were obsessed or excited in a way that was simply dangerous. On that occasion one friend came to our assistance, a very devout and trustworthy man. However, sometimes these sorts of events had to be referred to a specialist – one of the priests appointed by the bishop for this work.

In several places where people were in new locations and homes I was called out because the children would not sleep. In some instances there seemed to be some malevolent influence lingering in the house. In some situations I have blessed the house and residents, and sprinkled the rooms and people with Holy Water. It is not easy to allay such fears especially when a fragile new-born is involved. Sometimes we can discover relevant information about the place and previous occupants, but not always. Often, simply listening to what parents have to say is enough to ease the anxiety. We might well enquire about the presence or absence of any Christian activity in the family. A competent companion in these situations can be a great bonus.

Sustaining priestly ministry

Parish priests have to face many situations where there are no easy answers. We can stand by people in times of difficulty, but we do not have magical solutions. We can support people in prayer and discussion.

Being a workaholic does not imply that we are good priests. Human beings need food, rest, and recreation. We also need friendship from people who can stop us getting too pompous. Spiritually we need times of retreats, not only to step back from work, but to have time for a deeper level of prayer and recollection. A priest needs a spiritual director/confessor who is wise and discreet. He also needs to have good relations with fellow priests, in which context deanery meetings are important.

A parish priest must have a willingness to delegate tasks and responsibilities to lay people who are creative, constructive, and competent. Finally, he must be prepared to accept constructive advice from lay people within the parish.

Some thoughts on prayer

When we pray
We try to place ourselves before God – before the God we cannot see, the unseen God who can see us. It may be useful to use a crucifix, an icon, or a statue of Jesus to focus our attention. We can talk to God. We may want to ask for help. If we are alone we can pray aloud without any embarrassment. Sometimes when we prepare ourselves to pray, we find our heart and mind invaded by lots of distractions. It is a bit like the flotsam and jetsam washed up on the beach at the seaside! Don't let the rubbish distract you, focus your attention on what you want to place before God.

When to pray
When you get up in the morning, ask for help and guidance throughout the day. Pray for people you know, who are sick or in trouble. Pray for doctors, nurses, and teachers.
When you want rest. You might go to sleep but you might also be awake enough to reflect on the day so far.
Before and after meals. Give thanks for the food and drink and also for the cook.
In the evening. Time to reflect on the day, the need to say 'sorry', the need to say 'thank you'.

Well known prayers

OUR FATHER who art in heaven, hallowed be they name, they kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

HAIL MARY, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.

GLORY BE TO THE FATHER and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end.

SOME SHORT PRAYERS – EASY TO REMEMBER AND EASY TO PRAY.
To you O Lord be glory, king of endless majesty.
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me
Come Holy Spirit, pray thou thyself in me.
O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place my trust in You.
Our hearts desire to love you, Lord, watch over us while we sleep.
O Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us.

O Living Flame of love within the heart of Mary and her Son, kindle that same fire within my heart.

Here are some examples of Jesus' teaching and the way he prayed and lived according to St Matthew 5:3-11 (The Revised Standard Version).

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you, and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The following quotations come from the Gospel according to St John (RSV).

'Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life.' (Jn 5:24)

'Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, and has given him authority to execute judgement, because he is the Son of man.' (Jn 5:25-27)

'Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.' (Jn 6:47-51)

'Again Jesus spoke to them, saying "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."' (Jn 8:12)

'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.' (Jn 10:11, 14-15)

'Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me"' (Jn 14:6)

In my youth I would often hear my grandmother saying:

Without the WAY there is no going
Without the TRUTH there is no knowing
Without the LIFE there is no living

The Wheels of Providence and the Twists of Fate

Much of what we have pondered on in this booklet has been in the context of some sense of divine providence, but a sense not shared by all. Many of the people involved in Poplar for instance – adults and children – may have had no sense of the providence of God or the guidance of the Holy Spirit. For them life might be, as the traditional saying goes that, 'the record of human history is nothing more than one damn thing after another'.

Sometime after I had retired I had a phone call from my GP asking me to make an appointment to see him. After a short time of discussion he put some cards on the table and asked me about them. He then said that he was going to refer me to the memory clinic. Within a short space of time after this I was found on the pavement in Wharton Road, Headington. Some kind person phoned for an ambulance and I was unconscious in hospital for two weeks. I had to have a brain scan, and it revealed traces of two haemorrhages. It immediately put to an end my continuing to live alone in a flat belonging to the parish. The damage revealed in the scan was probably due to this incident and one three or four years previously when I stumbled and fell, crashing my head into a wall. After regaining consciousness, I was eventually released for some weeks to a nursing home.

Sometime after I had been discharged from the hospital, I had a telephone conversation with a priest friend whom I had known for several years. We both had a long-standing interest in the religious art and spirituality of the Orthodox Church. I had forgotten that he had suffered a very serious stroke and had a lengthy period of recovery. In the course of the conversation he said that when he regained consciousness he could not remember the Our Father or any other prayers. Sometime later, the Jesus Prayer 'popped up' in his consciousness. He was quite surprised when I said that the first thing that came into my mind when I regained consciousness was the Jesus Prayer. For both of us this simple prayer which is at the heart of Orthodox spirituality had become rooted in our hearts and souls.

> *"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner".*

During the next few months I used this prayer not only for my own benefit but for the many people who were caught up in savage and murderous conflicts in various parts of the world. At a later stage, when I was physically much better, I was feeling very depressed about not being able to go out without an escort when escorts were few and far between. Three images surfaced in my consciousness. It was impossible to ignore them and they were quite bizarre and vivid.

The first image was of a large full black plastic refuse bag dumped by the side of the road. This image may have some connection to the fact that after the final brain haemorrhage I was found unconscious on the pavement in Wharton Road in Headington.

The second image might have been picked up from a picture or image seen on TV. It was a beached whale! I can only imagine that it might be linked to emotions about being stranded and immobilized.

The third image was a wrecked ship, and it seemed highly appropriate. I had formally resigned from full-time ministry and had begun to move my possessions into a flat owned by the parish and previously used by a retired priest. Then I suffered my brain haemorrhage, collapse in the street, and hospitalization. It was decreed that I would have to move into a care home. Some excellent friends helped with the necessary arrangements and 'removals' work. During this process it seemed that everything I am, or was, or possessed, or could cope with was now completely disconnected or disappeared.

Fortunately that sense of complete disconnectedness has eased and there is a bit of order and hope for the present and the future. I am grateful to be still alive and reasonably active. I do not worry about the whys, ifs, buts, and wherefores of this situation, but I do pray that I will be able to serve God and the Church whatever the circumstances.

The wheels of providence and fate seem to have a variety of effects in our lives. For some people everything seems to go wrong; for others everything seems okay and enjoyable. Most of us have to live with a degree of uncertainty. We hope and pray for our well-being and the well-being of our families and friends. Many of us have found help and encouragement from the teaching that Jesus gives us about prayer and trust in the providence of God.