

ST. VINCENT'S CHURCH BURTON 1940- 1952

Recollections by Mike Wilson

First recollections are of Canon Rudd, a kindly but `distant' sort of gentleman. Canon Rudd lived in the Rectory; there was no Mrs Rudd but there was a housekeeper. Miss Ellesmere, a retired missionary, who lived in Debonnaire Cottage, was the other stalwart of the Church. She provided Sunday School classes for the juniors – in the Vestry – whilst Canon Rudd took classes for the seniors in the Main church pews. Perhaps two rows of pews being taken up by the `pupils, with Canon Rudd facing them, feet on a pew seat and backside on a pew back. I wondered how he managed to sit without falling off.

Elevation from the juniors to the seniors was achieved by asking for a move.

Miss Ellesmere also organised and ran the Torch bearers class. This was held on Friday evenings in the Dining Room of Debonnaire Cottage with its red tiled floor. The class comprised a few short stories from the Bible followed by orangeade and biscuits and games. The favourite game was `spinning the bread board'. One child in the middle of the room spun the board, called out someone's name who then had to catch the spinning board before it fell flat – good game.

Before leaving for home, the Torchbearer's song was sung:-

Jesus bids us shine with a pure clear light
Like a little candle burning in the night
In this World of darkness, so we must shine
You in our small corner and I in mine.

There was a pervasive smell of dogs throughout Debonnaire Cottage at that time. The other recollection being of the book covered wall in the best room which opened to reveal cupboards.

Canon and Mrs. Caulton followed Canon Rudd and moved into the Rectory somewhere around the mid 1940's. Canon Caulton was a much more approachable and friendly vicar held in high respect by most residents. He was a silver haired gentleman who walked with great difficulty and with the aid of two walking sticks. He made a habit of visiting every household in the village on a regular visit.

Some weeks prior to Christmas, Canon Caulton would organise a gathering of Carol Singers. A few practice sessions taking place in the Church. Needless to say the *owlet members did not always show due reverence when in Church and the writer was severely rebuked by his Mother after one particular practice when the younger element lapsed into uncontrollable giggles. Alan & Derek (Gunner) Ward sang their own version of `While Shepherds watched ', along the lines of `all boiling in a pot, when a lump of soot came falling down and spoiled the blooming lot'. The writer took the blame for this.

Then, as now, assistance with Church matters, was left to the few; the writer's mother, Mrs. Bradshaw, Mrs. Fasham, Annie Lingard, Francis Russon all spring to mind.

Heating in the church in those days was by a coke stove in the Vestry and another larger `below ground' coke stove in the *nave* of the Church beneath cast iron grating. In the late 1940's the writer obtained the position of `stove lighter'. The payment for this duty was 12/6d. per week — a veritable fortune to a 13/14 year old.

Standing instructions were to light the fires around 10.00pm on a Saturday evening. Burton Churchyard on a frosty winter moonlit night, with no lights visible anywhere, was a scary place for a 13 year old but the thought of 12/6d overcame any fears.

The vestry stove was the first to be lit; it was usually no trouble with a vertical chimney `straight off' the stove. However, the stove in the Nave was a veritable beast to light and the writer was reduced to tears of frustration on many occasions. This stove had a lengthy underground horizontal flue, incorporating a right angle bend, prior to entering the chimney on the right hand side wall of the Church.

On occasions chimney draught was non existent and it was necessary to light a paper fire at the base of the chimney. This was achieved by opening the external access door to give access to the base of the chimney. On many occasions the Church was filled with smoke — no windows to open — what was a 13 year old to do?

Once the Nave stove was functioning — usually by about 11.30pm, the next problem was to gauge how much inlet air to allow into the stove. Too much and the stove would overheat and the fire would be out by the morning; too little and the fire would go out.

An early Sunday morning visit was necessary (about 6.30am) to either stoke up the fires or to relay and relight. Whichever situation awaited me was immediately apparent upon opening the Church door - A pleasant warming heat or a cold Church.

Fires were stoked up, or re lit, and then left in the fervent hope they would be ok for the 11.00am service. On one occasion, too much inlet air had been allowed and the Nave stove was glowing red beneath the cast iron grating. Panic stations at 10.55am with the grating being hurriedly lifted and all air inlets closed off.

On one occasion Jackdaws decided to build a nest in the chimney on the right hand side of the Church. Canon Caulton and the writer checked this chimney every September by the simple method of light papers at the base. If smoke issued freely, then all was ok. If it did not then there was a problem.

The dislodging of the nests were undertaken by taking a clothes prop to the top of the chimney, inserting it into the chimney and physically battering the nest so that it fell to the bottom of the chimney where it could be set on fire or removed.. The problem was how to reach the top of the chimney!

An elderly `Canon' who walked with the aid of two sticks and a 14 year old? How we managed I know not, but we did. It was necessary to have one ladder to reach the roof of the Church and a pair of steps from the Church roof to the top of the chimney. When at the top of the chimney I recall being able to see, over the roof of the Church, the row of Hillside Cottages. I recall Cannon Caulton's words: `If we have faith, we can do anything'. He was quite right.

The other source of income for this 14 year old was to cut the grass in the Churchyard by hand mower, rake the gravel on the Church drive and keep the drive borders free from weeds, cutting hedges etc. 3/6d per hour was the payment at that time — the most vivid recollection being of perspiration and midges. The top half of the Churchyard was cut by scythe twice per year — a back breaking job but assistance usually forthcoming from `Grandfather Denton' — the scythe being kept in the apple tree in the garden at Denton's Cottage.

Canon Caulton was my ideal of a `country vicar'. He knew everyone in the village and participated in every aspect of village life. His study in the Rectory was `open house' to everyone. The Parish Magazine regularly invited anyone to call in for a chat and to share `a pipe of tobacco'. He was a regular spectator at the village cricket games — usually the only one. He was an active committee member and Chairman of the Burton Estate Club and when some minor financial problems occurred at the club it was Canon Caulton who put his hand in his pocket and put the club accounts back onto an even keel.

I recall a summer bus outing to Mablethorpe. Before we set off, Canon Caulton said a short prayer for a safe journey and for a warm and sunny day. He and `his Boss' got it 50% right. We had a safe journey but it rained all day.

When the writer returned to the village, married and with 2 children, Canon Caulton was still actively participating in village life. Indeed, within 3 days of moving into Denton's Cottage, my wife spied Canon Caulton coming through the gate to visit and to welcome. By the time he had reached the back door, my wife had had time to have a quick wash, change her working clothes, and answer the door in a presentable fashion — the first time she had met him.

Having been christened with the name `Michael', I have been called many names, from Mike to Michael to Mick to Mickey & various other unmentionable names. However, Canon Caulton would insist on calling me `Mikey' — I wish he had stuck to Michael or Mike.