

Anthony Caldicott

1931 – 2015

I first met Anthony in 1967 when he came to West Bromwich Parish Church (All Saints) as Organist and Choirmaster and also as Assistant Curate. I was his assistant organist and so began a friendship of almost fifty years which lasted right up to the time of his death on the 9th of this month. I think that his arrival in West Bromwich was a bit of a culture shock after the cloistered life that he had led at Lindisfarne College. The Choir was very set in its ways and didn't take kindly to change. One elderly, long serving tenor was heard to ask. "Are we giving Stainer's Crucifixion this year as we have done for over thirty years?" Yes indeed, Mr. Harding." Came the reply. "We are giving it a miss this year". His time with us at West Bromwich was brief but his unstinting efforts, enthusiasm and musicianship was long lasting particularly in the memories of those who were in the choir at that time. We had a large contingent of trebles and most weekends saw them enjoying outings, football matches, visits to cathedral and many other activities. Membership of the choir involved parents and became a way of life. Woe betide anyone who missed a practice without prior permission and a good excuse. The mother of one recalcitrant was heard to remark that she thought that the choir was voluntary. She was soon told that the only thing voluntary about the choir was joining it!

This attention to detail and total commitment was evident in all that Anthony did. He ran popular and well attended residential courses for Choristers at Lincoln Cathedral, St. Albans Abbey and Shallowford House in Staffordshire. He founded and directed the Middlesex Boys Choir and he co-founded the Karg-Elert Society in 1987 and I think edited every edition of the magazine that the Society and latterly the Archive produced. He was of course a superb wordsmith and punctilious over grammar and spelling. No mistakes in a printed document would escape his eagle eye. He was also punctilious over his own personal correspondence. Christmas cards were posted to arrive no earlier than the day before or even Christmas – Eve itself, Birthday cards always arrived on the right day and his 'thank-you' letters were always the first to drop through the letter box. No mere perfunctory 'thank you' but an appraisal of the performance if you had sent him a CD and some interesting and often personal connections with the music that it contained. He must have used gallons of that instantly recognisable black ink.

Anthony had quite an extensive teaching career beginning at Lindisfarne Colleges as Chaplain and member of the English Department. His teaching experience in West Bromwich at the local secondary modern school was brief. Little more than a term I think. Fifteen year old girls more interested in attending to their coiffeur and nails than applying their minds to the theological importance of Synoptic Gospels was too much for Anthony. Although his exchanges with 'Sandra' a particular *bête noir* whose rejoinder to all of Anthony's quips was,

“Ooh, ark at im!” provided great entertainment when he recounted them at our regular Friday suppers made even more so by Anthony’s mimicry of the Black Country accent. From West Bromwich he went to Arnold Lodge School in Leamington Spa where he taught Music, Religious Knowledge and English. He also combined this with the post of organist at Holy Trinity, a church renowned for the high standard of its music. The last of his teaching posts was at Ewell Castle where he taught English and French.

Anthony chose his friends carefully but those that he did chose were life-long and afforded tremendous loyalty by him. Many speak of his generosity of time, his joyful company and sense of humour, his lively and interesting conversations, his ability to listen but above all his unwavering support and considered opinion. He had a great ability to keep in touch and always to take a genuine interest in one’s life. Birthdays and Christmases were never forgotten, always remembered with cards, well thought out presents and meals. He showed great loyalty too, towards his passions for steam engines and cinema organs. Being one of the first members of the Severn Valley Railway and an ardent member of the Cinema Organ Society.

His Fellowship of the Royal College of Organists bears testimony to his personal commitment to all that he undertook. Although he did admit to me on more than one occasion that he only did the prestigious ADCM (The Archbishop’s Diploma in Church Music) to annoy the music staff at Lindisfarne. He continued to play the organ until almost the end of his life, giving recitals and concerts in local parish churches and further afield

Anthony was ordained priest in 1958 and served his title in Coventry and then was assistant curate in Bedford. Throughout his teaching career he always had the Bishop’s permission to officiate in the Diocese and often helped out in local churches. When he moved into the London Area in 1975 he first settled in Twickenham where he became Honorary Curate of St. Mary’s and carried the parish through an inter regnum. His former vicar testifies that he did more than just keeping the parish ‘ticking over’. He brought a greater focus on the spiritual life of the parish. In particular he organised a weekend retreat which was well attended and much appreciated. In fact it paved the way for retreats and conferences in the parish in later years. After retiring from Twickenham in 1989 he moved to Feltham and then Whitton. He took many services at local churches and officiated at many funerals in this area. Each one being conducted with the care and professionalism that he applied to everything that he did. It was here at St. Stephen’s Hounslow where he finally settled and I am sure from where he will be sorely missed.

Anthony had no close family to speak of. After the death of his twin sister in Australia I fear that there was little or no contact with his nephews or their families. Anthony’s friends were his family and he spent his whole life in service to them and to the church. Loving God and loving his neighbour, in the true Christian sense of the commandment. In choosing the reading for today it was important that it reflected his strong belief in the resurrection and the Christian hope and promise of eternal life. A belief strongly underlined and affirmed by John in the Gospel passage that we heard read. But it is the affirmation in that text by Jesus himself that for me is key to Anthony’s life. “I am the Truth, the Way and the Life”. It is in that Truth that Anthony Caldicott lived his life, it is that Way that he followed and it is to that Life that he devoted his own; and now his earthly life is over it is our prayer and our wish that he may rest in peace in the nearer presence of his and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen