

## MINSTER CHARACTERS PAST AND PRESENT

By John Meredith 13<sup>th</sup> July 1991

### 1. Vergers

Records go back to 1787.

A pencil drawing of this date in the Minster Library is a portrait of the then verger carrying the best silver verge (1664) on his shoulder. It could be **Henry Clay** who died in 1709 aged 82. A 1747 music manuscript contains the following verse about him:

"He bore the verge, poor man, while he was able  
then laid it down upon the vestry table.  
And now grim death hast maimed his feeble legs.  
Old Charles has taken his gown from off the pegs;  
He reached the heavy age of Eighty Two  
And then (God rest him) bade the world adieu."

Old Charles presumably was his colleague.

**Peter Coxson**, Head Verger for 50 years, d.1911. Had much correspondence with contemporary scholars.

**Mr. Parker**, here for a short time, left to go to Wells as Head Verger.

**Mr. Goodwin**, sacked for drinking the communion wine and going to the Saracen's Head during the sermon!

**Mr. Chamberlain**, assistant Verger, thought to have been locked in Boiler House by choir boys and suffocated by fumes.

**George McMicken**, formerly at Cartmel Priory, then Grantham. Head Verger at Southwell 1926-50, practically ran the Minster.

**Ted Wragg**, came in 1946 as third Verger from Chesterfield, where he was an engineer with the Sheepbridge Company. Head Verger 1950-80.

### Assistant Vergers

Under Ted Wragg:

**Douglas Bevis** from Winchester where he had been crucifer. Met a Danish girl in the Chapter House, married her and went to live in Odense.

**Tom Dorricott**, had been a prison warder, then Verger at Peterborough, then Southwell for 20 years. A real Christian gentleman.

**Robert Moore**, one of twin sons of Vicar of Melbourne. Very forgetful. Became a monk at Nashdon.

**Patrick Frost**, a Norfolk man from Diss. Came as lay clerk (bass) and verger, left to run a

coffee bar and later worked for Raleigh. Returned as Verger 1992.

**Eric Rogerson.** Head Gardener at Nottingham University, then became third verger. His son is Bishop of Bristol.

### **Geraldine Hudson**

**Bill Maltby** occasionally acts as relief verger. Choirboy 1910, 63 years as a sidesman, 56 years crucifer, under 7 Bishops. 1955 Churchwarden. 1912 worked as organblower in Song School for 1d an hour.

## 2. Dogwhippers and Sextons

**John ('nobbler') Gibson** looked after dogs left at the West door. 'Nobbled' noisy children with knob at end of his wand. He levelled the churchyard single handed.

**George Paling**, his nephew. A tree in the Provost's garden fell on him and he later died.

**Fred Coton** kept the sweet shop in King Street.

## 3. Stonemasons

**Mr. Potts**, had a workshop where the Minster Office is today. Rebuilt pinnacles at East End, carving heads of Bishop Wakeling, Provost Pratt and the Architect Dowland. His own head is on pinnacle visible from the Vestry window.

## 4. Bellringers

**John** [Meredith] himself used to ring from the gallery in the tower before the floor was put in. Southwell Minster ringers used to be famous and went round the country ringing, but they didn't bother to train up any successors, so ringing almost lapsed in the 60s. John Meredith as Captain of the Tower rebuilt the Southwell band of ringers.

**Fred Nilner**, blacksmith at Kirklington.

**Harry Clulow**, lived at 38 King Street, as John does now, was also daily clockwinder.

**Arthur Chamberlain, Fred Pickard, Mr. Paget, George Foster** who worked at the lace factory and his brother, and **Bill Midwinter**, still alive today, later Captain of the Newark Tower.

**Ernest Morris**, came from St. Margaret's, Leicester, also a Verger.

**Harold Poole**, Chief Inspector, Leicester Police, rang at Leicester Cathedral until, sadly, he took his own life.

## 5. Provosts

**1934 Provost Conybeare**, first to have that title, before that Rectors.

**1945 Hugh Heywood**

**1970 Francis Pratt**

**1978 Murray Irvine**

Rectors:

**Lewis Wild** later became Bishop of Newcastle.

**Canon Trebeck** built (first) Trebeck Hall in Queen Street, now part of Lowes Wong School.

6. Famous Visitors

**1956 Princess Margaret**, for millenium celebrations.

**Duchess of Gloucester (Princess Alice), Prince William of Gloucester** just before his death, as President of the Appeal.

**Elsie and Doris Waters**, friends of Mrs. Merryweather.

**Enoch Powell, Sir Adrian Boulton, James Galway**, who spread his instruments out on the vestry table and explained them.

**Meredith Davies** and the R.P.O.

**Paul Tortelier, Richard Hickox, Cecile Ousset, Robert Tear, Gillian Weir** (organist), **Digby Fairweather, Humphrey Lyttelton** and **Alvin Stardust** (old boy of Minster School)

**Yehudi Menuhin** lay flat on his back on the Vestry table meditating and played the violin in the Vestry for 20 mins. Ate only nuts and raisins for tea.

**Nigel Kennedy, David Essex, John Ogdon, Marisa Robles, Steward Bedford, Vladimir Ashkenazy Emma Johnson, Rostropovitch, Norman del Mar, The Spinners.**

T.V. and Radio

**Roger Royle, Andrew David, David Bellamy, the "lady in the iron lung", Roy Castle**, who signed hundreds of autographs, **Selina Scott, Richard Baker, Len Hutton.**

Stage

**Jack Hulbert, Cecily Courtneidge, Hewell Bennet, Googie Withers.**

M.Ps.

**Michael Foot, Shirley Williams, Michael Heseltine.**

**1984 the Queen and Duke, Sir Robert Fellows, the Queen Mother.**

The Church

**Bishop Trevor Huddleston, the Bishop of London, Archbishop of York, Dr. Runcie, Bishop Hugh Montefiore, Bishop of Norwich, and the Cardinal Archbishop of Wroclaw** to see the Katyn memorial, the first Cardinal to visit the Minster since Wolsey.