

## CHAPTER TWO

### Harold Bentley Bentley-Smith



The years that followed Mr Bentley-Smith's induction were, to say the least, controversial. Not that St Faith's had not been the centre of controversy in itself since its building: but until now it had at least presented a united front to the world. The events of sixty years ago changed this. It is not easy to piece together the exact course of events; the service books, not surprisingly, reflect little of what happened, and it is from 'Fifty Years' that most of what can be gathered is taken.

The new Vicar 'was obviously unfamiliar with the Churchmanship of the Liverpool Diocese', and seems to have been puzzled as to what exactly in the rituals of St Faith's justified its proclamation as a witness to 'Catholic Faith and Doctrine'. It must be remembered that St Faith's was still a 'Mattins Church' on most Sunday mornings: it is obvious that Mr Bentley-Smith felt it was time to change this. 'When he voiced this, there was antagonism, but contending for the Faith was what he enjoyed. He instituted a Sung Eucharist every Sunday at 10 am and put Mattins to 11.15.' To try and please everybody he left the sermon at Mattins, but expected the choir to sing at both services, duly fortified by coffee provided during a short break between the two services, by courtesy of the Vicar.

Things began to warm up. 'The congregation was split into two camps, and it is regrettable that ill-feeling often was evidenced. A protest meeting, with the Vicar in the chair, broke up in disorder, no decision being reached.' The Mattins people seem at first to have outnumbered the Sung Eucharist people, until in 1916 Mr Bentley-Smith formed the Guilds,

and young people began to join them. The members were invited to 'wear their badges and join in the procession at the Sung Eucharist.' Through this strategic move, the Vicar seems to have won the day: 'within a few months the congregation at Mattins had declined so seriously that, in the words of the Priest-in-charge, there would be no sermon to such a "miserably small" number' - and the sermon was transferred to the earlier service. Now, of course, the choir objected to staying on to sing to a mere handful and asked to be excused. They were duly excused; Mattins without music was rescheduled to precede a 10.30 Choral Eucharist and the Vicar's work was done. 'Further protest meetings were held, and the Vicar accused of "disloyalty" by a certain faction. Tempers now thoroughly aroused, no settlement was possible.' As the Vicar declared in the magazine of September 1917, 'at all other churches in the neighbourhood Mattins can be had as the chief service; we shall be one where the Lord's Own Service is given its rightful place'.



**The Chancel before the screen was fitted in 1921.  
The gas lighting is evident.**

It seems strange, sixty years on, to imagine the heat generated by what would seem so right and inevitable a development and so relatively mild a stand; it is interesting to speculate, however, what might be the reaction today if an incumbent were to adopt similar tactics in an attempt to reinstate Mattins at the expense of sung Eucharist! Certainly the effect was deep and long-lasting; many of the congregation seem to have left for other churches, and those that remained were perhaps less representative of the parish than may have been the case before. From this period will have dated the formation of the image that St Faith's was to enjoy for the next half-century: distinctive and uncompromising, a party rather than a parish church. Reputations take a long time to build up, and even longer to die.

The Service Book tells a little of this. 'Holy Communion' becomes 'Holy Eucharist'; the number of weekday celebrations rise. The first 'Choral Eucharist' was on November 7th 1915: there are recorded 62 communicants, but numbers fall rapidly from this point, until only a handful are taking the sacrament at the principal Sunday service. This went hand in hand with a decline in attendances: from '105 present' on November 7th it becomes '80 present', and later again '60 present'. Allowing for the inevitable fluctuations, it is clear that, following Mr Bentley-Smith's revolution, communicants and attendances fell away: the united congregation Mr Houldin speaks of was also a smaller one.

The registers also became more perfunctorily kept at this time, and comments are few. On Whit Sunday 1916 'Linen Vestments first worn'; a week later occurred a 'Masonic Service'. On September 17th 'Outdoor Procession: Pouring wet', and next week, when the sun shone, 'Harvest Festival - Procession with banner.' 'Silk Vestments for first time' were worn on St Faith's Day, when there were 51 communicants at 6.30 am. In November occurs the only recorded 'Merchant Taylors' Cadet Corps Parade' at Mattins, and in the National Mission Week that followed there were five services daily with up to 40 communicants. That year the Vicar began spelling Christmas 'Christmass' and began also to record a slow rise in numbers. Attendances during 1917 at the Choral Eucharist began to rise above 100 again; as the Vicar's incumbency drew to its close the tradition for which he had fought so hard was clearly becoming established. George Houldin fills in some more details. The Angelus Bell began to be rung; a cope was introduced at Evensong. The South Transept was, in 1917, transformed into a chapel and

an Altar purchased and ornamented by the Vicar. The frequent weekday ringing of bells, especially at 6.30 am services prompted several anonymous letters to the Liverpool press under the title of 'That Waterloo Bell'.

Nor, apparently, was disapproval of our activities confined to the laity. 'During the Patronal Festival that year (still 1917), some forty clergy and leading officials of local churches were invited to attend one of the week-night services, but none accepted.' The Vicar did not mince words in the magazine. 'With a well-meant desire to break down insularity and foster a Christian fellowship, we had the presumption, audacity and temerity to invite clergy of 21 neighbouring churches with members of their congregation to one of the week-night services. Light refreshments were to be served after. Only five of the 21 had the courtesy to reply and *none* turned up. We shall be chary in future about making any similar attempt.' And sad news of a different kind for St Faith's came with the death in action at Cambrai, France, of Captain Robert Elcum Horsfall, son of the founder, and to whose memory the screen was to be dedicated four years later.



That same year saw the end of Mr Bentley-Smith's ministry at St Faith's. His health had never been good, and when it broke down completely, the whole responsibility of the parish fell on the Curate, Rev. T.R. Musgrave. Mr Bentley-Smith's last celebration at St Faith's seems to have been 7.30 am on January 13th, 1918 (9 communicants: 116 on the plate). Henceforward the initials in the book are those of 'TRM' ('this truly faithful priest'). He continued the battle: 'Festal Evensong' features for the first time on the Eve of the Ascension, and later 'Green Silk Vestments' (presumably the ones to which Mr Houldin refers) were presented by the Men's Guild

and used for the first time. But, in the words of the history 'the congregation appeared to lose heart and become dispirited.' Added to this, came Mr. Bentley-Smith's actual resignation, and for the next five or six months the parish was without a Vicar. He was the first of three incumbents of St Faith's to resign the living through ill-health. He eventually recovered sufficiently to become Vicar of All Souls, Hastings, followed by several other appointments and died at the age of 87, in 1965. The departed incumbent had taken St Faith's a long way in his short stay and had laid the foundations for the incumbency that was to follow and the church we know today; but it had been an uphill task and must have caused much anger and distress at the time. The unhappiness arising from his changes can probably best be described as a necessary evil: the net result of this and the long interregnum was to leave St Faith's at the end of the Great War at a relatively low ebb, and in very great need of the man who was about to become its third incumbent.



**The Nave when the church was illuminated by gas and the pews extended past the pulpit.**