

CHAPTER THREE

John Brierley



On October 19th, 1918 at 2.30 pm a long list of signatures in the Service Register records the end of the interregnum and the 'Institution of the new Vicar, Rev. J. Brierley, M.A.' He had been Vicar of Greatham, County Durham, but could not yet be officially 'Vicar' of S.Faith's, for reasons explained earlier. George Houldin describes him as 'a young vigorous man, of some thirty-two years of age ... Never did courage and determination mean more to any priest, for he found no Vicarage, no verger, no money, no coke, no magazine and practically no congregation. What he did find was a keen little band of chancel workers and stalwarts in the small congregation. Of these men in those days, this priest wrote exactly thirty years later: "They stood by me so selflessly that there began such friendships as I have never known since".' Among this band Mr Houldin singles out one in particular - Mr S.R. Taylor. He had served as Warden under Mr Baxter from 1911 to 1915 but had then withdrawn his support' during the next regime. He rejoined the flock as Mr Brierley's Warden and became Lay Representative on the Diocesan Conference and Vice-Chairman of the Parochial Church Council. 'in and out of office his loyalty never failed and his regular attendance at public worship was maintained until, at a ripe old age, he was called to Higher Service.'

Mr Taylor became Warden in 1920, the year in which Mr Brierley's plans for rebuilding the life of S.Faith's seem to have been completed. Its keystone was 'attendance at Corporate Communion, monthly at least, and at the Sung Eucharist every Sunday.' It is interesting to note that this latter would not have involved taking Communion under normal

circumstances: the practice of general communion at the main service of the day was still over forty years off. 'At first there were some who resented being "forced to church" but patient and clear teaching convinced them that this was the start of the Catholic life, and soon the congregation at the 10.30 service was over three hundred, and the average Sunday communicants over 70.' These are interesting statistics - a larger congregation than we can muster today, but a far smaller proportion of communicants another comment on the changing pattern of Christian worship this century.

On the subject of statistics, it is intriguing to note that the new Vicar, whose records are always most neatly and conscientiously kept, seems to have instituted the odd custom of recording not attendances, but the number of coins collected at services: a later service book of his has this as a printed heading. If this is to be taken as a guide to the numbers giving these coins, it reveals, among other things, that despite the attendance boom Mr Houldin records on Sunday mornings, there were always many more coins received at Evensong than there were at Choral Eucharist.

From this time dates the regular recording of regular weekday celebrations: at 10.30 am on Mondays (a tradition already long-established and still continuing) at 7 am on Thursdays and 7.30 am on most other weekdays. Coins are faithfully recorded at these services too: weekday yields varied from 5d to some 2/-, and those who parted with them varied from 1 (quite often) to 7 or 8.

That Good Friday featured the Three Hours Devotion and that Easter saw 280 communicants (317 in 1975). Numbers rose steadily again, and in August Mr Baxter paid a return visit to a crowded church. And on September 14th the Bishop of Liverpool induced an Evensong congregation to part with no fewer than 1008 coins: probably a mixed blessing to Wardens and Sidesmen who had to count them.

April 21st, the 21st anniversary of consecration, was marked by the unveiling and dedication of the new Chancel Screen. It was the gift of the founder and the work of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, architect of Liverpool Cathedral. The magazine of April 1920 gave details. 'On March 9th the Chancellor of the Diocese ... granted a faculty for the erection of the screen which Mr H. Douglas Horsfall is giving to S.Faith's in memory of the late Captain Robert Elcum Horsfall. In the design are incorporated

carved figures of S.Chad, S.Paul, S.Agnes (with lamb) and S.Catherine (with wheel), marking the connection of the late Captain Horsfall with S.Chad's College, Durham (the patrons of the living) and the three great Liverpool Churches of S.Paul's, Stoneycroft, S.Agnes, Ullet Road and S.Catherine's, Abercromby Square.' In 'Fifty Years', Mr Houldin calls it 'one of the finest modern screens in existence.' It was unveiled in the presence of priests from two of those churches: S.Agnes and S.Paul's, as well as others from S.Margaret's', Anfield, S.Mary's, Bootle, S.Michael's and S.Luke's.



The Church Group in a 1935 photograph. Douglas Horsfall, wearing a hat, is on the vicar's immediate right.

That July is recorded 'Intense Heat' on three successive Sundays (they always say the summers were hotter in those days!) and for these weeks the Evensong collections fall below the morning takings for the first time. Was S.Faith's too hot for comfort those July evenings in 1921? Whatever the reason, the end of the heatwave saw the familiar pattern reassert itself.

Other things happened that year. A cinema group wanted to put up a 'super cinema' on the land now occupied by Cameron's garage 'and no greater antagonist was found than the Vicar, who was instrumental in quashing the idea.' He will have been even happier at the purchase of a Vicarage in College Road, purchased for £2000, raised within two years by the congregation. Soon electric lighting was installed in church, and the large gasoliers in the chancel replaced by 'hidden lights'. The supports under the roof, and marks of brackets in the Sanctuary can still be seen. In 1923 there was another new arrival: Jim Burgess. In that year he began fifty years of devoted service as Verger of S.Faith's, through a saga of fuel-heaving, boiler-

tending, flood, air-raids and fire. To his and everyone's delight, Jim was able to complete a full half-century of service before his eventual retirement in 1973.

The same year saw some interesting items in the magazine. The formation of a football club is announced, with the Vicar as its president: red and white shirts and dark shorts are to be worn, players to change in the Parish Hill and play on a pitch in Kingsway. They would find it less easy today! In October it was decreed as something of an innovation that for the period of a year the Creed was to be sung to the music of Merbecke 'except on great festivals'. And, following the marking of the Patronal Festival by two outdoor processions, the Vicar declared proudly that 'it is believed that it is the first time that the Cope has been taken into the streets of a Liverpool parish.' The musical innovations continued: in July 1925 'the congregation will note that we are trying a new setting to the Eucharist: Martin Shaw's "Folk Mass".' The Dean of King's College, Cambridge declares that 'it is very jolly and the congregation soon pick it up and love it.' He makes it sound like a baby rather than a service setting; but in fact the Shaw Folk Mass was adopted and remained a standard S.Faith's setting right through to the days of Series Three.

The tragic death of the Organist, Mr. Waugh, whilst on his way to Evensong on a summer evening in 1924 shocked all at S.Faith's; his daughter-in-law took his place at a moment's notice. Later the regard and esteem in which the congregation held him was expressed in the beautiful stained glass window to his memory. The Vicar appointed a young man, a pupil under Mr. Goss Custard of the Cathedral, and Mr. Ernest Pratt at 22 years of age began his responsible work. Under him our choir's reputation has been enhanced so that it is said that there is only the Cathedral Choir that is better.' Thus (George Houldin, on an appointment that, like that of Jim Burgess, was to span the years and last well into the sixties.

The previous year in the Registers had seen two Episcopal happenings. The Bishop of Nassau had preached to a large congregation, and 'Albert Liverpool' (A.A. David, third Bishop of the Diocese) had signed in at S.Faith's for the first time. Wednesday 4th June that year was a 'Day of Continuous Intercession for the Conversion of England to the Catholic Faith', with what looks like the first midnight service, and another at 7.15 pm

with the slightly sinister title of 'Reception of the Fiery Cross'. There was a United Corpus Christi service (united with whom?) and the first Merchant Taylors' Girls' School Ascension Day service, while on Tuesday September 15th a weekday record of 210 took communion prior to 'Pilgrimage to the Cathedral'.

The next major event was on Saturday October 31st, 1925, when Canon Peter Green and the Rev. T. Grigg-Smith (Children's Missioner) began a fortnight's Parochial Training Mission in the parish. 'The preparation was carefully undertaken, every house in the parish being visited by a member of the congregation for months prior to the mission. The chilly and often antagonistic reception which was experienced by many visitors proved that hostility to the Catholic cause was not quenched and misunderstanding was still rife.' One wonders how these visitors' successors would enjoy visiting 'every house in the parish for months,' and just what their reception would be today. The Register tells the story within the church itself. There were another new record of 218 communicants at the early celebration on the opening Sunday and five services each day throughout the fortnight, with good attendances, especially at the nightly mission services. Despite the hostility in the streets Mr Houldin records that 'The Mission of 1925 made a great impression on the life of the parish.' It is always hard to judge the long-term effect of such an event: the years following 1925 were certainly good ones for S.Faith's, and for this the work of that fortnight must doubtless take some credit. More credit still should properly go to Mr Brierley, his hard-working staff and the congregation, recovered fully from their early despondency and still, to use George Houldin's words again, 'Contending for the Faith'.

Mr Brierley began a new service book at Christmas, 1925, spelling that festival with just the one 's' again. He made it clear in the magazine that fasting from 6 pm was a necessary preliminary to communicating at the midnight

Eucharist: a long way from today's pattern of greatly reduced fasting and communicating twice in a day. There were 283 at four celebrations that Christmas, with the usual two only at the main service. And so the fourth Register goes its orderly way, in the Vicar's small tidy writing, and with red letter days properly recorded in red ink. The highlights are fewer now: 'Albert Liverpool' signs twice, and

Bishop Cathrew Nyasaland once. Other familiar signatures to supplement those of the Vicar and J. Howard Foy, his Assistant Curate, are J.M. Buckmaster and G.A. Studdert Kennedy ('Woodbine Willie'). That Easter recorded a total of 417 communicants: the slow but steady increase was continuing.

1926 saw several homely items in the magazine. In January we hear that a proposal to start a company of Girl Guides 'has taken definite shape.' In February a Rover Patrol is started for boys of 17 and over, and on July 15th came the official opening of the Mothers' Union. Industrial trouble that winter brought a contemporary-sounding warning from the Vicar. Coke was likely to cost £4 a ton as against last year's 32/6. As we needed 35 tons, this would mean an extra £83 required. And, in an exercise familiar to treasurers and Finance Committees, it was calculated that an extra 6d a week from everyone would just about meet the needs.

Probably the most significant event in 1928 was the arrival of the great crucifix. Douglas Horsfall, after a quarter of a century still a generous benefactor of S.Faith's bought it while on holiday in Italy and presented it to the church. From that time it was displayed during Lent for various periods of time above the High Altar, with the reredos closed and curtained in black, and below the Chancel Screen, providing a powerful and moving focus of worship and prayer. Later that year the Festival of S.Thomas is recorded as a 'Day of Intercession for the Ministry of W.L.M. (Mark) Way', with no fewer than seven services that weekday. 'W.L.M.W.' joins in the initials in the book that Christmas Eve: there were now two Curates to help their Vicar into 1929. Thomas, Bishop of Zanzibar, came for Sexagesima and Eric Milner-White, another famous name, took a service for Women in Holy Week. These latter had been a regular feature of S.Faith's worship for some years, and seem both to have been very well attended and to have welcomed many distinguished preachers.

Mark Way, now made priest (and on his way to the Episcopate) first celebrated at Christmas 1929. For that year the efficient Mr Brierley totalled the communicants as 6782: a far cry from the modest totals of twenty years before, but still well below the figures to come.

A few weeks later the old register is abandoned and records started in the first of the large-sized specially-printed tomes in use today. It featured the

embossed name of the church on the cover, and the ubiquitous printed column for coins. This was, of course, the thirtieth anniversary of the foundation; at an 11.15 am celebration on Easter Monday (April 21st) a flourish of red signatures attends the event, headed by the shaky hand of Charles C. Eleum, whose name also appears on the very 'first page of the first register in 1900. Other legible names are those of C. Thicknesse, Archdeacon Cyril Twitchett, and T.R. Musgrave, Curate during the previous interregnum. George Houldin records that the anniversary was also marked by the placing on the west wall of the oak boards recording the names of Vicars and Wardens and 'executed by the same craftsman who had carved the Chancel Screen.' His book also records the honour brought to S.Faith's and its Vicar when Mr Brierley was made a Canon of Liverpool Cathedral: 'a well-deserved tribute to a man who had done so much work for the Diocese, for as well as raising the esteem of S.Faith's, he found time to be Secretary to the Diocesan Conference, honorary Chaplain to the Bishop, and subsequently Proctor in Convocation.'

Less happy and more controversial events surrounded the first attempt by Canon Brierley, as he must now be called, to obtain permission for the Reservation of the Sacrament at S.Faith's. Permission was in fact granted but 'shortly afterwards an Evangelical Canon of Liverpool heard of our plans and threatened legal proceedings. The controversy raged for a short time and, rather than have legal action over so sacred a matter, the Bishop withdrew his permission.' A sad but not untypical event: beneath the respectable Anglican surface passions could still run high.

Nor was this the end of hostilities. A new generation of Protestant Reformers decided it was time to pay another visit to S.Faith's. The story of the events of an unspecified Sunday in 1931 is best told in the words of 'Fifty Years'. 'How Canon Brierley got the news, he would never tell, but get it he did, and acted upon it. Every sidesman and male member of the congregation was asked to be 'available' in Church that morning, and they were there to a man with such telling effect that when the band of some twenty 'Orangemen' arrived they were unable to find seats together and were separated - one here, one there - which quite devastated their plans. Heretofore, they had visited city churches which had but small congregations. Their interruptions here were hardly noticed, excepting that they sat down for the Creed and made one or two audible but harmless remarks

during the sermon. Unfortunately for them, they were sufficiently unfamiliar with the Prayer Book Service of Holy Communion as to imagine that the Prayer for the Church was the Prayer of Consecration, and they stood up all through it. A loud protest was voiced during the Prayer of Humble Access and, after making it, they noisily left the church, the large congregation taking no notice. The Protestants could barely have cleared the Church grounds when the Sacring Bell (at the moment of Consecration) rang out, and so there was spared any indignity to the Sacramental Presence. The condemnation of these men in visiting S.Faith's was very pronounced in the Liverpool papers next day, and one of their own leaders deplored their action. Since then we have been undisturbed.'

It is tempting to share Mr. Houldin's pleasure at this famous victory over the powers of darkness and bigotry, with its rallying of the faithful to the sound of the priestly trumpet, the satisfying ignorance of the dreaded 'Orangemen' as to exactly when to make their protest and the final humiliating rout of the 'Protestants'. It is nevertheless sad that it should have been necessary for offensive and defensive positions to have been taken up so vigorously in the first place, or that the press should have had so unedifying a spectacle to report at all. And it is certainly a cause for thankfulness that such a confrontation is harder to imagine today: in recent years, apart from a little picketing, handing out of leaflets and sending of denunciatory letters, we have indeed been undisturbed at S.Faith's.

The big Service Book says nothing of indignities to the Sacramental Presence in 1931. It records instead that October 19th was the Anniversary of the Vicar's Institution, with a special Celebration for those confirmed between 1918 and 1931. The next year, for the first time, a recognisably Scottish Episcopalian signatory appears: John, Bishop of Glasgow and Galloway. A peak of 464 communicants was recorded that Easter Day, and it was a good year for Bishops at S.Faith's as well. Autograph hunters could have obtained the signatures of Albert Liverpool, as he preached to the Crosby and Waterloo Urban District Councils, Charles Petriburg (Peterborough), preaching at a Lent Service for Women, and no less than William Ebor, Archbishop of York and Archbishop Temple of Canterbury to be, at another of the same. Advocates of Women's Lib will be pleased to note that at these services the Vicar was prepared to admit men 'so long as the main body of the church is reserved

exclusively for women.' That September the word 'Mass' occurs, as far as I can see, for the first time in the records of S.Faith's. 'Special Masses' are said to mark 'Miss Green's departure to Wantage' (to the Community there?) and 'Rev. H.W. Cockett's departure to Africa'.

It is time to return to the magazine for a selection of items from the early 1930's. By 1930 the green vestment set was wearing out and 'it appears that there is no great eagerness to renew them. We must patch and mend' declares the Vicar. A Vestment Fund is launched, but turns out to be 'the most extraordinary I have ever had anything to do with. I have just £9.5.0. in hand. The money is coming in at a rate which will not reach the required sum until 1932.' By July, however, he was able to report that all £30 had come in.

Bazaars - often two-day events - are regularly mentioned, until in August 1931 'we have taken a grave risk and decided to do without another bazaar for three years.' A more momentous announcement is of the events of September 20th, 1931, when there occurred the only recorded Ordination Service at S.Faith's. Eight priests and eleven Deacons were respectively ordained and made, and admission for regular congregation was by ticket only. A thousand copies of the service were printed, but as the church had only 500 hymnbooks members were urged to bring their own. The service seems to have been a success: the October magazine records that 'almost a thousand people' were there, although it is hard to accept such a figure, even if they were standing several deep at the back.

The same December, Canon Brierley declares 'we shall never get perfection (in singing) until the congregation take trouble to learn their part', and he announced congregational practices every Sunday in the Lady Chapel at 5.45 p.m. But by February 1932 the experiment was abandoned, and the attainment of perfection postponed for a while. Next year saw a solemn warning about attendance at the Three Hours Devotion on Good Friday. 'I dislike intensely seeing people come in late or go out early.' He makes an honourable exception for nurses and continues, 'This is sheer slackness and nothing else.' He was never afraid to be outspoken: nor to be dogmatic. Membership of the Guild (a communicant fellowship) involved an undertaking never to worship in any non-Anglican church, and he is also reported to have refused to accept some harvest decorations

which he had previously praised in church when he heard they had been used in a Nonconformist church.

He remained also a stickler for accuracy: more than once dates and service details wrongly entered in black are crossed out and the same data substituted in red. Attendances remained good, with 429 at Christmas 1933 and a new record figure of 245 communicants at the 7.45 a.m. 'Low' celebration on Advent Sunday. In 1935 S.Faith's was thirty-five years old and on May 6th celebrated both the King's Jubilee and the Dedication of Carpets, Rugs and Curtains for the Lady Chapel. In the same year there were 198 at S.Faith's Day at 7.45 a.m. (yet another record), when the 'Children's Banner made and given by Miss Hamilton' was dedicated.

But by now Canon Brierley's ministry was almost over. His last celebration was on Friday, November 29th, 1935, when there were 50 communicants for the 'Dedication of a (silver) lavabo dish in memory of Mabel Delano-Osborne.' The next entry in the book reads: 'Close of the Vicariate of the Reverend Canon John Brierley, October 19th, 1918 to November 30th, 1935.'

'I leave a parish united and full of vigour,' he wrote in the magazine. 'For me to remain indefinitely would mean that slowly but surely our work would be undone.' He left S.Faith's to become Rector of Wolverhampton, and a great era for our church had ended. He is clearly a major figure; equally clearly he was an autocratic one, and a priest of the old school. The story of his behaviour in a parishioner's house, when he is said to have seized and torn up a photograph of the local Member of Parliament because that unfortunate man had dared to vote for the Divorce Reform Bill, fits his character and, perhaps, the times in which he lived. His incumbency had also seen continued controversy, but only from without: the body of S.Faith's itself had undoubtedly been greatly strengthened and deepened by Canon Brierley's seventeen years of energetic and devoted ministry. Clearly a man of power and influence he had found a struggling, weakened parish and done much to 'put it on the map' as a church to be reckoned with, with a distinctive identity and witness. In so doing, he made possible the church in which we worship today.