

HAPTER FOUR

John Schofield



Unlike the previous interregnum, the one that followed Canon Brierley's departure lasted a mere ten weeks. Harold Stewart and Maurice Godfrey, assisted by George Houldin, held the fort, and maintained the pattern of worship: the most notable historical event to take place during their stewardship was the holding of a Requiem for King George V on Tuesday, January 28th 1936.

Three weeks later Bishop Albert returned to S.Faith's for the Induction and Institution of the Reverend John Schofield. The occasion brought forth 575 coins, and was, in the words of the magazine, 'of a quiet and dignified simplicity'. Mr. Schofield, in Mr. Houldin's words, was 'a saintly man of great charm, but unfortunately he was not very robust. He came from Yorkshire's hills and dales (hills *and* dales?) and the air of the neighbourhood 'was not suited to him.

This gloomy comment is sandwiched in 'Fifty Years' between a series of records of deaths connected with S.Faith's. Some time before news had come of the tragic death of the Revd. H.N. Cockett, in the mission field in Africa. It was, we are told, that tragedy which influenced Mark Way, who had been curate here between 1928 and 1934, to follow his former colleague abroad to work under the auspices of the Universities Mission to Central Africa: work which eventually led to his appointment as Bishop. Mr. Cockett's death was followed, in 1936, by that of Douglas Horsfall, the Founder. No specific memorial was raised to him: 'no other memorial is needed to the memory of this devoted son of the

Church than the magnificent edifice he so generously provided for us. May he rest in peace.' Mr. Sewell, 'Father of the Choir' was next, in 1938: his 38 years of service are remembered on one of the hymn and psalm boards in church. Finally there came the deaths of Canon Brierley's mother and eldest son. She had been a constant worshipper at S.Faith's and a great favourite and formative influence upon her son: the boy had been a server at S.Faith's altars. Both are commemorated, as is Mr. Cockett, in windows in the South Aisle.

On a more cheerful note, 1938 also saw the retirement of one Canon Sykes, Vicar of S.Mary's. This otherwise unremarkable event was of significance in that Canon Sykes was the last surviving incumbent of the original holders of office in the parishes out of which S.Faith's was carved. His departure meant that Mr. Schofield, three years after being instituted as Priest-in-Charge, could be duly inducted as the first Vicar proper of S.Faith's.

As Priest-in-Charge and as Vicar, Mr. Schofield takes over the register with his straggly writing. 28 communicants attended his first celebration, then things settled down to the normal pattern for those years: between 60 and 100 communicants at 8 a.m. and one or two only of the large congregation at 10.45 for the Sung Eucharist. Mr. Schofield increased the overall number of services held at S.Faith's; indeed there were no fewer than eight on his first Ash Wednesday, including Mattins, Communion and the Litany. His first Easter saw, instead of today's three celebrations at midnight, 8 and 10.30, five at 6,7,8,9 and 10.45: they produced 460 communicants, on a par with Canon Brierley's best years.

This seems in retrospect to have been a high-water-mark for these 75 years of history, both on Sundays and weekdays. There were now celebrations on all six weekdays, and often quite well-attended: it was not to be long, however, before numbers began slowly and steadily to decline.

First, however, one or two red-letter days stand out. Among Bishops now signing the book are Bishop Fyffe of Waikato and, at one of the Services for Women, William Sodor and Man's sloping hand accompanied its owner. In May 1937, 150 communicants turned up on a weekday to mark the Coronation of King George VI. Between these star appearances the mass of faithfully recorded statistics continues, and begins to show a slight

downward trend. In March, 1939, Mr. Schofield remarked in the magazine that unpunctuality is a very common failing at S.Faith's. If you *should* be late, slip into a pew at the back.' He complains also that 'there is really no need for the whole congregation (at the time of taking Communion) to *crowd* into the middle aisle. Those in front should come first, followed *gradually, and in order*, by those behind.

But events were moving in the world outside, and 1939 saw also the outbreak of World War Two which, for all its horror, as Mr. Houldin remarks, 'gave us a priceless treasure.' The events of a number of years before, with the reversal of the Bishop's decision over the Reserved Sacrament, have been recorded. Now the coming of war, and the need for the Sacrament to be made readily available for local emergencies, changed things, and permission was finally granted for its reservation in the Lady Chapel.

The war nearly brought disaster to S.Faith's, however. In 1940 the fabric had 'a most miraculous escape.' A bomb fell a few feet from the north wall of the Nave, buried into

the soil and blew up the heating gratings, doing a little damage to some pews and flooring in the area of the pulpit. But no damage was done externally, and nothing worse ever happened inside. The attendant fall of the cross from the roof at the west end left a cruciform indentation in the asphalt below which remained for many years. All the damage was duly put right, and a service of thanksgiving held. Throughout the war period the Vicar and the Revd. Eric Beard, his Curate at this time, were out at all hours; both they and Jim Burgess must have put in countless hours of overtime before the coming of 1945 and of peace.

The war brought its human moments. Just before Christmas 1940 there was 'no celebration: priest overslept' and next Easter 'Priest 15 minutes late - found no congregation.' Too much fire-watching, perhaps. Mr. Schofield was presumably on time for the 25th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood, even though only six people joined him. Communicants were down to 307 that Easter, and the blackout meant a temporary end to Christmas Midnight celebrations. Figures did not begin to pick up again until after 1945. As we study them, they seem to give the lie to the notion sometimes heard that people tend to flock to church in time of war: they don't seem to have flocked much to S.Faith's, anyway.

The war makes its appearances in the pages of the contemporary church magazines, too, sandwiched between reassuringly normal items. Two people per night are needed for fire duty, and the youth fellowship is to invite its 'soldier friends' to social events. There are to be no palm crosses, as shipping in wartime cannot be spared for such purposes (no, that palm crosses take up much cargo space). In June 1941 the magazine is reduced to two pages; the printers had lost premises, plant, and S.Faith's blocks through bomb damage. But at the same time we hear of the issue of new books for the Middle and Senior Sunday Schools: each child was given responsibility for his copy of the 'Church and School Hymnal' and bidden to 'keep it free from tears and grime.' Further reassurances in those dark days came when in 1941 the Vicar announces that 'Miss Palmer has given over teaching Sunday School during the winter; she will be back with the daffodils.' And a final wartime comment. In March 1945 the coke ran out and for Lent the congregation suffered a penitentially cold church. By June things were better, and the blackout paint was being removed from the Hall windows.

1946 saw not only peace in Europe but the installing of Standard lights in the Chancel and, from an anonymous donor, Spanish mahogany candlesticks to match the choir stalls, and designed by Mr. Harold Woodley. It also saw the death of one of its Wardens, Arthur Studley. Twice Civic Head, he was, as George Houldin puts it, 'One of the most popular men who ever entered public life, and his gracious courtesy and unflinching cheerfulness endeared him to all. No less was he loved as Warden of the church, and the good condition of the fabric of S.Faith's owes much to the care and attention given by Arthur Studley to the church he loved and served so well.'

That same year saw also two contrasting items in the magazine. An anonymous writer proclaimed that 'bad habits are catching. This is shown by the way an increasing number of people are leaving the church at the *early* celebration before the service is ended. This habit is undesirable and unnecessary.' By contrast we read of Miss Emily Conalty's achievements in obtaining a First in Theology at Durham University and being awarded a two year Research Fellowship. 1 She was the first woman ever to obtain a Theology First there, and no man had managed it in the previous five years.

The steady succession of black days and red is interrupted for the first appearance of Clifford

Martin, fourth Bishop of Liverpool, to preach to the Lenten Women. And the Revd. H.M. Luft, now Headmaster of Merchant Taylors' School, appears soon after, to take several Compline Services during Lent, 1947. But 'J.S.' himself appears less frequently in 1947 and disappears altogether from the book between June 1st and August 1st of that year, due to the illness that was soon to force him to resign the living. His return in August was temporary; his final celebration was on Wednesday, September 24th, with just four people present. His 'Vicariate' officially closed on 30th September, 1947, after eleven years, and the fourth interregnum began. He had been a gentle, quiet man, who was much loved by many, and he, like his predecessors, had done much for S.Faith's, if, seemingly, not in so demonstrative or obvious a way. In George Houldin's words 'The Revd. Sidney Singer, who had been Assistant Priest since 1942, manfully shouldered the burden of administering to the congregation, but in spite of his efforts things did not seem to do well. He left us in the early days of 1948 to take charge of New Springs, near Wigan.' In fact he was to live for only four more years, and the standard candlesticks now on the Nave Altar Platform are inscribed in his memory from his wife Florence. Despite the inevitable problems of an interregnum with or without a Curate, 'the wonderful family of S.Faith's stood together.' And this interregnum was mercifully short once again. At 3 p.m. on Saturday January 31st, 1948 the Reverend William Hassall, L.Th., Director of Youth Work in the Diocese of Lichfield for the four years before, joined S.Faith's from S.Stephen's, Wolverhampton. On the eve of his induction, as if to signal the beginning of another period of history, the old service book ends and the post-war story of S.Faith's was ready to begin.



St Faith's in 1937 showing how the roads had developed around the church.