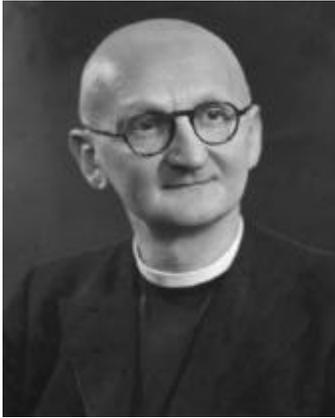


CHAPTER FIVE

William Hassall



Fr. Hassall was Instituted by Bishop Clifford Martin and Inducted by Archdeacon Twitchett. The tradition of referring to the incumbent as Father rather than Mr. seems to have begun with him and has continued although from his successor's time Christian names replaced surnames as the mode of address. His first entry in the new and smaller service register which begins with that service is appended to the signatures of attending priests and reads 'The Archdeacon of Salop and several others forgot to sign', an entry which strikes a sympathetic chord in any church officer who has tried to carry an unwieldy book round a crowded hall after such a service, attempting to get the signatures of numerous forgetful priests.

There were 90 communicants at his first celebration the following day (Sexagesima Sunday), but in the months that followed the more usual number at the 8 a.m. was about 60 or 70, although there was a total of 348 that Easter. There were daily celebrations each weekday, and the numbers varied those mornings between two and ten or so. That August the Scouts were at camp at Barmouth, and Fr. Hassall visited them. They went to the Parish Church for early Communion ('All the confirmed present') and he celebrated Sung Eucharist at 10.30 in Camp ('all the troop present').

Fr. Hassall's energetic approach to his ministry in those years is reflected in the magazine. In March he had written 'Some vestments are wearing thin and have had to be darned. They are unworthy of St Faith's.' This theme of unworthiness was to be the basis for many reproofs and a number of appeals in the years ahead. In April the magazine was claimed not to be paying its way, with a circulation of 270. There was a plea for an increased circulation to prevent the need to charge 3d a copy.

Back with the register, we read on September 5th that at the 10.45 Sung Eucharist there was 'Dedication of the New Children's Comer;' a fortnight later at the Harvest Festival Solemn Evensong and Procession the preacher was the splendidly named 'Vincent Windward Islands'. There were 92 communicants at the Patronal Festival that year (some years were still to pass before St Faith's Day at St Faith's was to become a major red-letter day), and the next month saw a Church Spring-Clean, according to the magazine. The heating system, and the walls and arches received attention: some of the areas were not to suffer such an indignity again until 1975. That Christmas in the register has a painted banner across two pages saying 'Nativity of our Lord' entwined with flowers, and accompanied by a beautiful little illustration: Fr. Hassall records '150 + 94 - Full Church' at the midnight, and a total of 322 at all the services. It is again interesting to note that Easter Day communicants exceeded those at Christmas.

The January 1949 magazine cover is blank but for the words 'TEMPORARY COVER UNTIL MARCH; by March this reads 'TEMPORARY COVER UNTIL APRIL', and April at last sported a new layout of information about priests, services and officers. A Confirmation service took place in Lent, and is noteworthy for the addition to the register of a parchment most beautifully recording the event, complete with a medieval style illuminated capital fully gilded. Lent went its normal way otherwise, although without the Women's Services that had once featured so prominently, and gave way to Holy Week. The last celebration before Easter morning was at 6.15 a.m. on Maundy Thursday; after this Compline, the Good Friday Liturgy and the Three Hours Devotion preceded Holy Saturday Mattins, Evensong and Blessing of the Paschal Candle (some innovations here). There were 346 communicants on Easter Day. The magazine records that the Lady Chapel had now been restored in memory of those lost in both wars, with the pleasing detail that the Cubs had collected a thousand jam jars to pay for the renewal of the Sanctuary Lamp. Corpus Christi gets star billing now for the first time and, as a proper corrective, perhaps, so does the 400th Anniversary of the first English Prayer Book, falling entertainingly within the octave of that feast. But the most significant event that summer was the first broadcast service from St Faith's. This was on Sunday 10th July, 1949, and took the form of Choral Mattins. The Radio Times recalls the hymns as being standard favourites: 'Bless'd are the pure in heart', 'Fill Thou my life' and 'O praise ye the Lord'. The preacher was Canon

Bernard Iddings Bell, Chaplain to Chicago University. For this special occasion all the choirboys signed in their careful handwriting: there were 22 of them and 8 men and they produced, according to the press, 'An impressive and inspired service, outstanding for the beauty of its choral singing'. The same report oddly records further that there 'was not an exceptionally large attendance at the Church, but those who were not present no doubt heard the service 'on the air' before taking part in the usual 11 a.m. service.' Actually it was at 10.45 and the collections (the only guide to attendance) were £3.16.9 at 10.45 as compared with £3.0.7 for the B.B.C.

During 1949 an interesting change comes over the Register. 'Holy Communion' and 'Sung Eucharist' gradually metamorphose into 'Low Mass' and 'Sung Mass', with occasional 'High Mass', but this does not happen at one fell swoop. High festivals come first, then a mixture of styles, and finally the book goes the whole hog and remains thus for the next twenty-four years. An unusual High Mass was the one on Friday September 23rd at 11.30 a.m.; it was the Reunion Festival of St Chad's College, Durham, Patrons of the living of St Faith's, and records several additional details. We read 'Principal of the College: T.S. Wetherall, M.C.: Robin Smallwood, Thurifer: David E.W. White and Boat Boy: Derek Clawson.' December 8th saw a performance by the College of St Catherine of the Chester Nativity Play, and soon after 381 communicants at Christmas. Next Easter they were to be 327, setting a proportionate trend that continues to this day.

1950, Golden Jubilee Year, opens quietly. In the February magazine the Vicar complains that 'The kneelers are in a disgraceful condition: very dirty and beyond patching.' He appeals for the congregation to give one or more, at 6/- a time, during Lent. Lent itself witnessed the reintroduction of the Women's Services at 3 p.m. on Thursdays, with such preachers as the Rector of Liverpool, the Bishop of Liverpool and Bishop Gresford Jones. The book had been somewhat perfunctorily kept for a time, but at Easter and for its last few pages it begins to look up again. For the Jubilee Festival began on Thursday 20th April, 1950, and after the 8 a.m. Low Mass on that day a new book begins.

As far as the records go, the Golden Jubilee was celebrated in fine style. The seventh Register of Services, handsomely bound and inscribed, opens with two pages of photographs and press cuttings from the local papers, as well as a special article from the 'Church Times'. Photographs of assembled Wolf Cubs in long shorts are there, along with one of Fr. Hassall, bald head

gleaming and a larger one of 'a happy group taken at the parish social', in which the Vicar's bald head is concealed beneath a party hat, as are the heads of some of the others. The Church Times article is very informative about the events of the week. Canon Brierley returned to preach and to recall the penniless state of the church upon his original arrival at St Faith's. 'There were no funds to buy boiler fuel; and he remembered how a few stalwart young parishioners helped him load coal on to barrows and hauled it to the church so that we might have at least the semblance of warmth for next morning'. The article also reports that the laity of the parish had distributed two and a half thousand leaflets in a visitation to every house in the parish. 'On the day of the festival itself priests from many neighbouring parishes attended the Sung Eucharist, and took part in the procession. The choir, which has a reputation for being second only to that of the Cathedral, sang the Mass to Merbecke's setting. The men of the congregation were necessarily at work; but the women turned out in force. Even so, most of St Faith's fifteen servers had made arrangements to be present and the organist, Mr E.H.Pratt, who has held the post for 25 years, took his yearly holiday at the time of the Jubilee. The Right Rev. H.N.V.Tonks, formerly Bishop of the Windward Islands, who had presided on the previous evening, preached. Afterwards, fifty guests sat down to a jubilee luncheon in the parish hall.' Their signatures adorn the next page of the Register. And finally, on a more homely note, the local press records the fact of the presentation of a 37 foot flagpole, at a cost of £12, the gift of the Choir of St Faith's.



Fr Hassall and the congregation in the Church Hall during the 1950 jubilee Celebrations.

Once the new register has passed the splendid pages of red-letter Masses, Solemn Evensongs and Processions and the like, it settles down again to the routine. Only an occasional entry catches the eye: 'Solemn Evensong' is solemnly recorded, as are the first use of 'Complete set of new kneelers' (to be replaced again in 1975), 'New Red Chasuble' and 'New Silver Wafer-box'. Two

entertaining magazine articles appear at this time. In June Fr. Hassall roundly declares 'If you are told Corpus Christi doesn't appear in the Prayer Book, tell them "Neither does Harvest Festival!".' And in the same issue we read that 'The Vicar's Discretionary Box has been sadly neglected of late.'

1950 was also the year of publication of 'Fifty Years: A History of Saint Faith's Church Crosby' by Mr. G.W. Houldin, the invaluable record of half a century to which the present author is so indebted. It concludes with a 'state of the nation' account of St Faith's in 1950, which I quote here in tribute. It opens with a tribute itself: to Fr. Hassall:

'It was in answer to prayer that God sent us a man worthy of past traditions, a man capable and energetic enough to formulate new plans for the future. He immediately set about refurbishing the sanctuary and renewing the robes of those who served therein. He transformed the dreary North Transept into one of the most beautiful Children's Corners to be found anywhere. Early in 1949 the Lady Chapel was renovated in a style more in keeping with the building, and this constituted the 'memorial to many former sons and daughters who are now at rest.'

'At no time have parochial interests obscured the wider activities of the Church, for with unfailing regularity the Diocesan Quota has been paid in full. The Vicar has endeared himself to young and old alike by his cheery friendliness. It seems more than likely that Canon Brierley's words are coming true, for just before the Induction and Institution he said: "There is no reason to doubt that your new Vicar will make the glories of the past seem but a pale light compared with the glories which are to come."

In concluding this concise history of achievement, there come to mind all those who worked and worshipped with us and who are now in the Nearer Presence of Christ, and those who have been called to the distant parts of the world. For their contribution profound thankfulness is felt; and we welcome those who have recently joined the family, with the prayer that to the future generations may be passed on with even greater lustre the sceptre we now wield.'

And so the Golden Jubilee Year ends and 1951 begins at St Faith's. That February 'Charles Warrington' conducted an episcopal Quiet Afternoon, proceeding several appearances by 'S.M.Gibbard S.S.J.E.' (the Cowley Fathers). He came back in November to conduct a mission, and an extravagantly decorated page records its title as

'The Key to Happiness'. At its conclusion the Vicar records 'Total number at the Early Masses 529.' For 1951, with characteristic attention to detail Fr. Hassall records 7,189 communicants and collections of £957.2.11. 1952 saw Requiem Masses 'for His Late Majesty King George VI', and the appearance of 'New purple Frontal and a new Gong for the High Altar, the gift of Mrs. Martindale'. Visiting preachers are frequent: they include W.L. Mark Way, Charles S. Nye of St Nicholas, Blundellsands, Clifford Liverpool, Kenneth W. Warren and W.J. Phythian-Adams. And on October 18th, St Luke's Day, two masses celebrated the consecration of one of those signatories, W.L. Mark Way, as Bishop of Masasi in Westminster Abbey.

In January 1953 the Vicar wrote in the magazine: 'January 31st, 1948 was a Saturday - and on that Saturday I was instituted to St Faith's living. Those five years have passed all too quickly, and as I look back I can only say how thankful I am to you all for your loyal support and affection, without which I could not have remained here.'

A report of another sort, in the local paper, records the 'Clipping of the Church' on Mothering Sunday 1953. 'Despite the nip in the air,' we read, 'the sun shone through brightly, gleaming on the golden cross which, held on high, took its rightful place at the head of the procession.' The press seems always to have been capable of stating the obvious in style.

A selection of other cullings from magazines of the Fifties. 'The music covers are unworthy of St Faith's, and new ones must be bought.' (1951). Twice in 1952 the offertory boxes were rifled and in one case removed. In July the Vicar notes that 'for some reason or other' St Faith's doesn't have many weddings. (It doesn't have many these days either.) The Paschal candlestick was given in 1953, in which year we hear that 'all four gates of the church have for many years been a disgrace. We want a new set worthy of St Faith's.'

In 1954 an interesting and unusual Register page records the signatures of 'The Bishop of Liverpool's Helpers from St Faith's who visited St Margaret's, Anfield on Saturday 27th March on the Occasion of the Bishop's Lent Mission.' They include G. W. Houldin, Caroline Mountfield, Raymond J. Clark, Madge Palmer and Dorothy and Lilian Carter, several of whom were still at St Faith's twenty years later to welcome a rather more permanent return visit from St Margaret's! The magazine appeals continued. Fr. Hassall asked for £30 for a new set of green vestments and £12 ('no offer is too small') for the renewal of the St Faith's banner. George Houldin gave a red

frontal and the Vicar declared 'I am most particular about the perfection of things used in God's service.' In 1955 the new house for assistant priests at 16, Alder Grove was blessed by the Bishop of Liverpool on March 10th in the name of 'Saint Faith's House'.

There soon came a major appeal for lighting. The total communicants for 1956 were up to 8,078, with the numbers for Easter and Christmas both just over 400. Sundays now saw between 50 and 80 at 8 a.m and about ten at 10.45. There were low masses each weekday with anything from two to twelve communicants, and recorded daily Mattins and Evensong attended usually only by the priest or his deputy. Rather better attended was a Classical Concert in February 1957. The Crosby Music Society Orchestra were brave enough to tackle Schubert's Great C Major Symphony and the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto before an audience of over 300.

Later that year the church Garden of Memory was laid out and hallowed. The P.C.C. agreed to have the ground thus landscaped, but the men of the congregation ended up doing the work as the gardener's estimate was too high. The hallowing took place after Evensong on July 28th: the congregation gathered round to await a procession headed by crucifer and choir; there were psalms, prayers, sprinkling with holy water and a blessing. It was soon to be well and truly watered again. 'Se vere storms swept the country for 48 hours' the next month. Soon after appear for the first time the ominous words. 'Owing to illness of the Parish Priest these services could not be held.' With only Lay Reader George Houldin and no Curate, many services had to be cancelled until Fr. Hassall returned to health. Despite this, the year saw 8,011 communicants in all.

In 1958 the Saturday morning celebration became established as a 'Mass with Instruction' for children. At the same time the communicants at the 10.45 a.m Sung Mass begin to creep up to anything between ten and twenty, and this despite the forbidding notice still in the porch at this time instructing intending communicants at that service to inform the Wardens in advance if they wished to make their communion. Clifford Liverpool came that Passion Sunday and 'Mark Masasi' at S.Faith's-tide. Soon after there is another spell without services: this time it is 'Vicar in Retreat', but he is advancing again the following week for Ascension Day. In June it is declared 'With effect from this day Mattins is said before the first Low Mass' although the individual services are not recorded. This meant no fewer than three services every weekday and certainly represented a high-water-mark at St Faith's: a remarkable

achievement for a Vicar without a priested Curate and in doubtful health.

In September the Sunday Schools were re-organised into Guilds: Children of the Cross up to 7, Crossbearers from 7 to 12 and Companions of the Cross over 12. The change, appropriately enough, took place on the Sunday of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (Trinity 15). In the same month Peter Ryan conducted a Requiem for Helen Duggan, aged 104. Soon after there were only 52 communicants at three celebrations on St Faith's Day: it was still better kept by the clergy than by the people. Next month it is reported that £600 had been raised by direct giving in six months for the new oil heating system at church, so that the year, with 7947 communicants, could thus end on a warmer note.



The Children's Corner.

1959 opened less auspiciously. Fr. Hassall suffered a slight stroke and, after January 4th, his initials are absent from the book until April 27th, and then he took only Evensong until May 11th. 'T.S.S.' (the Revd. Thomas Stanage, his Curate now) was still only a Deacon, and the maintenance of regular Eucharists was in the hands of the Reverends E.W.Pugh, Peter Ryan, H.Cawley and others, with the Rural Dean, Canon Nichols, also assisting. A Requiem had to be cancelled, and in its place T.S.S. provided Ante-Communion and Communion from the Tabernacle: the first recorded entry of this. Canon Naylor, the Bishops of Liverpool and Whitby, the Vicar of St Agnes, Ullet Road and 'Thomas S.S.F.' were among visitors during this period. Fr. Stanage, now priested, celebrated regularly from Corpus Christi 1959, but at the end of July the Vicar reduced the weekday services to three days only, although he did celebrate the somewhat exotically termed 'Sacrament of Unction on the Feast of the Falling Asleep of the Blessed Virgin Mary.' On a more homely level, the Hall was modernised and redecorated at a cost of £700. In

November the 8 a.m figures, which had been hovering in the nineties for some time, twice exceeded 100, and the 10.30, 20. 'Christmass' saw 335 communicants at midnight ('very full church'), and the year ended with a record of 8,661 communicants. 1960 was Jubilee year again. It opened with a Morality Play performed by 54 St Faith's people, pre-recorded and mimed 'on the night' in church. In March the magazine reports that Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of York (to become Archbishop of Canterbury and once of Liverpool Parish Church) had written refusing the invitation to the Diamond Jubilee as he would be abroad. The Bishop of Whitby was promised instead. Woodworm was found in the reredos during its regilding.

April 21st itself was the Thursday in Easter Week, and the Festival actually opened on Sunday May 1st. Another splendidly drawn and illustrated register page heralds a week of services. 'Philip Whitby' presided on May 1st, and other visitors to sign the book were T.S. Wetherall of S.Chad's, John Brierley, Charles, Bishop of Warrington and Clifford of Liverpool: three Bishops in one week! The Sung Eucharist of May 5th was attended by the clergy of all but two of the Deanery Parishes: a far cry from that occasion when they all cold-shouldered St Faith's. On this occasion they were rewarded by a special lunch. The register contains two pages of photographs. One, in faded, sepia, shows the St Faith's of 1900: standing oddly alone without hall or houses, surrounded by a fence and fields; inside we can see gaslights, a bare brick west end, no screen, and two candles only on the High Altar. The 1960 pictures are mostly of people processing and eating. A page of cuttings records the events of the week and includes the Festival invitation leaflet sent round the parish, which actually gets the date of Consecration one day wrong. In the magazine afterwards Fr. Hassall wrote of this 'most memorable occasion.' He said that 'the attendances at all the services were excellent; the many splendid preachers were worthy of the occasion, and the dignity and beauty of the ceremonial at all the services were in the best traditions of St Faith's. It was a joy to have as preacher on the Thursday Canon Brierley and to have with us many former Curates, some of whom now serve the church far from Crosby. Father Godfrey came from the Channel Islands to be with us. ..Canon Honner and Father Ford, who also began their ministries at St Faith's, came a long journey to join us in our Festival.' Among others thanked are 'our friend Mr. Du Cros' for the excellent lunch and the 'Magpies' for the jolly entertainment' that followed it.

Then 1960 settled back into routine, although there were 500 present at a Mothers' Union

Festival not long after. By the end of the year there were often more than twenty 10.45 communicants: the year totalled 8629, with 340 of them at the Christmas Midnight Mass. The magazine suffered a financial crisis and a change of printer, and featured an article, from an anonymous contributor, which sounded a note that was to become familiar in future years. He wrote: '1960 was Jubilee year, but it is a time for looking forward. Fine preachers, a beautifully-dressed church, large congregations and elaborate praise tempt us to think things are all right as they stand. We should go out into the world to witness to Christ as Lord and Master with renewed vigour.' For most of that year, however, the emphasis seems to have been on going out into the garden rather than the world. There are constant magazine pleas for young men to tidy the grounds, and to donate money for the badly-needed new mower. The Garden of Memory was getting very untidy. 'I can't do it all myself and no one else cares. In future we must ask for a gift if anyone requests to have ashes placed there.' Later the Vicar reports complaints about the state of the place. We notice that those who do most talking give little or nothing to keep it neat.' Only marginally further afield, Fr. Hassall asks parishioners to squash a strange rumour that the new vicarage, then in the planning stages, was to be a bungalow.

Inside church, Fr. Stanage left just before St Faith's-tide and the initials of Canon Bates of St Luke's, the Rural Dean of the time, begin to appear with those of Fr. Cawley on a number of early celebrations. There were 8170 totalled for the year: the last time the Vicar was to add this information. Next Easter as many as 42 came up to the Altar at the Sung Mass. And in October the long- delayed new Vicarage began to be built. The papers reported that the Vicar and some officials intended to sit in the porch one Saturday to receive donations: a later photograph shows Fr. Hassall in his old study beaming with pleasure at donations duly received. And an artist's impression shows the Vicarage set amidst what appears to be several acres of grounds stretching across Milton Road into Cameron's Garage. That 'Christmass' the communicants were down to 286 and the banner headline in the register failed to appear. The year ends with the recording of much vile weather, and 'very thick fog' ushered in 1963. Snow continued into February with 'Blizzard all day' on 7th February and the Low Mass cancelled. There were different troubles in April: the Vicar reports problems with lads entering the church, lighting candles and burning notices. On one occasion the church narrowly escaped a serious fire: from then on the church had to be locked to

prevent a recurrence. Not until 1975 and a regular rota could the church be opened again.

On September 24th the Bishop of Liverpool blessed the new Vicarage in the church grounds and Fr. Hassall moved in from College Road. A less happy fate was in store for the printed Church Magazine, which had struggled on since its last crisis: the last two months of 1963 saw only two issues emerge. And the old service register ran out on December 23rd; its last entries averaged some thirty at the Sung Mass, and down to forty or fifty at the early celebration. The new book is equally vast and well-kept; its first act is to record 333 Christmas Communicants. W.H.'s hand becomes increasingly shaky as the new year gets under way, but the firm hand of 'Laurence Warrington' appears for the first time to take the Three Hours Devotion on Good Friday. That May saw the reappearance of the magazine. Non-existent for several months, it was resurrected in duplicated form, with a cover, redesigned monthly, printed in colour on card at the Merchant Taylors' School Press by this writer. In this more economical and flexible format it has continued since, with contents varying from 12 to 32 pages. The first issue set the tone for future ones, with a wide range of home-produced articles and views. Its early numbers contain, among many other things, a desperate appeal from Mr. Pratt for more choirboys, a quotation from the Church Times on the occasion of the death of Canon Brierley (a Requiem was held at St Faith's on June 15th) and articles on Vestments, the omission of the Last Gospel, and the value of Retreats. In 1965 thanks were given for the transformation of the Garden of Memory, the meaning of the term 'feria' was explained, the importance of genuflection emphasised and the life of a Franciscan explained by Brother Christian S.S.F. (Raymond Clark of St Faith's).

But that autumn, after further periods of illness and consequent absence, Fr. Hassall finally reported his decision to resign the living of St Faith's. The Service Register had shown the way things were going for some time, with fewer services possible and increasing help from outside: not surprisingly, too, numbers were falling off significantly. At the end of Fr. Hassall's term of office, the numbers at 8 a.m. are around forty, although now as many as thirty would sometimes communicate at the Sung Mass.

Florid and largely indecipherable writing boldly records the 'End' of the Incumbacy (sic) of the Rev. W. Hassall' on All Saints Day, and the interregnum began. Before he left, though, the Vicar had printed in the new magazine a long and impressive list of work carried out during his time

with us; and it is this, rather than the sadder memory of his failing health and latter-day lapses of memory and concentration, that is his proper memorial at St Faith's. His first three years had seen the redesigning of the Lady Chapel, a new High Altar Cross and (six) candlesticks and various minor items. The next five years brought new vestments: copes, chasubles and cottas; new banners, gong, font cover, kneelers, carpet and lighting, as well as the complete overhaul of the organ and the installation of a new pedal-board. His last two years had added the adult library, wrought iron gates for the churchyard, Baptistry chairs and candlesticks, Children's Comer torches, hot water in the choir vestry, new oil heating for the church and the redecorating of the redos. Over £7000 had also been raised towards the new Vicarage he had occupied for so short a time. A further memorial to a man who valued above all the beauty and dignity of worship and music at St Faith's was the subsequent restoration and cleaning of the organ in his name: a plaque dedicated by his successor and recording this is situated in the choir.

The interregnum began with a vast variety of signatures in the book. Regulars are '+ L.W.', Canon Bates and the Reverends W.H. Watterson, Paul Nichols, H.M. Luft and J.A.L. Irvine. Only two weekday services could be maintained: the traditional and practically unbroken succession of Monday 10.30 a.m. and a 7 a.m., usually on a Wednesday. During this period, the Sunday 8 a.m. numbers fell further until they were on occasion below those at 10.45. Other events worth noting were the resignation of Mr. Gerald Laybourne as Sacristan and his replacement by Mr. George Goodwin, and the serious ill-health of George Houldin. But in July 1966 there is a message in the Parish News, after more than one false alarm, from our Vicar-designate, Charles Alfred Billington. The Wardens express the hope that he will be known as Father Charles, and plans are on foot for the Induction. Eventually the book, still semi-indecipherably and still inaccurately, records the 'Beginning of the Incumbacy (sic!) of the Rev. C.A. Billington' when he took over the living of St Faith's on July 16th, 1966 and opened a new chapter in the life of the church. Doubtless every new incumbency seems to begin with sweeping changes, but there is no doubt that in its seven years this particular ministry revolutionised our way of life and of worship at St Faith's and in so doing made possible the church we know today.