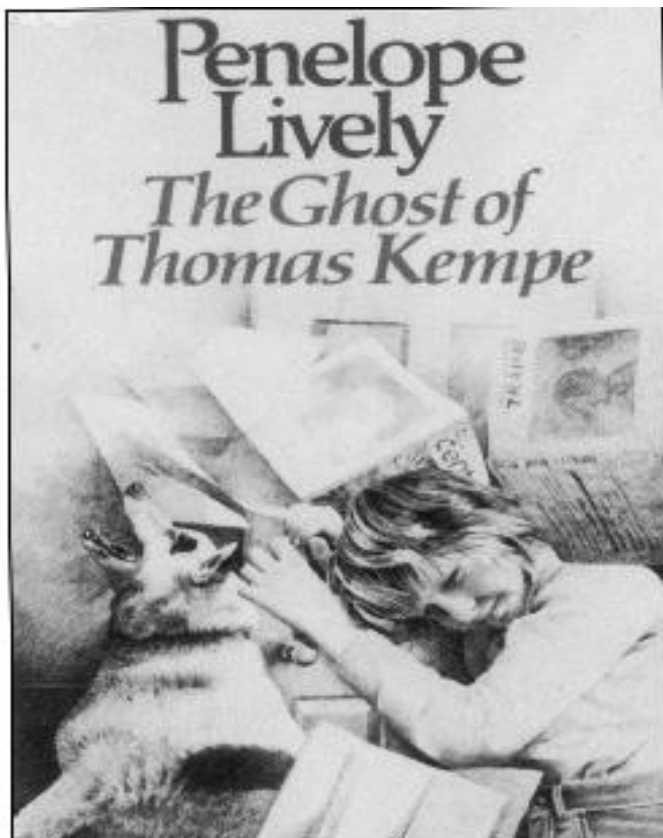


*The*  
**Eynsham**  
**Record**



Number 25 – 2008

## Note on abbreviations

Bodl.	Bodleian Library, Oxford
Chamb. 1936	Chambers, E.K. <i>Eynsham under the Monks</i> . Oxfordshire Record Society, vol.18, 1936.
OxS	Oxfordshire Studies, Central Library, Westgate, Oxford
EHG	Eynsham History Group
ER	<i>The Eynsham Record</i>
Eyn.Cart	<i>Cartulary of the Abbey of Eynsham</i> . Salter, H.E. (Ed.), in 2 vols. Oxford Historical Society, vol.49 (1907) & vol.51 (1908).
Eyn.Cens	Eynsham census returns at 10 year intervals from 1841 to 1901, transcribed by members of the EHG.
Eyn. MIs	Monumental Inscriptions at St Leonard's, recorded by the Oxfordshire Family History Society, 2002.
Gordon, 1990	Gordon, Eric. <i>Eynsham Abbey: 1005-1228</i> , Phillimore, 1990.
OS	Ordnance Survey
ORO	Oxfordshire Record Office (formerly Oxfordshire Archives)
PRO	Public Record Office
VCH Oxon	<i>The Victoria History of the County of Oxford</i>

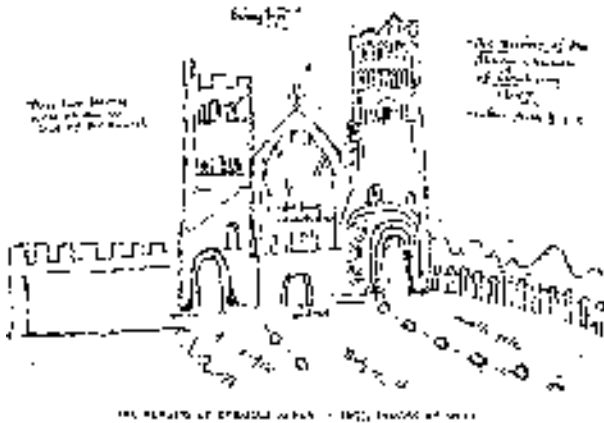
## FRONT COVER

The front cover of the paperback 1975 edition by Piccolo Pan Books of the book discussed here on page 3. Illustration by Yvonne Gilbert.

# THE EYNSHAM RECORD

Number 25: 2008

Journal of the Eynsham History Group



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## EDITORIAL

Many thanks to Sara Ruane for permission to record her account of the history of St Peter's Church. She wrote this in 2004, but wanted it to be updated for this journal. This was done by Father Martin Flatman, who also lent me the church archives from which I have copied the pictures reproduced on pages 20, 24, 30 and 40. Their contributions comprise half of this number! I have also reproduced Fr Lopes splendid 'defence' of the village which was in the archives. Many thanks to Fr Flatman for his speedy help.

Offerings from regular contributors are always welcome. In this number we have items from John Golby, Martin Harris and Pamela Richards.

It is good to get a feedback from readers, and especially pleasurable when this is favourable. Here is an email I received in October from Ethel Kearns, née Rusher of Melbourne, Australia.

"I was thrilled to find an article on the internet written by P Renold about John Rusher of Eynsham (p.24, Eynsham Record, no 10, 1993) John and Jane Rusher were my 4x great-grandparents and I am descended from their youngest son James born in 1771 who married Rebecca Hibberd. James had a business in Berkshire. It was quite a surprise a few years back, to find that one of my sons-in-law was also descended from John and Jane Rusher through their son Thomas, and older brother of James. My daughter and son-in-law had been married 20 years before we discovered the connection! The article by P Renold is a real treasure, giving us an insight into the lives of our ancestors. Thanking you".

Joan Stonham who runs the website <[www.eynsham.org.uk](http://www.eynsham.org.uk)> on which she posts past numbers of the Eynsham Record came up with the idea of consolidating the first 20 numbers on a CD which will shortly be on sale. There will be many advantages for people with access to a computer, including the facility to search electronically for a name, date, place, etc. in all 20 numbers. Hard copies of back numbers (except nos 2, 3, and 10 which are out of print) remain available, most at a discounted price of £1 from Fred Bennett (01865 880659) or Brian Atkins (01865 881677) -- their addresses on the back cover.

## **The Revd Canon Geoffrey W. Hart 1927-2007**

Geoffrey Hart was born in Cardiff, and his family moved to Oxford when he was five. He was educated at the City of Oxford School and Exeter College followed by theological studies at Cambridge. After ordination in 1959, he served successively as a curate, vicar and rector in Islington, Leeds, Southport and Cheltenham. He served on the General Synod when he was at Southport, and a Rector of St Paul's & Holy Trinity in Cheltenham. He was chairman of the Chairman of the Council of Higher Education when the College achieved University status. After retirement he preached in Borneo by invitation. Following some time with his wife, Betty, in Branscombe in Devon, they settled in Eynsham where he was often invited to preach at St Leonard's. In recent years he was Secretary of the EHG and entertained us with talks on his old school and on Lawrence of Arabia, also a former pupil of the school. A member of Eynsham Probus he often said the 'Grace' (never the same words twice) before our monthly lunches. Our condolences to his wife, Betty, with whom he had four children and seven grandchildren.

*The above draws heavily on an obituary notice by Peter Ormerod published in the May 2007 bulletin of the Cheltenham Rotary Club.*

## **E R R A T U M**

### **E.R. no 23 2006 p.15**

In Joan Weedon's poem *A Ballad of Eynsham Abbey*, the first line as printed should be the last line of the first stanza. Apologies for this error. Ed.

## A FICTIONAL STORY BASED ON EYNESHAM

### *The Ghost of Thomas Kempe by Penelope Lively\**

This book won the Library Association Carnegie Medal for the outstanding book of the year for children. It was aimed at readers aged 11 to 14.

The author, who read history at St Anne's College, Oxford and married an Oxford don, had previously written six very successful novels for children.

This prize-winning story was set in a fictional place called Ledsham, but which can be clearly identified as Eynsham. The evidence is overwhelming.

For example the haunted house where much of the action takes place overlooks the church with its square tower and peal of six bells. It is a very old place somewhat between a village and a small town, situated between Oxford and Burford, and near Church Hanborough. Its streets are too narrow and corners too abrupt for modern traffic. Two or three histories have been written, mainly dealing with the decline and fall of an Abbey for which the village had been renowned in the Middle Ages. In addition to the main crossroads, the Swan, the Red Lion, the High Street are named and there is an Abbey Way and an Abbey Road (although not an Abbey Street). In the old market place there is an 'odd little building' with small barred windows, once the village jail and 'now' the public library - (the lower Bartholomew Room has in its time served both these functions as well as many others!).

So, the author certainly modelled her 'Ledsham' on Eynsham.

But some readers have gone further in suggesting that the house at the centre of the story called 'East End Cottage' is modelled on on The Thatched Cottage in Church Street, but I can find nothing in the book to support this suggestion. In the story the cottage overlooks the church; it is at the end of Pound Lane' and at the end of the village - the *east* end of the village judging by its name; from the main street Pound Lane runs between terraced cottages.

I believe that, although the author based her 'Ledsham' on Eynsham, her 'East End Cottage' was a pure invention and cannot be modelled on any real building. The reason seems obvious; If (an albeit fictional) ghost story points to the identity of a real home with a haunting, the owners might well be concerned about the effect on the value of their property!

\*Published by Heinemann in 1973

# LITERARY EYNSHAM

by Martin J Harris

Eynsham and the surrounding area have, over the years, been featured or briefly mentioned in published books both factual and fictional or linked in some way with authors. Only this year, it was reported that letters belonging to the American novelist Henry James were found in a house in Eynsham.

For books that include Eynsham or are written by Eynsham authors the list is larger than perhaps you might think. In Eynsham Record 1 and 2, Brian Atkins compiled lists of writings (books, leaflets and unpublished) that had historical references to Eynsham but these now need updating. The following is an inevitably incomplete list of Eynsham authors and books of fact and fiction that mention Eynsham somewhere in their pages. This list does not include, for example, the many contributors to this journal (unless mentioned below for their other publications), papers by Eynsham scientists and other scholars in the specialist literature, nor all the many references in guidebooks and gazetteers.

Key to the entries: \*Lived or lives in the village. \$ Factual. + Fictional

**Aelfric**\*\$ Eynsham Abbey's first Abbot in 1005. Much of his work was written when he was at his previous monastery in Cerne, Dorset. His output included the *Colloquy* (a sort of Teach Yourself Latin), his *Customary* and his *Letter to the Monks of Eynsham* (detailing the rules and regulations for the then new Abbey), his sermons written down (called *Homilies*) and his *Lives of the Saints*. [see ER 9, p12, ER 23, p39]

**Adam**\*\$. Abbot of Eynsham Abbey in the early 13th century. Previously he had been chaplain to Bishop Hugh of Lincoln, later sanctified. Adam wrote St Hugh's biography, *Vita Hugonis*, and also *The Vision of the Monk of Eynsham*, an account of his brother Edmund's extended dream, while in a coma, of his tour of purgatory. This account was widely circulated and may have been used by the Italian poet Dante. [see ER 13 p.4].

**Amis, Kingsley & Martin**\*. The successful novelist Kingsley Amis briefly resided in Marriner's cottage in Newland Street in the late 1940s. His young son Martin, who would continue the literary success, was just a baby when they moved away. While in Eynsham, Kingsley's wife Hilly befriended Anastacia Smith (1916-2006) who then lived at St Michael's lodge in Acre End Street with her husband and young children.

**Allen, Trevor** \$. Wrote a chapter, *The Gutteridge Murder* in *Famous Crimes of Recent Times* - This book contains chapters of various crimes mainly from the



period 1900-1930. Allen's chapter is about a village constable shot dead in Essex with one of the perpetrators having Eynsham connections. The two criminals were Frederick "Leo" Guy Brown(e) and William Henry Kennedy [see ER 8, pp30-36 and ER 21, ppl5-20] whom he compared to "Chicago gunmen". The chapter includes details about the former as follows:

*"Leo Browne - his real name - was born of working-class parents in Catford in 1881. As a young man of twenty-eight he lived with a widowed mother at Eynsham, Oxfordshire, and carried on a bicycle repairing business as Brown Brothers. The business was a mask for stealing bicycles, which he rebuilt, removing identification numbers, and sold in surrounding market towns. In these days he carried a loaded revolver about him on his predatory excursions, mostly at night ... His wife declared that she first met him at Eynsham in 1910, and married him at Clapham in September 1915. "*

**Atkins, Susy\*** Broadcaster and writer who lived in Eynsham through her childhood, has written ten books on the subject of wine.

**Chambers, Sir Edmund K.** \*\$ .A great Shakespearean scholar, he lived at Hythe Croft in Eynsham and wrote *Eynsham under the Monks* (1936).

**Chapman, Don** \*\$ Eynsham resident Don compiled *Images of Oxford* in 1994 with fellow Oxford Mail colleague Peter Farr. This fascinating book includes a range of old Oxford photographs from shops no longer in existence, to royal visits. For many years he wrote the 'Anthony Wood' column in the Oxford newspaper, and was its theatre critic. 2008 marks the publication of his history of the Oxford Playhouse.

**Cobbett, William** and the Swann family\* William Cobbett (1763-1835), political agitator and author of *Rural Rides*, was great friends with the Swann family, owners of Eynsham paper mill and probably visited them in Eynsham. The Swann family themselves would have sold paper that ended up as publications (like Cobbett's *Weekly Register*) or books and bibles [see ER 18, pp5-6]

**Crossley, Alan** \$ Former editor of the *Victoria County History of Oxfordshire*, he researched and wrote the lengthy section on Eynsham in Vol.12 [see ER 8, pp.44-6]

**Dexter, Colin**+ *The Dead of Jericho* (1981). One of Dexter's earlier novels, this was the first Inspector Morse story to be dramatised on television. In the early part of the book, Morse attends the Oxford Book Association's talk by Dame Helen Gardner (qv) on *The New Oxford Book of English Verse* in Oxford's Walton Street. He also mentions that the Book Association's chair had taken the "distinguished speaker back to Eynsham."

**de Villiers, Lady E.** \$ Wrote the text for *Swinford Bridge 1769-1969* which was published by the EHG in the bicentennial year of the toll bridge; a booklet long out of print.

**Gardner, Dame Helen\*** (1908-1986), moved to Myrtle House (12 Mill Street) in Eynsham after her retirement in 1975. A literary scholar and university teacher, in 1966 she was appointed Oxford University's Merton Professor of English Language and Literature, being the first woman to hold this chair. In her own publications she wrote about poets such as Donne and TS Eliot.

**Gordon, Bishop Eric.\***\$ Former Bishop of Sodor & Man, he retired to Eynsham where he lived with his second wife, the sculptress Gwynneth Holt at Cobden in Queen Street. There he spent much of his last 16 years in research which resulted in a new book, *Eynsham Abbey* (1990).[see ER 10, pp.3-4]

**Gransden, Antonia** \$ edited *The Customary of the Benedictine Abbey of Eynsham in Oxfordshire*.

**Grundy, Lynne** \$ wrote *Books and Grace: Aelfric's Theology* (1991) which was based on research for her PhD at King's College, London

**Hall, Mr & Mrs S.C.** The Book of the Thames (1859, republished 1975,76,77). Books on the Thames abound and so, unsurprisingly, Eynsham gets a mention and sometimes photographs/drawings in many of them. This mid-19th century publication by Samuel Carter Hall (1800-89) and his wife Anna (1800-1881) includes two Eynsham drawings of "Ensham Bridge" (i.e. the bridge at Swinford) and "Ensham Cross". It contains a very brief Eynsham history and states that following the dissolution, the Abbey went to the Earl of Derby. However, as the book is very much about nature, most of the Eynsham narrative focuses on the weed "Anacharis absinastrum" better known as the American weed which according to the Halls was new to England in the last 10 years and had spread rapidly.

**Hardy, Alan** \$ The last senior archaeologist to supervise the excavations on the abbey site in the 1990s, he was responsible for co-ordinating the subsequent research and co-wrote the definitive volume, *Aelfric's Abbey* (2003), and a slim booklet, *Eynsham: A Village and its Abbey*.

**Harris, Martin J.** \$ Chairman of the Eynsham History Group since 1998, I have published three books, *The Changing Faces of Eynsham* (1997, 1998 and 2002), which consist of photographs of village life from different periods, with extensive captions.

**Harris, Mollie.** \*\$ Known nationally as the shopkeeper Martha Woodford in the radio soap 'The Archers', Mollie who lived in Mill Street was also a prolific author. Perhaps her best known writings are her accounts of her childhood in Ducklington, and, for local historians, her book *From Acre End* (1982) in which she recorded the oral memories of 24 elderly Eynsham folk. [See ER 13, p.3 for her obituary and a full list of her publications].

**Hibbert, Edward** \*\$ was co-editor with his historian brother Christopher for the 1988 book *The Encyclopaedia of Oxford*. It is an essential book for anyone who loves Oxford and its history. Following his retirement as an Oxford solicitor, Edward moved to Eynsham in 1987. He died in 1992. [see ER 10, p.2].

**Jordan Tim.** \*\$ Tim, who lives in a converted barn in Newland Close, published his book *Cotswold Barns* in 2006.

**Keevill, Graham.** \$ Senior archaeologist on the abbey excavations until **Alan Hardy** (qv) took over, he wrote *In Harvey's house and in God's house* (1995), an account of the results of the dig at that time. He continues as a freelance archaeological consultant to the current fishponds restoration project.

**Lively, Penelope** + *The Ghost of Thomas Kempe* (1973). See front cover illustration and page 3 of this issue.

**Mee, Arthur.** \$ Whilst there are too many gazetteers and county guides to mention in detail, they are an important source of information on Eynsham. For example, in Arthur Mee's *Oxfordshire (The King's England)* (1942) the main focus in his entry for Eynsham is on its Abbey history and its churches including the Roman Catholic church which was then in the old prison house (Bartholomew Room). Mee describes Aelfric's writings as being "a musical style, a kind of poetical prose".

**Oakeley, Mary.** \*\$ Daughter of Major Oakeley of the Gables, she grew up in Eynsham to where she retired after a successful career as a Headmistress in New Zealand and as a teacher in Switzerland and England. Her autobiography, *The Long Timetable* was published in 1997.

**Oakeshott, Sir Walter Fraser** (1903-87) \* After retiring as rector of Oxford's Lincoln College in 1972, Oakeshott lived in the Old School House in Station Road. He wrote many books, especially on his interest in Medieval art history. His publications (and subjects) included: *Founded upon the Seas* (1942) (Renaissance cosmography), *The Queen and the Poet* (1962) (Sir Walter Raleigh's poetry), *Essays on Malory* (edited by JAW Bennett) (1963), *Mosaics of Rome* (1967), and *Sigena Wall Paintings* (1972). His studies on the Winchester Bible resulted in *The Artists of the Winchester Bible* (1945) and *The Two Winchester Bibles* (1981). He was knighted in 1980. [Also see ER 5 p.14 for a Thomas Hardy link]

**Page, Nick** \* Nick moved to Eynsham in 1994 and as a professional writer has brought out books on history (*Lord Minimus*), Christianity (*The Tabloid Bible*, amongst many others) and bad writing (*In Search of the World's Worst Writers*).

**Richards, Pamela** \*\$ lives in Abbey Street and is an active member of the Eynsham History Group, and for many years, as a schoolteacher at the local County Primary School, encouraged the children in their interest in local history, resulting in several articles in the ER, and their own journal, *Good History* (1995-). Her own book, *Eynsham; A Chronicle* (which draws heavily from the pages of this journal) was published in 2005, and reviewed in ER 23, pp.40-2.

**Salter, H.E.** \$ An indefatigable transcriber of medieval documents he edited, with extensive commentary, the *Cartulary of the Abbey of Eynsham* in 2 volumes (1907 & 8), the first and most thorough transcription.

**Sergeant, John** \$ Sergeant is probably most well known for having been the BBC's Chief Political Correspondent. He was reporting on television, live outside the Paris Embassy in 1990 as then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher came outside to comment on her failure to win a significant majority on the challenge to her leadership by Henley MP, Michael Heseltine. In his book of memoirs *Give Me Ten Seconds* (2001) whilst living in Wolvercote, he describes how his mother met her second husband in the late 1950s. She arranged, as part of her work for adult educational classes, for a fellow of Magdalen College, Courtney Edward Stevens, to talk to "the aspiring intellectuals of Eynsham" about Roman Britain.

**Shute, Nevil** + (real name Nevil Shute Norway [1899-1960]) is perhaps most famous for *A Town Like Alice* (1950) which was made into a successful film. In his 1961 novel, *Stephen Morris*, the eponymous character drove by car out of Oxford, travelled "over the bridge before Eynsham" and paid a girl at the tollgate. He then drove through Eynsham and on towards Witney and Burford. Shute himself had been educated at Balliol College so it is no surprise that the city is featured in this book. Shute moved permanently to Australia in 1950.

**Taunt, Henry** \$ *A New Map of the River Thames* (1872 1st edition) [republished and edited by Susan Read in 1989 as *The Thames of Henry Taunt*]. Taunt's photographs of Oxford, Oxfordshire and the Thames are today considered an important resource for local historians having been championed by Malcolm Graham (Centre for Oxfordshire Studies) for many years. This book follows Taunt from the Thames head in Gloucestershire to London via maps, photographs and narrative. The Eynsham part includes a photo of Eynsham Bridge viewed from the south with the toll house in view. The narrative mentions that there are nearby pubs the Swan and the Red Lion and that your boat can be left at the bridge with Richard

Treadwell the river and weir-keeper. It also (in the 1889 edition) describes Eynsham or Boldes Weir as being in a "ruinous state".

**Thurston, E. Temple.** \$ *The Flower of Gloster* (1911). Perhaps almost forgotten by all except canal lovers, Ernest Charles Temple Thurston (1879-1933) had many books published from 1895 until his death. His first of three wives, Katherine Cecil Thurston (whom he divorced in 1910), was also a writer. Thurston's 1911 book told of his actual journey along the Oxford Canal and Stratford Canal in *The Flower of Gloster*. Starting at Oxford he went into the Nag's Head in Oxford's Hythe Bridge Street to find his bargee Eynsham Harry who took him on his trip. Who was Eynsham Harry? Perhaps we'll find out when the 1911 census is made available to the public.

**Tolkien, John** \* Although the celebrated author of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, JRR Tolkien, did not live in Eynsham, his son John was the priest at St Peter's for many years.

**Weir, Alison** \$ *Eleanor of Aquitaine* (2000). Renowned historian, her biography of the wife of England's Henry 11, whom she married in 1152, includes as the first entry in her *Primary Sources and Notes on the Chief Sources* the monk Adam of Eynsham (qv) for his biography of St Hugh of Lincoln.

**Wright, Lilian** \*\$. Long time resident of Eynsham, and frequent contributor to these pages, she is an expert on the history of St Leonard's Church - *St Leonards, Eynsham* (1981).

Acknowledgements: My thanks go to the following who have assisted me -

Brian Atkins, Diane Braggs, Jennifer Harland, Pamela Richards, the family of Anastacia Smith, Pat Woodman, Fred & Lilian Wright.



## A 'CHRISTMAS' WEDDING FOR MRS LILLEY ...AND THE WI CAME TOO

by Christine Lewis (The Oxford Mail 14 November 1972)

Picture: Malcolm Rouse

The church bells chimed for the Christmas Day wedding of Mrs Martha Lilley -alias Mollie Harris of Eynsham - and Joby Woodford yesterday. But what was supposed to be Ambridge Parish Church in the BBC radio series *The Archers* was really a studio at the broadcasting centre in Pebble Mill Road, Birmingham.

The parson was the actor Norman Shelley and the congregation Mollie's fellow members of Eynsham WI. The bride, given away by Walter Gabriel (actor Chris Gittins), wore a matching blue dress and coat with a pink picture hat and carried pink carnations. Matron of Honour was Mrs Perkins (played by Pauline Seville).

"Mrs Lilley" travelled from her real home at Close Cottage, Mill Street, Eynsham in a coach with the 55 members of the WI. On the way they practised singing carols for the service.

The wedding march was played by Phil Archer (Norman Painting). In fact, it was pre-recorded by Norman at Warmington Parish Church, where he is assistant organist. At the reception the shy bridegroom (George Woolley) stumbled over his speech and Tom Forrest (Edgar Harrison), who was Best Man, sang The Archer's special version of The Twelve Days of Christmas.

Back in the BBC canteen, Mollie shared a gallon of her home-made wine with the WI members and admitted that she that she had never been so nervous in all her life as she was on Mrs Lilley's wedding day.

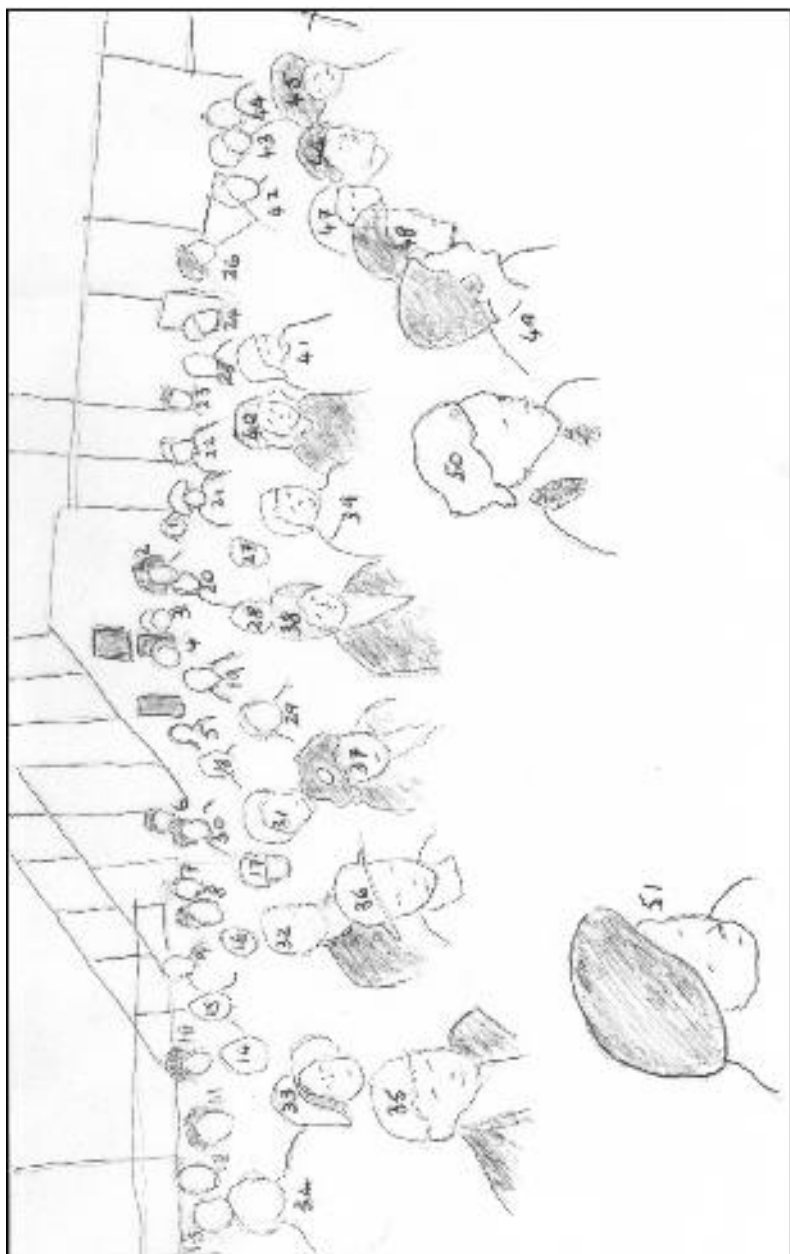
"I am sure Joby will make Mrs Lilley a good husband", she said. "he is nice and solemn and steady and she is not".

The recording when Joby proposes to Mrs Lilley will be broadcast about two weeks before Christmas. Producer Tony Shryane, whose idea it was to invite Eynsham WI to play the congregation and guests, was very pleased with the way they coughed, laughed and sang on cue. "They are a good congregation", he said.

Previous weddings in *The Archers* were recorded in a parish church. But the right sound effects can now be achieved in a studio. The programme was recorded so far in advance of December 25 to give plenty of time for it to go through the transcription service. It will be heard in Cyprus, Singapore, Malta, Gibraltar, New Zealand, Romania and Germany.







**If you can add to this list, or challenge an identification,  
please contact the Editor, Brian Atkins (01865 881677)**

- |                           |                                |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 ?                       | 26 ?                           |
| 2 Mrs Maureen Clapcott    | 27 Mrs Dorothy Heyworth        |
| 3 Mrs Joan Wilkins        | 28 Mrs Pat Taylor              |
| 4 ?                       | 29 Mrs Mary Evans              |
| 5 ?                       | 30 Mrs Beryl Hastings          |
| 6 Mrs Doreen Bailey       | 31 Mrs Winterbourne            |
| 7 Mrs Pam Green           | 32 Mr Brooks                   |
| 8 Mrs Doreen Crozier      | 33 Mrs Brooks                  |
| 9 Mrs Jean Sharpe         | 34 Miss Anderson               |
| 10 Mrs Jean Cleal         | 35 Mr Crawford                 |
| 11 Mrs Audrey Duffield    | 36 Mrs Crawford                |
| 12 Mrs Marion Clark       | 37 Mrs Rosie Peachy            |
| 13 Mrs Pat Woodman        | 38 Mrs Pat Burton              |
| 14 ?                      | 39 Mrs Joan Howard             |
| 15 Mrs Pankhurst          | 40 Mrs Joan Hooper             |
| 16 Mrs Irene Sutton       | 41 Mrs Joyce Treadwell         |
| 17 ?                      | 42 ?                           |
| 18 Mrs Elsie Floyd        | 43 Mrs Jenny Howard            |
| 19 Mrs Julie Durbin       | 44 Mrs Bungay                  |
| 20 Mrs Doris Hicks        | 45 Jean Alder                  |
| 21 Mrs June Pettet        | 46 Mrs Rose Green              |
| 22 Mrs Dorothy Buckingham | 47 Mrs Nancy Butler-Miles      |
| 23 Mrs Cissy Seeney       | 48 Mrs Emmy Harbud             |
| 24 Mrs Nellie Evans       | 49 [Cast member - the Archers] |
| 25 Mrs Elsie Evans        | 50 [Cast member - the Archers] |
|                           | 51 ?                           |

## FIFTY YEARS AGO

by John Golby

Nowadays it seems that most of the population own mobile phones and for many young people it is difficult to remember a life without one. The mobile phone has very many uses but perhaps one of the most valuable is the immediacy with which accidents can be reported. But what was it like in rural areas before the age of the mobile phone?

A report in the *Oxford Mail* for 3 January 1958 recorded the continuing concerns voiced by Eynsham Parish Council about the lack of phone boxes on the A40 between Eynsham and Witney. In fact there was just one phone box on the 6 mile stretch between the two places and, understandably, the Council pointed out the problems arising from a road accident and the difficulties in summoning help from the police or ambulance services if an accident occurred. The Council was especially concerned about the stretch passing Barnard Gate where, it was alleged, the accident rate was especially high.

The response to the Parish Council's request for a phone kiosk placed on that section of the road met with little success. The Rural District Council responded by stating that this request for a new kiosk was only third on their list of priorities for 1958-59. Their decision was based partly on a report from the Post Office which believed that there was one private phone for every ten inhabitants in Barnard Gate thus reducing the pressing need for a kiosk.

Despite objections from Mr F.G.Hayes, Father Lopes and other members of the Parish Council who considered that it was totally wrong to take into account private telephone subscribers in relation to reporting road accidents, Eynsham's request was turned down.

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The historian Peter Ackroyd has recently published his latest book *Thames: Sacred River* (Chatto & Windus, 2007) in which there are many references to Eynsham. On page 289 he tells us that at St Margaret's Well at Binsey, reputed to work miracles, "two blind sisters of Eynsham, Jurkiva and Rilda, were supposed to have regained their sight after their pilgrimage there".

He gives no source for this quotation.

## MORE FROM THE EYNSHAM CHRONICLER

by Pamela Richards

I was rather flattered when I first read the report of my book' in the *Witney Gazette*, but on looking closer at the article I realised that the writer was no historian. He wrote that *The Chronicle* was the 'definitive history of Eynsham'. I am afraid that no one with any understanding of history would believe that any history was really definitive. There is always something else to find or something to correct; and in this article I wish to make some corrections, particularly about the career of Mr John Bruce.

Some years ago I was given information about the village by Anastasia Smith. We printed some of it in *Good History*, the junior history magazine, and no-one challenged it so I imagined it was all right. I should have repeated a mantra which all historians should repeat over and over again. Beware not of women, but of Oral History. Actually in this case it was woman beware woman.

Mrs Smith had written her memories as accurately as she could, but I should have done some more checking. I should have found time to go to the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies, but procrastination led me astray. Fortunately, Mr John Whitlock came forward with the evidence from the local newspapers.

The matter I refer to is the enterprise set up by John Bruce. In 1945 he started a metal processing business in Eynsham, the premises being what the *Oxford Mail* described as 'a ramshackle cow-shed'. To begin with it was John Bruce and his two assistants working day and night, until in 1946 he took the first steps to expand. Apparently, the expansion all came about because of a chance meeting with an old acquaintance, Mr Sidney Leigh, at Birmingham Station.

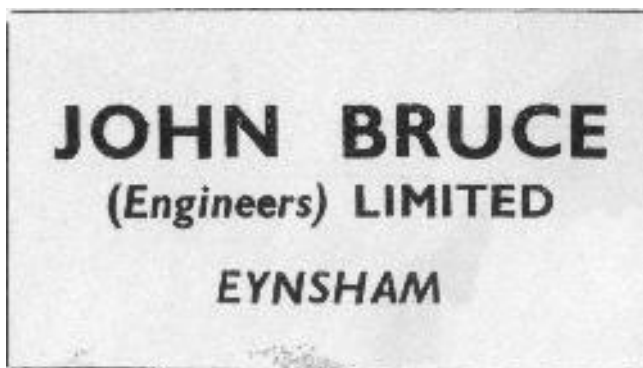
The two men got into conversation and John Bruce explained what he was doing -'Mark 11 blueing' which turned out to be metal processing of gun barrels and a lot more besides. He also talked about wanting to expand and Mr Leigh became very interested. They obviously talked of forming a company together which is exactly what they did in October 1947. Mr Leigh became the Chairman and John Bruce took on the role of Managing Director. They also brought on board a Mr A.B.Speak and Group Captain J.Noaks. Noaks was a former Commander at Kidlington R.A.F. station.

Later Speak went to Canada and Mr Leigh took a more active part in running the company. They were then joined by Mr Reginald Barber, who had been a clerk at an Oxford car factory, bringing with him no doubt his expertise and contacts. A move from the 'cowshed' was necessary. Although the firm had done well there,

doing such diverse things as metal processing to the hand painting of aluminium teapots, they needed to move into something bigger. First they moved into premises in the village but as orders increased, particularly from local car factories, and with a growing reputation, it was decided that there had to be a significant move onto a new site. Bicester was eager to expand its light industry and so new premises were designed by a Banbury firm. This is where Mrs Smith may have been confused about the place of relocation as she thought they had moved to Banbury. The company moved to Bicester on August 8th 1960 and it is worth noting that the whole move was completed in five days, with only a few days of production lost. One thing Mrs Smith did get right was that John Bruce was a good employer. Thirty of the Eynsham workers moved to Bicester with the firm, including my informant Mr John Whitlock. He had returned to the John Bruce firm after 4 years in the R.A.F. Others moved their families to Bicester, as the Bicester Urban District Council provided them with council housing. A couple of other families bought houses in Bicester while others preferred to commute. There were also some foreign workers.

Later John Bruce apparently turned his mind to chicken farming and invented something called a 'Brooster' to assist in the feeding and watering of the small birds. My attempts to find documentary information on this matter have not succeeded. Sadly, it seems that John Bruce died in a car accident.

1. Pamela Richards. Eynsham: A Chronicle. Robert Boyd Publications, 2005



# HORSES AND MEN PASSING THROUGH EYNESHAM IN 1756 AND EARLIER

by Brian Atkins

There were three government surveys, in 1686, 1756 and another undated one between, which sought to establish for each town and village the availability at inns and alehouses of stabling for horses and beds for the men.

Unfortunately the data for Eynsham in 1686 are not recorded. Jeremy Gibson, the author of the original article on which this piece is based<sup>1</sup> points out the importance of villages on the roads to the west which avoided the hills and rivers around Oxford, and he refers to Islip, Kidlington and Bletchington. It is true that before the Swinford bridge was built in 1769, fording the Thames at Eynsham could be a hazardous enterprise, of which there are several examples, and travellers to and from the west may well have chosen another route (although Bletchington-Oxford suggests a north-south rather than a west-east route?). I don't find this a satisfactory explanation for the lack of data in 1686, given that data are provided for both the later surveys, again both before the Swinford bridge was built. I think it more likely that, in 1686 horses and men were passing through Eynsham requiring accommodation and that 'our' data may have been buried in the statistics for nearby larger communities (e.g. Witney, 62 horses, 33 men).

In the undated survey for which Gibson gives a good reason to propose that it preceded the Act of Union in 1701, the figures are stabling or standing (?) for 39 horses and beds for 17 men. (This survey lists us as 'Evesham', but this must be an error - it is in Oxfordshire and immediately follows the entry for Witney as 'a smaller settlement grouped by a larger town').

When we come to the 1756 survey, again before the bridge was built, we learn that Ensham [sic], in the Witney 'division' could stable 25 horses and provide beds for 17 men passing through. It is disappointing that none of the surveys mention individual inns and alehouses, but in the case of Eynsham likely candidates would have included the *Red Lion* and the *Swan*, both well-established coaching houses by the 19th century<sup>2</sup>.

## References

1. Jeremy Gibson, *Oxfordshire Local History* vol.8 no.2 2007 pp.3-21
2. John Golby, ER no. 14 1997 p.7

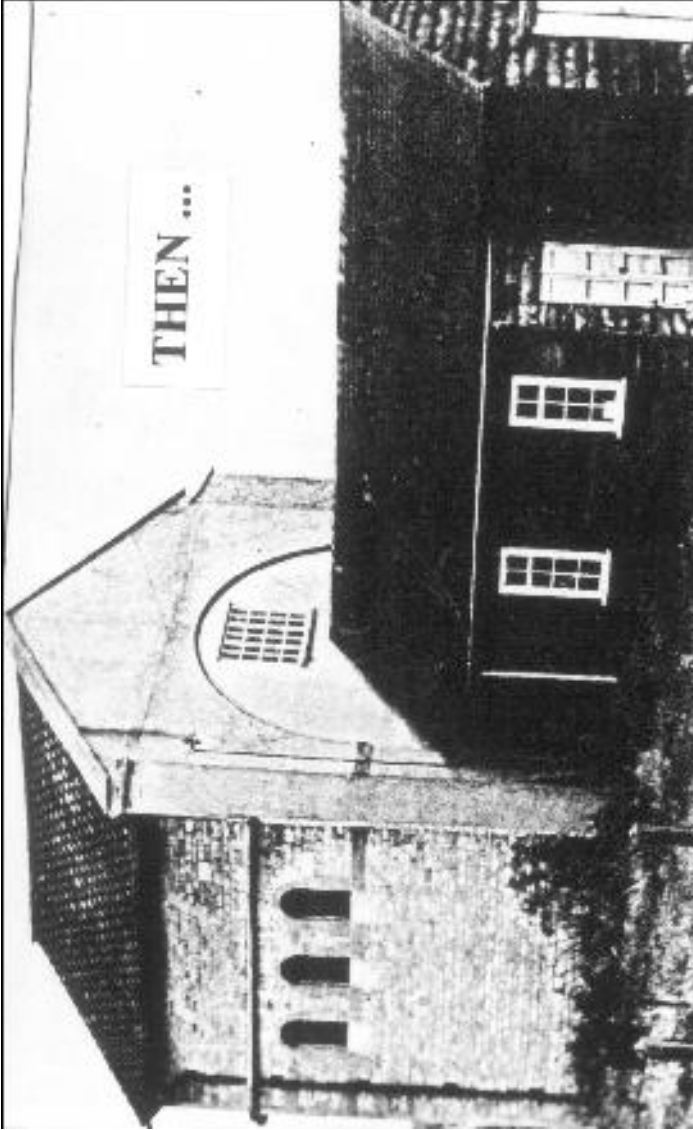
## AN IMAGINED JOURNEY

*In the 2006 summer edition of Oxfordshire Local History, vol.8 no.1 (This is the journal of the Oxford Local History Association, to which the EHG is affiliated), the Editor, Chris Hall, set the following challenge to his readers - Identify the author and date of the following account of an imagined journey down the Thames 'early in the reign of Henry VIII'. Nobody had the answer, which was then provided in the next number of the journal, vol.8 no. 2.*

*Rather surprisingly, the author was John Buchan and the date 1929. Buchan was then an MP living at Elsfield. The passage comes from his preface to The Thames Valley from Cricklade to Staines, which was a survey commissioned and published by the Thames Valley branch of CPRE.*

*Chris Hall goes on to describe the 'handsome volume', and its authors, one of whom helped to launch the CPRE in 1926*

At Eynsham we reach the first of the great religious houses, confronting us with two tall towers, and a superb western window looking out on the water-meadows. Wytham Hill is rougher than today, and the woodland spreads nearer the river. When we turn the corner of it, we see Godstow nunnery among its trees, and a mile beyond it a mighty tower, seven storeys high and crowned with a spire, so high that it seems to hang baseless in the clouds. That is the bell-tower of Oseney Abbey, the third greatest in England, of which now scarcely a stone remains. Its courts and cloisters, orchards and gardens cover many acres, and by its side is a little burgh of its own, Oseney-town, dedicated to handicrafts. Runnels from Isis have been led everywhere, so that the whole huge place is full of the scent and sound of 'chinking rivulets'. In its great days Oseney was not an appanage of Oxford; rather Oxford was an appanage of Oseney. Now in the early sixteenth century, it is somewhat declined, and the Oxford towers east of it have risen in importance. Most of the familiar names are there -New College, Merton, Christ Church spire, Magdalen, but not yet Tom Tower or the Radcliffe Camera or the later pinnacles of All Souls.



St Peter's Church in the 'wooden hut' days ca. 1940-68 (see p. 27)





The completed church. The original stone sanctuary, now forming part of the entrance to the church, can just be seen in the distance to the left of the tree. The presbytery (the priest's house), with its new red roof, is on the right.

## **ST PETER'S CATHOLIC CHURCH, EYNHAM, 1929-2008**

**by Sara Ruane (to 2004) and Fr Martin Flatman (to present)**

### **The building of a parish**

Our story begins early in 1895 when, by the actions of Mr Herbert May, a small Catholic mission was begun in Eynsham. The first chapel adjoined the stables of Mr May's home, 'Newland Lodge'. This soon proved too small for the growing congregation so the chapel removed to the drawing-room of the house. 'Newland Lodge' was unfortunately burnt down and the chapel moved to a club-room belonging to the Railway Inn, formerly in Lombard Street. Mr May then settled into a house called St Michael's, and the chapel was once again set up in his drawing room which was seen as a more secure place for the Blessed Sacrament.

Sunday Mass was said by priests from Oxford or by the Servite fathers from Begbroke. There was an average attendance at Mass of between 40 and 50. Despite this, the mission was short-lived and was closed in June 1898. We can only guess at the reasons for this, but we do know that Mr May moved to Oxford at this time, hinting at 'a variety of accidental and unforeseen circumstances'. Little is known of the Catholic community in Eynsham from that date until the parish of Witney was established in 1914.

The Jesuits of St Aloysius and of Campion Hall took responsibility for the new parish which included the bustling market town of Witney and 38 surrounding villages including Eynsham. Masses were very few and far between. It was not until 1928 that a resident priest, Father John Lopes, was sent to Witney. He travelled throughout West Oxfordshire assessing the numbers and needs of the Catholic community and, in addition to his duties in Witney, established parishes in Eynsham and Carterton and a chapel of ease in Burford, which in time became a parish. He was later to some as 'the apostle of West Oxfordshire' because of his long-standing influence.

Much has been written elsewhere about Fr Lopes. I will not retell his colourful story before he came to West Oxfordshire except to note where it is relevant to his life as the parish priest in Eynsham. He had been ordained as a Church of England priest in 1907 after studying at Exeter College, Oxford and at Ely Theological College. He came from a wealthy family and contributed generously to church building funds within his parishes. As early as 1909, at St Basil's in Deritend, his taste for the Romanesque style was evident.

In 1914-15 he became a convert to Roman Catholicism and eventually was ordained deacon at Monte Casino. It was then that he developed an interest in the Benedictine order that would later influence his decision to settle in Eynsham. He

was Chaplain of Cambridge University from 1922 until coming to West Oxfordshire in 1928.

In 1929 Fr Lopes established the new parish of St Peter's in Eynsham, six miles to the east of Witney. Larger Catholic communities existed to the west of Witney, so at first sight Eynsham may have seemed an unlikely place in which to set up his first new parish, but the village held a particular attraction for Fr Lopes.

Eynsham had been the site of a large and influential Benedictine Abbey from medieval times until the reformation, and with his great sense of history he visualised a new abbey rising from the ruins of the old. Perhaps foretelling where his future lay, he immediately moved to the village, living briefly in 'Llandaff' in Thames Street before buying 'the White House' in Mill street. Fr Lopes quickly became a familiar and formidable figure as he fought to establish the parish. There was no Catholic church and Masses were held in yet another temporary location -the Bartholomew Room in the Square.

Fr Lopes was in Eynsham for 32 years and throughout that time he continued to cherish the hope that a Benedictine community would return to Eynsham. To this end in 1939 he commissioned the Oxford architect Gilbert Flavel to design a splendid Romanesque basilica which would encourage the foundation of a new abbey.

Only a part of his dream would become reality with the building of the sanctuary which now forms the baptistry at the eastern entrance of the present church. He set about acquiring part of the original Abbey grounds as the only fitting site for the basilica. As luck, or providence, would have it the land was owned by Mrs Emma Payton Pimm, a member of a prominent local family. After tortuous discussions reputed to have lasted several years a two-acre plot of land was acquired with the only condition being that any church to be built would be the work of her family's building firm. It is perhaps only in latter years that we have come to appreciate the advantages (and disadvantages) of having such large grounds.

A wooden building was placed on the site as an interim measure, but Father never let the humble 'wooden hut', as it was fondly known in later years, limit his horizons. Noel Green, a parishioner now in his eighties, recalls that 'the priest was a great lover of the liturgy and he never allowed the paucity of his surroundings or the slimness of his congregation to inhibit him'. One unfortunate side of his enthusiasm for liturgical rite was the length of time it took to complete when coupled with his erudite, but prolonged, homilies. Noel remembers that outbreaks of rebellion among his own large brood had to be quelled 'by the bribery of sweets or the threat of instant murder. When all else failed, the bawling child and self-conscious parent would noisily exit the hollowly echoing wooden church much to the relief of all'.



This drawing of Fr Lopes's vision for his Eynsham church shows the ground plan and the building designed for him by the Oxford architect Gilbert Flavel. The most conspicuous features are the tall basilica to the south and the columned entrance.

Because his tenure was so long Fr Lopes became very involved in village life and served for many years on the Parish, District and County Councils. His contribution was recognised when a road was named after him. (Perhaps this familiar usage has contributed over the years to the changed pronunciation of Lopes which most villagers now rhyme with 'slopes' rather than, more accurately, with 'Lopez').

A wonderful picture is conjured up by Canon Alphonsus de Zlueta of a 'man with grand ideas, with a greater sense of demand than of supply. [He] got through two fortunes in church building and grand living, always full of hospitality, kindness ... and much charity.' He is still remembered in his later years as a man of great vitality, a lover of conversation who retained an interest in all aspects of life.

Throughout the immediate post-war years and the 1950s the building project made no progress because of the lack of funds and perhaps because the diocese and the people of the parish knew that the basilica was not a realistic option. Fr Lopes was not to be swayed and was encouraged by influential friends like Mgr Alfred Gilbey, who had in 1934 followed the priest into the Cambridge Chaplaincy, and by his stalwart church warden, John Pimm.

Fr Lopes, an ecumenist at heart, was a great friend of the Anglican vicar of Eynsham, the Revd Stuart Blanche, later Archbishop of York. They delighted in 'swapping' Anglican and Catholic newspapers, and it was he and Fr Lopes who together published a regular bulletin giving news and notices of the churches in Eynsham, a forerunner perhaps of today's *Roundabout* magazine.

In 1959 Fr Lopes retired into the care of the sisters of St Joseph's Nursing Home on Boars Hill. He would sometimes take a taxi to Eynsham and say Mass in his stockinged feet. A parishioner remembers the Mass often being interrupted by his becoming stranded at the altar and roaring at the unfortunate Mass server "Michael, Michael, where's my stick?" His enthusiasm for the liturgy and for extended homilies remained undiminished. He died on 18th September 1961 in his eightieth year, much loved and mourned by all those whose lives he had touched. He was buried at Eynsham on the 23rd of September after a Requiem Mass at Blackfriars.

Only ten days after the death of Father Lopes, on the 8th September a new, go-ahead priest, Father Kevin Good, arrived in the parish. Fr Good felt that once the future of his beloved Eynsham was settled the old priest could die in peace. Fr Good lived briefly at Newman Hall in Littlemore and then, preferring to be in the parish, moved to a flat at the Talbot Inn where the newly arrived landlord, Patrick Flynn, was also a parishioner. Finding that this was not central enough he moved to the gardener's quarters of a large house in the village. Preferring to live 'over the shop' Fr Good bought, begged or borrowed a small caravan in the autumn of 1964 which became his home and office for the next two years. Interestingly, he notes

that following his move 'petty vandalism has stopped'. Vandalism, contrary to popular opinion, is not an invention of today. He set about reviving the idea of building the new church, realising that the grandeur of Fr Lopes plans was a major hindrance.

After the long tenure of the ageing priest, the parish had to recognise the need for change. This can sometimes prove difficult for both priest and people and it was fortunate that Fr Good could charm the birds out of the trees. He soon became a popular figure and made allies of the young people in the parish who would surround him, chattering like starlings, at the door of the church following Mass.

Despite his easy-going manner he pulled no punches. In a letter to parishioners in September 1962 he reflects on the small size of the parish. 'We cannot lose ourselves in the crowd - there IS no crowd! And we cannot leave it to all the others - there aren't enough others! So each parishioner must play his part according as he is able'.

Few families at that time had cars and there was no bus service between Hanborough, Freeland and Eynsham. Fr Good recognised that Catholics in these villages felt isolated from the church and, although technically within the parish, found it difficult to come to Mass, so in March 1962 he organised a mini-bus to pick up parishioners. The charge for the service was a shilling (5p) for adults and threepence (1.5p) for children. This service was short-lived but memorable. The seats were arranged around the sides of the bus so there was nothing to hang on to except each other as we swung and swerved merrily on our way driven by Mr Fred Plumb. It was a testament both to faith and to Fr Good's persuasive tongue that so many braved the weekly bus-ride. Fred also played the organ with enthusiasm and performed a hundred and one other tasks, ably supported by his wife Helen who remains a parishioner today.

Parochial events were organised including a children's Christmas Party and an outing on a fine August day in 1962 on a Thames Steamer, downstream from Folly Bridge, which attracted 72 parishioners. It was agreed that local parishes would join together to organise a grand draw in which the prize was to be a 'mini-car', - a grand prize indeed. The prize-giving took place in Littlemore and Fr Good was asked to draw the winning ticket. He was not easily ruffled but imagine his embarrassment when the ticket proved to belong to Eynsham parishioner Esme Green. I'm sure that there was no connection, but the joint venture was not repeated.

The collection at each Mass totalled between £8 and £10. Noel Green relates how one day an altar server dropped the collection plate at the end of Mass. The plate crashed to the floor and the coins rolled to every corner. The noise

reverberated around the building with its raised wooden floor. As the echoes died away Fr Good broke calmly into the shocked silence. "Oh well,...help yourselves".

Building work was begun by John, George Pimm and Sons and the foundation stone was laid on 1st August 1940 by Dom. Justin McCann O.S.B., the Master of St Benet's Hall, Oxford. This stone can still be seen at the back of the present church. While the outbreak of war had not been enough to hinder Fr Lopes's plans, work was soon suspended through lack of funds and, possibly, a shortage of building workers. Matters were desperate; the parish must have a church! What was to be done?

The answer came in the form of a wooden building which would seat 60 people. This was to be attached, 'as a temporary measure' to create a nave for the newly built stone sanctuary. This sanctuary now forms the entrance of the church through double doors when the building was enlarged (see Then & Now pp.20 &21). Notice that the arch had to be filled in and a window added to accommodate the small wooden building. The 'temporary' arrangement remained in use until completion of the present church in 1968. The basilica was destined to remain a dream due to a lack of financial backing and disagreements about the grandiose design. Undaunted, Fr Lopes set out to make this makeshift wooden structure worthy of its calling. The church was completed by the gift of an altar for the splendid sanctuary, and the installation of a small organ which gave splendid service until it died of exhaustion in the 1970s. The altar remains in use today in the side chapel of the present church. The following poem was written by Anastasia Smith 'on the occasion of our first RC Church in Eynsham'. Anastasia, who died in 2006 within days of her 90th birthday was a faithful parishioner to the end.

### **My Little Wooden Church**

Lonely He waits in my little wooden church.  
Lonely for the footsteps on the crude gravel path.  
Lonely for the children as they wend their way  
To worship Him on this Sabbath Day.  
No great carvings hath my little wooden church.  
No spire attaining to the sky;  
Just the low lamp burning on the altar bare,  
The people, heads bowed in silent prayer.

Maurice Couve de Murville, later Archbishop of Birmingham, met Fr Lopes first in 1949 and describes him thus. 'He was vast; his voice was deep and resonant ... he loved conversation; stories, jokes, reminiscences, observations on all aspects of life poured out'. It is not so surprising, given this description and the length of his stay at St Peter's, that Fr Lopes became something of a legend within the community and many tales have survived through the year both of his goodness and his eccentricity.

His calm good nature was certainly needed in the initial negotiations for re-designing and funding the church and presbytery. The cost of the original basilica by 1965 was estimated at £150,000, while there was £17,500 in the building fund. In addition, the monies from the sale of Fr Lopes' house were also available. The house had been left to the Benedictine Order who had offered it to St Peter's. Fr Lopes' executors refused to sanction the new church plans and Fr Good, employing lateral thinking, suggested that the legacy might instead be used to build the presbytery. In 1965 the diocese instructed that building should begin and a parishioner wryly noted "'Good' had triumphed".

By 1966 building had begun and the presbytery was well on the way to completion. In the summer of that year there was a surprise for the parish when Father Good was sent to pastures new. He was not destined to move out of his caravan into the relatively palatial presbytery. It came as no surprise that, being a modest man, he left before most parishioners could say goodbye.

He was succeeded by Father Laurence Daly who 'camped out' in the unfinished presbytery. He had come late to the priesthood and had previously been a quantity surveyor so he was ideally placed to supervise the building of the church and steer a course through to its completion. He was a large man whose slow, stately manner led one parishioner secretly to dub him 'Dilly Dally Daly'.

The foundation stone for the new church was laid in September 1966 by the Right Reverend Joseph Cleary, Bishop of Cresima, Auxiliary bishop of Birmingham, following the blessing of the foundations of the church and the almost complete presbytery. The *Oxford Mail* noted that 'the church cost £30,000 to finish, some which still has to be raised. Until the debt has been cleared the church will not be consecrated'. Everyone waited with great anticipation to see the new St Peter's. The long awaited church was ready to receive her people. St Peter's was beautiful, everything the parishioners had hoped for. The high wooden ceiling added to the feeling of spaciousness and the large windows flooded it with light.

In addition to its pleasing design, the comfort that the new church offered was a welcome change. By some sleight of hand the builders managed to leave the wooden building in place while the new church grew around it and parishioners must have been relieved when they no longer had to teeter across scaffolding boards on their way to Mass.

One interesting feature of the new church that traditionalists will notice is that it is 'the wrong way round with the altar at the western end. We can only guess at the reasons for this, but during the 1960s church design had changed to allow more access to the sanctuary with the altar facing the people. The original sanctuary now at the entrance to the church is narrow and would not have lent itself easily to this more open style.



St Peter's was 'open for business' in 1968, but much of Father Daly's energies still went into overseeing the details of its completion. Despite this, parish duties were not neglected. There was a need for the children attending non-Catholic schools to receive instruction. As well as setting up classes in Eynsham, he wanted classes for the children in the other villages too, and as a first step he set up the first communion classes in Long Hanborough.

In 1970, his difficult task completed, Father Daly moved on and the parish welcomed Father Timothy Dinan. Fr Dinan found himself in a thriving parish, but one that had seen continuing change over the previous ten years and was happy to take things more easily for a while. Part of the building debt was still outstanding and there was also a realisation among parishioners that although the church was complete its upkeep was going to need considerably more money than the old wooden hut. This realisation was shared by Fr Dinan who, while no doubt mindful of the parable of 'the lilies in the field' also had an appreciation that God helps those who help themselves. To the irritation of some parishioners, every couple of weeks the homily would drift into high finance and the vital necessity of a more generous collection. Maybe he had a recurring nightmare that one day he would receive 'the plate' at Sunday Mass and it would be completely empty.

Fr Dinan was quiet and had a wry sense of humour. He carried on with the communion classes begun by Fr Daly and was very popular with the children; he told them jokes and was a good story teller. The classes in Hanborough were held in parishioners' homes. Before long it became difficult to fit everyone in as more children demanded to be involved. I clearly remember him sitting on the floor in my sitting-room with his back comfortably against the warm radiator, surrounded by a sea of attentive children aged from 3 to 12. The children would flood out at the end of the class to wave him off in his black beetle Volkswagen.

During his time in the parish Fr Dinan's health, never robust, began to deteriorate and in 1978 he retired.

St Peter's next priest was Monsignor Francis H Davis. Because of the nature of the parish the day-to-day workload at that time could be tailored to suit Mgr Davis who was already elderly. He was a gentle, modest man and very few in the parish knew that he was a theologian of some note and had taught theology to the seminarians at Oscott College. He was forward thinking and perhaps ahead of his time in his liberal views on social issues. When the Holy Father visited Coventry in 1982 Mgr Davis, as the oldest priest in the diocese, had a special role in the celebration of the Mass.

The small church organ having 'died' before Mgr Davis's arrival, the congregation sang hymns unaccompanied at Sunday morning Mass. This did not prove a great success; one weekend Mgr announced that he had solved the problem



An unusual old view from the 'Nursery' field of St Peter's in its 'wooden hut' days and St Leonard's

by buying taped hymns so that we could 'sing along'. He had actually bought three hymns which were then played week after week. I never hear 'Go, the Mass is ended' without thinking of him.

Mgr Davis did not drive and so the weekly lessons for the children ceased but he did like to visit parishioners in each of the villages. This he did, to our astonishment, on a drop-handled 'racing' bike. The sight of this apparently frail old gentleman leaping on to this formidable machine was unforgettable. He would pedal off at high speed, head down, completely ignoring other traffic as it parted before him like the Red Sea, while we said a prayer that he would cross the A40 in one piece.

In complete contrast to Fr Dinan, Mgr appeared blissfully unaware that St Peter's was in danger of insolvency. He emptied the coffers by innocently announcing one day that he had bought a carpet to cover the barren coldness of the vinyl-tiled floor. The ladies of the parish were somewhat taken aback by his choice of a geometric pattern in shades of dried mustard. The more irreverent members of the congregation reckoned the carpet had fallen off the back of a lorry, or that our gentle Mgr had done a shrewd deal on a job lot! He was such a loveable man that no one had the heart to tell him that his choice was not generally thought to be a design classic, although the added warmth the carpet brought to the church was appreciated. Parishioners were alarmed to hear of Mg's next project. He had to be dissuaded from completely remodelling the interior of the church because he disliked the unorthodox positioning of the altar at the western end. Bankruptcy loomed!

In 1983 Mgr Davis was asked if a strip of land could be bought by St Leonard's to extend its churchyard. Original correspondence shows that the dry-stone wall between the churches was to be taken down and rebuilt. This would have been an expensive undertaking and after protracted negotiations with Eynsham Parish Council Mgr Davis was reluctantly persuaded to agree that a chain link fence could be erected instead and masked with a beech hedge. A price of £1,350 for the land was agreed but the sale was not completed.

Towards the end of Mgr's tenure he had become very frail; parishioners had taken on many routine tasks and some tried to increase a spirit of community by inviting other parishioners to their homes for coffee after Sunday morning Mass. In general though, the parish had become rather quiet and sleepy by 1984 - and then came the arrival of Father Aldo Tapparo.

Father Aldo swept through the parish like a whirlwind, leaving us all gasping in his wake. Ceremonial and music were back! St Peter's had become used to Mgr Davis's 'laissez-faire' style and now found every aspect of parish life under scrutiny

and subject to change. The new energy and enthusiasm were welcomed but with some apprehension. What would he think of next?

Fr Aldo was greatly concerned that the laity should play their full part in the liturgy. A short time after his arrival an occasion arose for the renewal of baptismal vows. Father set off solemnly; "Do you reject Satan?". Back came an almost inaudible "I do". He continued and back again wafted the faint response. He stopped and looked around stern faced, "Well, do you or don't you? We don't have to do this. Now let's start again as if we mean it!" Our responses came out loud and clear, "I DO". We could not have done it better if we had been US Marines - "SIR, yes SIR".

A small electronic organ appeared and (Fred Plumb having retired, possibly nervous of the high standard now required) each Sunday found Fr Aldo flying from altar to organ and back again, stage-managing all aspects of the Mass. He had a very good voice and sang while he played. He was unimpressed by our mumbled singing so a choir was soon formed and the congregation's meagre skills were licked into shape. Fr Aldo was always careful that the enjoyment of the music enhanced the liturgy and did not detract from the solemnity of the Mass. Music became, and remains, an important and valued part of the liturgy at St Peter's.

It was decided that there was to be an induction ceremony for our new priest. We couldn't remember this happening before but it seemed like a good idea. The preparations sent priest and parish into overdrive. Everything had to be right and it was certainly worth the effort: the most impressive occasion the church had yet seen. Another impressive occasion took place on 8th September 1986 when the Service of Dedication of St Peter's Church was enacted by The Right Reverend Leo McCartie, Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham. This important event was celebrated with all due solemnity and the attention to detail that we had come to expect.

There are those who will admit that this attention to detail sometimes caused gritted teeth among those who had to meet Father's exacting standards. An altar server of the time remembers that the geometric design on the carpet came into its own as a marker for the altar servers who were required to stand in exactly the right position so as not to spoil the symmetry of the grouping around the altar.

Eynsham Parish Council wished to complete the sale of land for St Leonard's church but Fr Aldo tried to re-open the question of the boundary fence, believing that the ancient dry-stone wall should, after all, be moved and re-instated, rather than lost. Following a flurry of letters he conceded that re-negotiation was impractical and in 1985 the sale was completed and the wall disappeared. The chain-link was erected and a baby beech hedge planted.

The rural nature of the parish, which includes several villages on either side of the busy A40, meant that a sense of community was lacking. Parishioners simply

did not know each other. The value of meeting after Mass had been proved, and a rota was set up to organise coffee at the back of the church after Sunday morning Mass and we learned to mingle under Father's watchful eye. This was the first of a variety of social gatherings designed to bring the parish together.

We are fortunate to have large grounds and these were used for a summer barbecue. In the autumn a parish supper was planned and was held in the church. This caused some unease among older members of the congregation, but there was simply nowhere else. Pews were turned around and tables squeezed between them. Fr Aldo, ever the perfectionist, rushed around as the tables were laid making sure that cloths were flawless and place settings inch perfect. Dinner for 80 people was prepared in the tiny vestry, although how this was managed remains a mystery. The event was so successful that it was decided to hold a 'pancake feast' on Shrove Tuesday in St Leonard's church hall. This attracted not only our own parishioners but also the wider village community. These social events were initiated largely by Fr Aldo and they have all continued until the present and have greatly contributed to parish life.

There were times when Father's enthusiasm proved his undoing. One Sunday morning he was wielding the thurible with gusto and clouds of incense were filling the church when there was an almighty bang. The incense burner had crashed into the corner of the altar and the force of the collision had broken off a fragment of the stone. This flew several feet through the air into the side chapel. There was a stunned silence before he continued as if nothing had happened. During communion a member of the congregation stealthily retrieved the small chunk of stone and by that evening it had been stuck back in its rightful place. You can barely see the join unless you look very closely!

Father Aldo's love of music drew the parish into a great debate when he decided that the church must have a proper pipe organ. "How much will it cost?" "Do we really need one?" Questions such as this weren't relevant: the bit was between his teeth and the search was on for the right instrument. Great Britain couldn't provide and the search was widened to Europe. Eventually workmen arrived from Belgium to install the organ. We were taken aback at the size and splendour of the beast, but it had to be admitted that it looked impressive and made a wonderful sound! Fred Plumb could not resist it and took to slipping into the church to play when the church was empty, although he rarely played at Mass.

People had come to enjoy the faster tempo of parish life and were sorry when in 1987 the time came for Fr Aldo to move to the larger parish of Bicester. It was time for another change of pace and style with the entrance of Father John Tolkien.

At the time of his arrival I am not sure that Fr Tolkien really wanted to come to Eynsham despite the fact that Oxford had been his home. It may be that he saw it as

a semi-retirement which he felt was premature. He kept in motion the well-oiled machine that had been organised by his predecessor and gradually seemed to become more at home. Indeed, he took to the notion of retirement and if called on to take on an extra task he would growl "I am supposed to be retired you know!" He zealously guarded his day off and we were careful not to intrude, but some wondered what would happen if a parishioner was foolhardy enough to die on a Tuesday.

Fr Tolkien was a strong character who could appear rather fierce if roused. A special irritation was reserved for parents who did not remove noisy children, especially during the homily. He could also be a kind and generous man. It was during this time that a shelter for the homeless in Oxford, 'Gatehouse', asked for the help of local churches to provide food on a regular basis. Father had a long held concern for the welfare of homeless people and was quick to encourage us to respond.

Fr Tolkien became very concerned with security after a break-in at the church. As an elderly man he may have felt isolated in the presbytery and it was at this time that the wall between his garden and the car park was built. He liked company and let it be known that invitations for Sunday lunch were always welcome. Given the slightest encouragement, he would hold forth about his father, JRR Tolkien, of whom he was rightly enormously proud. Parishioners too enjoyed the connection and were pleased casually to mention to visitors that "our priest's father was JRR Tolkien, the Lord of the Rings author, you know".

It had long been recognised that St Peter's needed a parish hall but the financial outlay had made this a dream. For Fr Tolkien the question wasn't whether we could have a hall, but rather, how much did we want one? If we were willing to do some serious fund-raising he was happy to provide the shortfall. The archives don't show what proportion of the cost was raised by parishioners but, due to Fr Tolkien's amazing generosity, within what seemed a very short time plans were agreed and our hall was a reality. This excellent meeting place the 'Tolkien Room' is in constant use and its value to the parish cannot be over-estimated.

English Heritage wanted to explore the site of Eynsham Abbey. This would involve excavating the entire north-south length of the church grounds, from the eastern boundary to the eastern end of the church to a depth of about 12 feet. Fr Tolkien's enthusiasm for this idea may seem surprising given his dislike of disruption to his routine. He was obviously curious to see what would be discovered and perhaps the scale of the undertaking appealed to him. The priest's generosity also played a part in this project which proved to be very extensive and expensive. The results of the archaeological dig and the discoveries made have been detailed elsewhere. They were very impressive and worth all the effort involved. In 1994, in failing health, Father Tolkien retired to Oxford.

Our new priest, Father David Mead, bounced into the parish in 1994. He had recently retired as an army chaplain and was full of enthusiasm for his new role. His quirky sense of humour was immediately in evidence in the form of his weekly bulletin which, instead of a straightforward list of forthcoming events, took the form of brain-teasing jottings in which the relevant facts jostled with jokes, reflections and literary allusions. Some parishioners were entertained by the bulletin and spent time teasing out every last reference, while some were baffled and occasionally needed a translation.

Here is an easy example of his style, taken from his first-ever bulletin at St Peter's:

### *POOP THEE NOT*

*Another thing I have to announce without knowing a great deal about it is (and I quote) The Three Churches' Garden Party. Next Friday, 7.30pm, at 2 Newlands Street. Tickets are (I'm told) available at Mass today @ £2.50 or (I'm quoting again) "£1.50 for Concessions" I have no idea what Concessions are, or what they believe in, but on this occasion they're probably on to a good thing.*

### *NOT QUITE LEFT, RIGHT?*

*The above party gives me a forum in which to celebrate. I am here a little early, within my terminal leave: technically I am still a soldier and shall be so until 2 Jun inclusive. Friday is therefore my first day as a civilian. If euphoria causes me to misbehave, please bring me home, put me to bed, and be gentle with Saturday's reveille.*

As might be expected, soldierly efficiency was soon applied to licking the parish paperwork into shape. Parish registers were updated and visits scheduled to all parishioners. The parish's filing system was organised on military lines - if it could be filed, Father filed it, preferably in triplicate.

The church and the presbytery were beginning to suffer from the shortcomings of 1960s building design and were in need of renovation, particularly the heating system. Fr Mead was just the person to organise it. Given the penchant for DIY which he displayed after leaving the parish, we must be grateful he didn't buy a set of plumber's tools! The opportunity was taken to knock down the odd wall in the presbytery and to upgrade facilities, and parishioners were not surprised to discover that once again the church's coffers were verging on empty.

Younger parishioners will remember the children's Masses at that time. These were held infrequently but Fr Mead took enormous trouble over them. He would group the children together in the front pews and speak directly to them. Two Masses come to mind. In the first he put on his vestments one by one before Mass and explained why he wore each of them. After Mass he questioned the children about what he had told them. They remembered everything. In a similar exercise he

produced "my portable church". This specially designed box contained every item needed to say Mass and had been made for use during his service in Northern Ireland.

Some parishioners were concerned that Fr Mead's nomadic army lifestyle might occasionally have led him to undervalue their attachment to the fabric and customs of the church that they had attended for decades. Change is never easy for anyone. Fr Mead's brisk, chirpy bonhomie was (and presumably still is) balanced by a quieter side most in evidence in his approach to the sick and bereaved and in his skill in helping those on the margins of the parish. His taste was for a quieter, more contemplative Mass. He had felt called to the idea of setting up a small retreat and in 1997 he decided the time was right and he set off for the wilds of the West Country.

So it was that in 1997 we were informed that our new parish priest would be Father Andrew McGann, a Mill Hill Missionary 'on loan' to the diocese. Having an old-fashioned notion of missionaries we awaited our new 'fire and brimstone' priest with some trepidation. Well, how wrong could we be?

After only a few hours in the parish one lady had decided that "He's a pussy cat". I doubt that 'pussy cat' was one of the phrases he had in mind when Fr McGann asked what I intended to write about him. "What do *you* think I should say?" I asked in turn. His reply was typical, "There is nothing to say, I'm just bland." Well how wrong could *he* be ?

Father McGann was totally unflappable, sailing through the trials and tribulations of parish life with generosity and unfailing good humour (well, almost unfailing!). He had a never-ending fund of jokes, mostly one liners - and mostly terrible! He also had a tendency to throw quotations in Latin, Spanish and Dutch into the conversation. This can be disconcerting if you're not sure whether you're supposed to understand them. On principle I always demanded a translation.

He was an armchair sportsman, golf being his favourite game, but he would welcome you cheerfully when you rang the doorbell - even if the champion was on the eighteenth tee. "No, it's alright, I wasn't really watching it."

He was a man who seemed at ease in any company and who had a knack for making those around feel at home. A personal memory is of a large family gathering to which Fr McGann was invited. I planned that he should sit with my husband's rather staid brothers and sisters but he had other ideas and settled himself in the midst of the Irish nephews and nieces - potentially a much more rowdy bunch! As the evening wore on, laughter continually floated up the room. A new and appreciative audience had been discovered for his jokes. Their verdict was "we had a great 'craic', he's grand altogether, so he is." Father's verdict on the Ruane clan remains unrecorded.



Did this paragon have any faults? He believed that wheels, once set in motion, will continue to move under their own momentum. He took some time to grasp that like 'the mills of God' the wheels of Eynsham grind slowly. This laissez-faire philosophy could leave parishioners irate and gasping for breath if, as occasionally happened, it led to an under-estimation of the time and effort it takes to organise something. Invariably things did get done and the unruffled Fr McGann's beatific smile seemed to say "I told you so".

A notable event during recent years, of course, was the Millennium of 2000. The upkeep of our church continues to be an ever present duty and as part of the Millennium celebrations an opportunity was taken to do various outstanding tasks, including improving the lighting in the church.

The parish has always been generous in supporting various charities but wanted, in addition, to offer on-going help in a more focused way - to see it make a difference. Fr McGann had one worked in Cochabamba, Bolivia and was able to set up contact with a charity in Cochabamba looking after and educating the large number of desperately poor street children. This project proved rewarding for all involved and we looked forward to continue building bridges between our communities.

In 2003 we were pleased to welcome the Archbishop of Birmingham, Vincent Nicholls, to officiate at Sunday morning Mass. The visit was informal, only two days notice was given and few parishioners knew of the visit until the Archbishop appeared at the door of the vestry. It was a very happy and memorable occasion. Later the same year the parish received a Diocesan Visitation which involved many parishioners in preparations of both a practical and spiritual nature. These included the compilation of a Parish Profile. This offered us the opportunity to take stock of our community.

As part of the groundwork for the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the parish, a parish mission was undertaken. Two Mill Hill missionaries, who had trained for the priesthood with Fr McGann, led us in a spiritual exploration of our parish and, building on the work done in the Parish Profile, helped us to focus on the possibilities for future development.

Then in 2004 much to our surprise, Fr Andrew announced that for health reasons he had decided to retire and would be moving to Burnley immediately after the 75th anniversary celebrations.

So, a few days after these celebrations we welcomed a new priest to St Peter's, Fr Paul Chamberlain. The first highlight under his leadership was in 2005 when we welcomed our Archbishop again with our fellow Christians from Eynsham and other visitors to celebrate the millennium of the foundation of Eynsham Abbey. However, given poor health, the dual task of being our Parish Priest and running

the Diaconate Training Programme for the Archdiocese was just too much for Fr Paul and within a year he moved on, and once again we wondered who would replace him.

We were glad therefore to hear that he would be replaced by Fr Martin Flatman who was already known to the people of St Peter's because he had helped Fr McGann and Fr Chamberlain in the parish on a number of occasions. He arrived in October 2005, and like Fr Chamberlain was called upon by the Archbishop to do two jobs. However, unlike Fr Chamberlain who often had to travel to Birmingham for his duties, Fr Martin's other job as the continuing Chaplain of Oxford Brookes University only required him to commute to Oxford, making him easily available to us and to students and staff in Oxford. The other new experience for St Peter's was that Fr Martin had a wife and a grown-up family, as he was one of the married Anglican clergy who had become Catholics in the mid 1990s. Each of them, after a three year part-time period of re-training, had then been given a dispensation by the Pope to be ordained as a priest without the normal obligation to celibacy.

Fr Martin's first task was to complete the work of repairing the Church roof. Fr Paul had already led the Parish in raising the money and engaging the builders, and so the work was soon put in hand and the water that had been dripping into parts of the church for many years was no more. He was then able to renew the lighting and provide new outside lighting and signs so that people could find the church more easily in daylight and at night. A year later, he was faced with the need for a complete renewal of the roof of all the other parts of the St Peter's complex and a new pitched roof was put on the Presbytery and Sacristy in the autumn of 2007. Meanwhile Fr Martin was assiduous in his advertising of the church, not just in Eynsham but in all the villages served by St Peter's so that many more people now know where their local Catholic Church is even if they never visit it. He also works hard to keep in touch with all Catholics in the Parish, whether or not they come to Mass, by sending them Christmas and Easter cards.

We can be grateful that each of our priests during those nearly 80 years has taken the parish to his heart and helped to shape and guide it. We may also, in retrospect, be grateful for the difficulties encountered over the years in the building of the church in which we are now privileged to worship. The challenges and setbacks faced by each generation brought our community together and helped to strengthen our faith and sense of purpose.

Our parish has come a long way in almost 80 years and it is hard for most of today's parishioners to imagine the problems which have been overcome on that journey. Some of us remember the last days of the 'little wooden hut'. One or two can remember beyond that as far back as the building of the wooden church and these parishioners had the privilege of knowing all of our parish priests.

We are a small parish, but a lively one with lots of activities run by the parishioners. Good work by many different priests and laity over the years have meant that those who come to Mass still represent a good cross-section of people of all ages and backgrounds. We have a small but lively group of children and young people, and with new young families moving into the area, it will be interesting to see how we move forward based on the nearly 80 years of splendid work.

To those future generations we can only say:

St Peter's, Eynsham is a very special parish. Please look after it well!



Father John Ludlow Lopes 1882-1961  
Founder of St Peter's Catholic Church in Eynsham, and its first  
priest from 1928 until he retired in 1959.

## IS EYNESHAM A NUISANCE?

by **Father John Ludlow Lopes**

*Two years after his arrival in Eynsham in 1928 John Lopes wrote the following delightful defence of the town which was to be his home for 33 years. It was in response to an attack published in the Witney Gazette.*

Sir, --- I hope that my fellow townspeople will have read the remarks of our superior though anonymous visitor in your issue of 24th March from the woolly metropolis on the Windrush [Witney] with the same amusement as I did.

However, I think that they amply justify my contention at the town-planning meeting on Friday last (when I seconded the motion adopting the principle of town planning) that in the eyes of our flourishing neighbours Eynsham is the "little Lazarus" of West Oxfordshire.

A knowledge of the past glories, and a correct appreciation alike of our town will, I think, correct any such false idea.

For nigh upon 1,000 years Eynsham-by-Thames has filled an honourable place in the history of England.

The foundation of the great Benedictine Abbey by King Ethelred in A.D. 1005 laid the foundations alike of religion and culture in this part of England long before the neighbouring University of Oxford came into being.

Great English kings, like Henry II, and saints, such as Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln have trodden our streets.

Councils whose enactments have been of high importance to the development of Church and State have been held in our town.

It is stated in a recent authoritative book, "Towns and Town Planning" Hughes and Lambourne (Oxford University Press), that the great mediaeval Abbot of Eynsham, Adam, was a pioneer in this branch of social science.

In the field of English literature, the names of Abbot Aelfric, the Saxon writer of the 11th century, and of our distinguished townsman, Sir Edmund Chambers, the leading Shakespearean authority at the present time, are familiar to scholars all the world over, even if not in Witney.

It is true that the destruction and spoliation of the Abbey in the 16th century and the consequent religious and social upheavals, greatly reduced the prosperity and importance of Eynsham, as of many other English towns.

But the existence of our beautiful little Free School and of our numerous post-Reformation Charities bear eloquent witness to the loyalty and generosity of Eynsham people to their home town, even in these leaner times.

At the present time, the prospects of Eynsham, we are officially assured, are very bright.

The new road surface, as well as the ample provision for lighting, water and drainage, and the excellent building sites available here, will certainly attract many fresh inhabitants to our ancient town.

And, as I would like to testify from my own experience of two years' residence in Eynsham, they will receive a friendly welcome on all sides.

In short, we at Eynsham are both proud of our past and confident of our future development, and we emphatically deny that we are a nuisance, either to ourselves or to anyone else.

We are, however, highly honoured by being singled out as the pioneers in our neighbourhood in that fight for individual freedom, based upon the dignity of human life, and for that ordered civic progress which has ever been the peculiar glory of the little towns of civilized Europe and their special contribution to the world's history.

Some of the clearest thinkers of our time hold that on the success of this movement depends the very existence of England in the future. --- I am, etc.,

JOHN LOPES

# EYNSHAM HISTORY GROUP

**Founded 1959**

The E.H.G. exists primarily to encourage studies in, and to promote knowledge of the history of the village and parish of Eynsham, Oxfordshire, by means of regular meetings (normally at least ten), with invited speakers, during the winter and spring; and occasional outings in the summer.

**New members are welcome.**

Please apply to the Secretary for details of meetings and subscriptions.

Officers and Committee members subject to confirmation at the AGM in March  
Unless otherwise stated, all addresses are in Eynsham

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