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## Memories of Joyce Kirkland

In 1973 Joyce Kirkland looked back over the sixty years that she had worshipped at St Stephen's Tivoli

The following 'Profile' though not in itself a biography is still of great interest in that it gives a very chatty picture of life at St Stephen's at the beginning of the 1900s. It was written by the late Joyce Kirkland for the centenary of St Stephen's in 1973 but did not see the light of day.

On looking at mother's diary, a five year one, I see the entry, "Sam and I went to St Stephen's Church special War Service, Sunday August 9<sup>th</sup> 1914."

We came from Worcestershire to live in the Lansdown Road in the Spring of 1913 and though my earliest memory of being taken to church is of Christmas Day in the Cathedral at Worcester, I also remember being taken to St Mark's, Cheltenham, as of course we had moved into that parish. On emerging from that service, my mother said "Too low" and we never went there again. Then came St Stephen's, pew number 15 in the north aisle and this must have been in Canon Jennings' time. Matins, and how I was bored! I could not yet read the dreary sounding psalms and I remember most vividly the change when Robert Hodson came as Parish Priest as his sermons were something that even a child could appreciate. He was a superb preacher and teacher.

What did the child of 60 years ago think about church going anyway? I think we accepted it much as we accepted going to school – teeth had to be cleaned, a habit to be formed young. We sang the hymns and in no time the familiar words of the loved Book of Common Prayer were part of our understanding and love. Hoddy began a new chapter at St Stephen's. He it was who introduced the Choral Eucharist at 10am before Matins and as we came out of the former service, the diehards of Edwardian Cheltenham, the colonels and their Mem Sahibs waited in the porch for their Matins!

The Curates I remember were Mr Crossman who did duty in the war while Hoddy was a Chaplain to the Forces in France. The Rev Hugh Marmaduke Rowden died of the wicked killer influenza in 1918. He took the children's service hardly able to stand or speak and retired immediately to bed in his digs in one of the tall terraced houses in St Stephen's Road – and died. My mother had sent delicacies round to try to tempt him to eat, but to no avail. His Memorial Tablet is on the wall as one enters the vestry from the church, and he was buried near the south door of Charlton King's Church.

Those of us who were children in the 1914-1918 war will never forget the insufficient nourishment in the horrible margarine, the dearth of potatoes, the soldiers in the houses in the Lansdown Road, troops marching down the roads singing "It's a long way to Tipperary", the ambulances bringing the wounded to New Court Hospital, and above all the intense cold. One's face sponge was solid ice and so was the water in the jug in one's bedroom.

Robert Hodson returned from the war and set about to build the new vicarage in Andover Road. Until then number 1, Lansdown Terrace was the Vicar's home and he had a small chapel in the basement. I learned to kick a football with his son John, taught by Mr Hawker the famous and dearly loved Verger for so many years. John Hodson, Robert's son, became a Priest and up to 1973 he was a Canon of Cape Town Cathedral and Rector of Christ Church, Constantia in Cape Province.

Confirmation classes were held privately at the vicarage or in church en masse. I was instructed in the vicarage and was confirmed in St Stephen's in March 1921 along with about fifty others. Old Bishop Gibson confirmed us and of course all the girls had new white dresses, cotton gloves and a lawn veil. Girls up one side, boys the other. My father, a die-hard Victorian had refused to allow me to 'be done' until I was 14, whereas Hoddy believed 12 or 13 was the right age. First Communion was Easter Sunday, a superb spring day, and on returning from the 7am service, I found our beloved cat had produced six kittens in the chaff bin in the stables. Yes, we still kept horses in those days. My mother and I used to get up at 6am and creep out of the house and walk along the Lansdown Road to the 7am Communion. We hoped that my father would be unaware of our excursion. He was deeply suspicious of High Church practices and had been brought up from 1860 by an extreme evangelical maiden aunt. Church thrice on a Sunday, no games and only holy books read. No wonder he said that he'd had his fill of church going and anyway, he always caught cold when he went! I think he was afraid that we would end up as religious maniacs and on reading some of his family's letters from 100 years ago, I think some of his family actually verged on that malady.

As we grew older, girlish giggles assailed us in church. We ogled the choirboys and I was even taken for a walk by one and kissed in what is now a built up area around Hatherley. Once when our mirth overtook us in church, Miss Schuster of beloved memory, leaned forward and said, "If you don't behave I shall take you out!" This did fairly shake us up. My mother's deafness meant that we sat two pews from the front at the Eucharist and Evensong, so there was also the eagle eye of Hoddy to subdue us. The organist was Mr Townley and he collected a first class choir. Dr Herbert Brewer of Gloucester Cathedral came to play for community hymn singing at one time. There were three Townleys in the choir and also Ronald Greenslade who had a superb voice.

The War Memorial Chapel was begun soon after the war and one only has to look at the inscribed names to realise how heavy were our losses. I sometimes read them and remember back to the gay young men in khaki, brothers of my girl friends, home on leave from the trenches, but whose names are now there.

The Reverend Addenbroke came and the stirring days of Hoddy were followed by a period of consolidation. He was much older but had the same tradition of Churchmanship. I married in 1930 and Hoddy came back to tie the knot as they say and Rev Addenbroke assisted. He was a great favourite at the tea parties of the old ladies in the parish and I can well remember his kindness, firmness, white hair and red face.

After 1930 until 1947, I was following the drum as Hoddy called it, returning from leave only to make the acquaintance of Canon Ronald Sutch. But Father Hilder I did know well. He it was who prepared my daughter for confirmation. My son was baptised at St Stephen's by Rev Addenbroke, and my daughter was married there by Rev George Willis.

There have been many changes over the 60 years of my worshipping there. Many influences, some stranger than others, but I have always thought that there is something St Stephen's can give to its Parish Priests, as well as what we the laity can give to them, and far, oh infinitely far more that we can give to the God whom we worship within these walls.

Baptisms, confirmations, First Communion, weddings, funerals, and then it all begins again in another generation.

St Stephen's has an ugly exterior, but after my daughter's wedding a Priest wrote to me that it was one of the loveliest Victorian Churches he had ever known.

Joyce Kirkland, the author of these memories died in the late 1990s and hoped that this 'Memory' would be shared with a wider audience.'