

The Black Cardinal

Fr Rushmer had been ill for some time and had already announced that he would soon be retiring but his sudden death in 1953 was still unexpected.

His replacement was a 'Master of the Society of the Holy Cross,' Revd Sidney Allso.

Fr Allso's thoughts and words are a reminder that the 1960s did not come as a thunderbolt from a blue sky. Divorce, sex, abortion and women's rights were topics of rising concern and Sidney Allso had strong opinions on all of them. With his black cape and hat and rather stern features some of our older parishioners still have memories of his forbidding presence.

What is perhaps unfair is that the records only reveal the irritations and conflicts. No one bothers to write down how many ill or elderly people were visited, what difficulties had been eased by a well-placed word or comfort drawn from a quiet intervention or how many times he had performed mass when his mind and body were telling him to stay in bed.

Congregations are all too often united by shared annoyances about present incumbents and nostalgic affection for whoever preceded them. Nevertheless, Fr Allso was quite clearly, a bit tricky.



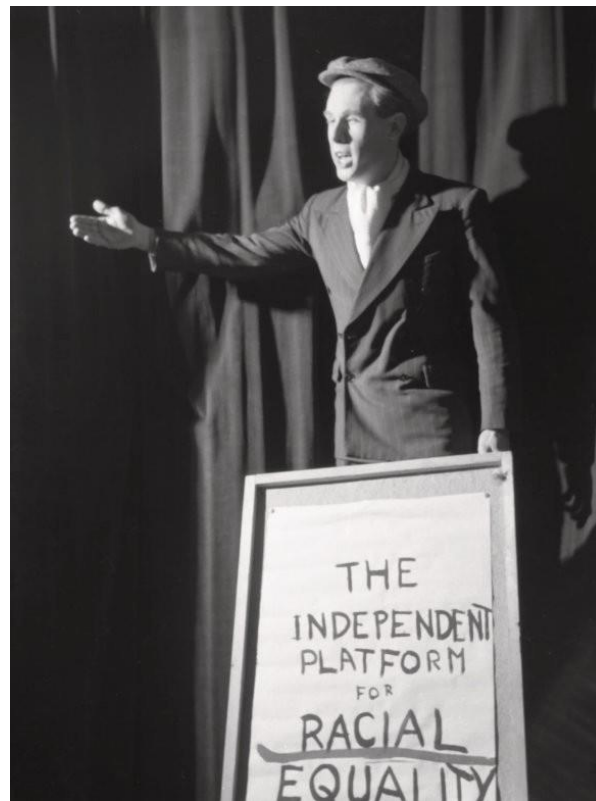


His name, however, can be found as a notable guest at the great gatherings of Anglo-Catholic England in the 1950s.

There is a note of a requiem mass with him sitting amongst the head of the Catholic League, the Gregorian Association, the Medici Society and various other dignitaries.

He arrived with an understanding that the parish would be 'amenable to the Catholic faith.' Indeed he was, he said, committed to 'win East Finchley for Christ' and after that the 'conversion of England to the Catholic faith.' It is always good to have ambition.

Meanwhile, even East Finchley was feeling the wind of change. There was talk of equal rights and the Rex generated a little scandal with an X certificate film.





Fr Allso felt East Finchley had been neglected and All Saints' needed to re-engage with the community and bring the worshippers back to the pews. His little congregation, who had more enthusiasm for fetes and badminton, displayed rather less missionary zeal. He announced that there would be a Franciscan Mission to East Finchley. Sister Eudora and others would seek to break down the barriers between All Saints' and its parish. The response from the people of East Finchley was said to have been for the most part 'courteous,' but there are no reports of any converts.

Fr Allso then declared that there would be in January 1957 a 'Family Fortnight', a 'Firm Faith' Mission. Afterwards he expressed his regret that it had not been met with 'a great measure of loyal support.' He tried again in 1958 but this time it was a more manageable Family Week. There is no record of anything following in 1959.

He was not defeated. When someone mentioned in 'any other business' during a particularly dull PCC meeting that there was to be a discussion of the hydrogen bomb in North Finchley, Fr Allso said it was important that someone from the parish should attend to ensure that Finchley's position on nuclear weapons was not determined entirely by protestants. 'Rock and Roll,' he declared, was forbidden on church grounds for 'structural reasons.'

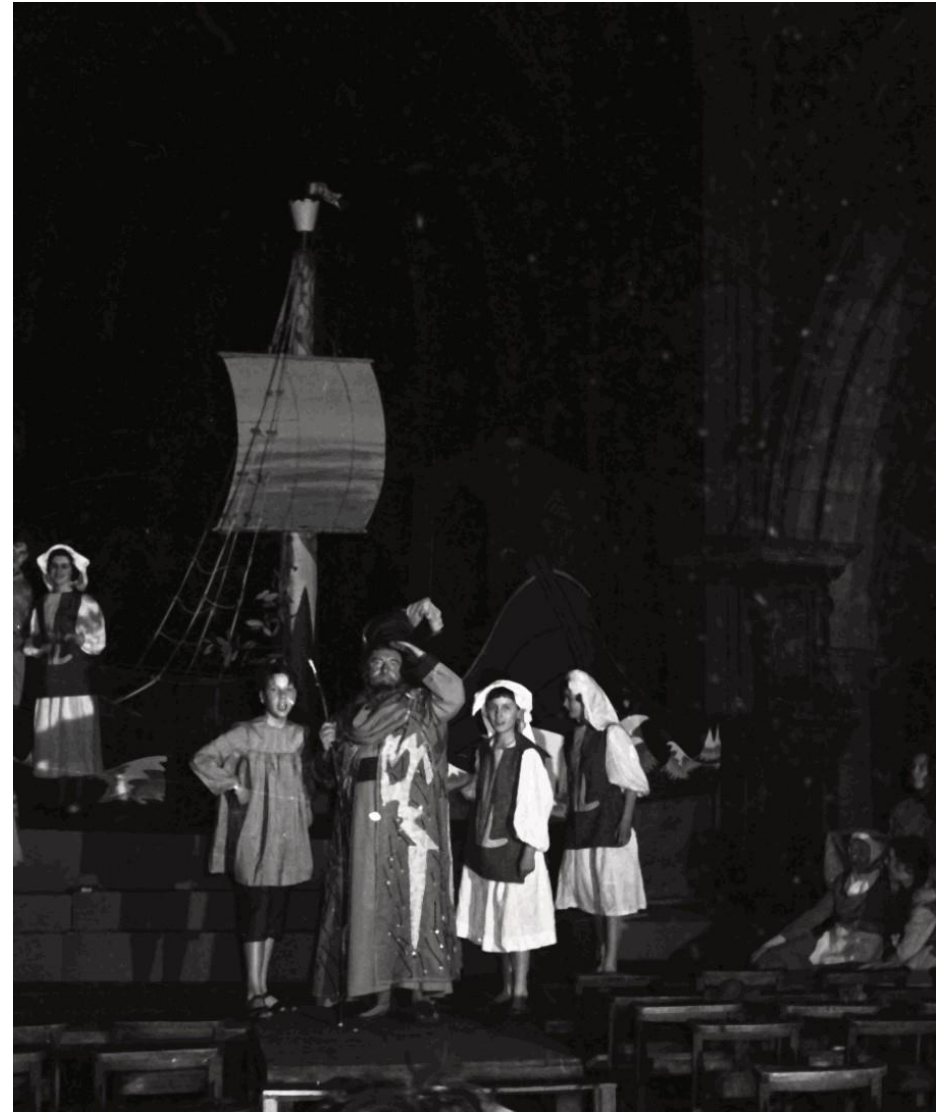




Of course there were high points in his time in East Finchley. The most memorable featured a man who later became rather familiar. Those of us of a certain age will remember an advert for Yellow Pages (you'll have to explain what that is to anyone under 30) with a character called JR Hartley played by Norman Lumsden, who was trying to find his book on fly fishing. He was also an opera singer.

In April 1959 Norman Lumsden played Noye at All Saints' in Benjamin Britten's children's opera, *Noye's Fludde*. The 'voice of God' was played by the wonderfully eccentric Revd Kenneth Loveless who was a passionate Morris dancer and collector of coffin handles. *Noye's Fludde* had only just had its premiere in Aldeburgh when the youth of East Finchley had a crack at it. The Finchley Children's Music Group was set up for the production and sixty years on they are still going. It was a great success and there were plans to stage it again the year after.

However, Fr Allso could not forgive an 'incident' in the church in which the show's 'producer' was discovered smoking. It was said 'an unpleasant scene ensued,' and the vicar was also led to understand that the offending producer might not have been a practising Christian. The PCC voted seven to three in favour of the vicar, with four abstentions. The minutes refer to a 'long discussion.' *Noye's Fludde* went elsewhere.



Noye's Fludde





But if the PCC minutes are anything go by Fr Allso's main concern was money. The choirboys were asking for a shilling to perform. The answer was no.

He said the reliance on church fetes, collections and bazaars had to come to an end and imposed a new system of planned giving. The Easter offering would remain but it would now be a gift for the priest. Letters came in, many were opposed, some were in favour. One anonymous note pointed out the verger was woefully underpaid.

In 1959, the press attended the All Saints' AGM and listened as Fr Allso bemoaned his meagre stipend and said he would have to take on another job to make ends meet. Members of the PCC were appalled at this 'washing of dirty linen in public.' Fr Allso was unrepentant.

Indeed, he displayed a certain bluntness in the way he dealt with his flock saying at one point that he had never before met such an 'apathetic congregation.' However, it was not just in the local press that you could detect a certain degree of discord.

The parish paper's name was changed in 1954 to 'Outlook' and it was very definitely going to be Fr Allso's outlook.

He spoke out against any reform of the divorce law and in a peculiarly personal tirade he railed against working mothers, especially working mothers in the Mothers' Union. What made this upsetting to the congregation was that this was clearly directed at one of their members, a Mrs Joan Hanchet who was employed by the MU.



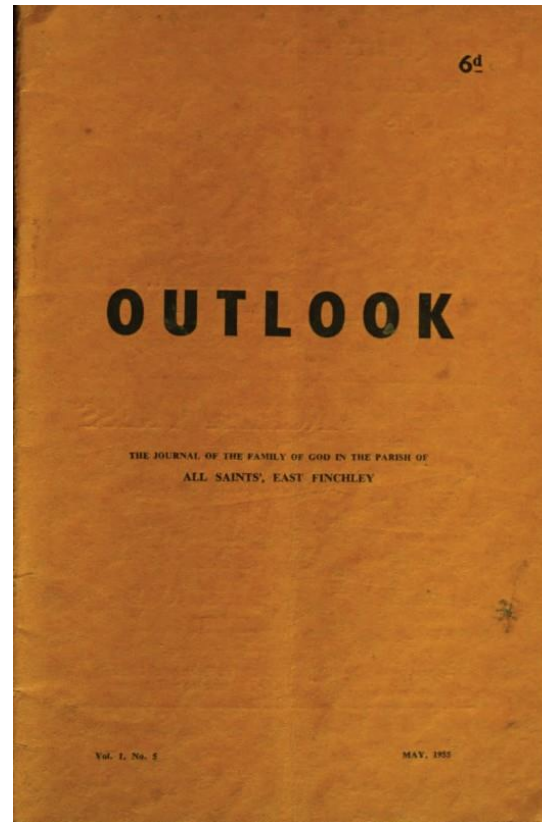


She and her husband sat in church listening to a sermon that was a personal condemnation. They were not the only ones to feel deeply upset. Sixty years on, the sense of outrage had not entirely faded.

Meanwhile in the opposite corner was the editor of the parish magazine, John Purchase. He was not a fan of Fr Allso, writing at one point:

‘Fr Allso usually manages to introduce any new procedure or idea to the congregation with a suddenness and vigour that has the impact of a bombshell behind it!’

One of those bombshells was his decision to create his own rival youth organisation, the Church Lads Brigade.



All Saints’ was never a large church and to have two separate uniformed youth groups suggested a degree of internal division. The scouts, who had for reasons now forgotten, adopted red neckerchiefs were not going to give way. The scout hut, which was known within the church as the Kremlin, was the domain of Mr Purchase.

The 8 stalwart members of the new brigade under Fr Allso’s right hand man, Colonel Bull, soldiered on for a while but all the enthusiasm lay within John Purchase’s scout pack.

This was perhaps then not the moment to introduce a bit of satirical humour to the parish paper.

“It’s not your business to think.”

Fr Allso was described as a man with a somewhat severe demeanour. No one remembers much levity in his day to day encounters but that did not stop Nesfield Andrewes, the paterfamilias of the Andrewes clan. The paper, which included an insert from the ‘Fiery Cross’ was up to that point entirely joke free.

The story, a little Alice in Wonderland related satire in which Alice encounters a gloomy and judgmental ‘Black Cardinal’ and is denounced as being ‘no better than a protestant’ did not go down well neither did a comic version of the church calendar which featured St Pancreas and St Duodenum and the feast of Agatha Christi.

Strangely this copy of the magazine is missing from the church’s archives, but we do have the following August edition and it had a new editor, Fr Allso.

By 1965 the number of people on the Electoral Roll had slumped to just 77. Even the scouts left All Saints’.

ALICE

A hitherto unpublished manuscript. With apologies to Lewis Carroll, Messrs. MacMillan, and any whose sense of humour is unaffected.

It was a fine still morning in early summer, with that faint hint of mistiness that promised warmth and sunshine later in the day. Alice was on her way to Mass, and as she walked up the hill towards the church, she felt that there could be no keener happiness this side of heaven to be compared with going to early Mass on such a morning as this.

“That’s a bad frame of mind to be taking to church!” said a stentorian voice, and she looked up to see the Black Cardinal towering above her.

“I beg your pardon?” said Alice.

“No chance of snow this morning,” said the Cardinal. “Not much virtue in going to church on a morning like this.”

“But,” said Alice, “I thought . . .”

“It’s not your business to think!” exclaimed a voice, and Alice turned to see the Mock Papal sitting in a confessional at the side of the road “Perfect obedience,” the Mock Papal went on, “is all you need. Poverty you have already, and no credit to you or your parents.”

“Have you got a headache?” broke in the Black Cardinal.



