



Harmony in Black and White

The 1960s arrive.



In 1966 Eric Coombs, the Sacristan of All Saints', began knocking on people's doors. He had good news to impart, Father Allso had retired. Within a year there was a report in the local newspaper that the congregation at All Saints' had doubled in size. Fr Allso's replacement, Fr Philip Rowe and his curate Alan Hopes had made quite an impact. And it was more than just numbers, the 1960s had arrived.

In the East Finchley Carnival of 1968, All Saints' was represented by a float. 'Harmony in Black and White' featured four girls in mini-dresses promoting racial tolerance. For a church that had been a bastion of sabbath day millinery, the arrival of youthful knees was quite a departure. Miss Gillian Knight and Miss Linda Howe were also pioneers, the first sideswomen at All Saints. Women also began to carry out readings and there was a new Sri Lankan Sunday School teacher, Miss Haridevi Somasundaram. This was unusual enough to warrant a photograph and article in the Finchley News. Of course the fact that she had also been a model might have helped sway the picture desk.



Fr Rowe also had talks with leaders of the rapidly growing Greek Cypriot community with hopes of offering them a place for worship. It was clear that attitudes and the make up of the local population were changing. Not everyone was happy with this.

In September 1967, The Finchley Times, reported that a grim echo of the 1930s had reappeared. A gathering of the Mosleyite Union was held at the junction of Lincoln Road and East Finchley High Road. A group of men stood with Union Jacks declaring 'Britain for the British' and that each time a 'coloured family' stepped off a boat a British family lost a home. Standing opposite them was a counter demonstration and at the head of it holding a wooden cross was Fr Rowe.



**CHURCH MEMBERS
PROTEST AT
MOSLEY MEETING**





The Finchley Times described the tense scene as the small group of latterday blackshirts stood and watched as 'a gleaming Daimler purred out of Lincoln Road.' The reporter, who seems to have been highly engaged with this local drama, peered inside the car and spotted 'a Great Dane in state on the back seat, 'looking almost human'. "Sooner or later" said the speaker "you will not see a white face walking down the street." It was at this point the reporter noted that 'The Great Dane frowned.' The confrontation ended peacefully when the loud hailer broke down and all that could be heard was Fr Rowe leading the Lord's Prayer. And this was not the only political activism from the energetic new priest.

In 1967, Fr Rowe led a campaign to install a zebra crossing on Fortis Green Road. There is no doubt that this came from a heartfelt desire to improve road safety, however, there were also fringe benefits. The campaign helped generate some useful publicity and it was also a good way of encouraging people on the south side of Fortis Green to come to All Saints'. These streets were a focus of his evangelising zeal because, after some delicate negotiations with Holy Trinity and Muswell Hill's St James, Fr Rowe had managed to increase the size of the rather stunted parish. He was not going to let traffic stop anyone making it to church. He also tried to involve a local resident from Fortis Green, a musician from a band that had begun by performing at the local pub, the Clissold Arms. Sadly, Ray Davies of the Kinks was not available to wave a placard. However, the Clissold was not the only hostelry of interest.

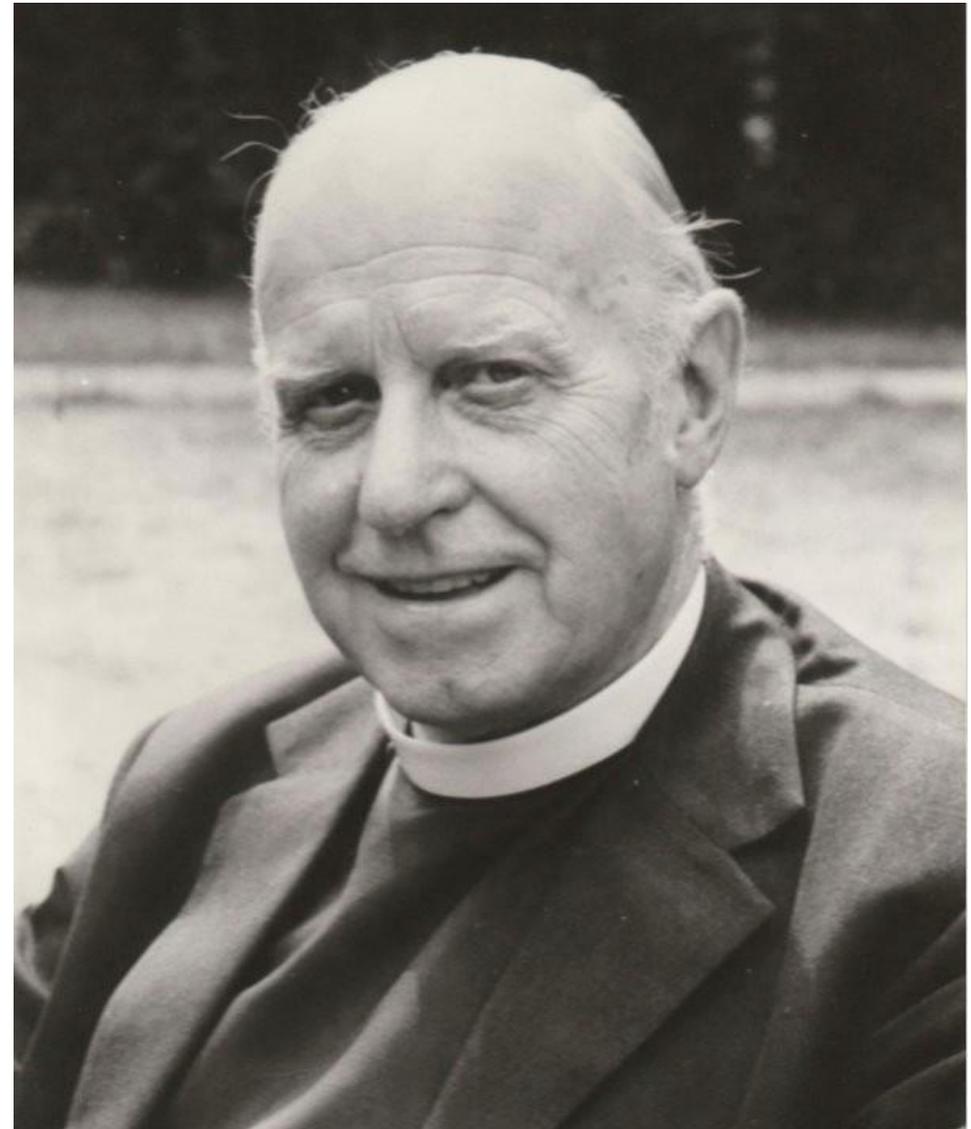
A small article in the Finchley Press noted that the parish magazine had a series of articles on the history and traditions of local pubs. Fr Rowe explained it wasn't his work but that of Fr Hopes who he said was 'much more of a pub man' and enjoyed meeting people and encouraging them to come to church. His wide-ranging and enthusiastic appreciation of East Finchley's public houses was, quite clearly, missionary work and a wonderful example to us all.

Of course, all these efforts were only a part of the explanation for the growing congregation. None of this would have worked without the warmth and spirituality of the fellowship and worship within the church. One of those seduced by the distinctive character of All Saints' was a religious migrant from Muswell Hill.



It was in 1971 that Graham Summers decided he had had enough of attending mass at eight o'clock at St James in Muswell Hill. He wanted to see if there was something more suited to his tastes and sleep patterns and was told to have a look at All Saints'. He had lived in the area all his life but had never considered the small church hidden on Durham Road. What he discovered left him 'flabbergasted.' The spectacle of robes, music, incense and ceremony was utterly unexpected and as he tried to leave he was gently accosted. There was no escape. Within a few months he found himself elected as churchwarden.

What surprised him was that behind the ritual and splendour of the mass was the humility of Fr Rowe and Fr Hopes. Most days they would be found sweeping out the parish hall and attending to jobs. There were reasons for this beyond Christian charity because, despite the improvement in the church's fortunes, there were fewer people able to devote their spare time to keeping it all going. Children still wanted to be scouts and guides but it was harder to find leaders. The mothers and housewives of the 1950s who had polished brass and arranged flowers, were heading out to work. Some of them, it was noted, no longer wore hats in church. All Saints' may have enjoyed a revival in the 1960s but everyone knew the world All Saints' had been built for was fast disappearing.





Fr Rowe then asked his parishioners if the current arrangement of buildings was the best solution to the parish's needs. He had, he said, been approached by builders keen to redevelop the vicarage grounds. He suggested a block of flats and a smaller easier to maintain vicarage might be more suited to the church's future. All Saints' congregation may have been recovering after the ups and downs of Fr Allso but it was clear that the religious tide was heading in one direction. Someone on the PCC even suggested knocking the church down and replacing it with something more suitable. The PCC was not impressed and Fr Rowe's suggestion of a redevelopment was shelved. The problem did not go away.

When Fr Rowe left, his replacement was a former military man, Fr Theo Cunningham-Burley. His wife Dorothy and their son and daughters were glad of a large vicarage and for the next few years parish life continued almost unchanged. Tall, energetic and willing to attend to his congregation's pastoral needs, he and Dorothy welcomed new families into the church. His first address to the congregation declared that All Saints' would be a 'caring church,' a 'real parish church,' serving everyone not merely catering to the needs of 'those who like our Catholic ways.' The streets around All Saints' were changing, houses were being split in to flats and the area was gradually becoming more multi-cultural.





When one family, the Selvadurais from Sri Lanka, arrived they found a welcoming social life for their three daughters. Dorothy Cunningham-Burley would help ferry children to school and, within weeks, they found themselves enmeshed in the church's social calendar of garden parties around the vicarage oak tree, cakemaking, dramas, scouts and youth clubs.

In 1981 Fr Theo addressed the congregation at the annual meeting and announced that the congregation was growing and income was up by 24%.

There were also gifts and bequests. The Sacred Heart Chapel (which is where the font now sits) received a new altar rail. One of the great stalwarts of the church, William Roper, paid for the Sanctuary lamp that hangs in front of the altar.



But, the church's ability to raise cash and attract new worshippers was being outrun by its increasing outgoings. The Diocesan quota rose from £1500 to £8500. The vicarage was expensive to maintain and it was suggested it might be sensible to move to another house on Twyford Avenue. The energy that drove parish life was not enough to keep everything going. In 1984 the PCC treasurer Lionel Mayhew resigned. The 'harassment and worry' of trying to find the money to pay for the upkeep of the church was too much. The 'straw that broke the camel's back' was a bill for altar requisites of £400. The bank account did not have £400. But Lionel was not the only one feeling the strain. Fr Theo's last year was marked by long periods of ill health. At the annual meeting in April 1984, he announced he would be retiring to Harrogate in the Summer. He died a few weeks later.

