

The Revd Peter Jeffery

'On December 16th 1969 the Reverend Peter Noel Jeffery M.A. locked and unlocked the main door of the church and then tolled the bell to make his induction known to the public. He had been instituted and inducted to the cure of souls in the Parish of Turvey, in All Saints Church by Bishop John Hare.'

So wrote Len Savage, who was churchwarden at All Saints, when Peter celebrated his twenty-fifth anniversary as Rector.

Peter's appointment to the parish was greeted with some trepidation – was he really suitable? How could a single man be expected to communicate with families and children? And what would the parish do without a 'Rector's Wife'? They needn't have worried – Peter's time at All Saints is legendary and most parishioners of his time, whether church families or not, are deeply saddened to hear of his death.

Peter was born in Sussex, the elder son of a priest. He was educated at Christ's Hospital School and Pembroke College Oxford, where he read theology. He went from there to Lincoln Theological College and served his first curacy in Smethwick, Birmingham. In 1964 he became Priest – in – Charge at St Andrew's Church Bordesley – now demolished, its name has been given to the nearby football ground of Birmingham City FC who play at the St Andrew's Road ground. What a pity the church site was not amalgamated into a Formula 1 track - Peter loved Formula 1. On the church calendar in the vestry against certain Sundays were the mysterious initials GP. Thinking that this was code for a church festival of which she had not heard, a parishioner asked what they meant. The reply came 'Grand Prix, short sermon'!

Peter was ideally suited to be Rector of Turvey; down to earth he enjoyed simple country pursuits such as fishing, sailing and walking with his dog. He also supported village groups and organisations - TATS, the Village Hall Committee and the Recreation Ground; FOTSA and the NSPCC; he was Chairman of the Trustees of Barton Homes, and under his leadership the church choir went from strength to strength – as did the tower team of bell-ringers. Peter himself was a very good musician and a more than competent organist.

It was the work behind the scenes, however, that marked Peter out as an excellent priest and pastor. Whether it was quiet listening, support at the death of a loved one or just helping to mop up a flooded boiler room at Turvey Abbey, nothing was outside his remit – and all was done quietly and without fuss. Many people have told me of small acts of kindness and care that mark out the life of a good and devoted 'parson' – an old fashioned word, perhaps, meaning a special person in the community, but a word that that well describes 'Parson Pete'

Peter had a great sense of humour and a real gift with young people. The Church Choir and the Youth Group both thrived under his leadership. On Saturdays he would regularly load them all into the back of his van, with the current large dog, to go swimming. He first made sure he had the permission of their parents as, he said, the minute he took off his glasses he would not be able to see a thing and so could not be expected to act as lifeguard. Wickstead Park was a regular outing arranged by 'Mr J' and the then Choirmistress, Enid Wadsworth, whilst the bell-ringers' treat was punting in Oxford. One of the youth group once told her parents 'You can talk to Mr Jeffery about anything'

Then, of course, there was Lancelot. Lancelot was introduced to village life by courtesy of a parishioner who had accepted the gift of a donkey before she realised that it was not very practical when she lived in a flat in Bedford with only a balcony as 'grazing space'. She approached Peter one Sunday morning after the service – 'Would you like a donkey', she asked? Peter said he would love a donkey so Lancelot, like his master, has become part of village folklore. Peter had a donkey cart and gave rides to the children at village fetes – on a more negative note, Lancelot was known to bite if he was provoked – and once ran away with the donkey cart landing Peter and his brother in a bush. I hope that, for new comers to the village, this now explains the rather odd name of the Village Green by the Post Office – Lancelot's Piece.

Many people in the village and beyond have wonderful stories to tell of a man who gave tirelessly to the people he served; there is not space in this publication to recount them all. Peter was a man who not only preached about God's love in Christ but who showed that love in the way he lived his life - in a practical and unstuffy way – and he was loved in return. He was a man who could laugh at himself and at the institution he served. I loved getting emails from him with his incredibly funny but rather cynical reflections on the Church Established. I only knew him after his retirement – first through the endless stories that were told about him when I arrived in the village - later, as we met up on 'State Occasions', I got to know him for myself and realised just how special he was and why he was so much loved in the Parish.

I end as I began, with a quote, this time from Peter himself. He was writing about inscriptions on grave stones – a subject which raises great anxiety in the hearts of those in charge of ensuring 'good taste' in our village churchyards. He wrote,

'For myself, I ask nothing, believing that we are best remembered in the hearts and minds of our loved ones. But if something is wanted for me, how about "He was always trying"? I'd settle for that, but if it is considered too flippant there are the splendid words from T.S. Eliot's 'The Rock' – "Take no thought of the harvest, but only of proper sowing." That would be really nice: but I wonder if it would pass the regulations.' Jo Spray 2019