

CLIFFORD PINHEY

24th March 1930 – 18th May 2009

I remember visiting Boxgrove Priory when I was a student at Chichester Theological College. Fr Rose had recently died and Fr Freddie Jackson, Chaplain to Bishop Eric, suggested that I might like to attend the Advent service at Boxgrove.

Being a musician, I was conscious in the first few bars of the Advent music that here was huge competence and real depth. The choir and conductor were in a wonderfully musical partnership. The conducting was nicely understated and all proceeded with an unfussy sense of purpose.

When, about twenty years later, Bishop Eric asked me whether I would like to be Parish Priest of Boxgrove I was delighted to say yes, having first ascertained that Clifford was still the Director of Music and that Boxgrove Priory's music was reckoned to be excellent.

Clifford had a slightly fearsome reputation among the clergy. Those who got to know him well realised that standards were important in his scheme of things. He had a first-rate imagination and applied it to the liturgy of the Church, always wanting the best possible combination of text, music and liturgical action.

Clifford could be (and often was) single-minded in his pursuit of excellence. The choral tradition that he established at Boxgrove would not be as strong as it is without the blood, sweat and tears of all who worked with him to achieve what we now have.

For myself, I gradually counted Clifford among my friends and was pleased, on occasion, to be his confidant. We shared a fair number of opinions and I felt that I had really arrived when he invited me to play the organ for a Sunday mass!

Often a guest at Sunday lunch in the vicarage, Clifford would regale us with stories of singing under Vaughan Williams in a small group who were trying out some new compositions by RVW. He would also tell us of the time when he was a cinema organist, "Uncle Cliff", playing one of those wonderful instruments where the console rose up out of the ground!

Clifford never actually said "no" to me. He was a master of side-stepping things that he really did not want to do, or did not feel



Clifford in his early days at Boxgrove

competent to do, but he was supportive of my more realistic hopes. He embraced the Sunday 11.15am mass when we made it a weekly feature of our Sunday pattern. He gladly turned up to play the organ for Holy Hour on the first Friday of the month.

Clifford, as is well known, had a preference for early vocal music, both plainsong and polyphony. His tastes in keyboard music stretched to the mid eighteenth century. At least that was what he liked people to think, for hidden behind that musical screen was a human being of huge sensitivity and some emotional vulnerability. He often avoided Romantic music because the tears could be too near the surface, and maybe there is wisdom in that, because tears can be a questionable substitute for technical excellence.



Conducting choir members, past and present, at the 30th anniversary of his arrival in Boxgrove

Nevertheless, Clifford's own compositions are rarely without emotional content. Like all of us, he was a complex person, emotions and all.

He did a vast number of good, kind and often practical things around the village community. His skills as a woodworker and a worker of miracles with things that would not work meant that he was rarely idle. He covered thousands of

miles on his bicycle as he went about his practical, helpful and skilled work, and this made him very visible around the village. What was less visible but wonderfully true was the quiet support he gave to many in the development of their musical skills. He was a first class teacher and a highly perceptive person.

Now we must get on and exercise the skills that he gave us and continue to share in the vision that shone so clearly in all that he did. I thank God for giving him to us and, reluctantly, hand him back – commending him to God as one who has valued and developed his God-given gifts and thereby brought many others to faith. May he rest in peace. Alleluia.

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Clifford cutting the cake at the 30th anniversary of his arrival at Boxgrove