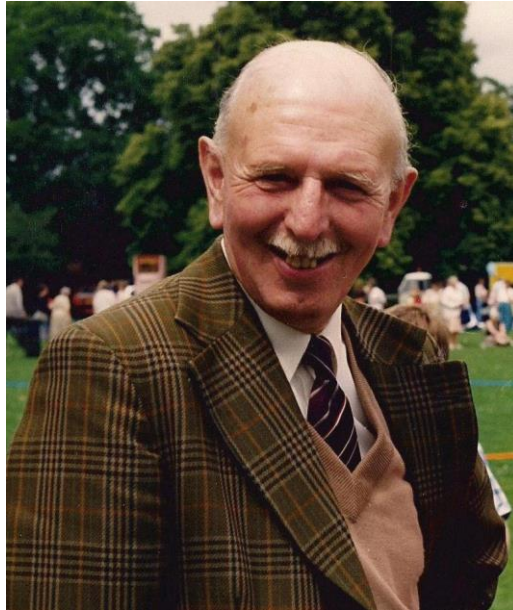


## **The Memories of Cliff Boddy**

*Chorister, Scribe, Sacristan and Verger who served the congregation at St James for 79years.*



I was born in a house in Fir Tree Lane, Littleton. My mother was an orphan who had been adopted by a Mrs Boswell from Fir Tree Lane. My father came from Spital Walk Boughton, near St Paul's Church. I had two brothers, Stanley and Austin, but I was the eldest in the family. We all wore wooden clogs, and they made a great noise as we walked to school mainly over cobbles. Everyone had clogs, and you could hear them clip clapping along the lane. We got them from a shop in Watergate Street called Cowleys. In fact I think it is still there. We started school in the Girls and Infants School at the bottom of the village near the Blacksmith's. You could start at three years of age in those days if you wanted to. My teacher was Mrs Fleet, the blacksmith's wife. When I was five I went up to the Boys' School opposite the church, and the teacher I remember was a man called Hullah. He was there before Tom Solloway. I always wanted to walk to school even when I went to Love Street School in Chester. It was about three miles each way every day, and then Woodfines of Tarvin started a bus service. The bus ran from Tarvin and Tattenhall through Christleton to Chester. We paid him 9d return per week on a Monday morning and used to start school at 8.30am.

The teachers could be all right, but they were very strict and often kept order by using a stick, but I never had it. I stayed at Love Street until I'd taken my school certificate, and I left in 1928 when I was 15. There was a slump on with no jobs, none at all. I wanted to be an architect, but there was no chance at all of anything like that. I had to take the first job that came along. I went to an electroplating company in City Road, where the Bank of Scotland is now, and I started as an apprentice silversmith; I stayed for 45years.

One of my proudest jobs was doing work for the Mayor of Denbigh. He brought in a pair of Elizabethan maces from about 1580. They had been knocked about and had been repaired before with pieces of any old metal, brass and tin. It was terrible- a sacrilege. I had the job of restoring them as best I could. It took two or three weeks, and when they were ready, the Mayor himself came to collect them. He had a shock and said they weren't theirs, but I showed him the hallmarks and he knew they were. He then had proper cases made for them, all plush lined. I was very proud of that job, and it was one of the most interesting things I did. I developed an interest in heraldry after that and copperplate handwriting.

The track between Christleton and Littleton was mainly a dirt track, and it was called Quoit Alley. I suppose because they used to play quoits there. I can remember a brickfield near the stile in Fir Tree Lane going across to the Manchester Road. It was big field. I remember all the kilns looking like bee hives. I remember those kilns quite well, but the time I was talking about the bricks weren't made there any more, and the kilns were falling to pieces.



We knew that the Pit was a marl pit and there were always lots of fish in it. As boys we would sometimes spend afternoons there, and you could catch as many as 80 small fish in one afternoon. You could also walk across it in places. We knew where the ford was so we could go across when we wanted. It wasn't Dandy's farm in Littleton then, it belonged to a Mr Bentley and it was a mixed farm. They grew hay, oats and wheat, and they had cattle of course. There would be about half a dozen men working on the farm. He had horses, of course, in those days to do the heavy work, and cowmen too. I remember they started work at Bentleys at 6.00 am, but they used to stop for breakfast at 8.00am, having first washed in stone cold water outside by the pump. I sometimes used to help collect hay in the holidays, by really preferred playing about in it. Sometimes children would work on the farm, doing jobs like picking stones up from the fields, and the schools used to close for this time.

There was only one farm in the village making cheese; that was Lunt's. He farmed where the Ardens had their farm in the village until recently. There were two or three brothers. William Lunt, I think, rang the bells and Frank, the cheesemaker, had a short leg and used to limp. They also used to make black puddings in the village and sold them in Millwards Shop. I don't think that Digger Swindley from the Old Farm ever did so. Millwards was a great village shop; they sold everything, including the sweets that I liked, and all kinds of things like mops, buckets and brushes. Anything that you wanted, Millwards would have it. There used to be an advert over the door for their coach building works which was in Bold Square, Chester. Today their shop is Drakes, the hairdressers.



Millward's Grocery Stores in 1920's

There were two blacksmiths in the village. There was Fleet, of course, near the Bottom of the Wood. Joe Fleet was the father and Frankie the son, and when Frankie died, a chap from Saighton came along and took it over-Fred Williams I think it was. The other Smithy was near Arden's Farm; it's the one called Smithy Cottage today. Rogers was the blacksmith there, a chap with a big moustache. I knew him quite well, and he could swear for half an hour and not repeat himself. He could honestly. On our way home from school, we used to sit down and watch him doing his work and we used to pinch nails from his box. Of course he would chase us off and his language.....That's where we learned our bad language.



Fleet Family blacksmiths at Plough Lane Rogers the blacksmith on Little Heath Lane.

There was also a shoemaker near the corner and a Mr Woodcock worked there. He had a club foot and he mainly repaired shoes rather than made them. There was a sadler too up an alley near the ladies hairdressers today. Digger Swindley used to live at the Old Farm and he used to chase us many a time. He had a walnut tree in his field, and of course, we lads used to like to pinch his walnuts when they were ready. He wasn't a very tidy farmer and there were always lots of cowpats about his yard. He and his wife came to church every Sunday morning. I always remember he wore a long frock coat. Digger wasn't the only one as Mr Heap from Rowton also wore a frock coat together with a top hat. The Ince Family also came to church on Sunday mornings, and they and their guests always sat in the front pew, the Townsend Currie pew. I remember Major and Mrs Currie. She was a nice lady, very flamboyant. I think she was an actress before she married the Major, but they had no children. Other important families included the Sidebottom's, Macfie's, Synge's, Porrit's, Heywood's and the Fleming's. They were nearly all merchants in cotton, wool and grain and that sort of thing from Manchester or Liverpool.



Rector Hickey leading the choir, Freddie Finch is the first person behind the boys.

I joined the choir when I was 11years old when the Rector was Mr Hickey. Later I remember Mr Guest Williams coming, after exchanging parishes with Mr Hickey. I also remember Freddie Finch the choirmaster and organist. He was only a small man, effeminate in a way, but I musn't call him that because he was a always a most kind man. I was always a big lad and found it difficult to sit on the front row in the boys' pew.

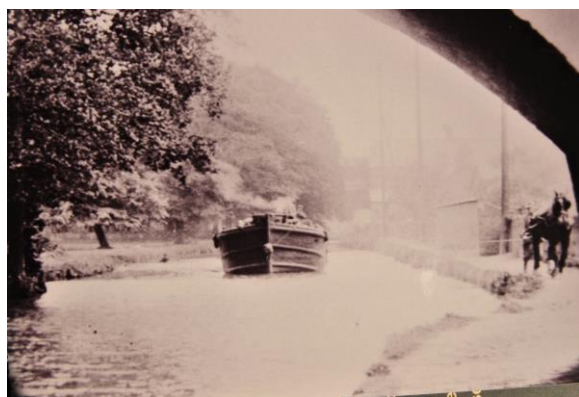
So one Sunday he said to me, "You are getting too big to sit there. Go and sit with the men in the back row". So I did. I started as a boy soprano, but then developed into an alto and sang this until I was sixty. In those days a male alto singer was looked at in a funny way. I still sing alto occasionally, but it is not the same as it used to be. I then began to sing tenor, and I sometimes sang bass when they were short. I wonder what Freddie would say if he knew that one of this "laddies" was still singing in 2000. Not so well as before, perhaps, but still trying and remembering. I recall one boy all those years ago who was always sent home for not behaving at choir practice, but he always managed to be in his place on Sunday. Sometimes it was a case of, "Come and sit with me laddie, where I can keep an eye on you." My memory goes back and remembers the boys who sat in the stalls 70 years ago: Bill Payne, Alan Matthews, Dennis Morgan, Sonny Dutto, and the Needhams, Mac and Popsy. It was a privilege to wear your Eaton collar all day on a Sunday. These are the boys who made the gardeners' lives a misery on Flower Service Sunday when the Big House gardens were thrown open and fruit trees were very vulnerable. The senior members of the choir then- their names come back to me- were George Dean, Mr Mellor, Bob Gregory, Bill and Sam Pickervance, Mr Wynne, Baden Brammall, George Ashton, Bill Johnson and many others whose names escape me. In those days *Messiah* and the *Crucifixion* held no terrors for our choir, neither did an anthem every month and settings for canticles and communion. If a psalm had 70 verses, we sang them all. If there were three psalms for the day, we also sang them.

After the demise of Freddie Finch, several organists took over the choir. I remember Mr George Guest senior, George Guest\*, Mr Sutton, Sam Barker, Norman Rimmer, John Reed, Ron Smith, Bob Owens, Ken Stark, Carina Moffatt and, of course, our present organist Steve Roberts. All worthy musicians to whom the choir past and present, owes a great deal. In the old days, our pipe organ had to be blown by hand, and I remember one Sunday when Freddie put his hands to the keys after the sermon expecting sound, no sound came out. He dashed around the back and found the organ blower fast asleep on the seat.

Mr Guest Williams was a very interesting man. He was a real scholar. He was a member of the Society of Antiquarians. His sermons weren't everyone's cup of tea but they were very clever and very deep. He used to preach over the people's heads to tell you the truth, but he was a real gentleman. He was also most generous. He helped us in putting on our Sunday School and Choir Trips. We went to Rhyl mostly, and in those days we used to go to Chester Station by horse and cart before going by steam train to Rhyl. Once or twice we went to Beeston Castle by barge and spent all our time rolling down the hill. We would catch the barge; a Mersey flat boat usually used for carrying grain, by Butler's Mill. There was a bread shop at the mill, and we also got bread from Morgan's Post Office in Pepper Street.



Sunday school visit to Rhyl via Chester Station



Visit to Beeston in a Mersey Flat

I also liked working for Charles Mack. He was straightforward and called a spade a spade. He helped us out in our choir work, but we were disappointed when he first came. As he was an organist and a choral Scholar from Cambridge, we had expected him to give us settings and real church music, but he wasn't that bothered. He really wanted the congregation to sing. Another person I remember well was George Guest; I actually called him young George. After Freddie Finch dies we had several organists, and the first one to stay was George Guest's father from Helsby. By then his son was 18 and was assistant organist at Chester Cathedral. He came to join us and was the best organist we ever had. All the boys loved him because he would join in and swing the tunes. He became the eminent Dr George Guest of St John's College Cambridge and was a great friend of mine.

*\*Dr George Guest CBE FRCO who became the Organist & Choirmaster at St John's Cambridge for over 40 years was a frequent visitor to Christleton and he clearly loved the place, and even in the 1980's & 90's would drop in for evensong when he was visiting the area. He would quietly slip into the nave, and Cliff would turn to the choir and say "sing well tonight, George is in the congregation."*



Dr George Guest



The Church Choir. Cliff Boddy is 2<sup>nd</sup> left on back row.

I had many friends in the village. Fred Watkins was one, but he came from Wem, so he was a foreigner. Frank Poston, Bill Astle and Frank Mitchell were others. They were in the scouts with me in 1927 with Mr Tarbuck, who had been a policeman in Liverpool. His wife ran the wolf cubs and Mr Geoffrey Wain ran the Rover Scouts. WE had a long army hut to meet in, where the present Scout Headquarters are. We did all the things that Scouts do, tying knots, and physical training, and we danced every Wednesday night – a proper dance with ladies. This dance in the Scout Hut was always well attended even in the holidays. We also used to go away for camps. We went to Heswall several times and to Arrowe Park, Birkenhead for a big Jamboree. We used to go to Riley Bank at Mouldsworth quite often. Once we went to Criccieth in North Wales; we went there in a big lorry owned by Les Astle. He later married Mrs Tarbuck's niece, I think.

I remember the Fetes. They were sometimes held in Hunter's Field opposite the pond, sometimes down in Birch Heath Lane, and sometimes in the field at the side of Faulkners Lane on Mr Cullimore's land behind the village quarry. I can remember the big marquee they used to have in those days with vegetables, cheese, flowers, sheep, cattle and horses. They were very popular events, with people coming from Hoole, Tattenhall, Waverton and all around. During the war I served in the Grenadier Guards at Windsor Castle. Bill Jones from the Village was also there, but he joined before me and was killed in Africa. It was a war of nerves at Windsor. There were soldiers and policemen at every point around the castle. If you were on guard, you always had a policeman with you. You used to see the Royal family now and then, but those corgis always used to warn you first.

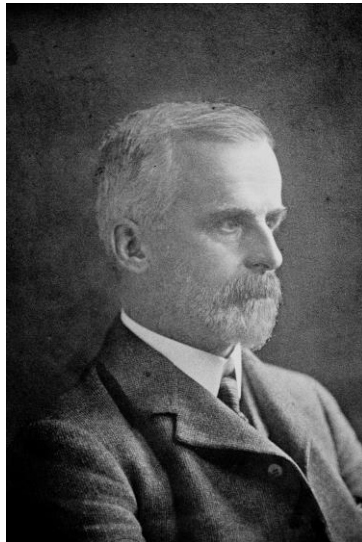
The Policeman always gave the order "Up Sentry", and you then presented arms. Lord Montague of Beaulieu was our Captain and our Adjutant was Lord Hamilton from Scotland. I was a caterer to start with at a big training depot. It had a huge sign on the wall with a big gate that had the sign over it saying, "Abandon hope all you who enter here." I was there about three months. Everything had to be done at the double, but it hasn't harmed me has it? After the war was over I stayed behind to instruct young soldiers in writing and learning to read. I loved doing that, but it also got me out of doing six mile cross country runs. I also sang in the choir there.

These are the memories of an old chorister who would like to be a boy again and sing through the past years. *Tempus edax rerum* (time, the devourer of all things.)

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I interviewed Cliff many times and this is the story of Mr Arthur Heywood from Christleton Lodge that he recalled to me on one occasion.

Mr Arthur Henry Heywood of Christleton Lodge Christleton



Arthur Henry Heywood

It was the arrival of the Heywood family in 1903 that ensured that Christleton Lodge became a family home. Arthur Henry Heywood was an accountant with the family firm of Heywood & sons, Wool & Cloth Merchants of Church Street Manchester. Arthur Henry was also on the board of many charities and Hospital Trusts in the Manchester area. He also did valuable work in Chester for the House of Mercy, St Bridget's Home and the John Sellers Trust in Christleton.

He was remembered by the late Cliff Boddy, a longstanding chorister & servant of St James' Church as a elegant grey haired gentleman with great charm, with a very beautiful young wife. He would always wear a frock coat and top hat when seen in the village or church. He was extremely kind to the choir boys and bell ringers, and at Christmas time would give each of them an orange and a sixpence. He and his wife took a great deal of trouble to be involved in village life, and in helping out where they could. There are numerous reports of them giving presents to the children of both Boys & Girls schools and providing parties at Christmas time. On another occasion Mr Heywood gave the children of both schools a treat with tea and crackers, and entertained them with films about the LNER Railway and Edinburgh Zoo.

The Heywood's also entertained a great deal at the Lodge, and many church committees met there, including the Parochial Church Council. The most memorable occasion was on

the Wedding of his eldest son Geoffrey to a beautiful French lady, Mademoiselle Magdeline Herpin. Two large marquees were erected on the lawns and the village invited to the party that followed. The younger choir boys were invited to drink a glass of punch with their sandwiches and cakes. Geoffrey Heywood later Captained the Village Cricket Team, and Charles the younger son who married Miss Dobie, became a minister of the church, and was regularly invited by Rev A. A. Guest Williams to preach at St James' on the occasions of St James' Day & Harvest Festivals. In 1939 aged 80, Mr Heywood gave a delightful party for the Bell ringers, members of the Boys Bible Class and Girls Friendly Society. The comment in the Parish Magazine was, "How many at the age of 80 would be so actively hospitable".

There was great sadness when Mrs Heywood died in 1933, as "she was such a gentle and fine lady". Mr Heywood had even more tributes paid to him when he died in 1943, as his service was conducted by the Bishop of Chester, "to recognise Mr Heywood's wonderful service to the church generally and the local community.

*Note; Much of this story taken from the memories of Cliff Boddy, Chorister, Scribe, Sacristan and Verger who served the congregation at St James for 79years.*

The Rectors that Cliff served during his service to St James' Christleton.



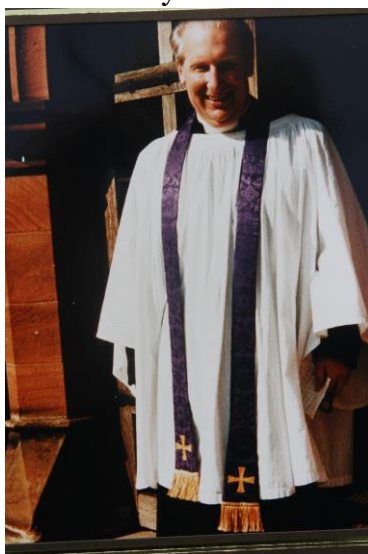
GMV Hickey



AA Guest Williams



Canon Laurie Skipper



Canon Charles Mack

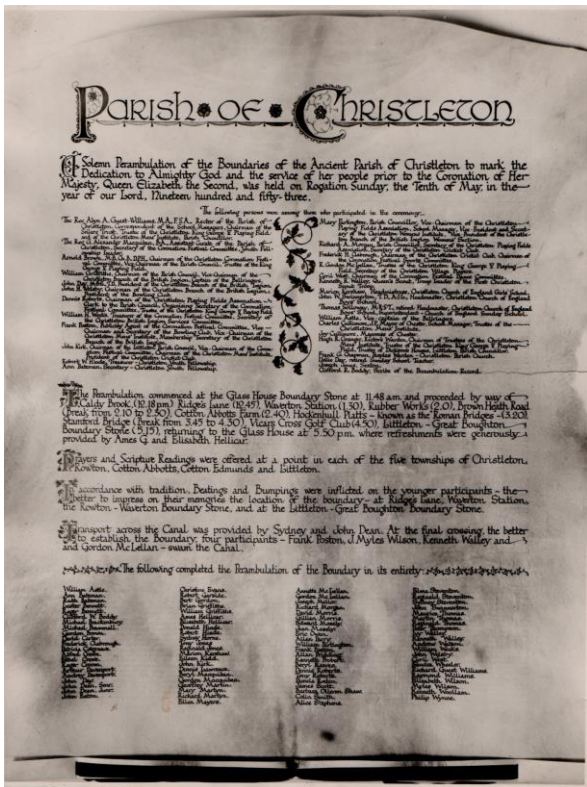


Archdeacon David Garnett

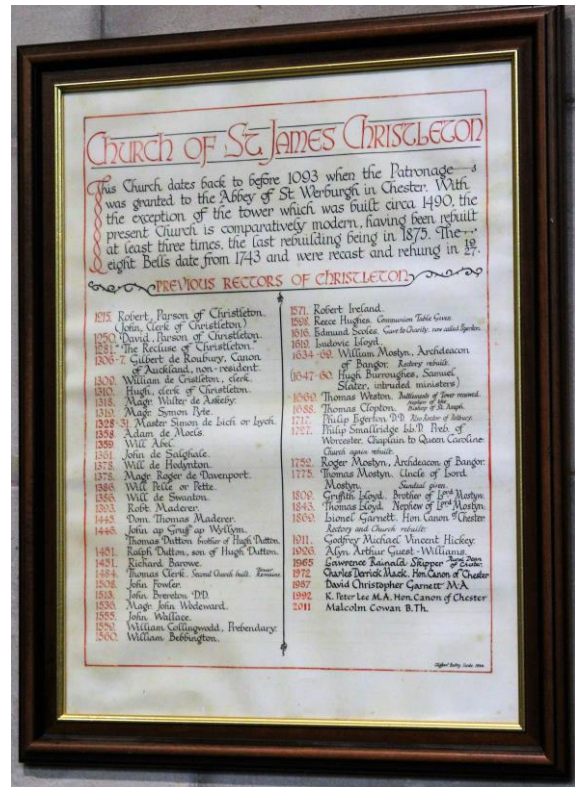


Canon K Peter Lee

## Beating of the Bounds & other Documents



1953 Ceremony Hand scribed on calfskin



List of Rectors at Christleton from 1215



Cliff designed this stained glass memorial



The occasion of Cliff's award from the Royal School of Church Music for 75yrs service. Cliff with Bishop Peter & Rector Peter