



Link e-Newsletter

No.4

New Year 2015

Sorry for the Silence!

The Link between Exeter and Bayeux et Lisieux is primarily a link between bishops, so our Link Group exists to fulfil the agenda agreed by the bishops. In the last few years both dioceses have received new bishops, which has meant that new relationships have had to be formed, and new visions for the Link agreed upon. Hopefully we are now entering a new period of stability, so that our work can begin again.

Colloque 2013

The Colloque we were planning for the spring of 2013 had to be cancelled because of the Pope's retirement. That may sound strange, but the Conclave to elect the new Pope was called for the time that had been booked for the French Catholic Bishops' Conference, so that had to be changed, and was moved to the week of our proposed Colloque, which would have meant that Mgr. Boulanger could not attend. We attempted to find another week which both Bp. Michael and Mgr. Boulanger could manage, and then a week which both Mgr. Boulanger and Bp. John could manage; but it could not be done. We remain hopeful, however, that it may yet be rescheduled – we will let you know as early as possible if anything happens on this front.

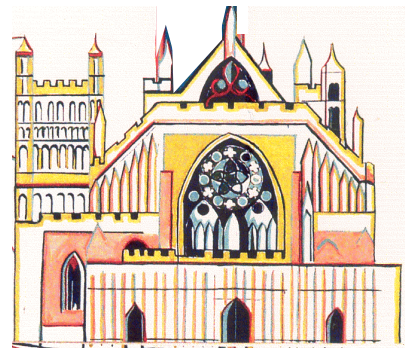
D-Day Commemoration

The beaches where the British and Canadian troops landed on D-Day are all in the Département of Calvados, and so in the Diocese of Bayeux-Lisieux. In spite of the firm laicisation of the French state, the Church had been invited to play a significant part in the commemorations. Our Link diocese invited us to bring a party to share with them in the various events.



Our leader was the Archdeacon of Exeter (the only bishop in our diocese at the time was Crediton, and he was necessarily involved in D-Day events here). There were four members of our Link Group, and two ordinands from the SWMTC (in recognition of the attempts being made to form a link between our training course and the Grande Séminaire at Caen).

The full programme included, on the Friday



- an Anglo-French ecumenical Service of Remembrance in the cathedral at Bayeux, in the presence of the Prince of Wales and the French Prime Minister, during which the new Peace Bell was blessed by the Cardinal-Archbishop of Paris;
- a Service of Remembrance in the British Military Cemetery in Bayeux, in the presence of the Queen, the Prince of Wales and the French Prime Minister;



- the international ceremony on Sword Beach (Ouistreham), in the presence of eighteen heads of state both from the countries of the Alliance in Europe, the Commonwealth and the United States, and of Germany and Italy – the Church party, some 40 or 50 strong, was seated in the main covered stand, not a stone's throw from the heads of state. The speech given by M. Hollande, the President of France, can be found (in English) at <http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/President-Hollande-pays-tribute-to-23524>;

- a concert in the cathedral by an American choir from Arizona;

and then on the Saturday

- mass at the American Military Cemetery at Colleville, led by Bishop Richard Spencer of the American forces;
- prayers in the German Military Cemetery at La Cambe, led by Bishop Rainer Klug of Freiburg;



- a solemn *Te Deum* and an address on War and Peace by Bishop Boulanger in the Abbaye aux Dames in Caen – in his address Mgr. Boulanger used the term “*artisans de la paix*” for peace-makers, stressing that we all need to share in being actively creators of peace (an English translation of Mgr. Boulanger’s speech can be obtained from the Editor);
- mass for the Eve of Pentecost, in the cathedral, with the Confirmation of a couple of dozen adult candidates – the clear devotion of the candidates, and of the many young people present, was an inspiration.

Marisa Cockfield and Alison Hardy, the two ordinands, have provided the following impressions of our trip.

“This visit was rather like Topsy – it grew and grew, with a shower of invitations to commemorative events for the D-Day landings in 1944. It was a many-layered experience: the generous hospitality of our hosts, who endured some rather bizarre experiences with our rusty conversational French

(describing a badger proved difficult, and they concluded we were talking about turkeys, until my partner-in-crime explained that badgers had four legs).

It was a wonderful opportunity to meet with the Catholic seminarians, talk about their journeys and their futures in ministry, and to meet the clergy of the diocese of Bayeux-Lisieux, recognising that we face many similar problems – larger groups of parishes, fewer clergy. It was interesting to discuss the different options available to an established church, and one which was free of state identity: the French government and communes will take on the upkeep of church buildings, where congregations demonstrate a continuing need and wish to use them, which means that the work of congregations can go to raising funds for good causes, and resulted in the two beautiful bells which were blessed during the service in Bayeux Cathedral and which will now ring out for peace and reconciliation.

It was a privilege to meet and spend time in conversation with the Bishop of Bayeux, the American Bishop to US forces in Europe and the German bishop, who were present together at commemorative services in the American and German cemeteries. We travelled on 'le bus episcopal', with representatives from the Anglican, Catholic and Orthodox churches, and had access to a number of memorable events over that weekend.

Here are a few 'snapshots': being piped into Le Havre; attending the Franco-British service in Bayeux Cathedral with the choir of St. John's Cambridge; seeing the response of the crowds to the veterans, thanking them for what they had done; talking to a French-Canadian sergeant about my uncle (French-Canadian), who volunteered and served in Europe throughout the war, was at Dieppe and in Italy, France and Germany; hearing President Hollande's call for European unity at Ouistreham; walking through the grounds of the American and German cemeteries; going to the evening fête with our hosts in the square where de Gaulle gave his first speech on landing again in France.

As well as gratitude for the wonderful opportunities I was given, I also take from this weekend a better understanding of how the Diocese of Bayeux works, the possibilities of lasting friendships and working towards better understanding and co-operation between us: we have much to learn from each other, and a great deal of spiritual encouragement to offer from our differing traditions."

"We were hosted by parishioners of Bayeux and welcomed into the seminary. As a female ordinand shortly due to be ordained there was no shortage of questioning - both quizzical and frank - over the possibility of ordination for women. Yet it was conducted with a warmth and openness that led to a mutual respect of value towards our different traditions. The route of training differs in France in that the seminary remains very much the central base for curates during their curacy, whereas, back home in England, I was launched straight out into the parishes in which I presently serve. I found it heartening, therefore, to meet with curates in various stages of their training who were still worshipping together and supporting one another through a sharing of experiences.

My second abiding memory must be the various D-day celebrations to which we were invited. I found the cemeteries challenging; the rows of head-stones and crosses impressing upon me the sheer scale of the numbers involved. The German cemetery was particularly emotive as it resembled a field dotted with mature trees, yet dominated by a huge man-made hill at the base of which were buried many soldiers. There were thousands of plaques on the ground, unseen until approached because flat with the earth and surrounded by grass: each one bearing the name of two men. The contrast of the peaceful meadow struck forcibly with the sobering knowledge that thousands lay

buried beneath it. At the commemorative service held there it was salutary to hear the mingling of French and German voices - and English! (Although I wished I had thought to learn in French at least the Lord's Prayer before I came.)

The whole visit will be something which I will never forget, and which I hope will continue to influence me in the years to come. We saw the evidence of death on a huge scale; we prayed for the soldiers who gave their lives; we prayed for the fallen of the enemy. Yet I became aware that D-day itself was the cause of enormous sacrifice of life on the part of the local inhabitants who died as a consequence of the fierce shelling of the area in order to make it possible for the allies to progress forwards through France. This I wish to pay tribute to: that we were not only warmly welcomed to share in their celebrations but that they themselves have borne the pain of destruction of local communities on a large scale and yet remain very much resilient and joyful."

As Marisa has been said, it was a great privilege for us all to be able to participate in these impressive events. We were especially grateful to Fr. Laurent Berthout, Rector of the cathedral parish in Bayeux, for the enormous amount of organisation he had done for the whole ecclesiastical involvement in the various events.

Mgr. Boulanger in Exeter

Bishop Boulanger paid a very brief visit to attend the Installation of our new Bishop, Robert, on 5th. July.

With him came Fr. Xavier Signargout, his Vicar General, and Isabelle Berthelie, his Ecumenical Officer. Unfortunately he could not stay longer, as he needed to be back in Bayeux on the Sunday morning.



A Reception was held at lunch-time on the Saturday for all the visitors from our various diocesan links.

David Nixon in Caen

In the years when there is no Colloque it has been our custom to arrange an exchange of preachers for the Sunday in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Last year Fr. Olivier Ruffray, Rector of the Shrine of Ste. Thérèse at Lisieux, preached at our cathedral, and the

Rev. Dr. David Nixon, Dean of Studies for SWMTC and our chairman, preached to their cathedral congregation.

This year, with the building of a new relationship, our efforts to find a pulpit for a French preacher proved to have started too late. The Rev. Dr. David Nixon was, however, already booked to visit Caen in January to give a couple of talks, so Fr. Berthout invited him to preach in his new parish in the centre of Caen on the Sunday when he was going to be there, which turned out to be the first day of the WPCU.

David's report follows.

Activities

- Short papers on 'History and implications of Exeter-Bayeux/Lisieux exchange' and 'Diaconate in the Church of England' for diocesan conference *L'œcuménisme: la diaconie dans les Eglises* (15 Jan)
- Visit to small Anglican community in Caen, support for their training and activities (17 Jan)

- Sermon at main Mass at Abbaye aux Dames, Caen (18 Jan)
- Contribution at ecumenical service for unity Protestant Church, Caen (18 Jan)



Remarks

The clear context in the background (and foreground) of all these activities were the two terrorist attacks in Paris of the previous fortnight. Much discussion about the right of free speech versus the need for respect etc., the huge gatherings of people in cities, small towns and villages (e.g. I was told that of a population in Bayeux of 15 000, 10 000 had been on the streets), relations with the large (c. 7%) Muslim population, the '1968' ambiance of *Charlie Hebdo* and its reluctance/inability to see differences in 2015. I was told there were armed soldiers very obviously in front of the Synagogue in Caen on Friday-Saturday.

'We have learnt from ecumenical dialogue how to do inter-faith dialogue.' There is more attention at the moment given to inter-faith dialogue than Christian ecumenism; but some of that is due to the progress already made in the last 50 years in ecumenical terms. Younger people in France are perceived not to see ecumenical issues as particularly important.

The Reformed churches in France have become the United Protestant Church (l'Eglise protestante unie de France) May 2013 – a big step forward.

Most noteworthy at the conference was the hugely different French style of presentation: rapidly read papers in dense French for the most part, reflecting how teaching is still done at universities and seminaries. By contrast my relaxed powerpoint seemed a relief to all. Resistance from some seminarians I asked to change to a more informal style.

At Mass I preached, joined the two concelebrants at the altar for the Our Father, received communion in both kinds with the priests, distributed communion to the congregation. I think I was being treated as a combination of catholic layman and priest.

Brief discussion with Fr. Xavier (Vicar-General) and Isabelle (ecumenical representative) about the future of the exchange: the responsibility is ours to organise a visit of the French to England, perhaps with the subject previously discussed: the Church's response to secularism and multiculturalism. Isabelle is grateful for my presence as a way of keeping links alive.

Local Links

As you will see, this is a little late in publication, but it is all I have, and it is still good to share any church members' experience of twinning.

AXMINSTER'S TWINNING VISIT APRIL 2013

The Mayor of Axminster and I along with a party of nearly forty local people have just returned from a visit to our twinning town of Douvres la Deliverande in Normandy. Douvres is a similar sized town to ours also a short distance from the coast and in particular the historic Normandy beaches. It is such an excellent scheme encouraging friendship between people of different cultures and language, and although I struggle severely with my poor French the process of communicating with host families is incredibly rewarding. We all had a great time and look forward to welcoming the French families back to Axminster next year.

Our first full day was a visit to the attractive port of Honfleur where we were given a guided tour followed by lunch in a delightful restaurant with our host families. A real highlight of our visit was the formal presentation to the town of a fine Axminster carpet based on the original design. It will be hung on the walls of le Baronie which is a newly restored 15th century banqueting hall. It is certainly the first time in my ministry that I have blessed a carpet!

Attending church on Sunday was an interesting experience as well, with the Mass celebrated by a frail old priest who must have been touching ninety. He shuffled in five minutes after the service had been due to begin, and despite the excellent sound system in the Lalique Chapel which is part of a nunnery in the town, he was almost inaudible for most of the service. As one member of our party put it to

me afterwards "that puts the difficulties of the Church of England into perspective!

It was a great event within such easy reach of Axminster, and I was personally blessed with fantastic hosts who took great care of me. We so look forward to reciprocating their hospitality next year.

John Streeting. Rector, Axe Valley Mission Community

If you have any news which you are happy to circulate of the church's involvement in any local links, please let me have any information, preferably with a photo or two, to vicar1simon@waitrose.com. This probably isn't the season for twinning activities, but if you let me have news whenever you have it, it will keep the flow going.

Simon Crittall
Secretary to the Link Group