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**A Spiritual
Odyssey**

**By Richard
Phillimore**

Introduction

In writing this odyssey about spiritual experiences I was of course faced with the dilemma – “Isn’t that blowing your own trumpet?” People, and especially Christians, should never seemingly blow their own trumpets. How do we know that these happenings are not a figment of your imagination? All these thoughts have gone through my mind.

On the other hand, I have the view that many people in their pews are not reaching their potential for Christ, waiting patiently for Christ to do something in their lives. Much more I think that in their prayers they should ask Jesus what work he has for them to do.

The arrival of Alpha on the religious scene and the decision of the group I was a member of two years ago to continue meeting once a month has meant that the number of people with whom we can share religious experiences has increased enormously. We realise that we can all learn from each other.

Let me say straight away that I am certain God introduced the idea of Alpha to the Church and all that has followed on in various churches is His work. I include in this our recent liaison with the local Moslems. We are all inheritors of the Kingdom of God.

A large number of Christians in Great Britain do not believe that healing is taking place in our World today. In the C of E and the RC denominations these doubters may amount to a half.

If they are confronted with what is suggested as a miracle they say there must be some other explanation. Why? These same people know the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles and admit that healing obviously happened in those days. They say that this was a feature of the early Church but God never intended it to go on. On the contrary, God has told his disciples in every age to go out into the world and bring people to Christ.

Jesus and his disciples were always healing the sick. It has always been something that Christians should aspire to do.

The work of Jacky Pullinger with the Chinese heroin addicts in a part of Hong Kong where the Police would never penetrate has been fully shown in books and media, films and video.

We are lucky that we have in our village someone who helped in this work for a month, who saw the very dregs of humanity come in and demand Jesus, the name others who had been healed said they should ask for. Each individual aspiring to come off heroin was never left for 48 hours, even in the loo. Then more normal treatment such as hymn singing and prayers followed. Many reclaimed addicts have been healed while in prison. One was a murderer.

Remember, these never had a faith of any kind in the past, except to worship their ancestors.

Pictures of them ‘before’ and ‘after’ show the miracles in their lives. Many who were being ordered about by the local Triad bosses now turn to God. And one of the Triad leaders asked to be

made a Christian when he saw what had happened to his followers.

I will go ahead with writing this book.

I will tell what has happened to me in my Christian life. I will also write of two miracle workers I at one time knew well and of things they taught me. I will also describe how I came to receive Baptism of the Holy Spirit. I will also tell of the work God has entrusted to me. As long as this work goes on I shall be kept in health to do it. When it is finished my life will end.

1. Pre-War Days

I was taught to say my prayers morning and night at my mother's knee, or at the knee of my nanny, when my mother was abroad with my naval father. I can still remember the starchiness of her uniform against my face.

I think I can truthfully say that I have said my prayers ever since. I went to a prep school, Twyford School, where one of the masters was ordained and Chapel was twice a day. He, poor man, was an early victim of polio and was always in a wheel chair.

And after entering the Navy and going to the Naval Colleges at Osborne (1920-1) and Dartmouth (1921-4) a Senior Cadet would shout out "Say your Prayers" and 'Finish your Prayers', the latter in the evening being followed by 'Get into Bed' and in the morning by 'Through the Bath', which was always cold.

I always found the Navy a naturally religious service, obviously continued from the age of Sail, when you were entirely affected by wind and sea and tide, all of which man had no power over. Gales at sea even since the days of sail can be very fearful, even though at the same time they are majestic. Sailors whether they go to Church or not say silent prayers in stormy weather and also in fog, another time of danger, especially before radar came along.

But as a boy and young man I was entirely self centred and selfish. Good at games I thought of sport all the time, only working sufficiently to pass exams fairly poorly.

The media today gives young people a bad press, but apart from a small percentage, for whom crime has no limits, I am amazed at the unselfishness one meets on all sides, which is rarely reported. They may not go to Church as often as young people went, often forcibly, for discipline at school and at home was much stronger, but today's boy and girl are much nicer characters, though I notice that most of them tend to keep away from handicapped people as ours did.

At sea, I soon became friends with other Officers but for the men of the Ships Company I rarely thought and only spoke to formally. In peace time and especially in visiting ports in different parts of the World it worked all right.

I had a day in a submarine on the China Station in 1935, acting as an umpire in some competition. I noticed that there was a much better attitude, officers and men working together as a team. I wondered if I should have volunteered for submarines instead of the Fleet Air Arm, which I had been in since 1933.

At that time the Fleet Air Arm came under RAF Control which meant that ashore we were virtually under the RAF, as I had been for my training as an Observer. It was in 1938 that the Navy got the Fleet Air Arm back with quite a number of RAF pilots exchanging dark blue uniforms for their light blue.

After nearly three years in aircraft carriers on the China Station (1934-7) I got appointed in 1938 to a cruiser, the Cornwall, which was at the time employed in the Home Fleet as a Boys training Ship. Here we carried a

Supermarine Walrus amphibian but we also had 180 16 and 17 year old Seamen Boys on board and I was one of three Officers selected to be in charge of 60. They had all done their initial training.

It was a time of massive unemployment, over 2 ½ million being out of work as we slowly recovered from the great depression of 1931. Many came from families where the father was unemployed.

In that ship we got to know them extremely well. About a month ago I looked at my diary of 1938 and was amazed at all we did for them and how sad we were to say goodbye to them at the end of their training.

Whenever possible at the weekend we used to organise picnics, where discipline could be further broken down, and they could show initiative.

My flying duties, being catapulted by day and night and getting accustomed to landing in the open sea and being hoisted in to the ship at ever increasing ship's speed and in difficult sea conditions was a good antidote to pure Boy's Training.

In 1939 I was appointed to the battleship Rodney, this time the aircraft being a swordfish on floats, and also appointed as Boy's Officer. Once again there were to be 180 Boys for all of whom I should be responsible. I had a wonderful Chief Petty Officer under me called Walmesley who lived on the Mess Deck with them. He told me that he tried to be an extra uncle to all of them.

This was a time of rapid rearmament but I was frankly appalled at the new Boys

batches coming from their shore establishments. They were disciplined so thoroughly as to be almost automaton-looking and very silent. They were as unlike lads of their age as you could imagine.

I decided to give them regular talks, the earlier ones being all about that we are all different and have personalities of our own which we must bring out. I remember telling them that I could play no musical instrument and that I was sure some of them could.

I thought that picnics could play an even bigger part.

When we were at Devonport, our base, I, a bachelor in those days, used sometimes to take my car to one of the many beauty spots round Plymouth.

I would send along to the Boy's Mess Deck to ask if there were three Boys of the Watch allowed to go ashore, who would like to come for a drive. We would end up having a cream tea.

This sort of thing helped me to get to know them and break down the too rigid discipline.

There was no possibility in the Rodney of having the training classes that had been so successful in the Cornwall as the Boys were all required in the work of the ship.

I think it was in April 1939 that we went first to Portland where we were to spend all of the next three months.

I said to someone in the Ward Room 'I wonder where we can go for our picnic on Sunday'. Another officer heard me

say it and said: 'The Governor of Borstal is a friend of mine. I will write to him if you can produce someone to take my letter.' And so it came about that we received an invitation for 20 Boys and 4 others to go to Borstal at 2 o'clock. It was an extraordinarily interesting afternoon. The Governor, Mr Vidler, had first come to notice a few years before this as organising for the Duke of York (afterwards King George 6th) what had been called the Duke of York's camp, where Boys from the East End of London and from public schools met for a week in Essex, the Duke usually coming for one or two days.

I went round with him and his knowledge of each individual lad and friendship for them was remarkable. We went round the sick quarters and stopped and talked to two men suffering from piles.

When we left he said to me 'Men like that founded the British Empire but there is no scope for them today. They have been fighting on the government side in the Spanish Civil War and did very well, ending up as Majors.

'When they came back to England they had a big night out in London, stole a car and finished up here. When war comes I should like to command a company of these lads'. Laughingly he added 'and we should never need to worry about food'.

He said, 'Many of these lads have terrible homes' and added 'if you and I had had homes like them I hope we would have finished up here.'

We invited some of them on board and it was interesting to talk to them. One said

the Governor was the nicest man he had ever met.

Vidler was a bachelor and on Sundays ex Borstal Boys used to visit him and have tea with him.

These visits continued but we did not see Vidler again. Unlike other Borstals, Portland had a success rate of 75 percent.

The brand new aircraft carrier Ark Royal did the same. Questions were asked in Parliament because visitors were not allowed on board her but Borstal Boys were. The Government Minister said he knew there were no spies among the Borstal Boys.

The Captain of the Ark Royal sent a signal to the Governor, 'Sorry there has been a fuss about your Boys. I suggest you send another batch next Sunday.'

It was all quite a welcome relief from the preparations for War.

2. War – The Early Months

The Fleet gave early summer leave that year as all ships had to go up to Scapa by August 1st.

I felt that in war time my job with the Boys would be still more important preparing them for the transition from Peace to War. In the event I wasn't actually on board at the time of the Declaration of War. The Fleet went to sea on 31st August for a sweep of the North Sea and the next day – when two thirds of the way to Norway – we were catapulted with a signal from the Commander in Chief to the Admiralty asking for more ships to join him, which he did not want to send from sea to give away his position.

So we flew to the Base Ship at Scapa. On the next day (2nd) we flew to Invergordon. When we got back the new cruiser Edinburgh had arrived, but without her aircraft. So we were hoisted on board and it was there that we heard Neville Chamberlain's broadcast that we were at war. It was the 3rd of September at noon.

That evening the Edinburgh was ordered to sail at midnight for the north of Iceland and so at 11.45 we were hoisted over the side and told to taxi all night in the darkened harbour, a rather perilous happening, but my pilot, John Corbett, was very skilled.

At 7.00 the next morning the Fleet came in, accompanied, however, by about 6 German reconnaissance aircraft, which

stayed all day remaining most of the time too high for anti-aircraft guns, though occasionally some ship fired a few rounds.

We were glad to be hoisted back on board the Rodney.

Much happened in the next 3 ½ months. In operations near Norway the Ark Royal was attacked by a U boat, but the latter's torpedoes did not run well and the U Boat was sunk by a Polish destroyer.

A small number of ships including Rodney and Ark Royal were spectacularly attacked by dive bombers. Ark Royal was the target. She was not hit, but one bomb was close enough to take paint off her side and crockery to be broken in the Captain's pantry.

The Royal Oak was sunk inside Scapa Flow by a U Boat which penetrated the harbour.

The Fleet used Loch Ewe on the West Coast of Scotland thought to be beyond the range of German aircraft. On one occasion of Rodney going into Loch Ewe there was a shock below the surface.

The Armed Merchant Cruiser Rawalpindi was sunk in the Atlantic by a German pocket battleship and the Fleet proceeded to search between Scotland and Iceland. All was well with Rodney at speeds up to 17 knots but above that she went into a circle of about 5 miles in diameter.

Our aircraft was sent first to Greenock to tell the authorities that the Rodney was returning and then to Liverpool to

arrange for docking. So the Rodney was sent first to Greenock in the Clyde and then to Liverpool where, after deammunitioning cordite, she went into the Gladstone Dock. When the water was pumped out it revealed that half her huge rudder had been lost. This accounted for the knock going into Loch Ewe and was caused by U boat torpedo or mine.

At that moment I received orders from the Admiralty to leave Rodney immediately and go to No. 3 Bomber Group Headquarters at Mildenhall in Suffolk.

How had the Boys, and everyone else, settled into the Wartime routine?

I had wondered if they would have been frightened in the first brushes with the enemy. I thought a lot of them hadn't realised that in war the chances of their becoming a casualty were greatly increased.

One not very bright boy was in an anti-aircraft gun's crew when they had fired a lot at the time of the dive bombing of the Ark Royal.

He came to me afterwards and said 'I have just realised I may be killed. What can I do?' I told him 'When you get into your hammock at night ask God to look after you.'

It was astonishing that the Rodney got through the war without suffering any fatalities. They were very lucky. In the Norwegian campaign a bomb from a German flying boat penetrated two decks but never went off. If it had the ship would have blown up like the Hood.

In Wartime for long periods there was no chance for any leave to be given.

At Sea there are long periods for everyone to be closed up at their action stations. This is especially so around sunrise and sunset. Scratch meals often have to be taken at Action Stations.

Getting about the ship is difficult and slow for hatches up and down are closed, as well as watertight doors along the decks are clipped down and have to be reclipped.

So far as I know two Boys who were with me in the Rodney were killed. I feel rather responsible for one, for he followed me into the Fleet Air Arm and was killed as an Air Gunner in a Swordfish Squadron operating at night over the desert with the 8th Army. The other was killed in a destroyer action in the Mediterranean.

It was the custom in the Rodney for the Officer of the Boys Division to write to the parents of the lads when at 18 years of age they became Ordinary Seamen. I took with me a list of 150 next of kin and their addresses and wrote to them in the next few weeks. It was a decision that gave a lot of pleasure as I was to learn many years later.

3. With The RAF

I arrived at the RAF Station Mildenhall as Wellingtons of No. 3 group were returning from a disastrous daylight raid on Wilhelmshaven, in which we lost 8 out of 22 aircraft, each with a crew of 6. It is true that a much greater number of ME 110s (Messerschmidts, the German fighters) were shot down, but their crews were recovered. We achieved nothing as we were ordered only to drop bombs on warships not alongside for fear of causing civilian casualties. Most of the targets were alongside.

On arrival at Mildenhall I learnt the reasoning behind my appointment there.

About 15th December 1939 the Prime Minister, who did not want to start bombing of land targets decided that Bomber Command should attack certain targets, warships at sea. But Bomber Command had never been taught to do this, hence the decision to appoint Naval Observers to each of the four Bomber Groups who flew Whitleys, Blenheims, Wellingtons and Hampdens. I never discovered the names of the other observers.

My brief was to help aircrews to identify enemy warships, teach them how to attack them and to take part with aircrews in operations over the sea.

The other stations in the Group were at Feltwell, Newmarket, Marham, Honington and Stradishall, all in Suffolk and Norfolk.

The Air Officer Commanding was John Baldwin, who retired from the RAF on

1st August 1939 and who was called back to his old appointment on 15th August. When I went round the other stations he said I was never to be away from Mildenhall for more than one night at a time.

Before a week was out I saw that they had extreme deficiencies in Navigation and Communications and their equipment for operation over the sea was woefully inadequate. Most of the crews had been together for about two years and they were very pleasant companions in the Mess.

I am not going to describe any of the operations I took part in, but would like to make some general comments.

These Air Stations are almost all in very pleasant country. On the perimeter are houses where married members of the crews lived. In wartime the families counted the number of the aircraft taking off and the number coming back. Poor families. It must have been terrible for them.

I also felt it was horrible, in the period of the Cold War especially, to take off from what is almost a peace time existence and within an hour be in a situation of extreme danger and tension, the like of which is comparable only to a submarine entering an enemy strongpoint.

Thank goodness the Navy operates generally from bases such as Scapa or Loch Ewe, where shore facilities do not exist nor loved ones live.

I was sent to Feltwell first, who, in the raid on Wilhelmshaven, sent six aircraft on the raid and lost five – 30 men at one fell swoop, men who had been together

in peace time and war. I was there only four days after the raid and everyone was still in a state of shock. I didn't stay long.

I made one good friend at Mildenhall, with whom I played squash. But a few weeks later he and two other pilots were killed in a night accident to their plane.

He had just received the DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross). Three Wellingtons on a sweep of the North Sea were attacked by ME 110s who shot down one Wellington. But my friend's gunner shot down one of the attackers and the two remaining Wellingtons limped home.

I wrote to the father in Perthshire, who had fought in a Scottish Regiment in the First World War and received a nice letter back.

Air Crew, of which I was one, had about two days off every ten days, so I spent quite a lot of time in trains between Ely and Botley.

Now I come to the aircraft crash I was in.

On the night of February 20/21 1940 the Submarine Salmon, whose Captain was a friend of mine, Eddie Bickford, reported sighting two German cruisers and a destroyer off the Island of Heligoland.

The Air Ministry decided to attack them that night with what was really the first big bomber raid of the war – 84 aircraft. But they decided to send two aircraft off an hour earlier to make sure they were there with Observers in each of them.

I was told I was to fly with 99 Squadron, an Australian Squadron, who were based on the 'July' racecourse at Newmarket and lived in and under the grandstand.

I had not as yet visited Newmarket. Briefing was at 7pm where I met the captain and Navigator of the aircraft selected.

There was a full moon.

We took off at 9.00 and flew at about 12,000 feet. When the Navigator thought he was near Heligoland he asked base for his position and was told he had gone too far and was near the mouth of the Elbe.

So we turned round and lost height to be at about 1,000 feet near Heligoland. We got into cloud and there was still cloud at 1,000 feet. It became apparent there was a thick fog so we reported the fact to base. The other aircraft were already airborne and continued towards Heligoland while we turned for home.

When we got to Newmarket we saw a light and turned to land, but by that time the light had disappeared as the fog came down.

The same thing happened at Mildenhall where we next went.

The Captain of the aircraft did not think he had enough fuel to fly to the sea to get rid of our bombs.

The crew was all standing around the cockpit but there was no room for me there. I was in the middle of the aircraft in an open space and feeling drowsy as we had taken off at 9.0. It was now about 3.0 am and nothing had happened.

The aircraft was in darkness. One of the crew came to me with a torch and said 'Stand by to crash'. I said 'What do we do?' He said 'Lie down – with your head aft'.

But before I lay down I said my prayers. I remember asking 'Dear Lord, I pray for the lives of the crew of the aircraft and of myself.' After an interval I said 'Lord if my life is spared I should like to give my life to help young people in their growing up time.'

A few minutes later we crashed. The first impact was underneath crashing against the tops of trees. From then until we stopped can only have been a very few seconds.

Fire was the chief danger. There was a terrible smell of fuel and the large batteries were sparking.

I found a hole in the side of the aircraft. I got my head through it and my shoulders but could not move either foot. After a time I got the left one free but was quite unable to move the right. By this time the weight of my body was outside the aircraft and I found myself hanging down half over the bough of a tree with my head about 3 feet from the ground. I was hanging from my two twisted knees and in agonies of pain but I was fully conscious.

The crew had got out suffering only from bruises and concussion. One asked if he could help and I asked him to kneel on the frozen earth – there was a sharp frost – and take the weight of my body, greatly reducing the pain. They took it in turns to do this for 45 minutes.

After about 20 minutes an officer and three or four soldiers appeared smoking. I shouted to them to put out their cigarettes. They took about 20 minutes getting my right leg clear of the wreckage.

After a time we all set off for the road with two soldiers carrying me in a stretcher. I remember being passed over one gate.

At the road were two ambulances, the RAF crew all going to the RAF Hospital 25 miles away, while I was taken to the North Cambridgeshire Hospital two miles away. I went straight to the X-ray room.

The Surgeon said to me 'Well nothing is broken. What do you think is the matter?' I said I think I am very badly bruised. He said 'It is only right to tell you that you will never walk again. The ligaments at the back of each knee are completely torn and the legs can be waggled in any direction'.

Both legs were put in plaster and I went into the men's ward where I had a very happy week.

I was sent a complete set of the RAF Official photographs of the crashed aircraft before it was dismantled and taken away. In the crash one wing was torn off and both engines were detached from the rest of the plane.

In 1995 with two of my sons I returned to the scene of the crash. There is a local RAF Museum and they took me where they believed the crash had been in a big orchard of bramley apple trees.

From the one local cottage came a short man walking on a stick. He said the site was not correct moving us forty yards.

He said that he was 13 at the time. The bomber flew low over the cottage and he knew it was going to crash and dressed. He said he knew the crew of the aircraft were safe and walking about and that one person was caught in the wreckage. He told the soldiers when they arrived.

I gave a talk about it that night in a local hotel to an audience of 37 men and one woman. At the end the man from the cottage who had spent all his life there gave me two small pieces from the aircraft.

The next day I went to the North Cambs Hospital which has been entirely rebuilt. I was interviewed by the Hospital Secretary who had nursed all through the war. She said that the happiness I experienced in the ward was a common feature of wartime casualties, when to be alive overshadowed the loss of limbs.

She asked about my fear from the time of being told standby to Crash till the crash itself. I said I was very drowsy and although a part of me thought we were going to crash the other part thought it was a horrible nightmare.

I asked how the tearing of all the knee ligaments would be treated today. She said it was a very unusual accident and then after an interval said, but you are a walking miracle. Aviation experts who have looked at the photographs do not see how anyone could have escaped.

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I was transferred to Haslar after a week, going with a male nurse in a first class carriage from Wisbech to Liverpool Street and thence in a naval ambulance.

At Haslar, where my parents came to see me, I was taken out of plaster, X rayed and told, as at Wisbech, that I should never walk. I was put back in plaster.

The President of the Royal College of Surgeons, Cecil Wakely, who had recently been attached to the Navy as a Consultant, came to see me and said that I must be taken out of plaster.

He said start electrical treatment above the hips and gradually work down towards the knees and when it is possible to do so start physiotherapy.

Five or six weeks later I was beginning to walk with crutches. I thought what a wonderful man he must be.

Two years later I read that he had been knighted and I wrote to congratulate him. He replied that he remembered my case – 'I thought you would be a cripple for life, but I didn't say so.'

Now that he has disclaimed having healed me it could only be due to God whom I started giving thanks to two years late.

4. The War Years

The training of new Observers was so necessary after the Norwegian Campaign had opened and the Germans broken through the French lines that I was called to go to Lee on Solent while still on crutches to take the course going through. This was in April. In May the British Army was pinned up against the sea at Dunkirk. Volunteers were called for to take small boats over to Dunkirk to bring back any of the Army. My two friends Jimmy Prowse and Mike Branwell, both Observers and members of the Navy cricket team, volunteered and never returned.

In June and July the Germans installed in airfields in France attacked convoys to the south of the Isle of Wight.

In August one afternoon they attacked Portsmouth in strength. At Lee we could see columns of black smoke and hear the noise of battle. One winged German bomber came down in the sea off Lee after losing height over the airfield.

At last the Admiralty decided that Observer training was impossible at Lee, sending us off on a week's leave before reporting at the Naval Air Station Arbroath. During that week Lee and Gosport were both attacked from the air with about 20 killed at each Air Station.

Arbroath was known to be only a temporary move before going to a new Air Station, Piarco, being built in Trinidad.

The first course and all the officers and men to run the station sailed in July and

were never heard of. It is believed that a U boat sank them near the Island of Rockall about 100 miles west of Scotland.

After a night at Ford, which is now an open prison, we went in a special train to Newport in South Wales and sailed in a New Zealand shipping liner to Bermuda, other passengers including staff to set up censorship in Bermuda. We sailed on through the islands to Trinidad in one of the Lady boats – Lady Nelson, Lady Rodney etc.

The camp was just ready to receive us. The pilots to fly the cadets were all over 40, the aircraft were Sharks and Barracuda and the American Proctor. We were called at 4.30am, were bused to Piarco at 5.30 and flew from 6.0 to 9.0. We did lectures and ground instruction til 1.0; lunch at 1.0 was followed by rest til 4.0, then sport and exercise til 6.0 when it was dark. Lights out by 10.0.

Those of us who were Instructors were fully aware that casualties were likely to be heavy among those we were training, who would be joining front line squadrons when they got back to England. I thought therefore that the course and time in Trinidad should be as pleasant for them as possible.

In May 1941 John Smallwood and I were sent by air to Washington for six weeks to give the US Navy Aviation the result of our experience of the war to date. We were both attached to the Instrument Section of the Bureau of Aeronautics in the Navy Department. America was not yet in the War, but they were starting to call up reserves for training.

From Washington we were separated. I was sent down to the Naval Air Station at Pensacola in Florida, flying by way of Atlanta and Mobile and then by train. I also went to Norfolk, Virginia, going by river steamer down the Potomac and back. I also went to Philadelphia and on board the Indomitable, badly damaged by air attack, while escorting a convoy with vital supplies for Malta. The large working force, mainly negro labour, were everywhere and excelled in the speed of repair of our ships in USA.

It was a very interesting six weeks. Sir Henry and Lady Chilton, who lived at Shedfield in Shedfield Cottage, were on a Foreign Office assignment and helped to make my time in Washington very pleasant and I accompanied them one weekend to Charlottesville and to Sutton, Nancy Astor's home where she had been brought up. Nancy Astor was the first woman MP and MP for Plymouth (Sutton).

I got home, 100% fit after my aircraft crash, at the end of November 1941 in a liner of the Union Castle Line which started from Suez and called at Capetown and Port of Spain, Trinidad.

I was appointed as Operations Officer of the Escort Carrier Biter building in Atlantic Basin, Brooklyn USA and joined the Bergensfiord Norwegian liner at Greenock – about December 22nd bound for Halifax.

One other ship sailed with us, who had on board the 120 survivors of the Bismark. More could have been picked up but there was a U boat alarm, which brought operations to a halt.

We arrived at Halifax on January 1st 1942 but all trains were required to take the prisoners to a camp in Ontario. So we left 24 hours later by train to Montreal, a 30 hour journey. It was good to see eastern Canada in the depth of winter; and the St Lawrence River piled high with ice.

That night we went on by train from Montreal to New York. When it was light the train was passing through the pleasing country of Connecticut, not unlike the English country scene under snow.

In New York we went to the Hotel Barbizon Plaza in 6th Avenue and 58th Street which was to be our home for almost six months. We went down daily to the ship going by subway to St George's, Brooklyn and then on by street car (tram).

The work force were almost entirely first and second generation Italians, and we were told not to say rude things about our enemy Mussolini if we wanted the ship built to time.

We received so much hospitality in New York where all seats in theatres were free. A White Ensign Club operated in the hotel and if we wanted to go away for the weekend this would be organised. I spent many weekends with Mr and Mrs Rochester in Long Island, he being the head of Rochester Ropes Inc., who made steel ropes for oil wells and arrester wires for aircraft carriers. On Saturday afternoons I would run with the beagles on Long Island within sight of New York's skyscrapers. There were usually about 80 officers from the Navy standing by for ships building or being repaired in

the area, all staying in the Barbizon Plaza.

We sailed in 1942 and joined a convoy off Halifax to return to England.

When we were in home waters we started working up for our anti-submarine duties to give protection to convoys.

But just as soon as we were ready all but three of the anti-submarine Swordfish aircraft were landed and we were told we were going to take on board Sea Hurricanes, the carrier version of the aircraft of the Battle of Britain. The deck was very small for them and most of the pilots had done very little flying in that type of aircraft. We sailed in a convoy of big ships, filled with troops and war material, passing close to the Azores and then the Straits of Gibraltar just seeing another big American convoy, whose troops were to land at Casablanca.

Passing through the Straits of Gibraltar on a lovely day I was flown by Swordfish to the aircraft carrier Furious to be briefed for the North African landings the next day, so that I could brief the pilots for the assault landings at Oran in Algeria where our pilots were to attack airfields and protect the ships from attack by French aircraft. The pilots were much more frightened of taking off and landing on the deck than for anything that happened in the air. We had no casualties but two or three aircraft were damaged beyond repair in landing. The other landing place was at Algiers.

We left as soon as the troops were safely ashore and the local airfields in our hands.

We called at Gibraltar for 24 hours and then sailed with a small convoy for the Clyde. Twelve hours earlier our sister ship the small carrier Avenger was sunk by a U boat in the Straits of Gibraltar and there were only two survivors. This was twelve hours before we sailed.

Off Cape St Vincent in rough weather the Union Castle Warwick Castle in our convoy was torpedoed by a U boat and had a big list. An hour or two later the U boat fired another torpedo into her to sink her. In spite of the weather, about two thirds of her crew were saved, and the troops that had been on her were all landed in North Africa.

We spent 24 hours at Greenock and then we went to Scapa for a day where Winston Churchill was visiting the Fleet. Finally we went to refit at Dundee. In Scapa I went over to the Fleet Flagship and was asked to stay for lunch, sitting only two away from Winston and hearing everything he said.

While on Christmas leave I was promoted to Commander and appointed to the Staff of Admiral Max Horton at Liverpool, who was in charge of all operations against the U boats. He was the finest man I ever met and particularly good when things were at their worst.

Suffice to say that in March 1943 our shipping losses to the U boats would, if continued, lose us the war in six months. But during May of the same year the U boats were completely beaten and their losses so heavy that they could never again carry out mass attacks against convoys.

In May Max Horton sent me to Maydown, a new Air Station just outside Londonderry, to run, with a Wing Commander RAF, fortnightly anti U boat courses for all those engaged in the Battle of the Atlantic. We had about 120 on each course. It was part of the working up of Escort Ships and we had full scale exercises by day and night at the end of each course. I returned to Liverpool monthly for 24 hours.

I stayed there until December 1944, going over to Liverpool to say goodbye to Max Horton. I hoped he would become First Sea Lord, but he told me he would retire when war was over as he was dog tired.

In January 1945 I was appointed Staff Officer Operations on the Staff of Flag Officer Air East Indies, Vice Admiral Clem Moody in Fisheries Building, Columbo, Ceylon. I flew out in a York aircraft of RAF Transport Command.

I lived within 50 yards of the Office, PG'ing with Mr Brocklebank, a tea taster, as all service accommodation was full.

We had Naval Air Stations at Ratmalana (Columbo), China Bay (Trincomalee) and others in the bush in Ceylon and others in South India with aircraft repair facilities at Coimbatore.

I attended the C in C's staff meeting daily in Columbo.

I had to attend periodical meetings in Delhi where Operation Zipper was being planned, landings in and recapture of Malaysia. We flew there in RAF Dakotas or in naval aircraft.

This was an off-shoot of Mountbatten's Headquarters, which were at Kandy in the Botanical Gardens outside the town. He was Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia, with Admiral Power commanding all naval Forces and General Slim Army Forces.

Also at Colombo there were frequent arrivals of Fleet Carriers and smaller carriers on their way out to join the British Pacific Fleet, operating with the US Pacific Fleet commanded by Admiral Nimitz. The Supreme Commander in all the Pacific was General McArthur. I would visit them all to see if they needed help.

When in Colombo I used to go to the Church close to my lodgings on Sunday evenings. It was the first time I had met the Church of South India. It had a very dynamic vicar and the Church was full with many servicemen of all three services who were in Columbo at that time.

I also attended the Consecration of the first Ceylonese Bishop of Columbo in Ceylon, one of three brothers. Another was an Admiral in the Ceylon Navy and I think the third was a politician.

However, within six months one of them was charged with corruption which reduced the influence of all three of them.

The War in Europe had ended in May. In August the forces taking part in the reconquest of Malaysia sailed and it seemed a good moment to take a week's leave. I went to the Viceregal Lodge at Outacomund (Outy) in South India which was available to officers of the three services.

And I was there while the two atomic bombs were dropped on Japan, followed on August 8th by the surrender of Japan and peace on August 15th.

In September I was flown home for a week to find out what were the plans for the Naval Air Stations in that theatre. In 1945 flying between Ceylon and the UK took about three days. The RAF flew us in York aircraft, the transport version of the Lancaster bomber. It seems that the Naval Air Division had not then got round to thinking about the Air Stations in our theatre, priority being naturally given to bringing home the Prisoners of War, who were mostly in a terrible state.

I went down to Shedfield very briefly. Shortly afterwards the C in C, Admiral Power went home and my Admiral took over temporary command of the East Indies Station.

5. In the Post-war Navy

In December I was appointed as Commander of the cruiser Argonaut, to join her at Yokohama. But first two of us, the other being a White Russian in the FAA, were loaned a vehicle with a native driver for a week to go anywhere we wanted in Ceylon. We saw something of the ancient history of the island, visiting Anaradapura, Singurya finishing up at Trincomalee and then back to Columbo.

I was sent to Madras, to begin my journey to Japan in a merchant ship, but several days elapsed before it was calm enough to board this ship off the port of Madras.

At Singapore I transferred to an RN ship to take me to Hong Kong and thence to Yokohama in a fast minelayer.

The Argonaut had recently been in Australia where the ships of the Pacific Fleet always had a great reception.

For much of the next few months we were the most important British ship at Yokohama where the surrender ceremony had taken place in the USS Missouri, with the Duke of York, Admiral Fraser's flagship also there.

We all had railway passes signed by General McArthur enabling all service personnel to travel free on the Japanese railways.

The 15 mile journey from Yokohama to Tokyo had largely been flattened by bombing as had also parts of Tokyo.

We went for a brief cruise at the end of January 1946 to Kure and Nagoya. At Kure the Ship's Company were sent half at a time, in buses to Hiroshima to see the effect of the first atom bomb dropped on that city under six months before. The thought was that very few Britons would have a chance to see it and our Captain – McCarthy – and I thought it should be made compulsory to go. We spent a few hours there.

In April we went to Hong Kong and took Admiral Harcourt, the Acting Governor, to Singapore to see the Governor there.

On return to Hong Kong we learnt that we should return home soon, but any of the 'hostilities only' part of the Ship's Company, who would like to emigrate to Australia, should be allowed to leave the Argonaut there. Fifty elected to do so.

Admiral Harcourt returned to the UK in Argonaut flying his flag.

We called at Singapore, Colombo, Aden, Port Said, Malta and Gibraltar arriving home in June 1946.

The majority of the Ship's Company left but I was left in charge of putting the ship into reserve at the top of Portsmouth Harbour.

A party of us also went to the city of Coventry for 24 hours, where we received the Freedom of the City. The Argonaut had been adopted by the City of Coventry.

In the evening we were all entertained to supper in a British Restaurant, which

was a feature of those early post-war days when the rationing was still as severe as in war time.

An appointment to the smaller cruiser Dido followed in 1947 in which we were in the Second Cruiser Squadron with the Superb the flagship.

In the spring we went to Oporto, Gibraltar and Casablanca and in the summer visited Haugasund (Norway), Stockholm in mid-summer, Copenhagen and Guernsey, all except Stockholm having been under German occupation.

We returned to Copenhagen for the funeral of the King of Denmark, embarking Admiral Burnett to represent the Board of Admiralty and the Royal Marine Band.

In the Autumn it was decided that there was no requirement for HMS Dido in the Post-War Navy. I went in her to the Garelock where she was gradually stripped of fittings by an ever smaller Ship's Company. I stayed about six weeks as Commander in Command.

I was told that early in 1948 I was to join a small Admiralty Committee under Vice Admiral Creasy whom I had met but never served under. He had his Secretary and there was one other officer. I remember on one Saturday he invited us to lunch at his home in Suffolk in one of the small villages where Constable had painted.

Early in the New Year I met Pamela Darlington of Soberton at a religious weekend in Sandown, Isle of Wight, where we had been sent by our respective Parochial Church Councils.

We continued to see each other and fell in love, getting engaged in March. We were married in Soberton Church by the Bishop of Salisbury, who was a friend of the Darlingtons, on Friday, 28th June. My best man was my first cousin Stephen Jenkins. At that period after the war rationing was still in force for food, clothing and petrol. A special allowance of food was given for weddings. The reception was held at Little Meon House where we had a marquee. I was married in uniform and my two young nephews, Tom and Jonathan Wells were in sailor suits.

Our honeymoon was spent in the Irish Republic at hotels at Castle Archdale, Co. Clare and at Rosepena in Co. Donegal. There was no rationing in the Irish Republic.

In August I was appointed to the staff of C in C Mediterranean as Fleet Aviation Officer, once again serving under Admiral Sir Arthur Power who had commanded the Naval Forces in Ceylon in 1945. He had also been Commander of the Hood in 1925-6 when I was a Midshipman.

Pamela and I travelled out to Malta in a liner. An uncle had married a Maltese as his second wife and it was through that connection that we were able to rent a house belonging to the Inguanes family outside the village of Birchikara. In the next house with a connecting garden were two Fleet Air Arm friends, the Lewins and the Carvers.

But we were not left in peace for long as war with Soviet Russia seemed likely. This was the time of the Berlin Air Lift.

I was sent to Military Headquarters at Fayid in the Canal Zone, where there were some 6,000 British soldiers with Air Force Units at Ismalia, 40 miles away. There we planned the defence of the Suez Canal in case of war with Russia.

It was the end of November before I was able to get back to Malta to Pamela.

Once or twice a year the staff would accompany the C in C cruising round the station, once in the Gambia (cruiser), Glory (aircraft carrier) and the Vanguard (battleship). Places we visited included Beirut, Cyprus, Marmaris for the regatta, Athens, one or two Greek islands, Corfu, Anzio, Bari, Naples, Tobruk, Tripoli, Algiers, Sardinia, Toulon and Marseilles where Admiral Power held an Investiture for members of the French Resistance. We joined them afterwards for a buffet lunch. Their citations read in French and English revealed the great courage many had shown.

At the end of 1950 I was passed over for promotion, which I felt much at the time though in the long run I feel I have contributed more in the post-naval part of my life.

But before I was allowed to retire I had 2 ½ years at the Admiralty in the Directorate of Air Warfare responsible for the development of Air Navigation as well as pressure suits leading to the present day space suits.

Each year we linked up for about ten days with our opposite numbers in the RAF, US Navy and US Air Force and Canadian Air Force to review progress in these fields. In 1951 we went to Ottawa and in 1952 to Washington,

working in the Navy Department and visiting Dayton, Ohio where the initial flight of the Wright brothers was made.

In 1952 we were the hosts, taking the Americans and Canadians to Farnborough and the Technical Research Establishment, Malvern.

Sons were born to us in 1950 at Shedfield and 1951, also at Shedfield, while our third son was born at Woking. We lived at Queens Club Gardens, W8 in 1951 and until October 1952, when we took the Charles Mills house in Woking for six months till April 1953, covering the birth of Charles in January of that year.

Finally I took Shiplake House from Cousin Stephen Phillimore from April to November, 1953 being fascinated with living in the home of my great grandparents on the Thames and commuting to Paddington by train from Shiplake. At weekends we went to the family church at Shiplake and in the afternoon used to row on the rivers Thames and Loddon in Cousin Stephen's boat. Part of the agreement was that we should put him up when he wanted to come down from London. Sometimes he accompanied us on the river.

In the bookshelves there I found a number of diaries of Elizabeth Phillimore, nee Bagot, difficult but not impossible to read, covering a visit to Paris in 1816 and some diaries in the years between 1825 and 1839. I took the diaries with me to Shedfield and transcribed them on tape, a Mrs Stent, living in Stanmore, Winchester typing them out. Latterly, I transferred them and sent the transcription to Christ

Church, Oxford where Phillimore Family papers were being assembled, especially covering the 20 odd members of the Family of Phillimore who had been at the 'House'.

In November 1953 on retiring from the Navy we bought Shedfield Grange from Robert, to whom it had been left in my Father's will and settled there.

6. Farming at Shedfield

When he retired in the late 1920s my father took over the running of the farm. Robert and I when we were at home gave him all the help and advice we could. But during this period we lost money we could ill afford. At the end of the 1930s his memory was going. My mother gradually took over the running of the farm and Mr Stuart Wyatt of Messrs Austin and Wyatt in Fareham paid weekly visits and paid the staff. My father died of pneumonia in November 1940.

During the war the Government instituted War Agricultural Committees throughout the country, who were responsible for the crops grown and seeing that efficient use was made of all land.

Our local Committee members were Messrs Ockenden and Warwick from this parish and Mr Yates from Curdridge.

I took over the farm at the end of 1953. It was a farm of 150 acres, mainly a dairy farm with a herd of pedigree Guernsey cows and young stock. We grew annually about 12 acres of wheat or barley, 10 acres of potatoes and some kale and fodder beet. We had a milk round selling raw tuberculin tested milk in about a four mile radius.

My brother Robert, farming at Swanmore, lost his Ayrshire herd in a foot and mouth outbreak in 1960. When allowed to have cattle again I persuaded

him to take over my herd of Guernseys, while we kept the young stock.

My first year's farming showed a profit of £3, but every other year showed a loss, though most of the losses were comparatively small and some were paper losses with the closing valuation less than the valuation at the start of the year. In the war years a subsidy of £20 per acre was paid to grow potatoes. But by 1954, my first year in charge, one had to pay £20 per acre to be allowed to grow potatoes.

Ron Brown, who was foreman, worked 58 years, the whole of his working life. Jim Privett worked 45 years, but could not drive a tractor and his skills were those of an earlier age. Bert Blackman was here 27 years as my cowman.

Farming 120 acres I should have had only one paid man and used family labour. In 1967 I learnt that it was not possible to extend the farm or the size of the herd so, frightened by reports of Professor Buchanan, who advocated overspill from London coming to South Hampshire and increased population coming, I asked for planning permission to build a golf course. This was granted by the County Council at the second application and was well before the general rush to build golf courses. A few years afterwards Robert sold his farm at Swanmore and moved to Warnford.

7. Paying for Education

Our 4th son, Mark, was born in 1956. The boys started education at the Village School when five and stayed there till nine years old, when they went to Twyford School, where I had sons between 1959 and 1969. They all four went on to Marlborough starting in 1963 and Mark finishing there in 1973. My brothers and I had been at Twyford.

Education was paid for by three sources. Sand of good quality was found, first on the south side of Sandy Lane, until drainage work proved it was not possible to go on. Before tackling the north side of Sandy Lane, where the bulk of the sand was, we had to dig a large culvert under Sandy Lane to take away the water. Warings were the contractors.

Among the buildings made using sand from Sandy Lane was the Admiralty Radio Establishment built on Portsdown – above Southwick.

We sold the two Vernet pictures of Mediterranean harbours, receiving £8,000 from the Lowndes Lodge Gallery (Peter Johnson), spending four and a half thousand pounds on buying three more one of which has since been sold at a profit.

We sold Woodman's Paddock after the death of Ron Brown to Mr Jurd for £50,000.

My brother John also helped me with money for education, even though faced

with the same education costs for his own children.

We were very lucky that the children's education was over by 1973 when there was a tremendous increase in costs, first of oil products and later of everything else, which would have made private education impossible to pay for.

Rent from the Golf Course started at a low rate about that time but increased steadily. It meant too that there were no more farm losses.

It was not until the 1980s that my tenant Tony Taylor's policy of restoring and sub-letting the old farm dairy buildings started bringing in a new income, for first the buildings had to be converted to their new use after restorations. Neither Tony Taylor nor I had capital to use for this purpose so the adaptation of old buildings went slowly but surely.

Row Ash Farm and its 60 acres were sold in 1968 to provide a small fund for my four sons on leaving school or university and going out into the world.

8. Religious Life at Shedfield after Retiring from the Navy

In 1954 I was elected a Churchwarden in place of my mother, who was then 78, she having been appointed after my father's death in 1940. That year – 1954 – Eric Staples came as Vicar of Shedfield in place of Brian Crowley, whom I had first met in Cochin, South India, in 1945 when he combined the duties of being Chaplain at the Naval Air Station with being a local missionary.

Eric Staples was a bachelor until 1964 when he married a Finnish widow with two teenage daughters and shortly afterwards was appointed to Helsinki to the Anglican Church there and soon found himself going to Moscow quarterly to conduct services in the British and American embassies.

Eric Staples had a great capacity for making friends and keeping them over many years. He was wonderful too in visiting the sick.

But he was not good with the young, especially the ages of nine to twelve, although he had been the Diocesan Youth Officer.

Miss Fielding ran a Youth Club of children of Junior School age and I helped her. I remember we used to play the games that were accustomed to be used in School.

Before she and Miss Searle, who lived with her in the School House, left to live at Kings Lynn she gave up and I ran it on my own for a time.

There were four families in Heathlands who had ten or more children each and they provided quite half the children of Junior School age. They were the Keiths, the Ponds, the Gales and the Samways. They often brought along younger children saying, 'Mum said could you have ? tonight or otherwise she will be alone'. Often the eldest girl who came of one of these families would be a wonderful help to me. I remember in particular Stella Gale and Carol Samways, whom I have known for thirty years and are still lovely characters, one of them in a family with problem children some of whom offended.

As in pre-war days increasingly I found the Anglican Church lacking in some things that I had hoped from it. I know that my mother had found the same thing but had been helped for many years by a prayer group led by the Vicar of Warnford. They used to meet weekly.

We had been helped in previous years by Canon Haldane who became Provost of Southwark and used to come and stay and hold one or two meetings. After he died Protestant Franciscans from Batcombe in Dorset used to come twice a year but the brother we knew best was sent to Sweden to start evangelising there.

In 1964 just after Michael Thomas had taken the place of Eric Staples, a lady who ran the Sunday School successfully alone, came to see Michael Thomas and said 'I can't continue with the Sunday School any more for personal reasons.'

Michael called a P.C.C. meeting but no one seemed prepared to take on the Sunday School. But after he said it must be closed down Audrey Hamper said she would take it over and I agreed to help her. We met on Sunday afternoons for many years, and were later joined by Ron Rainer.

9. Rhodesia and Southern Africa

In 1966 I had an opportunity to go out to Southern Africa for about a month.

I had been asked to stay for a few days at Kitale in Kenya near the border with Uganda. My hosts were the parents of a young man from Southampton University who was living with us. They had a farm with a Jersey herd and grew coffee.

Then I flew from Nairobi to Johannesburg to stay with my first cousin and his wife and three children. From their home I went to the Kruger Game Park, about the size of Wales, for two days. I flew south to Capetown spending two days there and being fetched to spend a weekend at Hormanus 70 miles along the coast.

Then I flew to Rhodesia, Tony Curtis meeting me at the Airport and driving me 180 miles to Umtali. The town of about 10,000 people is 4,000 feet high and is surrounded by higher hills up to about 6,000 feet.

In the Argonaut coming home from the Far East in 1946 we had a Brains Trust on board who used to operate some evenings on the Ships internal communications system questions being put to four individuals. I got to know one quite well, who was a 'Hostilities Only' Electrical Chief Petty Officer. After he left the Navy I communicated with him when he settled near Ipswich.

In 1950 he decided to emigrate to Rhodesia and settled in Umtali (now called Mulare). Tony Curtis had married an East Anglian girl, Janet, before they left England.

They lived close to the High School where their two sons were educated. I was godfather to Ben, the second son.

Many people there have more than one job. Tony's main work was in a plumbing firm run by a Yugoslav, but he was also an accountant and the organist of Umtali Church, now a Cathedral.

While still in England the Curtis' asked me what I would like to do. They had sent me two missionary papers from the Mande Mission, which had a link with Umtali Church. I said I should very much like to spend 24 hours at the Mission if it was possible. The reply came back 'Not possible, but you would be welcome for 48 hours'.

Mande Mission was about 60 miles from Umtali in the bush. There I met Arthur Lewis, very high Church, and his wife Gladys, in charge of the sick room. Fifty yards away was the school. About 200 children attended. School was from 7.00 to 1.00 with ages 7 to 12. Some boys and girls walked eight miles to school and eight back starting about 4.00 am. Fruit trees on the way helped to feed the children, some of whom came from Mozambique; the local tribe being cut in half. When the frontier was decided about 1800 it was a vertical line of longitude and had paid no attention to where people lived.

All the School provided was a tap of cold water.

The next day Arthur and I were to go to the furthest limit of the Mission about 13 miles away. We went in the old Land Rover with a snorkel attachment on the exhaust, as we had to ford two rivers about one or two feet deep. Starting about 6.00 am we took 3 hours to go 11 miles and then had to abandon the car and go about 1 ½ miles on foot. The heat was tremendous.

There Arthur had a meeting with the local elders of the tribesman under a big tree.

The parents had recently built a class room and another was being built. Apart from that there were small tents. I was surprised to find on a black board a list of World Religions chalked up. The tents were the coolest places.

We went to music practice for Sunday School - the instruments being mainly tins with a rod through the two ends and a number of pebbles.

All the people, African grownups and children, looked happy, but in a few years time they were all involved in the civil war.

My last day I went to Holy Communion at 6.30 am in Shona, the local language. When I went into the Church I saw we had to kneel on concrete and sit on a concrete block. I was somewhat lame then. The only cushion to kneel on in the Church was for Father Lewis, and he brought me the cushion, rather embarrassing! After the Service I was introduced to the fifteen African Women who were all members of the Mothers Union who were going to meet at 7.00. At that time Joanne Halifax was the World President, whose picture was on

their M.U. paper. I went up in their estimation when I said she was my friend and her house was 200 yards from ours.

Rhodesia impressed me a lot and especially the young people who seemed much more alert. Many houses are on the edge of the bush where wild animals and poisonous snakes may be found. There was always so much to do so young people were never bored. It made me wonder whether we as a nation do not molly coddle our children too much and try to keep them from all danger.

In the ensuing dangerous years there were frequent cases of boys and girls about twelve, in the absence of their parents defending their houses when attacked by armed terrorists. Some were reported on local radio and television.

From Umtali I went by train to Salisbury and stayed for a few nights at Meikles Hotel, where I was joined for the weekend by an old family friend Miggs Ponsony, who was living in Lusaka, Zambia. She was a longtime friend of Sir Humphrey Gibbs, the Governor and Lady Gibbs. So we were asked to lunch on the Sunday and walked there through lovely jacaranda avenues of the mauve flowers, a two mile walk.

Due to Rhodesia's UDI the previous year the Gibbs had become world famous and so was the Lord Chief Justice who was living with them because he had broken his leg. I sat next to him.

In the afternoon I was sent to see the cricket, Rhodesia v Transvaal, and was looked after by a judge and had tea with the teams. After walking back I had 30

minutes talking to Sir Humphrey in the garden until Miggs returned having been to see one of the Gibbs' sons and family.

I had always wanted to visit Rhodesia, for a friend of my youth had gone there in 1920 and in a time, when I was rather unhappy in the Navy I thought of following suit. Edward Haig, a relation of the World War One Field Marshall, was killed in East Africa in the Second World War. The family had lived at Bishopstoke, Eastleigh.

It was ten years before I returned to Rhodesia, spending a long weekend in Johannesburg first. My cousin had died and I stayed with his handicapped widow. She relied entirely on Mary, her African servant, who had to help her to dress and undress. She was devoted to Mary and Mary to her.

The situation in Rhodesia was completely changed for the white population was engaged in a bitter struggle with terrorists. The situation in the towns was fairly normal. In Umtali the only difference was that we were no longer able to go to the lake, Umtali's water supply, to sail when the Curtis' had a boat.

I had arranged to stay on farms and first went to one about 20 miles from Umtali where Raymond and Erica's house was surrounded by barbed wire, with arc lights and alsation dogs patrolling at night. Raymond was in the Hampshire Regiment during the war. The war ended with them in a village in Austria where Erica was a local girl.

He was always armed outside the house. His African foreman had a brother who was a doctor in one of the London

hospitals. Raymond was the head of the local Defence forces and spent much of his time with them.

Much of the defence of all the farms centred on the radio transmitter which each farm had. A major police station covered all farms in a 20 mile radius. At 6.00 am all farms were called up one by one from the police station. Each farm had a number and when the number was called they would report whether they were all right. If attacked at any time they would report by radio to the police station, so that it should not be long before help came.

Later I stayed on a farm at Shamva, 60 miles north east of Salisbury (Harare) with Lawrence and Val Ross. Her mother, aged about 65 slept in a bungalow inside the barbed wire of the house. At 6.30 every morning I joined her in a truck going out with an African young man and several bags of food to feed cattle in a wooded area about a mile away. The grandmother had a pistol round her belt, while I was given an F 16 rifle to stand guard while the cattle were being fed.

Marshall, the eldest son, aged 23, was in the Rhodesia Light Infantry, and was obviously a very good soldier. He came on leave for two or three days during my visit. On that first visit he was very sad. Much army work was done in units of five who became bosom friends. Marshall had been sent to do a course, and the other four in a Land Rover had been ambushed and killed. Marshall hoped that if he had been there he might have seen the danger. Alternatively he said he would have liked to die with them.

Tracy, aged about 18, came next. She worked on intelligence in a neighboring town and I never saw her at that time.

Then came Stuart. On that first visit Val and I picked him up from his school in Salisbury at the end of his last term. On subsequent visits he was in Air Force uniform. Lastly, Alex was about 10.

I know that Tracy's parents were worried about her because whenever there was any untoward happening Tracy would have violent sickness or enteritis. The local doctors could not account for it. She had been to see a specialist in Johannesburg who said it was a defect in her large intestine but it was not curable.

Almost a fortnight later I was spending a night with Val's brother and young family close to Harare Airport, from where I was to fly the next day to Bulawayo to stay with the sister of Mrs Pelly from Preshaw near Upham.

I learnt that Tracy was staying there for a night or two but was quite an invalid. My plans were all changed as I was invited to have lunch with Ian Smith, the Prime Minister.

I met Tracy, who came down late, 10 minutes before I was taken into town. I said to Tracy 'I am so sorry to hear of all your troubles. You know that there are other ways of being cured. One is by prayer'. She said 'I don't think that could happen to me because I hardly ever go to Church. But I do believe in God.' I said 'I am going back to England in a few days. Would you like me to pray for you?' She said she would.

Three months later her mother wrote to me to say she was much better. I had a letter from her in 6 months that she was completely well. Did God tell me to pray for Tracy?

My relationship with her is different to that of anyone else. I stayed in her parent's house when she was there, on one subsequent occasion for about ten days.

She came to Shedfield with the children in 1989 for two days and was here for three hours between flights this year. But we write to each other about every four weeks and often she writes that my children and I have been praying for you. Spiritually, I am closer to her than with my family.

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A word or two about my lunch with Ian Smith. I was taken there and a time arranged for me to be picked up.

Mrs Smith (Janet) was outside the house greeting a couple from Surrey, part of the lunch party. We looked at some flowering shrubs before she led us in and gave us cool drinks while the party of 10 were assembling. Ian Smith came in, saw that my glass was empty and said, 'Would you like what I mix for myself?' which was lemon and lime mixed. He let it be known that in wartime they didn't have any alcoholic drinks.

He was very easy to talk to and a very good host. His son was at lunch and a couple, not in Parliament, whose name I had known from the early years of the Rhodesia Front.

We had just finished lunch when he had to go to give an interview with the BBC whose equipment was being carried past the window.

Before we started lunch he said Grace. I wondered whether there were any other Prime Ministers in the world who said Grace before a meal.

I think I paid further visits to Rhodesia or Zimbabwe, its new name, in 78, 80 and 82. Bishop Muserawa was the Prime Minister of a National Government on one occasion but he did not please the Nationalists and the Communist Robert Mugabe then came to power.

Beside paying further visits to the Curtis' at Mutare, as Umtali was called, one visit coinciding with the marriage of my godson to a local girl, Liz, I paid further visits to the Ross family at Derry, 25 miles from Harare on the road to Kariba, two visits to Richard and Jane Light at Umvukwes. They grew tobacco and grenadines.

I also stayed with Clive and Margaret Ross near Harare Airport, Stan and Grace Ball and Arthur and Gladys Lewis in the suburbs of Harare.

The Rhodesian Christian Group

The Rev. Arthur Lewis, who in 1966 had been the Missionary in charge of Mandeia which I visited had afterwards been Vicar of Rusapa, a town between Harare and Umtali. Later Ian Smith made him a Senator in the Upper House and I twice stayed with him in the Harare Suburbs.

Eventually he was forced to leave the country and settled in Solihull and started the Rhodesia Christian Group whose object is "For the defence of the Faith and to monitor the spiritual, economic and social development of Zimbabwe and befriend, advise and assist where possible former Rhodesian citizens". Arthur was the Hon. President and Denis Walker, a former M.P. whom Mugabe tried to arrest, the hard working Director.

The Zimbabwe currency is now only worth about 5% of its 1978 value and there are many previous civil servants of Rhodesia who, whether living in England, South Africa or Zimbabwe have got practically nothing to live on. The Rhodesian Christian Group sends out a newsletter about three times a year to its friends in all parts of the world and asks for funds to send to the most deserving cases.

They often ask for prayers for various Africans and Europeans who have been arrested and often tortured. Some are not tried while others are sentenced to long years of imprisonment, sometimes 50 years.

There were two Englishmen, one Philip Hartlebury, whom we were asked to write to and pray for. I wrote to Philip for two or three years before world opinion persuaded the authorities to release him.

It is not easy to write to someone you know nothing of and cannot get a letter back.

Later there were four more and I started writing and praying for Odille Harington, a young South African girl,

who was gang raped, beaten and suffered electric torture before being sentenced to 25 years imprisonment for spying on the ANC (African National Congress).

Shortly after I started writing she appealed against her sentence and the judges reduced her sentence to twelve years because they said "she was only found guilty after torture".

In my letters I did not refer to the past at all. There was a lot of hostile opinion in other countries against her sentence and after she had served about five years she was released and went home to her family's house in the suburbs of Johannesburg. I was informed of this in the newsletter of the Rhodesian Christian Group, but a few months later they wrote that 'although her physical condition was as good as could be expected she was a wreck mentally and it seemed possible she would never recover'. They asked anyone who had written to her in prison to continue writing.

It was in November that I was overjoyed to receive a Christmas card from South Africa which said:-

'Dear Richard,

Many thanks for your kind words and for supporting me over such a long period of time. Thank you very much for your care and also for your prayers. Although it is an arduous process my healing process is advancing well and I am very grateful and in love with God.

Love

Odile Harington'

I was thrilled for her but also delighted to know that my Christian journey had advanced enough to know that I could help someone in another country, who was in desperate need, with my prayers. I was also pleased that what I had written in difficult letters had been of help. I think God must have guided my pen.

Jesus Christ told his disciples that when called before authority they were not to worry about what to say, as the Holy Spirit would guide them.

This was another example of what the Holy Spirit will do for us in similar circumstances.

10. The Focolare and the GEN

In the Spring of 1966 Sarah and Christopher Tisdall who lived in Gamblin's Lane, Shirrell Heath, were taken out to Italy for a week after Easter to meet the Focolare Movement at Rocca di Papa, south of Rome, by Sarah's parents who were some of the first people in England to meet the movement which started in war torn Trento in 1943. There Chiara Lubich and three other young 20 year olds brought their bibles into the air raid shelters and lived like the first Christians in bringing Christ to all people in want.

In December 1967 the Tisdalls asked two of the Focolarini, the permanent members of the Focolare to Shedfield for the weekend. They asked a number of local people including Pamela and me to hear them. Michael Thomas was not available so the Vicar of Droxford came in his place. The Catholic Priest from Bishops Waltham also came.

Maria Eggar, a German lady, came and spoke in broken English and with her was a girl in the GEN from Liverpool.

I was not more than quite influenced by what she had to say about Chiara Lubich and her close friends at Trento at a time of heavy bombing in 1943. But Audrey Hamper said she had invited them to come and talk to the Sunday School on Sunday afternoon.

Our local children are not very demonstrative and I was astonished that without any lead from Audrey or me

they all started shaking hands with Maria and I heard two or three say 'I hope you will come back again.'

I thought that the children see more in their talk than is apparent to me. They are good judges and we must follow this up. I think Maria came again, and in these early days we had two visits from Eduardo Flood, an Argentinian, who must have been one of the first Catholics to preach in Shedfield Church. Also came John Walmsley, more than once, a very good guitar player who taught us some of the songs that were sung about that time. The Meadows are Green was the first song we sang; another one was the GEN.

The Sunday School children were mostly rather young for the songs, and I remember going one afternoon that John was staying, to Heathlands to sing songs near the houses of the Keiths and the Ponds. A few came out. I remember also that there were heavy showers.

The Mariapolis in 1968 was at Twickenham in the Teacher's Training College in Strawberry Hill. It clashed with when I thought our wheat crop would be ready for harvesting. I thought of going for 48 hours but then I thought I shall be looking at it from the outside. Finally, I decided I must go there for the whole five days and in the event it was a very wet time and there would have been no question of cutting the corn crop.

The afternoons were free and I made friends with a family from Liverpool, Will Pugh, a Vicar, his wife Shirley and their children, three girls and two boys between the ages of 13 and four. I took them to places such as Runnymede and London Airport and asked them to

Shedfield for a week later in August. Will Pugh was one of the first Protestant Vicars to get to know the movement. The Pughs visited us for many years.

I was much impressed by the talks.

One of the earliest requirements then was to get our own guitarist. Paul Gateshill lived on Waltham Chase. Another who took it up was David Cledwyn, whose mother was a teacher at Shedfield Primary School.

The Focolare had come to England first in 1963 when they came to Liverpool and in 1966 to London.

In 1968 English Boys went to Rocca di Papa, south of Rome, for the first time, including about 10 from Shedfield and Swanmore. On this first occasion two parents, Davidson from Loftus, North Yorkshire and I were invited to come and shared a room in a local hotel.

Tom Sherard, a Focolarino, was in charge. We went by train to Dover, ferry to Ostend and were then taken in cars to Brussels. We spent the night in a dormitory at a School for Deaf and Blind children before leaving in a coach for Italy. There were 21 children from England plus 3 adults, 28 Belgians, 2 French, 2 from Luxembourg and a priest from Ecuador.

We left Brussels at 5.30 am and got to a school in Switzerland near the Italian border at Bellinzano at 2.30 am. Our coach driver had never driven out of Belgium.

Leaving at 10.0 am we got to Rocca di Papa at midnight to find that everything

was full and we would have to go to hotels near by.

Chiara spoke to the Boys GEN on four of the five days we were there. All talks were in Italian with translations in nine languages. It was tiring but very interesting.

The return journey was as exhausting as going there and we ran out of food and money. Five years later only Mike Robinson was still in the movement of those who took part.

But the GEN locally continued to grow comprising boys and girls aged from 7 to 17 in Shedfield, Swanmore, Soberton, Wickham, Bishops Waltham, Cosham and Fareham meeting fortnightly and with 150 children coming.

My time teaching in the Sunday School had not fitted me to talk to children from 7 to 17. I noted that they never seemed to talk of God nor of Jesus Christ. I started telling them of the Focolare girls and how in the bomb shelters of Trento they had brought their bibles and taught the people. Also when people often had lost everything except what they stood up in they appealed for what was needed and how well the people of Trento responded. There was one case of a man who took very large sized boots and had lost his and someone came almost immediately with a pair.

I remember we were invited to a meeting at the Lambert's house, South View, in Bletchingly in Surrey where I took three of the GEN. Bletchingly was one of the first places in the south of England to learn of the Focolare.

I had known that all Christians were taught to love their neighbours, but whenever I tried to love individual boys and girls I could only see their faults, perhaps boasting or not always telling the truth. But sometimes it was a trivial thing, not liking the way they did their hair.

At this meeting our GEN were taken away with other GEN and I found myself talking with three ladies. We were talking about who we were and one of the ladies said, 'Of course, we are all children of God. Jesus is the Son of God so we can say we are brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.'

The picture changed immediately in my mind. I thought of someone coming up to me and saying I want you to meet a sister of Jesus Christ. I should be thrilled and look at the person as semi-divine.

What that lady said changed everything for me. Since then I have completely lost the habit of criticising individual boys and girls. I look upon them instead as being brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. I can no longer see their faults.

Trying to analyse my feelings, I was glad it was boys and girls I was being asked to love and not grown ups.

I felt that at their age they could not yet be so sinful as some grown ups. A baby is born without sin and the GEN would not have lived long enough to get really sinful.

What happened that afternoon had a very big effect on what I said to GEN groups in the villages round Shedfield. It is an example of the help God was continually giving us.

The most important group was one based on Price's College and the Girls Grammar School in Fareham. I was greatly helped by Paul Gateshill, living at Shedfield House for 15 months and Lindsay Brown later for 12 months.

Paul Gateshill and Kevan and Ivor Bundell were all very talented guitar players and with Veronica Towers produced an LP which sold many copies. Led by Paul Gateshill they put on evening services in a number of places but especially Corhampton Church and later St Swithun's Church, Winchester.

The Revd. Slater was at that time Chaplain to Hampshire Secondary Schools and was a friend of many of our senior GEN and helped them with advice. We also met at the house of Revd. Hutchinson, one of the team clergy at Holy Trinity, Fareham.

I used to keep Bishop, John Phillips, informed and he was very pleased with the GEN.

But it all ended as suddenly as it had started with boys and girls disappearing to University or to work, jobs or college.

There is no doubt that God blessed this work and made it all possible.

From the local GEN have come two Anglican Vicars, one Baptist Minister, one Vicar's wife and the head of Religious Education, first in South London Schools, then in Surrey Schools.

A few wonderful young Christians came from the GEN but afterwards lapsed. I think it was Satan, who was threatened by their Christian talents but fought back

and at least temporarily triumphed over them.

Once a month we used to go on a Sunday evening to St Philip's, Cosham, attend Evensong and then have a Joint Session with their young.

In all the time of the GEN I used to go round collecting them. They were always at the door. Otherwise we should never had the success we did.

Looking back on those years from 1968 to about 1975 is in a sense looking back at history. One group we took on from the ages of 12 to 17 when they left school and some went to university. Gradually, it all came to an end locally and the same happened elsewhere in the country. Quite a number of the GEN, including Paul Gateshill and Callan Slipper from our local group, went out to Loppiano for the two year course before becoming Focolarino.

To give you an idea of the drive of the hectic time we lived in I enclose an address I gave to girls in the Fareham Girls Grammar School on 13th June, 1969 in the dinner hour.

I want to look for a moment at the world you are growing up in, with its wars and disorders, with its hatreds and its strikes, with its power politics and its inhumanity with the unrest of many young people. Many of them, mostly those who are young, are advocating revolution. They want to abolish this and that, they hate other races and classes and people.

It is not a pleasant outlook for you who are growing up, but we must always remember that those I describe are a small but noisy minority and the vast majority of Boys and Girls are basically good and because they are better educated than any previous generation they are the better able to solve the world's problems.

The GEN, which is short for the New Generation Movement, also plan revolution. We plan in the words of one of our songs 'to turn the world upside down', to establish a new order in Society, to bring about a new life. But the GEN revolution is based on love as taught in the Gospel, on forgiveness, not on hate or violence. Our aim is not to destroy but to reconstruct and heal.

The GEN is the young people's branch of the Focolare Movement about which you will be told something in a few minutes.

The GEN was only formed 3 years ago when some young Italians asked Chiara Lubich, the founder and head of the Focolare, if they could have their own movement. It is now 80,000 strong and is active in all five Continents. It has the fullest approval and support of not only the leaders of the Churches in this Country, but also the Lutherans and the Orthodox Church and Pope Paul's niece is Chiara Lubich's secretary.

We are growing very fast. We know that everyone is a child of God and as such we try to love those we meet, to see God in them. We try to love God, which means to do His will, to do His work.

I thought you might like to hear about two things the Movement has produced.

One of them are the Christian towns that are being built in Italy and the Philippines, the Cameroons and the Argentine. The one in Italy is just outside Florence at a place called Loppiano. Here 400 young men and women from 30 nations are living together, most of them for 2 years. They live and work together in an attempt to live the Gospel in every aspect of their lives. Loppiano is like the world of today in miniature, with places of study, industry – beside the continuous house building they make a caravan a day, agriculture – they have broiler chickens – a convent hospital, shops, a church, an art section with very high standards of painting, sculpture and carving. At weekends it is normal for more than 1,000 people to come in coaches to see this Christian town, which is self-supporting and where no one draws any wages for their work.

The second feature is the unique group of young musicians formed spontaneously by interested students at Loppiano, whose music embodies their ideals of

joy and charity which are the hallmarks of the GEN. This is the GEN Rosso group with 25 young men from 12 nations. What they sing are their own compositions which are the fruit and expression of their lives. On the Continent they have been playing to thousands and their records are getting very popular. Someone who has been to one of their concerts has told me that the first half is fairly orthodox, but after the second half the audience leave feeling they have been talking to Jesus.

Now the GEN Rosso group are coming to England from October 30 to November 13. They are having Concerts in the biggest halls in Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Warrington and at the Westminster Central Hall in London, which holds 1500 where they are due on November 11th. We shall be running coaches and I hope some of you will be able to join us.

The GEN is a wonderful movement, so new in the south of England that we are all pioneers. We are spreading so fast to something like a new place a fortnight, a village or a school. What is so wonderful is that as is the case this afternoon, all the impetus comes from the boys and girls themselves. But we also know full well that whatever we achieve is due to the way the Holy Spirit is helping us and speaking through us.

Now I am going to ask a boy and a girl to speak to you, Kevan Bundell of Price's School who lives at Soberton who is going to speak to you of the origins of the Focolare and Lindsay Brown who has organised this meeting and to whom I am very grateful. She is going to speak about some of the points we have found important in running our GEN Group.

The culmination of a lot of GEN meetings was, I think in 1969 when a large number of Focolarini from London were to come down from London, led by Dori, who was one of the girls with Chiara at the start of the Focolare Movement. She had arranged to meet the two Bishops of Portsmouth, the C of E John Phillips and the Catholic Warlock, who was to become Bishop of Liverpool. They all stayed at Park Place, where at the time there were French Nuns.

I remember we were so stretched that we had two meetings going on at the same time, in Southampton and Cosham.

On the last morning Dori sent for me and said she was not at all pleased with the GEN and that a lot who were called GEN had no business to call themselves GEN for they were not up to standard. She went on to name three or four Boys or Girls who alone were to call themselves GEN.

I was meant to say 'Very well, I agree with you and will bring that into effect'. But I didn't and said, 'I don't agree with you. I know the homes they come from and in some cases the standard some have reached is more praiseworthy than

those you have singled out.' One of those she had singled out said he would not be coming to any more meetings.

I was not prepared to stop the GEN's existence locally, but what was I to do?

In Shedfield we had a new Vicar, who had been here less than a month and to whom I had not talked about the GEN.

I decided to go to see Ron Paterson, the Vicar of Swanmore, whom I knew was there and a number of his boys and girls had joined.

It was better than I expected because he said he was going to see the Bishop that evening and would tell him about my problem. Before her meeting with the two Bishops, Dori got very nervous and had supper and I remember she asked for brandy.

In their meeting John Phillips liked what he heard, but Bishop Warlock was hesitant and asked her more questions and finally told Dori that he was not convinced that the Focolare was a religious movement.

After seeing Ron Paterson, Bishop John Phillips rang me up to say he was pleased with the local GEN and I should go on as in the past. I said can we go on calling ourselves GEN. He said yes.

And so for the next 18 months we had no relations with the Focolare and GEN movement in London. It was as if we had done a UDI (United Declaration of Independence), but I saw no alternative.

11. Taize and Vallo

Two places were to make a great impression on me throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. These were Taize and Vallo.

Taize is a small hamlet in Southern France, 400 miles south of Le Havre where Brother Roger, a Lutheran Pastor trained at Geneva had started to enroll other kindred spirits of varying nationalities and denominations in forming an order of brothers living together and coming together in prayer at the break of the day, noon and sunset. They would all work at different jobs, but have an oath of celibacy.

They soon found that the general public, in ever increasing numbers, wanted to join them in their prayers and in their talks. For many years now 20,000 join them at Easter and from May to September another 30,000 will come to Taize, the majority to spend a week. Many of the pilgrims to Taize are young men and women from all the countries in Europe and others from different parts of the world. All know that they are looking for something other than the material side of life. At the end of each week most will find that Jesus Christ is the person they are looking for.

The Services are in French, but with prayers in many languages, are beautiful. The Brothers sing the Psalms in plainsong and a musical tradition, originally taught by musicians from Notre Dame in Paris, has been built up

and maintained with beautiful singers among the weekly pilgrims.

As the Brothers all had their local jobs, including a doctor, farming, accountancy etc., they could not take part in looking after the pilgrims. When people arrived they were told where they were to stay, a field to put up their tents, old French Army tents with bunks, accommodation in a neighbouring village or in the one or two houses they had put up.

They are given alternative ways of spending each week, but the majority are in discussion groups, conducted in languages which they can partake in, and subjects to discuss. I found many of these really interesting.

I went to Taize five times between 1971 and 1983, though the first two were only for two or three days, when I do not feel that you are doing more than looking in on everything.

I have found that by far the largest number from any one nation are Germans, which is appropriate as a young German workforce built the Church in 1960 as an atonement for the sins of Germany against France in the war.

The preferred age for pilgrims in the opinion of the Brothers is 18 to 29 but there are people of all ages.

My impression is that British over 25 appreciate Taize much more than younger ones, but that is not the case among young pilgrims from Continental countries.

On one occasion during the week I was there I went to a young international

Group in the afternoons, presided over by a Brother who had been an Indian headmaster.

They were highly critical of Churches too proud of their Music or trappings to the detriment of helping the poor and needy. Many favoured the Bader Meinhoff Group who assassinated well-known politicians and others for failing to help the poor.

Many were planning to work with handicapped and mentally retarded grown ups and children when they had finished their education. Many were Idealists. None seemed to want much money.

One or two were doing National Service. Some criticised the British Labour Party who talked of helping the poor, but not at the expense of their own standard of living.

On the first day of my visit I was talking to a Dutch Boy and said 'Are all these large numbers of pilgrims Christians?' He said 'No, many of them are here because they are looking for more than the material side of life. At the end of a week we hope that they will see that who they are looking for is Jesus Christ, but we can't say that yet.'

That Dutch Boy struck the right note and I never received a better description of the work of Taize.

I found a lot of the young Continental Boys and Girls very impressive while some of the English of the same age said they were bored.

There were a lot of Catholic priests there from various nationalities. They were

astonished to find large numbers of young people, many of them Catholics, at Taize but said they never went to Mass at home.

That seems to be the fact among other Denominations as well as Catholics, and I heard Brother Roger say that it made him very sad.

It is the policy of the brothers at Taize to share with the pilgrims all current problems and to ask everyone to pray on the subject. This is in marked contrast to the Focolare, whose problems remain with the Focolarini.

One afternoon a week at Taize there is a period of silence, often being combined with a walk outside the immediate environs.

On Sundays at noon there is Mass/Holy Communion, a Service always with lovely music and prepared for by Choir Practice at 2.30 daily. I used to go to watch Choir Practice, taken by Brother Robert and a young nun with some wonderful singing. Often there were 100 or more sopranos. At the end of Choir Practice Brother Robert used the one word 'Merveilleuse!' and so it was. On one occasion in our group were two sisters who sang in BBC programmes. They took part at Taize.

Older adults, such as I always was, were in recent years put up at a house, El Alononi, where there was accommodation for about 40. We took it in turns to wash up there.

I think it was about 1973 that I went on a Religious tour of Europe taking with me Mike Bradshaw, now a Baptist Minister, Wendy Preece from Watlington and her

cousin from Wales. We went in my Volvo car.

We spent the first night camping in Luxemburg near the German border. Our next stop was Ottmaring beyond Augsburg in Bavaria, where I knew that the Focolare were instrumental in starting a Catholic Lutheran Centre. Arriving one evening and leaving early the next morning did not give us a chance of meeting any of the Lutherans but the German Catholics looked after us and put us up and fed us.

The next day we climbed up to the Brenner Pass and stopped for two or three hours in a wet Innsbruck before descending into Italy and passing the town of Trento where Chiara Lubich and her girl companions had started the Focolare movement in 1943.

We continued to Loppiano, the Christian estate left to Chiara where Focolarini are trained. There we rented a house kept for visitors for our stay of 3 or 4 days, having meals with the men's side and going to Mass daily and visiting the activities.

We planned to go from there to Taizé and drawing a line on the map found it all but passed through the small village of Vallo north of Turin in the foothills of the Alps.

Vallo had recently been the scene of an interesting article in the Focolare monthly paper *New City*. I met someone at Loppiano who had recently been to Vallo and told me the priest there spoke some English.

We started from Loppiano at 9.0 am on a hot Sunday. Our route took us to the

coast near Livorno and I remember we passed through a lot of tunnels near Genoa.

Later we came to Turin, where the huge Fiat plant is, a very long city on a slope as we started the climb up the Alps.

We went some way before we saw a side road to Vallo and at 5.30 drew up at the back of the village church and outside a drug store, which was open. Mike went in and found the only other person in the village to speak English, who worked in the store. She told us that the priest was in Turin until about 10.0pm, that the Assistant Priest knew no English, and that evening Mass was at 6.0 and would we like to attend?

It was St John the Baptist Day, our patron saint at Shedfield. This girl took us to the Church, introduced us to the Assistant Priest and left us.

We got taken to the front pew and I don't like being there in a service when one does not know whether to sit, stand or kneel.

But first I must tell the story of Vallo. About 1970 Vallo was a small village of 600 people where religion had largely died out. Very few people went to Mass.

But the young people started a GEN Group and this prospered. Their leader was a 12 year old girl, Maria Orsola, who was a good skier and sang well and played the guitar. She started being asked to GEN events all over Italy. One summer she was in Venice in a hair dresser's tent, when there was a thunderstorm. The tent was struck by lightning and she was killed.

Before the funeral her family found that she had been keeping a religious diary, which showed how great her faith was.

800 mourners, led by the Cardinal Archbishop of Turin, attended her funeral and processed up to the cemetery above the town.

Her death changed everything. Vallo decided they would be a Christian village and make everyone welcome. All the 600 inhabitants went to Mass each Sunday.

Now small communities all over Italy send representatives to Vallo to learn how they should become a Christian community.

A fine and excellently equipped Young People's Club with a musically equipped hall was built at the top of the village. The Fiat Company in Turin paid the lion's share of it. Vallo was the place where the four of us in my Volvo car had arrived half an hour before Evening Mass on St John the Baptist's Day.

In the Service, at the time of the Mass, the whole congregation left their pews and stood before us to welcome us, whom they had been told were not Catholics.

The same thing happened at the end of the Service but some young people produced guitars and the Priest gave me a Mass Book, which included the Psalms and at the end of the book all the GEN songs, including one English song, Bridges, which had been translated into Italian.

For half an hour GEN songs were sung in the Church. Then they told us to

follow them up to the Maria Orsola Club, where we were to find a fine supper laid out for ten people including the four of us. The young lady in the drug store during Church had been round to her friends asking them to provide food for supper. The result was an excellent meal. Afterwards the adults left and the Vallo GEN Group took their place. We sat in a circle and sang GEN songs til 10.0 PM when the Priest arrived from Turin and unlocked the big fridge and we all had drinks and ice cream.

Shortly we retired to bed in two rooms where everything including red roses had been laid out. We did not see the GEN again for they started school early. But a fine breakfast including fruit, was laid out for us and at 9.0 when we left, the Parish Priest came to see us off bringing presents for each one of us.

I felt very humble at all that we had received and wondered how a group of Italian Catholics would be received at Shedfield Church unannounced.

About three years later I was at Castle Gandolfo in the week after Easter when in our ecumenical week we received a party of about 12 from the small fishing port of Gaeta, near Naples, who were learning how to become a Christian parish. I asked them if they had been to Vallo. That is where they had started their course.

We climbed up to the Monte Cenis Pass and stopped there for a few minutes, 10,500 feet up, before making for Taize where we arrived in the afternoon. On that visit we stayed only two days. I was sad that my companions did not get as much enjoyment out of Taize as I always

did, as they found the living conditions too primitive to be acceptable. I was glad of my naval training.

Soon after that the living conditions improved. On my next visit we were billeted in a nearby village, and in later years I was twice put up at the house near the Church where some forty people are put up.

Inevitably, I try to compare the Focolare and Taize which have had such an influence on my spiritual odyssey.

I have seen much more of the Focolare and the GEN in the 30 years than I have of Taize. Even when I haven't been to any meetings during the year, receiving the monthly New City and the Word of Life has kept me in touch with the latest news. I am more and more amazed at the quality of Chiara's writings in the enormous number of months she has contributed the Word of Life. As time goes on she has become more and more a world figure.

On the other hand it must be nearly 15 years since I have been to Taize. I have always been thrilled by the services there and the large number of young people who come there.

There is something very thrilling in seeing so many young people from so many countries looking for a purpose for their lives and in many cases finding it.

So many of these young people were not on our side in the war, but to go there you see how a future war between the nations of Western Europe is unthinkable today when the Christian unity in these weeks at Taize are so very marked. I leave Taize always with such

gratitude to God and to His local leaders Roger, and the other Brothers.

12. Healing

It was about 1970 that Audrey Hamper told me that an Evangelist called Harry Greenwood was coming to the Youth Club in Emsworth to take three days of Bible Study and on the following day he was going to lay hands on sick people, as he was a healer.

I took her in my full car to each day and I remember that George Harman, a widower friend of mine with five children, came on at least one occasion.

On the healing evening I remember there were two people wheeled in, who didn't seem to move at all, so that I did not know whether they were alive or not. I think he laid hands on them without any result.

Harry was especially friendly to one of the Manners brothers and me, as we were ex-Navy and he had done his National Service in the Navy.

Before starting he said that to be healed, people had (1) to believe in God, (2) to believe that they could be healed and (3) after being healed they had to thank God every day of their lives.

That evening one of the people who was healed had cancer of the throat. Another was a tall man who had a lot of back trouble, and ended up stretching his arms in all directions.

Our seats were some way back in the hall. I was next to an aisle up the middle of the room. He finally said 'Is there anyone else who would like God to heal them?' The other side of the aisle sat two

ladies. I heard one say to the other 'Why don't you go up?' She got up and walked slowly up in short steps. Harry, after speaking to her said 'This lady has got only one lung. She has heart trouble too and can only breath in short bursts. God is going to give you a new lung'. He laid hands on her and said to her 'Take a deep breath. As she did it she raised her hands above her head. He said 'Do it again.' A broad smile started on her face. He said 'Now go back to your seat.' As she went back she continued to take deep breaths and raise her arms and her face was wreathed in smiles. I thought it was wonderful.

I heard that there was a Christian Group of various denominations starting in Emsworth, so I joined them. They were about forty strong and a Baptist Minister used to lead them. I think they met first in a private house and later in the Anglican Church. I didn't care too much for these meetings. At the start of each meeting they had some 40 minutes of prayer and praying in tongues, which soon became singing in tongues. There was a great deal of repetition and I felt a lot of their activities were in praise of themselves.

Still they did arrange for Harry Greenwood to conduct two services in the Village Church with a few months in between. They also organised a weekend at Park Place in which Harry Greenwood would take us in Bible Study.

I went with a car load to both the Services at Emsworth. For the first I arrived early and was talking to Harry Greenwood when the man who had been healed of cancer of the throat came up. He said that for a month after he had been healed at the Youth Club Meeting all went well, but then it started to go

bad again and was now in the same state when Harry laid hands on him. Harry said 'What did I tell you to do after being healed? I said you were to thank God every day. Have you been doing this?' The man said, 'No, I forgot'. Harry said God will heal you once more, but you must not forget. I felt that the man was treated as a small boy.

For the other service, Wendy Toghill, a teenager from Bishops Waltham asked if she and her boyfriend could come. Earlier that summer she was one of a number of the GEN who were with me in the house of the Carpenters in Farlington. I remember that she was taken ill with a stomach pain and the ambulance came and took Wendy to hospital. Two or three months had elapsed and I had not seen her.

When she went to hospital from the house in Farlington they sent her home after a couple of days.

But when I picked her up to go to Emsworth she told me that since I had seen her she had had her appendix out. I said, 'Is everything all right now?' She said, 'No. A swelling has come up and I am in considerable pain and unable to walk well. I am going to see a specialist soon and they will decide if they will operate again.'

When we arrived at Emsworth Parish Church the Service had already begun.

In Harry's sermon he told us of two remarkable cases of healing that he had been associated with recently.

And then he said God tells me that there are three people in this congregation He wants me to lay hands on. He said, 'One

is a person on crutches who cannot walk well. One is a person with backache and the third is someone with a lot of pain in the lower part of the body. Will they please come out to me?' Then he said, 'The first two have come out but I still want the one with pain in the lower part of the body.' I leant across the boyfriend and said, 'I think he wants you to come out.' Wendy said, 'Do you think so?' and got up and walked over to him.

All three were women. The one with crutches threw them away at the end of the Church and walked the whole length without them. The one with backache was healed.

After laying hands on Wendy Harry said 'We must now bring the Service to an end but there are other people in this congregation who have aches and pains. I am going to say a prayer and I want you to put your hand on the part of the body to be healed.' I had a lot of cramp often when going from a sitting posture to kneeling. I also had gums which were soft and painful. So I used two hands one on a knee and one across the mouth. Since then I have had no cramp and instantaneously my gum became hard and normal.

When we got clear of the Church in the car I said to Wendy, 'How did you get on?' She said, 'It was wonderful. A warm feeling came right down through my body and I'm healed. I know I'm healed.'

When we got to her house she ran up the little path to her parent's bungalow.

At that time after Sunday Church some members of the GEN used to come to Shedfield House for an hour's meeting. The service at Emsworth was on a

Saturday evening. The following day Wendy walked to Shedfield House to our meeting from her home in Bishops Waltham.

After 18 months I decided that I must go up to London to visit the Focolare. I went and they were all very friendly. During that time the first Anglican Focolarine had joined them, Lesley Ellison. I saw her and went to Holy Communion at a London Church with her that evening.

It was arranged that she and one of the London GEN would come to Shedfield for the weekend, staying at Shedfield House and there would be meetings there and at Swanmore Junior School.

A railway strike forced the cancellation of the first date, but another weekend was chosen.

On the Sunday before I took a car load of GEN to the United Reform Church in Gosport where Michael Bradshaw, who helped me with the Wickham GEN was the organist. I remember I felt feverish that evening.

The next day I remember I again felt feverish. I thought I had better see my GP on Tuesday. Dr Kinnear examined me and he could not find anything the matter but he had better take my temperature. He threw up his hands and said, 'Your temperature is 103 degrees! Go back to bed and I will come and see you in the morning.'

On Wednesday morning I was still feverish and in addition I had something which I had never had before or since. I had seized up and was bent and had difficulty straightening up when going to

the loo. Jim Kinnear, knowing about the coming weekend said, 'I will give you what Ernie Bevin used during the war when he needed to be well in a short time. I will come to see you before noon on Friday, but don't get up til I come.'

On Thursday I was no better. I rang up Sarah Tisdall, the one person who might have been able to collect all the GEN children but she was going away for the weekend.

By Thursday afternoon I realised that my only chance of the weekend taking place was if I could be healed.

I must get in touch with Harry Greenwood, the healer, whom I knew lived at Chard in Somerset. Through enquiries I got his telephone number. His wife told me he had gone out but would be back by 9.0 pm.

When he rang me I had first to tell him about the Focolare and the GEN and then the need for the weekend of meetings. I asked him if he could say a prayer to God for me. He told me that God was omnipresent, with him as he said a prayer for me, and with me as I received it. He said, 'You have seen me heal people. You know that you must thank God for healing you before in fact you know that you have been healed.'

He then said a prayer for me and I said, 'Thank you, Lord, for healing me'.

Before ringing off he said that he had written to me about someone I had asked him to pray for. He would be at Emsworth on the Monday and would I come to see him?

I went to the loo and as I started to be bent double I said repeatedly, 'Thankyou, Lord, for healing me'. Gradually, I got straighter. The bending changed and I felt as if I was bruised all over.

I took my supper tray downstairs to the kitchen, astonishing my son Charles who had left me bent double.

I wondered whether I should take the doctor's tablets but I remembered Harry telling a lady that when God heals he heals completely and you have no need of further medicine.

During the night I twice woke up with my pyjamas sopping, but I was glad, knowing that the fever was going out of me.

In the morning I felt brittle but all right.

My next problem was Dr Kinnear. He didn't come by noon, so I dressed and was having lunch. What was I to say to him? I thought I can only tell him the whole story. He asked whether I was still taking the tablets. I said, 'No'.

He asked me if I had seen anyone else healed. I told him of the lady with one lung. I think he was interested, for he was a Christian.

I met them off the train at Winchester on Friday evening. The weekend went very well as I knew it would.

On Monday I saw Harry Greenwood. I told him, 'This illness was a disaster for the doctor. I had two things the matter, the fever and seizing up, neither of which he was able to cure. Do you think it possible that my illness was caused by

Satan, who did not want these GEN meetings to take place?' He said, 'It is not only possible but highly likely.'

13. Wendy Toghill

About that time Wendy Toghill became a remarkable young Christian. Neither of her parents were practising Christians and she had no connection with the Parish Church.

After her healing she was very keen to receive Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Eventually, she learnt that Harry Greenwood was at Park Place for the day and she went and received it and spoke in tongues.

I have already mentioned the weekend at Park Place arranged by the Emsworth Group which I attended. After the last talk on the Sunday afternoon Harry Greenwood asked how many of the fifty odd people had received Baptism of the Holy Spirit and about two thirds put their hands up.

He asked how many of those who had not received it would like to obtain it and about ten of us put up our hands.

We sat in a row. Harry told us to empty our minds of all earthly things and to think only of God. He told us that he would come along the row laying hands on our heads. Then he would come past each of us again in turn when we should give thanks to God for the honour he had given to us. He said we might find ourselves speaking in an unknown tongue and not to be disappointed if that happened.

He said as we were praying to God before hands were laid on us we might

find our chests swelling up. They would go down as we thanked God.

Everything happened to me as he had indicated. When I had finished talking in an unknown tongue he said, 'That is good and quite understandable'.

The young woman who was next to me started crying and said she could not speak in tongues. Harry turned to me and asked me to speak slowly to her in tongues, but I could not. I have never again spoken in tongues. A Baptist Minister told me that I was very much at fault, not making regular use of a gift God had given me.

Later I found in an American book that some people could only speak in tongues after considerable preparation, while others could turn it on or off as a tap.

Wendy was one of the latter, telling me that she read her Bible daily and as she read it she translated it instantly into tongues.

She wanted to do training as a mental nurse at Knowle Hospital and for about a year I took her and a Miss Didymus from Shirrell Heath and brought them back in the evening.

Some of us, Wendy, Paul Gateshill, Kevan and Ivor Bundell used to meet at Shedfield Church on Tuesday evenings at 5 o'clock for prayers.

I remember Wendy asked if we minded her saying her prayers in 'tongues'. I said we must know who or what she was praying for if we were to be sharing in the prayers. She gave us a synopsis in English usually saying that I am going to pray for members of staff and patients who need my prayers.

One day Wendy rang me up from home to say that she had been taken ill at Knowle with fever and some purple blotches on her legs. So the authorities had sent her home in a taxi and told her to go to bed.

When her mother, a nurse in the children's ward at Winchester Hospital every other day, came home she sent for a doctor. By this time the purple blotches were all over her body and her legs. She heard the doctor say to her mother, 'I have never seen anything like it. It is a little like ... (she didn't get the next word but heard him say, 'and that is always fatal.'

The next day the blotches had spread to her head but after that it started to get less.

Friday was a beautifully fine day and I suggested she should come to me and sit out in the garden. She said that she must be back at work by Monday as the staff were short handed and she was worried what the doctor would say as she had to see him on Saturday.

I said, 'Shall I get in touch with Harry Greenwood to say a prayer for you?' She said, 'No, we must keep that for an important occasion. I am sure that my prayers and yours will heal me on this occasion.'

And so it turned out. When she went to see the local doctor on Saturday, it was none of the regular Bishops Waltham doctors and he agreed readily that she was well again.

Next week we discussed the illness and she was sure that these strange symptoms were caused by Satan.

Shortly afterwards, Wendy got engaged and later married a soldier in Germany and has disappeared from my life.

14. Esmond Gwatkin

It was in the late 1970s that I got to know Esmond Gwatkin who at that time came to live at West Meon with his wife. They had both been Elders at the Christian Science Church in London, but had both retired, he to become a Catholic, she an Anglican.

I only met her once but he was a very striking figure with grey hair and a long white beard. He had already got the reputation of being charismatic and ecumenical and the Catholic Church was using him to go round universities and give talks to Catholic undergraduates.

I remember he telephoned one Sunday to ask if I would care to come with him to the Evening Service at the Pentecostal Church in Portsmouth which I accepted. With him in the car was a young man, Martin Opie, about whom I must write a little.

As a baby Martin was taken to the Methodist Children's Home in Alverstoke close to the Anglican Church and was brought up there until his 16th birthday. It was a very fine home. I went there with the Waltham Chase Motor Cycle Club who gave a display at the time of their annual fete. Shortly afterwards the home was sold and it's now a housing estate.

When he left the home Martin was found accommodation in Alverstoke at the home of a retired Anglican Vicar but had to leave there because of the way he was treated. With very little money he went to London to look for a job and very

soon he had no money. Hungry and feeling desperate he had decided that he would either have to sell himself or sell drugs when he ran into Esmond who stopped and talked to him.

Esmond took him down to Hampshire with him and asked Park Place, where there were French nuns, to put him up until he could find someone to have him.

I remember the Pentecostal Service was good and well attended. Afterwards Esmond told the Pastor he was a Catholic and had much enjoyed it.

Martin came to our house two or three times. He went to live with a Mr White in Bishops Waltham whom later I knew a little with his wife, Anne, in the Community Church.

About 1990 there was a reference to Martin Opie in the Hampshire Chronicle living in Four Marks.

To return to Esmond he told me how he had been in Leeds for a weekend, staying in a hotel. He said that in the Catholic Cathedral they had a lovely 10 o'clock Choral Mass which he wanted to attend.

But he said that God wanted him to attend the 8 o'clock Mass with no music as he woke up in good time for that.

When he got back before sitting down to his breakfast he said good morning to the man at the next table. When this man finished his breakfast he came over to Esmond and asked him if he could speak to him for five minutes in his bedroom.

Esmond thought it odd. The man followed him up to his room and said, 'My wife died a year ago and now

whatever I do I make a lot of money. But I don't want to make a lot of money. I want to be a Methodist Minister and to go to the Theological College in Sheffield. But they won't have me because they say I have an incurable illness.'

'And that is why I have asked to speak to you because I want you to heal me.' Esmond said, 'You are quite right. There are people who could lay hands on you and heal you but I'm afraid I am not one of them'. The man said, 'But I know you are. I can see it in your eyes and your hands.'

Neither would give way and finally Esmond said, 'In any case its God who heals and not man. Will you be content if I say a prayer over you and then place my hands on your head.' The man said, 'Yes, that is what I want'. Esmond said a prayer and laid his hands on him and immediately the man said 'I am healed. I know I am healed and now I am going straight to the Training College in Sheffield to present myself for training.' Esmond said, 'I also knew he was healed, because I felt something pass from me to him.'

Esmond told me that a man, whose name I have forgotten who has healed many people in Nairobi and for a time was taking bibles into Romania had asked Esmond to join him when he was going to lay hands on a bedridden lady in Chichester. They both said prayers and then this man told Satan to come out of her which provoked many tears. When the tears had subsided she got out of bed and walked over to them.

This man had talked to a Focolare class at Shedfield House about his experiences in Romania when the spirit of God was noticeably at work.

I saw quite a lot of Esmond and he kept me informed of what he was doing. On one occasion he took me to an afternoon at a Catholic place near Alton. He attended a Charismatic Catholic week in Rome.

I told him about our prayer group in Shedfield to pray for Geoffrey Morrell and he joined us for about a month and once laid hands on Geoffrey who, however, never thought he would be healed.

I asked Esmond to lay hands on two friends of mine which he accepted but said I must take part too, read the Epistle or say a prayer and also lay hands with him. Then in one case I knew that the person concerned had been healed.

Cecil Ward had for a time run the Waltham Chase Post Office and had combined it with being Scout Master to the Waltham Chase Troop.

Later he became a lay reader at Shedfield and moved to Fareham. His eyesight was deteriorating a lot and he wrote to ask if he could come to Burswood in Kent to attend one of their healing Communion Services. After some time he was told to come on one Sunday and he asked me if I would drive him there.

But unbeknown to both of us, the Priest who had brought healing there to many and was well known in the press and Christian circles had died and another priest was acting locum until a new appointment was made. We went to the Holy Communion Service and attended the tea afterwards, but no individual was chosen to have hands laid on them.

I told Cecil about my friend Esmond and he thought he would like to have hands laid on him by Esmond. The hospital in Southampton had told Esmond that his eyes would steadily deteriorate – they were already bad. There was an operation he could have. It would give him one chance in ten of his eyesight being improved. In the other nine cases he would soon become blind.

I took part with Esmond in laying hands on Cecil. Almost immediately afterwards he had the operation, which brought a little improvement.

About two years later he died of heart trouble. Gradually I started to see less of Esmond, but it was a shock to learn a few years later that he had died.

15. God's Presence in my Life

One spring morning I woke up early with an order from God that I must that day go to see a Mrs Levey, who lived in Spring Vale, the Swanmore housing estate.

Mrs Levey was a customer for our milk and I used to do the milk round every other weekend and also in the case of the milk roundsman being on holiday.

I had been to see her some three months before and I knew that her husband had a drink problem and used from time to time to beat her up when he came in from drinking in the middle of the night. I knew she was thinking of getting a legal separation from him. But I had doubts whether this was a figment of my imagination or if it had really come from God.

I went to see her about 4.0pm when the children would be back from school. She had three girls whom I think must have been about nine, seven and four.

When I knocked on the door a tall girl of about 20 answered and said she was a neighbour. I said, 'I have looked in to see how the Leveys are.' She said, 'Well, they have got only half a loaf and half a pint of milk for their tea.' Mrs Levey came to the door and said, 'I have got no money at all.'

I told them all including the 20 year old to jump into my car. I asked them what

local shop they used and got no definite answer so I took them to the shop at the Chase End of Lower Chase Road. I found I had only £3 on me, which I gave to them to spend and went on home and rang up the Hampshire head of the NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children), who I knew in Winchester. He was out but his wife asked if they would be alright until tomorrow when he would come out at 9.0 am. I said they would.

In the car I had established that at Droxford Magistrates Court a day or so before a Legal Separation had been granted. It was agreed that he was to give them a sum of money each week.

She had expected that money would have been paid over to her immediately, but her husband was not in court. In or about 1970, there were all sorts of ways a family could obtain money and I would have thought her neighbours would have lent her money.

Going back in the car after they had spent my £3 Mrs Levey said, 'But who told you about us? We wondered if we should ring you up. We didn't think God would let us starve.' I said, 'I will write you a letter this evening to tell you who told me.'

In the next two years I visited them from time to time. I met Mrs Levey in Wickham about a year ago. They are all well. As far as I can remember all the children are married and there are about five grandchildren.

I have often wondered if there have been other occasions when God has asked me to do things and I have thought they must be figments of my imagination.

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In 1974 I went to the Focolare Ecumenical Week at Rocca di Papa after Easter and I paid for Mrs Preece from Watlington in Oxfordshire to come too, as I had seen a lot of her children in the GEN and especially of her daughter, Wendy.

This time we flew to Rome from Luton, where I went by car and left my car at the airport.

This time at the end of the course we went by coach to Loppiano and spent the night in a hotel nearby.

On Sunday we went to Church in Florence in one of the famous churches. While the Catholics in the party went to Mass in the Church a service of Holy Communion was arranged in the crypt, which was attended also by members of the Swedish Protestant Church, who had done the course with us.

After lunch in Florence we went by coach to Rome to catch our flight home which left at midnight. Mrs Jameson, whose husband Tom had been in the cricket eleven at Dartmouth with me, and also became an Observer, lived at Watlington and I arranged to take her home as well as Christine Preece on my way from Luton to Shedfield.

I suppose it was about 2.0 am when I went in a bus to find my car and bring it back to the Airport Buildings where I had left the two ladies.

I was horrified to find I had a puncture. I had only once changed a wheel in that

car and found it difficult and the thought of having to do it at night filled me with alarm.

But first I decided to back out some ten yards close to one of the airfield lights. I bumped out for this short journey, then opened the boot and got out my tools and was amazed to find the tyre had become inflated on its own.

After that I knew that the rest of the journey would go well. I dropped off Mrs Jameson and Christine Preece with whom I had breakfast and got home to Shedfield without getting too sleepy after having had no sleep the previous night.

16. The Community Church

The GEN groups were beginning to tail off. Some had gone off the university, many more to College.

Education was being criticised. Boys and girls who had passed through the comprehensive schools were not well enough educated at school to meet the needs of industry, especially in the computer age which was coming in. More homework must be done and longer hours given up to work outside school. Thus the time that the GEN groups used to meet had to be used for more school work.

The hope that those drawn to Jesus Christ in the GEN movement would become worshippers in Anglican and Catholic churches never came about.

The same happened with those from Taizé. I remember it was the only time I ever saw Brother Roger angry when he learnt that the enthusiastic young pilgrims who came in their thousands to Taizé summer after summer hardly ever joined their congregations at home, though they tried to continue to meet with others who had been to Taizé. So I was thrown back on the Sunday Services at St John the Baptist at Shedfield and found them not providing all I needed in my religious quest.

I have always wanted a good Bible Study class but Shedfield has never

produced more than a few people with similar wishes. We had one good group towards the end of the eighties which went on for nearly two years study of Mark's Gospel in considerable detail.

A friend from Waltham Chase told me that as she was passing through West End on Sunday evening in the bus she saw a queue of people standing outside their village hall and was told they were waiting to go to church.

I am nothing if not inquisitive and on the next Sunday evening I went to see for myself.

We all crowded the small village hall filling all but two or three seats for a typical Methodist type service.

Afterwards any of the congregation who liked were told that there would be an after meeting in the house of one of the congregation and I usually went there too.

I learnt that the Church was formed by four men, one Anglican, one Methodist, one Baptist and one other who said that the Word of God was no longer being preached in their Churches. They found a man who was prepared to act as Pastor and said they would pay him the average of what they received in their work. That is how the Southampton Community Church started.

I could only attend irregularly because I was Church Warden at Shedfield and all this time I was a Sunday School teacher up to 1988.

In the Community Church the numbers steadily grew. Sometimes after Evening Church in the summer about a quarter of the congregation, carrying a mobile harmonium, would go to a local housing estate and sing hymns and address the

houses. I think the only response would be from small children who were already in bed and would come to stand at the bedroom window.

The next thing was that the Community Church bought an acre of land just beyond the then limits of West End. For some months services were held in a large marquee on this ground and we learnt that a Church was to be built.

It consisted of a bungalow shaped building with a large entrance with small rooms and a kitchen leading out of it and one large room holding about 160. But almost as soon as it was built it was obvious it was not going to be big enough for instead of the bulk of the congregation coming from West End and Hedge End large numbers were now coming from Southampton.

A few years later another floor was added on to the Church and it became a school for ACE principles, ACE standing for American Christian Education. One of these schools was already open in Basingstoke. All the staff came from members of the Church and all the children were from the families of those attending the Church. This was a primary school and its headmaster was someone I knew at the time.

As members grew a house was bought for children of secondary school age close to Fishers Pond.

Meanwhile the Church had to move into Southampton and initially went to a comprehensive school near Mousehole Lane. By this time there were up to 400 people at the Service. Probably 80% of them were aged between 20 and 40, in

the age group that at that time was largely absent from Anglican and Catholic churches. Incidentally, this is the age group that goes in large numbers to Taizé.

I was told that in the Community Church there were more teachers and hospital workers than any other, but there were always a lot from the University.

Before one of the services at this time sitting next to me were two students from the University with brand new bibles. The one nearest to me said, 'It's wonderful. We've only been Christians for ten days and we are going to be baptized next Sunday.' Whatever I said in reply seemed so inadequate for such enthusiasm.

The services took about two hours and what was so surprising was that at the end no one seemed to want to leave.

On the platform was the Pastor and the Elders, about half a dozen of the leaders of the Church. Also there was the orchestra, at least six instruments and probably another half dozen vocalists. There were no books. All the songs were shown on two or three screens and would be sung through about three times.

It was not called a Service, but a meeting and started with about 40 minutes of praise and prayer leading on to a time of speaking in tongues or singing in tongues. After one or two bible passages, the sermon followed, lasting up to an hour. The meeting ended about ten minutes later.

Communion was held every three or four weeks. The elders would go to separate

parts of the hall and would each have a plate with part of a loaf on it and a bottle of wine with a very small glass. People would gather round their nearest elder. A number of prayers were said and then the receiving of Communion. Each individual received bread and wine from a neighbour and then proceeded to give it to another neighbour. I found that part always rather nice and it was done in a reverent manner.

On one occasion when we were using the school near Mousehole Lane it was decided on a weekday evening we would go in pairs to visit 1,800 homes in Midnabury. There were 60 pairs from the Church and it was decided that we should spend three hours on it from 6.0 pm to 9.0 pm, each pair doing 3 hours.

If people were out we left a card giving the place and time of our services, a telephone number and a welcome. I was paired to go with the pastor. I am sure God likes a joke for the first house we went to had two Spaniards who could speak no English nor we speak their language.

When people were at home we usually were invited in and people were friendly. I thought I was going to have an easy evening but when twenty houses had been done the Pastor said he was going to be quiet and I must take the lead in the final ten homes.

This considerable effort by the Church had a very meagre result, about three individuals from that evening's visit joining the Church.

But one notable event happened the next day. One of the pairs did not complete their houses, leaving about half a dozen still to do. Two girls, the elder 12 years

old, volunteered to complete the job the next evening.

In one of the houses they went to was a mother with a son of about 9 or 10, one of whose knees was bandaged. The mother told the girls that she was rather worried as the knee was considerably swollen in spite of having gone to the doctor.

I think the bandage was taken off and the 12 year old girl asked whether the mother would like her to pray for her son and his knee. Before they left the house the swelling had gone right down. The girl who achieved this was pointed out to me. I understood that the family whose son was healed joined the Church.

Beside the Sunday meetings we were in a group led by an elder which met weekly in the elder's house. I started in one at West End at which there were initially about 45 people including children. We started at 7.30. At 8.30 the children left to go to bed and we were told to move to sit next to someone we did not know.

On one occasion I took Geoffrey Morrell to this Group. When we left all he would say was 'We have a great deal to learn.' Later I was always in a Hedge End group smaller than the initial one. Over the years I remember being in three.

To return to the Sunday meeting. After a time we left the school we were using in Southampton and moved to Boldrewood, the medical side of the University, whose excellent buildings we made use of for several years.

After a time the Community Church said that all new members must tithe, pay one

tenth of their income to the Church. They also started a foundation course at the end of which they would receive Baptism. This was by total immersion and each individual had to testify.

At an earlier time a young widow, whose 30 year old husband in a large container ship had died of a heart attack, was received into the Church and a fortnight later was baptized and spoke in tongues. The next Sunday she was in floods of tears. It had all happened far too quickly and she did not know where she stood. I was told to counsel her.

As the result of what I told the elders everything was slowed up somewhat and the foundation course was started.

There were several redundant churches in Southampton because they wanted to own their own premises. But none of these churches, all Victorian ones, had any room for parking cars which the school and Boldrewood had.

Eventually, the Church bought St Mary's Hall at the bottom of St Mary's Road, which was in a bad state of repair but before that they decided to become much more regional and found premises in Eastleigh, Fair Oak, Hedge End, Bishops Waltham and Fareham and only had meetings of the whole church on rare occasions.

I went on a few occasions to the meetings in Hedge End, which took place in the Community Hall. There I met various old friends but it struck me it was a static Church with few newcomers.

Once I went back to a meeting at Boldrewood with a friend who had

sometimes accompanied me in the past. As before, there were about 400 in the big lecture hall and great enthusiasm, my neighbour telling me that she had only been coming a few months and found it wonderful. Looking round the congregation I could only see four people that I knew and the elders were all new.

Very quickly they became a rich Church with the great majority tithing. One of the treasurers told me that the bank was astonished for the Community Church was paying in thousands when other Churches dealt in far smaller sums. But they also spent money very liberally apart from buying St Mary's Hall and spending a lot on it. When the religious bookshop in Gosport opened they gave, I believe £6,000 and paid the wages of one of the staff.

From Bradford a religious monthly magazine was printed. We not only had it on sale for members but sent 300 copies monthly to a sister Church in Nairobi. We sent several hundred pounds a month to the Church in Bombay.

On a few occasions I attended a Baptismal Service and once I was asked to be a sponsor to someone being baptised. Before being baptised by an Elder each individual would give an account of the events leading up to their asking for baptism. The majority had been in Sunday School and then from the age of ten they had seen nothing of the Church throughout their teens. In most cases a member of the Church had invited them to come to a meeting or two, which gave them the urge to join.

I found I liked about 80% of the Church's activities but didn't at all like the other 20%. They were completely parochial and were only interested in an area of about 5 miles from where they met.

They had no use for any other denomination and thought that all non-Christians were followers of Satan.

There were a number of teachers who continued to teach at State schools and parents who continued to send their children to state school rather than their own ACE School. This they condemned.

But I was also appalled at the rigidity with which they clamoured for money, not only from a tithe but extra to help get the school started. A lot of these young students had very little money and their initial enthusiasm is partly emotional. At one meeting they were being told if they had little money to get a scrap of paper and write on it IOU £20 and sign their name. One early member on that occasion said, 'I will not give them a penny.'

The pastor spent more and more time abroad. I remember him going to Belgium, Spain, Germany, India more than once, and Nepal.

In the end I was quite glad to give it up.

17. HMS Rodney Association

About 1990 I received a letter saying that an HMS Rodney Association had been formed, that they met for a weekend at Devonport Barracks and would I join them? This I did getting a lift by car the first weekend. I found that the Secretary and Treasurer of the Association were those who had been in the Boy's Division which I was in charge of in 1939. Altogether about 12 who were there were in my Division. It was strange to meet them again for I had known them when about to start adult life and now I was seeing them again after their working life was over and they were retired in the evening of their life.

Some of them were very kind and said that in their time in the Navy I was the only Officer who cared for them. One said I believed you loved us. Certainly I had got very fond of them.

I went for six or seven years combining it with staying sometimes in Cornwall and Devon. For two years I stayed at the Stewardry at Boconnor, which was the place my father and many of his brothers and sister had been born.

I also went with Bill Curling, who joined the Rodney in August 1939, to his sister's house, (Di Parker), at Delamere, Cornwood, near Ivybridge, a house known to my father and grandfather when they were Commanders in Chief at Devonport.

I enjoyed these weekends at Devonport, our meetings held in the Warrant Officers and CPO's fine Mess in the Naval Barracks. On the Sunday we would attend Parish Communion in the Dockyard Church, where prayers would be said for our old colleagues.

I also went to a weekend in May based on the big hotel in Scarborough where we got involved and entertained by the Mayor of Scarborough and had a lovely coach excursion around the beautiful Yorkshire countryside.

These service reunions of Officers and men who served in wartime together have become extremely popular. In 1990 over 100 were at our annual dinner, dropping to about 65 by 1997, the last year I attended. Vice Admiral Sir William Crawford, who was the Rodney's Gunnery Officer when they sank the Bismark, is our President and I was his Vice President. Everyone is over 70 at the reunions.

18. The YMCA

Associating again with the ex-boys of the Rodney Association brought me back to think of the Wellington crash and what I said to God that night. After praying that we might be saved I said to God that if my life was spared I should like to work to help young people in their growing up period.

My work with the GEN had finished and so had my work with the Sunday School after twenty years.

The only young people I saw were two visits a year from the children of members of the Waltham Chase Community Association, who walked across country from the Village Hall to Shedfield House. Here they cooked their lunch of sausages and I was required to have a bonfire ready for them to put frying pans on. By this time I was about 80 and called on my grand daughters Laura and Alice to help with the fire. On these occasions on a good day we would have about 40 children up to about 12 years old and perhaps 10 grown ups. Later the numbers grew so that we had 78 children and 50 grown ups. Hardly any children were over 16.

The press and media started to report large numbers of people living rough in London and other big cities and about three quarters of them were under 25 with some as young as 15.

On rare visits to London I would find some in the tube stations or their approaches. The television one evening showed a picture of a girl from Waltham Chase whose brother I knew well.

By this time I was considerably better off. Instead of the farm losses I always incurred when farming I was now getting a regular and growing income from the Golf and Country Club. I had for about fifty years given £5 a year to the YMCA. Now I started to give a great deal more to them and also to the Salvation Army and a few other charities.

I learnt that the YMCA were very concerned about the homelessness of young people, and although there were a few cases of the young being workshy, in many cases the homes of many of these boys and girls were so rotten that they had no option but to leave. In some cases, often after the parents had separated and a stepmother or stepfather had come, the children were physically or sexually abused. In a few cases the unemployed parents were unable to keep their teenage children any more.

The YMCA were taking into their hostels as many homeless children as they had beds for and each year, as funds allowed, they were taking in more and more. In the YMCA hostels these young people were rehabilitated by carers and given training. Sometimes the process went smoothly and other cases it took a long time, but in the great majority of cases it was successful. The YMCA continues to look after them until they have a job and somewhere to live. It was apparent that the numbers living rough were so great that only a small proportion could be reached by the YMCA, Salvation Army and one or two smaller associations.

I soon realised that the ones found and taken in by the YMCA were the lucky ones. I became particularly concerned with those who in the course of their

homelessness had committed an offence. Judges or magistrates have no alternative with young homeless people but to send them to prison.

Ever since Geoffrey Morrell came as Vicar of Shedfield we have had a small group who meet weekly at 9.0 am on Tuesday mornings. I brought to one of our prayer meetings a draft letter on the subject which concerned me and asked who I should send it to. Geoffrey said, 'The Archbishop of Canterbury' (Carey).

I got a friendly letter back saying he had sent my letter to the Bishop of Lincoln, the Bishop responsible for Prisons, who told me that the Chaplains in all Young Offenders prisons helped the young men. I was urged to become a prison visitor. At one time Winchester had a youth wing of lads awaiting trial, but this had been discontinued and all local young offenders were now sent to Reading.

I tried the politicians. At that time we were in the Fareham Constituency and our MP, Sir Peter Lloyd, had been Minister responsible for prisons in Margaret Thatcher's Government. But someone else had now succeeded him. Peter Lloyd was the one politician who had consistently helped and he on his own initiative had started a scheme for young offenders who are married which was clearly of great help to that particular group.

When Michael Howard became Home Secretary in John Major's government he never even answered my letters and had no interest in helping young offenders. In the case of the homeless it became inevitable that sooner rather than

later they would commit some offence and be back in prison.

I tried Dimitri Bregant of the Focolare Movement and he put me in touch with a one time Focolarini who was now a Psychiatric officer in the North of England's prisons. I told Dimitri I was going to a Focolare Weekend one Whitsun at a girls school in Hertfordshire and he suggested I should have a meeting with two ladies who were going to be there. One, a Methodist and new Magistrate, Catherine Chaney, who lived near Banbury was particularly helpful, talking to prison officers on my behalf and giving me names of Methodist Chaplains at YOPs. One of them, Peter Collingwood, was particularly helpful and agreed largely with me but said that the Anglican Chaplains, who were full time and not part time chaplains, make the decisions. He gave me the name of the C of E Chaplain of Portland, but said he didn't think he would be helpful, and in fact he never answered my letter.

I wrote my thoughts on the subject to my friend, Keith Miller, in Yorkshire who is Recorder of Middlesborough, who wrote back as follows:

'So many of the people who appear before me are sad rather than bad. It is rare for youngsters to be accompanied by a parent and life is for most of them hopeless to a degree which few of the rest of us can grasp.'

If one had no home, no family, no job or chance of getting one it must be almost inevitable that you fall into a life of crime.

I was interested in your suggestion that people at local churches should befriend young offenders. I have tried as yet without much success, to get people in our PCC (parochial Church Council) to take an interest in what some of the churches in Leeds (also in our Diocese of Ripon) are doing to help the homeless. Unfortunately, there is both an appalling ignorance and I have to say a desire among many in the church to walk by on the other side.

I am certain however that your approach is right. Although politicians may on occasion throw money at such problems that alone will never provide the answer'.

Although the Conservative Home Secretary in 1996-7 was not interested in the subject I thought that I should turn to the Labour Jack Straw who was the Shadow Home Secretary, who was at once interested in what I wrote. So I continued to have a correspondence with him and he said, 'When we get into power I will bear in mind what you have written.'

I sent my thoughts to the President of the YMCA, Lord Remnant and got a friendly letter back.

He retired shortly afterwards and Lord Judd took his place. Lord Judd, at one time member of Parliament for Portsmouth North, was in Wilson and Callaghan's government and is likely to be in the right job in another Labour Government. After a few months in the job he invited about a hundred people to

a buffet lunch in the House of Lords followed by talks and videos and time for discussion.

I got permission for Jill Hancock to come and look out for me and we were able to meet a homeless boy and girl, both from Somerset though they didn't know each other. We talked to them at some length and afterwards they spent the rest of the day with us. I had a long talk in the afternoon with the head of the YMCA in London. It was a good day.

I have been especially concerned with young homeless boys and girls in prison because during their sentences and afterwards living as homeless nothing is done to rehabilitate them. They must feel in despair and once again suicides in YOPs (Young Offenders' Prisons) is on the increase.

It was that day at the House of Lords that I learnt that, through the influence of Sir John Anderson, an enlightened Chief Constable of Manchester, courses in which the YMCA were involved were being tried in two or three YOPs in Merseyside.

Shortly afterwards I learnt that for the first time two or three young offenders were being accepted to go direct from prison to YMCA hostels at the end of their sentences. Until then the YMCA had refused to take anyone direct from prison.

I think it was at the end of 1997 that the real breakthrough occurred when it was decided that there would be a YMCA presence in all YOPs, the target hopefully reached by 2000. The YMCA would start a course for a limited number of offenders and at the end of

their sentence they would be transferred to YMCA hostels to complete rehabilitation.

Wetherby in Yorkshire was chosen for the first YMCA presence and was visited by Jack Straw.

In the YMCA Calendar for 1999 we learnt that the YMCA Coordinator at Wetherby, Mick, had started well and he was shown with one of his first group of offenders there, Adam, who was enthusiastic about the way out of crime which this presence from the YMCA brings. Of course, one swallow does not make a summer and it is clear that success hinges to a large extent on YOP senior staff being prepared to work with this link in the chain. It is vital that the coordinator does not side with the offender against the staff. But with my very limited knowledge of staff in YMCA hostels, I am struck by the desire of the staff to make reconciliation a success, and if one method does not succeed to try another. The stakes could hardly be higher with the end result a life of crime or an individual who, after perhaps endless vicissitudes, has come good and married and settled down in a good home and enjoying a good job.

The next few years will show how successful the scheme is and what type of man or woman makes the best coordinator.

I got invited in April 1998 to spend an evening at the YMCA in Guildford and Jill Hancock kindly took me there. It was an interesting evening and provided a good chance to speak to staff but apart from a spastic girl who had been allowed to stay on in her room longer than others are allowed, we did not meet any other tenants. They were too shy to meet us.

But the girl did show us her room, a little larger than I expected. The Bishop of Guildford was one who was there.

I had a talk to Nick Nightingale, The National Secretary, but he has now gone to Geneva so that his experience can be available to the worldwide YMCA.

In the Summer of 1999 I wrote to the National Secretary, Eddie Thomas, asking how the scheme of YMCA presence in prison is working. He sent me a letter which shows that it is a great success and if future teams are as enlightened as the first ones in YOP and with God's help, it will enormously improve the lives of those young people of today from poor homes and poor education in Britain in the 1990s.

I cannot do better than include a letter from the Governor of HM Prison Moorland, Hartfield Woodhouse, near Doncaster to the National Secretary of the YMCA in June 1999.

HM Prison Moorland, 17 May 1999

Dear Mr Thomas,

On behalf of Moorland Young Offender Institution, I would like to commend the continued efforts of the YMCA in working with many of the young people in our care.

The YMCA fulfils a vital role in motivating and educating young prisoners while they are serving their sentences. I have seen many young people develop a completely different attitude to their future having worked with the YMCA's team.

More importantly, the YMCA keeps these young people away from crime in the long term by offering them support after they are released. In the past, young people leaving us have found it extremely difficult to find housing, training and employment because of their criminal past. But with the YMCA's help, and a determination to change, young people leaving Moorland now have a real chance of making a fresh start in life.

This is a vital service and I have nothing but praise for the YMCA's work. I look forward to seeing the scheme and its benefits expanded in other prisons nationwide.

*Yours sincerely
D. Waplington, Governor.*

19. Our Prayer Group

Geoffrey Morrell came to the Parish of Shedfield in 1976 and was on dialysis. He had only been here a very short time when he was very ill. In the early months of his Ministry he was often ill. I remember on one occasion I called on people to come to Church to pray for him. On this first occasion fifty people came including Ron Paterson, Vicar of Swanmore. But on later occasions not many people came.

I think it was in 1977 when Pat Malvern, who lived in Waltham Chase, came to see me and said she had had a dream and been told by God that she should get a small group of people together, who should meet once a week and pray for Geoffrey Morrell and the needs of the Parish.

And so came into being our weekly Prayer Group who meet at 9.0 am every Tuesday. The original members were Pat, Geoffrey Morrell, Marian Mort, Cynthia Tester and me. Twenty two years have elapsed and still we meet. Of the original members, Pat left, exchanging the Anglican Church for the Methodist Church on Waltham Chase. Marian Mort went to London and subsequently did a course in Theology before becoming a priest in Swanmore. We have been joined by Eve Evans, our Verger. While Bill Moore, who retired from being a doctor to become a priest, joined us until his death in 1998. Over the years Geoffrey has received no divine healing. Although we have received no manifestation of God's

healing, what we and the parish of Shedfield have received cannot be measured. I am sure it has been of immeasurable advantage to the parish.

I think I can speak for the others when I say that we have come to know God and to love God in a way that we never did before, and our relations with each other and our love for each other has grown over the years.

I could not write this Spiritual Odyssey without giving space to the 20 years of weekly meetings of our Prayer Group when we read the Daily Office together before making individual prayers.

Once a month too Geoffrey, assisted by Eve, brings Holy Communion to the inmates of the three Parish Rest homes or Nursing Homes. We receive Holy Communion at the end of our prayers.

While writing this book Cynthia Tester, who had been rather unwell for some time, was diagnosed as having terminal cancer and died three weeks later. Her death has been a tremendous shock to all the Parish. More people attended her funeral than any I have attended in Shedfield. The Church was full. Right up to the very end she was thinking of and praying for others.

Meeting with her and praying with her weekly for 22 years I have never met anyone who seemed to me such a complete Christian. She has set a tremendous target for those of us who follow. She was revered by Methodists as well as Anglicans. May she rest in peace.

20. Finale

In a long life with varying experiences in different parts of the world I have met with unusual happenings, all of which stem from God. There are examples of God's love for the human race and of Him being prepared to use any would be Christian followers who aspire to help the building of Christ's kingdom on earth.

I am struck by what nice characters are many young people today and imbued with unselfishness and I know how selfish I was when growing up. Many of them have fine ideals and are prepared to give their lives in helping the poor and handicapped of the world.

But they have not been brought up in a disciplined surrounding which is, in my opinion a necessary part of the life of a Christian pilgrim. The crowds of young people who make worship at Taize so inspiring and exciting are not prepared to worship regularly in their parish churches at home, a fact which I personally have heard Brother Roger condemn.

It is a feature of modern life which the Churches and Society must try to correct in the new Millenium.

I hope that this short book may be of value to lay people and especially to those like myself, who are of an inquisitive nature, and want to know what is God's will for us on our Christian pilgrimage.

The shortage of clergy today in all the main denominations makes the laity dependent more than in the past on

literature and on each other. Work for God previously done by priests now needs to be done by the laity.

The Acts of the Apostles has always been a book of great interest to me, giving a picture of the life of the Church in the first generation after Jesus Christ's life on earth. Thrilling things happened then as well as dissension in the Church.

And so it is today. We rarely hear of the good and wonderful things that are happening in the Christian Church, partly because the media as a whole likes knocking and criticising the Church. In today's world they resemble the Pharisees.

But in different parts of the world people are being healed by men and women working in God's name and their miracles are as comprehensive as any in the first century.

I have read somewhere that a miracle is not counted today until the recipient has lived another five years. That I believe is the criterion for the medical profession and that would account for the silence of the press.

Similarly we feel at times God's presence with us while at others we feel an evil presence. A lot of people I know had odd symptoms of illness which modern drugs seem not to respond to. I should like to urge sufferers to tell Satan to get away and to stay away.

Similarly I feel that fine young Christians who suddenly relapse from the Christian life have been got at by Satan. As a healer said to me, 'There aren't many people who are hostile to the devil's words and stand in his way'.

Nowhere in the Bible is there a suggestion that the war against Satan has been finally won.

But we can always win any individual battle by calling on God for help.

That is why a movement like Alpha is so good. We can learn from each other and also we can help others who are being subjected to evil pressure to bring every problem to God for His help.

In a Church congregation all have duties to help each other in addition to their other tasks.

I have written very little about prayer but it is of course of the greatest importance. Before my aircraft crash I prayed to God to save the lives of the crew of the aircraft and of myself. But apart from that occasion I don't think I have ever prayed for my own health, as I reason that God, having saved my life once, will continue to look after me as long as he has work for me to do. I do however pray for the health of others and sometimes for guidance from God.

We must continue alert. Sometimes time elapses before God instructs us what to do and we may at first be confused if we are told to do something different. What He gives us to do is always something within our capabilities, allowing always for his help.

A healer told me that once late at night God had told him, while he was on holiday in the West Country, to go and lay hands on a small boy in Lincolnshire. He knew that he didn't have enough petrol in his car for the journey, but he

said you never run out of fuel when doing God's work.

Jesus loves each one of us. That does not mean his love is only for those who try to do his work, for those who go to Church and who love him. Jesus loves also people in prison for terrible offences, drug addicts, those who hate the name of Jesus and all he stands for. However difficult it may be we should try to do the same. As Paul was converted, so also are people in today's world. We know so little about other people we meet, the problems they have, the pressures in their lives. We don't know whether they have ever been loved themselves. It is difficult to love if you have never been loved. This is something that God can help us with, if we tell him we are finding it so difficult to love an individual.