

Obituary Canon Michael Halliwell

A lifetime of faith informed by the devastation of war

A visit to the ruins of post-war Germany helped draw Canon Michael Halliwell towards a life of peace and reconciliation

IN the summer of 1947 Michael Halliwell travelled to Bonn University with a group of fellow students from Oxford University as part of one of the first exchanges with Germany after the end of the Second World War. What he witnessed in the country had a profound and lasting impact on him.

"I was completely overawed as I walked through the total devastation of the once proud city of Cologne and saw the remaining inhabitants eking out a living amongst the ruins," he later wrote.

The visit made him determined to do all he could to build a new and peaceful Europe and, in his words, "to help the rising German generation to feel part of the family of nations".

His efforts were recognised only days before his death on 4 August 2024 at the age of 96, when he was awarded the Bailiff's Silver Seal by the Deputy Bailiff and the German Embassy's German-British Friendship award by the German Ambassador.

Michael Arthur Halliwell was born on 8 May 1928, the eldest child of Arthur and (Gertrude) Dorothea Halliwell. He had two brothers, Anthony and Richard, and a sister, Daphne.

His father was appointed as consultant surgeon at the General Hospital in Jersey in 1932 and his work there is commemorated through the name of the Halliwell lecture theatre. Canon Halliwell wrote about his father's experiences during the war years in the book "Operating under Occupation", which was published in 2005.

After attending St George's School in Rouge Bouillon, Canon Halliwell went to boarding school in the UK, although in September 1939 his parents decided that it was unsafe for him and his brother Anthony to return to the UK and they were instead educated by private tutors.

On 18 June 1940, when it was becoming clear that the Channel Islands might be occupied by the advancing German forces, Mrs Halliwell and her children left Jersey on the SS Hantonia for Southampton. Little did they know that it would be over five years before they would see their father again.

The family travelled to Somerset to live



■ Canon Michael Halliwell outside the General Hospital with a copy of his book, *Operating under Occupation*, about his father, Arthur Clare Halliwell, who was a surgeon during the Occupation. Picture: JON GUEGAN (00181481)

with Mrs Halliwell's family, and Canon Halliwell was a boarder at Pilgrims' School which had relocated from Sussex to Halse Manor in Taunton because of the war. He later recalled how he would watch German bombers flying over the school on their way to bomb Cardiff and Swansea.

In 1942, he moved to St Edward's School in Oxford. He excelled in languages, winning the French prize in 1945 and the Newman prize for German in both 1945 and 1946. When he passed his Higher Certificate of Education at the end of his schooling he gained a distinction in French. He was also a House Prefect and a sergeant in the school's Junior Training Corps.

On his 17th birthday Canon Halliwell listened to Winston Churchill's VE Day speech in his housemaster's study at St Edward's.

After Jersey was liberated the following day, news was soon received from his father, who, the following month, travelled to England to be reunited with his family. "He had last seen me aged 12: I was now 17," Canon Halliwell later

wrote. "To me he seemed so much older, thin and haggard. The five years of loneliness and deprivation had undoubtedly taken their toll."

Canon Halliwell gained a place at St Edmund's Hall, Oxford, and studied modern languages, graduating in 1950 with a degree in French and German. He was, for a time, president of the Oxford University French club.

After leaving university he taught at Holmewood House School in Langton Green near Tunbridge Wells before going to Ely Theological College in 1952 to train for the Anglican ministry.

Canon Halliwell was ordained as a deacon in 1954 and on 19 September 1954 he began work as a curate at St Mary the Virgin church in Welling under the Rev Robert Dampier. It was a new church that was still being built when he arrived and services were held in an adjacent hall until the new church building was opened in 1955.

He was ordained as a priest at Southwark Cathedral on 25 September 1955 and, two years later, he moved to be curate at St Alban's Church in Bournemouth. He served under the Rev Lawrence Hibbs, who had been Rector of Trinity from 1946 to 1955, and who was later to return to Jersey as Rector of Grouville in 1975.

It was during his time in Bournemouth that Canon Halliwell met his future wife, Susan Nicholson, and the couple were

married at St Alban's Church by Mr Hibbs on 22 July 1961.

In the autumn of 1959 he took up a post at Lambeth Palace with the Church of England's Council on Inter-Church Relations. He was often asked to deal with relationships with Germany and was involved with many inward visits, particularly from members of the Lutheran church, as well as accompanying visits to Germany.

In 1962, the opportunity to work full-time in West Germany arose when he was appointed as chaplain to the British Embassy in Bonn and Anglican chaplain in Bonn and Cologne. It was a post that came with diplomatic immunity and he was involved in many initiatives to build relationships with German churches, preaching in both English and German.

He arrived at a time when the German economy was just beginning to grow strongly and the contrast with the country he had seen in 1947 could not have been greater. He later wrote that when he "saw the blue European flag with 12 gold stars flying on the ferries across the Rhine, it seemed like the end of a nightmare and the fulfilment of a dream".

After some five years in Germany, Canon Halliwell and his family returned to England and he was appointed as vicar of St Andrew's Church in South Croydon where he remained until his appointment as Rector of St Brelade in October 1971 following the death of the Rev William Tabb.

He was inducted as Rector on 16 December 1971 and he remained at St Brelade for 25 years, also becoming a Vice Dean during his last years at the church.

He oversaw a total transformation of the church's work in the parish, always working closely with his wife Sue, who took a very active part in church life.

Shortly after his arrival he established a church council which, although it had no formal status, involved a greater number of the congregation in the running of the church, with several sub-committees covering matters such as finance, worship and education.

In consultation with his parishioners new forms of worship were introduced, including a new family communion service from Whitsun 1974 which, by that summer, had a regular attendance of over 100. Home study groups were created and the congregation grew considerably.

Over time the church moved to the use of more modern service books while nevertheless still making regular use of the Book of Common Prayer. He led a quarterly traditional eucharist in French and introduced open-air services in the summer months.

Baptism services were held during the morning service so that the whole congregation could welcome the children and their families. Canon Halliwell was keen for those who had been baptised to remain involved with the church and, in conjunction with his wife, ran a toddlers' service at Communicare.

He was a passionate advocate of church unity and shortly after he arrived the St Brelade Group of Churches was formed between the Anglican and Methodist churches. Many ecumenical services were held, including joint confirmation services so that those who had been confirmed could participate as full communicants in the life of both denominations.

The ecumenical work was later extended to include the Roman Catholic churches with the signing of a declaration of intent to work more closely together in 1984 followed by a formal covenant in 1989.

When he first arrived at St Brelade work on planning Communicare was just beginning, with the Rev Gerald Stoddern from the Methodist church being the main driver behind the vision for the new centre.

Canon Halliwell was an extremely enthusiastic supporter of the project and



■ A plaque to commemorate German servicemen originally buried in St Brelade was organised and unveiled by Canon Halliwell in 1995



■ Leaving St Brelade's Church with Constable Len Downer in 1981 (JA/75/IA3/6/6593)

always keen for it to be more than just a secular centre. After it opened in 1976 Communicare was used by a whole range of church and community groups, including the joint Anglican-Methodist Sunday school. The centre's success meant that it soon needed to be enlarged and, in 1985, an extension was opened which almost doubled its size. By 1995, it was estimated that some 2,000 people were using the centre every week.

Although major restoration and remodelling work had been carried out at St Brelade by the Rev Balleine at the start of 20th century little had been done since then. Canon Halliwell oversaw a significant number of building projects, including the rebuilding of the organ, new lighting and closed-circuit television in the church, the renovation of the church hall, the creation of a new car park and the restoration of the Rectory cottage. Floodlighting was also installed outside the church.

From November 1978 significant renovation works were also undertaken in the Fishermen's chapel, with advice sought from Dr Warwick Rodwell and other experts who threw new light on the historical significance of the building.

Canon Halliwell maintained close links with the abbey at Bec in Normandy and accompanied groups on visits there. In 1986, he became an oblate of the abbey's Benedictine community. He also established links with the church in Malawi and, during a sabbatical in 1987, he and his wife visited the projects that St Brelade was supporting in that country.

He was keen to research and celebrate the Celtic heritage of St Brelade and, in 1995, a pageant was held in the parish

church involving many parishioners in a dramatic presentation of 14 centuries of Christian worship in the parish.

Throughout his time at St Brelade Canon Halliwell continued his efforts to encourage reconciliation with Germany.

In 1974, he was invited by a pastor in Darmstadt to preach at an ecumenical service in the city on the 30th anniversary of its almost total destruction in an allied bombing raid when some 20,000 people had died. "I could not but wonder at the courage of my friend, the pastor of the church, in inviting a British preacher to commemorate this occasion," he wrote.

The following year he organised a work party of young people from different trades to travel to Nuremberg to help a German congregation complete work on its new church.

As the churchyard in St Brelade had been used to bury German soldiers in both world wars Canon Halliwell would greet German visitors to the church in their native language and often invite them into the rectory.

He was one of the first people in Jersey to encourage the twinning of Bad Wurzach with St Helier and was disappointed when, after a visit to town with his wife in 1990, efforts to achieve this were not supported by some in senior positions in the Island.

He was thrilled when the twinning was finally agreed in 2002 and saw it as a very positive step when the Mayor and the German ambassador were invited to join the Liberation Day celebrations.

He was always keen for these celebrations to focus on reconciliation and on the 40th anniversary in May 1985 he held

a eucharist for peace and reconciliation which was attended by former allied and German soldiers. The preacher at the service was Dr Avriil Darling, who had been on the staff of the hospital alongside Canon Halliwell's father throughout the Occupation.

Ten years later, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary, a plaque was unveiled on the site of the former German cemetery to commemorate the 337 servicemen who had previously been buried there and whose remains had been transferred to Normandy in 1961.

Canon Halliwell retired from St Brelade in July 1996, shortly after being appointed as a Canon of Winchester cathedral. He and his wife moved to Gorey and he served

as a curate at Grouville parish church. He worked in the parish alongside his wife, who had trained as a Reader, until the couple relocated to England to be closer to their family. They initially settled in Romsey, where Canon Halliwell assisted at Romsey Abbey, before later moving to Surrey.

Canon Halliwell's wife Sue died in 2022 and he is survived by his children Katharine, Philip, Elisabeth, David and Rachel and by his brother Richard. To them and to the members of their families the JEP extends its sympathy.

A memorial service for Canon Halliwell will be held at St Brelade's Church at 3pm on Sunday.

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■ Canon Halliwell and members of his family in May 1980 at the opening the Halliwell Theatre at the General Hospital, which was named after his father (JA/75/IA3/5/3871)



■ Canon Halliwell (left) as a young curate at the opening of the new church of St Mary the Virgin by the Bishop of Southwark on 2 October 1955