

Reflections • Thursday 7 March 2019 • By Bishop John Roundhill

Reflections on Canterbury

The 'Baby Bishops Conference' was quite a treat. It is officially called 'Conference for bishops in the early years of their episcopacy', but even the Archbishop of Canterbury affectionately refers to it as the 'Baby Bishops Conference'.

What particularly struck me at the conference is that the Anglican Communion seems to be moving rapidly forwards while simultaneously standing stock still, which is exactly how it should be.

29 bishops from all around the Anglican Communion attended the conference, with The Right Rev'd Dr Murray Harvey, Bishop of Grafton and me representing Australia. This year's conference attendees came from Australia, Brazil, Canada, India, Japan, Kenya, Madagascar, Melanesia, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Scotland, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, the US, and Zimbabwe (see below for a complete list of attendees).

It was quite a gathering, and rather strange for the first few days to experience the peculiar solidarity that mutual jet lag brought, with most of us dealing with our own time zone delay.

The conference was held at Canterbury Cathedral in the UK where we spent 11 days, spanning two Sundays. It was marvelous to be immersed in the daily worship of the community there. Every day we joined the Cathedral for Morning Prayer, Eucharist and Evensong. Evensong was sung with a robed choir and was deeply traditional, as we slowly made our way through about three psalms, taking a breath to allow ourselves to catch up at the 'diamond' (the colon in our Prayer Books), as we were taught. The pace of the worship was measured and deeply prayerful and beautiful. The clergy robed in cassocks and surplice for Evening Prayer, and even the vergers (and there seemed to be quite a few) were cassocked. You could easily picture yourself back in time – 50, 100, 200 years ago. However, when you saw the vergers discreetly speak into their lapels, for each had an earpiece and radio, you were abruptly brought back into the modern day.

This blending of the modern with the traditional was also reflected in the activities of the gathered Bishops. We all had mobile phones, and in one meeting we shared photos of our families and homes. There, on a slick modern Samsung phone, the Bishop of Barrackpore (Northern India) shared photos of simple mud-built homes. The same was true of some of the African Bishops. They work and minister in an environment that looks as though it has not changed for centuries, while rocking the newest of phones – just like the clergy at Canterbury Cathedral. This was a glimpse of a well-talked about phenomenon at the conference – the developing world seemingly skipping typical stages of industrial development and moving straight into the digital age. There is something wonderful about seeing so many Bishops engaged on their phones. When I commented that I usually sit at a desk with a PC, there were sympathetic smiles from some who evidently did not envy the backwardness of this Australian Bishop's work practices.

The Communion's ancient liturgical traditions were fittingly juxtaposed with the high-tech work practices of the Bishops at the conference. At the rate that the Church is growing in India and Africa, and the opportunities that modern technology is providing, there are exciting times ahead for the Communion. Importantly, the precious practices of the past are not being left behind.

Registrar Gordon Gall



Registrar Gordon Gall (back row, third from left) with the Executive and Finance Committee, Sailors and Soldiers Church of England Help Society ca 1945

In the written histories and publications of the Diocese, there is often much focus on the role and impact of archbishops, bishops, and priests – with little mention of the role and impact that registrars and administrators have had behind the scenes. This article honours our longest-serving Registrar to the Diocese, Gordon Gall, and his service.

The period between 1913 and 1945 saw two World Wars and the Great Depression. It also covered the period of our longest serving registrar.

Originally from England, Gordon Gall came to Queensland in 1896 – firstly to pastoral land near Winton, then joining a sharebrokers business in Charters Towers, and later an insurance business in Brisbane. Gall first joined the Diocese as Assistant Secretary to the Registrar and then, upon the resignation of Alexander Orme, he was appointed Diocesan Registrar in 1913.

Gall served in uniform in both World Wars. He enlisted in late 1915 for World War I and spent over twelve months in France, when he noted in a letter (published in the March 1918 edition of the *Church Chronicle*): “a friendly land, and the (French) people are always so ready with a smile. One’s heart warms to them in admiration for their bravery.” In October 1917 Gall was seriously wounded at the Battle of Passchendaele. The *Church Chronicle* for May 1918 notes:

“(Gall) was hit in the jaw by a piece of high explosive and lay unconscious for twenty hours. While in this condition he was blown up by another shell and injured in the ankle and lung.”

He contracted pneumonia due to his injuries and exposure. Gall survived – attributing his rescue and survival to “the continued petitions rising on his behalf from the hearts of the faithful.” In World War II he was again in uniform, helping the work of the Red Cross as one of its Commissioners.

In his role as Registrar, Gordon Gall oversaw significant development in the Diocese, including the construction of St Martin’s War Memorial Hospital, the move of the Theological College from Nundah to its current home in Milton, and the establishment of Slade School in Warwick and Churchie in East Brisbane.

He was considered a financial adviser of great ability (of particular use during the Great Depression) and a devoted family man, spending many years caring for his invalid wife, who predeceased him by only a few years.

Gall retired due to ill health in December 1946 and spent the last months of his life in St Martin’s War Memorial Hospital (now St Martin’s House). He passed away on Sunday 23 February 1947. The funeral service was held in the Cathedral on the 25th, which was conducted by the Coadjutor Bishop Horace Dixon with Archbishop Halse reading the Lesson.

In the *Church Chronicle* of April 1947, Archbishop Halse noted that Gall was:

“...one of the most respected and saintly lay men, whom it has been my privilege to meet....His simple faith and trust in God was only equalled by the fortitude with which he bore great suffering and pain. His end was a merciful release to one who had long learnt to take up his cross daily and follow Christ.”

As Dean Barrett noted in his address at Gall’s funeral: “The duties of a Registrar are not spectacular, nor do they lend themselves to ‘highlights’ but they are very important to the material side of Church affairs.”