

Canon John Thurmer

An appreciation of the life of Canon John Thurmer, by Heather Morgan, from Exeter Cathedral News, February 2015, page 23.

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We were very sorry to hear of the death of Canon John Thurmer, Canon Chancellor of the Cathedral from 1973 to 1991. He died on 25th January. (The funeral will be at St Michael's, Mount Dinham on Monday 9th February at 2.30pm.)

John was at school in Essex, and was called up in 1944, serving in the Middle East, where he only just escaped the bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. After studying at Oriel College, Oxford, and a three year curacy in Newham, East London, John lectured at Salisbury Theological College for nine years.

His long association with Exeter began in 1964, when he was the first Lazenby Chaplain at the University. Generations of students can testify to the warmth of John's hospitality (he had an apparently endless supply of sherry), to the varied liturgical diet, and to the lively community of the chapel, its choir and the Anglican Fellowship.

At the Cathedral, to which he moved on the day of the first ever congregational party, we enjoyed John's theological expertise and his knowledge of history, the Oxford Movement being a particular area of interest. The works of Dorothy L. Sayers were another specialist subject, about which he wrote in *The Detection of the Trinity*. He was an inspiration to those whose faith was informed and enriched by the study of history and literature; I remember well a series of Lent Sermons that ranged from *The Man born to be King* to *Watership Down* via *Faustus* and *Narnia*.

He kept the musicians on their toes too, being an expert in hymnody, and his liturgical knowledge served the Cathedral well, not least his part in the revival of the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday. For a while, John served as the Cathedral Administrator, and his handwritten missives became a familiar feature of life.

John's sermons were models of brevity and clear structure, from which one always learnt something new. They were characterised also by his ready wit and dry humour. Although professing never to give pastoral advice, he did in fact support and encourage numerous friends, students and colleagues.

John was wonderfully entertaining company. He enjoyed, and dispensed, excellent claret, and was a generous host, though dinner could be interesting. Paul and I often reminded him of the occasion when for dessert he offered us "figs or prunes....if we don't get you one way, we'll get you another!"

It was good that members of the Cathedral Community were able to join him to celebrate the 60th anniversary of his ordination last year. He will be sadly missed by his many friends.

May he rest in peace, and rise in glory.

Heather Morgan