

# Ivor Bulmer-Thomas 1905–93:

## In Memoriam

*Ivor Bulmer-Thomas, who died on 7 October 1993, gave much of his later life—nearly forty years—actively to the service of the Ancient Monuments Society. He first became a Member of Council in 1954 and was elected Secretary in 1957, an office he combined with that of Deputy Chairman from 1961 to 1964. From 1970 he was Honorary Secretary until elected Chairman in 1976, an office he continued to hold until he retired from daily involvement in the Society's affairs in 1990, when he was appointed a Vice-President. Even then he continued to visit the Society's Office every other day or so until his death. His major life's work in the world of the conservation of buildings was also reflected in his membership of the Executive Committee of the Historic Churches Preservation Trust and in his chairmanship of the Redundant Churches Fund, 1969–76. He was founder and Honorary Director of the Friends of Friendless Churches.*

*Ivor Bulmer-Thomas was born on 30 November 1905, the son of A.E. Thomas of Cwmburan, Monmouthshire. He married, first, Dilys (d. 1938), daughter of Dr. W. Llewelyn Jones of Merthyr Tydfil; and, second, Margaret Joan, daughter of E.F. Bulmer of Hereford. Educated at West Monmouth School, Pontypool, he went up to Oxford, initially as a Scholar of St John's College but later was a Senior Demy of Magdalen College. He took first-class Honours both in Mathematics (1925) and in Literae Humaniores (1928). He was Liddon Student (1928), Ellerton Essayist (1929), and Junior Denyer and Johnson Scholar (1930). A considerable athlete, he was awarded a Blue for athletics, achieving distinction later as a Welsh international cross-country runner.*

*A spell as Gladstone Research Student at St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden (1929–30), preceded his appointment to the editorial staff of The Times (1930–7). Subsequently, he was chief leader-writer to the News Chronicle (1937–9) and Acting Deputy Editor of the The Daily Telegraph (1953–4). During World War II he served in the Royal Fusiliers (1939–40) and the Royal Norfolk Regiment. He was successively a member of three major political parties, entering Parliament as Labour M.P. for Keighley from 1942–8 and becoming Conservative member, 1949–50. He was Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, 1945–6 and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1946–7. In later life he became a member of the Liberal Democrats.*

*In the affairs of the Church of England, Ivor Bulmer-Thomas played a long and active part. He served as a Member of the House of Laity of the Church Assembly 1950–70, and of its successor body, the General Synod, 1970–85; he was Chairman of the Faith Press and Vice-President of the Church Union.*

*His life-long contribution to the study of Greek mathematics was recognized by the award of the degree of D.Sc. honoris causa by the University of Warwick (1979); in conferring upon him the honorary degree of D.Litt., in 1992, the University of Wales recognized his outstanding contribution to the conservation of buildings as well as his considerable literary output.*

*Ivor Bulmer-Thomas's long list of publications includes Coal in the New Era (1934), Gladstone of Hawarden (1936), Dilysia: a threnody (1938; republished 1987), Top Sawyer, a biography of David Davies of Llandinam (1938), Greek Mathematics (1939–42), Warfare by Words (1942), The Problem of Italy (1946), The Socialist*

Tragedy (1949), (ed.) E.J. Webb, *The Names of the Stars* (1952), *The Party System in Great Britain* (1965), (ed.) St Paul, *Teacher and Traveller* (1975), *East Shefford Church* (1978), and many contributions to learned journals including, recently, 'The Star of Bethlehem—A New Explanation—Stationary Point of a Planet', *Q.J.R. Astr.Soc.* 33 (1992), 363–74.

MEMORIAL ADDRESS by THE MARQUESS OF ANGLESEY

*This Address was delivered at the Memorial Service in St John's, Smith Square, SW1, on 30 November 1993.*

If one gets in touch with the National Meteorological Archive at Bracknell, one will be told what the weather was like in any area on any day in the last 150 years or so. I was mildly disappointed to find that the record kept at School House, Monmouth, not far from Ivor's birthplace, on the 30 November in 1905, disclosed nothing more exciting than cloudy with rain, wind light and temperature in the upper 40s. In short, Ivor came into this world, eighty-eight years ago today, in dull and dismal weather—how inappropriate! During the thirty-five years or so that I had the privilege of knowing him, he was never dull, never dismal. Thunder and lightning, alternating with long periods of brilliant sunshine—and possibly a touch of frost—would have been very much more fitting.

Though very considerably more irenic than the impression sometimes given by his public image, Ivor was not one to entertain the idea of peace at any price. His capacity for producing thunder and lightning—and sometimes a touch of frost—at the right time and for the furthering of those causes in which he passionately believed, was an important element in the greatness of his achievements. It is interesting to note—and so typical of him—that he invariably directed his thunder and lightning at those who were great and (possibly) good—those who could well defend themselves. It is remarkable, looking back on the more disputatious parts of his career, how right he almost always was.

Turning to his career as a whole, I have no doubt that we who have come here this morning to celebrate and extol it—and even more posterity—will agree that the moment when Ivor turned away from active politics was the most profitable and beneficial, not only for his reputation, but equally for those great undertakings to which he devoted so much of his exceptionally brilliant brain and his formidable energies. Energies! Energies of brain and of body: I remember him, when well into the last decade of his life, slashing away at six-foot high brambles and ten-foot high saplings in more than one Anglesey churchyard!

Ivor often brought to mind those great Victorians—scholars, churchmen, architects, engineers, literary giants—who, like him, pursued, with apparent ease, numerous successful careers, any one of which most of us lesser beings would have difficulty in following with even moderate success within one life-span. Unlike most of those great Victorians, however, he never showed the slightest inclination to court self-aggrandisement. Like the devout practising Christian gentleman that he was, he combined courage and conscientiousness with candour and courtesy. Nevertheless, false modesty was not part of his style. He never, for instance, denied that, had he not rightly wanted to enter the arena of active life he could have got any number



Private Ivor Thomas at Dinner Parade, Territorial Camp, 1939

of *further* Firsts at Oxford—in almost any subject, including athletic and sporting ones.

Again, he found that words (to quote his own) came to him as naturally as the leaves on a tree and, what is more, in seven languages! To that, eloquent testimony is borne by his numerous books and innumerable learned articles, to say nothing of his veritable flood of letters, written as often as not in his inimitable hand. Oh! how I, for one, shall miss them!

I have been fortunate in coming across many people of very superior intellect, but I've never had contact with a brain more brilliant than Ivor's. In Roy Jenkins's words: 'He trailed great clouds of intellectual glory'. How gloriously lucky have been the causes which he espoused, and so valiantly and profitably fought for, to have applied to them Ivor's brilliance, common sense and application, no cause more than that of churches no longer (for the time being, at any rate, as he so persistently emphasized), in use for worship.

It is very proper and felicitous that we should be thanking God for him in this grand temple of St John's, which he did so much to bring back to life after its cruel bombing. It is worth remembering that he always insisted that, despite its largely secular use, occasional services should be held in it each year.

He would have been the first to acknowledge that no one is indispensable; nonetheless, it is almost impossible to believe that, without Ivor's vigorous determination and persistence, there would now be nearly three hundred outstanding redundant—and once friendless—places of worship all over England and Wales, in being and maintained by Church and State to the glory of God. Without his crafty—I use the word advisedly—tactics many of these splendid parts of our national heritage would have been demolished or rendered ruinous.

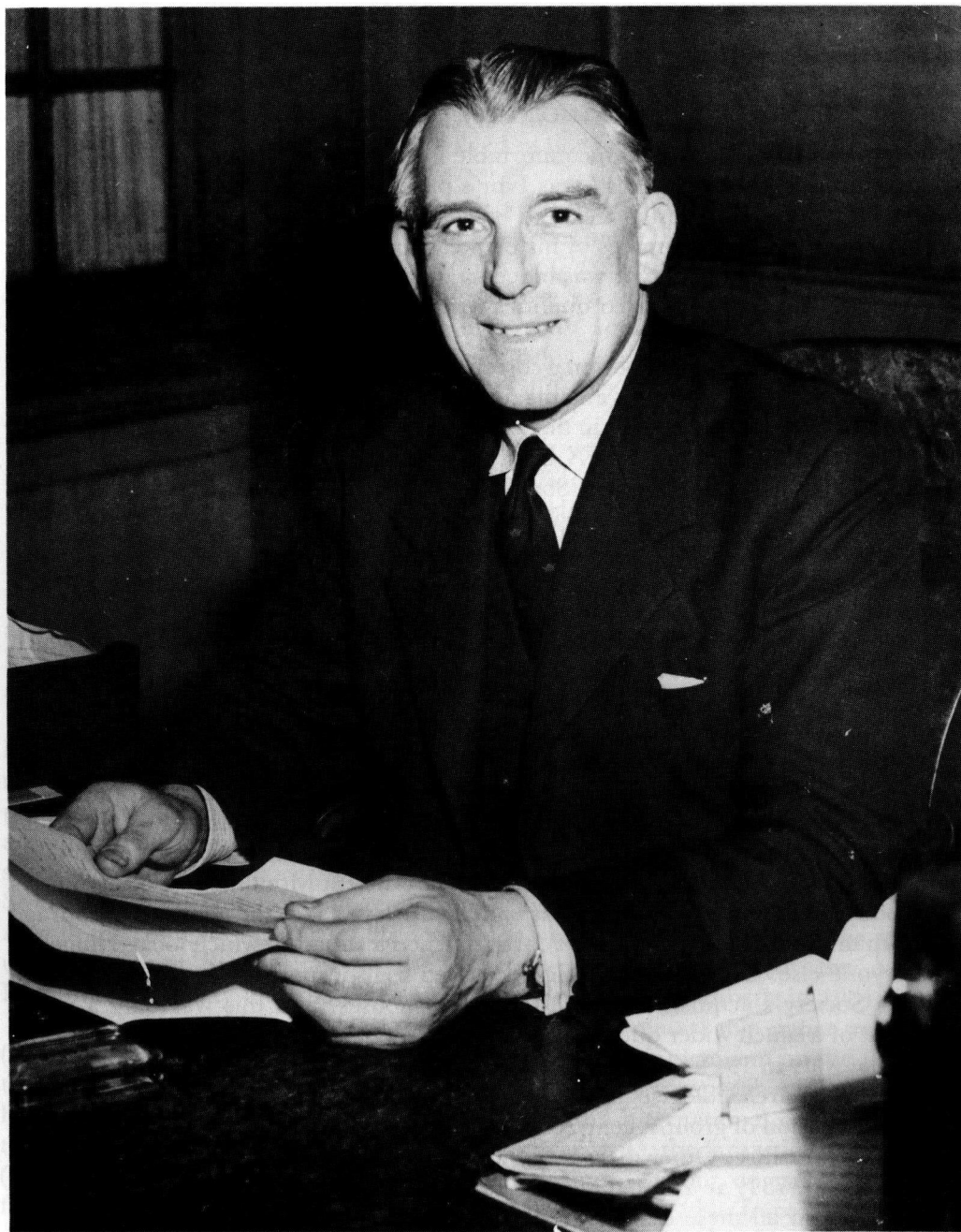
He was the very model of polymathic man: classical and theological scholar, mathematician, historian, biographer, journalist (and, incidentally, obituarist), politician, athlete—(even aviator)—and much else. (Some of us used to refer to him, behind his back, as Len—short for Leonardo!) As we have heard, movingly read by his grand-daughter, the quality of his verse written after his life's one great sadness shows that he could have been, on top of all his other accomplishments, a poet of a very high order.

Ivor was little interested in the delights of the table, though he enjoyed a good wine, and he was invariably dressed less than showily. He saw no benefit in wasting valuable time on such minor matters. His capacity for sustained hard work was phenomenal. Indeed he was working up to the last minutes of his life. I well remember, when touring (rigorously) with the Redundant Churches Fund, eating our sandwiches inside the church (when wet) and on tombstones (when dry), not ceasing for a moment to discuss how best, and most economically, to proceed to the building's salvation.

Then, Joan tells me that it was always difficult at home to get him to attend to meals. 'The omelette is getting cold', she would cry. 'I *like* cold omelette,' he would answer as he continued labouring at his desk. His sense of humour, too, was always bubbling just below the surface. I was reminded the other day, that when he received his C.B.E. he at once supposed that, in his case, the letters stood for Churches Before Evangelism—a slightly in-joke which no one here will fail to appreciate!

Those of us who relished the vast privilege of being his acolytes, associates,





Ivor Bulmer-Thomas in 1954 when Acting Deputy Editor of *The Daily Telegraph*  
*The Daily Telegraph*

assistants and ardent admirers—to say nothing of his wonderfully supportive wife, children and grand-children—will retain for the rest of our lives joyous memories of a great and lovable man. We shall not see his like again.

THOUGHTS ON IVOR BULMER-THOMAS by JOHN H. HARVEY

'I will guarantee to make life uncomfortable for all who would destroy buildings of architectural or historic interest' was Ivor's proud boast in a letter of 1 November 1968, where he had modestly declared: 'such gifts as I have are rather in the nature of an agitator'. These estimates of his own capacity, in spite of leaving out a great deal, are his best epitaph. Ivor was indeed a great agitator and a doughty opponent of the tricky and false: inverted qualities regrettably common in some of the fields in which he moved.

The immense files of his personal correspondence, with me alone, run from March 1958 to March 1991 and cover an amazing number of diverse subjects. I had joined the Ancient Monuments Society in the winter of 1954-5, two years before Ivor became Secretary, and attended my first A.G.M. at Lambeth Palace on 9 June 1955, when Dr C.R. Dodwell was the speaker. Somebody, perhaps John Swarbrick (an old friend of my father), surprisingly asked me if I would propose the vote of thanks. Thus started an alleged 'tradition', which Ivor took up and maintained as my special prerogative, in spite of my frequent inability to attend Annual General Meetings. Adherence to such ideas, imbedded in his retentive mind, was a constant of Ivor's personality. His patience and persistence in good causes were extraordinary. The first subject on which he enlisted my help, in 1958, was the case of St Mary-at-the-Quay, Ipswich, where the authorities were removing the fittings to pre-empt the case for demolition. The font was taken to Brantham, but was brought back in 1977, the outcome of twenty years of determined effort on Ivor's part.

Much time and precious energy were wasted for some years in coping with internecine squabbles over principles and methods of conservation. All this would be better forgotten if it had not thrown into sharp relief Ivor's indomitable determination. The commanding position of the Ancient Monuments Society in this field today is due, basically, to him: as with Atatürk in 1922, the genius and courage of one man alone (Turkish *Tek adam*), transformed a situation which looked hopeless to everyone else. One problem which occupied a disproportionate amount of time was the Society's acquisition of the Cromford houses, and this was only a single fragment of a much wider question of mass destruction of 'minor' buildings. At the end of the war, in 1944-5, the results of condemnation by medical officers of health had perturbed archaeologists, and twenty years later the same problem, leading to piecemeal erosion of groups, centred on the wonderful village of Langton in the East Riding of Yorkshire. Other threats in the North affected parts of Beverley, and the noble bridge (1731) at Yedingham was saved only by its scheduling as an Ancient Monument. In all these cases Ivor played a leading part.

Very different kinds of threat had to be dealt with, and Ivor again and again showed his skill in dealing with them. The incompatibility of a new organ in the Chapel of Merton College, Oxford, with some of its famous glass; the assault upon Levens Park in Westmorland by a new link road; and the devastating proposal for the York

Ring Road, were only three of many cases dealt with between 1967 and 1975. Of even wider concern was the levying of V.A.T. on repairs and maintenance of old buildings, but not to modern replacements of 'fake' character. Using every weapon in his armoury, Ivor attacked this vicious and nonsensical assault on our heritage for years after 1974, until some success was at last achieved. Time was also found for activity on local matters which involved major principle, such as the closure to traffic of Deangate, York.

York was prominent again in the detailed assistance which Ivor gave to the Archbishop's Commission on Redundant Churches in the City of York, a pilot scheme for the whole country. In the report *New Uses for Old Churches* (1967), this Commission printed a detailed memorandum by Ivor on uses, actual or potential, for Anglican churches made redundant, including over sixty actual instances, with valuable comments. This was, of course, a prelude to his appointment in 1969 as the first Chairman of the newly-founded Redundant Churches Fund, over which he presided for seven years.

So far this memoir has dealt with Ivor the warrior: now for the man. At the time when he became Secretary of the Ancient Monuments Society in 1957, I knew nothing of him except that he had become notorious for his opposition to proposals for Anglican retrenchment by means of wholesale redundancies and profitable sale of church sites for redevelopment. Oddly enough, I did not then realize that he was the same Ivor Thomas who was an outstanding expert on ancient Greek mathematics, and appreciation of his many-faceted personality only developed over several years. For some time I was quite unaware of his outstanding academic and athletic achievements at Oxford, and of his political career.

Memory holds the door on much: Ivor's generosity as a host, and as a devoted helper in many projects. He was always an unfailing support over matters of language: notably ancient and Old and New Testament Greek and Italian, as well as on nice points of English usage. When I sought his help over technical details of the Italian account of Cosimo III's visit to England in 1669, he went to very great lengths to show that the word *gazzone*, used to mean grass-turf (in the description of Hinton St George, Somerset) was not really Italian but a borrowing of the French *gazon*. Also in the context of historical gardens, Ivor was a pillar of strength in the setting-up of the joint Symposium on the Conservation of Gardens (by the Ancient Monuments Society and the Garden History Society) at Lambeth in 1984.

Turning to mathematics, in connection with his remarkable paper on Euclid (*Archaeological Journal*, vol. 136 for 1979) he delivered the judgement on the *Elements*, that 'with the exception of the Bible, no work has had a comparable influence over human thought and action'. He engaged in lengthy international correspondence to discover the background of the 'Duplicatio Scaccarii', the fantastic total reached (18,446,744,073,709,551,615) by placing a single grain, or coin, on each of the sixty-four squares of a chess-board, and doubling progressively. He traced this back in modern scholarship to an article by N. Khanikoff (*Journal of the American Oriental Society*, VI, 1860, 79-80), and showed its identity with our western version of the blacksmith who charged a farthing for the first nail in shoeing a horse, etc. Not only did Ivor work out the whole calculation afresh (eight pages, Christmas Day, 1970), but years

later (10 April 1977) sent a reference to the same problem from Dante's *Paradiso!*

Although from early years I had been a royalist and from my teens commemorated King Charles the Martyr on 30 January, it was with amazement that I found that Ivor was the guest-speaker to the Royal Stuart Society on White Rose Day, 1967. It was about that time that he hosted a luncheon in York, in the restaurant of a well-known hotel, and on being asked by the waitress to taste the wine, the bottle steaming from a hot-tap, issued the mild rebuke: 'I did not tell you to boil the Burgundy'. On another occasion he produced the finest claret I have ever tasted. . . .

#### AN APPRECIATION *by* MATTHEW SAUNDERS

The goblet engraved by Laurence Whistler, offered to Ivor Bulmer-Thomas by his admirers in celebration of his work, is inscribed *Conservatorum Princeps*, the chief among conservationists.

Ivor was indeed a towering figure in the conservation world for four decades. His was a constant presence in the Ancient Monuments Society from 1958 until his death, as Secretary for twenty years, Chairman for fifteen years and, latterly, as Grand Old Man of the Council. In the seventeen years of my involvement with the society he was ever present, yet even when I first met him in 1976 he was already in his seventies.

In 1977 the Ancient Monuments Society needed a Casework Secretary and, as I had come to know Magda Russell and Laura Grenfell well through weekly visits in my capacity as Secretary of SAVE Britain's Heritage to monitor the register of cases maintained by the A.M.S., I was—as they say—in the right place at the right time to be considered when Jennifer Jenkins needed an Assistant. The interview turned out to be a pleasant chat in Ivor's civilized drawing room on the first floor of number 12 Edwardes Square, a house of 1811 where he had lived since the beginning of World War II. To me the floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, the tall French windows overlooking the vast square through the knarled trunk of a creeper, the comfortable sofa, and, above all, the genuine interest shown by this soft-spoken and unpretentious man, convinced me that this was the field I wanted to enter. Ivor's world was divided into those he liked and those he did not like and I felt, after that all-important meeting, that a rapport between us had been established and that I was included among the favoured ones.

I remember thinking, rather tritely, that this man with bright white hair parted down the middle, dressed in the much-worn black suit that I later came to identify as a trademark, should somehow have projected his greatness more. Earlier mugging up in *Who's Who*, and briefing by Magda and Laura, had confirmed me in the belief that here was a great man, but in the flesh his presence was neither charismatic nor overbearing. He was a man entirely without personal vanity who displayed even at our first meeting some highly personal eccentricities, most particularly a marked hatred of the telephone. Our meeting had been arranged through a series of letters, and a telephone call interrupting our talk was answered abruptly, even if it did include a promise of a letter to the caller. I learnt to understand that this was not just displeasure at being interrupted, but a dislike for an instrument that required sudden reaction and impeded an intellectually-rounded sequence of thought.



One obvious clue to Ivor's breadth of interest were the titles of the books that filled the longest wall of his drawing room. Politics jostled with religion, mathematics with history. I pointed to the biography of Attlee, who had given him a ministerial post and then unceremoniously discarded him; Ivor's judgement was not that of the expected irreconcilable hostility. I noted that there were very few novels; Ivor's was a love of facts. There were few works on churches, but I knew already that scores of books on the subject had been donated by him to the library of the Friends of Friendless Churches, maintained in the side galleries of St Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe. I was to learn, only gradually—and as often as not from acquaintances as from him—the degree to which historic churches, the passion which bound us jointly, was but one of the dynamics of his life. I realized, too, how much could fill the waking hours of a man who needed only five or six hours of sleep and who was blessed, or, as he once confided in me, cursed, with powers of total recall; he neither needed nor kept a diary. His stamina enabled him to cross the Sahara in a jeep with a number of friends after losing his seat in the House of Commons and fuelled him to combine the Executive Chairmanship of the Historic Churches Preservation Trust from 9.30 a.m. until 4.30 p.m., followed by a regular stint at the *Daily Telegraph* until 8.30 p.m., composing the following day's Editorial.

My knowledge of his other passions emerged gradually. As to the field of sport: he knew most of the dramatis personae in the film 'Chariots of Fire' and, but for an injury, would have been selected for the 800 metres in the 1928 Olympic Games. Of mathematics: I knew that he had translated Euclid, and had written extensively on the history of mathematics, but I had no real idea of his standing in that field until David Fowler wrote to *The Independent*, on 13 October 1993, to expand on my own Obituary. He quoted a letter from Ivor: 'I have met Planck, conversed with Einstein and known Gowland-Hopkins and Rutherford, but I will continue to regard Newton as the supreme genius'. Only the day before Ivor died he concluded another letter 'I am just refreshing my memory of the theory of relativity'. Of languages he knew six: English, Italian, Latin, Greek, French and German.

There were also the great passions: religion, politics and churches. He was baptized a Baptist at the age of twelve years but was soon enticed by the certainties—and sense of tradition—of High Anglicanism, a belief confirmed at Oxford. Had not the worldly need to earn his living intervened, he might have trained for the priesthood. He announced his resignation from the Labour Party after a period of prayer on retreat at Mirfield. Ivor's God was not a prig; life was to be enjoyed, heartily on occasions, but he demanded constancy. Verities were eternal and to be defended against all trimmers and modernizers. As a natural controversialist, and as a biographer of Saint Paul, Ivor was reluctant to accept women priests; he was also a forthright contributor over many years to debates in Synod. Here and elsewhere jaws could still drop at the bluntness of some of his remarks. Not that he was immune to the power of words and actions to hurt. Slightings and unfairnesses, some imagined, rankled with him for years.

Ivor's political certainties seemed less hard and fast than those in religion. The facile headline of some commentators, and even Ned Sherrin in 'Loose Ends' on the Saturday morning after Ivor's death, concentrated on the *annus mirabilis* when he managed to represent the same constituency as a member of the Labour and Tory

parties and as an Independent. The picture looked even more kaleidoscopic given his later entry into the S.D.P., but it was typical of the man that this was prompted as much by sincere belief as by his longstanding friendship with Roy Jenkins whom he had known since he was a boy. He was always worried by those who consistently saw both sides without opting for one or other. When I wrote a piece on Façadism as part of the *Festschrift* offered to him on his eightieth birthday he thanked me warmly for editing the piece, but then expressed concern that he was unclear from that particular article whether I was for or against.

Ivor's origins in Wales were modest and, although displaying a weakness for people with titles, he was never a snob, and his meritocratic instincts kept the Radicalism which drove him in his early political life alive. His intellectual curiosity was never sated.

It was above all as a conservationist, tireless, passionate, selfless and unafraid to tread on sensitive toes, that I knew him. He was the man who wept on seeing the demolition of the ancient church of St Peter-the-Less in Chichester in 1957—the year he decided to dedicate the rest of his life to the preservation of historic churches from mutilation and destruction by establishing The Friends of Friendless Churches. The principal spur had been a very public row in 1956 with Archbishop Fisher, which led to his departure from the Historic Churches Preservation Trust, following the insistence of the Church of England authorities that money from the Trust be denied to churches that were closed, or facing closure, and should be spent at the behest of the dioceses. Ivor had already shown his mastery of the subject by chairing the committee on the future of historic churches at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, which led directly to the Quinquennial Inspection Measure of 1955. This required P.C.C.s to arrange for professional inspections of their churches every five years, a sensible exercise in good housekeeping and one that has been followed by other churches and, recently, by the National Trust.

Ivor's love of churches did not extend to the products of the nineteenth century. He once told me, in an innocent echo of the Puginian fallacy, that churches before the nineteenth century were built naturally. He also gave me, as a Christmas present, Jack Simmons' study of St Pancras but chided me gently on the flyleaf for being too much of a Victorian. He responded strongly to the atmosphere of nineteenth-century industrial England as one would expect from a former M.P. for Keighley and he could be more Victorian than the Victorians in appreciating transparent quality. He resigned from the Victorian Society over what he considered to be their failure to save Paley and Austin's wonderful church, The Saviour, Bolton. He alone fought the Consistory Court, on behalf of the A.M.S. and the Friends of Friendless Churches, in 1978 to save Gilbert Scott's incomplete masterpiece, the parish church of Stourport, Worcestershire. However, the buildings that really moved him were the modest and the venerable; as he once said in relation to the tiny church at Sutterby in Lincolnshire, owned by the Friends, no one would dream of demolishing Beverley Minister, but Sutterby might easily be swept away, the victim of indifference and tidy-mindedness. The evocative little double-cell church at Llangua, just west of the Welsh Border, was maintained by him, at his own expense, as a memorial to his first wife, Dilys, who died so tragically in 1938, and in whose honour he composed and published

a moving threnody. Fleeting fashion, immediate need at the expense of beauty, artistry and tradition were what enraged him.

What delighted Ivor was to see the Friends' churches preserved and used for benign and appropriate purpose. He did his best to attend the annual open-air service in the summer in the ruins at South Huish in Devon; he was pleased to arrange a ceremony at the Friends' only Nonconformist property—the Strict and Particular Baptist Chapel at Waddesdon Hill in Buckinghamshire—for the descendants, many of them living abroad, of the man who had founded it in 1792. The service he organized at Llanfair Kilgeddin, near Usk in Gwent, to celebrate the completion of repairs, struck a typical chord in combining unaccompanied Welsh singing with a Latin oration and a celebration of the 400th anniversary of the defeat of the Armada. These, and all the twenty-one Friends' churches, owe their survival at all, or in dignity, to Ivor. Even with a guinea of churches under his wing he was still looking forward to further acquisitions and was in negotiation with both church and government authorities in Wales at the time of his death in the expectation that the Friends would be identified as the chosen instrument for the establishment of a Redundant Churches Fund in the Principality.

It was with a due sense of humility—and a passionate commitment to carrying on the work of this lovable, occasionally infuriating, but wonderful man—that I accepted the invitation of the Council of the Friends of Friendless Churches to succeed Ivor as Honorary Director on 4 November 1993, knowing that I would be helped inestimably in this by the support of his family, particularly by Joan, his wife, and his daughter Jennifer, and by the remainder of the Friends' Council.

I began with a Latin tag because I knew it would please Ivor, and I shall end with another, albeit one outrageously unoriginal. But it really is the case that if a monument is required to his work then the best witnesses are his twenty-one children in stone and mortar maintained by the Friends and indeed the 300-odd now owned by the Redundant Churches Fund of which he was the inspiration and first Chairman (and on which John Bowles writes). As was said of Wren on his tomb in St Paul's: *SI MONUMENTVM REQVIRIS CIRCVMSPICE*

#### THE REDUNDANT CHURCHES FUND *by* JOHN BOWLES

Ivor's article on Redundant Churches in the Society's *Transactions*, 17, 1970, based on an earlier address to the Ecclesiological Society, in which he described the origins of the Pastoral Measure of 1968 and its procedures, gives no hint of the controversies which were so soon to follow. It is difficult now to convey that feeling of excitement as each of the statutory bodies set up by the measure sought to define its position within the complex procedures—complex because they were an uneasy amalgam of the accepted recommendations of the Bridges Commission (on redundant churches) and the Ilford Commission (on pastoral reorganization).

Definition evolved rapidly when section after section of the Measure was read into as the future of each church came to be considered by the Church Commissioners. The Redundant Churches Fund was well-placed, for, as Chairman, Ivor had with him a team whose range of expertise and experience was authoritative and won for it lasting respect: the Marquess of Anglesey, Mr Edward Bishop, M.P. (later Lord



Joan and Ivor Bulmer-Thomas in 1968, receiving gifts at Bible House

Bishopton), the Very Revd Walter Hussey (Dean of Chichester), Mr Patrick Gibson (later Lord Gibson), Sir Edward Muir (a member of the Bridges Commission), and Mr Paul Paget, F.R.I.B.A. Each made a distinct contribution to the whole. Discussion at its meetings was lively. Decisions were unanimous; and they needed to be when every case was judged on its merits, and precedents did not exist.

It was vital in these initial discussions that the Fund had a clear vision of its purpose in preserving the surplus churches 'in the interests of the nation and the Church of England', and that was quickly achieved thanks to Ivor's conviction that churches are in themselves acts of worship, 'their message is delivered, not for half an hour on Sundays, but for every hour of every day of every year, and not merely to those who enter, but to all who pass by'. It was this consistent theme which not only had led to the founding of the Friends of Friendless Churches in 1957, following the decision of the Historic Churches Preservation Trust to confine its help to churches in full use, but clearly had also lain behind his steering through the Church Assembly in 1955 the all-important measure providing for the quinquennial inspection of churches.



It was Ivor's hope that the long-neglected churches, often those superseded by new ones on different sites in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, or both, and some of which had already benefited from speedy action by the Friends of Friendless Churches, would quickly find their way to the Redundant Churches Fund. Slowly many did, like St Thomas, East Shefford, long a favourite of Ivor's, and which also bridges his previous life in politics. It was Mr H.V. Armstrong, former Secretary of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations, the P.C.C. member who first alerted him to its structural plight in 1958, and did much more. The dramatic story of the repairs undertaken by the Friends of Friendless Churches is given in Ivor's guide to the church.

In 1972 it was no foregone conclusion that a church as small in scale as East Shefford would be an automatic choice for vesting in the Fund. The lure of domestic conversion was strong, supported by a vociferous minority, mainly clergy, in General Synod. East Shefford escaped because of the accidental discovery by Mrs Eve Baker of its chief glory—the mid Anglo-Saxon frescoes (see *Transactions*, 19, 1972). Indeed it must be emphasized that from the outset the likelihood of the vesting of any church in the Fund could not be assumed. Things had got off to a bad start late in 1969 with the recommendation by the Advisory Board for Redundant Churches that St Peter, Wolfhamcote, be vested, but not before it had been partly demolished and partly unroofed. Like East Shefford, Wolfhamcote was one of the Friends of Friendless Churches's early successes—an almost miraculous eleventh-hour rescue of a church which had already lost its complete sets of box pews to vandals who fortunately found the medieval pews they concealed too sturdy for their attentions.

That recommendation of the Advisory Board did more than anything else to confirm the Fund in its view that it must be the arbiter of the condition of any church under consideration for transfer to it, and of the cost of the repairs which it considered necessary to put it into good order. Attempts to 'second guess' the Fund's costings were, at the least, unacceptable, a view which rings true today. After much discussion the church was vested, and intact. One can recall more than one letter going from Ivor's pen with the opening sentence 'This will not do'. It never failed to alert the reader to be on his toes. Lord Anglesey's vignette in *Transactions*, 30 (1986), brought back memories of that, and many a similar, incident.

One such was the decision of Kirk Sandall P.C.C. to build a new church in the village centre, incorporating major parts, e.g. the arcade, from the old. For Ivor the proposal was vandalism, and it was an act of cynicism to expect the Fund on vesting what remained of the old church to have to make sense of a deliberately created ruin. Wiser counsels prevailed. The case reinforced Ivor's conviction that churches destined for the Fund must be transferred with the structure intact and with the fittings complete. This has remained a guiding policy, and accepted by the Church Commissioners to the extent that the most recent Redundancy Schemes (the transfer documents) contain a clause giving the Fund almost draconian power to recover fittings previously removed without authority, i.e., Faculty.

Ivor had hoped that the Friends of Friendless Churches would, after the setting up of the Fund, have been able to divert much of its energies to the neglected churches of Wales and to the nonconformist churches. Although this did happen, it soon became

apparent that something had to be done for the churches which were not considered of sufficient merit for the Fund and for which no suitable alternative use had been found. The Friends of Friendless Churches had to save them as the last recourse from demolition. It is worth mentioning that in the 1970s the landscape contribution of the churches might not have been as highly regarded as now, with the result that the Friends of Friendless Churches and not the Fund had Wood Walton and Saltfleetby Old St Peter's Tower.

Unnecessarily provocative was the Church Commissioners' decision to demolish St Margaret Old Woodhall, despite the offer of the Friends of Friendless Churches to take it on. Ivor had fallen under the spell of Lincolnshire and its churches, and was more than disappointed that the local support which, so much a feature if not an essential of the work of both the Fund and the Friends, was absent there. That a largely medieval church 'hallowed by centuries of prayer' could be so easily demolished worried him greatly. Though the Fund acquired the greensand from which it was mostly built, Ivor found offensive the sight of the stone filling the churchyard like a large potato clamp, and the later use of some of it in the repair of Saltfleetby Tower was small compensation.

If Old Woodhall was a failure, then Saltfleetby Tower certainly was not. Saving it for the Friends, after Saltfleetby All Saints, Skidbrooke St Botolph, and Theddlethorpe All Saints had been vested in the Fund, was a triumph. It was won largely through the one local supporter, Mark Stubbs, 'that splendid man', who refused to let illness conquer until he knew that the tower was safe in the Friends' hands. His was a courage and determination which Ivor understood and shared, and its circumstances had a profound effect. It reveals Ivor's rapport with all who struggled selflessly to save their churches, yet needed that extra resource which only he could give.

That help took many forms, and it endured. We must not overlook the fact that so many of the occasional services, a mainstay of the Fund's policies as well as of the Friends, encouraged in each church, were fostered by Ivor. Ever practical, he would drive the musicians from London to the services at week-ends in the Fund's Range Rover, believing that the services should be important local events as they were in the past, and especially in the remoter areas, with Feast of Title and Harvest Thanksgiving.

These notes serve to illustrate that Ivor's ideas and actions both for the Redundant Churches Fund and the Friends of Friendless Churches were the working through of that constant theme of the purpose of a church. The last words must be his, and they come from his review in *Transactions*, 35 (1991), of Richard Wilding's report to the Department of the Environment and the Church Commissioners on the working of the Fund and the then current arrangements. Ivor offered only one criticism, that Mr Wilding 'shows no awareness of the fact that a beautiful and historic church fulfils its most useful purpose merely by existing—as a pointer to a world of spiritual values'.