

## TWO VIGNETTES

“I found Llantrisant Old Church [in Anglesey] in good shape, though it took me three days this year to subdue the luxuriant vegetation.” Thus writes Ivor in a post card four months before his eightieth birthday.

To watch Ivor subduing luxuriant vegetation is to witness a veritable Hercules at work. That he should do it at all is typical of the man. There’s no damned nonsense about its not being his job. What a splendid example he sets incumbents and church warden in this respect!

His physical toughness is astonishing—(but I do wish he would let up on that annual skiing)—yet it is as nothing to his mental strength. That and his wide-ranging scholarship, combined with an enviable memory which seems to encompass, amongst other things *every* church, whether friendless or not, as well as its ailments and its beauties, are matched by a dogged and invariably well-informed determination to see justice done and good prevail over evil.

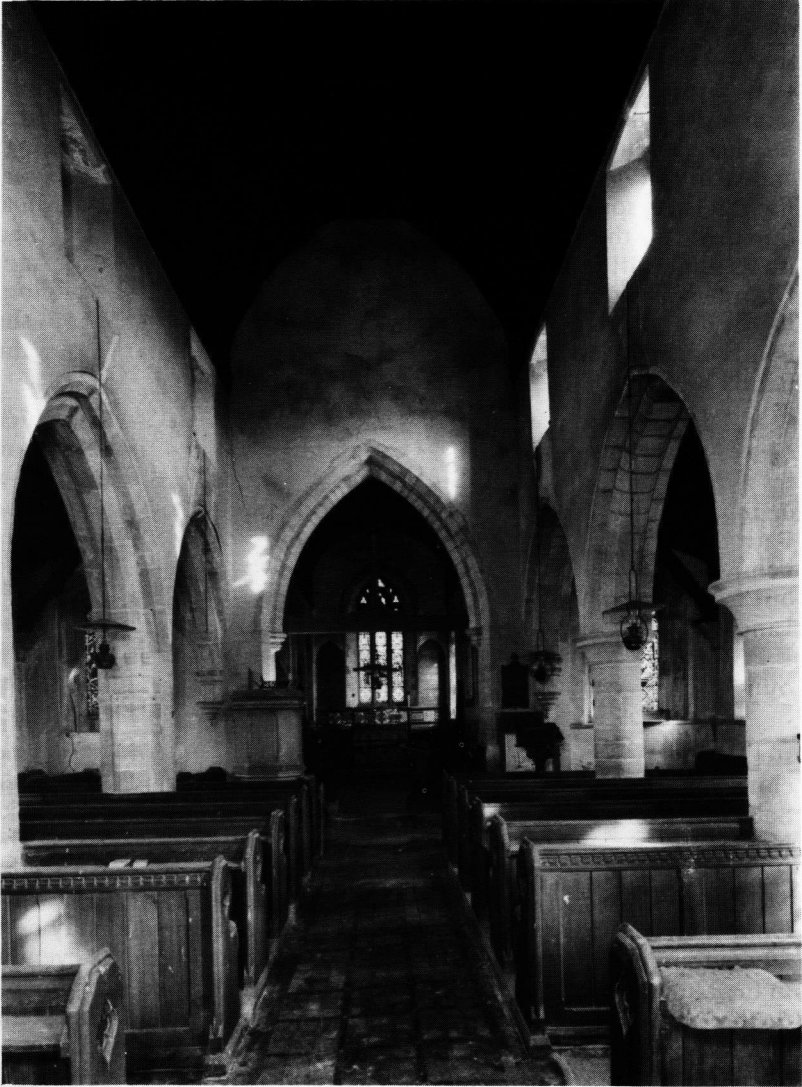
This sometimes makes him uncomfortably combative as becomes the great fighter he is. In parliament, in Synod, in committee, whenever a battle must be won, Ivor has always been ready to fight it—with few holds barred.

Men of such strength of conviction are, of course, sometimes wrong, but looking back over the decades during which I served (and was honoured to serve) as Ivor’s protégé and acolyte, I can identify hardly a single occasion when his cause was not a good one.

There have been times when his indignation or enthusiasm carried him away, when he was inclined to engender undue antagonism towards a sinning opponent, but he nearly always accepted the wisdom of a little judicious toning down of an expression or sentence: an irenic exercise which I have sometimes been pleased to perform for him.

My personal gratitude to Ivor arises from many actions and achievements, but is greatest, perhaps, for what he has done and is doing to help me as Chairman of the Historic Buildings Council for Wales to deal with the often intractable problems of redundant churches in the Principality. When these are eventually solved, much of the credit will be his.

*Marquess of Anglesey*  
*President, Friends of Friendless Churches 1957-84*  
*President, Ancient Monuments Society 1980-84*



St Andrew's Wood Walton, Huntingdonshire. One of the seventeen churches owned by the Friends of Friendless Churches.  
(Photo, courtesy, Royal Commission on Historical Monuments).

Every time I travel up to London—by train from Grantham to King's Cross—I pass the little church of Wood Walton, standing solitary on its Huntingdonshire hillside, so close to the railway, so far from its village. It stands there—nave and aisles and chancel, west tower with pyramid roof—in its lonely churchyard, a typical mediaeval country church, not specially notable, but charming, endearing, a holy place. And I think, every time I pass, of Ivor. Faint hearts, some years ago, declared it 'redundant': ecclesiastical bureaucrats, their minds on money, not on prayer, condemned it. Redundant! Not sufficiently distinguished for the Redundant Churches Fund, Wood Walton might have passed into oblivion, might have been pulled down; but, thank God, it passed into the hands of the Friends of Friendless Churches—and that means the hands of Ivor Bulmer-Thomas.

There are countless churches all over England and Wales which owe their preservation to Ivor. I can think of one near here, Fenton in Lincolnshire, which fifteen years ago stood derelict—a distinguished little church of which I have the good fortune to be Patron. I appealed to Ivor: could the Friends of Friendless Churches help? I assured him that Fenton was indeed friendless—down and out. 'Of course' he replied, 'We've done too little for Lincolnshire'—and Fenton received a magnificent grant from the F.F.C. I shall be preaching there at their Harvest Festival in a few Sundays' time: Fenton now has many friends. I shall think of Ivor.

'Too little for Lincolnshire'—but now this vast county is studded with churches which Ivor has helped to save—grand churches in the empty Marshland like Theddlethorpe All Saints, Saltfleetby All Saints and Skidbrooke, smaller churches like Normanton or tiny Clixby—all now in the safe keeping of the Redundant Churches Fund—or the solitary tower of Saltfleetby St. Peter—now in the care of the F.F.C. When he was still Chairman of the R.C.F. he would sometimes come and stay here after a tour of some distant churches; he would arrive in the evening in his Land Rover, tired maybe, but full of energy and excitement, the fire of the warrior in his eyes—and, after a hasty wash, he would be ready to go out to dinner, or meet a crowd of friends here.

"We believe" he wrote in an early *Report* of the F.F.C. "that there can be no solution to the problem (of church maintenance) unless it is recognised that an ancient and beautiful church fulfils its primary function merely by existing. It is in itself, and irrespective of the numbers using it, an act of worship. A beautiful church, whether standing alone in the countryside, or surrounded by wharves and warehouses, is a perpetual reminder of spiritual values. In Shakespeare's phrase, such churches are 'sermons in stones', and their message is delivered, not for half an hour on



Tower, St Peter's Saltfleetby (pron "Sollerby") Lincolnshire.  
 Owned by the Friends of Friendless Churches  
 (Photo, courtesy, Christopher Dalton).

Sundays, but for every hour of every day of every year, and not merely to those who enter, but to all who pass by."

So, as we pass Wood Walton, solitary by the railway, or Skidbrooke standing quite alone across dyked fields in majestic isolation, we can thank God for their preservation, and bless the name of Ivor Bulmer-Thomas—*ad multos, plurimos, annos*.

*Rev. Henry Thorold  
 Marston Hall, Lincolnshire  
 Former Chairman, Friends of Friendless Churches*