

**Address given at the Funeral of the Reverend Canon Henry Thomas Platt Evans (88)
on Tuesday, 14 February 2017 by The Very Reverend Dr Derek Hole**

I feel very privileged to give this Address at the Funeral of someone I have known since 1958. If it were not for Henry I would not be standing here today. One of my closest friends at Lincoln Theological College was Martin Phillips who served his Curacy with Henry at Stocking Farm and before Ordination we would come to Leicester and meet up with Henry and Ruth. It was Henry who introduced me to Canon John Fielder who offered me a curacy at St Mary Magdalen, Knighton where many years later, Henry himself would become Vicar..

Henry was proud of his Welsh ancestry, and a fanatical Welsh rugby fan. He was born in Brynmenyn, a village near Bridgend. His parents were keen Presbyterians where Henry and his sister Ruth were nurtured in the Christian Faith. They had two uncles who were Presbyterian ministers and two other uncles who were Anglican clergy. Henry went to Bridgend Grammar School and attended the local Anglican Church where the Curate who had been educated at Selwyn College, Cambridge suggested that Henry might go there. But before that, National Service intervened and in 1946 Henry trained as an ordinary seaman in Plymouth and Dartmouth. It was two years later that he went to Selwyn and read for an Honours Degree in the Theological Tripos and from there to Lincoln Theological College.

It was on Whitsunday 1953, a week before The Queen's Coronation, that Henry was made a deacon in Chelmsford Cathedral serving his curacy at the Church of St Barnabas, Manor Park in the East End of London. After six months, the Bishop allowed Henry to marry Ruth Bayliss who came from Swanwick, Derbyshire whom Henry had met 6 years earlier in his uncle's Vicarage.

In 1956 Henry was invited by Bishop Ronald Williams to be the first priest-in-charge of St Luke's, a new parish of 15,000 people on the northern edge of Leicester, comprising the Stadium, Stocking Farm and Mowmacre Hill Estate. The Diocese provided a new Vicarage and Church Hall on an imposing site at the top of a hill. Before long it was a new Church building that was needed and Henry asked Group Captain Henry Goddard, a direct descendent of the architect who designed this Church of St James the Greater, if it might be possible to build a Church by voluntary labour. The architect agreed provided they had an experienced foreman. Arthur Cattell, a Churchwarden of All Saints' Leicester had the necessary qualifications and offered his services. Colin Shrewing designed the interior of the building. Five years later, with the skills of many volunteers from the parish and beyond, together with the generosity of donors who gave readily in admiration of the whole enterprise, the present Church with tower was consecrated by the Bishop of Leicester in the presence of HRH The Princess Margaret at the end of April 1966. It was there that Keith Shepherd met Henry and who summed him up succinctly. 'The first time that someone came to the Church Henry would ask his or her name. The second time he would welcome them by name and use it at the communion rail. The third time he would give you a job!' It was during his time at Stocking farm that the two children, Jonathan and Caroline joined the Evans family. They, of course, have very fond memories of their father and would pull his leg about his lack of household skills - he couldn't even boil an egg! But Ruth would always say 'but he takes a lovely Funeral!' And Henry could laugh at himself. Caroline told me and in fact we all knew that Henry was blest with a large nose and a fantastic and innate sense of direction. He would sometimes say, 'Well I just follow my nose. With my nose I can't go wrong'. 'I know I have a large nose. It doesn't bother me because I can't see it. It is other poor souls who have to look at it that I feel sorry for'.

Jonathan has asked me to add his own gratitude to Henry. 'I have always thought of Dad as a Builder – of churches, halls and communities. He and I didn't see eye-to-eye over everything but I respected his faith and commitment enormously and had many fascinating discussions with him on many topics. He understood and accepted my atheism without any judgement or criticism. He was a great listener, organiser and leader, and, though he always (wrongly) felt that he hadn't given Caroline and I enough support and attention because of his calling, he was a very loving and supportive father even when we ran into difficulties. Above all, he was the most genuine Christian I have ever known – living his life and treating others according to the teachings of Christ in whom he had absolute faith'.

In 1967 Henry became Rector of St Matthew's Stretford, Manchester. For Henry, it was a useful experience of a Church in a different tradition, with a strong choir and Borough responsibilities. It proved to be a difficult time for Henry, but he was joined by two of his most able Curates, namely John Shepherd and Jim Cotter who supported him with unstinting loyalty throughout his time there where many benefitted from his quiet spirituality. One radical idea introduced at the time was to have lady 'Sidesmen'. In the parish Henry was instrumental in saving two rows of Victorian terrace houses that were going to be demolished and are now a unique part of Stretford. Whilst in Stretford Ruth had the opportunity to train as a teacher and taught at a local Church School. Henry oversaw the transition of the Primary School from Aided to Controlled.

In 1973 the Bishop of Leicester invited Henry to become Vicar of St Mary Magdalen with St Guthlac, Knighton. Ten very happy and fulfilling years followed. A Parish Centre was built and dedicated in 1974 and Ruth became Head of St Crispin's Prep School in Avenue Road. An appreciation of Henry's ministry at Knighton by Brian Small is included in your Order of Service.

In 1983 Bishop Richard Rutt asked Henry to be Warden of Launde Abbey. Another ten busy and fulfilling years followed. The derelict stables were converted into more accommodation after a £200,000 Appeal and as the Retreat Movement grew, so Launde became a national centre for Silent Retreats as well as Conferences. The Chairman of the Launde Trustees, Canon Brian Davis said, 'There are many of us who feel that it was Henry's vision, energy and leadership that secured the future of Launde – the Launde we all enjoy today. His time as Warden established Launde as one of the finest Retreat Houses in the country'. Henry always acknowledged he had stalwart and hardworking support in Ruth, Anne Laurence, Gisela Pick, Martin and Lindsay Oliver, Jinny Wade and Gill Russell who staffed the Retreat House over the years. At Launde, Henry was able to develop his inherent interest in so-called 'spirituality' because, as Warden, he was expected to give spiritual counsel when needed. Retiring in 1993 at the age of 65 he continued this 'listening' ministry which, he said, gave him a quiet and humbling fulfilment and there are many people here who were grateful to him for his wise counsel. He was invited by Barbara Butler to become the Treasurer of 'Christians Aware', an Organisation which she had founded. Henry held the Office for several years. He and Ruth moved to Clarendon Park and together worshipped here. Sadly Ruth died in 2005. They had been married for 51 years. He said of himself that he was 'hugely blessed in the love he received from friends, notably Anne Laurence, who left her house in Oakham and came to live first in Evington and then in Clarendon Park. Henry joined her in Avenue Road in 2011 and Anne lovingly cared for him until his death. We, his friends, all mourn his passing. We shall all miss his wise counsel and advice, but our thoughts and prayers today are with Anne, Jonathan, Linda, Daniel and Oliver, Caroline, Peter and James and Ruth Anne.

Henry's life and ministry reflected the Gospel he passionately believed in and which drew people to him. He has now entered into the joy of his Lord where, we pray, he rests in peace. Amen.