

## Rev. David Arthur Stonebanks, Chaplain 1980 - 86

Rev. Stonebanks was born in 1934, and had his education at Louvain University in Belgium obtaining a MA in 1970. His ordination training was at the College of the Resurrection, Mirfield, 1964. He was ordained Deacon in 1966 and priest in 1967.

He served as Curate at St. John the Evangelist and St. Edwards, Burgess Hill, Chichester and from 1966 to 1968, moving to London as University/Polytechnic Chaplain for the City, 1970-1973.

He then transferred to Continental Europe. First to Strasbourg, Eglise des Peres Dominicains with Stuttgart and Heidelberg from 1973 to 1980 and then he came to us at Holy Trinity Geneva in **1980**, where he ministered until **1986**.



Thanks to Wendy and Pierre Martinek, we have this photograph of Rev. Stonebanks in conversation with their son Dr Igor Martinek,

It was under Rev. Stonebanks' watch that the Church building underwent a complete renovation. A complicated and expensive process, as we are well aware today in 2023, 45 years on, as we go through a similar process particularly given the fact that the building is listed as a Historic Monument.

Quoting from Dyne Steel's booklet: *The History of the English Church in Geneva, Chapter VIII, The Great Stride Forward (1957 – 1985):* *By the early eighties, however, it was clear that nothing short of a complete renovation, both inside and out, would suffice to put the seriously deteriorating building in good order. The roof was leaking in several places and parts of the outside masonry had crumbled beyond repair. It was a formidable task, such as the congregation had never been called on to face since the construction of the Church in the 1850's. With the support of many eminent sponsors from Switzerland, England, and the Commonwealth, the Renovation Appeal was launched in 1983, accompanied by a beautifully produced brochure. It was in the same year that the work of restoration actually began, under the sympathetic direction of architect Angelo Mattana.*

*The response to the Appeal was immediate and most encouraging. This was in no small measure due to the fact that the building was scheduled as a Historic Monument on 16 February 1983.*

Apart from the generosity of the Swiss state institutions, banks, businesses and hotels, quote: *the congregation contributed both individually and collectively by supporting bazaars, jumble sales, concerts and other enterprising events. One fund-raising idea was to ask people to buy and inscribe a roof slate. As a result, part of the roof now has ingeniously decorated slates.....*

*Part of the general renovation included the replacement of the organ, dating to 1968, which had not proved to be a wise purchase. A splendid new Swiss organ built by Kuhn S.A., of Mannedorf in the canton of Zurich, was installed.....*

*On 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1985, two years after the launching of the Appeal, a Thanksgiving Service was held, in the presence of the Bishop of Gibraltar, to celebrate the completion of the renovation work. .... unquote.*

An extremely busy and fruitful period for Chaplain and congregation.

Rev. Stonebanks set his sights on the youth early in his ministry and called upon a newlywed couple, John and Peta Tracey, to build up a Youth Group for 10-14 year-olds, aptly baptising it the Laser Group. This group grew throughout the 1980s, with the youngsters themselves going on to form an ecumenical youth group.

That brings us to Rev. Stonebanks' interest in all things scientific and a particular fascination for astronomy. A shared interest in astronomy with the then RC priest in Geneva, Fr. Richard Frost, led to a lasting bond which carried on into their retirement. One cold November night, at the invitation of the Traceys, the two of them sat in a field next to the Tracey's house, tucked up in sleeping bags on sunbeds, watching shooting stars; central heating was provided by some good single malt ... The Traceys lived in a dark skies location, a small village at the foot of the Jura, in the adjoining Canton de Vaud, with no big-city light pollution.

Rev. Stonebanks, a bachelor, fell in love with a parishioner, Hilary Weber and they were married, with a Blessing held at HTC. Shortly after that, the couple left Geneva for St. Andrews, Zurich, with St. Gallen and Winterthur, where he worked from 1986 to 1989.

Returning to England in 1989, as Rector, of St. Giles, Horsted Keynes, Chichester, he became the honorary Chaplain of the local preserved steam railway known as 'The Bluebell Line'. The scenic Bluebell Railway runs between Sheffield Park and East Grinstead in Sussex. As Britain's oldest preserved standard-gauge railway, it shows off the area's beautiful bluebells as they come into bloom each spring. Run by volunteers, it takes passengers through 11 miles of gorgeous Sussex scenery in the luxury and comfort of a bygone era. Rev. Stonebanks would bless the train each year in spring, at the commencement of services and in exchange, he received a free ride on the train.

Rev. Stonebanks retired from active duty 10 years later in 1999 but retained permission to officiate until 2016 and passed away in 2017. His wife Hilary had pre-deceased him.

A Requiem Mass was held at HTC, Geneva, on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> May, presided by the then Chaplain, Canon Alex Gordon, who had met Rev. Stonebanks just once, in unrelated circumstances, but by sheer coincidence, seemed to have followed him around Europe in their respective postings ! Canon Gordon started his homily by thanking Peta Tracey for her recollections of David, in which she said: *We loved the fact that he was so 'human' and realistic - 'fiasco' was one of his favourite words when things went wrong – and still today we often remind each other of his advice to 'think about what you want to do – and then halve it – it avoids a lot of stress and disappointment'.*

To further quote from Canon Alex's homily:

*Even in the very short acquaintance that we in fact shared, I knew he was very much a professional priest in the best sense of the word. And I knew this also from what he left behind him.*

*What are we doing at this moment in celebrating a requiem for David?*

*Well, first we are offering our thanks for a warm-hearted and generous and very human person who wasn't afraid to take risks and even make mistakes – or fiascos as he might have said! We are offering thanks for a faithful priest who had an interest in so many different aspects of life – including the scientific. (Which is something else that we share!) We are offering our thanks to God for the continuing effects in our lives that David's ministry has left with us. Here, in Strasbourg, in Zurich, in the diocese of Chichester, and in other places too.*

*And we do all of this in the context of the Holy Eucharist, in which we call into the present the saving acts of God in Christ and plead them for those we care about in this life and in the life to come.*