

400 years awaiting the Bishop



The Rt Rev and Rt Hon Richard Chartres KCVO FSA, Bishop of London

By Dr Edward Harris

‘... for a bishop to live at one end of the world and his Church at another must make the office very uncomfortable to the bishop and, in a great measure, be useless to the people.’ —Thomas Sherlock, Bishop of London 1748-61

Memo to the –Bishop of London

The Rt Rev and Rt Hon Richard Chartres KCVO FSA

At Bermuda–17 November 2012

Your Grace:

Looking back from On High and over a perspective of 400 years of the permanent settlement of Bermuda, which began under my governorship, starting in July, 1612, I do welcome you to these islands which some regard as Heaven on Earth, albeit some four centuries late. While the Bishop of London was given responsibility for our American colonies those many years ago (‘the care was improperly lodged...), your congregation here is delighted that at long last we shall be able to see the head of the Diocese of London in this paradise and to hear news of the capital and your words of wisdom and benefaction, as we hope you will deliver sermons to all of the Anglican Churches hereabouts. As this is the first visit of a Bishop of London, I thought I might give you a little background on the Bermudas, although as a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London (like that chap Dr Edward (‘Doc’) Harris up at the National Museum in the old Bermuda Dockyard), you have probably boned up on the history and archaeology of the place, given your fellowship in that ancient and learned society.

Be that as it may, I take the liberty to recommend to you the work of your late and dearly departed servant, Dr AC Hollis Hallett, of this place, but once the President of University College Toronto, a man of brilliance and God (and also a good organ player at St John’s in Pembroke). ‘Archie’, as he was known to all his family and friends, dedicated his later life, with his wife ‘Keggie’, to the pursuit of historical matters in the most scholarly of fashion. In that fashion, Mrs Hallett, as you may know, recently completed a wonderful transcription of my successor Governor of Bermuda, Nathaniel Butler’s (161922) history of the first decade of the island’s settlement, making that rambunctious ten years of the birth of the place accessible to the public, unlike the earlier publication by Governor J. Henry Lefroy FRS, who gave a verbatim publication of the “Historye of the Bermudaes” with all the non-standard spelling of the day. In 1993, Dr Hallett made the history of your diocese in Bermuda most accessible with his Chronicle of a Colonial Church, 16121826 Bermuda (I have a signed First Edition you might be interested in).

On the title page, Archie quoted one of your Ministers here, Alexander Ewing, who wrote of Bermuda in 1784 that “small though this spot is, a great deal of the world can be seen in it”, a statement as true today, in the island’s 400th anniversary year, as it was then and also in my years here. You may bear witness to Ewing’s statement yourself, as I can tell you from the very beginning that these Bermudians were a canny, not to say crooked, lot and soon developed an island mentality, which some might say bordered on schizophrenia, had we had that word in earlier times. Their bad points aside, I hope you will find that they live up to their reputation as one of the most genuinely friendly people on God’s Earth, even including some of the heathens up around Scaur Hill way (“Doc” Harris will unfortunately be in your London while you are in his Bermuda, otherwise he could fill you in on some finer historical details, if not ecclesiastical ones).

Originally, your Church in Bermuda was to comprise four places of worship, the chief at St George’s,

the next in Hamilton Tribe, the next in Pembroke Tribe and the last in Southampton Tribe. (The word ‘tribe’, by the by, has nothing to do with an agglomeration of souls, but is an ancient word denoting a division of land, a word seldom used, but for some reason it reared its head eight times in Bermuda, the ninth division of its lands being St. George’s, not given over to shareholders, but held in common for the use of the Governor of the day: all nine partitions of the place were later called ‘parishes’, a word associated with the Church.) However, the first Bermudians disagreed with the four-church regime of the Bermuda Company in London, so that your congregation eventually had a church in each tribe, all of which remain, albeit in more modern architectural guises, and to which may be added the now defunct Dockyard Church, once located in a warehouse of the Victualling Yard, as the Royal Navy would not stump up for a separate edifice, though plans exist of an intent.

Now that you have come, we hope your visit will be a most enjoyable one and of benefit to your farflung flock in the “second most remotest place on earth”. Indeed, you should be pleased with the activities of your Church in this anniversary year, wherein the original one (which I established in 1612 at St George’s), has assumed, with the consent of Her Majesty, the title of ‘Their Majesties Chappell’ (after a Warrant of William and Mary), a matter related to you as Dean of the Chapels Royal. Your very dedicated and active team there, under the guidance of the Rector of St Peter’s, the Reverend David Raths CD BA BD, have done much to promote the Church in this four-hundredth year of the settlement of Bermuda and I do commend them to you for being a very bright start in an otherwise lacklustre firmament, having used up most of our powder three years ago for the 400th anniversary of the sinking of the Sea Venture (1609). That miraculous adventure gave William Shakespeare the inspiration for his last play “he Tempest”.

While many a storm has this island struck and your Church here ridden out its fair share of tempests, again I welcome you to Bermuda and hope that yours will be a temperate visit that is imbued with all that is blessed about this place, its people and your Congregation.

Your Obedient Servant,

Richard Moore

First Governor of the Bermudas, 161215.

*Edward Cecil Harris, MBE, JP, PHD, FSA is Executive Director of the National Museum at Dockyard.
Comments may be made to director@bmm.bm or 704-5480*