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| **The dedication of the Ridgway Memorial window**  **January 22nd 2006** | | |
|  | Ridgway Window    Just over three years ago it was my privilege to be invited by Audrey, to give the address at **Canon Ridgway's** funeral service, at Christchurch. Rhydycroesau near Oswestry And today I must thank Rick and the churchwardens for inviting me to come back out of retirement, to share with you some thoughts, on this occasion, - to share with you, - something of the man whom we are remembering especially today, Why, for instance, are we dedicating a memorial window to Maurice Ridgway, who was vicar here from 1949 - until he moved to become Vicar of Bowdon from 1962?    First of all, I want to say that today, January 22nd is a most appropriate date for the dedication of the Ridgway Memorial window, here at St. Boniface, because it falls between two very important dates in Maurice's life, - he was born on January 19th, and he was inducted to the living here at Bunbury, back in 1949, on January 26th So, - although the date chosen for our service depended on all sorts of other influences and considerations, it could not have been better chosen. And I must offer congratulations to all who have seen this project through Rick, our Vicar, his PCC, Churchwardens, with perhaps a special word for Walter Done who really has worked hard I know, on the project.    And I must confess that although Rick said in his welcome that I look resplendent this morning, strictly speaking I am not correctly dressed as a Reader, but I hope I can be forgiven for that. You see, when I was first licensed as a Reader we did not wear the blue scarf, but a badge of office and ribbon. When the blue scarf was introduced it superseded the badge and ribbon. It was Maurice Ridgway who presented this badge to me in Chester Cathedral, back in October 1958, just as today, Rick presents the blue scarf to any Reader newly licensed to this parish - So I felt I would just like to wear it once again today, as one of my personal links with Maurice, on this very special Sunday, and special Service.  When he arrived in Bunbury, Maurice came to a parish with a church that was badly damaged by war, - most of its windows were missing, over 20 had been destroyed; the building was very much open to the elements The roof had been stripped of its tiles. That damage was all the result of a German landmine, jettisoned, we believe, as the planes tried to get back from Liverpool after being fired on so heavily that all they wanted to do was to drop their loads anywhere. At my home at Beeston Moss we had incendiary bombs in the garden and in the fields around. That was nothing compared to the damage caused by the landmine that dropped over the corner of the churchyard, narrowly missing a row of little cottages that stood there.    I know that many people - far beyond this parish, - will remember Maurice for his written, published work, - on rood screens, (One book, about the rood screens of Wales, earned him a special award, which in turn led to his having a fellowship of the Society of Antiquaries bestowed on him; they never do that lightly!), He wrote also about stained glass - but perhaps most important of all, on silver, especially church plate and Chester silver. He was in his time, arguably one of the finest authorities in the country, on church silver. Just weeks before he died Mary & I visited Audrey and Maurice and be showed me something of what he was preparing at that time; he was cataloguing the work of the Chester Silversmiths. I believe he'd already published three works on Chester silver; this seemed to be a current update on which he was working. I marveled at the research, the detail, - yes, and the love and the care he was devoting to that work. If you visit Chester Grosvenor Museum, you will find the Ridgway Silver Gallery, which was opened in 1997 by HRH The Prince of Wales, and which was named after Maurice as a tribute to his work and in his honour.    Today, with the dedication of this window, we again celebrate, as we did at his funeral service, the life of a most remarkable and a very godly man. His whole ministry was spent in the Chester Diocese but this morning I am thinking specially about his ministry here among us in Bunbury.    Soon after arriving here, Maurice introduced us to a young lady named Audrey Cobden-Turner, and soon afterwards he and Audrey were married. Later the children were born and spent their early lives here.    As Maurice set about his task of restoration of this lovely church, he found that although the bomb had been dropped nine years earlier, very little had been done - although he discovered the Diocesan authorities had arranged for the Diocesan Surveyor to go ahead with payment for war damage. A figure had more or less been agreed, even though the extent of the damage had never been assessed -so Maurice had to tell the Diocesan surveyor that that arrangement was not acceptable (We can thank God that he did make that stand - it must have been the first of many battles he had to fight to try to get fair reparation for the restoration.) I shudder to think what sort of restoration would have been possible had he not fought almost every inch of the way for the beauty to which this church was restored. I don't suppose we would have had our lovely east and west windows, for a start!    I have had the privilege of seeing his own account of his work on the restoration, telling as it does of all those struggles, - and at one stage he was seriously ill (in 1954) and was out of action for six months, either in hospital or convalescing. In reading his account, amongst all the detail and meetings and hiring and firing and the frustrations, headaches and heartaches involved in that planning, he wrote, "Above all, there was a parish of souls to look after, and I trust this was always a priority." Those of us who still remember his ministry here will, with me, vouch that that was his priority. Despite his scholarship; despite his expertise in the work of restoration here, it was as a Parish Priest that he himself would wish to be remembered.    When that landmine fell on Bunbury, this church saved the village from much damage but in the process it did become almost a ruin. Can you imagine a blackbird, building its nest and rearing its young on the rood loft? Or a blue tit, sitting on the screen through a communion service? Swallows taking up residence in the south aisle? He remembered them all. They were his companions, as he himself worked here, day by day. He tells how on occasions the snow came in through the unshuttered east window and even landed at times in the Ridley Chapel where some services were still being held.    I think it is most appropriate for the window to be in the Ridley Chapel, for a number of reasons, but - on a personal basis - because I for one will always associate it, from when we lived here, with early morning communions on Saints days (7.0am) -when, after the service, we were invited back to the vicarage by Audrey, for breakfast, before getting the train to Crewe or Chester, and on to work.    In October 1951, during evensong, we had just reached the Magnificat when there was an ominous crack in the nave roof - Maurice cut evensong short and advised us to leave. He called in the experts the next day, and they told him the roof was in a dangerous condition and could collapse. Services on Sundays then were conducted for a time in the village hall. Yet another frustration for him, - and remember that, at that time he was still quite a young man. It was his first parish., - it was indeed a heavy responsibility on young shoulders. Yet he proved to be more than equal to that grave responsibility. It was only I think, later on, that we realised that one reason the Bishop had appointed Maurice to this church at that time, was because of his expertise - he saw the restoration of the building to an even greater glory and beauty than before it was damaged.    He painted those shields at the top of the pillars, bearing the arms of the townships of the parish, - he went up ladders day by day to paint them. I believe he personally did quite a lot of work on those bosses you will see in the ceiling - at the west end you will see one bearing his initials, together with those of Tom Steventon and Herbert Major, - his churchwardens then. There is quite a lot of Maurice Ridgway then, still here with us today. As far as the restoration went he described himself as "Clerk of Works and painter". Look up, look around -and you will see his work still with us.    But not only did he come to a parish with a war damaged building, but he brought a breath of fresh air with him and ministered to a people who were still themselves, reeling from the effects of World War II. He built up the Sunday schools - four of them, one here, and also at Calveley, Haughton and Peckforton, all working to a common syllabus (and in passing I will mention that churchwarden Walter Done and I were part of the team at Peckforton in those days). Which reminds me too, that Walter's father, the late Mr. Alf Done, spent a time himself, working on the restoration of this building.    Through his association with the late Bishop Norman Tubbs, the then Dean of Chester and himself a member of the Worshipful Company of Haberdashers, Maurice built on, and strengthened the relationship of church, Aldersey School and the Haberdashers, (our Church patrons), establishing a bond, - a close and strong bond that still abounds today. I don't think the importance of what he did was realised or indeed recognised at the time, but he certainly sowed the seed of the strong bond that exists today.    He organised great services here -including celebrations in 1955 for the 12th centenary anniversary of the death of St. Boniface - a service attended by at least 12 Bishops and a number of other very senior church dignitaries. He had a wonderful way of reading a passage from the bible, bringing that passage to life, even if it was a passage that we might have thought of as being rather obscure. He fostered more than one vocation to the church's ministries, including my own as a Reader.    Shortly before his death he wrote a paper called "OMEGA" — a paper that enshrines amongst other things his great faith. He paid me a great compliment by sending me a copy and inviting my comments. Me! Wow! Writing, about this life on earth he put it this way. *"We believe that all is in God's hands not ours"*. He placed his entire life in God's hands, - and it showed.    St. Boniface, the patron saint of our parish church, signed his letters as *"the servant of the servant of the Lord"*, That too, was how Maurice saw himself, - not as somebody who was power seeking or some "boss" to throw his weight around, but as the servant of those to whom he ministered For him, that meant, not just the Church of England members of the parish but also those of all denominations, - and in his visiting, it was the same. His visits were to homes and families of all, not just his own church members. And you know, that's another reason why today is a good choice for the date of the dedication of this window, falling as it does, during the week of prayer for Christian unity. Let me quote once again those words that shone out for me in his restoration account, among all those frustrations, "Above all there was a parish of souls to look after and I trust this was always a priority."    Enshrined in our memorial window are the words, "Remember before God, Maurice Hill Ridgway" I pray that, as you do, it will always be with thanks to God for his ministry here in those difficult years, trying to combine the full time work of parish priest, - in his very first parish. - with that of clerk of works for a most important and extremely complicated project. As we look back on his devotion and dedicated service in restoring this church from almost a ruin, to a building of beauty may I close with a prayer that I know is familiar to you    *Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve,* *To give, and not to count the cost,* *To fight and not to heed the wounds,* *To toil and not to seek for rest,* *To labour and net to ask for any reward,* *Save that of knowing that we do your will,* AMEN  **Walter Williamson (Reader Emeritus)** |  |