

**Peart-Binns, J.S., *The Cure of Souls - A Great Parish Priest.* Charlton Kings Local and Family History Society. Not dated. (£10 (+ £3 p and p))**

A biography about Robert Deakin, Vicar of St Mary's, Charlton Kings, Cheltenham between 1949 to 1973.

This is the last episcopal biography written by John Stuart Peart-Binns, who died in 2022, and the 56 page booklet is based upon the earlier research of Rosemary Ash and includes the memories of some of the curates who served at St Mary's, Charlton Kings, during the incumbency of Robert Deakin. However, this modest booklet contains rather too much of Peart-Binns (what he thought, what he believed about the Church of England which he left in 2000 to become a Roman Catholic) and too little of Robert Deakin. While Deakin heard confessions, Peart-Binns mistakenly implied that 'the sacrament of confession' was a common practice in the Church of England: but it is neither a sacrament nor is it widely practised.

Robert Deakin, who was born in the Forest of Dean in 1917, spent all of his life in Gloucestershire apart from the time when he was a student at Oxford and Wells. After ordination, all of his ministry – as a curate, incumbent and bishop – was served in the diocese of Gloucester. He died in the county in 1985 and his ashes were interred at St Mary's.

What sort of person was Deakin? Peart-Binns said that he was intelligent, but not an intellectual; 'a highly successful priest ... a man of energy, ideas and action' (11,12); 'popular but never [a] popularist' (38); he was a well respected and skilful leader who exercised 'a restrained forcefulness' (21). He was a 'shy and sensitive' person with a good sense of humour who smoked a pipe which showed him to be a man of the people. At heart he was a traditional parish priest who served and cared for other people. He appears to have been rather ambivalent towards the institution of which he was a part and unexpectedly became the Bishop of Tewkesbury in 1973, and although his tradition was Anglo-Catholic he valued the comprehensiveness of the Church of England.

Deakin served for 33 years in parochial ministry and a further 12 as a bishop, and much of his ministry took place when the institutional church was in an inexorable decline. While church-going had picked up after the Second World War (not least through the American evangelist Billy Graham) the 1960s marked the steady decrease in the number of regular

church-goers and the loss of contact with those on the fringes of the life of the church. During that period there were daily services at Charlton Kings and on Sunday mornings the central act of worship was Holy Communion and, bucking the trend, the congregation remained strong with a commendable number of communicants and a large Sunday school.

Traditionally the strength of the Church of England has been evident in the life of the local church where godly and orthodox clergy proclaimed the good news and served the people committed to their charge. This 'cure of souls' was well demonstrated in the life and ministry of Thomas Carlyle Joseph Robert Hamish Deakin (1917-85).

Alan Munden

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