

A Brief History of St. Boniface Bonn

by Frances Klein

The first recorded reference to a Chaplaincy in Bonn is in the Act Book of the Diocese of London in 1842. The Bishop of London had jurisdiction at that time, as ‘...*whatever jurisdiction (in the Church of England) was not conferred [on] someone else belonged to him...*’ (London Diocese Files, quoted in Schniewind). In November 1842 the Revd. Septimus Fairless B.A. was Chaplain to the British residents in Bonn. A local tradition, however, relates that before 1794 a few Anglicans in the Bonn area belonged to a parish in Oberkassel.

Bonn in the days of the Grand Tour

An attraction of Bonn then was the University (originally founded as an Academy in 1773), but inaugurated as a University in 1786 by the Prince Elector Max Franz as a ‘...*Bulwark of the Establishment in the Lower Rhine...*’. In 1789 Ludwig van Beethoven was a student there. Max Franz also developed Bad Godesberg as a spa and health resort. By the end of the eighteenth century the German Rhineland was included in the itinerary of the European Grand Tour, a favourite activity of the English aristocracy. In 1794 Ann Radcliffe saw Bonn ‘...*as...a green spot in the midst of ignorance, injustice and misery...*’. Max Franz’s University did not survive the invasion of the area by French troops in 1794 but, after the defeat of Napoleon, the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms University was founded in 1818. One result of the French invasion was the construction of the Route Napoleon along which travellers like the famous artist J.M.W. Turner were able to walk the Rhine valley in 1817. The first Baedeker guide, published in 1832, was produced for such visitors to the Rhine. These English travellers were caricatured by many writers including Karl Simrock, Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben, Richard Doyle and William Makepeace Thackeray. One of the latter’s characters said, after seeing the guest book of a hotel in Bonn, ‘...*Why, everybody is on the Rhine!...Here are the names of half one’s acquaintance...*’.

Hot Cross Buns, Perkin’s Ale and the Schloßkirche

In the 1830s it was reported that as many as fifty or sixty English families lived in Bonn and were able to purchase hot cross buns on Good Friday and drink Perkin’s Porter Burton Ale. Living was comparatively cheap and a good education could be obtained. They lived near the Koblenzertor and this area was termed by one wit, Henry Mayhew of Punch, the ‘*Colonia Anglicana*’ or ‘*Castra Cockneyenses*’. Willian Wenbourne ran a boarding school according to the principles of the ‘*Established Church of England*’ in Koblenzer-Strasse (now Adenauerallee) from 1835-1860. Prince Albert, Queen Victoria’s consort, was a student at the University 1837/1838, and the royal couple visited Bonn in 1845 and witnessed the unveiling of the statue of Beethoven in Münsterplatz.



Koblenzertor Bonn

According to the 1849 Baedeker Guide some church services took place in the Schloßkirche, the chapel in the main university building, formerly the Palace of the Electors of Cologne. In fact, permission had been given by the Prussian King on 12th January 1841 for services of the English Episcopal Church to take place there. On 15th September 1849 a service took place in the Schloßkirche at which

the Bishop of Guyana confirmed some candidates on behalf of the Bishop of London.



Schloßkirche University of Bonn

In order to support the spiritual life of the English-speaking congregation in Bonn, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts had a branch in Neugasse (now Rathausgasse) in the 1840s. In 1859 and 1860, 396 people were recorded as Anglicans in the town's denominational statistics (total population 17,461). At this time the Revd. James Stuart Murray Anderson M.A. (1800-1862), Rector of Tormarton in Gloucestershire, was Chaplain from 1852 until his death in 1862. He lived in Colmant-Strasse and is buried in a magnificent sarcophagus in the Old Cemetery in Bonn. Some 50 other people of British origin were also buried there between 1829 and 1884.



Revd. John Stuart Murray Anderson 1800-1862

At the farewell event for the Revd. John David Macbride Crofts in 1878, after four years' ministry in Bonn, the good relations between the British and German Royal Families and their subjects were mentioned. At this event a mixed English group, 'The Glee-Singers', reportedly gave an excellent performance of German songs.

The building of a church was mooted and in 1882 Emperor William I (1871-1888) offered 1000 Marks from his 'private purse' towards the project but the reduction in numbers attending worship and the rising cost of living seemed to prevent any action being taken. Prior to World War I, Bonn was numbered among the wealthiest towns in Germany,

In the 1890s the Revd. George H. Weber held services at 8.30 am and 5 pm in a chapel attached to a house called 'Aram', most probably on the corner of Rheinallee and Ubierstraße, Bad Godesberg. The house was both the '*...parsonage and the English Chapel...*'. Other services were held at the Schloßkirche at 11 am on Sundays. Holy Communion was celebrated 1st and 3rd Sundays at midday and 2nd and 4th Thursdays and Holy Days at 8.45 am. Information on services and locations is given in the 1903 Baedeker Guide. Captain W.E. Weber, son of the Revd. George Weber, ran a school for Britons in Bonn which was still in existence in 1937.

From 1910 the congregation in Bonn ceased to have its own chaplain and was served by the Chaplain in Cologne. There is little information about where the services were held. After World War II the Control Commission in Germany employed a number of chaplains under the Rural Dean of Germany, the Revd. George Ingles, who later became Bishop of Fulham. In these difficult times services were held in many different places. The Revd. David Stewart, a chaplain from Wahn, took occasional services in a building in Troisdorf in 1950. From 1951 to 1956, Colonel Rowett, who was a licensed Reader, held services in the Gemeindehaus, Bismarckstrasse 17, Bad Honnef. He is also reported as being the mainspring in starting a Bonn Chaplaincy Committee. The Rural Dean, the Revd. J.G.W.T. Williams, visited Bad Honnef once a month to celebrate Holy Communion. In Bonn itself, worship took place in a house in Zittelmannstrasse. The Revd. Anthony Grain (the priest in Cologne when All Saints Church

was built) wrote that he came ‘...in October 1950 from Hannover and took services for (the) first time in Bad Godesberg at 9.45 am...’, adding that ‘...In 1955, a copy of *Spotlight* dated 30th June 1955 announced “Bad Godesberg 9.45 Morning Service” and also “Sunday School 9.45 in French School”...’. The Military Chaplaincy withdrew in 1958 and a civilian chaplaincy was established.

John Le Carré’s View of Diplomatic Anglicans

It is unclear when services were first held in the Rigal’sche Kapelle but by December 1966, the congregation in Bonn was worshipping there and was called the Chaplaincy of St. Boniface. Mrs. Freda Weikardt-Day, Richard Weikardt’s mother, played a significant part in this arrangement. The British Embassy was in Bonn at this time and Chaplains were Chaplain to the British Ambassador. This part of the congregation’s history is depicted in John Le Carré’s thriller ‘A Small Town in Germany’; ‘...*Behind the English Church, on a wooded hill, in a semi-rural avenue away from the centre of Bad Godesberg, the Embassy had built itself a modest piece of suburban Surrey ...On each Sunday...a few minutes before eleven o’clock...a dozen wives...followed by their husbands...begin the move downhill to the Church...reaching the Church steps...the senior wife present...climbs the steps...leaving her inferiors to follow...the order of succession which protocol...would have demanded ...*’. The Chaplain had an office in the Embassy building: ‘...*the Chaplain sat at a portable typewriter in a small white cell opposite the telephone exchange...*’ (Le Carré knew what he was talking about, since his diplomatic career included a posting to Bonn). A memorable event remembered by the Revd. Michael Halliwell, the Chaplain from 1962 to 1967, immortalised by John Le Carré, was the Passion Play entitled ‘On the Way to Jerusalem’ produced by Mrs. Freda Höltgen in the Pauluskirche in Friesdorf.

Over time the strong link between the Embassy personnel and the Chaplaincy weakened, although Ambassador Sir Nigel Broomfield recalled that he had been required to lead worship when he had been a more junior member of the diplomatic staff in the 1970s. In 1999 the British Embassy moved to

Berlin and the Chaplain ceased to be Chaplain to the Ambassador.

The Rigal’sche Kapelle

The Rigal’sche Kapelle itself is an interesting building. It was built in 1857 by Freiherr Ludwig Maximilian von Rigal Grunland, the grandson of a French Huguenot, Jean Rigal, who had left France as a result of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. The neo-Romanesque chapel was built in the grounds of his villa (subsequently the Chinese Embassy and Consulate) and was consecrated in 1858 as the first Protestant place of worship in Bad Godesberg. This part of the Rhineland was under Roman Catholic authorities until it was granted to Protestant Prussia, by the terms of the Treaty of Vienna in 1815.

The community of the saints

Worship continued at the Rigal’sche Kapelle until 1986. Meanwhile the two Chaplaincies of St. Boniface Bonn-Bad Godesberg and All Saints Cologne were amalgamated in 1971. The Chaplaincy was to ‘...*be administered as a single unit with combined accounts and a single Chaplaincy Council...*’. The Electoral Roll was to be maintained in two sections in order to ensure that the two parts were adequately represented and there were to be four Church Wardens, two elected by the Bonn-Bad Godesberg section of the Electoral Roll present at the annual meeting and two by the All Saints section (Chaplaincy Constitution).



Rigal’sche Kapelle Bad Godesberg

The Chaplain at the time of the amalgamation was the Revd. Alan Ninn, His wife wrote about the first meeting that took place after their arrival in June 1970 when it was reported that

there was only enough money to keep a chaplain for three months. In the face of this serious situation Alan Ninn organised a Summer Fair in the Embassy grounds and planned a Christmas Fair. Other money raising activities included art exhibitions, barbecues, a thrift shop and a recipe book. These were so successful that *'...when (they) left in June 1972, there was enough in the kitty to keep the chaplaincy going, without any further fundraising for three years...'*. During Alan Ninn's time the Chaplaincy broadcast a BBC Morning Service which had to come from the American Church in Kennedyallee as the Rigal'sche Kapelle was too small. Additional participants included members of All Saints Cologne, the American church, the Old Catholic Church in Bonn, as well as the Band of the Royal Horse Artillery.

One Chaplain, the Revd. Brian Addison, who previously had been chaplain to a Cambridge College, was instrumental in the setting up of the amateur theatrical group, 'The Embassy Players', in 1981. This group continues to produce high quality drama in English at least twice a year but now, since the departure of the British Embassy, bears the name 'The Bonn Players'.

Archbishop revisits Bonn

In the autumn of 1983, during the incumbency of the Revd. Alan Cole, the Chaplaincy was honoured by a visit from the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Revd. and Rt. Hon. Robert Runcie during his formal visit to the Protestant Church in Germany and its Luther Year Celebrations in Wörms. He took a service of Holy Eucharist at the Rigal'sche Kapelle on the morning of November 2nd 1983, had breakfast with the British Naval Attaché, lunch at the home of the Canadian Defence Counsellor and dinner the previous evening at the British Ambassador's Residence. The Church Times of 2.12.83 recorded this visit with a photograph of Dr. Runcie and Mrs. Doris Liberty, wife of the Ambassador of Liberia, Mr. Robert Arbutnott, Director of the British Council, and Dr. Gustav Deveneaux, Ambassador of Sierra Leone; an indication of the international nature of the Congregation. Dr. Runcie also visited the renowned Aloisiuskolleg in Bad Godesberg, where he had stayed in August 1948 as part of a University of Bonn vacation course in German for international students.

In 1986, the congregation moved from the Rigal'sche Kapelle to St. Cyprian's Old Catholic Church, Adenauerallee 61, in central Bonn. This move gave visible expression to the 1931 Bonn Agreement between the Church of England and the Old Catholic Church which brought the two churches into full communion with each other. The Bonn Agreement was one of the very first ecumenical agreements. Currently the Old Catholic Bishop in Bonn is an Assistant Bishop of the Anglican Diocese in Europe. St. Cyprian's was originally built in 1934 as the "Friedenskirche" but being badly damaged by the bombing of Bonn on 18th October 1944 it had to be rebuilt and was then dedicated to St. Cyprian in 1957.



St. Cyprian's Old Catholic Church, Adenauerallee

The congregation marked its 150th anniversary with a Festal Eucharist in St. Cyprian's celebrated by the Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe, Bishop John Satterthwaite, in 1992. Former Chaplains and representatives from other Chaplaincies in North West Europe (to which Deanery the Chaplaincy then belonged) and other congregations in Germany, were present. 'The British Embassy Singers' led the music. This choir, now called 'The Bonn Singers', continues to provide excellent music for the annual Christmas Carol Services and other occasional services, as there is no Chaplaincy choir. During the Revd. John

Newsome's incumbency a weekly evening discussion group began and has remained in existence ever since.

In 1993, the St. Boniface congregation moved from St. Cyprian's (which was undergoing major renovations) to temporary facilities in the British High School in Bad Godesberg. Churchgoers became adept at arranging the school hall for worship and several successful Christmas bazaars took place there as well.

Haus Steinbach – an ecumenical location

A search for a more ecclesiastical setting by the Chaplain, the Revd. Patrick Curran, brought the congregation to the Chapel of Haus Steinbach in 1994. Haus Steinbach in Mehlem is an Old People's Home belonging to the German Red Cross. The Chapel, set as it then was like a fairy tale chapel hidden in greenery and wistaria close to the River Rhine, was built as an ecumenical chapel. The donors, Mr. and Mrs. Steinbach were of different Christian denominations but wished to have their funerals and graves in the same place. Their joint grave lies on the north side of the chapel. The chapel is used by several denominations for services. It was remarked by one chaplain that here Protestants and Roman Catholics share an altar but maintain separate vestries. As Anglicans the congregation felt well placed between the Protestants and the Roman Catholics and were even able to have their own vestry. Proximity to the River Rhine was not always an advantage as at least twice in the 1990s the flood level was such that access to the Chapel was impossible. Encouraged by the Chaplain, the skilful ladies in the congregation created a magnificent patchwork banner to brighten up the somewhat sombre east wall. During this time there were sponsored walks for charity, the Jubilee debt release chain in Cologne, musical evenings, barn dances, pilgrimages to the shrine of St. Boniface in Fulda and other sacred places, visits to Istanbul, Rome and more local sights of interest and parish away-weekends, as well as the inevitable bazaars and coffee mornings. A monthly morning group was re-started, the chaplaincy constitution was revised with considerable help from the Revd. Canon Michael Gudgeon, the Bishop's Chaplain, and the Chaplain became much involved in local ecumenical activities, including being the chairperson for a time. The move to Berlin of

many of the Embassies meant the loss of an office in the British Embassy and an expected decrease in congregational numbers which had to be addressed. A project was undertaken to raise sufficient money to pay for an Assistant Chaplain to be based in Cologne, which led to the appointment of the Revd. Dr. Stephen Miles in 1997. Stephen Miles concentrated on developing the congregation in Cologne but on Patrick Curran's departure for the Chaplaincy in Vienna in 2000, he became Chaplain, with a church office in the British Embassy's Bonn 'outpost' in Argelanderstrasse. Meanwhile renovations in the Old People's Home meant that the chapel had to be vacated and so in June 2000 the congregation returned to the Rigal'sche Kapelle in Bad Godesberg. The Kapelle was renovated at the time of the move to St. Cyprian's and those who had known it from before commented that it was now less colourful than it had been previously. The 'heritage' experts presumably deemed the sombre colours more appropriate for a Protestant church. Colour, however, was not totally absent, as the awaiting French congregation, whose service followed the Anglican one, discovered when Bishop Geoffrey Rowall, visiting for a confirmation, processed out in his striking robes.

Stephen Miles oversaw the change to Common Worship and the production of two service booklets for general worship and family worship. In 2001 the Embassy 'outpost' also closed and the church office was relocated in Kaiser-Friedrich-Strasse. The Revd. Dr. Charlotte Methuen completed her title as a non-stipendiary Assistant Curate to the Chaplaincy (2001-2003) and then spent a further year as honorary Assistant Chaplain.

Archbishop Rowan Williams at Bonn University

In January 2003 Stephen Miles returned to Australia, in March the renovation of Haus Steinbach was completed so the congregation returned to the Mehlem Chapel and in September the Revd. Ian Wright became Chaplain. His culinary skills were impressive and the Christmas Carol services were enhanced with his home-made mince pies. Several meditative retreats were held in a monastery in Belgium. In 2004 the congregation of St. Boniface was invited to attend the ceremony in the University of Bonn when the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most

Revd. Dr. Rowan Williams, was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Theology by the Faculty of Protestant Theology in recognition of his work in Patristics (the study of the Church Fathers). Dr. Williams gave a very erudite lecture on 'The Creed and the Eucharist in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries' and met some of the congregation at the ensuing reception. This ceremony took place the day before the Council of Anglican Episcopal Churches in Germany (CAECG) met in All Saints Cologne. The setting up of the CAECG in 1995 owed much to the efforts of Chaplains who served in Bonn and Cologne.

2007 sees the congregation in an interregnum, benefiting from the services of several experienced retired clergy. With its history of continuous movement and change, stability is maintained through regular Sunday worship and fellowship, wherever it is held.

Sources

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