**the reverend T J S Thomas**

**(1921 – 2019)**

I remember John Thomas well – a sign of increasing age!  I’m pretty sure he was Senior Chaplain at Lyneham when I joined the Branch in 1970 and I recall he was eventually Resident Chaplain at SCD – may have been his last tour.  I also recall he wrote to me with his views when we were reorganising the management of the Branch when I was in the chair as Chief!   A nice, kind Welshman. (Robin Turner)

It is my understanding that Padre Thomas was at St Clement Danes around 1976 , (probably his last tour) when the first Friends of SCD Service took place.   Indeed he was very much in involved in establishing  the Friends.  Michael , his son has been in touch with SCD and the Friends and an obituary will appear in the next issue of Oranges and Lemons. (Ray Pentland – as President of the Friends of St Clement Danes)

 A recent "Oranges and Lemons" has a great account of John's tenure as Resident Chaplain at St Clement Danes. Worth digging out again. A real character and an unrepentant Welshman! I knew and looked to him for tips as a rookie padre. RIP, John and rise in glory. (Brian McAvoy)

The Reverend John Thomas was the first RAF Chaplain I met when I went to RAF Lyneham with my parish ATC camp in 1969. As a fellow-Welshman we formed a friendship from the outset. I went with him on ward visits in both RAF Colerne and RAF Wroughton hospitals, and observed a priest operating in the RAF. I decided it was for me.When I joined the Branch the following year John was then the Resident Chaplain at St Clement Danes and an Assistant Chaplain-in-Chief. He was a natural in the specialist ministry of a London city church, charming to visitors, caring with grieving families of service personnel, and warmly loved by his regular congregation. His wife, Enid, was a Cordon Bleu cook and they entertained widely in the apartment attached to the post of Resident Chaplain, which was two minutes’ walk from the church and named The Anchorage (I think) with the anchor device of SCD above the door. It was later taken over by LSE. After preaching at SCD on a Sunday morning I remember enjoying an excellent luncheon with John and Enid in their comfortable home in the Anchorage.

He retired in 1977 and was appointed Vicar of Horsham. Here, again, he charmed the dowagers of the parish into swoons. When Enid died, he was somewhat bereft, and in 1988 he retired finally and returned to Ammanford in his native Wales. I had a long telephone conversation with John a few years ago when he spoke with great affection for the Chaplains’ Branch and expressed firm opinions about how it should be organized! Padre John Thomas was the best of company, a most able and faithful priest, and a loyal member of the Branch, which he served with distinction. (Brian Lucas)

The Friends were founded in 1976 by John Samuel Thomas then Resident Chaplain of St Clement Danes. John served in the RAF from 1941 to 1946 and then 1951 to 1976 achieving the rank of Group Captain and Assistant Chaplain in Chief, Air Ministry.

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**The Origin of the Friends of St Clement Danes (published in *Oranges & Lemons* Issue No 42 Autumn 2016*)***

Daniel Kettle: an Interview with Group Captain John Thomas

Contrary to even our own documented history of the beginning of the Friends, we are fortunate enough to have been guided and reminded as to the formation of the Friends of St Clement Danes by the founder himself.

Born in 1921 Thomas John Samuel Thomas, known as John, grew up in the village of Cwmgors in South Wales. John’s relationship with the RAF began in 1940 soon after the outbreak of the Second World War when he volunteered for the service whilst studying at Swansea University, joining in April 1941. Within the war years John served as an aircraft engineer.

During the war he served in West Africa, both in Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast, where several squadrons of the Sunderland seaplanes were based. As a flight engineer John flew with the Sunderlands whilst having opportunities to teach aircraft engineering to West African forces.

Released from the RAF in 1946, John then returned to South Wales to resume university studies, graduating in 1949 from Lampeter University, where he studied History and Theology. In 1949 John was ordained as an Anglican Priest and then served in St David’s Church, Llwynhendy in Llanelli for a couple of years.

Following his service to the RAF he had always wanted to return to the Force and did so in October 1951 as a Chaplain; he served in this capacity for the next 25 years, achieving the rank of Group Captain and Assistant Chaplain in Chief, Air Ministry. In August, 1951 he married Enid and she dutifully accompanied him to all of his postings including Aden, Libya, Cyprus, Singapore and throughout the UK.

From December 1971 until December 1976 John was the Resident Chaplain of St Clement Danes and it was in his last year there that he founded the Friends. The Inaugural Service of Dedication and Thanksgiving was held on Sunday 10th October 1976 in the presence of HRH Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester. It was a grand occasion with the church full on both ground and upper levels.

The idea of the Friends came to John in 1975. He was seeing lots of people in the church, perhaps praying or looking within the Books of Remembrance and he rarely saw them again. It occurred to him then that these visitors might like to belong to an association to link and tie people together. At that time the church was run by relatively few people and John had a degree of autonomy in terms of decision making.

To progress his idea John spoke with the then Chaplain in Chief, Air-Vice Marshal Hewitt Wilson and the Air Member for Personnel, Air Marshall Sir Harold Martin (Mickey Martin of Dambuster’s fame), both of whom were personal friends. John was also on cordial terms with HRH Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester, and was confident that with his personal approach she would agree to become Patron in Chief of the Friends’ Association.

This duly happened. Indeed, John went to Kensington Palace to arrange the Princess’s involvement in the Service. It is also the reason why her son, the present Duke of Gloucester, followed his mother as Patron in Chief of the Friends’ Association.

Another personal friend of John’s, Lord Elworthy, Chief of the Defence Staff , a very early member of the Friends, readily agreed to give the Address during the Service. Lord Elworthy remained a Friend until his death. Sir Neil Cameron, then Chief of the Air Staff, read the Lesson in the Service; he too was a good friend of John. In addition, John recognises the invaluable support of his then secretary Elaine Tame and her husband Wing Commander Freddie Tame, who was Secretary of the Guild of St Clement Danes, which would organise the front of stage.

During the early part of 1972 John was appointed a Queen’s Honorary Chaplain. In December 1976 he retired from the RAF and passed over the helm of the Friends to the then new resident chaplain of the church Glyndwr Rhys Renowden. Many years later in 1996, under Air Commodore Felicity Peake’s leadership of the Friends, the Friends achieved its charitable status.

Now nearing his 95th birthday, although by his own admission his mobility is diminished, his mind is still exceptionally sharp. John is now in the process of writing his own biography but this will be for his family only and won’t be published.

Sadly, John’s wife Enid is no longer with us. John still takes a very keen interest in St Clement Danes, its ministry and various activities. In addition, still a member of the Friends, John enjoys reading the articles within the editions of Oranges and Lemons.

Since finishing his tenure at the end of 1976, John has returned many times to the church and even taken some services! His last visit was about 10 years ago. He still very much agrees with the general approach and ethos of the Friends of St Clement Danes and feels that it is a job being well done.