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Interviewer: My name is Mark Beech. It's the 15th of February 2016 and I'm here talking to the Reverend Doctor Malcolm Johnson for the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement Oral History Project. Malcolm, thank you very much for being willing to have a conversation with me this afternoon. I wondered if you could just start by telling me something about your childhood and your early years, as it were.

Respondent: I was born in Great Yarmouth in Norfolk, and my father was the managing director of a family firm which was clothing manufacturers, and he was in charge of the oilskins and other members of the family looked after socks and things like that. I think he expected me to go into the family firm and I never had enough courage to say to him, "Look, I'm not interested. I'm not a businessman". And it was quite a long while before actually I told him. I went to a ghastly public school, fifth-rate, called Framlingham College in Suffolk, and from there I went to do my national service in the Royal Norfolk Regiment, and I was a subaltern. And I went to Cyprus and I went to Germany and I enjoyed it immensely. No sex, please, we're British. There was no sex at all, but there had been at school, of course, and in my prep school as well, it was taken for granted that everybody had sex, which was very not penetrative, but just wanking. And I enjoyed that no end. So, I knew that I was gay a long, you know, early on. But in the Army, nothing happened at all. And then I went to Durham University, where again nothing happened at all. It was a very small university. Newcastle was still part of it, but Durham, I forget how many students it had, something like 1500, and I enjoyed that enormously and became chair and president of the student Christian movement, so of course I knew everybody and they all knew me. Then I got my degree, moved to Cuddesdon Theological College. Again, no sex at all. I was very fond of one of my fellow students, but it was never anything physical. He would come and stay in the holidays and... but nothing happened at all. And from Cuddesdon I went to St Mark, Portsea, which was a very big parish in Portsmouth. There were two big parishes, St Mary which had fallen on bad times, and St Mark. There were nine of us, the vicar and eight curates.

After about a couple of years I was desperately unhappy because I was gay and couldn't express my feelings, and so I went to see Chad Varah, who was the head of the Samaritans, who I knew. And he said, "Oh, what you need is a nice woman. You're obviously frightened of women. I'll get you a woman to take you to parties," and of course I nearly died. I dashed off up to St Paul's and said some prayers and a year later I went back and I said, "Look, I don't want a woman, thanks, but I do need to be heterosexual. I want to get married". So, he gave me the name of a psychotherapist called Mrs Phillips, who was a Jungian. I used to call her my Jung lady. And twice a week I would lay on the couch and she would smoke a cigarette behind me, puffing away, and let me talk. And of course I just lay there, expecting something to happen, but it didn't, of course. And she went along with my idea that I ought to be heterosexual and nothing happened, except that I started to have sex when I went to see her in London. In the evenings I'd pick up prostitutes, and I'm very ashamed of that even now, pay three quid, take them to my hotel and have a lovely time. And I was very, very upset about all that. I never told her, of course. The Jung lady didn't know. (laughs)

Interviewer: Shall we just pause there for a moment? So, that's a big stretch of your life. Do you think that any of what happened subsequently in terms of your ministry and so on could be kind of seen in your childhood? I mean were there aspects of that that linked in any way?

Respondent: I don't think so. Well, of course when I accepted being gay, I realised that part of my ministry must be to help other people accept their homosexuality, and I did an awful lot of counselling work and people would come and see me and talk to me when I was chaplain of Queen Mary College in London. And I think my early childhood obviously had affected that, that it was so unhappy, I was determined that other people were not going to be so unhappy.

Interviewer: You talk about, in your Diary of a Gay Priest, you talk about deciding to run your car off the road and the only thing that stopped you was Ben, your spaniel.

Respondent: Yes, that's right, yeah.

[0:06:31]

Interviewer: Had there been previous occasions when you'd felt suicidal or...?

Respondent: No, no, there hadn't. There hadn't. I was depressed, of course, but on that day I'd been to see the Jung lady and she really hadn't been much help, of course. I just felt so depressed that there was no future for me. I couldn't see myself getting married and I thought, "Well, I'll kill myself". I know it all sounds very dramatic, but I was at Hindhead, I can see it now when I was driving along, I would drive off the road onto the Devil's Punchbowl, it's called. And then Ben was sitting there and I thought, "Well, I can't kill him as well," and so we went on. My vicar, of course, had to be asked if I could be away from the parish two days a week for this therapy, and he had agreed and I had put him under the seal of a confessional not to tell anyone and he told the bishop. And the bishop said to me after six months, "How's the counselling going?" and I felt very angry about that really, very angry indeed. So, obviously I had begun to have sex with men and I enjoyed it, there's no two ways about that, in London. But in the parish, of course, it was a very busy parish, huge Sunday school, massive youth club, and I was the one who really... one of the curates... I was the curate who ran it, the youth and the children. And as I said in the book, I'm so glad that I've never been attracted to children or teenagers because they were very fond of me and used to push me around and I didn't feel even slightly attracted to them. Who I did feel attracted to was one of the alderman(?) who was 19 then. I was very attracted to him and I never touched him, but we used to go out for drinks. And that gave me some warmth in the middle of all this coldness.

Interviewer: And the fact that you were gay, you'd never told anybody?

Respondent: No, nobody at all.

Interviewer: All through your adolescence and armed service?

Respondent: Nope. Well, when I made my confession, of course, I did, because the other sins didn't get a look in, you know. I remember Father Martin Knight, who was Kellum(?) father said to me, "Oh, you shouldn't worry about this because it's a gift, you know, and if you feel sexy thoughts coming along, go and wash your hands". (laughs) That didn't seem to do much good. I had very clean hands, of course. But I told nobody else at all.

Interviewer: And the desire to change, to become heterosexual, as you put it, was really quite strong?

Respondent: It was very strong, but of course I didn't know how to do it. And then, on my last day in Portsmouth, a ring on the doorbell of the clergy house, there was this girl who I'd been fond of at Durham, I wasn't attracted to her sexually, but I did like her very much, and she said she'd been a nun for five years, she'd been fond of me and she was now a nurse and should we go out together? Well, of course I thought this was God giving me

my answer with her on the doorstep. It just seemed too good to be true. So, when I came to Durham... to London to be chaplain of Queen Mary College, I saw her quite regularly. We'd go to the theatre. We never touched one another hardly at all, just a little peck on the cheek, and after a while I asked her if she would think about marrying me. And about two weeks before the wedding, which was to be a very big affair, I told her I was mainly gay. She said, "Oh, don't worry, we'll beat that. You know, we'll be alright," and so we got married, which of course was the biggest bloody mistake I have made in my life. And I ruined her life and I wrecked my life, and luckily I didn't have to leave my job because I went to see the bishop, who was Robert Stopford, told him that I would resign, and he said, "There's no need to. You haven't done anything wrong". He said, "You've just made the biggest mistake in your life and you must be sorry for the mistake but get on with your life. And because you're a university chaplain I won't sack you because I think most of the students and the staff wouldn't be very bothered".

Interviewer: Where are we? Mid '60s, yes?

Respondent: '67, 1967, yes.

[0:12:05]

Interviewer: That's really quite an enlightened view on the part of the bishop.

Respondent: You're telling me. Stopford was a wonderful man and he was so gentle and loving. He'd been Bishop of Peterborough, and I remember going to see him at Fulham Palace and trembling, thinking, "Well, he's going to get rid of me". Instead of that, he said to go back and get on with. You're obviously a very good chaplain, get on with it. And a month later a letter appeared from him, would I like to preach in St Paul's as one of his nominees. I mean that's terrific, isn't it?

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely, yes, yeah.

Respondent: And I then went back to see him again. He asked to see me a couple more times and he was wanting to get information. What was it like to be gay? How many clergy did I think were gay? And I said, "Well, I would quite like to work, after university, after Queen Mary College, with the gay community and be a sort of chaplain". And he said, "Well, it would be a marvellous idea because nobody else is doing it. But where could we put you?"

Interviewer: Let's talk for a bit about Queen Mary College because that sounds like it must have been quite an exciting time in your life really, I mean not least because of the work that you were doing.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: But I think there might be other reasons as well.

Respondent: Well, I enjoyed all the students, of course, and one or two of them were very handsome. I fell in love with one of them. I remember saying to him, "I do love you very much, you know. Are you worried?" "Good lord no," he said, "If you said you hated me I'd be worried". And he was beautiful. He lived... we had six students living in the chaplaincy with me and I often wonder what happened to him and whether he remembers that, but he was very physical with me. He used to sort of throw me around and hug me, as the boy in Portsmouth had done. He used to sort of hold me and wrestle with me and nearly drive me mad. But I did enjoy Queen Mary College because I offered to help the Albany Trust. The law had just changed in 1967, '68, I can't remember now, and so I began to have people sent to me for counselling. Well, I needed the counselling, never mind about them. But I did the work and started a group at the Royal Foundation of St

Katharine for people who were being counselled as a social group. And we had dancing and we had a bar and of course I went to work at the Royal Foundation later on, but every Saturday night, 60, 70, 100 people would meet in St Katharine's, and I still see people who say, "I met my partner because of you," which is lovely.

Interviewer: And you had Mary Whitehouse to come and speak.

Respondent: Oh, yes, I did, yes. (laughs) And the students regarded her as a bit of a laugh really. Every Sunday night in the halls of residence in Woodford, where about 800 people lived, I would put on a speaker. And we always had 200 people after supper would come and listen, and of course they all came to hear her. And she made a fool of herself, of course. I knew she would, and I didn't like her at all. And I got one or two other people, like George McLeod(?), to come, who were much more with students. I used to enjoy those talks very much.

Interviewer: And am I right in thinking that you met your partner while you were there?

Respondent: Yes, indeed. My marriage broke up, sadly, after only nine months. I couldn't fulfil her needs, her sexual needs, and I just... we both agreed to part. And after that, my partner was referred to me from the Albany Trust and I fell in love with him and we've been together ever since. It's 46 years this year, maybe 47.

Interviewer: That's not a bad record for, you know, gay people who are supposed to be incapable of long-term relationships.

[0:16:53]

Respondent: Well, we had our ups and downs, obviously.

Interviewer: Well, that's life, isn't it?

Respondent: But we're still together and we're very happy together. He came to me by mistake really. He'd heard a talk by Father Fabian Cooper from the Albany Trust about homosexuality at his university, which was City University. So, he went to see Dorian Cordell, the social worker, and said, "I think I'm gay. Could I go and see that very nice priest, handsome priest?" And she said, "Well, I don't think you can because you're an Anglican. You'd better go and see Malcolm Johnson". (laughs) And so he came to see me. And about six months later we moved in together in the flat that I was living in, as I say, and we've been together ever since.

Interviewer: And any comment by the university authorities?

Respondent: No, none at all.

Interviewer: Just accepted?

Respondent: The students and the staff all accepted him as part of the furniture, as the bishop had said that they would. I mean had I been in a parish it would have been very different, wouldn't it? I couldn't really have had him living in the vicarage, I don't suppose, although nowadays people do.

Interviewer: I mean did clergy have their partners living in the vicarage in the '60s? I mean did it happen at all?

Respondent: There are one or two, but they were very heavily closeted. And when I started the group for gay clergy, which I started in... it was about 1973, I think, they were mainly on their own, the clergy. One or two were with partners, but it wasn't possible, I don't

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think, in parishes in those days to have your partner living in the vicarage. We had two meetings a year, it was called the consultation, and that's different from the social group that I mentioned. The consultation was for clergy and as there were only men in those days, they were all men.

Interviewer: And was there some overlap between the social and the consultation in terms of membership?

Respondent: Yes, there was, because it was fun on a Saturday evening. Sometimes it was boring, but you had a drink and you had a laugh and you met other gay people, you danced. I mean that was amazing really that we had dancing. So, yes, some of the clergy came to that and met their partners there.

Interviewer: In the book you talk about going to a nightclub.

Respondent: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: I forget what it was called.

Respondent: Well, it was lovely. It was in Archer Street, the Rehearsal Club. We used to go there quite often. It was mixed, gay and straight, men and women, and run by a woman called Jo, who's still around. I've forgotten her surname. But it was a lovely easy club, and I used to take young members of either the clergy or the other group with me, half a dozen. Robert and I would take them so they could see what a gay club was like, and there was dancing there.

Interviewer: And that that club existed prior to the change in the law?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Right, so... and had you visited to it prior to the change in the law?

[0:20:44]

Respondent: No, I think it was after, after that.

Interviewer: I'm just wondering the impact that the change in the law had. You know, I'm 54 so I was very young when it happened. I think it's very hard for us to imagine the impact of the change in the law.

Respondent: Yes, it was an enormous change, and various groups started, like Gay Lib and the bookshop, you know?

Interviewer: Gay is the Word.

Respondent: Gay is the Word. And it was much easier to go to clubs and pubs and restaurants which were gay, started up in the early 1970s. It was much more relaxing and I'm so grateful that the law was passed.

Interviewer: Were you active in any kind of political way during that period in terms of the change in the law?

Respondent: No, not really. It was before I came out really. My job was more counselling after the law had changed to help people to adjust to their sexuality, particularly Christian people, who of course were weighed down with guilt.

Interviewer: Yeah, still are.

Respondent: Still are. And that, I think, is a terrible thing.

Interviewer: Yeah. Right, so we've got to Queen Mary College.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: And the time comes for you to begin to think about moving on to something else.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: And there's quite a story there too, isn't there?

Respondent: It was very difficult to know where to go. The bishop had changed. It was Ellison, Gerald Ellison was the bishop who kept saying to me, "Why don't you keep quiet?" He had a lovely deep voice. "There's no need to keep on," because of course GCM had started and we had the first service in St Botolph's, and the first annual general meeting, if you like, in the school. I had a school which I was chairman of. And Gerald was very angry. He was more angry that the Roman Catholic priest had actually preached at the service, which was packed, of course. He didn't seem to worry about the gay bit really, although later on he told me that he was very angry with me for not telling him, and he wanted to know who was there. He wanted a whole list of all the clergy, and of course I didn't give it to him. He just kept saying, "Keep quiet," because we had two or three hundred homeless people a day in the crypt of St Botolph's, every day, and he said, "You'll wreck the homeless work and we don't want you to be so open about being gay," but I wasn't banging a drum really. I mean I just did things more quietly. I used to go on the Gay Pride march, you know, but that was about all that I did. Gerald came round to understanding what I was doing. He was very kind. In fact, he offered me St Botolph Aldgate in 1973 without knowing the full story, although John Hester, the vicar of Soho, did tell him. He said, "You know what Malcolm is doing, don't you?" and Gerald said, "No". He said, "Well, he's mainly working with the gay community". And Gerald didn't say anything. He inducted me and then he came for a confirmation, he came to lunch afterwards, about six months later, and he took me into the dining room and sat me down and said, "Now, tell me all about this. You were married?" I said, "Yes, I was". "You have a partner?" "Yes, I have." "Tell me about the work that you do." So, I told him. And he was quite understanding. I was very fond of him because, again, he could have been... he couldn't really sack me because I had freehold, of course, and I hadn't done anything technically wrong. I suppose having a partner was wrong, but he didn't sack me. But of course then he retired and I had that ghastly creature Graham Leonard as Bishop of London, who was meant to be so wonderful pastorally and wasn't. And he was always telling me off. "I've had this letter about you," you know, all that sort of stuff. I was area Dean and he got George Cassidy to be his Arch Deacon. Everybody wanted me to be the Arch Deacon of London because I was the area Dean, but he wouldn't have that. He sent for me and said, "I can't make you Arch Deacon". He didn't say why, but it was pretty obvious.

[0:26:07]

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And George Cassidy found out that LGCM had an office in the tower and so of course told me to get them out. Well...

Interviewer: I remember all that, and I actually wrote to you...

Respondent: Did you?

Interviewer: To thank you for your work and your support...

Respondent: Really? Goodness.

Interviewer: And all the rest of it, long before I'd accepted myself that I'm gay and certainly hadn't told anybody else, but yeah.

Respondent: It was tremendous publicity because in the end, of course George Cassidy won. There was a hilarious consistory court where I was told how naughty I was. The (inaudible 0:26:55) has done terrible harm, something like that, the judge said, silly old man. I saw him in the athenaeum the following week and I nearly pushed him down the stairs. I wanted to push him down the stairs. And so they had to go, of course, and we had a special service which Ken Leach and Lionel Blue preached at and they moved to Oxford House.

Interviewer: Let's talk a bit about the formation of GCM, as it was. You were one of the prime movers, is that right?

Respondent: Yes, I was, yes.

Interviewer: And who were you working with?

Respondent: Jim Carter, who's just died, of course, which is so sad.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Kennedy Tom, Peter Ellers, who I was not very fond of. He was so camp. He was married, of course, which rather sort of muddled the waters really. But we met at Southwark Cathedral Chapter House and said that we really ought to found a Christian gay movement. There was one, I've forgotten what it was called but it was absolutely no good at all. And so from that meeting at Southwark Cathedral Chapter House we decided that we would form GCM, as it was then. And the first meeting, as I say, was at St Botolph's and the first service was at St Botolph's. And then I offered them a room in the tower.

Interviewer: And what was the reaction among gay Christians to the foundation movement?

Respondent: Well, it was wonderful because the first meeting, the first service, people turned up who I didn't know were gay, and there they were sitting there in the pews and I thought, "God, this is terrific". And people were obviously very glad that there was a Christian voice because there were lots of other voices, like Gay Lib, you know. So, yes, I think they were very pleased.

[0:29:07]

Interviewer: And what were the kind of founding principles? You know, what did you hope that the organisation would achieve?

Respondent: Well, I would have to look up whatever the statement was for LGCM, but we would try and affect churches' views on gay people and also support gay people. And I was very keen that there should be worship so that gay people could worship together, and we had a gay carol service, which does sound terribly funny now, doesn't it? But there were hundreds came. And we had a Gay Lib service in June and I wanted us to worship together because the gay clergy consultation, the most moving thing about that was the service, the Eucharist at the beginning. There would be something like 70 or 80 of us all standing in a circle and we received communion together. It was very moving.

Interviewer: Just thinking about where to take the conversation next. And all this was happening at the same time as St Botolph's was continuing work among homeless people and...

Respondent: Oh, yes, and expanding. We had no staff when I went there, only volunteers, so I had to get some staff. And I got the most wonderful social workers, led by a man called Daly Maxwell, and then an administrator. I left that too late, a man called Richard Bash came along. I was keen to get the social workers in the crypt with the men morning, afternoon and evening, and we rather went upside down with the administration. So, I then hired an administrator, and that was Richard, and everything evened up again.

Interviewer: And where was the funding coming from for this?

Respondent: Oh, I had to go round with my hat, beginning money from parishes. A lot of parish centres harvest goodies and money. Then I went to the City Corporation, and they gave us a good slice thanks to the director, who was Elizabeth Crowther, who I'm still in touch with. She was very helpful. And then I went to the DHSS and said, "Please cough up," you know. And we started founding hostels, we had four hostels, and so we then had to have special appeals for the hostels as they were opened. I don't think that our work with the gay community affected the homeless work. One or two people withdrew, but the two main ones...

Interviewer: In terms of supporters withdrew, yeah?

Respondent: Yes, two people withdrew, who then came back to us again. And I had to go and explain to them what we were doing, you know. They just didn't know what we were up to and I don't think it affected the homeless work at all. And it was a disaster after I left. The man who took over, called Brian Lee, let it all collapse, the homeless work.

Interviewer: The homelessness? Right.

Respondent: I haven't forgiven him for that because it meant the hostels went back to their housing associations, but the work in the crypt finished. And if you go in the crypt today it's empty. It's a store.

Interviewer: Gosh. I still thought of St Botolph's as, you know, a centre of social action, but...

Respondent: No, it all finished.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: I was terribly upset about it. I'd moved on to be master of the Royal Foundation of St Katharine, which is... was a conference house. The Queen Mum was the boss. She would come twice a year. She was very keen on us working with the East End. I would go to lunch and... but I of course had left St Botolph's and my successor just let it go.

[0:33:41]

Interviewer: So, how long were you at St Botolph's for?

Respondent: 18 years.

Interviewer: Oh, right. Gosh, long time.

Respondent: 18 years.

Interviewer: And what might you describe as the highlights during those 18 years?

Respondent: Oh, we had the Queen turn up. She came to a service and she was very flattering about the work in the crypt and asked to meet some of the customers and some of the volunteers. That was a big highlight. And Princess Alexandra came twice.

Interviewer: Was the flower seller from...

Respondent: Yes, Nellie(?) Ellis. She was lovely. She'd been at the siege of Sidney Street and she came into the church during the Queen's service, went up into the balcony and fell over the drums and sat in the choir. And the Queen said to me, "Who is that wonderful woman?" "Oh," I said, "That's Nellie Ellis," told her all about her. So, Nellie then came to the reception in the school, without a ticket, by the way, went straight up to the Queen and curtsied and said, "I'm Nellie Ellis". The Queen said, "I know you are and I've heard all about you". (laughs)

Interviewer: Wonderful, yes. So, could you say something about how the gay Christian movement developed and, you know, what your involvement was with that?

Respondent: Well, I was never on the committee. I decided that I'd be the host at St Botolph's. We shared a secretary called Fiona Morgan, and then when Richard Kirker came, we had our own secretary and he looked after LGCM. I mean my job really was more counselling and supporting Richard Kirker really.

Interviewer: So, the counselling, did it increase? Were the issues over the period...

Respondent: Oh, yes, yes.

Interviewer: Did it increase? What kind of issues were people bringing?

Respondent: Well, a lot of gay people who couldn't put their faith and their sexuality together. So, I decided to hire a full-time counsellor. John Lee appeared, who is a counsellor, fully trained.

Interviewer: Is that the John Lee who's the appointment secretary?

Respondent: That's right, yes.

Interviewer: Ah, right, yes.

Respondent: And he, his marriage had just broken up, and I did know him, I'd known him as a student, and he came to me and we talked and he said he was going to get remarried, and he introduced me to Sue, the wife, and he started work as counselling. And that took a lot of stuff off me, except of course he'd always say to me, "I'm always being chased round the room". He said, "People think there's more on offer than counselling," because he wasn't gay, you see, he isn't gay. And I said to him, "Well, you're so lucky; nobody chases me round the room". (laughs)

[0:36:48]

Interviewer: So, there's the issue around bringing together faith and sexuality.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Any other kind of issues that people were...?

Respondent: No, I think that was it because we were a church and people would assume that we would be able to help them put their faith and sexuality together. No, I think that was the main thing. John helped enormously because of course it gave me more time to

do... we had two schools. I was chairman of both the schools and so I had quite a lot of work on from the education point of view. I'm very fond of John; he's more like a brother to me than anybody else and we still meet regularly. He's just retired.

Interviewer: Has he? Right, right. Yeah. I'm just thinking about the emergence of the Metropolitan Church, for example, as a kind of alternative church for gay people, many of whom have been quite wounded by their experience of the Church of England.

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: What's your... how would you react to that. I mean would you have encouraged somebody... because the Metropolitan Church started back in the...

Respondent: Yes, I had Troy Perry come to St Botolph's and then he sent along a priest who was actually Anglican but he was working with the Metropolitan Church, and he said to me, "What are we going to do?" you know. I said, "Well, you can use our premises". I made the fatal mistake of asking Bishop Gerald Ellison if the Metropolitan Church could use our premises, say in the Sunday evenings when we didn't have anything, and he interviewed... I've forgotten who he... what the name of the priest was, but he came with very good references from his bishop, and Gerald said, "No, I don't want the Metropolitan Church in St Botolph's". I shouldn't have asked him, you see. I learnt very quickly that...

Interviewer: Because he couldn't really have told you not to, could he? And he knew that as well as anybody else.

Respondent: That's it.

Interviewer: So, would you have urged people to stick with the Church of England or...?

Respondent: Yes, yes, yes. I think that's what I was trying to do was to say, "We are welcoming, some are not, but we are, so come and join us".

Interviewer: Right, so after 18 years at St Botolph's, what year does that take us to?

Respondent: '74, sorry, no, no, sorry, that's when I went to St Botolph's. '84, '88, '89, I went... the Bishop of London, who by then was David Hope, thought the only place for me would be St Katharine's because it was like a conference house. But the governors and I didn't get on at all. They were very classy and they didn't understand the gay thing at all. But I didn't... I tried very hard not to make it a gay centre. We used to have lots of funerals because HIV had started, and we had lots of funerals at St Katharine's in the chapel, but the governors were never, ever supportive. And they used the fact that I didn't live in, because I only lived up the road about a mile away, to get rid of me.

Interviewer: Oh, right.

Respondent: And after, I think it was about five years, Richard Charter sent for me. Well, he didn't send for me, he said, "I want to come and see you," and came one morning at half past seven.

[0:41:01]

Interviewer: On his way to work?

Respondent: And he said, "They want you to leave".

Interviewer: Right.

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- Respondent: So, I mean it was... I knew that something was going on, but I didn't know they wanted me out, and they wanted me out. And it took nine months to get me out because I got my lawyer and I said to John Underwood, "Please get a good deal". The alternatives were to give me 70,000 quid and go, so they must have wanted me to go, or to give the diocese 70,000 quid and I could go to another church and do counselling work. And that, of course, is what happened. Richard Charter said, "I don't want you to give up being a priest". I did apply for two jobs. One was to be in charge of Crisis at Christmas, but I didn't go through with the interview because Richard Charter said, "Go to St Martin-in-the-Fields, have a room there," Nick Holton was the vicar, and I could see people there. It also meant that I could start writing books, and I wrote a book about St Botolph's. And then I wrote a book about a Bishop of London, Blomfield, who was a reformer in the early 19th Century. I loved doing that because all the research was terrific, you know.
- Interviewer: I wondered why, when you went to Fulham Palace and you record this in the diary, you talk about Stopforth.
- Respondent: Stopford, yeah.
- Interviewer: Stopford looking up at the picture of Blomfield...
- Respondent: Blomfield, yes.
- Interviewer: And saying, "What would he say?" And I thought to myself as I read it, "Well, why did the bishop ask that question?" Now I know the answer.
- Respondent: (laughs) I mean Blomfield would have been horrified, of course, but that was a different era, but he was always unpopular. He reformed the Church of England top to bottom, founded the church commissioners and has been neglected.
- Interviewer: Was that what your PhD was on?
- Respondent: No, the PhD was on crypts and graveyards in London, how much did the church get from funerals.
- Interviewer: Oh, right.
- Respondent: And we found nearly 40% of the income up to 1852 came from funerals.
- Interviewer: Right. So, what happened in 1852?
- Respondent: The law was passed that no-one to be buried in a churchyard in London any more, nor in the crypts. So, it all finished. So, my PhD was to try and discover what happened then. Well, of course some of them made homeless centres, some of them made restaurants. I enjoyed doing that very much indeed. I was really too old to do it, but I did enjoy it. And I had a knowledge...
- Interviewer: I think you've got the pink dressing gown then, you know, you clearly weren't too old to do it.
- Respondent: My supervisor was a man called Arthur Burns. He was terrific. He really encouraged me and helped me to... and Robert decided in the end what the thesis should be because what Arthur said was, "We don't want a history of the churches. We want a thesis," and Robert said, "Well, the thesis should be that the church benefited financially from burials and then suddenly it all stopped. So, what happened?"

[0:44:45]

Interviewer: Yeah, hmm. So, let's just think about the St Katharine's bit for a moment.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: It doesn't sound like it was a particularly easy time.

Respondent: No, it wasn't. I was meant to form a community of nuns and friars. Three friars came who I knew and four nuns. The nuns were never happy, quarrelled with the friars, quarrelled with me, and it was a very unhappy time. I tried very hard. We had a support group to try and help people to talk to one another, you know, but it didn't work, and I had to ask the sisters to leave. Well, of course, the governors were furious. "Why have you asked them to go?" I said, "Well, they don't do anything. They just sit around and groan and complain so they've got to go". So, they were very angry at that, so then I had to go. Now there's no community. They were obsessed by St Katharine's having a community.

Interviewer: Well, the Mirfield Fathers had been there before, hadn't they?

Respondent: They were there, yes, yes, they were there, but sisters, Deaconess Community of St Andrew.

Interviewer: Oh, yes, that's right. Yeah.

Respondent: They were a community, but then, you see, if you're not working together, who else would want to come and be in a community like that? Everybody who turned up was slightly odd and they didn't stay very long, of course.

Interviewer: Yes, well, there's a parable there, isn't there?

Respondent: Yes, there is.

Interviewer: Yeah. And now it's a very smart conference centre.

Respondent: It is and I regret that because it's commercial now.

Interviewer: It's not the place that I first went to on retreat.

Respondent: Exactly, no, exactly.

Interviewer: In fact, the first time I went there, it was a retreat being led by Kennedy Tom.

Respondent: Oh, really? Yes.

Interviewer: And I went to talk to him and he pointed me to the community house in Nottingham that I was telling you about.

Respondent: Really? Yes.

Interviewer: So, that was a life-changing experience for me there.

Respondent: Yes. Was I the master then?

Interviewer: I don't think you were. That would have been '80...

[0:47:04]

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Respondent: Augustin Harry(?) was there, and then one of the Mirfield Fathers, Christopher Lowe.

Interviewer: Yes. I think it was Mirfield, it was '82, I should think.

Respondent: Yes, it probably would have been then, yes.

Interviewer: I think that's what it was. I was at university. So, you've made reference to the number of funerals through HIV.

Respondent: Yes, terrible. It really was a terrible time, and I put in the book that I began to realise what the chaplains and the two world wars had to go through with all the young men dying. They were all young men, of course. They were... it was terrible, absolutely awful. I got fond of them, of course, and I'd get calls, like, "Will you take my funeral?" And I said, "Well, tell me, when is it?" "No, I haven't died yet," he said, "But I'd like you to do it," so then of course I would go and see the person and I would see his other half, who would of course usually follow him within a year. It was terrible.

Interviewer: And were these people that you already knew well or...?

Respondent: No. Well, some were, but mostly they just came because they knew that I was involved in counselling and I was very angry with the governors at St Katharine's for not realising the importance of the work. Nobody else was doing it. Well, they were; David Randall was obviously doing some. I felt very angry with them.

Interviewer: Yes, I mean I suppose it must have been very difficult for the establishment, as it were, to... well it was difficult for everybody to come to terms with what was happening, but for the establishment it must have been even harder, I suppose.

Respondent: All of us, of course, had to learn what HIV, AIDS was. I remember the first time we had someone to supper who had HIV, Robert said, "Do we throw the plates away afterwards? Do we throw the cutlery away?" People didn't know. And we had to find out and tell people. The first conference for clergy was put on by two of my assistants at St Botolph's and it was put on at King's College and about 250 people turned up, and we had the Bishop of Edinburgh come. He was hilarious. You probably read in the book, he said, "I always thought rimming and frottage were West Country solicitors. Such a lovely talk. And we had..."

Interviewer: Was that Richard Holloway?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes, yes. Can you describe the personal impact of HIV?

Respondent: Well, I was terrified I'd catch it, of course. I mean I had been a naughty boy in my time. Robert and I have a fairly open relationship and I remember when we went on holiday to Venice, looking in the mirror and thinking, "This will be my last holiday". It was about 1982, '83, "I bet I've got it," you know. And I was always frightened that I would catch it. Obviously, once I knew what you had to do, I took the necessary precautions, but it upset me terribly. The funerals upset me greatly because of course I did get to know them then. There were about 50 funerals I took because when I left St Martin's, when I retired in 2001, I invited all the parents and the other halves if they were still alive, and there were 50 people who... and we remembered them in the prayers. Yes, it was a terrible time. David Randall was marvellous. He founded an organisation called Cara, which helped with people affected by the virus, and then he had the virus and he died and I had to take his funeral. That was terrible.

Interviewer: I have a distant memory of a television documentary about a priest in Yorkshire.

[0:52:09]

Respondent: Oh, that was Simon Bailey, who I knew, yes.

Interviewer: Was it? Right. I didn't know who it was but...

Respondent: Yes, he wrote a book about it or, no, his sister wrote the book, but he had HIV. But you see, if a priest had HIV, very often his congregation didn't know. We had one in Kensington who, even today, they blame me for not telling them. Well I couldn't tell them, could I? And I preached at the funeral and didn't mention it. We said he had cancer, but he did, but it was HIV really.

Interviewer: Yeah. And what was the impact of the famous government advertising campaign. Do you have any memories of that?

Respondent: I don't really, no. Maggie Thatcher was very keen, wasn't she, to educate people. I'm not sure. I don't know whether it had any effect or not.

Interviewer: Well, I think now it's held up as being the most effective advertising campaign in the world at the time.

Respondent: Really?

Interviewer: Yeah. And is... people now are saying, you know, perhaps we could do with another advertising campaign because patterns of behaviour have slipped and, okay, you can live with HIV, but, you know, it's not consequence-free.

Respondent: Right.

Interviewer: But that's running forward to today.

Respondent: Yes, I'm not involved any more, and I'm rather glad I'm not. All I do at the moment is take funerals, but not HIV. But ash cash is very helpful.

Interviewer: Yes, indeed, yes, and I dare say that the Church of England round here couldn't survive without people like you. So, the last few months at St Katharine's must have been quite difficult.

Respondent: They were very difficult and I had to decide whether I would take the money and run or whether we pay the diocese and I'd have an office at St Martin's. I'm so glad I went to St Martin's because Nick Holten was very welcoming. I preached once a month, which of course is an experience preaching at St Martin. I enjoyed very much being there.

Interviewer: And was your counselling work under the umbrella of St Martin's or was it...?

Respondent: No, just... well, my official title was Bishop of London's Advisor on Pastoral Care. He didn't ever refer one person to me. Not one.

Interviewer: And didn't ask for your advice.

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Ah, well.

Respondent: I didn't mind because I'd got enough work to do.

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Interviewer: So, tell me, you were busy, were you?

Respondent: Yeah, very busy. People just knew that I was around. I did a lot of spiritual direction, which sounds very sort of Victorian, doesn't it? But I did enjoy spiritual direction and a lot of clergy came and a lot of ordinary laypeople came, and I'm still in touch with some of them. But I don't see them now officially regularly like I did. People would come, say, every two months. I enjoyed that.

[0:55:39]

Interviewer: And the gay aspect of the counselling, did that continue?

Respondent: Yes, oh, yes, very much.

Interviewer: Right up until the point that you retired?

Respondent: Mmm, yes, it did.

Interviewer: Same issues?

Respondent: Sorry?

Interviewer: The same issues were being brought, the same thing about, you know...

Respondent: Same issues, yes, same issues.

Interviewer: Feeling excluded and...

Respondent: Yes, they were, and clergy, of course, had particular problems because, as I put in the book, the church is a dangerous place to be for a gay priest really.

Interviewer: Yeah. Don't ask, don't tell, that's what they say, isn't it?

Respondent: That's right; don't ask, don't tell. And that's so pathetic, isn't it, when a church should be open about everything.

Interviewer: I was wondering when we were talking about your visit to Fulham Palace, was the bishop using a don't ask, don't tell policy then, do you think?

Respondent: I don't think he had a policy on gay people because he didn't know any.

Interviewer: Right, okay.

Respondent: That's why he was asking me all these questions. He had me go and see him twice to say how do gay people see the church, what do you think ought to be done about gay clergy. He was wonderful, but of course he was near retirement.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, then Gerald Ellison...

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Saying to you, you know, don't talk about it so much.

Respondent: "Why don't you keep quiet?"

Interviewer: "Why don't you keep quiet?"

Respondent: "I don't tell people what Mrs Ellison and I do in bed."

Interviewer: Sleep, I should think. (laughs)

Respondent: I never... yeah, I thought it was so funny.

[0:57:17]

Interviewer: But I wonder if that's the beginning of the kind of don't ask, don't tell.

Respondent: Could be, yes, could be. Yes, he didn't really want to know, I don't think, and was hoping I'd keep quiet.

Interviewer: Because it would be much easier actually if this whole issue was, you know, confined to the closet really.

Respondent: I have no doubt at all that if I hadn't got parson's freehold, somehow they would have got me out of St Botolph's somehow.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: I think Graham Leonard would, and he used to get very angry with me. In area deans' meetings, I would say to him, you know, "George Cassidy is making a mistake. George should be sitting here as the arch deacon, you know, this is not the way to operate," and he'd go off the handle. He's say, "You don't know what pressure he's under. You won't have me for much longer," he used to say, "I'm going to retire and then you'll miss me," and oh, goodness, the area deans' meetings were very interesting.

Interviewer: Yes. And then of course George Cassidy became Bishop of Southwell.

Respondent: I know.

Interviewer: And I was at that stage an incumbent in Southwell, and we were in fear and trembling of what he was going to do...

Respondent: I know.

Interviewer: Coming to Southwell, so... in fact he didn't do very much really, but there we are.

Respondent: Well, they got rid of him from St Paul's, that's how they somehow or other persuaded someone to make him a bishop because they couldn't stand him at St Paul's.

Interviewer: Shove him upstairs.

Respondent: Sorry?

Interviewer: Shove him upstairs.

Respondent: Yes. That's exactly what happened, yes. He was a typical Ulsterman protestant and he used to use all sorts of nasty tactics. He said to me at a party once, it was a party that John Gladrun(?) was giving, he said, "I think you'll have to offer your resignation to Graham, you're upsetting him so much and he's ill," and he was ill at that time. I said to him, "Are you saying to me that I've made him ill?" "Yes," he said, "I am". So, I went to see Graham and I said, "George says I've been making you ill. Is that true?" "No," he said, "Course not". So... but they were nasty times. I didn't enjoy those meetings of clergy.

Interviewer: And the whole thing about the consistory court was terribly high profile, wasn't it?

Respondent: Yes, it was, yes.

Interviewer: Whether it was high profile outside the church, I mean I was certainly, you know, very aware of...

[1:00:04]

Respondent: Oh, it was front page on all the Times, the Telegraph and goodness knows what else, and of course the diocesan clergy, I forget how many of them, wrote to Graham and said they would not be paying their quota.

Interviewer: Oh, yes.

Respondent: And I was told to pay the arch deacon's fees, which were £17,000, as well as my own, but the diocese didn't ever come to collect the money from me. That was because of Haywood, Derek Haywood. He was the General Secretary, and he hinted to me, "I'm not going to chase you for the money". But of course I received quite a lot of money from supporters, including Rowan(?). Rowan sent me 250 quid.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: And he published a press release, Rowan, saying the diocese of London is behaving very badly indeed.

Interviewer: And at that stage he was...

Respondent: Lady Margaret professor.

Interviewer: Right, okay, yeah.

Respondent: At Oxford.

Interviewer: Yeah. Right, so we've talked about St Martin-in-the-Fields and then you retire.

Respondent: Retired, yes.

Interviewer: And does that... did you stop all...?

Respondent: I did really, yes, yes, I did. I told everybody who came to me that really I couldn't. I was living in Shepperton. There was nowhere I could see them and I did want to finish, and I've been very happy in retirement, doing the books. I've done seven books and doing the funerals, although you may laugh, the funerals give me a pastoral sort of dimension because you never know who you're going to turn up with, classy people or people who are very poor, who've never met a clergyman before. I get all the ones that, you know, not church.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. And I mean I was certainly enormously grateful of retired clergy who took funerals wherever I was, so... because there's an awful lot of work to do, isn't there?

Respondent: Yes, and I enjoy the work. And I will follow it up if I can, if I can.

Interviewer: And I think so often parochial clergy just don't have the time to do that, do they?

Respondent: No, no. I took Eric Sykes' funeral, which was hilarious. And then we had the memorial service at St Martin's, and I still see his widow every two or three months. She's lovely, she really is. So, I do try and follow up. Would you like another coffee or tea or something?

Interviewer: I'm fine actually, thank you. I think we've nearly finished.

Respondent: Nearly finished, yes.

Interviewer: I just wanted to ask about your reflections over the last kind of 40 years or so.

[1:03:27]

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: I mean clearly lots has changed.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: But quite a lot hasn't changed as well.

Respondent: Well, you only have to look at the fact that the Primates have suspended the church in North America to realise that things haven't changed very much because they have openly gay bishops and they are not bothered about gay clergy, and the times I've been to America, I've been very impressed by the Episcopal Church over there. They give, they really do give money and time. And for the Primates to do that and Welby to agree to it shows that we really haven't moved very far, and although we've got six diocesan bishops who are gay, not one of them would dare say they are.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And if you are openly gay now, you're in trouble, I think, really. And it's when you want another job that you're really in trouble.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yes, I did six months in the diocese of Newark in New Jersey...

Respondent: Oh, did you? Yes.

Interviewer: When Jack Spon(?) was...

Respondent: Oh, he's wonderful, isn't it?

Interviewer: (inaudible 1:04:57) and it was the autumn of '98, after the Lambeth conference. And they'd all come back from the Lambeth conference feeling bruised by the experience.

Respondent: I'm sure.

Interviewer: And there was a big clergy gathering and at the end I stood up and said, "I wonder if I could just give an English perspective on this because you can talk openly in 1998 about gay people in the church, whether clergy or not, we can't even have that conversation in England".

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: And I was given a rousing applause.

Respondent: Really?

Interviewer: Which was quite moving really, but yeah.

Respondent: When you think that he was a Virginian, wasn't he, a redneck Virginian?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, extraordinary.

Respondent: He came to stay with Robert and I with his wife and we had a whale of a time.

Interviewer: He invited us for thanksgiving but somebody had already invited us so we couldn't go, which was a shame, but there we are. Well, Malcolm, thank you very much for having this conversation.

Respondent: Pleasure.

[End of Transcript]