

# GEOFFREY PARMITER, M.B.E. (1910–2000)

by PHILIP HARRIS

**G**EOFFREY Vincent de Clifton Parmiter, who was for many years a key figure in the Catholic Record Society, died on 13 November 2000. He was born on 22 January 1910, the son of a solicitor who lived at Lymm in Cheshire; his mother was a very devout Catholic who built a chapel in their house. After education at the Oratory School and at Merton College, Oxford (where his subject was physics), he was called to the Bar at the Middle Temple in 1934. He practised at the patent Bar until 1949, but this period was interrupted by service in the Royal Navy between 1939 and 1944. He had been commissioned in the R.N.V.R. in 1932, and from August 1939 until September 1940 he was an assistant to the naval attaché at the Lisbon embassy, with the task of picking up what information he could by listening to the talk of the German officers who were in Lisbon. He then served for a period in ships and was torpedoed, before working in the Admiralty until 1944, mainly in the Anti-submarine Warfare Division. The stress of his work there led to his being invalided out of the service.

Before the war he had developed an interest in historical research. He had published a biography of Roger Casement in 1936, and in 1938 a work entitled *Reasonable Doubt*, dealing with various well-known trials, and with a chapter on the value of the jury system. The book on Casement reflected his interest in Ireland with which he had family connections. He met his future wife there. She was Lucita (Lucia) Gahan, who was of Irish extraction, but who came from Argentina. They were married in Lisbon in 1939, and had two sons and a daughter.

After the war the family lived for twenty-five years in The Little Boltons, near the Servite church in the Fulham Road, where Geoffrey attended Mass each morning before going to work. He devoted much time and effort to Servite Houses, a charity linked to the church. This was founded in 1947 as a housing association caring originally for the elderly, but later for other groups as well. For years Geoffrey was its very able chairman, and for this work he was awarded the M.B.E.

In 1949 he gave up his work at the Bar, and became legal editor of the well-known publishers, Butterworth and Co. In his spare time he pursued his researches and his writing. He produced a study of King David in 1960, but he increasingly turned his attention to the history of the English Reformation and of recusancy. In 1967 he published a substantial work on Henry VIII's divorce, entitled *The King's Great Matter. a study in Anglo-Papal relations, 1527–34*, and in 1976 the

Institute of Historical Research issued (as a supplement to its *Bulletin*) his *Elizabethan Popish Recusancy in the Inns of Court*.

Geoffrey joined the Catholic Record Society in the late 1950s, and a few years later was elected to its Council. In the mid-1960s he became one of the Trustees of the Society, and he discharged this responsibility until 1996. In 1969 he followed Cuthbert Fitzherbert as Chairman of Council. Fitzherbert had been an exceptionally good Chairman, but Geoffrey Parmiter proved to be a very worthy successor. Always calm and judicious, he gave everyone the chance to make a contribution to the discussion, and then summed up impartially. When a firm ruling was required, he gave it. During the early years of his Chairmanship the finances of the Society were causing concern because of rising costs, and Geoffrey decided that the reserves must be increased to produce more income. He therefore launched an appeal fund, which by the time that it was absorbed into the general fund in 1984 amounted to £15,000. Geoffrey also brought his legal skill to bear on the work of revising the Society's constitution. He continued his historical researches, producing articles for *Recusant History* and other journals, and a biography of Edmund Plowden, the Elizabethan recusant lawyer, which was published by the C.R.S. in 1987.

After his retirement from Butterworth's he moved to Oxfordshire, but he continued as Chairman of the Council of the C.R.S. until 1982. For several years after this he attended Council meetings and he continued to take part in the Society's annual conferences at Oxford until 1992.

In 1981 he and his wife had the very unpleasant experience of seeing their thatched cottage at Hanwell, near Banbury, burn down as a result of a neighbour's house catching fire. They lived for a time in a house at Banbury and then, about 1985, moved to Wimbledon to be near one of their sons. Here they spent the next twelve years peacefully, but Geoffrey's eyesight deteriorated as a result of cataracts, which was a particular trial since reading was one of his greatest pleasures. Fortunately his sight was restored by an operation in the late 1990s, but at about this time Lucita, who had looked after him so well while he was handicapped, suffered a stroke and died.

Before this, they had made arrangements to move into a private flat in a nursing home in Wimbledon, but in the event Geoffrey went there alone. He spent the next two years in this flat, before dying there. My brother (who knew Geoffrey well from the time when they both attended the Oxford conferences) and I had the pleasure of visiting him, and we found him as good company as ever. He was a fine conversationalist with a splendid sense of humour, a man of sound judgement, a committed Catholic, a hard worker for the organizations with which he was connected, a scholar—and above all he was a gentleman. May he rest in peace.