

## DAME BETTY RIDLEY 1909-2005

*July 3 1975 was a “miraculous” day for Dame Betty Ridley because a majority in all three Houses of the General Synod agreed that there were no fundamental objections to the ordination of women to the priesthood, a cause she had publicly championed for 46 years – but for her the day held bitter memories.*

Her father Henry Mosley, later Bishop of Southwell, chaired the Central Council for Women’s Church Work. In 1929, aged 20, she told the Council it was wasting its time if it was not working for women’s ordination. The Council co-opted her! Fifteen years later, while her husband Michael was Rector of Finchley, a neighbour was William Greer, then General Secretary of the Student Christian Movement, later Bishop of Manchester. Its Annandale offices were in Golders Green. Thus it was early in 1944 that Betty was among the first to learn of the ordination to the priesthood of Florence Li Tim-Oi on 25 January.

Two days after that event my father had written at length to his former curate William Greer and Canon Tissington Tatlow, his Commissaries, putting on record what he had done. She did not share her scoop with the Church Times which had to wait until 29 July to reveal his ‘insurrection’. Years later Betty gave me a transcript of his letter, the only known extant copy. Thirty one years later it was Dame Betty who moved the reception of the Standing Committee’s report on the subject, and imagine her delight at the General Synod’s “almost miraculous” (her words) opening of the door to women priests. And yet – in a speech later she urged that it was not “the will of God for his Church...that (it) at this time should be torn apart by divisions over it”. “Here I am, unbelievably, urging the Synod not to do what for years I have longed for it to do, apparently betraying the cause that has been nearest to my heart.”

Even though the House of Laity defeated that motion, who knows how many supporters then cold-shouldered her? What I do know is that, on my visits to her in her last years in a residential home in Winchester, she asked me: “Have I ever been forgiven for betraying the cause?” Nigh on 30 years later it was still a weight on her conscience that, out of generosity to the



opponents, she had counselled delay. When I visited her for the last time on 12 April this year, she asked me for my blessing. I will never know if that was the absolution she felt she needed all that time. She did what she did out of generosity and bore the pain for so long. Will we again have to accept lengthy procrastinations for the sake of the opponents of women bishops, or will Dame Betty’s generosity now be reciprocated?

**Christopher Hall**