

# Luxembourg's Anglican Community celebrates Golden Jubilee

## A talk with Bishop Geoffrey Rowell

✍️ Duncan Roberts

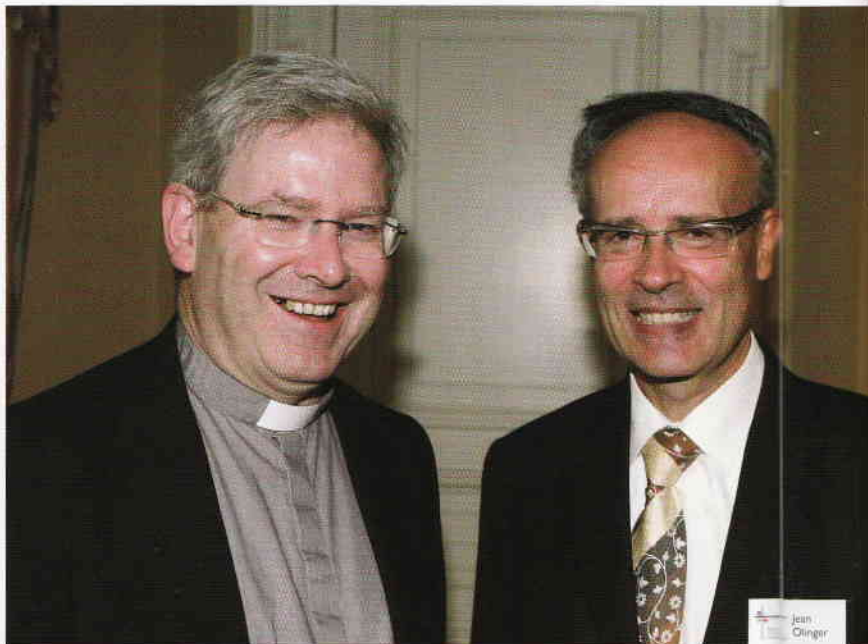
📷 Steve Eastwood

The residence of British ambassador Peter Bateman was the focus for the climax of a three-day celebration by Luxembourg's Anglican Community on Monday as the church marked its 50 years of existence. Indeed, it was fitting that the ambassador should host a reception, as it was in the residence that the foundations for the English-Speaking Church Community in Luxembourg were laid down at meetings in 1956.

Current Chaplain, Chris Lyon was on hand to help welcome guests and present to those who had not already met him Bishop Geoffrey Rowell, the Bishop Of Gibraltar in Europe. The Bishop had extended his weekend stay to meet with minister François Biltgen on Monday morning before setting off by train to Lourdes that afternoon to join the Archbishop of Canterbury in celebrations to mark the 150th anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady of Lourdes to Bernadette Soubirous.

That will complete the second leg of what is a four-stop journey through Europe – he next visits Armenia to take part in the Blessing of the Holy Chrism (which happens just once every seven years and involves all sorts of precious and fragrant oils) and the travels to Padua in Italy to ordain a Nigerian priest.

If that all sounds very exotic, it is far from extraordinary for the Bishop, whose diocese stretches from the



*The Rev'd Chris Lyon with church organist Jean Olinger at the embassy reception on Monday*

Canary Islands to Vladivostok, from Trondheim to Morocco.

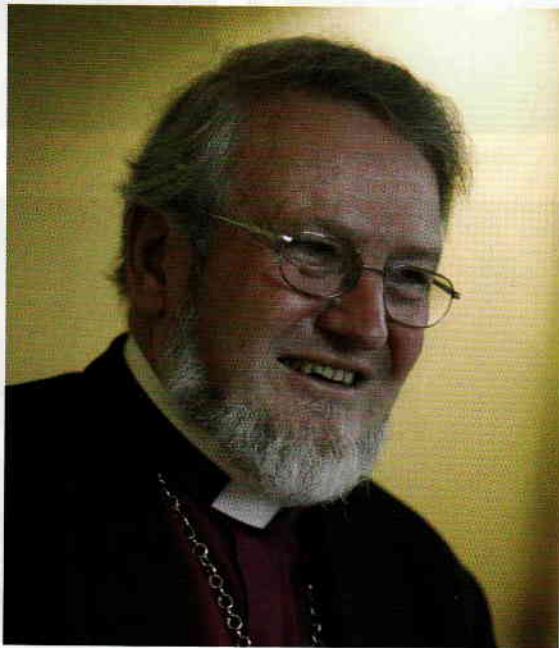
But, as François Biltgen pointed out at the embassy reception, Luxembourg is at the very heart of that diocese and it was especially the focus of the Bishop's full attention over the weekend.

The celebrations took place all over the Grand Duchy, and included not only a party for children and Even-song in Schuttrange as well as the Sunday service in the more familiar surroundings of the Konvikt Chapel in Luxembourg City, but also a special visit to the Echternach Abbey of St Willibrord, where the head of the Catholic Church in Luxembourg welcomed Bishop Geoffrey and invited him to attend a service of dedication of new bells, in honour of the 1400th anniversary of the death

of St Willibrord. Indeed, the Bishop was given the honour of being one of the first to strike the new bell.

### Commitment to ecumenical relationships

It seems appropriate that the Bishop should have been invited to take part in such a service, given his very public commitment to ecumenical relationships between the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches of the East – more of which later. This was also a theme taken up by François Biltgen when he spoke about the 2003 Convention signed by himself on behalf of the Luxembourg government and by Bishop David Hamid (the suffragan bishop) representing the Anglican Church



Bishop Geoffrey Rowell, Bishop Of Gibraltar in Europe

of Luxembourg. "We are convinced that religion should not divide but bring people together," he told guests at the reception on Monday. "Religion must be in the public sphere, and communities must work together."

Bishop Geoffrey's interest in ecumenical relationships stems not only from his mandate as Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe, but also from a deep interest in the history of the Church, especially that of the nineteenth century. It was, he explains, Queen Victoria, who in a letter in 1842 first stressed the importance of a good and close relationship with other churches, particularly the ancient churches of the East. "Relationships with the Catholic church were not particularly good for historical reasons," the Bishop explains.

The spread of British ex-pats to Europe after the Napoleonic wars had been the catalyst in creating the diocese. It now covers an area with nine time zones and contains 270 congregations and 150 licensed clergy, two of whom are in Luxembourg – Chris Lyon's wife Joan is an ordained priest.

That brings up another delicate subject in the current debate surrounding the way forward for the worldwide Anglican community – the ordination of women bishops and the church blessings of same-sex couples.

The latter is at the very core of, as Bishop Geoffrey puts it, tensions within the Anglican Community. Indeed, it was the focus of much discussion at the recent Lambeth Conference following the decision by

## Bishop Geoffrey Rowell

third Bishop Of Gibraltar in Europe

Born 13 February 1943, he was ordained priest in the Church of England in 1969.

He became Canon, Chichester Cathedral, in 1981, and was Examining Chaplain to the Bishop of Leicester, 1979-1990 and to the Bishop of Winchester, 1991-1993. Before his current role, Bishop Rowell was the Suffragan Bishop of Basingstoke, from 1994.

He was commissioned as Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe on 18 October 2001. The Diocese in Europe covers not only the area of Gibraltar in British jurisdiction but also all of mainland Europe, Morocco and the territory of the former Soviet Union.

Bishop Rowell writes regularly in *The Times*. In addition to numerous academic and scholarly articles he has authored the following or co-authored the following books:

*Love's Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness*, Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson and Rowan Williams, Oxford University Press, ISBN 9780191070587

*The Vision Glorious*, Geoffrey Rowell, Oxford University Press, ISBN 9780198263326

*Come, Lord Jesus! Daily Readings for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany*, Geoffrey Rowell & Julien Chilcott-Monk, Morehouse Publishing, ISBN 9780819219640

a significant number of traditionalist bishops from the developing world to boycott the meeting – a reaction to the 2003 ordination by the Episcopal Church of openly gay bishop V. Gene Robinson.

Bishop Geoffrey thinks the decision of the conference to call for a Moratorium on gay bishops was "absolutely the right action" on the issue. "American churches chose not to listen to other about the ramifications of their actions," the Bishop says.

But, he insists that the Anglican Community remains united and

flourishing, and even claims that the Lambeth Conference pointed the way forward. "It is difficult to take decisions for a global church," he explains and compares the 44 different churches under the Anglican umbrella to the 27 members of the European Union in terms of finding consensus.

"I liken it to looping together, or knitting," he says of his own job, which involves uniting so many varied communities. Indeed, with a touch of humour he recalls a story of a Dutch priest who introduced him as "the great knit".

## The English-Speaking Church Community 1958 The Anglican Church of Luxembourg 2008

**1956**

About 60 people decide to start an English – Speaking Protestant Church Community (ESCC). Services begin, in the Cercle Municipal, clergy come from Brussels and elsewhere.

**1958-60**

Constitution drafted and agreed, and approved by the Bishop of Fulham and Gibraltar.

**1960**

First Church Fair

**1964**

First resident Chaplain appointed  
The Rev'd George D Thoms.

**1969**

Rev'd David Millar leads services in the Konvikt Chapel, thanks to the generosity of the Bishop of Luxembourg

**1974**

Church Choir reformed under Jean Usher.

**1980-1990**

Growth, and stability with the Rev'd Barry Simmons

**1996**

Rev'd Cliff Poole and family move into the recently bought Vicarage.

**2002**

The Rev'd Chris Lyon appointed. The Rev'd Joan Lyon is the first Anglican woman priest here.

**2003**

Bishop David Hamid and M. François Biltgen sign the Convention between the Anglican Church of Luxembourg and the Government of Luxembourg. Ratified by Parliament in 2004.

