

Christopher Lewis Loyd 1/6/1923 – 14/7/2013

As we gather here this afternoon, all of us, in varying ways, will be conscious of memories flooding to the fore and an awareness that with Christopher Loyd's passing, not only have we lost someone personally dear to us but we are witnessing the end of an era.

Christopher Lewis Loyd was born in Lockinge House on 1st June 1923. His whole life had this place, this land, this community, this church as the hub from which everything else radiated out. And when a life is lived like that, deeply entwined and consistently rooted in one centre of gravity, the wrench of departure is very great.

We are conscious that we must let go, not just of an individual, loved and respected by all who knew him but we must also let go of someone who has become part of us. Christopher Loyd influenced, for many of us, not just how we saw the world but how we saw ourselves. Today we stand at the brink, not just of a new identity for Christopher, the eternal identity which St Paul assures us is the fulfilment and perfection of what we already experience partially and imperfectly on earth, but we also stand at the brink of a new identity for ourselves. And today is an opportunity to begin to come to terms with that. It's a chance not to accept that the bonds we had with Christopher are irrevocably broken but to discover that they continue, even though we have to realign them for, of course, when a person is no longer physically present among us, we can't relate to them exactly as we did when they were. And this is not easy. We are creatures of space and time and it's much easier to deal in those familiarities.

Here, Christopher himself, as he did so often in life, blazes a trail for us and I think that his lead is worth following. As many of you will already know, Christopher's Christian faith was hugely important to him. He regarded Holy Communion every week as a sacrosanct appointment that brooked no excuses for absence and I have rarely encountered anyone who was so determined to attend church so regularly and more importantly for whom it meant so much.

The life of the Church does not always get a good press in these days of secular cynicism but for Christopher it was always something alive and dynamic. In fact he had a quite radical grasp of how dynamic an agent it could be, which may perhaps explain his preference for the beautifully unchanging rubric of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer

and the mellifluous, timeless syllables of the King James Bible – they were sure anchors in what he knew were the spiritually transformative and sometimes destabilising waters of God’s engagement in the world.

Christopher’s Christian journey began with his baptism in the ancient Saxon font of this church ninety years ago to the day, of his death and during those ninety years he knew that he was travelling towards the God who had given him life. I encountered in Christopher a greater awareness and expectancy of that journey and its ultimate destination than I’ve met in almost anyone else. It’s not that he regarded life on earth as merely marking time in preparation for something better at the end of it – his deep engagement with all that life brought his way bears witness to that – but he was also interested in the eternal life that awaited him and the transformation that meeting God face to face, would entail.

It’s important to keep hold of that, in what we are about today and to draw hope from the lamp that Christopher now holds ahead of us. It will fuse together our memories into something permanent and freeing. This is a creative process not a destructive one - appropriate for someone in whose life the creative arts were so important.

It’s clear in the memoir that he wrote of life in Lockinge House as a child that artistic activities were an early love. His mother loved to paint and Christopher grew up in a house surrounded by the works of artists. Lockinge House was a busy and lively place that embraced his family – his parents, his two older brothers, John and Martin, his two older sisters, Anne and Hester, “Heck” as well as himself and his beloved twin, Catherine always known as “Ag” just as Christopher himself was always known as “Larch”. The twins for some reason had been nicknamed Archibald and Agatha while still in the nursery and the names stuck – abbreviated and adjusted for convenient pronunciation by their owners!

Along with the family there was a host of servants – Lockinge House in its heyday required a small army to run and for the young Christopher there was always company in the form of his siblings or friends around the house such as old Mr Camden the deaf carpenter who would obligingly mend anything the small boy brought him in need of repair. It was he too who drew for Christopher the outlines of animals on pieces of three-ply wood for him to cut out with a fret-

saw. Such activities along with spending happy afternoons with family and house-guests, of which there were many, made an idyllic early childhood. The idyll was shadowed in 1926 by the death of his brother Martin, aged only nine, from polio and Christopher never forgot the aura of sadness that descended on the house and he kept the Bible that his mother had given Martin in 1925, right to the end of his life.

But life went on and soon prep school at Stone House was calling followed by Eton. When the Second World War broke out in September 1939, Christopher was 16. By now his elder brother, John, heir to the Lockinge Estate, had gone into the Coldstream Guards and was serving in Egypt.

It was an anxious time in Lockinge House. There were fewer servants available to do the necessary work; there was an influx of exhausted evacuees to care for and in the background a very real concern for John's safety abroad.

By the time Christopher came to leave school however he was full of enthusiasm for joining the war as a fighter pilot. His father, with hindsight very wisely, in view of the numbers of casualties who never returned, did not think much of this idea and made it clear that Christopher was to forget the RAF and follow his brother into the Coldstream Guards. It was an age when parental wishes in families such as Christopher's were unquestioned and Christopher accepted the change of plan without repining.

While Christopher was still training, John had been wounded at Tobruk and invalided home. Tragically John died from complications from his wounds in October 1943 by which time Christopher had been posted to Italy.

John's death was a bitter blow for the Loyd family, doubly so with Christopher away fighting in Italy. Anxiety and failing health were beginning to take their toll on Christopher's father now in his early sixties and he too died unexpectedly in November 1944. Christopher was now the family's hope for the future. But there was still work to be done in Italy and Christopher with customary doggedness was not to be deflected from his task. He carried it out with unwavering bravery that was to earn him an MC in a daring manoeuvre of extraordinary deftness, courage and paramount care for the men in

his charge, under serious enemy fire. On the citation, General Alexander's annotation reads tellingly, "immediate MC." And an extraordinary postscript records the additional tribute to Christopher's bravery of the German officer who had subjected Christopher and his men to such intense fire.

Like many of his generation, Christopher did not talk much about the War but I shall never forget him telling me of an occasion in Italy when under appalling conditions the morale of his platoon had plummeted and he asked one of his corporals who was respected by the men but on this occasion was adding to negativity, to turn the tables and take a lead in raising morale. Typically modest, Christopher felt his corporal might be better placed than he to engender this. The suggestion was received in good part but as the platoon moved forward, a shell landed directly on the corporal in question, only a few feet away. Shaken to the core, it was down to Christopher to pull together the group of men and take the lead both in terms of getting his men to safety and in terms of rescuing morale. It's characteristic of him that he found depths of courage to do so.

When Christopher came home after the War, it was a different place. The world was a different place. Putting aside his youthful ambitions for a career as an architect after a degree at Cambridge, Christopher now took on another mantle he had never expected to wear in the running of the Lockinge Estate. It was not an easy time for landowners – death duties, changes in the law, agriculture and society were forcing a pace of change which saw many collapse under the pressure.

But Christopher believed in the dynamic and creative power of change as much in the material world as in the spiritual one. He loved tradition and all that he had inherited but he knew too that for it to survive and flourish, it must change.

Firstly there was the house. At the end of the War it needed fifty servants to run and cost a fortune. There were also rumours of government requisitioning. Christopher took the bold step of deciding to pull it down. It must have cost him to see his childhood home razed to the ground and someone less visionary and courageous might have been stayed by sentiment but Christopher knew that there was more at stake. The survival of the land and the community that lived there were far more important than the bricks

and mortar, panelling and pillars, of where he'd been born. Demolition work began in 1947 and the family removed to Betterton.

A new chapter opened in Christopher's life – one of landowner, with the associated work of farming, forestry and estate management along with his lifelong passions for art and books, horses, both racing and riding, and dogs. He took on a vast array of civic responsibilities and gave generously of his time and energy to all manner of charitable enterprises.

Things began to settle at Lockinge and life moved on. He met his future wife, Joanna, serendipitously at a racecourse, and they were married in St Margaret's Westminster on 17th December 1957. Thomas was born in 1959, Harriet in 1962 and James in 1966 and a new era of happy family life began in Lockinge. Holidays were spent at the family's seaside house on the Alderwicke Bay Estate – not too frequently because, with Lockinge as home, who needed to go away? But Alderwicke Bay was close to Goodwood and so a felicitous arrangement incorporating happy days at the racetrack with a wealth of friends and trainers and afternoons on the sea, lobster-fishing with the children proved satisfactory for all. This despite the fact that only one, lone lobster was ever caught and then only by sacrificing a sea-bass, proudly caught earlier in the afternoon, as bait!

Along with the house and estate, Christopher had inherited the important art collection started by Lord Wantage. A passion of his own, Christopher added to it and when there was no further room on the walls for paintings he moved on to sculpture. Thomas, Harriet and James would often return home from boarding-school for the holidays to find new marble additions to the family had taken up residence in the drawing-room, in their absence. Christopher's brother-in-law used to tease him that, regardless of their artistic merit, these acquisitions all looked like Christopher's Aunt Kitty!

Visionary change continued at Lockinge that was to ensure the survival of the estate into the next century. Christopher pioneered the conversion of disused farm buildings for alternative purposes a decade ahead of his time. Determined to keep the villages alive and working, he welcomed in new commercial enterprises and innovative farming techniques from the 1970s onwards. The fact that when today you walk around the villages of Ardington and Lockinge, they feel alive and active instead of dead and dormant is very much down

to Christopher's vision. The epithet on Christopher Wren's memorial in St Paul's Cathedral, applies equally to Christopher Loyd – "Si monumentum requiris, circumspice!" – "If you need a memorial, look around you!"

In 1985 Christopher handed over the running of the estate into Thomas' capable hands, but he maintained a hands-on approach right up to the last years of his life and when he voiced an opinion prefaced by the words, "I strongly advise..." it was usually best to go with what followed!

Christopher's vision embraced people as much as place – he was devoted to his family, proud of his children and grandchildren and unswervingly loyal to his friends and those who worked with him and for him. We who are left behind will miss him hugely but it is right that we remember the vision that coloured his entire life was one that embraced necessary change as well as cherished tradition.

That vision ensured the safe passage of an estate and a community across a lifetime of shoals and threats; on 14th July this year it ensured the safe passage of a soul much loved, both by God and men across the threshold of death into eternity; today it offers us safe passage into the future so that we may hold what we know and love in such a way that we may find transformation to be a thing of beauty and hope.

In his Christmas message of 1939, just after the outbreak of the Second World War, King George VI quoted from Minnie Louise Haskins' poem "The Gate Of The Year". It makes a fitting conclusion to these words today for it was the principle by which Christopher lived every one of his ninety years.

"And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied:

"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

So I went forth and finding the hand of God, trod gladly into the night. And he led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East."

EAMB

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