

# FR ALBERIC STACPOOLE OSB

## 1931-2012

FR HENRY WANSBROUGH OSB

*John Stacpoole born 19 April 1931 in Belfast; educated at Gilling Castle, Ampleforth College (St Cuthbert's) and St Benet's Hall; 1952-60 Army, Duke of Wellington's Regiment, Parachute Regiment; 1957-60 served in Ghana, Sierra Leone and Cameroon; clothed 18 September 1960; Ordained 5 July 1970; 1966-79 taught History, Politics and Religious Studies; 1967-80 Editor of the Ampleforth Journal; 1980-92 General Secretary Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary (ESBVM); 1985 D Phil (Oxon) ARCIC; 1990-2008 Ampleforth Lourdes Pilgrimage; 1990 Parish Priest at Kirkbymoorside and Helmsley; 1996 Assistant Priest at Leyland; 2001 Priest in charge at Helmsley; 2009 Resident in the Monastery Infirmary; died at Ampleforth 30 September 2012.*



AT AMPLEFORTH IN THE LATE 1940S John Stacpoole was respected by his contemporaries as sharply intelligent and utterly reliable. He was clearly capable of a distinguished university career, but preferred to follow in the footsteps of his distinguished military father, an officer in the West Yorkshire Regiment. His determination won him a place in a successful cross-country team, and the captaincy of the Second Cricket XI. He was also an adequate high-jumper, an event he later coached for many years.

After Sandhurst he was commissioned into the Duke of Wellington's Regiment and immediately sent out in 1953 to the Korean war as Commander of an assault pioneer platoon. In the third battle of the Hook he was instructed to lay mines and wires across an area much of which was in clear sight of the enemy and vulnerable to artillery, mortar and small arms fire. This hazardous task continued for 15 continuous nights under constant threat of fire. On the final night the Chinese mortars

opened fire. Second Lieutenant Stacpoole continued to lead his men after being doubly wounded and with a jagged piece of shrapnel grinding against his spine. It was only when he and his men had staggered back to the military hospital, the task completed, that he passed out. For his unflinching courage he was awarded the Military Cross. 'His personality left as strong an impression on his seniors as it did upon those who served under him,' runs the report. Seconded to the parachute regiment, he later served in Cyprus during the EOKA terrorist campaign and in the Anglo-French intervention in Egypt following President Gamal Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal. In 1957 he was appointed Aide-de-Camp to the British GOC in Nigeria, where he served until leaving the Army in 1960. When he left the army to become a monk, a fellow-officer wrote in the Duke of Wellington's regimental mess-book, 'exchanged one red hat for another.' He took the monastic name Alberic, the name in religion of Charles de Foucauld, because, as he said, 'He was a bad soldier and became a good monk, while I was a good soldier and make a bad monk.'

It was not until he was a monk that he at last went up to Oxford to read history. His tutor, James Campbell, remarked that his essays were like a military campaign in which every gun must fire at least once. He gained First Class Honours, perhaps helped by the fact that, owing to a recent bicycle accident, he was temporarily unable to write, and dictated his papers striding up and down his room. He continued his academic career with distinction. He assembled a stellar group of historians and theologians, who wrote articles for him. As Editor in 1967-1980 of the *Ampleforth Journal* (and later founder the short-lived *Ampleforth Review*) he transformed it from a school magazine into a respectable scholarly publication - not entirely to the satisfaction of its intended readership. At the same time he edited a 1,000-page tome on York, *The Noble City of York* (1972). In the school he taught history and politics, but he left perhaps his greatest mark as leader of the Senior Debating Society, training a series of debating teams, which year after year either won or did well in the competitions for the Observer Mace.

After a dozen years of teaching at Ampleforth he returned to Oxford as Acting Master of St Benet's Hall, and later as Senior Tutor. No longer an active sportsman himself, he took a naïve delight in the quite unduly high proportion of Blues among his students. He also completed an important doctorate on the early work of the Anglican Roman Catholic

International Commission. His ecumenical work perhaps even triumphed over his passion for military history. For many years he presided genially over the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary as General Secretary, becoming known for inviting his many distinguished friends to 'a Mass and a glass' at St Benet's. Perhaps his most important original achievement was editing *The Vatican Council by Those who were There*, published in 1986 to mark the 25th Anniversary of the Council, and containing detailed accounts penned by a wide range of the most important participants still living.

He flourished mightily in academic society, but after another spell as Acting Master he obediently returned to Ampleforth in 1990, despite the obvious disappointment of again not being confirmed in the post of Master. At the age of 60 he took up the post of Parish Priest of the two neighbouring towns of Helmsley and Kirkbymoorside, bewildering many of his Yorkshire flock by the sophisticated scholarly, international and royalist tone of his weekly bulletin. He also became the scourge of newspaper editors for his painstaking and meticulous correction of the smallest errors in military obituaries. One lasting memorial is provided by his ubiquitous painstaking corrections of books on military and contemporary history in the monastic library. In his last couple of years he slid gently into a benign dementia, visited by a host of military and other friends, and retaining to the end his ready smile and his perfect courtesy. He fulfilled his final ambition of living till the London Olympics.