

# PRIOR TIMOTHY HORNER OSB

## 1920-2018

FR LAURENCE KRIEGSHAUSER OSB



**J**ohn Michael Stuart Horner was born on 24th August, 1920, in Quetta, India (later part of Pakistan). The only son of Bernard Stuart Horner and Isabel Margaret O'Brien, he was to be the last surviving male heir of "Little Jack Horner" who had helped Henry VIII in the dissolution of Glastonbury Abbey and in turn purchased the Manor of Mells in Somerset. Before the age of two, Michael was sent to England to live with his paternal grandmother and some aunts. His favourite Aunt Olivia married Sir Ernest Barker, and their son Nicholas and his wife Joanna, sister of Fr Jonathan, became frequent

visitors when Fr Timothy was in America.

From his aunts he developed a great love of reading. Through a recommendation of his uncle who had tutored two monks of Ampleforth, Paul Nevill and Sebastian Lambert, Michael was sent in 1933 to school at Ampleforth. A member of St Cuthbert's House he revered the Housemaster, Fr Sebastian, had a fondness for his Latin teacher, Fr Felix Hardy, and generally found the monks humane and exhibiting "spiritual commonsense." He became head of house, a school monitor, Under-Officer in the Officers' Training Corps, and captain of cricket, a sport he would always regard as superior to American baseball even while developing an interest in the latter.

In 1938 at the end of his time at Ampleforth, Michael was awarded an exhibition to his father's Oxford college, Christ Church, where he studied Mods for a year. At the outbreak of World War II he enlisted in the army but was not called up immediately and so was able to complete a second year at Oxford. He entered army service in October 1940, and began training in England as an artillery officer. In 1943 he was sent to Burma, where he learned jungle fighting and rose to the rank of Major. At the end of the War he was awarded an MBE, an honour of which he never spoke.

On returning to England he knew that he wanted to do something with his life which would be continually fulfilling and meaningful. He was accepted in the novitiate at Ampleforth in September 1946 and given the name Timothy. As a junior monk at Ampleforth he began theological studies and taught classics in the school. In school year 1949-1950 he completed his degree in Greats at Oxford, making solemn

profession as a monk in 1950. He began the study of theology at Blackfriars but, needed in the school, he was called back to Ampleforth after one year and finished his theological studies in the monastery. Ordained in 1953 he continued teaching classics, coached three sports, worked in the monastic library, and served as pastor of Oswaldkirk. When in 1955 the Conventual Chapter of Ampleforth decided to make a foundation of a monastery and school in St Louis, Missouri, Abbot Herbert Byrne asked Fr Timothy if he would like to join the new foundation as Headmaster of the school, to which Fr Timothy replied, “No.” Asked whether he would go if sent, he replied, “Of course,” whereupon he was sent.

The St Louis community was founded at the request of local Catholic men who wished to create a school, which would prepare their sons for the best universities of the country, in particular those of the Ivy League. Fr Timothy arrived in St Louis on 19th October 1955, with the founding Prior, Fr Columba Cary-Elwes, and the procurator, Fr Luke Rigby. A property of 150 acres had been acquired by the St Louis lay group and the school was opened in the fall of 1956 in houses and barns and other outbuildings on the property, located in a farming area west of the city. In the first years of the foundation Fr Timothy made several trips to colleges and universities throughout the country to acquaint them with the new school and to learn what they were looking for in candidates for their schools.

The new community was small and the personalities of the Prior and the headmaster were strong and diverse. As Abbot Basil Hume observed after a visit to the community in the 1960s, the community “made great demands on charity.” But the monastic community worked harmoniously with the lay supporters and lay faculty, all three groups complementing each other in the work of creating an excellent monastery and school. Friends were also made among the local Jesuit community and diocesan priests. By the time of Fr Timothy’s retirement as headmaster in 1975, the school had erected a science building, a gym, a monastery, junior school and high school buildings, and had established a firm reputation as a premier Catholic college-preparatory school.

In 1973 under Prior Luke Rigby, the St Louis Priory requested independence from the Ampleforth community, the normal status of a growing monastery. The English monks were asked whether they wished to return to Ampleforth or transfer stability to the new community. Fr Timothy’s letter to the Abbot was brief and revealing: he wrote that he was leaving the Ampleforth community “with great sorrow” but that his request for transfer was made “entirely freely.”

After retiring from the headmastership, Fr Timothy collaborated with a team of monks who were preparing a new translation of the Rule of St. Benedict to commemorate the sesquimillennial of St. Benedict’s birth in 1980. Fr Timothy

headed the committee producing the translation, and the result was a volume that has become a standard version of the Rule in English-speaking countries. At the same time Fr Timothy began writing his account of the first decades of the Priory and School, a volume later published as *In Good Soil*. At about this time, the General Chapter of the Congregation named him Titular Prior of Ely in recognition of his work as monastery founder and founder of the Priory School.

A diocesan parish had been established in the region around the monastery in 1967, and the monks were happy for the parish to use their church as the parish church. In 1981 the position of pastor became vacant and the Archbishop of St Louis asked Prior Luke if a monk would be available to occupy the position. Fr Luke immediately suggested Fr Timothy, whereupon Fr Timothy entered into a new phase of his monastic life. As pastor of St Anselm parish at the Abbey, he won the hearts of parishioners with his ready wit and compassion for the sick and dying. He eventually published a book of “Homilettes,” two-line homilies delivered at weekday Masses. (“Little children know they cannot go it alone. We so easily think we can. The children are right.”) At his retirement from the pastorate in 1995 four volumes of notes of gratitude from parishioners were presented to him.

Toward the end of his headmastership Fr Timothy developed a taste for travel. On a sabbatical in summer of 1971 he drove with friends across Europe into Iraq and Iran to visit the cultural sites of antiquity. A workshop took him to Japan in 1976, and from that year into the 2000s he conducted foreign tours every other year. Timothy Tours visited Israel, Greece, Italy, England, Scotland, France, Spain, Central Europe, Egypt, Thailand, Cambodia, Chile, Argentina, and the California Missions and wineries. But “the tour to end all tours” was the journey along the “Old Silk Road” from Beijing to Moscow in 2000. Fr. Timothy always photographed the major cultural sites and would present slide shows to the St Louis community. His other hobby during this period was woodworking, and he produced a number of chalices and bowls for use by the community and as gifts for friends. He also became an expert oenophile.

His final years were spent in the monastery, writing his memoirs, published as *Learning All the Time*, along with a short book about his wartime experiences, *There’s a Bulldog on My Gas Tank*. He retained contact with many friends and welcomed all those who found in him a ready ear and wise counsel. He was a good story-teller, often asking, “Have I ever told you...?” The phrase showed his joy in telling a story, his desire to be close to the person addressed, and his shyness at possibly repeating himself. To the monks who visited him he often spoke of how the image of Christ crowned with thorns hanging next to his door would evoke from him the simple prayer, “I love you, Jesus.” He died suddenly in the monastery on 27th April 2018, at the age of 97, and was buried in the monastery cemetery.

Mourners from all periods of his time in St Louis filled the Abbey Church. Tall of stature with a flaming shock of red hair and a caustic wit, Fr Timothy was not one to suffer fools gladly, but over the years his brethren were aware of a gradual mellowing, the work of divine grace and his cooperation. He was a man utterly committed to the truth. The St Louis community was blessed to have its great founding headmaster among them for over 60 years. His legacy will not die.