



JBMS NEWSLETTER

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SUMMER 2017

The First International John Bradburne Conference

The first international conference on the life, poetry, and thought of John Bradburne, was held in the Great Hall of the Università per Stranieri di Perugia on 30 March 2017. It was a truly international occasion, with speakers from Italy, France, Spain, South Africa, and the UK, and an attendance that included academics from several university departments, as well as representatives of the Catholic Church in Italy. Many university students were also present, testifying to the way the story of John Bradburne holds an appeal for young people. A photographic exhibition in the corridor outside the Great Hall presented a pictorial history of his life, 'From the Lake District to Zimbabwe', and various books about his life and work were on display. The idea for such an event arose in 2015, during an academic visit to Perugia by Professor David Crystal, at the invitation of Rosanna Masiola, Professor of English and Translation at the university. The motivation was to make John Bradburne's writing available to a wider audience in Italy and elsewhere

through the medium of translation; and, as this had not previously been attempted, it was felt that a first step would be to explore the issues involved through an academic conference. Perugia seemed to be the obvious location, for it is close to Assisi, a region through which John Bradburne walked on one of his several journeys around Italy, and which he often refers to in his writing. He knew Perugia well. The primary aim of the conference was to acknowledge the way his poetry and thought has attracted increasing interest around the world, and to provide the first opportunity for translators of the poems to present their work and to discuss the issues that arise in handling such a challenging oeuvre. In the afternoon session, called (after the title of one of the poems) 'A Ring-a-ring of Rosary', participants heard one poem, 'Saint Francis', read in several European and African languages, Italian (Prof. Rosanna Masiola), French (Prof. Didier Rance), Spanish (Prof. Dianella Gambini), Amharic (Prof. Renato Tomei), and Xhosa and Afrikaans (Prof. Rajendra Chetty). The event, chaired by Prof. Enrico Terrinoni, resulted in an illuminating discussion of the way each of the translators had gone about the task they had set themselves.

Although the main focus of the conference was on the poetry as literature, each speaker adopted a broader perspective, placing the poems in the context of John Bradburne's life and the turbulent times he encountered in mid-20th-century Rhodesia, where most of his writing took place. The main contributions



in the morning reflected the title of the conference: 'John Bradburne: Poet, Mystic, and Martyr'. David Crystal, author of the forthcoming (2017) *A Life Made of Words: the Poetry and Thought of John Bradburne*, gave an account of the evolution of the poetry and its main features and themes, and drew attention to Bradburne's status as 'the most prolific poet in the English language'. Didier Rance, author of a biography of Bradburne, *Le vagabond de Dieu*, whose English translation appears in September 2017, reflected on the nature of the mysticism that permeated Bradburne's life, and how it was manifested in his writing on creation, and especially in the way bees played such an important role in his life and thought. Prof. Marco Impagliazzo placed Bradburne within the context of Christian martyrdom, drawing attention to the way his death can be seen as a significant moment in the 'ecumenism of blood' experienced in Africa during the 20th century, which he described as the most violent of all centuries. Prof. Daniele Piccini added a further perspective by exploring the nature of Franciscan poetics in the writing of Jacopone da Todi and John Bradburne.

An additional dimension was provided by two personal encounters. As part of his talk, David Crystal explained how he had come to be involved in editing the online database of poetry - the result of a chance meeting with a friend from his home town, who had met John Bradburne while travelling in Africa, and been cared for by him after falling ill with malaria. That friend, Kevin Jones, universally known as Casey (from his initials K C Jones), had received a verse letter from John, which he showed to David, sparking his interest. Kevin was present at the conference, and told his story, which was greatly appreciated by the audience, as he was the only person in the room who had actually met the subject of the conference.

A second personal perspective took the form of a welcoming letter from Celia Brigstocke, John Bradburne's niece, who looks after the John Bradburne Memorial Society. She was unable to attend the conference, so the letter was read on her behalf by Hilary Crystal. It gave a brief history of the Society and its current work in Mutemwa, along with childhood reminiscences, reference to some of the reported cures that have taken place since his death, and her hopes for progress in his Cause for beatification.

Although the Cause was not part of the remit of the conference, a groundswell of opinion emerged that this event could play its part in developing a climate which would help promote that progress. The outcome was the 'Perugia Statement', which was signed by many of the participants. This reads as follows:

The first International Conference on the life, poetry, and thought of John Bradburne, poet, mystic, martyr, and father to the lepers, was held at the Università per Stranieri di Perugia on 30 March 2017. As speakers and attendees at this conference, we firmly believe that the cause for his canonization should proceed at the earliest opportunity, especially in the light of his roles as a model for young people, the poor and marginalised, and the care of those with devastating diseases, and we ask for your help and prayers in taking this movement forward.

Further support was affirmed in a statement read out by Amilcare Conti, secretary of the Archdiocese of Perugia, on behalf of the Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti, Archbishop of Perugia and Città della Pieve. Prof Impagliazzo is also President of the Community of Saint'Egidio, founded in Rome in 1968 by Andrea Riccardi - a community of lay people spread throughout the world, dedicated to evangelisation, charity, and peace. Its main reference point is Franciscanism, which was also the lodestar of John Bradburne, a Third Order Franciscan, and whose desire to be buried in the Franciscan habit led to the first of the many special events that followed his death. It therefore seemed to many of those present that this conference would be remembered as having a double role: it would provide a foundation for further exploration of the literary, theological, and humanitarian legacies of John Bradburne; and it would act as a stimulus for his eventual recognition as a saint of the 20th century. The proceedings of the conference will be published in due course, edited by Renato Tomei, and a DVD of the morning's events will also be made available. In the meantime, anyone who wishes to add their name in support of his Cause may do so using the Beatification button on the JBMS website: www.johnbradburne.com.

For the full report by Professor Crystal please contact JBMS.

HEALING CEREMONY IN MEMORY OF THE DEATH OF JOHN BRADBURNE 18 February 2017

The sky was grey with rain clouds when we left Harare at 7:00am for Mutoko. A big bus, a kombi and my small car travelled together, hoping that the rain would not catch us out on the way. After numerous police roadblocks, we arrived at the turnoff to Mutemwa where we waited for a blessing before we turned in the opposite direction under the guidance of Fr. Patience Tigere OFM, the Franciscan parish priest of Mutemwa. He had organized a liturgy at the cave where John Bradburne was taken for trial before he was killed in September 1979.

All traces of rain had disappeared as we reached the turnoff to a narrow dirt road, leading to the Gwaze cave. The sun shone brightly as about 90 people gathered in the mango orchard below the historic cave to wait for others to arrive. The women led us in joyful song for almost an hour when we learned that the bus carrying about 80 people had become stranded on the narrow dirt road that led to where we waited. They walked most of the way from the bus, joining us at about 11:00am. Fr. Joseph Dandiro from Sacred Heart Cathedral in Harare led the procession up a winding path to a fissure in the huge boulders that formed part of a mountain. The gap between the boulders formed a kind of cave that we entered, singing and praying as we went. Fr. Dandiro and others



climbed to the top of the rocks at one end of the cave where an altar had been set up.

The ceremony started with the testimony of a local woman and a headman in the area who had seen John being taken away and who had pleaded with his captors to release him unharmed. These witnesses spoke simply and eloquently of their shock when John was killed as they had believed that their pleas for his safety had been heard and would be heeded. "We told them that he was a good man," they said repeatedly. "He should not be killed."

Apparently his captors were not moved by this intervention and John was later shot as he refused to leave the people at Mutemwa and intended to return and walk back to Mutemwa. His body was found later in a culvert on the Nyampananda road. After the testimony which had been given, Fr. Dandiro led the Mass and Fr. Patience preached the homily. At the end of the service, the congregation was invited to give more testimonies. Several people who had received healing after praying to John told their story. Fr. Patience then blessed everyone



there and we processed down the mountain to a nearby house where a cooked lunch awaited us. As someone who only met John once in 1977, I found it a very moving and profound experience. I could picture the scene with John kneeling and praying while his captors tormented him with false accusations. It was reminiscent of the trial of Jesus before the High Priest and before Pilate, where others accused Jesus of blasphemy while Jesus remained silent while they mocked and tortured him. I could imagine that John would have forgiven the youth who were about to take his life and that he rejoiced to follow in the footsteps of Jesus to his violent death. I felt a deep spirit of joy and forgiveness as we sang and prayed together.

On the way back to Harare, each of the passengers who travelled in my vehicle shared stories of how they turn to John in prayer when they are faced with problems. I shared a story of two women I know who had been married for many years but had not become pregnant though they desired to have children. Fr. John Dove, SJ took them to Mutemwa to pray to John. Now both women have two healthy children, a boy and a girl each. I am very grateful that I made the journey and now feel much closer to John and to all the people from various walks of life who are devoted to him and who turn to him in prayer when they need help.

Sister Janice McLaughlin, MM

John Bradburne, a Christian mystic ?

The term “mystic” has been often used by those who have met or discovered John Bradburne. Is this right? What is mysticism? What is to be a mystic? These terms have so many meanings. In Christian mysticism, it is God who takes the initiative to communicate with man.

John’s itinerary of life with God started in 1942. After the British army was crushed by the Japanese in Malaya. John, then a 20-year-old second lieutenant, fled to the Malay jungle for a month with Captain Hart, but was struck by cerebral malaria, which is usually fatal if not treated in time.

One evening, as he dragged himself under the trees,

‘Above the rubber-forest shone a star,
The brightest Westward, beckoning afar;
It seemed to me a sign from Christ the King,
Who out of chaos joy and peace doth bring.’

This quickly led him to a second discovery: “I felt for the first time that there is something beyond us – if only we could get in touch with it”, and that he himself felt he possessed as it were, a sixth sense to perceive this “something beyond us” (he rarely mentioned this). After arriving in Sumatra, he was between life and death for three days, and he had a vision of a “Lady” (he spoke only twice about it). On the fourth day he came out of the delirium, and became aware of what would change his life :

O blest delirium that told
Me clearly that to find The God
Was all I really wanted! odd.
But thus He called me to His Fold.

At once he began his spiritual quest which would lead him into the Catholic Church, then tried several times to enter religious life or to be an hermit in most incongruous places (on top of a mountain, in an organ loft of an Italian



Agnès Glichitch, www.peintre-icomes.fr.

Church, under a reservoir, in a henhouse or in a cell full of bees in Africa). It was only with the lepers of Mutemwa that he found his vocation: serving them by day, and being a hermit-poet with God and Our Lady at night (and sleep? Don't ask!).

Since the start, John had understood that the initiative of the encounter he desired was for God alone:

We are all misguided children,
We are all lost children until we find our
heavenly Father, or, more truly, until we
allow
ourselves to be found by Him (1949).

25 years later, he was still on the trail :

It seems to me a sempiternal trend
For blending with The One is none the
worse
Even for endless aeons unbegun,
To wit: God - Holy Spirit, Father, Son
(1974).

And he was, as he wrote, "piped by God", as a tune is piped by a flautist.

A trinitarian mystique

John's story of love with God had many dimensions. His relations with nature, with the animal realm, especially birds and bees, with poetry and with music, these were important parts of encounter. We could also distinguish what was deeply original in him and what is coloured by Franciscan and by Carthusian mystical spiritualities, and by the book the Cloud of Unknowing. And, above all, his mystical wedding with Our Lady and the passionate and chaste relation he had with her was definitely part of his mystic way. But, as he wrote in 1976 to his mother, "To come first to what matters most: The Blessed Trinity... this is the most important message of the purpose and purport of my life".

It was during one of the darkest periods in his life that his trinitarian meditation and life literally exploded, in 1973, when he was removed from his position as Mutemwa Warden and had to leave the settlement to climb the mountain Chigona and stay there in a tent. The innovative analogy (even if not totally unprecedented) of Father/Thought, Son/Word, Spirit/Voice he developed had the fragrance of personal experience. John, quite indifferent to

what he wrote, took it very seriously, wanted it to be known, and seemed to say discreetly that this mission was entrusted to him from above:

The thought, The Word, The Voice are
Persons Three
Of Love in Love with Love for
evermore,
I am assured that it is up to me
To write this down as clown and
troubadour (1974).

A mystique of participation in the Paschal Mystery of Christ

The touchstone of Christian mysticism is, of course, Christ himself, and mystical experience is an eminent form of the grace of baptism, participating in His salvific mission and his paschal mystery. John saw his personal relation with Christ and life in him as one of a minstrel, troubadour, juggler, jester, idiot, fool, buffoon and herald, as in the Franciscan and Fools-for-Christ tradition. Moreover, it was in the lepers that John met Christ most eminently and mystically, of whom he wrote in a premonitory way, a fortnight before hearing for the first time about the lepers settlement at Mutemwa: "Thou leprous God! Thou outcast stricken thing!" (Man Friday, 1968). And John was so assimilated to his companionship with Christ servant, serving Christ, served in the least of his brothers, that he invented a verb to describe that: "Jesus who brothers us in everything" (1974). Does this mean that this life with the lepers was easy for John? No: "He was just as unwilling as the rest of us. It is not a nice disease and yet John totally gave himself to these people. I stayed at the side of a bath where he was washing an old man. I don't think you would like that sort of thing, but it has to be done, and John had to do it (Fr John Gough); "Death is never a pleasant sight, but the death of a dirty, smelly, deformed creature is repellent. That is when John's saintliness was really apparent" (Mona Smith).

This participation to Christ's Passion through the poor lepers of Mutemwa was crowned by John's own Passion and death for them. The Christ-like figure dimension of his last days cannot be missed by those who learn about it: agony, arrest by treason, mockery, John's silence, trial, role of Pilate played by the commanding judge, crowd that claims

death, execution in a garden “outside the city – it’s impressive. And what happened after his death seems to show that if John participated in Christ’s Passion, he is working with him beyond death.

So, was John a Christian mystic? I asked Fr Dove the question in Zimbabwe in 2010, his closest friend and alter ego when they were together. His answer: “We could say that John was a mystic but it came quite naturally in his religious life, in his case. Yes, he was a mystic, but it was so natural, so lovely for him. I would say he was a mystic, a man who readily talked about God, and had an easy conversation with Him”.

As every charism, St Paul tells us, is for the good of the whole body of Christ, the Church, John’s mystical charism is also a gift for each one of us, and Jean Vanier is a good witness of this when he writes: “The story of John’s life has touched me heart and soul, and brought me closer to God. It has revealed to me a God wonderfully full of surprises, better, more intelligent, more creative than we could ever imagine.

An extraordinary God who cannot be confined in rational concepts or in an “ordinary” religious life.”

Didier Rance

Mutemwa 2017



Residents houses in Mutemwa

Mutemwa continues to do reasonably well. With the support of donors, the self-sufficiency projects go forward and bring in income to put back into the Centre, establishing a constant source of work and produce to sustain the people living and working in the Community.

There has been the development of another pig unit, and a bee-keeping project to provide honey. Crops are planted and with the help of irrigation, these are better nourished.

To go forward this year there is work due to commence to update and maintain work on the solar power which provides lighting in the homes and work areas. Like all projects there is a constant need for maintenance in certain areas and these cannot be neglected, the fabric of the buildings has suffered over the months, due to the strain of elemental conditions, particularly as a result of the very wet rainy season, and then the very dry hot months.

The Franciscans are most grateful for the monthly contribution that JBMS gives in order to support maintenance of the Centre.

We are always so grateful for the support of our members in various ways to help JBMS grow as a charity in order to help the residents at Mutemwa.



John’s huts stand just outside the entrance to Mutemwa leprosy settlement. From left to right they are: the guest hut, the sleeping hut, from which he was abducted, and, in tin, the living hut. They are places of prayer



Inside the chapel at Mutemwa

Fundraiser - Canoeing for John and Mutemwa



John Bradburne was my uncle and brother to my mother, Audrey. I feel a close connection with him and what he stood for. I also feel that I have the same fearless and adventurous spirit running in my veins and I want to do something in his memory for those he loved, helped, looked after and befriended at Mutemwa Leper Settlement in Zimbabwe. His appreciation of life and the natural world in all its beauty poured out of him through his poetry. Love and connectedness was his prayer. I feel that too.

At the beginning of July, I shall be embarking on a solo paddle trip from the navigable source of the River Thames, dropping in at Cricklade. I will be taking my time to enjoy the 134 miles paddling down to the Teddington tidal lock in London on this beautiful and welcoming river. I made the same journey in my canoe in the summer of 2015. Along the way, I was asked repeatedly whether I was doing this trip for charity. I replied that I was doing it for myself but it seeded the thought to do it again in the future for a cause close to my heart. And so, with encouragement from my family and friends, here I am.

There is something very special about paddling solo down a river, going along with the flow of

the water. I fear nothing and enjoy it all, living in each moment as it comes. I go to sleep as the birds settle for the night and wake up with the early dawn. It is a perfect natural rhythm to slip into.

There is also so much to see, to feel, hear and absorb from the stunning scenery that changes along the banks; from the little red tree roots in the river to surprising a trout as I silently glide over and above it as it dashes away with a startled splash. I hear wild beehives in the trees before I see them, like the poplar trees rustling in the wind. The buzzards and red kites soar above me along with the swallows and swifts who feed on the wing. Herons wait patiently for unsuspecting fish. The sounds and chatter of the river birds are great company from dawn until dusk; they will be my companions as I head down-river on my winding journey going east.

I have a 13ft open Canadian canoe and will take a small pop-up tent, food, water and basic supplies for the trip. I shall camp on little islands and riverbanks along the way, being mindful, respectful and leaving no trace behind.

I would be most grateful if you would like to sponsor me on this trip down the Thames in honour of John Bradburne and in support of his friends at the Mutemwa Leper Settlement in Zimbabwe through the John Bradburne Memorial Society.

Come with me John, let us go on this adventure together and hold Mutemwa in prayer.

Teresa Yonge

*Donations may be made by cheque to JBMS
PO Box 32, Leominster HR6 0YB or via PayPal
on the website www.johnbradburne.com*



SAVE THE DATE

September 30th 2017 Book launch at Westminster Cathedral Hall 2.30 pm

We celebrate the publication of two new books this September, so please keep this date in your diary. We will start the afternoon with talks at 2.30 and follow with refreshments.

Didier Rance's 'John Bradburne: Vagabond of God' is published as a translation from his French book published in 2013 which won the prestigious award, the Grand Prix Catholique de Littérature that year.

Didier will speak to us about this biography, the fullest account to date of a remarkable life, and will recall some of the adventures he had in his three-year research, journeying to the places where John Bradburne lived, worked and travelled. It is a most exciting read.

Professor David Crystal's new book called 'A Life Made of Words: The Poetry and Thought of John Bradburne' is the first detailed exploration of his many poems, mostly written during his time at Mutemwa. His talk will illustrate some of its most important features, discuss some of its theological insights, and talk about the hopes the author had that one day his writing would be recognized and enjoyed.

The maximum capacity in the Hall is for 300 people, so for those wishing to attend, entry is by ticket only.

Please apply by contacting JBMS so that we can issue a numbered ticket. The cost of entry is £10 per person which includes tea and refreshments.

If you book and cannot attend, please let us know so that someone else can come in your place. Closing date will be August 31st.

John Bradburne writes in a letter to his mother on February 3rd 1957, of Westminster Cathedral -

'How I love that place with its scribes and Pharisees (not hypocrites however) and cranks and wise men, and holy women and scrupulous crackpots, and publicans and sinners and Saints. You will not find such thoroughgoing motley in your quiet see of Canterbury, one part of the Stormy Sea of Peter, over which the Lord loves to breathe a great calm whenever the issue seems hopeless.



Please sign the Petition for support for the Beatification of John Bradburne

Please go to the JBMS website on www.johnbradburne.com to sign the form online.

Please note that all contact details are kept completely confidential.

We need as much support as possible for this petition. For those who do not have email, or for anyone who may prefer a hard copy of the form to sign, this can be sent on request.

Thank you in advance for your support