

THE BELOVED DISCIPLE

The Story of St. John's Church Essington

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From PATRICK CORMACK, F.S.A., M.P.



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I have particular affection for St. John's Essington because it was one of the very first churches which I attended as Member of Parliament in the old Cannock constituency, shortly after my first election to Parliament in 1970. Although that constituency vanished in the boundary changes of 1974, Essington has remained in 'my patch' ever since, and that first affection has developed with the years. I have made many happy visits to the Church and have attended the Inductions of all three Vicars installed since 1970, as well as Andrew Paine's and Timothy Fox's Farewell Services.

One of my greatest joys is visiting historic churches, as I always think that in them we come closer than anywhere else to the lives and spirit of our people through the centuries. No one could put Essington church in the same historic or architectural category as Brewood or Penkridge, or the many other ancient churches in South Staffordshire, but it has a quiet dignity and that most intangible of things, a wonderful warm atmosphere. Sixty years is not a long time in the span of human history but it has been long enough to hallow these walls and to make one instantly feel not only welcome but that one is in a Holy Place, made so by the prayers and dedication of those who have made St. John's what every village church ought to be - the centre and the heart of the community it serves.

I have been fascinated as I have read through its history. Not only has it told me things I did not know about Essington, and about the church, but it has reminded me, as I am sure it will remind many readers, of just how important it is to write things down. What a fascinating chapter of local history would have been lost had it not been for Ralph Tomkinson's researches, and what a period this has been too. From the years before the Second World War to the end of the Cold War, we are able to trace the history of one Staffordshire church community, of a building that has come to mean so much to them, and of the part it has played in their lives, in times of sorrow and in times of joy.

As I read through these pages I felt gratitude for the book itself and a sense of regret. If only there were such detailed histories available of all the churches in the constituency, how much richer and fuller would be our picture of the lives of those who have gone before us and helped to mould the places where we live, and the buildings we love.

With my very warm congratulations on your Diamond Jubilee, and my best wishes for the years ahead.