

Vicar who worked in Palestine

AFTER six years as chaplain of St. Luke's, Haifa, in Palestine, where his chief job was to look after all the English speaking Christians in this busy port Rev. John Ryecart is now enjoying a quieter life as vicar of the parishes of Great Sampford and Hempstead.

"When we went there were two or three hundred Armenian refugees in the big compound there belonging to St. Luke's and one of my jobs was to look after the compound as well as all the English-speaking Christians in Haifa.

Mixed bunch

"It was a very mixed bunch of people—English, Americans and Christian Jews. Many of the Christian Jews were Christians in secret because had their fellow countrymen known they were Christians they would have been ostracised.

"There are about 100 different nationalities of Jews in Israel and there is also the large Arab population. Haifa was a very exciting centre to be in with a population of about 150,000.

"I also looked after our church in Nazareth which was 25 miles away when the chaplain there left, also Tiberius

Personality Parade

years old was brought up by his father, who was a priest and a devoted nurse.

"I spent seven and a half years of my childhood recumbent because I had TB. But I managed to survive after I had several operations. It cleared up when I was about 13 although they had never expected me to live.

"When I was 14 I went to St. John's School, Leatherhead. I had not had much schooling because of my illness but I had had some lessons."

After leaving St. John's Mr Ryecart took his metriculation then did some teaching and some journalism. He spent three years working in the head office of the Westminster Bank and then decided to offer himself for ordination.

Year at Oxford

"I went to London University when I was 24 to do a theology degree where I remained for for three years, then I did a year at Oxford. As I was so much a southerner I thought it good to find out what was going on in the big world beyond.

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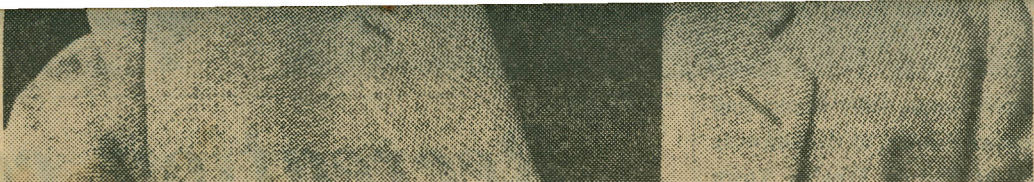
North Africa

"After three years I was posted overseas and spent a few months in North Africa, then went to Italy. Two days after Rome had fallen I was posted there to open up a leadership school, and I became R.A.F. Rome Chaplain.

"Four chaplains were selected to start up this school and we requisitioned one of the biggest hotels in the city. We then held courses which lasted nearly two weeks with personnel sent in from all over the area and of all different ranks. Candidates were selected purely on the leadership potential.

"The purpose of the school was to re-train people, who had been in the war for many years, to be civilians again — I suppose it was a sort of rehabilitation centre. We had 60 men on a course at a time. There was a lot of work to do, but it was immensely exhilarating looking back. It seems that few of our post-war problems were not anticipated.

"One of the things we did was to take each course to the Vatican for an audience with the Pope. I had 66 audiences with the Pope altogether — I



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"I also looked after our church in Nazareth which was 25 miles away when the chaplain there left, also Tiberias and sometimes Jerusalem. I used to take pilgrimages from Israel into Jordan about twice a year and we spent five or six days visiting the holy places in Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

"We were out there during the Suez crisis and we were uncomfortable on various occasions but it was an exciting life. Israel is a dynamic and alive place possibly because of the fear of what is going to happen tomorrow or even today."

Mr. Ryecart, with his wife and their two sons, remained in Haifa from 1953 until 1959 when they decided to return to England.

"It was really a great wrench when we moved but I think our main reason for returning to England was because of the education of our two boys. It would have been very unfair on them, they were aged eight and ten then, to bring them up in Israel so we brought them back to this country to prep school. But it did break our hearts to leave Haifa."

Mr. Ryecart was born in London and after the death of his mother when he was only six

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years old was brought up by his father, who was a priest and a devoted nurse.

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Year at Oxford

"I went to London University when I was 24 to do a theology degree where I remained for three years, then I did a year at Oxford. As I was so much a southerner I thought it good to find out what was going on in the big world beyond. So I was ordained in Southwell Minster and went to work in the industrial parish of St. Leonard, Newark. That was a very 'down town' parish, about three-quarters of the people were on the dole because that was in the depression of the early 30s.

"During the general strike when I was in London I drove a tram. Every willing person was called out to do a job so I volunteered and they gave me a tram to drive. We were attacked several times and had bricks thrown through the bus windows."

When Mr. Ryecart left Newark he moved to the church of St. John the Baptist, Sevenoaks, where he was also a hospital chaplain. He remained in Sevenoaks until the middle of 1940 when he joined the R.A.F. He had volunteered at the beginning of the war but it was nine months before he was called up.

He spent three years in Bomber Command in this country mostly in Yorkshire. "At one of my stations the very young C.O. was Group Captain Leonard Cheshire, and on appoint-

ment he quickly raised the very low morale of our station due to heavy losses. He was a great person to work with and it was a privilege to know him."

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"One of the things we did was to take each course to the Vatican for an audience with the Pope. I had 66 audiences with the Pope altogether — I should think more than any other Anglican priest has ever had.

"Rome was certainly one of the most exhilarating and demanding times of my life. I left there in 1946, after nearly 4,000 men had passed through the school. Many of the men are still in touch with me."

When he returned to this country Mr. Ryecart was rector of two parishes in Warwickshire where he was also both an Army and R.A.F. Chaplain. On his return from Haifa he became Vicar of Hempstead and Great Sampford, where he has been for the past ten years.