

## obituary

*The Revd Hugh Valentine writes:*

NO OTHER priest has impressed me so much by coherence of belief and action as the Revd John Goring Rowe, who died on 27 December, aged 94. John was born in the former colony of British Guiana, where his father, the Ven. Lewis John Rowe, was Arch-deacon of Demerara. His experience there of inter-racial education established in him an early awareness of discrimination, and helped him to foster "anti-colonial sentiments but also . . . socialist ideas".

He served in the Guiana Police (1942-45), then studied philosophy and English at McGill University, Canada (1945-48), and theology at the Montreal Diocesan Theological College (1948-51). During this period, he became involved with the Student Christian Movement and the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth, heavily influenced by the teachings of Fr Hastings Smyth.

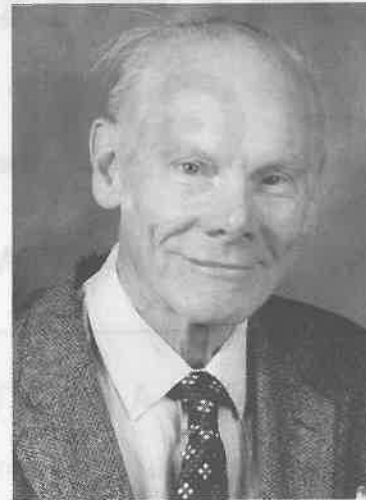
He was ordained deacon in Montreal in 1951; came to England on a student exchange with his wife, Isabel; and completed a further degree in philosophy at Cambridge (1951-53). He served his title at Trumpington, before being priested

# The Revd John Rowe

in Ely Cathedral in 1952. He took up the post of assistant curate at St Luke's, Burdett Road (later to become St Paul's, Bow Common), in London, between 1953 and 1956.

During this time he began to experience a growing sense of contradiction between the status of parish clergy and the people of the parish. Having heard reports of the worker-priests in France, he made the decision to follow their example, and resigned his post to work at Truman's Brewery in Spitalfields, where he trained as an electrician, and remained for 30 years. He remained an Hon. Assistant Curate at St Paul's from 1956 to 1984.

John's primary motivation in such a radical and costly move was not to win converts among the workers — "I wish simply to share in their way of life as much as I can, for they are no less God's people than those who go to church" — but to challenge what he perceived to be the self-



The Revd John Rowe, an electrician and priest in London diocese for 30 years

satisfied structure of the church itself.

In all this, he had the active support of Isabel, a professional nurse

and herself the daughter of a missionary bishop. In 1965, John wrote *Priests and Workers: A rejoinder*, which set out the case for worker-priests within the Church, and which was the subject of a *Church Times* feature. The couple's wish to live rather than simply recite or reference the gospel led to the establishment of the Pigott Street Community in Limehouse (1956-64).

In 1984, he gave up his licence, but not his priesthood, explaining in detail his reasons in a letter to the Bishop of Stepney. Over the years, he came to see the limitations of the Church in its organisational forms, which, he felt, compromised the call-

ing, for both clergy and laity, to follow the Jesus of the Gospels.

In a 2010 essay, he concluded: "So, knowing myself, I am not likely to abandon altogether either the Church or my favourite causes. However, I am on the lookout for some better way of affirming the Good News than 'by word and sacrament', or by public demonstration — some authentic and unromantic way of joining those who, being society's rejects, are, unknown to themselves, the passport-holders of the Kingdom of God."

John is survived by Isabel and their children, Marguerite, Jack, Annette, Paul, Kate, and Jim.

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## deaths

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**COLBY.** — On 28 February, the Revd David Allan Colby: Team Vicar in the Ewyas Harold with Dulas, Kenderchurch, Abbeydore, Bacton, Kentchurch, Llangua, Rowlestone, Llancillo, Walterstone, Kilpeck, St Devereux and Wormbridge Team Ministry (1983-91); Vicar of Westbury-On-Severn with Flaxley and Blaisdon (1991-99); aged 85.