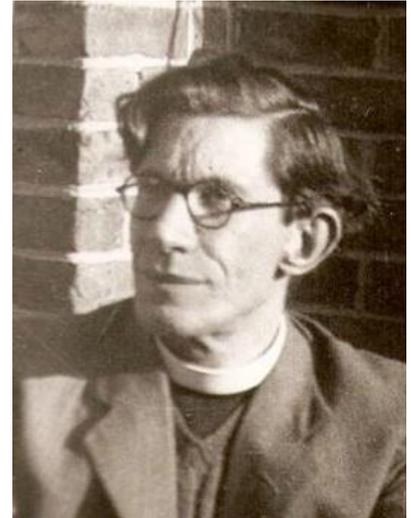


Obituary of Frank Coventry

Prebendary Frank Coventry, Rector of St Marylebone, 1958-78, died on November 12 aged 81. He was born on April 2, 1913.

Frank Coventry was a scholar-parson whose long and distinguished ministry in London was fired by a firm Christian faith clothed in gracious English manners. In one sense, he represented an old-fashioned strand in the Church of England – and especially in the diocese of London – having no interest in ecclesiastical partisanship and being identified with no wing within the Anglican Church.



Born in South London, Frank Coventry was the youngest of the three children of James and Florence Coventry. His parents were Methodists and, though while up at Cambridge the young Coventry joined the Church of England – largely through the influence of C.S. Lewis and the appeal of the music and architecture of the Anglican tradition – he retained throughout his life a fondness and affection for his Free Church roots.

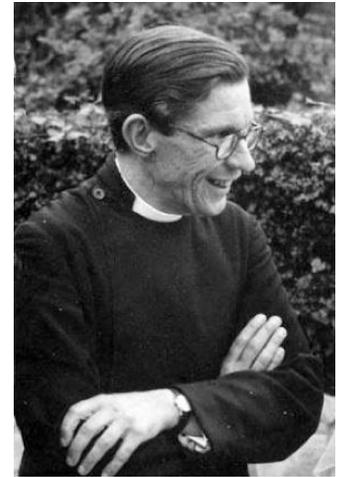
Educated at the Strand School, Brixton, he read English at King's College, London, taking a first. Towards the end of his time there septicaemia left him gravely ill and he was not expected to live. Although he pulled through, much to the surprise of his doctors, his life was lived never far from the shadow it cast. At Emmanuel College, Cambridge, he pursued his study of sentiment and sensibility in 18th-century English literature, gaining a PhD for his thesis on the work of Richardson, Fielding and Johnson. It was there he met his wife Ursula, studying social science at the London School of Economics evacuated to Cambridge during the war. They were married in 1948.

Coventry taught English at Raynes Park Grammar School, numbering among his pupils the broadcaster Robert Robinson. The lack of spiritual values among the boys encouraged him to offer himself for ordination. Two years at Lincoln Theological College, under the direction of Eric Abbott, later Dean of Westminster, led to his ordination in 1946 and a curacy at All Saints, Dulwich.

Rejoining Abbott as chaplain and tutor at King's College, London, in 1948 he spent five years there before being appointed vicar of St Mary Magdalene, Enfield in 1953. Coventry was heart and soul a parish priest and thrived on the round of parish

activities. Following the sudden death in 1958 of the Rev J.B.H. Evans, the relatively youthful Rector of St Marylebone, Coventry was appointed by the Crown to the living which was to become his greatest work.

St Marylebone was an extremely busy parish to which he applied a pastoral heart, informed by his own physical frailty, and an effective preaching ministry to which he brought clarity and scholarship. Apart from one year spent on exchange with an Episcopalian clergyman in Charleston, South Carolina – where his impeccable English manner made a great impression – he devoted his energies to the people of St. Marylebone and to the many young curates given to him to train. In 1973 he was made a Prebendary of St. Paul's Cathedral and on three occasions served as chaplain to the Lord Mayor of Westminster.



Retirement brought little respite from ecclesiastical duties and Coventry worked assiduously during vacancies at St. Mary, Brookfield, St. Mary Magdalene, Munster Square, and St. Saviour, Eton Road. The time he had for leisure pursuits was filled with music and architecture and he remained an able pianist to the end of his life. He and his wife were active members of the Hampstead branch of the National Trust and of the Heath and Old Hampstead Society. A man firm on the basis of the Christian faith, he wrote a book in defence of St. Paul.

He is survived by his wife and two daughters, a third daughter having died in infancy.