

***Eulogy for Fr Edward Corbould OSB
29th September 1932 - 6th November, 2024***

***The Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary -
The Brompton Oratory London,
Brompton Road, London, SW7 2RP
Tuesday 28th January 2025***

You may have already read one of the few obituaries of my uncle, Father Edward, formerly Michael, and in my case, Uncle Michael, or lately just Mickey. He was Boot to his school contemporaries and “The old chap” to the boys in his house, because that was how he addressed them. His great nephews and nieces fondly call him “the Monkle”.

Although I am his next of kin, he was foremost a member of the monastic community and their brother. However, I also know many of you treated him as if he was a family member.

He had a happy childhood in Norfolk as the youngest of six children, the eldest being his brother John, a great sportsman who influenced his love of cricket. He sadly died of polio in his early 30s. He also had four older sisters who loved him very much but could also be infuriated by him, especially when playing croquet or tennis as children, and bridge later on in life.

When he was two, his father, a high Anglican priest, converted the whole family to Catholicism, significantly altering the course of his life. He was nearly seven years old at the outbreak of war, and was dispatched to prep school - “All Hallows” - which had relocated to a large house on the edge of Dartmoor. Due to the perceived danger of German bombing, he remained at school a whole year, having his Christmas and other holidays cancelled. Hearing this story as a child, I could not imagine such a horror and now recognise the influence this had on him later in life. He went on to be a boy in St Edward’s House at Ampleforth, and later after a brief taste of office life in the City, followed his plan to become a Monk.

When talking about birthdays with my son, Ruaraidh, Mickey chipped in that he had already completed two weeks as a novice at Ampleforth on his 21st Birthday! A challenging part of novice training was testing their monastic calling. This was occasionally done by cancelling their annual holiday the night before it started. Of course, Edward had already experienced this hardship at Prep School at the age of seven.

When he did go home from school for his holidays, he was left to explore the local countryside in Norfolk. He became a keen bird-watcher, making meticulous notes in tiny, neat writing, recording his observations in minute detail: their birdsong, flight and nesting habits. This began a lifetime of conscientious note-taking and preparation for teaching, sermons and retreats.

Once his Noviciate was completed and he had studied history at Oxford he returned to teach in the School in 1959. As Brother Edward, he was directed to teach A-level European History, sharing the subject with an experienced monk who would teach English History. Edward studied hard over the holidays to be fully prepared for this new teaching post. However, at the start of the Autumn term, the other monk returned and pulled rank, insisting that he was the one who always taught European History, leaving an infuriated Edward with English History, no time for preparation, and having to battle hard to keep just ahead of his A-Level set!

He was ordained into the priesthood in 1962. Four years later, before his 34th birthday, the then Abbot Basil Hume appointed him to what he believed was the best job going, to become a housemaster and take charge of his old house - St.Edward's! Abbot Basil Hume also warned him that he should immediately prepare for the time when he ceased to be a housemaster.

There was little privacy or comfort for a housemaster. In Wilfrid's and Edward's houses, the house masters shared a single bathroom on the second floor with their bedrooms only twice the size of the boys' rooms, also on the same floor. It is hard to imagine the dedication needed to

look after over 60 teenage boys for two-thirds of a year, and to do this for 36 years!

He was a very hands-on housemaster, organising activities for his boys. Cross-Country running, evening Whist drives and, of course, gardening. From St Wilfrid's next door, I watched as the rough woodland behind St. Edward's was transformed into a series of grassed terraces with well-kept plants, trees and shrubs. Later, the St. Edwards boys were to develop other projects, creating steps, paths and terraces, fencing and drainage projects and of course, a croquet lawn and cricket nets.

Fr. Edward keenly recorded the daily life of the house in photo albums, which were again, meticulously annotated. This included records of all the inter-house sports competitions, especially the school cross country competitions, both house and school. The last three days of his holidays would be spent nonstop in the school photography darkroom, printing all the latest photographs.

When Fr Edward came to stay with us during the holidays, he always organised activities. Gardening, and in the Summer, Croquet. As a result, my three brothers and I became keen croquet players, honing our skills to take him on. We were always caught off guard by his introduction of new rules, which he claimed made the game more challenging. He was fiercely competitive.

When he retired in 2002, he was touched by the generosity of the St Edward's House families, who gave him a round-the-world ticket for his sabbatical year. It was such a wonderful opportunity for him to visit so many of his boys and their families all over the world. On his return, he continued to travel the country far and wide, ministering to his ever-broadening parish. As predicted by my Aunt Annie, he found it a challenge to settle back into monastic life after 36 years as a housemaster.

In recent years, as his health was deteriorating, he was keen to talk about what would happen to all his records. His teaching notes were given to one of the history teachers. His house and cross-country photo

albums remain with the school. He asked me to consider the best way to preserve his collection of church architecture slides, all meticulously indexed and catalogued. He wondered whether I could scan them for him. "How many slides are we talking about, Mickey?" I asked, "500, 1000, 2000?". "*No, it's a bit more than that*" he said "*it's 14,000*". I am forever grateful that a good faithful friend of his came to my rescue!

I took on his Garden Book Project, which needed to be completed in time for the St Edward's House celebration in Summer 2023. It was a wonderful evening held outside in the Chelsea Physic Garden, attended by so many. By this time, he was becoming unsteady on his feet and prone to losing his balance. Along with coming with us to Poland to marry our daughter, Anna and Kacper, this was one of his last main outings.

Earlier, while coming down to officiate at a local wedding, he became dangerously ill while staying with us in London at the beginning of 2016. He remained with us for 9 weeks, going in and out of St George's and other hospitals until his sepsis and other medical issues were treated. We enjoyed the opportunity to spend this length of time with him. He followed a disciplined daily routine: Saying his daily office, followed by checking his special leather-bound anniversary book (which for your interest, contained 1828 entries - mainly members of the Scrope family - I think); then Mass around the kitchen table, remembering all who were in the book for that day, and anyone who was ill.

He was an easy person to look after, and at no time during the day was he at a loose end. If there was no cricket, rugby, or golf to watch, he would continue reading his current book, or receive and make phone calls. He and my brother Richard would often share their book and podcast recommendations with each other.

While staying with us, a whole host of ailments became apparent. This culminated with a visit to a specialist, who he would call a "Top Man". It was clear that he needed to join an NHS waiting list for an operation and the late Summer was suggested.

“Oh, no. I can’t wait that long. I have a very hectic Summer schedule, and I need it done well before then.”

The specialist hinted that this is not quite how the NHS worked!

“Are you sure you can’t squeeze me in before then?” - he begged.

The generosity of the Bamford family saved the situation, thereby rescuing the 2016 wedding season from complete catastrophe!

The Bamford family also enabled him to continue his ministry around the country when he could no longer drive, and whenever he needed extra medical attention.

My mother was his last surviving sibling, and after she died in 2007, he phoned us most days, and stayed often with us in London and with my brother, Andrew and Frances, in Wadhurst. His phone was his lifeline to the outside world, although some of the pitfalls of modern technology needed to be explained to him. When staying with us, he would usually answer his phone on speakerphone. Of course, many of the conversations were quite personal. On one occasion, Richard and I were Face-timing our brother in America when Mickey answered just such a personal call. Mark could hear the conversation down the phone, which concerned him. Afterwards, I reprimanded him

“Mickey, you must tell people that they are on speakerphone.”

“You couldn’t hear it could you?” he said.

“Yes, Mickey, Mark could hear it in Los Angeles! - I hope you don’t do this when you're on the train?”

He looked very sheepish, but he was much more careful afterwards.

On another occasion, he found himself wishing a happy wedding anniversary to a couple, just before 9 am on a Saturday morning, on Face-time video!

“I must remember not to use Facetime,” he reminded himself!

After spending the day at Wimbledon at the Guthrie’s invitation, he turned on his phone as he left the grounds. He immediately received a volley of about 300 text messages that pinged and whistled constantly. Unbeknownst to him, the BBC Camera operator had focused on him and Lady Guthrie as an example of the more genteel Centre Court spectators

enjoying the match that afternoon. This brief cameo performance was spotted by many, including Fr. Francis at Ampleforth, who enjoyed ribbing him on his return.

Many of you who have had him to stay may have noticed that he was quite fussy about his food? He thought he had very definite dislikes.

- anything that might contain vinegar - meaning tomato ketchup and mayonnaise were banished
- anything with mustard, including horseradish, likewise
- and finally, parsnips -
- He said *"I had them once in the war and really didn't like them!"*

One night, I was considering options for supper.

"Mickey I'm thinking of making prawn cocktail this evening, would you like that?"

"Yes, I love prawn cocktail."

"It comes with a sort of pink sauce."

"Oh yes, I love pink sauce"

It became clear: After a lifetime of institutional food, he appreciated pretty much everything... except parsnips, of course!

Fr. Edward is remembered by so many different groups, no doubt all are represented here today. He was as proud as any parent might be of every St. Edward's House boy. He avidly followed the careers of those who joined the Military and he loved to hear of the achievements, both great and small, of all his boys and their family news. He treasured their regular visits to see him, especially when he was less able to travel.

He loved his golf and was a great fan, always keen to watch the Hallford Hewitt competition at Sandwich. Being included in their WhatsApp group gave him great pleasure and much amusement.

Recently, he was very honoured to be chosen to be a Chaplain to the Order of the Knights of Malta.

Over many years, he was a regular Chaplain on the Lourdes Pilgrimage, and above all he was devoted to his faithful group who accompanied him

to Medjugorje. It was a great sadness for him when he could not make the pilgrimage one last time.

To me, his house masses in our kitchen provide a very precious memory. He showed such interest in all our lives and activities, constantly enquiring about his great nieces and nephews, what they were doing and where they were in the world. His last baptism was in the monastic infirmary chapel, where he baptised his great-great nephew, Arkady. During the baptism, he was quite overcome, and his voice faltered as he held back tears.

Mickey was among the most physically and mentally active people I have known. He was a power of enthusiasm, impatient to be actively occupied. He always gave any task or conversation his full attention and focus. He was highly skilled at listening and rarely judgemental, always showing such humility and kindness. His memory was pin-sharp to the end. He fully appreciated how lucky he was to have had such a huge parish of all generations of Amplefordians and their friends scattered worldwide. You are all here today as a testament to that.

The care he received in the last months of his life was fantastic, and the infirmary staff managed so kindly with the many visitors he loved to see, despite being exhausted by them.

We visited him in the Monastic Infirmary for his last weekend, by which time he was no longer eating or drinking. He was so peaceful and ready to go. He smiled and occasionally spoke, quietly whispering the Mass with Fr Mark each day. It was clear from his smile and quiet chuckle that he enjoyed the stories we shared.

One of his final comments, which was only just audible to me, was, *"I really miss your prawn cocktails!"*

God bless you, Mickey; May you rest in peace.

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