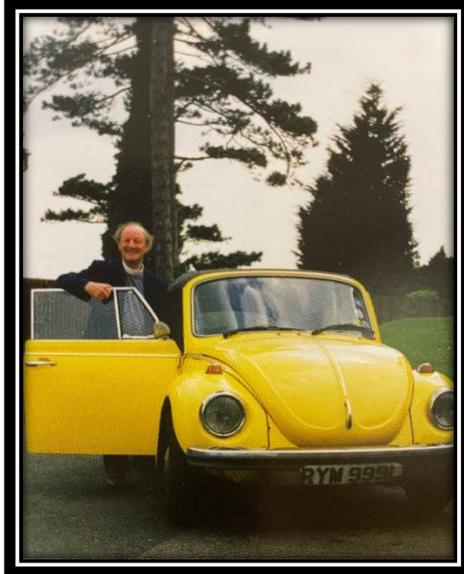


## Rev Michael Charles Booker – Eulogy

1936 – 2021

### The Music, The Ministry, The Memories, The Man: Michael Charles Booker



#### The MUSIC:

*Oh what a beautiful morning,  
Oh what a beautiful day,  
I've got a wonderful feeling,  
Everything's going my way.*

Imagine, we are in the Theatre Royal, settling down for our fix of the Broadway classic - Oklahoma but instead of Gordon MacRae, we have our very own Michael Booker in fine voice..... performing as the lead singer - Curly. Something he actually did!

So sit back and enjoy, for we are in for a musical delight of note. For our Curly, both in Character and Hair, The Rev, The Yellow Beetle Man..... is a musical genius. And when he is not performing a Rogers and Hammerstein classic,

- 1) he will be leading the evensong, in the cathedral, in his parish church or at Framlingham College. Martyn Lane describes him as a polished singer who set the standard for singing by the clergy and choir... a standard so high, it has not been seen since, in his life.
- 2) On one occasion, as precentor in the Cathedral, Michael looked up as the final hymn was about to start, only to observe that there was “no organist”, so Michael dashed up to the loft, and brought the service to a close, brilliantly, playing the final hymn.
- 3) But if it is pure entertainment you are after today, I highly recommend the “The Stained Glass Swingers”. They, the famed group from Harvest Suppers. With Michael playing honky tonk on piano ....he will lift any spirit!

- 4) But just as you feel you have the measure of the man, the director of music at Framlingham College, Martyn Lane decides to put on Benjamin Britten's – Noah's Flood or **Noyes Fludde**. A brilliant one-act Opera designed for schools, with Michael learning all the lines and acting as Noah.
- 5) Such is the mischief of Michael, John LeGrove and Richard Higgins both remember with fondness, his rendition of Anderson's Christmas tune - **Sleigh Ride** as played on organ. On one occasion, the Head of Framlingham College, had spent the chapel chastising the pupils because of an incident in Norwich. An incident, in which a student had been caught shoplifting, spent time in the police station and had brought the school's names into ill repute. Needless to say, the Head was very disappointed, and gave the school an impassioned and quite justified lecture on how this student had let himself, his parents and the whole school down. There was absolute silence in Chapel – you could have heard a pin drop; the tension was almost unbearable. Having delivered her talk, the Head walked out purposefully. As she strode back down the aisle, the tune of "**Sleigh ride**" struck up on the organ, accompanied by the cheerful sound of sleighbells. As one, the whole school erupted in laughter ..... Michael Booker had saved the day!
- 6) His legacy will also live on, as a composer of a considerable acclaim – be it as a number of Psalms for choir or as we will shortly hear – his composition: **The God of Peace** as sung by some of the former Cathedral Choristers.

### The Ministry

But his music was not his only ministry. Only God can count the apples from a single seed, but plant the seeds, of God's love, Michael did! And most of those seeds are of good humour and mirth.

I am told that his sermons were most memorable. He had the ability to make the unintelligible as clear as crystal, and in an entertaining way. The most talked-about sermon to this day, is when he got Sarah to complete the Rubik's cube puzzle – the craze at that time – while he was speaking. Of course, nobody can remember what point he was making, but at the time it illustrated the point perfectly! Bury schoolchildren also remember him visiting to take assemblies. He had a real gift for keeping the pupils engaged and entertained.

In the late 60s and early 70s, Michael started and ran a Holiday Club with a huge amount of help from an army of adults. This was held for one week in the summer holidays and was hugely popular, not least because Michael composed a theme song every year. Jeremy Allen, our organist today, recalls: "One year there was a space theme, and Michael sang a song called '**Calling Mission Control**'. To represent an astronaut's helmet, he placed a clear plastic bag over his head - definitely a, 'don't try this at home' moment!", but make you laugh, he did!

At Framlingham, his ministry was embedded in the very fabric of the school. With his office below the chapel, his festive socials with the likes of Chris Lenton and others and his bright Yellow Beetle, a symbol of joy and *jeu de vivre* – he was the bell of every party! I am told on one occasion, while playing piano for the rather boorish Kerrison boys in the house singing competition, he suddenly struck up with the South Pacific song – ***There is nothing like a dame***...and brought the boys to their knees - in delight and admiration.

Such was his energy and dedication, he also acted as Chaplain at the Prep School on occasion and saved the day many times in St Michaels Church – playing the organ on request.

We have received many tributes of thanks for his ministry from Old Framlinghamians, Michael an honorary OF himself. For example: Former pupils describes him as:

- 1) unselfish and generous.
- 2) A wonderful man.
- 3) “He was a really big part of my Fram journey”
- 4) If I recall correctly he could play a mean honky tonk piano”
- 5) “An extraordinary man with a true faith”
- 6) The cathedral writes: Michael held the role at the cathedral as Residentiary Canon and Precentor for some 15 years. It is a role he filled with gracious efficiency, prayerfulness and expertise. The Precentor’s role is a demanding one in any cathedral, needing great diplomacy and tenacity, having in mind a wide variety of stakeholders within the cathedral community, diocese, town and wider county. Michael achieved this in the years he was with us. He is still very fondly remembered by many people here in the cathedral family: he was a talented musician, a reassuring and prayerful presence, someone who listened to people, kind and with a great pastoral touch who made a real difference to all here.

### **The MEMORIES**

And all of this musical brilliance and Godly ministry happened because of a life well lived. A life that started in October 1936 in Brighton. The Youngest of three boys.

He spent his childhood in the village of Ticehurst, Sussex, singing in the church choir with his eldest brother, father and grandfather. When his family moved to Wimbledon, he went to Raynes Park Grammar School - where he admitted he excelled at nothing... except music.

His career really took off when he was selected as Organ scholar at the London College of Music and became Associate of the Royal College of Organists.

Even when in National Service, he spent it, at the army band school in Crickhowell, Wales, teaching music.

For his theological foundation, he studied at the London College of Divinity and was ordained at St Alban’s Cathedral.

His first curacy was at Royston Parish Church, Hertfordshire and then moved to Suffolk to be curate at St Mary's Church, Mildenhall.

After just a couple of years at Mildenhall, the then Provost of St Edmundsbury Cathedral (John Waddington) lured him to the cathedral as "understudy" to the then Precentor, Stanley Clarke. When Clarke left, Michael became a Minor Canon and Precentor, a role he held until the end of 1983. Together with Harrison Oxley, Organist and Choirmaster, he championed an integrated boys/girls cathedral choir – the co-ed choir is still in existence today.

And then, in 1984, he joined Framlingham College as the Chaplain. A post he kept until his retirement in 1999. Some 15 ½ years of ministry. I say retired... he never really retired and continued to offer music and ministry in Suffolk. Personally, he was a great source of comfort and support on my arrival at Framlingham.

But how does one do justice to such a fine man of God? The day, I learned of his death, I found myself simply paging through the College Service register and reflecting on every chapel service that Michael took over those 15 ½ years. From the 15<sup>th</sup> January 1984 to the 26<sup>th</sup> June 1999, Michael meticulously documented every service in his beautiful handwriting and reflects a man who has touched, oh so many lives as Chaplain, as Priest, as Musician, as Comedian, as Actor, as teacher, as theologian, as husband and as father!

But for me, Michael sums it up better himself, than I ever could, with his last entry in the College Service register with a quote from I Corinthians 2:

***"When I came to you brothers, I did not come as one of eloquence or superior wisdom – as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I have resolved to know nothing, while I was with you, except Jesus Christ and him crucified"***

***Oh what a beautiful man  
Oh what a beautiful ministry  
We've got a wonderful feeling  
Everything you loved, will NOT go to waste.***

**Rev Canon Brynn Bayman  
Framlingham College Chaplain**