

Reverend Derek Jones (12 April 1927- 26 February 2013)

By Sandy Grant



Derek Jones arrived in this country in 1954, accompanied by his newly married wife, Joan to take up the post of District Superintendent of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in Maun. He might then have assumed or perhaps even wished that his role would be no different from those of the many LMS missionaries who had preceded him. Yet within 12 years, and in startling contrast, he was Mayor of a national capital, Gaborone, which had not previously existed, and dancing with Princess Marina in the Independence Ball.

Derek died in England on 26 February 2013 aged 85. Something like 56 of those years (1954-2010) were spent in Botswana. Paradoxically, however, any attempt to convey some idea of his lifetime of service and achievement cannot begin with him, as is customary, but with her. After Derek had done his compulsory two years of national service in the Royal Air Force, in Egypt, he achieved a degree in Oxford University in (Politics, Philosophy and Economics) PPE and was then ordained in the Marlow Road Congregational Church in Wallasey on 21 May 1954. He married Joan and for the next 49 years, until her death on 15 September 2002, the two were inseparable. Yet they were opposites. She was voluble, unabashed, uninhibited, and exuberant and always relishing life; he was reserved, quietly spoken, detail conscious, undemonstrative and wary of extravagant opinion. Without her, he could only have been a very different person. But then without him, so might she! When she died, their four children and their extended family life helped to fill what must have been an awful void.

Derek's life falls into four distinct categories. His time as an LMS, later United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) pastor from 1954 in Maun -which then, as far as the LMS was concerned, included Ngamiland, Ghanzi and Chobe - in Kanye, Gaborone and finally, in 2003, Gabane. These years included his membership, during its earlier years, of the Botswana Christian

Council (BCC) and his role in the negotiations which brought related churches within a new umbrella organisation, the UCCSA. Inevitably, however, it was his years at Trinity (1965-72) in partnership with Fr Alan Butler which will be remembered by older people.

With independence, the country needed a new, first time ever capital. It also needed to create a new kind of society. In church circles, it was believed that a rare opportunity had been opened up and that they too could and should provide a lead, showing that if change was needed, they were ready. The result was that four churches, Congregational, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist together with the Society of Friends agreed to create a unity (not union) church, Trinity, with facilities that all could share and enjoy.

The appeal document for the £27,000 that was needed to build the new church was set in the context of what Jones and Butler brilliantly described as 'an awakening country'. Those two, showed how historical division and theological difference could be set aside and how both could also make very significant contributions to civil society. With the first national elections imminent in 1965 Derek was asked by the new Vice President Quett Masire to stand as a BDP candidate for one of the Gaborone constituencies? Derek declined, insisting that this would be inappropriate. But would he agree to stand as an independent - in which case the BDP would not field its own candidate to stand against him? He agreed, was duly elected unopposed to represent the South Ring constituency, and almost immediately was chosen to be the new capital's first Mayor.

When telling me about that first election, Derek was insistent that I should not divulge what had actually occurred and I was, of course, bound to respect his wishes. But others have noted that his candidacy represented the one and only time that the BDP has not opposed an independent candidate - and must have assumed that this was somehow by design, rather than accident. Now the need to respect those sensitivities is gone and the effect is surely to raise Derek's stature, rather than diminish it. Derek was Mayor for the first two of his years as a councillor but thereafter made way for Grace Dambe to succeed him in that office. He did not stand in the 1969 election. For his services to the new country and new capital during those first early years, the British honoured him by awarding him an OBE. Here, surprisingly, he was honoured neither then nor later.

Thereafter Derek renewed his earlier involvement in the church's publishing role. He had previously converted all its previous Setswana publications into the newly accepted orthography, with the exception of the hymn book. When the Pula Press was established, Derek, working with Moabi Kitchen, oversaw the increase of the *boswa jwa puo* series from two small books, to fourteen. Then with Martin Morolong, as principal editor, he coordinated the revision of Wookey's 1908 Setswana Bible. But during one of the many meetings that had to take place, he managed to outrage an offended Sebotho Modise who cried out, 'but this man has only been in the country for ten years!'

With Zak Mathumo, Derek then set about revising the English-Setswana dictionary which was eventually to be published by Macmillan. And again with Kitchen, he revised the *Padiso* Setswana series which was later to be further revised and expanded by Mae Johnson. In addition, he was involved in editing and publishing Alfred Merriweather's three books and in partnership with the Botswana Society, three other major publications. When the Botswana Society ran short of an editor, he accepted the challenge and published three volumes of its remarkable, long standing Botswana Notes and Records series.

In 2005-2007 I like to believe that the two of us saved the Botswana Society which was teetering on the edge. During that very difficult time, he played a key role in pushing the Alec Campbell-led book on Tsodilo which had languished for many frustrating years. For the record he served the Botswana Society, in one or another capacity, for many years as he also did as a member of the two service agencies, the Lions Club of Gaborone and the Rotary Club.

But it was as Manager of the Botswana Book Centre, more or less from 1972 to 1993, succeeding Rev Small, Brian Hagyard and Johnston Russell that he came into his own. In so many ways, the church owned Book Centre was Gaborone. If the new town could boast of excellence, it was

the Book Centre which was rightly famed far and wide. But the book trade worldwide was undergoing huge change, and possibly inevitably, a business run by an ill-equipped church owned Trust was unlikely to weather the storms. After his 1993 departure, Derek would have had no choice but to watch as the Book Centre slowly and humiliatingly sank. It must have been heart breaking for him, but I heard from him not a single word of regret or recrimination.

Derek's was, in so many ways, a most remarkable life. He wasn't the last missionary to travel by ox wagon - this being, I believe, Rev A Sandilands -but he did arrive here when Seretse (and Ruth) was still in exile, when Tshekedi was still a dominant power in the land, and when the country was a desperately poor backwater. He was lucky enough, however, to be here when it all began to change and when the country began 'to awaken'. Preferring to stay in the background, Derek quietly but consistently demonstrated, especially during the more recent years of change, that there would always be a need, perhaps greater than ever, for the old fashioned notions of reliability, personal integrity, accountability and common courtesy.