

## **Geoffrey Norman Gibbons.**

He was born in Birmingham in 1927 and educated at Moseley Grammar School (1938-45) and at Birmingham University where he was awarded an Honours degree in Law in 1948. On retirement from his legal practise in 1994 it seemed reasonable to pursue an abiding fascination with the history of this country especially that of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. He was accepted as a post graduate student of Warwick University in 1994.

He was awarded the degrees of Master of Arts of the University in 1995 and Doctor of Philosophy in History in 1999 and published his doctoral thesis in 2001. The book of this thesis was printed in the USA in 2002 by The Edwin Mellen Press. Entitled 'The Political Career of Thomas Wriothesley, First Earl of Southampton, Henry VIII's last Lord Chancellor', it is critically accepted as the leading authority on its subject.

In 1946 he was appointed organist at St. Ambrose Church, Edgbaston, an appointment he held until 1960 except for the years 1948 to 1950 when he fulfilled his National service commitment. He was commissioned in the Royal Army Service Corps on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1949 and completed his service in Egypt in 1950, starting with attachment to 482 Supply Platoon RASC at Moascar Garrison. Throughout his time in Egypt he was organist at the Church of St. George in Moascar Garrison, Canal Zone having been 'appointed' by Brigadier Potter shortly after arriving in the Canal Zone. He later commanded for six months the detached 'C' Section of 479 Supply Platoon at El Ballah on the banks of the Suez Canal and ended his service as acting Captain. During his only period of leave he visited Luxor, Karnak and the Valley of the Kings. His time in Egypt was not without incident but proved a formative (and enjoyable) period in his life.

He returned to England in June 1950, passed the Law Society's Final Examinations and in July 1952 was admitted as a solicitor and joined a firm in Birmingham which in the ensuing forty years grew twenty times over, ultimately with offices in Manchester, London, and Exeter as well as Birmingham. When he retired in 1994 he had been senior partner for seven years, and in the preceding forty years had served as a part time District Registrar in the County Court, was a Chairman of National Insurance Tribunals, and between 1977 and 1984 was a Deputy Circuit Judge on the Midland and Oxford Circuit, hearing both civil and criminal cases. This involved two weeks of Sittings in various Crown Court Centres every eight weeks.

In 1960 he was appointed Organist at the two churches in Henley in Arden, Warwickshire and held that post for thirty-four years until 1994 when resigned to have more time for domestic and academic interests. He chaired committees to raise funds to rebuild the large organ in St. John's Church, Henley in 1970 at a cost of about £22,000 and raised the funds required to replace the small instrument in St. Nicholas Church with a chamber organ built in 1798. He made a substantial personal financial contribution to the rebuilding costs and instituted a series of organ recitals at St. John's Church over the next few years with visits from Christopher Dearnley, Organist of St. Paul's Cathedral, Dr. Roy Massey (Birmingham Cathedral), Nicholas Kynaston, Harrison Oxley (Bury St Edmunds Cathedral) and a number of other eminent musicians from all areas of the UK. These recitals proved to be very popular and drew audiences from all over the Midlands.

For six years in the 1970s he directed the Barnt Green Choral Society. For eight years after 1994 he played at the monthly services at Packington Church, (the estate chapel of the Earl of Aylesford), on the unique two manual organ built in 1750 to the design of George Frederic Handel, and assisted in the Solihull Parish Church when a deputy organist was required. In 2002 he moved to Cornwall having for some years owned a cottage in St. Tudy and in 2003 he was appointed organist at St. Tudy Parish Church and three years later was responsible for the raising of £37000 required to rebuild the organ. As part of this project he secured the organ from the redundant church of St. Francis in Solihull. That organ, with the existing instrument in St. Tudy Church (c.1892) now forms part of the much larger, extended and modern instrument in use today. It has been highly praised by performers including three cathedral organists and many others. Dr. Gibbons was responsible for the arranging of a series of concerts annually from 2004 onwards for the purpose of raising funds for the continued maintenance of the church and its services. He has also initiated a series of other fund raising activities and had a key role in the re-ordering of the back of St, Tudy Church to effect a large open area for community use, for weekly events (coffee mornings) and displays of art works, flower festivals etc. Currently the Church is awaiting a response to an application he made on behalf of the PCC to the Cornwall Historic Churches Fund for a grant to protect invaluable 16<sup>th</sup> century slate memorials of a quality rare in the County.

Dr. Gibbons has travelled widely in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, especially in Tunisia, which he first visited in 1960, thereafter staying bi-annually with relatives living at Carthage, and was appointed Honorary Tunisian Consul in the West Midlands in 1990, an office he held until 2012. He was engaged professionally to advise the Tunisian Ambassador on several matters involving English Law during his term as Consul and was required as part of his duties to brief Tunisian Government Ministers in Tunis regarding the activities of a dissident Rashed Ghanuchi. Ambassador Mahomed Lessir.

Geoffrey Gibbons was elected to Solihull Council in 1960 and apart from a short period he remained a member until his retirement in 1994, being elected mayor in 1974 and again in 1984. In this capacity he regularly welcomed important visitors arriving at Birmingham International Airport which was located within the boundaries of Solihull, and these included Her Majesty the Queen and Prince Philip, Prince Charles and the late Princess Diana apart from other members of the Royal Family and many important visitors from abroad. The mayoral events of these two years were recorded in photographs taken and bound into volumes and presented on completion of the year in office. For several years he was Chairman of the Council's Planning Committee. He founded the Solihull Music Festival in 1988 and was the director of it for ten years working with the international concert pianist Peter Donohoe a resident of Solihull. In about 1978 he became a governor of Alderbrook School, Solihull, and served through the headships of five teachers, being elected Chairman of the Board of Governors in 1985, resigning in July 2002 on his removal to St. Tudy, Cornwall. Alderbrook School is one of the largest in Solihull with a mixed pupil population of about 1500 and a fine reputation for the standard of education provided.

He had been a member of the Birmingham Organists Association (of which his father had been President) and in the 1960s he became Secretary and held that office into the next decade when he was elected a member of the Council of the Incorporated Association of Organists acting as honorary solicitor to the Association for over 20 years.

For many years he played cricket for the Old Boys team of his School, tennis with Sparkhill Tennis Club and still swims and used to surf in Cornwall until advancing years brought their own difficulties.

In 1974 he married Hazel and inherited two step-sons, (one a Ph.D in Archaeology), has a daughter Sarah and nine grandchildren one of whom is a boy and one great grand son recently born. The grandson completed his Law degree at Exeter University in 2014 and a granddaughter is well on the way to completing her D.Litt at Oxford University this year.

Such time as he has available since retirement is spent in working in the local community in many fields, in reading and keeping abreast of current thinking in the fields of Tudor and Stuart history.