



Canon Gerry Murphy - Daily Telegraph obituary

Canon Gerry Murphy, who has died aged 87, was an Irish rugby international and later Domestic Chaplain to the Queen.

His uncomplicated character, warm personality and charm was employed with outstanding success for 22 years as an Army chaplain. He then held a series of important ministries: to holiday-makers on the Norfolk Broads; as vicar of Sandringham and Domestic Chaplain to the Queen; as Rector of Christ Church Cathedral at Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands; and finally as chaplain of the Royal Chapel at the Tower of London. In each he won admiration and considerable affection, and it was often said that he displayed the Anglican ministry at its best.

John Gervase Maurice Walker Murphy (he was always known as Gerry) was born in Bangor, Co Down, on August 20 1926 and educated at the Methodist College in Belfast, which he left in 1944 to serve in the ranks of the Irish Guards. A year later he was commissioned in the Royal Ulster Rifles, in which he remained until 1947. On demobilisation, he went to Trinity College, Dublin, to prepare for Holy Orders and resume an unusually promising rugby career that had started while at school.

During his three years (1952-55) as a curate in the Shankill parish at Lurgan, Co Armagh, he played at fullback for Ireland. Against England at Twickenham, in 1952, he was not the only novice priest in the team — the hooker, Robin Roe, would later be ordained into the Royal Army Chaplains' Department and would win an MC for bravery in Aden. However, Ireland lost 3-0 – with England's winning try being scored by Brian Boobbyer, the grandson of the Bishop of Buckingham. Murphy went on to win caps for Ireland against Scotland, Wales and, in 1954, the All Blacks.

In 1955 he moved to England to join the Royal Army Chaplains Department and was almost immediately sent to post-war Korea, where Army units were still stationed. On his return in 1957 he was enthusiastically recruited into the British Army XV and, although required to serve for relatively short periods in

Aden and Cyprus, managed to play also for London Irish against Wales and occasionally for the Barbarians .

Murphy was in every way an ideal Army chaplain. He mixed easily with all ranks, enjoyed the company of ordinary soldiers, knew how to address them effectively in church services and was always on hand to help with personal and family problems. He rose through the ranks and, having been senior chaplain to the Commonwealth Brigade, was Deputy Assistant Chaplain General of the Rhine Area from 1969 to 1972. He then returned to England to become senior chaplain of the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, before final appointments as Assistant Chaplain General British Army of the Rhine, then ACG South-East Area at Aldershot.

On retirement in 1977 Murphy accepted appointment as rector of the Norfolk parish of Ranworth and Rural Dean of Blofield. Attracted to the additional role of chaplain to holidaymakers on the Norfolk Broads, he became a familiar and popular figure as he exercised his ministry from a boat.

After only two years he was called to the special ministry of rector of Sandringham and Domestic Chaplain to the Queen, when she was in residence there, and to the staff throughout the year. Again, he was perfectly suited to the task. An admirable rector who was also leader of an eight-parish rural group, he knew exactly how to serve in the Royal Household. As a master of the seven-minute sermon (a Royal requirement), his services in Sandringham church suited all ranks.

He was made an honorary canon of Norwich Cathedral in 1986. Although it came as a surprise to many, it was entirely in character (and doubtless with the Queen's approval) that a year later he announced his intention to leave for the Falkland Islands to become rector of the cathedral at Port Stanley.

This remote outpost of the Church bears no resemblance to any other cathedral in the world, and for the next four years Murphy ministered not only to the civilian population and military personnel on the main island, but also to those parishioners – 1,900 in all – who lived on an archipelago of 200 other islands in the region.

Boats, helicopters and light aircraft were necessary tools of a ministry he greatly enjoyed and which is still remembered with gratitude by islanders.

The contrast between this and the chaplaincy of the Royal Chapel in the Tower of London, to which he moved in 1991, could hardly have been greater. His official duties in the latter post were not heavy. But during his five years there he made good use of the opportunities afforded by the post,

conducting the services, pastoring the Beefeaters and other members of the staff, welcoming the huge number of visitors and making his presence felt in the City, where he was chaplain to the Lord Mayor in 1993-94.

He retired in 1996 to Norfolk, where he assisted in the parishes for several years, while finding time to take a degree in Classics at Birkbeck College, London, as well as write a biography of Lowther Edward Brandon, a noted Dean of the Falkland Isles (The Very Reverend Dean Lowther Edward Brandon, 2005). Earlier he had published a centenary history of Port Stanley Cathedral.

He was a Chaplain to the Queen from 1987 to 1996, continuing as one of her Extra Chaplains until his death.