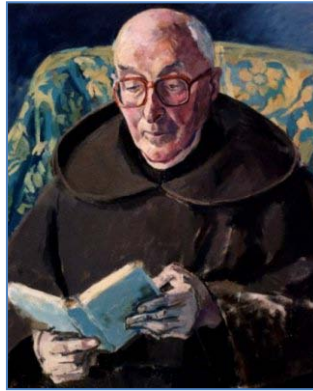


Obituary of Fr. Brocard Sewell, O.Carm. (1912-2000)



*Portrait of Brocard Sewell
by Jane Percival*

The death of Brocard Sewell has robbed the Carmelite Order in Great Britain of one of its most colourful and creative members. Brocard had been a member of the Carmelite Order for the past 48 years and during that period he was able, in the context of his life as a Carmelite friar, to pursue his varied literary interests and also to continue the artistic tradition of the Ditchling Community.

Brocard, or to give him his baptismal name Michael, was born on 30th July 1912 in Bangkok, where his father, Cecil Sewell, held a teaching post in the Royal Pages College. Sadly, his mother Ethel died shortly after his birth and he was sent back to Cornwall where his maternal grandparents, Charles and Ethel Grylls, took him into their care.

Charles Grylls was a solicitor in Launceston and was a well-known figure in Cornish life. Brocard was baptised on 1st November 1912 by his paternal grandfather, Arthur Sewell, who came from a long line of Anglican clergy connected with the Oxford Movement, and while Brocard was to become a Roman Catholic as a young man, he never lost his affection for all things Anglo-Catholic. However, paradoxically, he was to receive his education at an evangelical foundation, Weymouth College.

Brocard left school in the West Country when he was 16 and soon became involved with Gilbert Chesterton and G. K.'s Weekly and the Distributist Movement. He was also drawn to Ditchling where he was to be influenced by Hilary Peplar and Eric Gill. Here he developed his interest in printing using wonderful 18th-century presses.

After becoming a Catholic Brocard tried his vocation with the Dominicans. This experience was to be formative and he was fortunate to encounter some outstanding friars during his months in the novitiate. After leaving the Dominicans Brocard continued to be linked to G. K.'s Weekly and the Distributist Movement and renewed his contacts with Ditching.

While essentially a pacifist by nature he saw service during the War with the Air Force and had on the whole quite a civilised time becoming a map specialist. He spent a year in occupied Germany after the War and forged lifelong friendships with various Germans that he encountered. On re-entering civilian life he again tried his vocation and was attracted to the Canons Regular of the Lateran. He had known the Order both in Cornwall and London and it was at their Church of St. Peter-in-Chains, Stroud Green, that he had become a Catholic in 1931. In 1952 he realised his long-term hope of becoming a Carmelite friar. He

had previously tried to join the Order in 1937 but had met with a seeming rebuff. Aylesford Priory in Kent was to be his home for a number of years and here he set about establishing a fine Community Library. He also established the Saint Albert's Press where he continued the tradition of fine hand-printed works. For some 12 years he edited *The Aylesford Review* which became a significant literary magazine. Contributors included Thomas Merton, Muriel Spark and Henry Williamson just to name a few. Brocard also became a friend to many young writers and one young poet, Frances Horovitz, became a close and valued friend. Her death at a relatively early age was to be a tragic blow. Brocard was also fascinated by the byways of English Literature and his interest in Montague Summers and Canon Gray led to important insights about their life and writings. He also was a champion of the underdog and could often bewilder his superiors with the variety of folk that he would invite to stay at the Priory.

His Anglo-Catholic background made him feel uneasy with the liturgical reforms of Vatican II and his reaction to *Humanae vitae* led to his going to Nova Scotia where he was to lecture for some time at Antigonish.

In the last twenty years or so of his life Brocard lived variously in Carmelite communities at Cheltenham, Faversham and latterly in North London. He continued with his wide ranging literary interests and above all he continued to be a good and faithful friend to so many varied folk. He was once described, paraphrasing Muriel Spark's phrase, as being "an Edinburgh Festival all on his own". As a Carmelite friar he had a great love of the Order's traditions and was always a committed member of whichever community he was living in. While holding a wide range of often esoteric opinions, he was always obedient and would take on any task however uncongenial. He enlivened Community life with his anecdotes and good-natured conversation. He had a great belief in always being charitable. Despite the onset of the weaknesses that come with old age he remained good company to the last. The Carmelite Order in Great Britain is poorer for his death.

Wilfrid McGreal, O.Carm.