

MICHAEL ANDREW RICHARD HUNTER
Polwarth Parish Church 23 January 2015

In the name of the Living God: Creator,
Redeemer, Sustainer.

By some strange chance, earlier this week, I was reading The Church Times and I saw an article about an exhibition currently in Edinburgh by two painters whose theme is exploring the sacredness of creation. And immediately I thought of Andrew. One of the painters described wanting to get at the ‘truth of nature and expressing something of the divine that we can encounter there.’ **Andrew’s search for purity and truth, and the difficult choices he made on this pilgrim route seemed to be reflected in this art.** They are finding a new language to express nature and finding preciousness within the ordinariness. And I thought ‘Yes’ – this was Andrew: a free spirit, whose love and compassion was not restricted to any rigid pattern or formula.

Today, we draw together some of the strands that made him who and what he was: uniquely loved, as we all are, by God his Creator. We give

thanks for the legacy he has left us: a man who understood what it was to be part of creation through his love for God's people and his connection with the world around him. My task is not to give a precise biography, but to look at some of the kaleidoscope of pieces that coloured and shaped his life.

Michael Andrew Richard Hunter was the eighth Michael Hunter in an unbroken line since 1724. He was born sixty years ago in 1954 in Michaelchurch, Herefordshire, to Michael and Claire, with an older sister, Rosemary. They had a happy animal-filled childhood and the freedom of wild countryside with picnics up Cat's Back Mountain and annual holidays to the north Wales coast. From the age of eight he went to Prep school, which was not a happy experience for him, except for meeting his life-long friend, Patrick.

Life was very different fifty years ago and Andrew was a much-longed for son who carried the weight of parental expectations and a large family estate with him. He was sent to Eton where he picked up an unexpected skill – magic! He became very competent at this and was a member of the Magic Circle Club and his niece

Claire remembers her excitement as a little girl waiting for Andrew to arrive at Christmas in anticipation of the tricks she and her brother would be shown. He did row at Henley one year too, to the delight of his parents. **One other very good thing came out of Eton.** The school ran the Dorney Project, which it does to this day, which set out to develop the mental, spiritual and physical needs of young people handicapped by poverty and lack of opportunity. This was possibly the start of his interest in social work.

From the end of his Eton days, it became ever more apparent than Andrew was not going to follow the anticipated path that his father had hoped. He had a gap year in the States and eventually went to Harper Adams Agricultural College and throughout his life he would surprise people with his knowledge of different types of grasses on walks. However, deep within himself, Andrew knew that being a gentleman farmer, even a hands-on one, running a large estate, was not for him because that was not the person he was called to be. His childhood friend Patrick astutely and non-judgementally remarked that it was that difficult experience that led to Andrew's **valuable reflections about the**

meaning of life and the complexity of relationships, which eventually took him out of farming and into social work. Later too, it led him into the exploration of the value of story-telling as a vehicle **for discovery of the human personality and the search for the liberation of the soul.**

However, if things were uncomfortable between Andrew and his father, it didn't stem from lack of love. He was deeply saddened by his father's death in 1988 and the unresolved issues between them. In a very frank letter to his sister last summer, he wrote of how much more aware he was of the qualities he had inherited from his father.

The early 80's saw Andy as he was by then universally known, working with the Cyrenian Community in bio-dynamic agriculture. He kept this link with the community for some years. The 80's also saw him making time to take part in one of the major protest movements of the decade, the anti-nuclear demonstrations at Greenham Common. In 1989 he married Lucy taking on the challenge of being step-father to her little son Joel, at which he was a natural. All children adored him and he them. Lucy and

Andy went on to have Jacinta with whom he had a wonderful and happy relationship. In no small part this was due to the fact that he never put pressure on Jacinta to be anyone other than herself. It was a love that gave her permission to truly be who she was.

Integrity ran through everything he did. He really cared for the environment, for local history and for nature. He took the time to fight for causes in which he believed. He was never afraid of challenging people's expectations. Cycling, as we know, was a great passion of his. But it wasn't just a hobby or a keep fit activity. It mattered because it was environmentally friendly. He went to meetings about cycle lanes for the city, he wrote to politicians. His **political beliefs** were deep and sincere and therefore, as his nephew said, 'differences were respected and recognised as something held in common'. He was able to lead in a democratic way. He liked to be involved with things that he could change and improve. He introduced others to cycling, often taking people from the Trust on rides to show them the countryside and putting them in touch with nature.

A new chapter came with his marriage to Anne in 1997. Andy had trained to be a social worker by then and they were both working at Garvald, an organisation which supported people with a whole range of abilities, based on the work of Rudolf Steiner. Their marriage was truly a meeting of two souls. They were completely at peace with each other and could be totally themselves. As Anne told me, they had fun; they played games, they read to each other every day – they could be silly. Nature trips were a constant part of their lives. Andy loved the delight of being outdoors: camping, cooking on a little stove, gathering berries. He loved exploring and made every outing an adventure. He was also a skilled wood-carver, and delighted in making little wooden spoons as presents. He baked bread and made wine. He loved good food and they enjoyed eating out. Anne said they could always laugh and cry together. And **there were** tears over the unfulfilled life of their baby son Michael who was born with serious complications and sadly did not survive. He was always remembered and loved and remained a spoken-about part of their family. It's very fitting that Andy's final resting place will be with Michael later today.

Little was known amongst Andy's wider family of his **generosity**. Not only did his moral compass steer him into the field of social work but he used his personal family inheritance to invest in the long term care of those less fortunate than himself. He was involved with **The Network for Social Change** with his friend Ninian Crichton-Stuart, an organisation which encouraged and enabled wealthy people with conscience to make grants to organisations and people for the benefit of the under-privileged. With another old and trusted friend Peter Kampman, he set up **The Edinburgh Community Trust** – a small funding trust which provided innovative employment services in its own right. In time this was developed into the Forth Sector which is still highly regarded today and a room was named The Hunter Room in his honour in 2007. During this time Andy purchased St Mary's Place with his own money: a Georgian house in Edinburgh which the Trust turned into a guest house which people with mental health problems helped to run to serve members of the public. Andy's mother and sister only discovered this when they celebrated 21 years of its existence. Andrew was very close to his mother and she came regularly to Edinburgh to stay with them for the Festival which she

loved doing because, as she said: ‘they’re so happy.’ People loved seeing Andy because, as a friend from the States wrote: ‘He communicated his humanity to others.’ He had that great skill of giving his undivided attention to whoever he was with.

Andy was able to blend the importance of our heritage and surroundings into his stories. Gradually this evolved into setting up Storybikes in 2008 when his love of cycling and of storytelling came together. His Edinburgh tours were well-known, as well as trips that went further afield. He collected stories from all over the world: myths, fairy tales, and stories of the heart and spirit. And he shared stories: with family and friends, as co-founder of the Life Stories Project going into care homes, and with the wider public, at clubs and major Festivals. Most recently, Andy was involved with the International ‘Seeing Stories’ project in Fiesole: **La Terra, il Colore**, where, through merging words, singing, music and drawing, he participated in creating a new model of storytelling based on the lives of two local people. He formed great friendships in Fiesole, something for which he had a great gift, in particular with the actor, writer and director, Claudio Ascoli

who became a very special person for him. Claudio's belief in him enabled a flourishing in Andy that gave him a renewed freedom.

Although Andy had shunned the conventional route expected of him, he followed a very honourable personal pilgrimage and was constantly a seeker of truth. He kept in touch with all strands of the family in Africa and America as well as friends and tenants of the estate in Michaelchurch. He was down there to attend a funeral when he died and it's comforting to think that his end happened in an area that he **knew and loved** and where he was also **known and loved**. He kept in touch with people and sent Christmas cards to many. The owner of a well-known hostelry in Michaelchurch, said 'Once we had Andrew's card, Christmas could begin'.

Community mattered to him. He and Anne were members of the choir here. It may sound a small thing to mention but singing gave him real pleasure. Someone early on at school had told him he couldn't sing and that hurt stayed with him for a long time.

These reflections are rays of light and the Divine which shone from Andy – now we give him back into God’s care and love, where all wounds will be healed: all love, perfected.

The world is a better place for Andy’s time in it. He was genuine, gentle, caring, and gave love and friendship, generously. All that he stood for remains with us and we must cherish it – and smile when we stand in autumn leaves, or under the cool of the trees in summer and think of him. I leave you with words from Kahlil Gibran: ‘For what is it to die but to stand naked in the wind and to melt into the sun? And what is it to cease breathing, but to free the breath from its restless tides, that it may rise and expand and seek God unencumbered?’

Go freely, Andy, with our love and gratitude at having been part of your life, until we meet again. Amen.

Ros Trafford-Roberts
January 2015