

MERTON AT BROOKE

A Photo-Essay with Photographs by **Patricia Trunfull**

As a followup to the Summer 1988 issue of *The Merton Seasonal* in which we featured photographs of places Merton had visited and lived during his life — and accounts by William Buchanan, J. T. Ledbetter, and Brother Paul Quenon, O.C.S.O., of visits to places Merton had been, we present here photographs of another place in the Merton experience.

In September of 1932, while still a student at Oakham, Merton visited the family of his classmate and friend, Andrew Winser. The Winsers lived on the Isle of Wight where the father was rector of the church in the village of Brooke. Merton gave little attention to this visit in *The Seven Storey Mountain* (p. 102), but fictionalized the short stay in his novel, *My Argument with the Gestapo*. Andrew Winser, in an interview with Monica Furlong, gave his account of this visit, reported in part by Furlong in *Merton: A Biography*:

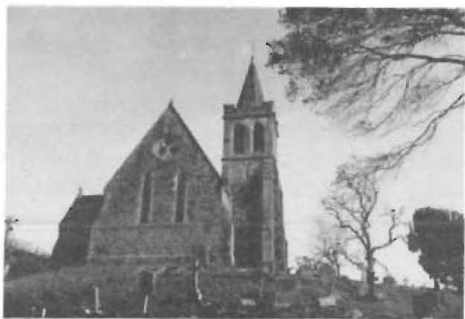
But Andrew, much as he liked Merton, found him at times a bit intense and un-English. He remembers that, when the two boys went for a walk on the downs together, Merton theatrically flung himself down on the ground and grabbed handfuls of grass with the cry “The earth — I love the earth!” It was not the kind of thing an Englishman would do.

Mrs. Patricia Trunfull, who lives in Newport on the Isle of Wight, wrote to the Abbey of Gethsemani, sending photographs of the Church at Brooke. She said:

For many years I have read and loved the works of Fr. Thomas Merton, but wherever photographs are shown, I feel sad that there is nothing of Brooke — a little village on the Isle of Wight which Merton visited Enclosed are photographs which may be of interest to you — and also the negatives in case some future book may show this little corner of the world where there were people he loved and who loved him — and still do.

In a letter to Robert E. Daggy, written in September 1988, she continued:

Did I tell you how the Brooke interest was aroused? . . . I had gone into one of our book stores here to ask if it were possible to obtain Merton’s ‘Asian Journal.’ The answer was ‘No.’ We have a Benedictine Abbey here (Quarr Abbey) and they have tried for me, too, to no avail. The owner of the book shop thought that maybe I meant another order and pointed to her order-book and there was written ‘Merton’ by Monica Furlong — (ordered by the Rev. Robert Bowyer). When I got home I looked up his name in the phone book — wondering what he had read of Merton (and surprised to find another interested). It took me three days to pluck up courage to phone him. I thought he might think it ‘cheek’ on my part. Finally I did. He is the partially retired Rector of Brooke Church . . . and told me I was an answer to prayer (!). That when he retired he promised himself to read about this man (Merton). So friendship developed with him and his wife — and thus permission for the photographs. One thing leads to another.



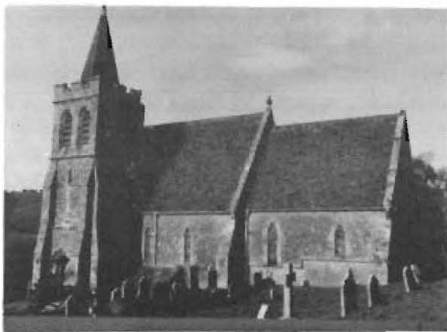
Brooke Church, Brooke, Isle of Wight.



Inside of Brooke Church where Merton read the lesson, the parable about the men who build their houses on sand or rock. He stood either in the pulpit or at the lectern.



View from Brooke Church. In Merton's time this view would have been obscured by trees which were destroyed in a hurricane force gale in 1987



Brooke Church, Brooke, Isle of Wight.