



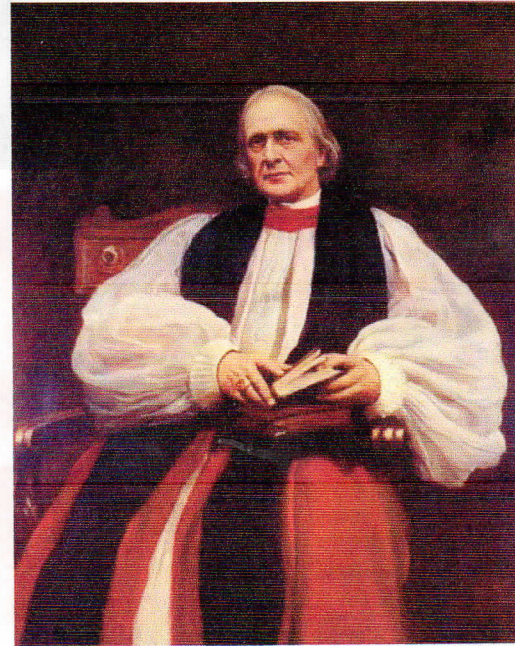
*The Balsall Heath Local History Society was founded in 1979 with the aim of promoting interest in our local history. We feel pride in our area and value its strengths – past and present. To meet our aims we work with local schools and community groups organising exhibitions and events. We have also produced several publications. We are a registered charity and rely on grants and donations to achieve our aims. For more information on our work, or to volunteer and help please contact us.*

**Balsall Heath Local History Society would like to thank all of you for your support in 2013.  
We wish you and your families a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year**

## A Canterbury Tale

The forthcoming erection (in September next year) of a Blue Plaque in Balsall Heath to John Bowen – local builder, alderman and luminary of the Victorian/ Edwardian era – is exciting news. While there have been many famous people associated with Balsall Heath, our only other Blue Plaque is in nearby Highgate – an area often included in with Balsall Heath. The plaque commemorates **Edward White Benson** (right) who was born on 14<sup>th</sup> July 1879 at **72 Lombard Street**. Benson is one of the area's greatest achievers as he became Archbishop of Canterbury!

He was the eldest of eight children of Edward White Benson, a chemical engineer and manufacturer, and his wife, Harriet Baker. His father was a strong evangelical with Yorkshire roots and his mother, from a Birmingham Unitarian family, had converted to the Church of England before their marriage in August 1826. When his father became manager of the British Alkali Works at Stoke, near Droitwich, the family moved first to Ivy Cottage in Wychbold, and later to Brook House, near the factory. The failure of the business in 1842 proved a great strain on his father's health and he died the following year. The business partners gave his widow an annuity, as well as a small house within the deserted factory on Birmingham Heath.



Harriet Benson obviously did well for her children because Edward was educated at King Edward's School, Birmingham and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he graduated BA (8th classic) in 1852. From there he began a career as a schoolmaster at Rugby School in 1852, and was ordained deacon in 1852 and priest in 1857. In 1859 he was chosen by Prince Albert as the first Master of Wellington College, Berkshire, which was built as a memorial to the Duke Of Wellington. Benson was responsible for establishing Wellington as a public school in the style of Rugby rather than the military academy originally planned. From 1872 to 1877 he served as Chancellor of Lincoln Cathedral, and the first Bishop of Truro from 1877–82.

In 1883 he was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. While in office Benson tried to amalgamate the two Convocations - the assemblies of the two Provinces of the Church of England, Canterbury and York - and the new houses of laity into a single assembly. In 1896 it was established that they could 'unofficially' meet together. In September that year, the papal letter *Apostolic Curae* was published. This was, issued by Pope Leo XIII, declaring all Anglican ordinations to be "absolutely null and utterly void".

Benson had started to work on a reply to the letter before his sudden death of a heart attack while attending Sunday service in St. Deiniol's Church, Hawarden, Wales on October 11th, 1896. He had been in the area on a visit to former Prime Minister William Gladstone. He was buried at Canterbury Cathedral in a suitably magnificent tomb located at the western end of the nave (left).