

## Peace and Reconciliation in Hitchin

Canon Michael Roden, Team Rector of the Hitchin and St Paul's Walden Team, is one of three priests from around the country who has been instrumental in an imaginative exercise in reconciliation



Canon Michael has been working alongside the Vicar of Dartford, Kent and the Sub-Dean of Salisbury, addressing the legacy of The Partition, when India was divided at the moment of independence in 1947 into two countries.

Although this sounds like an unusual concern for a Church of England priest, Michael became aware through meeting and working with those of other faiths that there was a painful legacy still affecting the Indian and Pakistani communities. A million people are estimated to have lost their lives in the turmoil and the mass-migration of people. The legacy? Grief, distrust and enmity.

As the 70th anniversary of Partition approached, the three clergy decided that it was time something was done. But what form should 'something' take? The tensions of the past were not just between the South Asian communities, but also lay in deeply buried resentment of the British architects of partition.

With intercommunal tensions already heightened over concerns such as radicalisation, Islamophobia or the marginalisation of minorities, taking from Partition its power to oppress and divide was a prize worth seeking.

In an interview on BBC Newsnight, Michael said: "At school, I learnt about Clive of India, the Indian Mutiny and then I learnt about Gandhi by watching the film. People just don't know this stuff. My children were taught even less than me. History teaching is largely Hitler and the

Henries and with large South Asian populations living here it's just not good enough. It should be on the national curriculum." The first priority was to find a way of telling the history accurately but sensitively.

Four years' research was followed by a seminar organised by Cambridge University, The Runnymede Trust and Coventry Cathedral in which Sikh, Hindu and Muslim educators and historians took part. It concluded that the arts were the best means of telling the story sensitively.

Michael was looking for the equivalent of Anne Frank's Diary. Eventually they settled on a play and a novel. The novel is *Train to Pakistan*, by Khushwant Singh. Michael would love to see this brought to a wider audience and although Lion TV and the BBC were offered and refused the story, Michael believes that their interest was piqued. This led to a panoply of programming covering Partition. The play, 'Child of the Divide' by Sudha Bhuchar, was first performed, fittingly, in St Mary's, Hitchin, before pupils from Denbigh High School, Luton, and St Andrew's C of E School, Hitchin.

Lesson plans and other resources have already been prepared and approved by leading academics. So the prospect of better teaching of the events of 1947 is at least one step closer to reality. Blessed are the peacemakers. Partition stories on the BBC are available at <http://bbc.in/2vOwG8t>