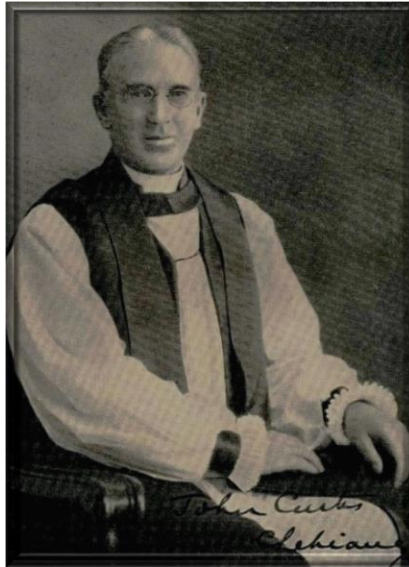


Hangchow Rotarian John Curtis a Bishop in faith and football

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Bishop John Curtis, an Irish missionary bishop in China



John Curtis was the big bloke with the moustache and his arms folded in the back row standing left 1.



The Right Reverend Bishop John Curtis, DD, MA, (邱約翰主教/高德斯主教) was one of the 24 charter members (*Classification: Religion - Protestant Churches*) of Hangchow Rotary Club (杭州扶輪社) which was admitted to Rotary International on 23 June 1932 with Charter #3525. The Club was the first Mandarin speaking Club in history, located in Hangchow (*Hangzhou*), capital city of Chekiang (*Zhejiang*) Province of the Republic of China (中華民國浙江省省會杭州市). (Note) Name in Chinese: (1) 邱約翰 is officially in the Anglican Church archives; (2) 高德斯 is commonly appearing in Chinese literatures.

In July 1937, the Imperial Japan launched full scale aggression to China, and Hangchow was soon captured and occupied by the Japanese forces. Rotary Club was not able to survive but to be terminated on 31 December 1943. After the War Victory in 1945, Curtis joined the former and new members to re-organize the Club which was admitted to Rotary International again on 22 April 1947. Regrettably, the Club was ultimately terminated on 21 December 1950 due to unfavourable social and political environment under the regime of the Communist Party (中國共產黨) to the newly established socialist People's Republic of China (中華人民共和國).



John Curtis (15 March 1880 – 11 July 1962) was an Irish Anglican bishop and missionary renowned for his extensive service in the Republic of China (中華民國), where he led the Diocese of Chekiang (浙江教區) from 1929 to 1950 amid political turmoil, war, and the rise of communism. Born in Dublin to Thomas Hewson Curtis, a corn exchange manager, and Margaret Curtis, he was the eldest of several siblings, including the historian Edmund Curtis. Educated at Benson's Grammar School in Rathmines and Trinity College Dublin, where he earned a Master of Arts, Curtis developed an early interest in sports, playing football for Bohemians Football Club and nearly earning an Irish international cap before ordination as a deacon in 1903 and priest the following year.

Curtis began his clerical career with a curacy at Christ Church, Leeson Park, in Dublin, but in 1906, at age 26, he joined the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and Dublin University Far East Mission (DUFEM) to serve as a missionary in the Ch'ing Empire (大清國) (China), initially in the Diocese of Fukien (福建教區). There, he married Eda Stanley Bryan-Brown, daughter of an Australian clergyman, in 1914. The couple had three children---John Guy (1919–1943), Arthur Bryan (b. 1924), and Joan---while facing the hazards of missionary life, including a dramatic 1922 incident where Eda performed an emergency tracheotomy on their son using improvised tools during a river journey. Interrupted by World War I service as an army chaplain with Allied forces in Thessaloniki of Greece, including the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, Curtis returned to China in 1919 amid the Republic of China's founding and escalating civil strife.

Elected as the fourth and final Irish bishop from CMS and DUFEM in China, Curtis was consecrated on 6 January 1929 at Christ Church Pro-Cathedral (基督代主教座堂) in Ningpo (Ningbo) (寧波), becoming the first foreign bishop ordained on Chinese soil for the Chung Hua Sheng Kung Hui (中華聖公會) (literally Anglican Church of China). His vast Diocese spanned 36,680 square miles in Chekiang (Zhejiang) Province (浙江省), encompassing 23 million people by 1950 and serving 11,574 Anglicans across districts in Ningpo, Linhai (臨海) (Taichow 台州), and Hangchow (Hangzhou) (杭州), with additional oversight of English-speaking congregations in Shanghai (上海), including Holy Trinity Cathedral (聖三一座堂). Under his leadership, the Church grew significantly, with baptisms doubling to 12,000 by 1940 despite challenges like banditry, famine, and civil war. Curtis promoted Sunday schools, women's missions, and the 1930 incorporation of the Chinese CMS into diocesan structures, emphasizing an indigenous, self-sustaining Chinese Church.

His episcopate was marked by profound adversity during the Second Sino-Japanese War and World War II (1937-1945). When Imperial Japan invaded China in 1937, Curtis remained in Hangchow---captured on Christmas Day---organizing aid for hospitals, refugees, and children through "milk rounds" and sheltering thousands in mission compounds. Arrested in November 1942, Curtis endured internment in Shanghai's Haiphong Road Camp (海防路集中營) and later Hong Kong's Stanley Internment Camp (赤柱拘留營), where he ministered to prisoners and faced threats for protesting mistreatment, all while learning of his son John's death in a 1943 Royal Air Force accident. Released in 1945, Curtis rebuilt amid the Chinese Civil War, but the 1949 Communist victory forced his departure in 1950 at age 70. Retiring to England, Curtis served briefly as vicar of Wilden, Worcestershire, before settling in Leamington Spa. He died suddenly in 1962, survived by Eda (who died 18 months later), with obituaries in 《The Church Times》 lauding his faithfulness, courage, and ecumenical spirit.



It could happen to a Bishop -- in faith and football

John Curtis as a youngster lived with his family on Montpellier Hill its steep incline rising to the North Circular Road gate of the Phoenix Park where Bohemian Football Club would be founded in 1890 by a group of men only a few years senior to young Curtis. By that time the growing Curtis family had moved the short distance to Blackhall Street, residing in a house next to the Law Society buildings at Blackhall Place which were then occupied by the King's Hospital school. Eventually the family moved to Hollybrook Road in Clontarf as Thomas' career continued to progress. The young Curtis was educated not in King's Hospital but at Benson's Grammar School in Rathmines which was founded by Rev. Charles William Benson on the lower Rathmines Road, the school also educated the likes of George Russell (AE) and members of the Bewley family. Curtis then graduated to study in Trinity College Dublin.

It was around this time that a teenage John Curtis first made an appearance for Bohemians. He appeared in the first team in the 1897-1898 season. He played most of his games for the Club at inside-left, and in that first season his partner at outside-left was none other than Oliver St. John Gogarty. The pair starred together as Bohemians won the 1897-98 Leinster Senior Cup final, defeating Shelbourne 3-1 while also progressing to the semi-finals of the Irish Cup.

The following season showed a similar pattern, another Leinster Senior Cup win and another lost Irish Cup semi-final (this time to Linfield) for the Bohs and John Curtis. Though not yet 20 Curtis was already a star player, in the 18 games he played that season he scored an astonishing 21 goals. Bohemians wouldn't join the Irish league until the 1902-1903 season so Cup competitions such as the Leinster Senior Cup and the Irish Cup, as well as the Leinster Senior League, would have taken precedent at the time and Bohemians were clearly the strongest side outside of Ulster at that juncture.

The 1899-1900 season saw further progress in the Irish Cup. This time Bohs got all the way to the final. John Curtis was instrumental in getting them there, scoring a vital equalizing goal in the semi-final against Belfast Celtic before Herbert Pratt scored the winner in a match played in the Jones Road sports ground, now better known as Croke Park. Curtis lined out against Cliftonville in the final in Grosvenor Park in Belfast in front of 5,500 spectators. Alas it didn't turn out to be a first cup win for Bohemians.

Bohs had made it to the cup final once before in 1895 when they were hammered 10-1 by Linfield, but the 1900 final was to be a much closer affair with Bohs being defeated 2-1 with George Sheehan getting the goal for the Dublin side. The newspaper reports described a tight game with Bohs deemed to have been highly unlucky to lose, indeed many observers thought that Cliftonville's second goal was a clear offside. Matters weren't helped by four Bohemian players picking up knocks during the course of the match.

On a personal note for John Curtis it seemed that just a week prior to the Irish Cup final he might be honored with an international cap. A first ever international game was to be staged in Dublin's Lansdowne Road and Andrew Gara, the Roscommon born, Preston North End forward was earmarked for a spot in the Irish attack, however just days before the game Gara was injured and the Irish Independent reported that his place was to be awarded to John Curtis. This didn't come to pass however, the sole Dubliner in the line-up was Curtis' team-mate George Sheehan who was given the honour of captaining Ireland in a 2-0 defeat to England. The closest Curtis would come to an international cap would be representing Leinster in an inter-provincial game that season against an Ulster selection.

While John Curtis would continue to line out for Bohemians his appearances were reduced in number over the coming years, he had sporting commitments with Trinity College as well, representing them in as a footballer in the Irish Cup while also enjoying games of Rugby.

Curtis featured in a team photo from the 1902 Leinster Senior Cup winning photo but lined out for the Club less frequently, he did appear in a couple of prestigious friendly matches in the early years of the century however, when Bohemians were keen to invite the cream of British football to their new home in Dalymount Park. Curtis played against Celtic in 1901 and against Bolton Wanderers the following year.

By 1903 Curtis had finished his studies in Trinity College and was ordained as a Reverend, his first parish being that of Leeson Park in Ballsbridge. By this stage his two younger brothers Edward (Ned) and Harry were both playing for Bohemians, though with less distinction than their older brother. While his footballing life might have been coming to somewhat of an early close the even more remarkable parts of John Curtis's story were only beginning. After only three years in his Dublin parish John Curtis was setting sail for missionary work in the Ch'ing Empire and embarking on a whole new chapter in his life.

The 44 Years of Religious Service in China

Early Life and Education

John Curtis was born on 15 March 1880 in Dublin, Ireland, into a middle-class Anglican family. He was the eldest son of Thomas Hewson Curtis, a clerk who later advanced to manager at the corn exchange near Christchurch Cathedral, and his wife Margaret Curtis. The family included two younger brothers, Edward (known as Ned) and Harry. His cousin was the historian Edmund Curtis. This reflected a modest but stable household typical of Dublin's professional class during the late Victorian period.

Curtis spent his early childhood in Dublin's northside, initially residing on Montpellier Hill near the Phoenix Park, before the family relocated to Blackhall Street adjacent to the Law Society buildings and King's Hospital school. As his father's career progressed, they moved to Hollybrook Road in Clontarf, exposing young John to the city's evolving urban landscape and Anglican institutions, including proximity to Christchurch Cathedral, a center of Irish Protestant tradition.

During this time, he developed an interest in sports, playing football for Bohemians Football Club and nearly earning an Irish international cap. His education began at Benson's Grammar School in Rathmines, founded by the Reverend Charles William Benson, which provided an early immersion in clerical and scholarly environments that hinted at his future religious path. This upbringing in a culturally rich, Protestant Irish milieu, amid the tensions of late 19th-century Ireland, likely fostered his commitment to Anglican missionary work abroad.

Curtis's Irish heritage, rooted in Dublin's Anglo-Irish community, instilled a sense of cultural identity intertwined with Protestant faith, influencing his worldview and zeal for evangelism in distant lands. He later pursued higher education at Trinity College, Dublin, building on these formative years.

Trinity College, Dublin, is a leading institution for Anglican theological preparation in Ireland. There, he completed his studies by 1903 and earned a Master of Arts degree, which formed the core of his academic foundation in arts and divinity.

Curtis later received the degree of Doctor of Divinity (DD). This advanced qualification underscored his preparation for ecclesiastical leadership, though specific details on the conferring institution or timing are not elaborated in available records. His time at Trinity equipped him with rigorous training in biblical studies, church history, and pastoral theology, essential for his future ministerial role.

The transition from academic pursuits to a clerical vocation was seamless for Curtis, culminating in his ordination as a deacon in 1903 and as a priest in 1904, shortly after graduation. No specific theses or writings from this period are documented, but his educational path clearly oriented him toward missionary service abroad.

Ordination and Early Ministry

Ordination and Dublin Curacy

Curtis completed his theological studies at Trinity College, Dublin, before being ordained deacon in the Church of Ireland in 1903 and priest in 1904.

Following his ordination, he served as curate at Christ Church, Leeson Park, in Dublin's affluent Ballsbridge area, from 1904 to 1906. In this role, Curtis assisted the rector with pastoral care, including conducting services, delivering sermons, visiting parishioners, and organizing community events typical of an urban Anglican parish at the time. His duties provided foundational experience in ministry, helping to prepare him for subsequent overseas missionary service.

Initial Missionary Work in China

Following his ordination and brief curacy in Dublin, John Curtis joined the Dublin University Mission to Fukien in 1906, departing Ireland that year and arriving in the Ch'ing Empire to begin his missionary service. Assigned to the Fuh-Ning Prefecture (福寧府), a remote and rugged area encompassing five counties with limited prior Christian presence, Curtis focused on educational and evangelistic efforts as part of the mission's post-Boxer Rebellion (義和團運動) rebuilding phase.

Curtis shared oversight of higher education in Fuh-Ning, including the Boys' Boarding School and the establishment of a new High School to provide advanced training, alongside plans for a normal class to prepare native teachers. By 1910, he assumed primary charge of Fuh-Ting County (福鼎縣), one of the Prefecture's most isolated regions, where he conducted pastoral work, itinerant preaching among fishing villages and mountain tribes, and support for day schools that funneled students into larger boarding institutions. These roles emphasized community building through education as a means of evangelism, aligning with China's 1906 educational reforms that abolished classical examinations in favor of modern curricula.

Early challenges included severe staff shortages due to furloughs and illnesses, leaving Curtis and a few colleagues overburdened across the expansive prefecture, compounded by the demanding Fuh-Ning dialect that hindered language acquisition and communication. Cultural adaptation proved difficult in a decaying port town plagued by opium addiction---though dens were closed by 1907---and lingering anti-foreign sentiments from the Boxer era, including sporadic persecutions like robberies and official harassment. Logistical issues, such as poor roads and isolation from Foochow (*Fuzhou*) (福州), further complicated travel and supply lines, yet the Mission's boat T.C.D. (Trinity College Dublin) facilitated outreach to coastal inlets.

Initial successes emerged in educational expansion and gradual church growth, with Sunday congregations in Fuh-Ning reaching 300 by the late 1900s and native contributions funding new buildings, including a church seating 500. Day schools in remote areas like Fuh-Ting began yielding catechists and converts, while missionary institutions gained reputation for discipline and hygiene, attracting students despite lacking government certification and contributing to broader efforts like anti-foot-binding campaigns. These foundations supported the Mission's self-sustaining native church model, mirroring the Church of Ireland's structure.

Episcopate in Chekiang

Appointment as Bishop

In 1929, John Curtis was appointed as the Bishop of Chekiang following the resignation of Bishop Herbert James Molony (麥樂義主教) on 31 December 1928, after 21 years in the role. The appointment came through nomination by the House of Bishops of the Chung Hua Sheng Kung Hui (CHSKH, the Anglican Church in China), marking Curtis's elevation from missionary priest to episcopal leader.

Curtis was consecrated on 6 January 1929---the Feast of the Epiphany---at Christ Church in Ningpo, in a service conducted entirely in Chinese. The consecrating bishops were John Norris (鄂爾德主教) of North China (華北教區) (serving as chairman of the House of Bishops), Gerard Huntington (韓仁敦主教) of Anking (皖贛教區), and Arnold Scott (史葛主教) of Shantung (*Shandong*) (山東教區), assisted by the retiring Bishop Molony and the Chinese-born Assistant Bishop of Chekiang, T. S. Sing (沈載琛助理主教), who delivered the sermon. This ceremony represented a milestone, as Curtis became the first foreign (Irish) bishop consecrated within China not merely as a missionary of the Church of England, but explicitly as a bishop of the autonomous CHSKH.

The Diocese of Chekiang, tracing its origins to 1862 under Bishop Charles Musson Parlett Russell's (羅致信主教) broad jurisdiction over eastern China, had evolved through territorial divisions and the 1912 unification of Anglican dioceses into the CHSKH. By 1929, it encompassed the province of Chekiang, including key centers like Ningpo, Taichow (Linhai), and Hangchow, where Curtis would later reside, overseeing a network of Anglican churches, schools, and medical missions amid a population exceeding 20 million.

Curtis's transition from 22 years of missionary work in neighboring Fukien Province to episcopal oversight involved assuming responsibility for the Diocese's clergy, laity, and institutions, emphasizing a shift from foreign mission dependencies to integrated CHSKH governance. His early priorities centered on organizational reforms to advance the CHSKH's autonomy, including incorporating separate mission boards into diocesan structures to foster self-supporting local leadership. Additionally, Curtis pursued ecumenical relations within China's Anglican community, building on the CHSKH's synodal framework to promote unity and indigenous development across denominations.

Missionary Contributions and Church Development

During his tenure as Bishop of Chekiang from 1929 to the early 1940s, John Curtis prioritized the expansion of Anglican missions through targeted initiatives in Church planting and evangelism across the Diocese's vast 36,680 square miles, which encompassed the Ningpo, Taichow, and Hangchow regions. He undertook extensive foot tours to remote areas, fostering new congregations and supporting the integration of the Chinese branch of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) into the Diocesan Board in 1930, which embedded missionary activities as a core function of local church governance. These efforts emphasized grassroots evangelism, including the establishment and growth of Sunday schools and women's missionary groups, which saw significant expansion despite regional challenges.

Curtis's educational initiatives focused on sustaining and adapting Anglican schooling to local needs, overseeing CMS secondary schools that provided theological and general education until wartime pressures forced relocations. Ordination candidates were transferred to training programs in Nanking (*Nanjing*) (南京), while in occupied areas like Hangchow, informal educational sessions continued unregistered, and in freer zones such as Ningpo and Shaohing (*Shaoxing*) (紹興), schools operated in split shifts or village settings to evade disruptions. A Teachers' Institute in 1939 gathered around 60 young people for instruction, and weekly youth classes in Hangchow engaged over 40 groups, promoting literacy and Christian formation aligned with Chinese cultural contexts. These programs aimed to cultivate indigenous leadership, adapting Anglican curricula to emphasize self-reliance and community relevance.

Collaboration with local Chinese clergy was central to Curtis's vision of an authentically indigenous Church, as evidenced by his consecration in 1929 by Chinese Assistant Bishop T. S. Sing alongside foreign predecessors, symbolizing a shift toward shared authority within the Chung Hua Sheng Kung Hui. He worked closely with Chinese pastors to distribute aid and maintain services, with local clergy leading hospital ministries and evangelism in both urban centers like Hangchow---where two Chinese priests served the city and its hospitals---and rural outposts. Anglican practices were adapted to Chinese culture through the promotion of self-propagating structures, reducing foreign oversight and encouraging vernacular worship and community-led initiatives, which Curtis described as transitioning from "mission relationships to Church relationships" by the late 1930s.

Quantifiable impacts under Curtis's leadership included a doubling of baptized Anglicans to approximately 12,000 by 1940 from around 6,000 in 1920, driven by surges in adult baptisms--such as 50 at Christmas 1938 and 79 at Whitsuntide 1939 in Hangchow alone---often linked to relief and outreach efforts. Church planting yielded sustained congregations, with regular services in Ningpo and confirmations alongside the ordination of four deacons in 1939. Healthcare development leveraged the medical expertise of his wife Eda Curtis, a medical doctor, in sustaining CMS hospitals. The Hangchow facility remained operational with Chinese staff, treating hundreds of patients including soldiers and refugees, while the Leper and Tuberculosis Branch Hospital efficiently managed specialized care, contributing to community trust and evangelistic opportunities. These advancements underscored Curtis's role in building a resilient, culturally integrated Anglican presence in Chekiang.

Challenges during Tenure

Political Turmoil in China

During John Curtis's episcopate in Chekiang from 1929 to 1950, the province and broader China were engulfed in profound political instability, marked by the intensifying Chinese Civil War between the Kuomintang (中國國民黨) (KMT) (Nationalists) and the Chinese Communist Party (中國共產黨), as well as the full-scale Imperial Japan's invasion starting in 1937. Curtis had already navigated early tensions upon arriving in China in 1906, witnessing the fall of the Ch'ing Empire and the Republic's founding in 1912, but the 1920s brought escalating conflicts, including the 1927 Nanchang Uprising (南昌起義) in neighboring Kiangsu (*Jiangsu*) Province (江蘇省), where Kuomintang forces routed the Communist Red Army, displacing survivors into Fukien where Curtis served. By the late 1920s, he described the political landscape as "perplexing" with signs of drift toward "Red China". The Japanese invasion exacerbated these

divisions. After the Marco Polo Bridge Incident (盧溝橋事變) in July 1937, Japanese forces captured Hangchow---Curtis's diocesan seat---on Christmas Day 1937 following intense urban combat involving 90,000 troops. This period divided Chekiang's expansive 36,680-square-mile Diocese into occupied, war, and free zones by 1939, with ongoing KMT-Communist skirmishes in contested areas like Fu-Yang County (富陽縣) leading to widespread banditry, famine, and home burnings that devastated rural parishes.

Missionary work faced severe disruptions amid this turmoil. The Japanese occupation closed all Church Missionary Society (CMS) secondary schools in Hangchow, forcing the evacuation of ordination candidates to Nanking, while large swaths of the Diocese fell under enemy control by June 1938. Air raids, refugee influxes, and economic collapse halted regular operations; in bombed towns like Chu-Ki (諸暨) and Tung-Lu (桐廬), trade ceased, and infrastructure crumbled, compelling reliance on canal boats for travel in free areas such as Ningpo and Shaohing. In war zones, fighting directly imperiled congregations, with Curtis noting deaths and property destruction during his April 1939 visits. Aid efforts emerged as a key response: the National Christian Council of China (中華全國基督教協進會) provided relief grants administered by Chinese pastors to assist affected Christians, including distributions of rice and clothing through church networks and the Red Cross. Despite these challenges, baptisms persisted, with 50 adults in Hangchow at Christmas 1938 and 79 at Whitsuntide 1939, reflecting conversions among the impoverished amid what Curtis called the "great tribulation".

Curtis responded with determined leadership, prioritizing continuity and protection of Church assets up to 1942. In occupied Hangchow, he and 13 other foreign missionaries, including hospital staff, refused consular urgings to evacuate, remaining as one of only 31 foreigners in the city---the sole Irish national. He organized "milk rounds" to supply children and escorted families to refugee camps in mission compounds, such as those at the YMCA housing 3,000 people, while a Red Cross committee at the mission hospital coordinated aid to prevent soldier intrusions, aided by limited Japanese Military Police presence. Provincial Chinese authorities interacted directly with Curtis, requesting in November 1937 that his hospital absorb 300-400 wounded soldiers from a government facility, which was transferred to allied Huchow Mission (湖州傳教區) staff. The hospital successfully evacuated approximately 300 patients "across the river" before occupation, leaving over 200 under Japanese oversight without interference. In war zones, Curtis held services for Chinese soldiers, including a Brigade Commander, and mediated local tensions by fostering community support. He undertook a six-week diocesan tour on foot in autumn 1938 and continued visitations into 1939, conducting confirmations and ordinations, such as four deacons in Ningpo on Whitsuntide 1939, to bolster morale. These efforts safeguarded Church properties and mediated amid hostilities, avoiding the atrocities seen elsewhere like Nanking.

To adapt to the instability, Curtis oversaw strategic shifts in missionary approaches, emphasizing self-reliance and pastoral resilience. In 1930, he integrated the Chinese CMS into the Diocesan Board, promoting a self-sustaining Church that grew Anglican communicants from approximately 6,000 baptized in 1920 to 12,000 by 1940 through evangelism via Sunday schools, women's programs, and institutes like Hangchow's Young People's Institute with over 40 weekly classes. In occupied areas, focus narrowed to hospital operations and refugee care, while war zones prioritized relief for burned communities. Free areas maintained near-normal activities with adaptations like 6 a.m. Sunday services in Ningpo to dodge raids. By 1939, Curtis adopted a pragmatic "carry on" ethos without elaborate contingency plans, centering on visitations,

fellowship gatherings, and worker support to fortify the faithful against division and invasion pressures. These changes ensured the Church's endurance amid the KMT-Communist clashes and Japanese advances through 1942, when Pacific War escalations further strained communications and mobility. Following Imperial Japan's surrender in 1945, Curtis briefly returned to rebuild amid the resuming Chinese Civil War, but the Communist victory and establishment of the People's Republic on 1 October 1949 imposed increasing restrictions on foreign missionaries, emphasizing indigenous control and leading to his departure in 1950 at age 70.

World War II Internment

In November 1942, Bishop John Curtis was arrested and interned by Japanese forces, first at Haiphong Road Camp in Shanghai and later at Stanley Internment Camp in the British Crown Colony Hong Kong. He and his wife Eda, both in their sixties, endured internment until the end of the War, with Eda continuing medical work within the Camp. The internment lasted until 1945, with Curtis facing severe hardships including overcrowding, inadequate food, and harsh treatment typical of Japanese civilian camps.

During his imprisonment, Curtis faced physical and emotional trials, including malnutrition and the psychological strain of isolation from his family, yet he emerged as a key leader among the internees. He organized communal activities to bolster morale and openly challenged Japanese guards over mistreatment, at one point receiving threats of execution for his outspokenness. As an Anglican bishop, Curtis provided spiritual guidance and sustenance to fellow prisoners, conducting services and offering pastoral support that helped sustain their faith and resilience amid the despair.

Journalist and Church of Ireland priest, Patrick Comerford wrote that on one occasion, "the Japanese threatened to shoot him if he continued to criticize their treatment of his fellow prisoners, but it was said that in internment he was a great asset to the morale of the camp."

Curtis was released in September 1945 following Japan's surrender, reuniting with Eda shortly thereafter. The ordeal had profoundly impacted his health, leaving him weakened and with lasting physical deterioration from the years of privation, though he and Eda managed a brief return to missionary duties in Hangchow supported by Red Cross aid before departing China permanently. The separation and hardships intensified the family's grief, compounded by news received during internment of their eldest son John Guy's death in a Royal Air Force accident in January 1943.

Family, Health and Personal Challenges

In 1914, John Curtis married Eda Stanley Bryan-Brown, a fellow missionary and qualified medical doctor, in Fuh-Ning. They had met earlier through their shared mission work in the Fukien Diocese, where Curtis arrived in 1906 and Bryan-Brown had been serving since 1909, contributing to evangelical and medical outreach efforts among local communities.

The couple had three children: John Guy, born in 1919; Arthur Bryan, born in 1924; and Joan (born c. 1925). Family life was closely intertwined with their missionary duties, involving frequent relocations across China to support Church expansion and community welfare, while Curtis balanced pastoral responsibilities with family needs during periods of regional instability.

Eda's role as a mother complemented her professional commitments, as she often integrated childcare with on-site medical aid in remote mission stations.

Eda pursued a parallel career as a doctor in mission hospitals, providing essential healthcare to Chinese communities affected by poverty and disease. Her expertise enabled joint contributions with Curtis to public health initiatives, including hospital management and emergency medical interventions that supported the broader goals of the Church Missionary Society in promoting holistic missionary work. For instance, during family travels for evangelistic purposes, Eda demonstrated her skills by performing life-saving procedures under challenging conditions, underscoring the family's collaborative approach to mission responsibilities.

In 1916, Curtis returned to Europe in the midst of the First World War. This meant separation from his wife and his missionary work. Curtis joined the British Army Chaplains and shared the dangers of the combat troops in trenches and on battlefields. He spent time in Greece and also would have ministered to members of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers during his service. As one journalist who knew Curtis well observed of his character: "one cannot picture him holding back from that cataclysm". Indeed despite his obvious religious devotion most descriptions of John Curtis focus strongly on his energy and fearlessness, whether on the sports ground, or the battlefield or in his missionary work.

Luckily Curtis survived the War and in 1919 received the Victory Medal, however he swiftly returned to his work in the newly established Republican China. Since arriving in the Ch'ing Empire in 1906 Curtis had witnessed crowning of the child emperor Henry Puyi (溥儀) in 1908 as well as his forced abdication, the end of the Ch'ing Empire, and the founding of the Republic of China just a few years later. His post-War return witnessed further upheaval.

By this stage John Curtis and Eda had become parents to a son, John Guy Curtis in 1919, Arthur Bryan Curtis in 1924 and followed by a sister, Joan. It was a restless time to have a new family but there was further change. At one stage, Curtis wrote with insight from Fu-Ning: *The situation out here politically is more and more perplexing. It seems as if we are drifting nearer and nearer to some sort of a "Red China"*. Undaunted, he stayed on in the region until 1926.

Throughout his extensive missionary career in China, John Curtis encountered significant personal health challenges that compounded the rigors of his vocation. In 1922, during an arduous river journey, his eldest son John Guy contracted laryngeal diphtheria and nearly died, necessitating an emergency tracheotomy performed by Curtis's wife, Eda, using a pen-knife and hairpins as improvised tools under dire circumstances. This incident underscored the perilous health risks faced by missionary families in remote areas, far from medical facilities, and highlighted the emotional strain of such isolation.

A profound personal tragedy struck in 1943 when their son John Guy, serving in the Royal Air Force, died in an accident. Curtis learned of this while interned by the Japanese, adding immense emotional burden amid wartime hardships.

Curtis's own health deteriorated markedly in his later years, with severe arthritis developing after his retirement to Leamington Spa in 1957 at age 77. The condition severely limited his mobility and physical capabilities, yet he coped with remarkable fortitude, remaining in good spirits and continuing to nurture connections with old friends and acquaintances through

regular visits to Dublin. This resilience was rooted in his unwavering faith, which served as a primary coping mechanism amid physical decline and the disruptions of mission life.

The broader emotional challenges of missionary work, including prolonged separations from family during travel-heavy assignments and the cultural clashes inherent in establishing Anglican communities in early 20th-century China, further tested Curtis's endurance. These trials were mitigated by the steadfast support of his wife Eda, whose partnership provided essential emotional ballast throughout their 44 years of service.

Later Career and Legacy

Return to England and Final Ministry

After resigning as Bishop of Chekiang in April 1950, amid the political changes following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, John Curtis and his wife Eda were compelled to leave the country permanently and returned to England later that year. They settled in Worcestershire, where Curtis, then aged 70, sought to continue his clerical ministry in a quieter setting.

Curtis was appointed Vicar of Wilden, a small rural parish near Stourport-on-Severn, serving from 1950 to 1957. Despite ongoing health challenges from arthritis, which had worsened during his internment in China, he managed the parish duties with dedication, maintaining pastoral care for the community while adapting to physical limitations.

In 1957, at the age of 77, Curtis retired from active ministry and moved to Leamington Spa for a more sedentary life. His final years were marked by quiet reflection, occasional correspondence with former colleagues, and a continued interest in global church affairs, though he largely withdrew from public roles.

Death and Enduring Impact

Rotarian Bishop John Curtis passed away suddenly in 1962, aged 82, and RotaryAnn Eda died just 18 months later. They had truly lived full, dramatic and difficult lives.

In an obituary in *《The Church Times》*, the former Dean of Holy Trinity Cathedral, Shanghai, wrote of him: *“He was a faithful father in God, a wise counsellor and a sympathetic friend ... memories of him we shall treasure, and lives shaped by his influence and example will carry on God's work which he loved and made so attractive by his own life and ministry.”*

A CMS missionary in China at the time, William Robert Osborne Taylor (泰樂), recalled John Curtis as a bishop with “distinctively Irish gifts” that were valued in non-Anglican ecumenical circles which had little use for bishops. Taylor was the acting secretary for the CMS mission in Hangchow during 1937-1938.

Curtis's enduring impact lies in his pioneering vision for an independent, indigenous Chinese Anglican Church, which anticipated key elements of modern Chinese Christian theology by emphasizing self-reliance and cultural integration over foreign mission dependencies. As the last Irish bishop linked to the Church Missionary Society and Dublin University Far East Mission in China, his oversight of the Chekiang Diocese from 1929 to 1950 fostered significant growth, with baptized Anglicans doubling to 12,000 by 1940 amid wars, famines, and occupations---a testament to his resilient leadership that integrated mission work into local church structures. Post-1950, his model influenced the Anglican diaspora from China, promoting ecumenical ties

and self-governing churches in exile communities, as noted in church histories highlighting his wartime morale-building efforts during Japanese internment.

Contemporary obituaries praised Curtis as a “faithful father in God, a wise counsellor and a sympathetic friend”, whose influence shaped lives and perpetuated his ministry’s appeal through personal example. His family’s wartime experiences, including the loss of son John Guy only 23 when he died in a flying accident while on service as a Royal Air Force pilot, underscored the personal costs of his mission, yet no direct continuations in ecclesiastical roles by descendants are documented. While his administrative and pastoral contributions are well-recognized, scholarly attention to his theological writings remains limited, suggesting opportunities for further exploration of his Irish-inflected ecumenism.



Map of the Anglican Church Dioceses in China in 1925

In Chekiang Today

John Curtis

1 November 1939

Like China as a whole and like Gaul of old the Chekiang Diocese is divided into three parts. We have an "occupied" area---much less "inhabited" than previously---round about Hangchow, we have a "war" area which begins anywhere outside Hangchow and runs across the Fuyang Hsien northwest towards Anhui, and we have the "free" area which includes all the right bank of the Chien T'ang River and all the left bank as well beyond the "line" which runs through Fuyang.

We of the Sheng Kung Hui have no work in the "occupied" area except in Hangchow and with regard to our work there all through the period of occupation we have had very much to be thankful for. None of our foreign missionaries were evacuated and none were directly interfered with. We were able to keep all our missionaries---men and women---four men, ten women, one retired woman-worker and one independent but partly attached woman missionary; of these, two men and eight women were in the Hospital, one woman and one man in the Branch Hospital (Lepers etc.) outside the city proper and the rest were in the heart of the city. We were fortunate in being able to keep all our Chinese hospital staff except a couple of "internes" and a few nurses who would not face Japanese occupation or whose parents insisted on taking them away, but it was a well-staffed efficiently-working hospital that went through the bad times and proved such a source of help and stability in the afflicted city. We also had our two Chinese clergy in the city and one in each of the Hospitals. We were much better off than the other missions who were each represented by one foreign man and rather a smaller number of Chinese clergy.

The matter that finally cleared away any hesitation there may have been about remaining was the request in November 1937 from the Provincial Governor and Mayor that we should take over from them the inmates of a hospital they had been running with between three hundred and four hundred seriously wounded Chinese soldiers whom they could make no provision for. They put them in a school next door, provided all necessary equipment and money, also a staff which vanished just in time to make room for the staff of the Huchow (Methodist Episcopal South) Mission Hospital under Dr. Manget and Miss Morton to take over. These latter had evacuated to us a body and were moving back hoping to find work. They reached us at the psychological moment and took charge of the wounded soldiers next door, and though we got most of the credit they did most of the work! We had already quite a number of wounded soldiers in our own Hospital and there was a busy time before the Japanese came, preparing all who could be moved for evacuation "across the river"; during the month that was left we evacuated about three hundred and we left with just over two hundred when the city was occupied. May it be said to the credit of the Japanese that they never interfered with these men in any way except that after seven months one hundred convalescent were taken away and put under more careful guard but not in any way ill-treated, and after another seven months the remainder were allowed to go free without any restrictions. This whole piece of work reflected credit on all concerned, our hospital staff, the Huchow Hospital staff, the Chinese Central Government who paid for all those who came to our Hospital, the Chekiang Government who

paid for those whom they handed over to us and the Japanese for their scrupulous “non-interference.”

The Leper and T. B. Hospital outside the city was also kept going in an efficient way, (we evacuated the orthopaedic children to the city hospital) and not interfered with though we had many alarms and excitements such as finding free Japanese cavalry men mounted on top of the hospital hill one day---the walls were not intact and these men were scouting!

Our local Red Cross Committee with headquarters in the Hospital also did a notable work--we concentrated about 3,000 women and children in our various mission Y.M.C.A. and some other compounds and we just had enough foreign men (and two women!) to help the very efficient Chinese workers we had in the oversight of all these places and again we have to record a very successful piece of work. It needed constant care, day and night, (for Hangchow was much the same during the first three months of occupation as all other East China cities) to prevent soldiers from coming in, to persuade those who had got in to go out, to get the Military Police in specially difficult cases, but again the work was successfully carried through without any of the regrettable incidents reported from Nanking and elsewhere, largely due to the fact that our refugees were all collected into compounds that could be kept closed and that we had in most cases a resident foreigner as the last line of defence or at any rate continual visits from a responsible person. The Japanese Military Police also helped us in a great measure but at first they were very few in number.

It took several months before our refugees were all evacuated but at last only on which still has nearly 1,000 villagers from burnt out areas was left.

All this work led on to the resumption by degrees of our regular church work---some of the clergy have never returned but all our churches have long been back at work mostly with congregations of whom more than half are “new” people met during the great tribulation. In our own Sheng Kung Hi there were 50 adults baptized at Christmas 1938 and 79 at Whitsuntide 1939; these numbers are quite exceptionable in our work in Hangchow and are directly due to work in “the bad times” and our experience is common with the other churches in Hangchow ---“much people was added unto the Lord”.

Most Christian community evacuated before the Japanese came---generally speaking only the poor remained---and financial matters are difficult on this account. All the churches combined in relief efforts last winter. They made clothes, they contributed money, they distributed rice provided by N.C.C. and Red Cross Funds and they are beginning to lay their plans for next winter already. The church members led by their responsible leaders are getting out into community service in a new way to response to the dreadful need evident in the city and although a lot of old leaders are absent, the church is giving a very good account of itself in poor present day half dead, half populated Hangchow.

Schools “of sorts” are being carried on. Only the Roman Mission so far has registered a school with the present authorities, and as yet we have no plans for the future. We go on from day to day “in hope”, but there is probably much more effective evangelistic work going on in Hangchow city now than ever before in its history. We usually have a big Sunday work radiating out from our Young People’s Institute in Hangchow and there was a Teachers’ Institute with about 60 young people present in July for a fortnight---and any Sunday afternoon there are over forty classes being held in the institute.

Now for the area No.2---the war area. Here we have little to report, only one of our parishes is affected and it only in about half its area---but many of our people suffered in the original fighting and many more had their homes burnt out and quite a number were killed. I was close by a time in April of this year coming from the "free" side and was able to hold services in a couple of places where the catechists are carrying on---one of them is close touch with the Chinese soldiers in the neighbourhood and at a service when I was there we had a Brigade Commander, his director of medical services, some other officers and some of the rank and file present, some of them Christians from other parts of China, some of them learning what Christianity means. The N.C.C. gave a grant of \$500 to help the people of this area and two of our Chinese pastors spent some time there in July to administer this money in various ways and to strengthen these suffering Christians with the sympathy and help that came through them and the N.C.C. from all over the world. We know little of the area just inside the Japanese side of the line---it is still a "front line area" and visitors are not welcomed.

In area No.3---"Free China"---our Sheng Kung Hui work radiates out from Ningpo, Shaohing and Taichow and there is also what used to be worked from Hangchow along the Chien T'ang River and along the highway to Anhui. I was able to visit these areas in October-November 1938 on my way to Madras. In these days we could not get passes from Hangchow for a long enough time to visit the districts across a few of our Chinese leaders and the one foreign man we have there for a few days consultation each time. All the workers there are at their posts and the work (of all missions and churches) on the whole goes on under nearly normal conditions except that instead of our good highways we are back to our canal boats of every sort---all our advance in communications made in the last ten years has been lost, roads and railways dug up and destroyed as far as possible; there is no difficulty getting about but it is slower. School work has been carried on under difficulties as air raids have at times been frequent. After various interruptions the Ningpo schools have all gone to the villages and in Shaohing they have early morning and later afternoon sessions, and the pupils are encouraged to spend the rest of the day in the country outside. In the large towns a good deal of help to passing refugees has been given and regular work has gone on, Sunday services in Ningpo at 6 a.m. and 5 p.m. I held a confirmation service there on Whitsunday at 6 a.m. followed immediately by the ordination of four deacons. Conditions in Ningpo have varied---raids nearly eighteen months ago nearly emptied the city for a couple of months and then conditions gradually got back to normal till in April 1939 eight raids in quick succession inflicting much damage and many casualties on the civilian population once more emptied the city and after that business was all carried on early in the morning and late in the afternoon. Shaohing has been much less seriously bombed but quite enough to make the population very careful though business there has been much less interfered with. There is a large number of refugees in Shaohing from the areas across the river and the churches are busy in relief work. Chuki, a flourishing hsien city in the Shaohing district on the Chekiang-Kiangsi Railway, was badly bombed and the greater part of the business area burned out---but it works away in makeshift premises seemingly as busy as ever. Up the Chien T'ang River, Tung Lu has also been largely burnt out by air raids but it mostly remains in its ruins as nearly all the river trade has stopped now, as there is no access to Hangchow. Most other towns have been bombed but not so seriously and the people with the help of air raid warnings carry on.

Taichow, though farther from the Hangchow occupied area, is near the coast and had a useful little port at Haimen. Now Haimen is closed and often bombed and the towns inland, Huang Yen and Lin Hai (Taichow), are constantly bombed especially the latter where the people mostly live "out". Our women missionaries here as in Ningpo have able to carry on but it is nerve racking work and holidays could not be arranged this summer as travelling is very difficult. But as I said earlier on---all workers are at their posts and the work goes on in most ways nearly normal.

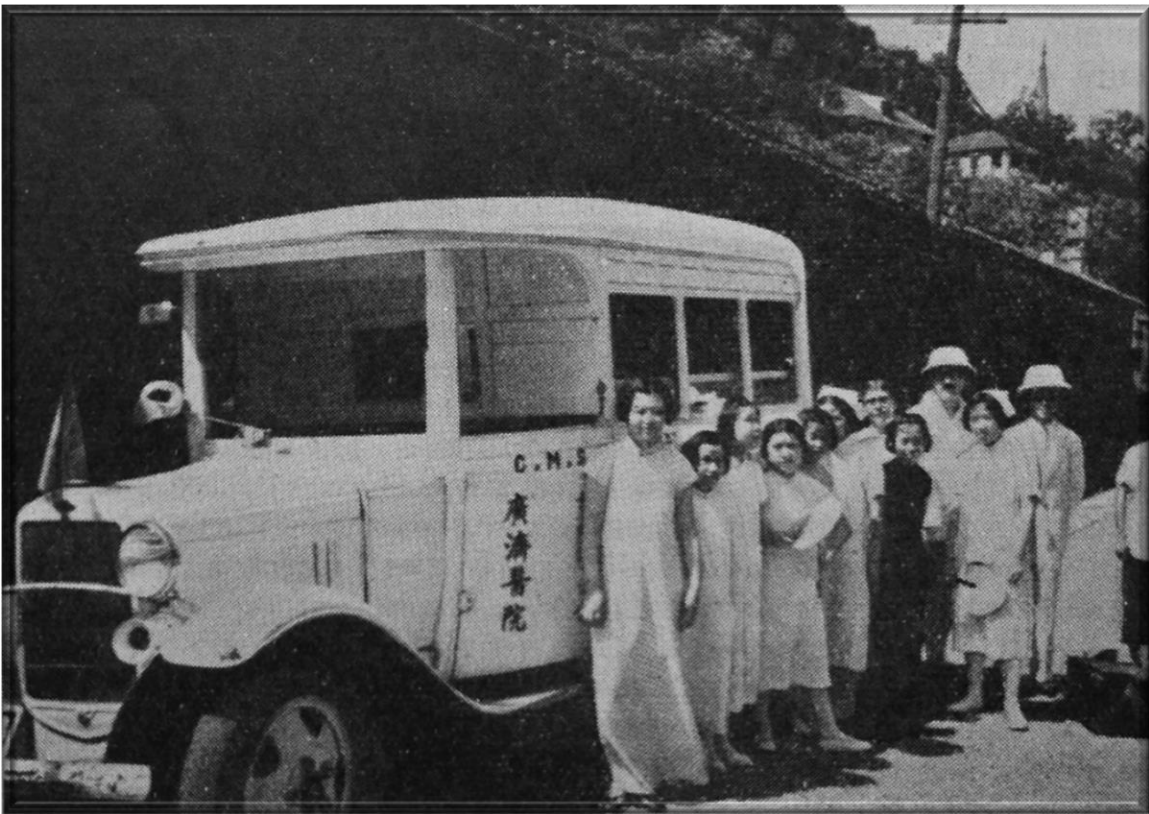
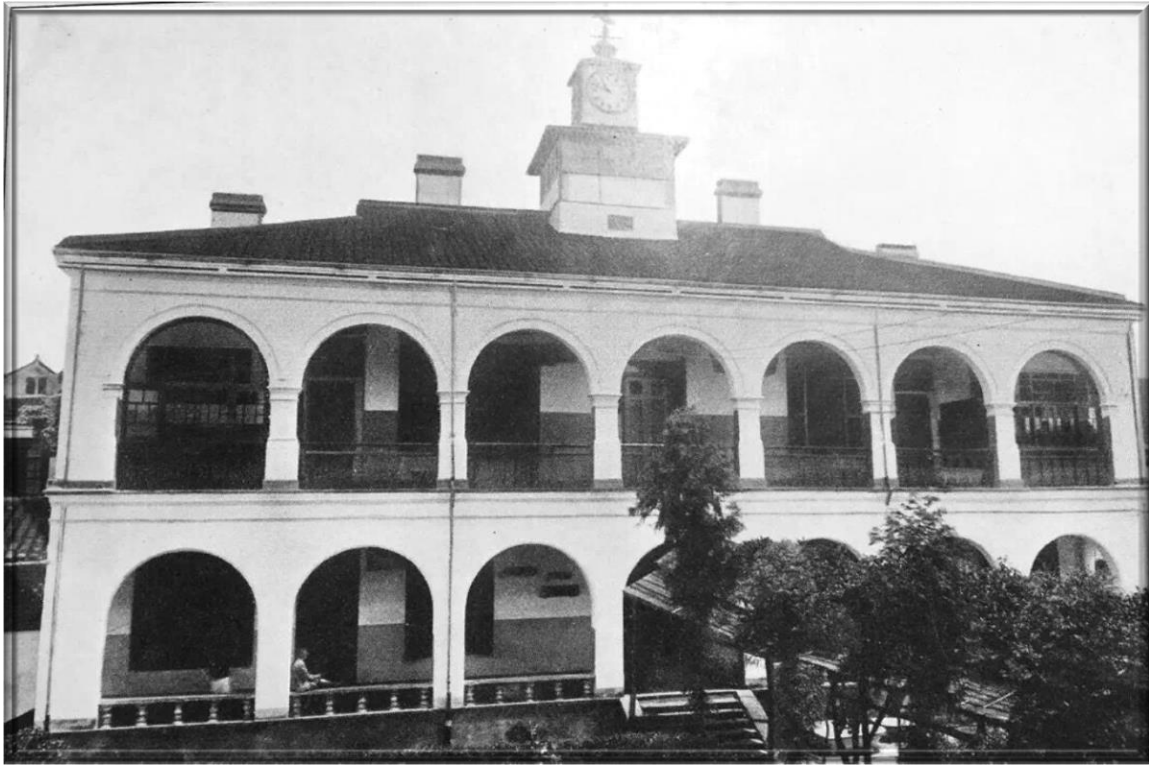
I was able to visit all these districts during my two tours and hold confirmation services as usual. The people are able to get together as usual on Sundays, the clergy and other workers can move freely amongst their people and carry on their work and the people feel they are still Chinese and are expected and if necessary compelled to supply men for the army, so that everywhere there are recruits being gathered together and drilled. At the back of the line labour corps are at work and there are plentiful indications that although the enemy is near, the war is not ended. Everywhere the price of food seemed dearer than usual, many refugees, many soldiers, poor communications, etc., etc. The effect of the war is evident everywhere but in most places at a short distance from the fighting area it is a case for the agriculture population of "business as usual!" The big towns are most affected by disruption of communications and stoppage of trade but if only the war could be brought to an end, one feels that conditions would very soon be normal in "free" China and though in occupied China a longer time would be necessary as much material damage has been done, yet even there free communications would soon bring very much more normal conditions.

So there we are, (1) in Hangchow useful work with the new constituency and much community service, (2) a dead zone where the fighting line runs and where machine guns and sometimes artillery come to live at any time and then (3) "free" China with almost normal life in the villages and war conditions for business in the big towns---"We are troubled on every side yet not distressed, we are perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not forsaken, cast down but not destroyed."

We have no special plans, but just at present "carry on". I hope to have most of September, October and November "across the river" and we hope to have all the workers of each area gathered together somewhere in Ningpo, Taichow and Shaohing districts for a few days special meetings---the rest of the time I hope to spend visiting the various parishes and holding confirmation services and having fellowship with the Christians in all these places so that we shall mutually strengthen on another's hands in God.

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Group photo of the CMS Hangchow Hospital staff in front of the ambulance