

Past Clergy of Christ Church

1. The first clergyman to take charge of the new church was Rev William Francis Taylor, LL.D. He was a curate at St Catherine's Church, Higher Tranmere, for a year before Mr Ball, the Patron, offered him the care of Christ Church and he was appointed Minister in Charge. He only stayed two years and then went on to be Priest-in-Charge of St John's, Liverpool. (At this time Liverpool was part of Chester Diocese). Rev Taylor wrote several books, including "The Man of Sin", "The Prophet's Lamp" and "The Time is at Hand."

2. Rev Taylor was followed by Richard Paul Blakeney, A.B., LL.D. He had been in the ministry for nine years when he came to Christ Church and he was Priest-in-Charge for twenty two years, until 1874. He built up the congregation and gave Christ Church a reputation for sound evangelical preaching. "He was beloved by all who knew him and the work of the Lord prospered in his hands." Among the books he wrote were "The Moral Theology of Alphonsus Liqoin" and "A Manual of Romish Controversy."

3. Our third incumbent was a Bishop from Hong Kong. The Right Rev Bishop Charles Richard Alford came to Christ Church in 1874, having been in China from 1867-72. He was a very able man and during his four years here, boldly took the steps necessary to create a parish for Christ Church. He was Canadian by birth and returned to serve the church there in 1877.

4. Rev W.H.F. Robson came from the Diocese of Peterborough in 1877 and stayed as Vicar of Christ Church until his death in 1913. He was Rural Dean for six years. During his long incumbency, many changes took place to the structure and interior of the building. The height of the pulpit was lowered and the organ brought from the West Gallery to its present position in the Chancel. The number of church activities and organisations increased. An orphanage was started and a church school and the daughter church of St Michael's were built.

5. Rev George Foster Carter came from St Aldate's, Oxford, where he had been a rector. He had been a lecturer at Wycliffe Hall Theological College for two years and while he was with us he was examining chaplain to the new Bishop Chavasse and left to become Vicar of Boscombe in Devon in 1923.

6. Rev Eric Bernard Rae came from Deptford, London, where he had also been Secretary of the Church of England Scripture Readers' Association. He opened a small Sunday School in the basement of the Vicarage in Lorne Road. In 1933, he left us to become Vicar of St Jude's, Southsea.

7. Harold Robert Bates (1933-37) came from the South of England where he had been Vicar in Southampton. After four years he left to go to Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire.

8. Thomas William Isherwood (1938-42) was a Canadian. For ten years prior to coming to Christ Church he had been a Professor of Systematic Theology at Wycliffe College, Toronto. After four years he left Christ Church to become Home Secretary of C.M.S. and five years later he returned to Canada to become Rector of St Paul's, Halifax.

The following has been submitted by the daughter of the late Canon T.W. Isherwood, M.A., D.D. via the internet:

Thomas William Isherwood was born in Preston, Lancs. It would be more accurate, therefore, to call him a Lancashireman rather than a Canadian. Certainly, he could tell jokes like one! After grammar school he attended Brasenose College, and received his M.A. degree from Oxford University. After serving a Curacy at St. Mary's, Chesham, he accepted a position at Wycliffe College, Toronto, as Professor of Systematic Theology (where he was a colleague of Donald Coggan, later archbishop of Canterbury). While there he met his wife, the former Muriel Stanley, born in Wales though of Cornish parents; there also my wife Mary and her brother Stanley were born.

He returned to England just before the 1939-45 war as Vicar of Christ Church, Cloughton (1938-42). He served as Home Secretary of CMS for a few years, and then returned to Canada as Principal of the Canadian School of Missions in Toronto. On the invitation of the Bishop of Nova Scotia he left this position to become Rector of St. Paul's Church, Halifax, Nova Scotia, just in time for its 200th anniversary. St. Paul's has the distinction of being the oldest Anglican church in Canada, as well as having been the first Cathedral outside of Great Britain.)

On his retirement (because of ill health) Dr. Isherwood taught theology for a while at King's College, Halifax, N.S., finally returning to England for a couple of years prior to his death.

9. Francis John Taylor (1942-54) came to be Vicar of Christ Church after lecturing at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, for four years. While he was with us he lectured at St Aidan's Theological College and at William Temple College in Harwarden. When he left Christ Church he became Vicar of St Andrew's, Oxford, and then Principle of Wycliffe Hall (1955-62). In 1%2 he was consecrated Bishop of Sheffield. He wrote several books and took part in

an Anglo-Russian Theological Conference in 1958. He was also editor of the religious inset "Parish and People" for a number of years.

10. Charles Mervyn Wedgewood came to us from Kirby Muxloe and only stayed two years before moving on to become Vicar of a church in the Bath and Wells Diocese.

11. Canon Laurence R. Skipper (1956-66) spent the early years of his ministry in the South of England and came to Christ Church after being Chaplain of Trent College, Nottingham, for six years. Many members of Christ Church will remember Laurie's active and successful ministry. He had the difficult task of overseeing the closure of St Michael's Church in Carlton Road and the transfer of members of that congregation to Christ Church and other neighbouring churches. He left us to take a living near Chester and he still resides in this Diocese now he has retired.

12. Richard Gibson Harland (1966-72) had been a CMS Area Secretary in the Diocese of Ripon and York for eight years prior to his arrival in Birkenhead. His was a very caring ministry and his sudden untimely death was a great shock to the congregation and deanery.

13. John Richard Price (197~78) came to us from Yorkshire after a long interregnum. After an active ministry of four years he became Vicar of Mottram in Longendale at the far side of the Diocese and on the edge of the Pennines. He is now Vicar of Nantwich.

14. J. Melvyn O. Davies (1978-83) came to Christ Church from Heswall where he had been a curate. After five years with us he accepted the living at Waverton and is now Rural Dean of Malpas.

15. Rev Donald S. Allister (1983-89) had been a curate in Sevenoaks before he came to Christ Church. He knew Birkenhead well, having been brought up in the town and been educated at Birkenhead School. Under his ministry, The Sunday services were modernised and new hymn books purchased. A great effort was made to evangelise the neighbourhood and the congregation on Sunday mornings grew. Amplification was introduced, a very necessary improvement in such a large church. The schoolroom below the church was divided into three smaller rooms and redecorated and new toilets installed. Rev Allister left to become Vicar of St Mary's, Cheadle.

16. Frank H. Taylor (1989-1996) Rev Taylor had served curacies in Chester and Timperley before coming to Christ Church. During his second year here he led the church through a major rebuilding project when the roof was replaced and the interior modernised.

17. David M. Wilson (1996 – date) is the current vicar.

Canon Robson

Of the clergy who have been vicars of Christ Church, the one remembered best is Canon Robson. He came from Peterborough in 1877 and stayed as Vicar of Christ Church until his death in 1913. For his work in Peterborough, he was made a Canon of that Diocese and in 1907 he became Rural Dean of Birkenhead.

Canon Robson became well known as a powerful evangelical preacher. From 1878 he edited a magazine called "the Cloughton Messenger", price 1d, in which he printed not only his sermons but religious articles by well known evangelicals of his day. It is from these magazines that we learn about the organisation and activities in the church. It was started "to promote the spiritual welfare of its readers" and ran for nearly half a century.

On Friday 2nd December 1890, there was a presentation and address by Canon Robson on the completion of 21 years as Vicar of Christ Church. The Canon was presented with a grand piano and a cheque by Mr Worthington on behalf of the congregation.

During his incumbency the times of evening church services were changed from 7pm to 6.30pm.

The weekday services in 1899 were:

"On Mondays, Christian instruction for girls at 5pm and 8pm in the Lecture Room, now the Vestry.

On Tuesdays, classes for young men at 8pm.

On Wednesdays, Bible reading for ladies at 11.30am in the Lecture Room, lasting approximately 50 minutes. At present studying the Epistle to the Hebrews."

A special prayer meeting was held on October 10th to call down God's blessing on the whole of the parish. "Brethren pray for us that the Word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified." "The gravest sin of our times is the worldliness now so common among Christian people."

The number of communicants in 1898 to 1899 was 4,932.

From the Cloughton Messenger of October 1902, we read about 'Services for the People':

"These special service on the 1st Sunday evening of the month have been encouragingly attended hitherto. They began in November and have been continued regularly (except in August). They are intended particularly for those who have not usually been in the habit of attending church and we are glad to be able to state that they have been the means of attracting many to the Rouse of God who have since attended regularly.

"The service is particularly simple: popular chants are used for special psalms; the hymns are such that all can sing and a gospel sermon is delivered, addressed to the conscience and heart as well as the head. We pray for and look for a present blessing on this effort. Christ Church congregation as a rule extends a heady welcome to the strangers and hymn sheets are provided.

"On Sunday evening 5th October, the Vicar hopes to preach on the subject of 'Controversy - Catholic, Protestant, Christian'."

When Canon Robson passed away in 1913 his funeral was very well attended and a whole page of the Echo was devoted to it. He was buried with his wife, who pre-deceased him, and two of his children, in Bidston Churchyard. Five of his sons entered the ministry. One for a time was Vicar of Meols Church.

He visited every family twice a year. He did not care for giving talks. More work and less talk was his idea.

The Vicar's "At Home"

"The Vicar will be 'at home' on the first and third Tuesdays of December to see any member of the congregation from 8pm to 10pm. "The Vicar particularly wishes it to be known that he reserves the first and third Tuesdays of the month from October to April to be 'at home' to any member of the congregation from 8pm to 10pm. He is anxious to see more of the people to whom he ministers. It is impossible even with constant visitation house to house for him to know as much as he desires of the congregation, therefore, he trusts they will come to see him at the Vicarage at the times specified, when he will be at home to welcome them."

Vicarages

There is no mention of a vicarage in the early years of Christ Church. The first incumbent, Rev Taylor, lived at 5 Osborne Terrace in Woodchurch Road. The following Vicar, Rev Blakeney, lived at the first house in Rose Mount and later moved to 7 Christ Church Road which no longer exists. While he was minister, the trustees decided a Vicarage must be found and it was agreed to build a house for this purpose. A plot of land at the corner of Lorne and Alton Roads was purchased for £2,090 on 30th April 1872. At this time there were no buildings in Lorne road except for the Wesleyan Chapel at the corner of Palm Grove. The building was finished in time for Bishop Alford to occupy the new Vicarage in 1874.

Canon Robson lived in the Vicarage from 1877 to 1902, when he moved to 18 Christ Church Road, also no longer standing, as his large family had left home and his wife had passed away. A smaller house nearer the church was more suitable and convenient.

Rev Carter also lived at 18 Christ Church Road, but the following Vicar, Rev Rae, chose to reside at 24 Lowe Road, opposite the original Vicarage.

When the tenant in the Vicarage left, 22 Lone road was put up for sale. Rev Bates lived at 7 Beresford Road.

Finally, in 1937, the present Vicarage in Palm Grove was purchased from George Ball, a bank manager. This was a modern six-bedroom house, more easily run without servants.

Curates

1884 to 1888 Rev F.T. Stoney

1888 to 1890 Rev T. Brook-Gwynne

1890 to 1892 Rev W. Hodgson

1892 to 1894 Rev AH. Rhodes

1894 to 1898 Rev AH. Sharpley

1898 to 1902 Rev Edmund Freeman

1899 to 1902 Rev Atkinson

1902 to Rev F.W. Hopkins (responsible for St Michaels)

1902 to Rev B. Jackson

1907 to Rev A.E. Rowan (1st Vicar of St Michaels)

Rev T.O. Charteries

Rev F. Shippam

Rev W.J. Hopkins (served in First World War)

1925 to 1928 Rev E.J. Panter

Rev L. Sheith

Rev John Savage

1934 to Rev C.N. Daintree

Rev S. Baggott

Rev Peaston

1949 to 1951 Rev L.W. Johnstone

1953 to 1954 Rev W.H. Correy

Rev P.R. Sanet

1957 to 1960 Rev F.C. Howard

1960 to 1963 Rev C. Parry-Jenkins

1963 to 1967 Rev Mark Pickering

1964 to 1966 Rev F.T. Howard

1969 Rev Phineyas Nyaga (from Ghana)

1969 to 1972 Rev Colin Sneyd

1975 to 1978 Rev D. Jamieson

1978 to 1984 Rev Ron Bussell

1986 to 1988 Rev Ian Thompson

1988 to 1990 Rev Rob McLaren

1990 to 1995 Rev Alan Maunder

1998 to date Rev Mike Turnbull

Quotes from Vestry Meetings of the last century

1879

An objection was raised by Mr How that the seat occupied by Mrs. Griffiths had been appropriated inasmuch as certain parties who had sat in them had been requested by Mrs. Griffiths to move. Mr Smith, a sidesman, stated that the seats were perfectly free to all and if Mrs. Griffiths wanted them she must be in church early enough to take possession of them.

Some worshippers had taken all the cushions from the free seats. It was decided to remove all the cushions from the free seats and to put hassocks in place of them. A list of the free seats would be posted at the back of the church. All free seats would be labeled clearly.

1880

Mr Worthington called attention to the annoyance caused to some residents near the church by the ringing of the church bell. Some

suggestions were made for shortening the time but finally the matter was left to the Vicar and Wardens to do as they thought best.

1887

The Vestry respectfully requested the Vicar to adopt the use of the surplice in the pulpit if this meets with his approval. The Vicar replied that it was a matter of indifference whether he preached in white or black, but he felt that a large proportion of the congregation would not find it acceptable. The motion was withdrawn.

(The surplice was introduced in 1888).

1901

Mr Elgen, the Church Warden, said he thought it rather unseemly that many of the congregation should be in such a hurry to leave church immediately after the close of the service.

1899

Mr Ryalls remarked that the Wardens had chosen several new sidesmen for the galleries as they needed the work to be done more efficiently. He asked that younger sidesmen would remember that the collection needed to be counted as well as collected.

1895 Burglars

On the night of Tuesday 8th May, Christ Church was broken into by sacrilegious robbers and the whole of the Communion Plate was stolen. It is necessary that the sacred vessels should be replaced. Will the congregation send in help? May God convert the robbers.

1897

Mr Hedley complained of Mr Bryson's playing of the organ being sometimes too loud. Other gentlemen expressed dissatisfaction with the musical portion of the church service. Mr Lee complained of the behaviour of the choir boys. (There were no women or girls in the choir in those days).

1890

Mr Proctor alluded to the difficulties which arose in expeditiously seating the strangers who attended the church in large numbers and after discussion at some length it was proposed by Mr Proctor and seconded by Mr Ashbridge that "it is the opinion of this Vestry that immediately upon the

commencement of the service all vacant places should be free to strangers and that notice of this resolution be given to all seat holders in the church by the Wardens."

1896

Mr Worthington reporting on the Diocesan Conference said that the Bishop of Chester made remark that Christ Church congregation were doing their duty and setting an example to other congregations.

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