

“The Book of the Rectors of S. Paul’s Deptford”

William Norton 1730 -31
James Bate 1731-75
Richard Conyers 1775 -86
John Eaton 1786-1807
John Drake 1807-1808
Richard Farrer 1808-9
Henry Purrier 1809-11
Charles Burney 1811-17
George Cookson 1818-19
Thomas McGuire 1819-33
Benjamin Ffinch 1834-73
Frank Owen 1874-81
Henry Cundy 1881-90
John Hodson 1890-1906
George Harcourt 1906-09
Richard Roseveare 1909-17
Andrew Amos 1917-22
Arthur Wade-Gery 1922-30
Douglas Robb 1931-44
David Blackman 1944-61
Derek Brown 1961-69
David Diamond 1969- 92
Peter Fellows 1993-2005
Paul Butler 2006-

William Norton 1730-31

The minister of St Nicholas Deptford and continued as Rector of the new church. He died however within a short while in 1731.

James Bate 1731-75

Mr Bate was the Rector for over 40 years. He had been a Fellow of St John’s Cambridge. He gave a 15th century Persian manuscript to the college in “grateful remembrance of the happy years” he spent in Cambridge. Mr Bate was an author – “An address to his parishioners on the occasion of the Rebellion” (the rebellion led by Bonnie Prince

Charlie in 1745). In a preface to another book he lamented that “it was his hard fate in his younger years to serve as one of our Ambassador’s chaplains at a foreign court” (this was as the chaplain to Horace Walpole, the British Ambassador in Paris).

There is a memorial in the church to John Harrison, founder and first surgeon of the London Hospital who died in 1753 and was buried in the churchyard during Mr Bate’s incumbency.

Mrs Margaret Hawtree, “a famous midwife”, was buried in the churchyard during Mr Bate’s incumbency in 1734.

Richard Conyers 1775 –86

He had been a vicar and rector of Helmsley, Yorkshire. He was presented by John Thornton, the patron, his brother in law. Thornton was a member of the Clapham Sect (Wilberforce and the evangelicals).

The memorial to James Sayer, Vice Admiral of the White, 1776, in the church is from Mr Conyers’ incumbency.

Mr Conyers was so much beloved by his parishioners in Yorkshire that on hearing the news of his appointment to Deptford, many of them publicly along the road, and if he was determined to leave them, his carriage should drive over them”. He left Helmsley in the dead of night for Deptford.

At Deptford Mr Conyers converted his coach-house and stables into a domestic chapel. He held four week night lectures which were well attended

On the Saturday before his death Mr Conyers took his servant with him into the churchyard and said “I want to look out a spot for my grave; show me Mr Barker’s grave”. Having fixed on a place he drove a stick into it and said “If I should live till Monday, I will get the sexton to come and try whether there is sufficient depth of earth; but I do not think I shall hold out until Monday”. Next day he went to church as usual. While reading the second lesson, Acts chapter 20, he made “several pathetic remarks on that part of it in which the Apostle calls the Ephesian elders to record that he had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God and intimates they should see his face no more. This proved in the issue but too applicable in his case... While pronouncing the blessing his voice seemed to falter and finding himself seized with the stroke of death he said to his servant near him ‘I cannot get from my knees’”. Mr Conyers was removed to the rectory and died at four o’clock in the afternoon. His friend, Mr John Newton, Rector of St Mary Woolnoth, preached the funeral sermon. John Newton had been a slave ship captain, but was converted to Christianity and is remembered for his famous hymn “Amazing Grace”. Mr Conyers was buried in S. Paul’s churchyard.

John Eaton 1786- 1807

Mr Eaton died at Dr Drake's in Amersham "on his way to Bath to recover his health" in 1807.

John Drake 1807-1808**Richard Farrer 1808-09****Henry Purrier 1809-11****Charles Burney 1811-17**

Born 1757 died 1817.

Mr Burney was the son of Charles Burney, the music historian and the brother of the novelist, Fanny Burney. His brother, James, sailed with Captain James Cook on his second and third voyages and became an admiral.

Mr Burney was a pupil at a school in Chiswick run by Dr William Rose, a translator of Sallust. Mr Burney later married Dr Rose's daughter. He moved the school to Hammersmith and then to Greenwich in 1793 where he established a private academy. Many eminent naval and military officers were educated at the academy at the beginning of the 19th century.

Mr Burney was a school master, a classical scholar and priest.

He had a great dislike of cool breezes. "Shut the door" was usually his first greeting to any visitor. It was joke against him that he used the same words as a parting greeting to a couple of highwaymen, who had taken his purse as he was travelling homewards in his carriage.

Mr Burney had a splendid collection of rare books and manuscripts. When he was at Cambridge, he was admitted to the University Library as a special privilege. When a large number of classical texts began to go missing after Mr Burney's arrival, suspicion fell on him. The Under-Librarian decided to search his rooms secretly during dinner. In a dark corner was found 35 of the missing volumes, mostly 16th and 17th century editions which had the university arms removed and the Burney bookplate substituted. Other volumes had been sold on. After Mr Burney fled Cambridge, a further box of stolen

books was sent back to the library from London. During his few months at the university he must have been stealing books almost all the time.

Mr Burney was hard drinking and kind hearted. He had been complaining for some time of pains in his head and died of a stroke at the age of 60.

He left behind a treasure trove of books and manuscripts. These were assessed by experts on behalf of the British Museum and were bought for the nation. The whole collection was valued at £14500, an enormous sum at the time. The question remains how Mr Burney had managed to acquire “probably the most complete [classical library] ever assembled by any man”.

The memorial in the sanctuary of the church records that Mr Burney was a Doctor of Divinity and a Fellow of the Royal Society, a prebendary of Lincoln and a Chaplain Ordinary to His Majesty (George III).

“In him was united the highest attainments in learning, with manners at once dignified and attractive, peculiar promptitude and accuracy of judgment, with equal generosity and kindness of heart, his zealous attachment to the Church of England was tempered by moderation and his impressive discourses from the pulpit became doubly beneficial from the influence of his own example”.

There is also a bust of Mr Burney in one of the church’s vestries.

The parish uses chairs donated by Mr Burney at the Sunday Parish Mass.

George Cookson 1818 -19

Thomas William McGuire 1819-33

Mr McGuire died at Deptford in 1833 aged 44.

Benjamin Sanderson Ffinch 1834-73

The Ffinch family were an established Deptford family. Dews’ 19th century History of Deptford records that “on the south side of the Chancel is a sumptuous monument, before which are several steps of black marble inclosed with iron rails. On a sarcophagus is a large urn of statuary marble, in part covered with a mantle, and on the front” is an inscription to Mathew Ffinch died 1745 and Benjamin Ffinch his brother. There is a Deptford street named after the Ffinch family.

Mr Ffinch was the curate at S. Paul's from 1827 to 1834 at which time he succeeded Mr McGuire. He was Rector for almost 40 years. He was appointed domestic chaplain to the Earl of Buchan 1842 and chaplain to Trinity House (the lighthouse authority) in 1847. A lectern was placed in the church as a memorial to him on July 2nd 1886 (not in the church now).

On the 19th May 1835, "a meeting of many of the most influential inhabitants, including the Rector, Mr B. S. Ffinch, was held at the "Red Cow Inn", Butt Lane (now the High Street) for the purpose of forming a Conservative Association".

Frank Owen 1874 - 81

Mr Owen had been curate at St Martin, Birmingham and of St Stephen the Martyr, Marylebone, Rector of Dunmore East (Ireland) and Vicar of Christchurch, Nailsea, before coming to S. Paul's. After resigning from S. Paul's, he went on to be Rector of Miserden, diocese of Gloucester and Bristol. He exchanged livings with his successor to S. Paul's, Father Cundy.

Henry George Cundy 1881- 90

Father Cundy had been Second Master to Christ Church Cathedral School, Oxford, curate of St Philip and St James, Oxford, Professor of Classics at Queen's College, Birmingham and Rector of Miserden, Gloucs. He exchanged livings with his predecessor at S. Paul's, Mr Owen.

The church has several years of parish magazines from Father Cundy's incumbency in the 1880s. Entries show that from Fr Cundy's incumbency (if not before) S. Paul's had become a parish in the Anglo-Catholic tradition of the Church of England. An entry in October 1885 reports that "*the Rector proposes preaching two sermons ... when he will ... shew that in all essential points the Church of England at the present day is the same Church as that which was planted in Britain in Saxon times*". An entry in May 1886 records the Three Hours on Good Friday at the Edward Street Schools – "*the service has the approval of our Bishop*". There are many references in the parish magazine to appeals for the poor e.g. the Coal Club and the District Visiting Society in October 1886. These indicate the great changes to Deptford in the later 19th century from a town where fashionable people lived to a working class district. The Anglo-Catholic priests were committed to serving the poor of London.

Also of interest is an entry in the magazine for August 1887 which reports a sermon by the Rector on peace, at the Volunteer Church Parade.

Following Fr Cundy's resignation from S. Paul's, he became the Rector of Beeby, Leics, thus exchanging with his successor Father Hodson.

John Hodson 1890 - 1906

Father Hodson had been curate at St Thomas Coventry, Netherton Dudley, Throckmorton Worcs, Isleworth and Hanwell and Rector of Beeby. He exchanged the living of Beeby, for S.Paul's with his predecessor Father Cundy.

There are two memorials in the church to bequests to the poor of Deptford during Father Hodson's time here. See the memorial in the Lady Chapel and to the side of the lift - bequests for Christmas blankets, bread and coal. These memorials provide a great contrast to the 18th and early 19th century memorials to grandees in the sanctuary and help show the social and economic changes to Deptford between the building of the church and the late 19th century.

George Ximenes Harcourt 1906 -09

Fr Harcourt had been curate in Teignhead and Dawlish and at St Mary Chatham and Vicar of All Saints Battersea Park and of Upnor Kent.

Richard Polgreen Roseveare 1909 - 1917

Fr Roseveare had been curate of St Mary Lewisham and Mexborough, Rector of Great Snoring with Thursford and Vicar of St Matthew Thorpe-Hamlet and Perpetual Curate of Ascension, Blackheath. On his resignation from S.Paul's he became Vicar of Lewisham.

One of his curates, Father Edward Noel Mellish, was the first ever Army Chaplain to win the Victoria Cross.

Fr Mellish was a frontiersman type. Before he was ordained, he had ridden with the British South Africa Police in the Boer War and later worked in a diamond mine at Jagersfontein.

He became a curate of S. Paul's in 1912. He did great work with the Church Lads Brigade taking over an old public house behind the Empire Music Hall and turning it into a boys' club. The youngsters insisted on naming it after their curate and it became known as the Noel Club. Fr Mellish's name appears in the minutes of the St Pauls Institute and Clergy House Scheme in the parish's archives.

After the First World War broke out, Father Mellish joined the army as an army chaplain.

In early 1916 he was attached to the 4th battalion of the Royal Fusiliers who at that time were serving in Ypres in Belgium. The battalion took place in a significant operation which sought to cut away a German salient that encroached on the British lines.

Tunnelling companies had prepared six mines which were blown in the early hours of a spring day in 1916. Following this at dawn the 4th Royal Fusiliers with other units went over the top to come up against rifle, machine gun and artillery fire from the German trenches.

Despite the opposition the attackers did manage to take the German first line trench but then had to consolidate, so weakened were they by the ferocity of the opposition.

On the first day Father Mellish brought in ten badly wounded men from ground that was swept by enemy machine gun fire.

By the second day the Royal Fusiliers had been relieved but undeterred out Father Mellish went again to bring in twelve more men and on the evening of the third day he took charge of a party of volunteers who went out again to rescue any remaining wounded they could find.

An officer witnessed these actions.

"Into this tempest of fire the brave Parson walked with a prayer book under his arm as though on church parade in peace time.

Some of the men would not have survived the ordeal had it not been for the prompt assistance rendered to them by Mr Mellish."

Father Mellish was awarded the Victoria Cross for his bravery. He was the first ever Army Chaplain to be awarded the VC. He survived the war and lived to a ripe old age.

There are two members of Fr Roseveare's family in the list of the fallen which is read at S.Paul's on Remembrance Sunday.

Andrew Amos 1917 -22

Fr Amos had been curate in Gateshead, the Clare College Cambridge Missioner in Rotherhithe, Rector of Datchworth and Vicar of St Anne Lambeth. After serving at S.Paul's he became the Rector of Rotherhithe.

Arthur John Wade –Gery 1922 - 30

After an Oxford 1st in Maths he went to Cuddesdon Theological College. He was the first Rector to have attended a theological college. Fr Wade-Gery was a curate at St John the Divine Kennington, St Saviours Roath and St Olave York. He was a member of the College of St Saviour and a Wilberforce Missioner and a licensed preacher in Southwark. After S.Paul's he became Rector of Brown Candover with Chilton Candover.

Percy Douglas Robb 1931 - 44

He was educated at Oxford University and Westcott Theological College, Cambridge. He was curate in Lambeth.

Towards the end of the Second World War, Fr Robb was appointed Vicar of Lewisham (following the career path of Father Roseveare). Later Fr Robb was appointed Archdeacon of Kingston. The story is that Fr Robb fully expected to become a bishop. Rumour had it that he had all the appropriate episcopal gear in a trunk in his attic. There is a memorial to Father Robb in the sanctuary.

David Robert Blackman 1944 - 61

Fr Blackman had been a Kelham theological college student. He served curacies at St Jude Peckham, St John Limehouse, All Saints Poplar, St Alban Sth Norwood and St Andrew Stockwell. He then became Priest in charge of St Thomas N. Keyham, Devonport. Following his resignation of the S.Paul's living he retired to Sale, Cheshire. He was the uncle of Brian Blackman, the brother in law of the late Henry Duquemin, a much loved churchwarden of S.Paul's in the later part of the 20th century.

Derek Frederick Brown 1961 - 69

Fr Brown was a student at St Francis College, Brisbane, Australia. He was a member of the Bush Brotherhood of St Andrew and served in the outback of Queensland. He had been curate at Rockhampton Cathedral, Queensland, and priest in charge of Winton. When at S.Paul's the Rectory was at 5 Albany Street. Fr Brown converted the crypt into a community centre and had to move over 400 coffins. The coffins were placed in two tunnels leading into the crypt (those tunnels had once been used by grave robbers who came up to the church from the Thames). Father Brown died recently at a great age.

David Diamond 1969 - 1992

The only Rector of S.Paul's to have a book written about him - "*Father Diamond of Deptford*" edited by two of his former curates, Frs. Rodney Bomford and Fr Harry Potter.

Fr Diamond is a legendary figure, remembered with great fondness by thousands of people. The following are extracts from Nicholas Taylor's obituary of Fr Diamond in "*The Guardian*" reproduced in "*Father Diamond of Deptford*":

"A year after he arrived [in Deptford] in 1969, [Father] Diamond started the annual Deptford Festivals, determinedly anti-elitist and inclusive. A thousand-strong pensioners' outing would set off at the firing of a cannon (not the ecclesiastical variety) – with the High Street lined by waving schoolchildren who had collected the necessary finance. "High Mass: Licensed Bar: Fireworks" would be the punch line of a typical invitation card for the St Paul's Birthday Mass at the Festival's climax. Among visiting personalities were Princess Margaret, Archbishops Runcie and Carey, and Dick Emery. Bands trumpeted....

The crypt became a youth club, then a centre for Caribbean discos...

Underpinning everything was Diamond's intense personal ministry, responding to personal crises at a moments' notice at any time of day or night. His rectory was burgled over 40 times; his cars were regularly stolen... He had an extraordinary rapport with the local underclass of young offenders, black and white. When he visited a parishioner in Parkhurst Prison in 1990, no fewer than 14 inmates greeted him as their 'Farv'....

He died as he lived. Mass for the sick on the Sunday morning, a record ten babies baptised in the afternoon, an evening sermon in Harrow and then the night train to Perth with his beloved Dad, cut short [by a heart attack] after a perfect drive around Loch Earn."

Fr Diamond's funeral stopped the High Street.

Canon Graham Corneck wrote this in "*Father Diamond of Deptford* : "The High Street shops pulled down their shutters for the morning of the funeral ... Eighty Anglo-Catholic and other clergy in their birettas trod behind the funeral cortege as the coffin was drawn in state from Deptford Broadway ... For two and a half hours the procession and service went on ...

The quest to secure [Fr Diamond] a last resting place on the North West side of the church is a typical Deptford tale in itself. The odds were stacked against such a burial.

The church yard had been closed to interments for years, time was short, and the Privy Council alone could grant the dispensation needed. In Deptford we were told it was impossible. At the eleventh hour a friend of the church, Sir Anthony Lloyd (then an Appellate judge) was approached. The future Law Lord used his influence in high places and “the impossible” was achieved.”

Peter Fellows 1993-2005

During Fr Peter’s incumbency there was a ten year project for the restoration of the church. This culminated in the rededication of the church by the Lord Bishop of London in 2004. The restoration was made possible because in July 1997 the Fund made a substantial grant award. The award enabled the project to go ahead. The total amount of grant awarded was ultimately just over £3m – the largest ever grant awarded to a parish church.

During the restoration there was a serious fire in the church which destroyed part of the sanctuary.

The congregation worshipped for several years in the crypt during the restoration project.

Paul Butler 2006 –

In 2007 under Fr Paul’s leadership the PCC agreed the parish’s priorities for the next five years with the Bishop of Woolwich.

1. To keep worship is at the centre of everything we do.
2. To serve the people of Deptford.
3. To ensure the full participation of every church member who belongs to S. Paul’s.

This is work in progress. The good news is that –

1. Since returning to worship in the church after the completion of the restoration project, the full Catholic round of Masses and offices has been restored. A notable highlight of the church’s year is the Corpus Christi procession in the High Street and parish.

2. Extensive and fruitful contacts have been made to enable the church to serve the people of Deptford – for example the schools, the local authority, the police, community organisations and the local undertakers. We aspire to renew the crypt to enable the space to be used more widely.

3. We are making progress in achieving the full participation of every church member in the life of the church. We have a large team of young servers. We have a new Director of Music who intends to facilitate more church and community musical activity. There are lively parish study groups.

Some sources:

James Bogle “Place, People, Building, Priest – and People: Some Parochial History” in Malcolm Torry (2004) *“The Parish”*, Norwich: Canterbury Press

Rodney Bomford and Harry Potter (1994) *Father Diamond of Deptford*, Burgess Hill: Ditchling Press

Crockford’s Clerical Directory – several editions (accessed at Lambeth Palace Library)

Nathan Dews (1884) *The History of Deptford*, London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., Deptford: J D Smith

Clare Harman (2001) *Fanny Burney*, London: Flamingo.

The Clergy of the Church of England Database 1540-1835 (“CCEd”),
<http://www.theclergydatabase.org.uk/index.html>

Parish Magazines of S. Paul’s Deptford (S. Paul’s parish archives)

Note:

Some of the information above was obtained through internet searches or anecdote. Like the life of the parish, “The Book of Rectors” is a work in progress. The author seeks the reader’s understanding for any errors and omissions.

Father Brian McHenry CBE

Assistant Curate S. Paul’s Deptford 2008-2011

23rd March 2011

