

## Vicars of Bicton 1853 – 2015

1853 - 1875	William Sandford
1870 - 1875	(curate in charge: Charles Ingram Roberts)
1875 - 1886	George Newton Lloyd
1886 - 1890	(various locums)
1890 - 1918	Frederick Stephen Edwards
1918 - 1920	(various locums)
1920 - 1928	John William Purser
1928 - 1931	Anthony Clifford Lawson
1931 - 1949	Richard John Vernon Philp
1949 - 1950	(locum: Russell Stephen Renfree of Oxon)
1950 - 1953	Arthur Edward Smith
1953 – 1955	(locum: Russell Stephen Renfree of Oxon)
1955 - 1970	Robert Edward Jones
1970 - 1990	Francis George Smyth
1990 - 1998	Kenneth John Forbes McClean
1998 - 2000	(priest in charge: Peter Frank Barnes of St Georges)
2000 - 2006	Mark Rowland Godson
2007 - 2015	Christopher Harold Deakin
2015 -	Mary-Lou Toop

At last we can add a lady to our list of Bicton vicars after twelve or more males, who, on average had served about 13 years each, some more, some less. We must not, of course, also forget the neighbouring clergy, who on several occasions helped plug gaps between the appointments, as well as lay readers and Church Wardens who 'held the fort'!

The education and experience of these men were quite varied although mainly based on a College – Curate – Vicar sequence. The detailed stories of the first half have already been discussed (June 2015) so we will concentrate now on the rest.

As part of their experiences, some were of a generation which got caught up in the wars, not to fight, but to provide a chaplain service. Anthony Lawson, with a Yorkshire congregational background suffered from the mental strain of comforting others and was grateful for support from fellow chaplains, who then helped him join the Anglican team in Shrewsbury and later Bicton. Meanwhile Russell Renfree was 'mentioned in dispatches' for his work on the front.

In the second war, Robert Jones, from Wales, served for five years and perhaps this contributed to his 'down to earth' manner which so endeared him to his rural flock.

Otherwise, there were also two contrasting career patterns, in which some had sought ordination early in life soon after normal education, while others had followed other professions first, which offered them early retirement (e.g. as with Archbishop Welby). For instance, Francis Smyth and Kenneth McClean were initially in the army, albeit in education rather than fighting. As a result their subsequent church careers were more compressed so that Bicton became their last appointments before retirement. Kenneth then moved to Shrewsbury, but Francis returned to be buried at Bicton in 2010. Meanwhile Christopher had been pursuing his first career in music and teaching.

Others, including Richard Philp, Arthur Smith and Mark Godson were dedicated to a clerical life from the start. Mark in particular, like many professionals, enhanced his career through a rapid succession of moves and also involvement with the health services as chaplain. To quote his own words *'days of vicars spending up to thirty years in a rural parish are over!'* Thus after just six years he moved on to head a clergy team in Hampshire.

Indeed, others while in Bicton had also had other duties: Francis Smyth as Prison Chaplain and Richard Philp at Holy Trinity, Belle Vue. Early in his career Arthur Smith had some varied roles within the diocese of Manchester, as well as being Rural Dean of Trentham later. With such organising experience he was able to help with establishing the Village Hall in Bicton in 1950, as well as staging a grown-up nativity play there, casting Mary Fowles (nee Paddock) as Mary.

In 1970, when both Francis Smyth and R W D Biddle of 'Montford with Shrawardine and Fitz' retired, the opportunity was taken to unite the parishes. Also Bicton Vicarage was replaced. When Christopher Deakin took over, 'Leighton with Albrighton and Battlefield' was added on too. The appointment of Robert Parsons then created a sort of team ministry now common in the Church of England. The modern clergy must wonder how their Victorian predecessors managed to fill their time in one parish and with both curates and domestic staff!

Over the years departures have been by well planned retirement or moving on, but Richard Philp had to leave suddenly in 1949... Later, local playwright, Lionel Brown, who lived at Lyndhurst actually wrote a play based on this affair which the BBC broadcast but which has sadly since been lost.

Recruitment is normally by advertisement but some personal contacts can help. It could not have been just coincidence that Robert Jones not only followed on from Arthur Smith at Fulford in Staffordshire but also followed him to Bicton a few years later.

Lastly we must not forget the wives and families behind these gentlemen, who also played their part, but do not feature so much in the records.



Revd. Robert Jones and his team – 1961. Horace Everall, James Paddock and Mr & Mrs George Slater (receiving a presentation upon leaving the village)