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## EARLY DAYS

**A**s Father James Douglas of Modderpoort had been requested to send some of the members of the Society of Saint Augustine into Basutoland to open up the mission field there, the Bishop in return promised to relieve the Church at Modderpoort of the district work in Ficksburg, Ladybrand and Clocolan. The plan was carried out and in October 1889, the Reverend R. Gresley Douglas, a nephew of Father James Douglas, sailed from England to relieve Modderpoort of the Ficksburg and Ladybrand districts.

In a letter in the Quarterly Papers of April 1890 the Bishop wrote that the school in Ficksburg had been undertaken by a schoolmaster who had lately come from England and who had been licensed to help the Reverend Gresley Douglas by taking services in his absence. This was Mr. Harbord, who was ordained Deacon in December of the same year. The Bishop stated that this was a great gain for Ficksburg and that the school had been out of the church for some time. Deacon Harbord stayed in Ficksburg until the beginning of 1893, when he moved to Jagersfontein.

A meeting of the male parishioners of the Chapelry of Ficksburg was held on the Tuesday of Easter week April 8, 1890, in the St. John's schoolroom, with the Rector of the Parish, Canon Douglas, in the chair. At this meeting the need for a new church was discussed. Those present on this momentous occasion were, Canon Douglas, his nephew the Reverend Gresley Douglas, who was Priest-in-charge of the district, Dr. Taylor, Mr. William Mitchell, H. Foxcroft, J. Thom, Mr. Brumage senior, Walter Brumage, C. Brumage, R. Fichardt, G. Myers, W.R. Davies, F. Harbord, M. Harries, P. Harries, a Mr. Cooper, and C. Spershott.

It was proposed that the present erf and the church on which it stood, be sold, and the proceeds divided, half going towards the erection of a church for the natives, and the other half towards the fund for the new English Church. At that stage it was proposed that both buildings be erected on the same erf.

At the Diocesan Synod held in Bloemfontein that same month, it was resolved that the chapelries then in existence should henceforth be placed under the charge of Vicars. These Vicars were to be appointed by the Bishop with the consent of the Rectors.

of the Parish in which the chapelry was situated. The Vicars thus appointed were then to be in independent charge. As noted, Ficksburg had been a chapelry in the Modderpoort Parish, with Canon James Douglas, the Superior of the Modderpoort Fathers, as Rector. Now the Reverend R. Gresley Douglas was duly licensed as the first Vicar of Ficksburg on June 25, 1890.

A service was first held in the new church on Whitsunday, May 17, 1891, when the Vicar celebrated the Eucharist at 8 a.m., and preached at Mattins, while the Reverend Joseph Deacon, priest-in-charge of St. Saviour's, Thlotse Heights, preached at night.

At the annual Vestry meeting held on April 24, 1892, it was decided that the new church required a porch and further fund raising was put in hand.

The church was dedicated to All Saints' on January 21 1893 by the Bishop, the church register recording the fact that, "Rain came on just before the service - but a hearty service". The following day, a Sunday, the Bishop confirmed 17 from Ficksburg and two from Modderpoort.

A comment in the Service register on August 20, 1893, at the 8 a.m. Service was, "Two ladies present, one fainted. No collection." One wonders whether it was the event of the lady fainting which caused the omission of collection, or whether there were ONLY two ladies present, and with one unconscious, it was felt unfair to wave the collection bag at the one remaining faithful parishioner.

The Reverend R. Gresley Douglas left Ficksburg in November 1893, to take charge of the parish of Beaconsfield. He was succeeded as Vicar of Ficksburg by the Reverend F. M. Lane, who had been working as Assistant-Curate at Modderpoort from October the previous year.

In 1894 an effort was made to systematise the work amongst the coloured people and provide them with a church in which to worship. The ladies of the European congregation worked diligently with a view to raise the necessary means. Already in hand, or promised, was a considerable sum of money, several "ornaments" for the Church, and the land on which to build it. This was a large erf on the corner of Visser and Einde streets, in what became Caledon Park.

Also in 1894 Canon James Douglas of Modderpoort, having been ill for some time, died at the age of 52. The whole Diocese mourned the passing of this much-loved priest, services being held around the country, including as far away as Port Elizabeth, and 'The Standard and Digger's News' of Johannesburg recorded on the 20 August the



The Reverend Gresley Douglas  
First Vicar of Ficksburg



The Reverend James Douglas S.S.A.

special services at St. Mary's in some detail.

The "Church Magazine" was a magazine for the Diocese of Bloemfontein to which the various parishes contributed articles concerning their activities. An interesting anecdote is recorded in the "Church Magazine" of May 15, 1895, as follows:

"Easter Sunday morning afforded a unique and most gratifying instance, first, of ill-applied, then of well-applied, energy. The Easter decorations had been made more elaborate, and, if possible, prettier than usual. When all the work, which had been done outside, was finished and put into the Church, instructions were given, in the purest Sesuto, to a servant to sweep up the litter outside the church. On Sunday morning, before the Early celebration, every trace of decoration had disappeared, the chairs were in confusion, and what had been, on Saturday evening, a beautifully arranged floral Easter offering, was now a heap of rubbish outside the door. The first thought was naturally "An enemy? What fearful sacrilege!" Happily an explanation was forthcoming to give the horrified worshippers at the early service. The servant had misunderstood his instructions, and had, most energetically, before 7 a.m., cleared every vestige of decoration from the Church. The best remains to be told. Before 9 a.m. fresh flowers had been sent in from all parts of the town, a zealous band of workers had collected together, and at 11 o'clock the decorations were prettier, because fresher, than ever, thanks to the plucky determination of the faithful band."

The new altar rails, designed, made and erected by one of the communicants, were up in time for the Confirmation service on the 26 May, 1895.

On July 28, 1895 the Church Services register recorded that the parishioners had gone to the Dutch "Naachtmaal" for the institution of their new minister. This was Ds. P.J.J. Boshoff who had come from Ventersburg. It also recorded that there was much sickness in town, chiefly influenza and whooping cough.

A Sunday School treat was organised in January of 1896 and was reported in the Church Magazine as follows:

"....in which event particular mention should be made of our Churchwarden, Mr. Foxcroft, and Mr. Wilkins, under whose auspices we found ourselves travelling in wagons belonging to Mr. Foxcroft and Mr. C. Harris, drawn by teams of bullocks lent by Mr. Harris and Mr. William Spershott.....and conducted by Mr. Graham Mac Askill to a charming spot in the Poort beyond the bridge, and we found ourselves at an early hour ensconced under a wide stretch of canvas, on a bright grassy slope, on a hot day,

in a breezy spot amongst rocks and mountains, enlivened by the silvery streak of a bend in the smiling Mogokare River." The Mogokare is, of course, what we know as the Caledon River.

In January 1898 a cloudy day caused some foreboding for the Sunday School treat on the 5th, but it seemed "to have rained heavily almost everywhere around except at the beautiful spot, perfect for a picnic, where, by the kind permission of Mr. and Miss Bowie, we encamped, and where the scholars and their friends congregated in considerable numbers.

Mrs. H.S. Taylor, in the unavoidable absence of Dr. Taylor, very graciously consented to distribute the prizes; and the superabundance of good things was provided by the friends of our valued and indefatigable teacher, Miss Cooke.

The sports were conducted by Dr. J. Brown con amore, the rule for prizes being that no single child could receive more than one....."

"January 6th (1898), saw the meeting of a large and somewhat lazy Diocesan work party, which, after Evensong for the Feast of Epiphany, adjourned for cake and tea to "Toy House," where the Vicar had the great pleasure of distributing some handsome books provided by Miss C.M. Cooke for those scholars of her flourishing day school who did best in the voluntary work which was advised them for their holidays."

There is no record of when the Harmonium was obtained, but in October 1898 it was recorded that, "the carved organ stool of dark hardwood, presented by Misses Cooke, Elliotte, Sanders, and Mrs. Carter, now in use, is a most pleasing addition to the choir furniture, and is in exact keeping with the framework of the organ. The accounts for 1893 itemises an amount of 10 shillings for "Carriage of old organ to Winburg", which seems to indicate that unless the Church has had other organs over the years, the Harmonium known to us in 1991 was obtained in about 1892.

The story of the Boer War and its influence on Ficksburg has been told by a number of writers from different viewpoints, among them Dr. Henry Taylor, at one time the Chapelry treasurer, and Anna Barry in her book "Ons Japie". A Commando from Ficksburg under kommandant Jan van Schalkwyk were part of the Boer force which routed the British at Magersfontein in December 1899, and various books on the Boer War refer to Ficksburg and its relevance to Boer and British manoeuvres.

The War also made its impact on the church in Ficksburg, and various notations in the Services Register tell of the coming and going of the combatants and other incidents. In a letter to the Quarterly Papers dated June 28, 1900, the Reverend Deacon at Tsikoane, Leribe, wrote, "There is a strong body of troops in Ficksburg and in the neighbourhood now; they have been there for a month past. We don't know what they

are doing; for they are, very wisely, not telling the world much about their plans. Provisions are very scarce in that place; ordinary paraffin candles being 5d. each - that is, the six to the lb. size!

There is hardly any tea to be had, coffee is very dear, and soap almost unobtainable. Transport charges are very high, and it is difficult to secure wagons."

This 'body of troops' referred to by the Reverend Deacon, were part of the build-up of 16000 British troops in this area of the Free State as President Steyn and Christiaan de Wet fell back to Bethlehem. Shortly after this came the concentration of the forces around and in the Brandwater basin, that area stretching from Commando Nek outside Ficksburg, through Fouriesberg and up to Slabberts. As the Boers were trapped by the British, 4500 were forced to surrender in the mountains leading to the Golden Gate area.

During the war The Vicar of Ficksburg, the Reverend Olive, found the isolation rather trying, but on the whole was left alone. However, at one point he wrote that he had been threatened as he was accused of singing "God Save the Queen", and "Rule Britannia" in church. Finally, at the beginning of 1901 he was forced to leave Ficksburg during an occupation of the town by the Boers, and took refuge at Tsikoane in Lesotho. There was a report that on January 4, 1901 the Boers had arrested the Vicar and removed articles from the Church.

By February 1901, the boers who were still fighting had joined de Wet as he headed south, and the British once more returned to Ficksburg. The Church was used as a military hospital, so services were held in the Town Hall by Army Chaplains until the Church was handed back by the military and opened for Divine Service again on July 20, 1902. The Army Chaplains during this period were the Reverends Findley, White, Rayner and Stewart.

It is interesting to note from the Army Book of Services that during the occupation, apart from the services held in the Town Hall and hospital wards, services were held on the Imperani, on Stafford Hill, and also on "Worcester Hill".

During much of the war the clergy in the various towns were cut off from Bloemfontein and the rest of the Diocese and so, although there was no Bishop in the Diocese, it was not possible to call a meeting of Synod to elect a Bishop.

In September 1902 the regiment (1st Worcester) was withdrawn, and the Reverend L.W. Olive having previously resigned, the parish was left without a Vicar. The Reverend Fogarty, Principal of St. Mary's, Thlotse Heights, undertook to provide services every Sunday until a new Vicar could take up the work. Finally towards the end of the year the Reverend G.E.A. Hilliard took charge in Ficksburg.

At the Vestry meeting in 1905, the plans for the erection of the church bell were finalised. Also, it was agreed to buy a new iron gate for erection opposite the Church porch. In 1907 agreement was reached to have seats made to replace the chairs.

In 1907, Bishop Arthur wrote in a letter that he had undertaken a trip to the North of Basutoland, going from Modderpoort to Ficksburg on the new railway line, which was not yet opened. He wrote, "I started in the guard's van of a construction train, then changed on to a railway trolley, and finally boarded another construction train, and entered Ficksburg in great glory, seated on my portmanteau on top of a truck full of ballast." One wonders if he was wearing his gaiters and full regalia as he steamed into Ficksburg!

In 1907 the Reverend Tatham came to Ficksburg, but had to give up the work here after only a few months, on account of his and Mrs. Tatham's health, and so moved to work with the Reverend Gresley Douglas who was by now working in Rondebosch.

He was succeeded by the Reverend C.S. Hill who could only come in 1908, so Father Haynes from Sekubu took services in Ficksburg on a regular basis until Father Hill arrived.

Another farm on which services were held was "Hillside" at "Roodekrantz" where Mr. and Mrs. S. Peacock kindly lent their house for the service, "and most hospitably entertained at luncheon those who came from a distance." Services here were held once a quarter.

An interesting commendation was made at the 1909 Vestry when Mr. Snell was thanked "for his services in lighting the Church and ringing the bell", an insight into the days before electricity, when 'putting on the light' could be quite a chore.

In 1909 the children's picnic was held at Morgenzon "on the King's Birthday", an event which seemed to be enjoyed by all. Mr. Bowie and Misses Annandale provided the hospitality and Messrs. J. Wilkins, W. Mitchell and Rorke lent wagons. Prizes for sports were handed out as well as Catechism prizes.

In 1910 a scarlet fever epidemic affected the Sunday Catechism classes for a few Sundays, but by Advent Sunday a new beginning was made. In 1911 it was an epidemic of measles which affected Sunday School and congregations in general. We have got so unused to what was once a common occurrence in the health of a town at one time that we should perhaps be reminded from time to time and give thanks to God for modern medicine and the medical profession.

Canon H.W. Orford came to Ficksburg next, this in 1911, and as he took charge of a considerable amount of country work in the eastern part of the Free State, the

Reverend E.H. Hemsted came to join him. As Archdeacon, later Assistant Bishop, Balfour was a long-standing friend of Canon and Mrs. Orford's, he took up residence with them in Ficksburg, making this his headquarters for a while, although most of his time was spent in Basutoland. The Reverend Hemsted stayed until 1915, at which time he went to Kroonstad and the Reverend H.J. Beddy, a deacon, took his place.

Canon Orford's second son, Mr. J.F.W. Orford, was reading for his ordination and in 1912 was admitted as a sub-deacon by Bishop Balfour at the Harvest Festival service in February. Mr. Orford was able to help in the parish in many ways until he left for St. Paul's Hostel in Grahamstown to further his theological studies.

It is interesting to note that it was only in 1914, that Synod passed a Canon entitling women communicants of the parish to take part and vote in the Vestry meeting. Prior to this only male communicants could do this.