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PERSONALITIES

In writing a history of a particular community of this nature there are so many people who should be mentioned and yet cannot for lack of space and time. For that reason it is necessary to concentrate here on personalities who were not only well-known in the Anglican or English Community, but made their mark by being recorded as such in the Church records. Even then it is not possible to mention everyone, so here we will consider only a few, and ask forgiveness for those not mentioned.

There is a tendency in Ficksburg to forget the priest who was the first to serve this area, namely, Canon Beckett. The Quarterly Paper of the Bloemfontein Mission, dated April 1885, gave notice of his death, and on page 71 relates; "As the Clergy truly say there, "No words could rightly describe the great and good influence which he has exercised in the country, where he is called, in Dutch phrase, the 'Grandfather' of the whole district!"

We have noted, in chapter one, of the arrival of Canon Beckett in the Free State, but let us have a brief look at his background. He has fortunately left us a journal and some letters, which we hope we will be able to publish in the near future.

Canon Beckett graduated at Cambridge - B.A. 1840, M.A. 1844 - he was ordained Deacon by the Bishop of Ripon in 1840, Priest by the Archbishop of York in 1841. He was installed Canon of Cumbrae in 1852, and of the Cathedral of Bloemfontein in 1867. He held the office of Chancellor of the Diocese for some years, and, up to a few months before his death, was Rural Dean of the north-eastern district.

In Chapter one we also noted something of the Reverend Meyer and how he went to Bloemfontein to fetch his bride. Prior to her marriage she was a Miss Caroline Elizabeth Blackmore, and at the time of their marriage on January 17, 1883, she was 31 years old and he was 34.

Theodore Albert Meyer was born on April 17, 1848 and baptised at Celle (Hanover) in Germany. He was confirmed at St. Edmunds, Northampton by the Bishop of Peterborough on April 28, 1876. After coming to South Africa he was Assistant Master at St. Andrew's School in Bloemfontein before being ordained priest and coming to Ficksburg in 1882.

While in Ficksburg his wife gave birth to three children, two daughters and a son, and as we have learnt in the extracts from articles given in Chapter one, he seemed to build a very successful ministry in Ficksburg. However he and his family left very suddenly sometime after September 1886. Canon Crisp, writing of the arrival of the Reverend Robert Gresley Douglas in 1889, states, "From 1882 to 1886 a resident ministry had been established (in Ficksburg), but this had ended disastrously." This leaves us with a mystery which seems cannot be solved 100 years later.

In the Clocolan district one of the church families in this area provide an interesting story. In 1871 the Reverend Mr. Bevan, one of the clergy of the Bloemfontein Diocese, while on a visit to England, went across from Retford to have lunch at Bole with the Reverend Stockdale and his family. Henrietta Stockdale was by that time already fired with enthusiasm for the Orange Free State Mission, although still living with her parents.

The Reverend Mr. Bevan found that the youngest son, Henry Walter, who was eighteen at the time, "had not been placed at any special work or profession", so it was suggested that he should go out to the Mission Brotherhood at Modderpoort to work the farm there. This suggestion was put into effect and he arrived at Modderpoort in March 1872. However, by June 1873, Mr Stockdale found that he wanted his independence and also hoped to make a larger income for himself than he could as manager, so he set out to rent a farm, proposing to take as his partner Mr. W.H. France. So the Stockdale family came to the Clocolan district. Some years later, through the assistance of Canon Harcourt Vernon of Keble, Mr. Stockdale acquired the farm, "ALMA".

Dr. Henry Taylor has written his own autobiography, so we will only record that he was a staunch member of the parish while he was in Ficksburg, taking an active part in church affairs. As Chapelry Treasurer, he was a member of the fund raising committee for the building of All Saints' Church, and was in fact responsible for the negotiations with the builder, Mr. William Dickens. The Special Vestry Meeting held on 8 May 1895, to discuss the building of the porch and vestry, was held in Dr. Taylor's surgery.

Perhaps the person who is best recorded in church annals, and who served the parish as priest the longest, both at Clocolan and Ficksburg, was the Reverend A. H. H. Vernon.

Algernon Hardolph Harcourt Vernon was born on July 7, 1858, in Nottinghamshire, and was brought up in Retford, taking his B.A. degree at Keble College, Oxford, in 1882. He was the son of the Reverend Canon Evelyn H. Harcourt Vernon of Grove Hall, Retford, who for more than 10 years was the Honorary Treasurer of the Community of St. Michael and All Angels Sisterhood fund in England.

Miss Francis Harcourt-Vernon, Algernon Hardolph's sister, came out to South Africa as a mission worker in May, 1878, becoming the 2nd Mother Superior of the Community of St. Michael and All Angels in March, 1887. Her brother first came out to the Orange Free State in 1883, a year after his first marriage (to Miss Candle,) establishing a home at Bishops Glen, Bloemfontein, but after his wife died he returned to England and took holy orders.

Algernon Hardolph was ordained at Truro Cathedral in 1886 and in the same year was married to Georgina Marguerite, who originally came from New Zealand and whose maiden name was Martin. In 1891 the Reverend Harcourt Vernon was invited to become vicar of the Cathedral parish in Bloemfontein.

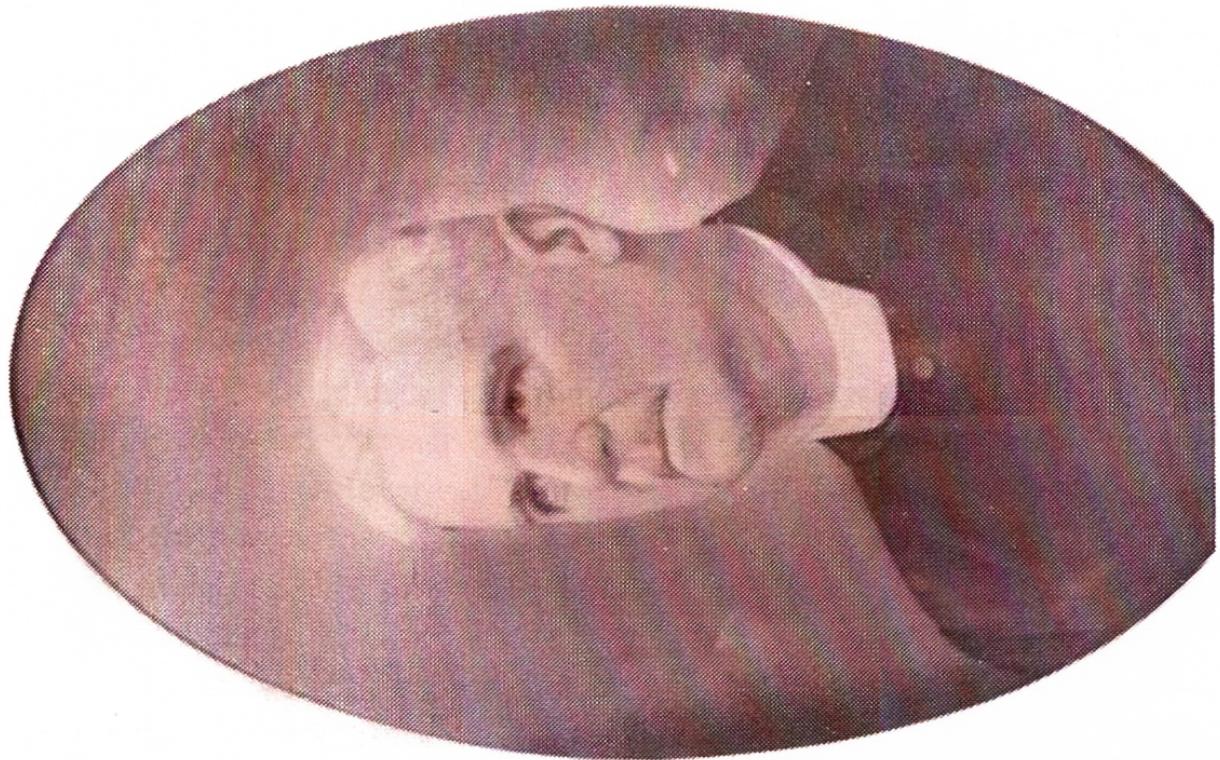
In March 1892 Archdeacon Crisp wrote in a letter as follows: "On my return from Kroonstad in January, I found Mr. Vernon very much out of sorts. The heat has been unusually oppressive this year, even to us who are accustomed to it. I therefore took the parish off his hands, enabling him to get a run down to the coast. He tells me that he does not feel himself strong enough for such a parish as Bloemfontein, but is willing to continue to take charge of it until the arrival of the Bishop." For the uninitiated, priests may be called either 'the Reverend Father' or 'the Reverend Mister....', and the tendency was more to the latter at that time.

By the end of 1883 the Reverend Harcourt Vernon and his wife had left Bloemfontein and were residing near Clocolan where he had bought a farm and renamed it "Keble", after his old College. Here he established the first purebred Jersey herd in the Orange River Colony, as it was known in those days.

We have noted that by the beginning of 1894 the Reverend Vernon was also helping with services at Clocolan, and in 1898/99 he built a chapel on his farm.

The "Church Magazine" of March 15, 1899 reported as follows: "The Chapel is built to accommodate about a hundred persons, and great care and taste have been exercised in the decoration of the interior. The appointments and hangings at the East end, the carved oak furniture, and the colouring of the walls, all combine to make reverently beautiful the little building, which has been set apart for worship. The walls are solidly built of the fine stone which is to be found at Keble, and the windows are on the Gothic model." The Reverend Vernon explained, during his address, that the picture he had hung over the altar very aptly illustrated the great event which was their cause of rejoicing on that day - the advent of the Saviour. The picture on the North side was a copy of one hanging in his College at Oxford, and represented the Saviour as the Light of the World.

Sunday services at Keble are still remembered by a number of people in the district. Families would travel long distances by cart and horse to Keble and then enjoy



The Reverend Canon A.H. Harcourt Vernon



"Granny" Tennent.

For many years the organist at All Saints' Church

the hospitality of picnic meals supplied by the Harcourt Vernons.

The chapel was used for special occasions as well, as for instance, in 1907, the wedding between Mr. Leonard Bigg, son of the Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Oxford, and Miss Faulkes, a cousin of one of the judges in Bloemfontein.

This Chapel was used for a number of years but, unfortunately, in these latter years it has degenerated into a store room, although at the time of writing, the present owners have expressed their intention of restoring it as a chapel.

During the Boer War the Reverend and Mrs. Vernon, like many others in the area, were often quite cut off from communication with the outside world, the Boers visiting them from time to time but not seriously interfering with them. However, by October 1901, the Reverend Vernon and his family had been obliged to leave their home and were living in the new St. Andrew's College in Bloemfontein. The Reverend Vernon was therefore able to assist with services at the Cathedral during their stay in Bloemfontein.

In 1915 the sad news was received of the death of the second son of the Reverend Vernon, killed in action in German East Africa on June 5th. His older brother, Granville, was with the forces in German South-West Africa.

Apart from these two sons, Reverend Vernon had a daughter from his first marriage, Kate, who married Captain Dugald Stewart Gilkison of the Scottish Rifles. The Reverend and Mrs Georgina Vernon also had two daughters, Marjorie, who married Ritchie Moffett, and Dorothy, who never married.

In 1925 the Bishop proposed that the Reverend Vernon take responsibility for Ficksburg as the Reverend Griggs had left. At the Vestry meeting on 26 April 1925, this proposal was put to the members of Vestry and the opinion was expressed that the Reverend Vernon was too old a man for the parish. It should be remembered that by this date he was about 67 years old, so one can understand their concern. However, when one considers that Father Vernon served the parish until his death in December 1936, as a much respected and beloved priest, the parish should be pleased that when put to the vote the motion was carried for the Reverend Harcourt Vernon to be accepted.

As an indication of the regard held for him by the clergy of the Diocese at large, the Reverend Algernon Hardolph Harcourt Vernon was elected a Canon of Bloemfontein Cathedral in 1931.

In 1939 an Altar and Riddle Posts were dedicated in All Saints' Church on September 17, 1939 by the Bishop of Bloemfontein, the Right Reverend A.H. Howe-Browne, as a memorial to Canon Vernon. The Altar was designed by the Reverend Father Norman Taylor of the Society of the Sacred Mission at Modderpoort. The Altar and its surroundings were carried out in teak with ornamentation in colour and gilding,

the arms of the Harcourt Vernon family being the chief motif on the Riddle Posts.

Mrs Vernon's influence among the parishioners and particularly the children, was outstanding. During the many years the Reverend Vernon laboured in this area for the Church he was helped unceasingly and devotedly by his wife. Mrs Georgina Marguerite Harcourt Vernon passed peacefully away at her home "The Loquats" on July 27th, 1951.

The Bowie family name is found throughout the parish records right from the early days of Ficksburg and one member whose whole life was spent in association with Ficksburg was Charles Ward Bowie. Born at the old homestead, Morgen-Zon, in 1876, the second son of John and Margaret Bowie, Charles started his education at St. John's School in Ficksburg, which had been started by the Reverend Meyer. At an early age Charles was then sent to the Grove, Claremont, which was a preparatory school for the Diocesan College (Bishops), which later moved to Rondebosch. In those days the nearest railhead was at Kimberley, and Charles and his brother had to be taken from Ficksburg to Kimberley by Cape cart in order to make the long journey to Cape Town by themselves.

Charles returned to farm at Morgenzon when he was 18 years old, his elder brother having died the year before. Here he continued to farm until his death one day before his 82nd birthday.

The first mention of organists at Ficksburg was in the minutes of the Vestry meeting on May 5, 1891, when Mr. Herbert Mitchely was sent 5 pounds as a gift for his playing the organ during the past year. As the first service in All Saints' Church was on May 17 of that year, the organist must have been active in St. Columba's Church.

In 1895 Miss MacAskill is mentioned as organist, and singing practice was in full swing in 1896.

As Sunday School teachers, we first have mention of Miss R. MacAskill in January 1896, and she was assisted by Miss A. Donald. In 1897 the Sunday School teachers were Miss Cooke and Miss Dormel.

In March, 1897 the organist, Miss Louisa Macaskill was married to Jacob Frederick Siebert. She left to live in Bloemfontein, and was presented with a cheque and a gold watch from the church officials and congregation. Also "a silver salver and tea service very handsomely engraved, and a most beautiful centre-piece in silver open work and pink glass."

Miss Alice Margaret Donnell then took over the organ until in May of the same year she married Mr. Alexander Ferdinand Wande of Spitzkop. Thereupon Mrs. E.A. Snell, wife of the Churchwarden offered her services, but in August 1898 the

Churchwarden and his family left Ficksburg, and All Saints' was without an organist. A Miss or Mrs Macaskill then played until 1905 when she resigned.

Mrs Dalton played for a short while until Mrs Siebert could take over as organist in 1906. During 1909 there is a record of a choir, apparently conducted by Mr. Leysath until he and his wife left the parish to take up residence in Basutoland at the end of 1912. The choir continued for some years. In the December copy of the "Church Magazine", congratulations were offered to the choir for their beautiful rendering of Stainer's Anthem, "What are These", at the Festival Services. In January 1910 the same magazine commented on the excellent rendering of the Anthem by Norman Churchill, "Behold, I Bring You Good Tidings", sung at the Christmas Services.

The choir lost one of its members in March, 1910, however, when Miss Muriel Snell was married to Mr. Philip Macaskill, and the couple set up home at Erfdeel, in the District of Senekal. Miss Snell was presented with a teapot and an address of congratulation from the choir. Miss E. Phillimore and Miss L. Mitchell also left the choir.

Still in 1910, the services at the All Saints' Festival were well attended, the Church being decorated with the earliest Arum Lilies, and the choir sang "Woodward's Communion Service", and the Anthem, "Sun of my Soul".

In 1914/15, Mr. D'Ath played the organ after which Miss H. Tennent and Miss I. Wille took over for a short while. Mrs Snell then played with Ina Wille playing in her absence, but by 1919 we have Mrs. Long as organist.

Thereafter, although the organist is often thanked at the annual vestry meeting, no name is mentioned until 1929, when the Church Wardens were asked to write to thank Mrs. P. Wille for her services at the organ. In 1930 Mesdames Wright, P. Wille and Van der Westhuizen were thanked, and in 1932 the name of Prestwick was added to this list, and by 1935 the names of Mrs J. Tennent and Beryl Macaskill were included.

In 1940 we once again find the name of Mr. Leysath mentioned as choirmaster, while the voluntary organists were Mrs. Leysath, Mrs. P. Wille, Mrs. Tennent, and Miss Tennent. Mr. Leysath continued as choirmaster until his death on Easter Eve 1947. Mrs. Theresa Brits also played the organ at one time, as well as being a member of the choir.

"Granny" Tennent, as she was affectionately known by all, came to Ficksburg with her husband from Scotland, where she had studied music and began playing the church organ. She played at weddings in Ficksburg for so many years that she eventually found herself playing at the weddings of children of couples at whose wedding she had played years before. The Harmonium at All Saints' was of the "pedal it yourself" variety until, in order to make it easier for Mrs Tennent, the organ was fitted with an electric blower.

Mrs. P. Wille and Mrs. Tennent continued as organists for a number of years and in 1958 Miss Cedar Sorour joined them, but in 1965 a crisis was reached when no organist was available and Miss K. Tennent stepped in to help out although she said she preferred to lead the singing rather than take on the task of organist on a permanent basis. In 1967 the Annual Vestry Minutes reported that the problem of the organist had been solved by arrangements being made with Mrs. Gilliland to play at certain services for a small fee.

In March 1970 the proposal was made to ask Miss Cedar Sorour to play on the 1st Sunday of the month. Cedar agreed to do this. In 1973 the council minutes record that it was always difficult to find an organist and it was decided that hymns would be sung only at Easter, Christmas, and on special occasions. However, Miss Sorour continued to play the organ on a regular basis except when she was on holiday. Mrs. Marietjie Sorour also started to play when Cedar was not available.