

Christ Church - Stratford, E.15

**Diocese of Chelmsford
Archdeaconry of West Ham
Rural Deanery of West Ham**



1852 — 1952

**A Short History of the Parish
Compiled by the Vicar
in connection with the Centenary
of the Consecration of the Church
15th May, 1952**

MESSAGES OF GREETING

FROM THE BISHOP OF CHELMSFORD

"It gives me great pleasure to send this short message of greeting to all members of the Church and Parish of Christ Church, Stratford, on the occasion of your Centenary Celebrations. As you thank God for all who have helped to build your Church and to hand it on through a hundred years, from one generation to another, enriched and beautified, may you all resolve to use it more often for the purpose for which it has been given you—as a place where you may draw near to God and worship Him together as members of His Family, and then go forth strengthened to serve Him more faithfully in your daily life and work.

May God bless you all in your worship and your witness as members of His Church in Stratford."

FROM THE BISHOP OF BARKING (Archdeacon of West Ham)

"I am glad to send my good wishes for this history of Christ Church, Stratford, which is being published in connection with the celebration of the Centenary of the parish. Christ Church, Stratford, has a position of unique importance in the Diocese of Chelmsford as it is the first parish in the Diocese on the main road from London. During the past hundred years it has maintained its witness to the Christian faith under very difficult circumstances, and the way in which it has triumphed over the difficulties of recent years is a source of admiration to many of us. It has a splendid history of devoted service and many of its parishioners bear it in thankful remembrance.

"Though the reorganisation of the Diocese in these post-war years necessitates Christ Church losing its identity as a separate parish, yet we believe its Church life will continue to flourish and indeed develop under the care of the mother church of St. John, Stratford.

"I would like to take this opportunity of expressing warm appreciation of the splendid work during the past few years of the present Vicar, the Rev. H. Reseigh. Under his devoted leadership the parish's post-war recovery has been made possible. We are also most grateful to him for the enterprise and initiative he is showing in the arrangements for celebrating the centenary, including the publication of this history."

FROM THE BISHOP OF COLCHESTER (Archdeacon of Colchester)

"I can only say that I am looking forward to coming to Christ Church for the great occasion of its Centenary on May 11th. In spite of the travelling difficulties of the present time, we must make every effort to maintain and develop contacts between the different ends of the Diocese of Chelmsford. I am very anxious that the London part of Essex, and my rural Archdeaconry of Colchester, numbering about 200 parishes, should be aware of each others needs and of the work that the Lord has for each to do. From the open lands of North Essex, we send greetings to your crowded and busy parish, with prayers that God will inspire you, both in the particular difficulties which beset you, and the varied opportunities which open up before you."

FROM THE RT. REV. HENRY A. WILSON (formerly Bishop of Chelmsford)

"When I came to the Diocese as Bishop in February, 1929, the Rev. R. B. Bertin was the Vicar of Christ Church. I remember very vividly my first meeting with him and a group of his leading parishioners, and I was much impressed with the gay enthusiasm which radiated from him. He did a wonderful work in reviving the parish and putting it on its feet. He was succeeded by the Rev. W. D. Topping, and he in turn was followed by the Rev. H. H. Griswell. Several keen friends of the parish had either died or found it necessary to discontinue their work, and they were much missed. The Rev. T. H. Hollingdale, who succeeded as Vicar, was a Welsh Rugby International, and at his institution the front three pews were filled with famous Welsh footballers—a remarkable sight! Christ Church has seen some good days."

FROM THE PROVOST OF BRADFORD (Chairman and Hon. Secretary of Simeon's Trustees)

"I have great pleasure in sending this expression on behalf of Simeon's Trustees, the patrons of Christ Church, of congratulations on the occasion of the Centenary of the Church.

"It is within our knowledge that the congregation under Mr. Reseigh's zealous leadership, has been battling against many adverse circumstances since the war, but the flag of the Gospel has been kept flying—and that is the first call on the energies of any Christian family.

"Whatever difficulties the future may hold, let the Centenary celebrations be a time of re-dedication on the part of every member of the Church, to this primary task."

"CONCERNING THIS HOUSE"

I KINGS, 6, 12

The foundation stone of Christ Church, West Ham (to give the original title), was laid on February 25th, 1851, by the Rt. Hon. Lord Ashley, Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, the renowned Evangelical Churchman and social reformer. A brass plate, above the actual foundation stone close to the organ, carries a copy of the inscription which formerly was on the stone itself

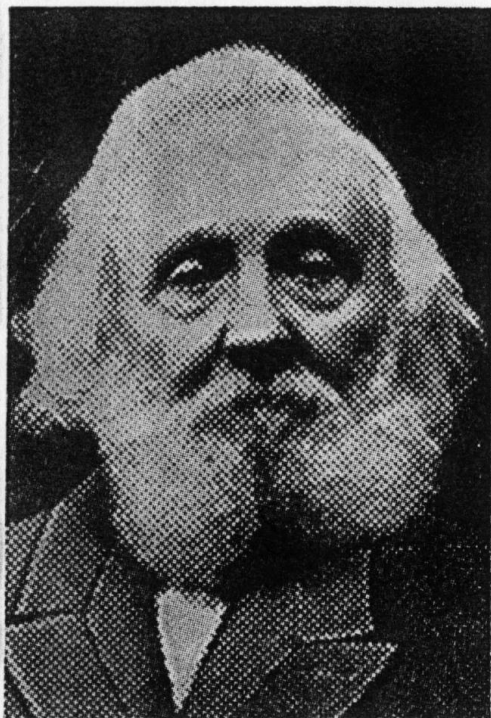
THE STONE BELOW WAS LAID ON FEBRUARY 25th 1851, BY THE RIGHT HONBLE LORD ASHLEY, IN FAITH AND HOPE THAT ON JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF, THE FOUNDATION AND CHIEF CORNER STONE OF HIS CHURCH, THERE MAY BE RAISED UP IN THIS, AN HOLY TEMPLE OF THE LORD, AN HABITATION OF GOD THROUGH THE SPIRIT.

Ephes: II XX, XXII.

The actual building of the Church coincided with the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace which was opened by Queen Victoria on May 1st, 1851, and it is intriguing to think of the many who from all parts of the Essex countryside must have gazed on the partly-built Church on their journey to and from South London.

Christ Church was built to provide for the spiritual welfare of the many hundreds of industrial and dock workers who had moved into this particular part of East London, referred to by Charles Dickens as "London over the Border," and on May 15th, 1852, the Church was consecrated by Bishop Charles James Blomfield of London, in whose diocese Christ Church then was. Originally Christ Church formed part of the parish of St. John's, and after its formal constitution as an independent parish, on November 10th, 1852, the former Curate-in-Charge, the Rev. Edward Cridge, became first Vicar.

Edward Cridge had come from a curacy in North Walsham, Norfolk, to the curacy of West Ham Parish Church (and charge of Christ Church) and he was, evidently, a man of great missionary vision and pioneering zeal, for in April, 1855, he left this country to become Chaplain to the Hudson Bay Company at Vancouver Island, subsequently being appointed Rector of Trinity Church, Victoria, British Columbia. In 1866, he became Dean of Christ Church Cathedral, Victoria, but in 1877 withdrew, with a large number of his congregation, from the Anglican Communion, on points of conscience. They established an independent Church under the title of "The Church of our Lord" and afterwards united with the Reformed Episcopal Church in which Edward Cridge was consecrated a Bishop at Ottawa in July, 1876. From this brief picture it will be seen that our first Vicar was a man of great spirit, vigour, faith and principle.



THE REV. EDWARD CRIDGE
(OUR FIRST VICAR)

The Reverend Stopford James Ram was appointed to the benefice by the Vicar of West Ham in 1854, and remained there until 1858. Mr. Ram was the author of "The Temperance Movement—its importance and Christian character." Upon his departure he became Association Secretary of the Irish Church Missions.

The Reverend J. M. Kennedy became Vicar in 1858, when the official population of the parish was 3377, and the parochial income £50 per year. The Church was still in the Diocese of London, Archdeaconry of Essex, and Rural Deanery of Barking.

It is not easy to speak with any certainty of the period between the departure of Mr. Kennedy in the summer of 1859, and the arrival of the Rev. John Strickland in the winter of 1861. Fairly wide enquiries have shed very little light on the question of who was actually Incumbent here

during that time, but a fairly long interregnum seems to have been brought to an end with the appointment of Mr. Strickland in 1861, who remained until 1864 when he accepted the Vicarage of the nearby parish of St. Jude, Whitechapel.

The Reverend James Wray Carter, who had been ordained in 1861, was then appointed by Trustees in 1864. He had come from the City parish of St. Peter's, Saffron Hill, and during his incumbency, resided at 7, Avenue Road, Bow. He died in May, 1878, and his grave may still be seen in West Ham Cemetery, just past the Church, and along the main path on the left. It was during Mr. Carter's ministry that our parish, in company with all others of the Barking Deanery, became part of the Rochester Diocese. To understand this, it should be realised that up to 1845 the whole of the County of Essex was included in the Diocese of London. In 1846 it was transferred to the Diocese of Rochester, except the Deanery of Barking, which remained until 1867 under the jurisdiction of London. In 1867, the Barking Deanery was also included in the Rochester Diocese, and our own parish of course shared in this transfer. Mr. Carter had the strange experience of seeing Christ Church become part of yet another Diocese for just towards the end of his ministry, the Diocese of St. Albans was founded (1877), which comprised the whole of Essex and Hertfordshire.

The Reverend Charles William Servante was appointed to the benefice in 1878. He had been ordained in 1871, and had served as Curate of St. Anne's, Limehouse. At the time of his appointment, the population is given as 8,000. Mr. Servante remained at Christ Church until his resignation in 1922, thus having served the parish for no less than forty-four years. Diocesan grouping had still not finished, and Mr. Servante shared something of the experience of Mr. Carter in seeing Christ Church in yet another Diocese, for in 1914 the Diocese of Chelmsford was founded. In something like the short space of 62 years, the Church had the peculiar experience of being in no less than four dioceses—London, Rochester, St. Albans, and lastly Chelmsford. During Mr. Servante's ministry, electric lighting was installed in the Church, and the organ enlarged as a Memorial for the men of the parish who had given their lives in the first World War.

On January 6th, 1923, the Reverend Reginald Brackstone Bertin, Curate-in-Charge of St. Edward's, Leyton (now a parish of its own), was instituted to the parish. Space prevents us recording a really full picture of his great leadership at Christ Church. Let it be sufficient to say that he exercised an almost superhuman influence over all the work he so ably undertook, during the ten years of a devoted ministry. In 1925 the Church was closed for restoration, and re-opened with the addition of a new Choir Vestry. The

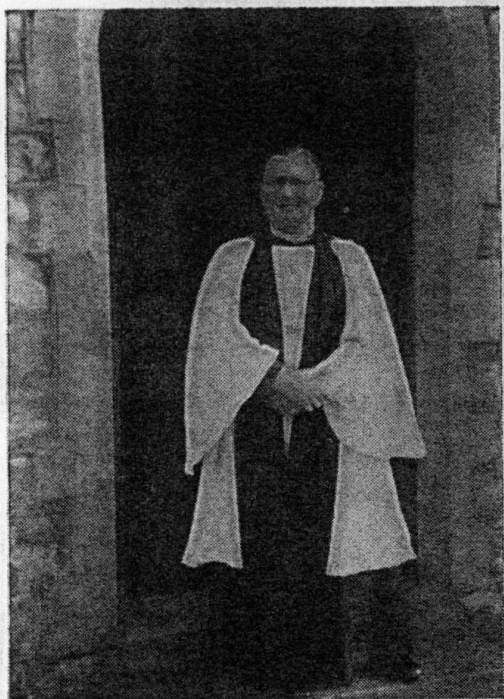
Gallery had been removed, the West wall underpinned, and a new and larger type of window took the place of the old west-end window. At the same time, the Nativity and Resurrection paintings over the Lord's Table took the place of tablets recording the Ten Commandments. The reredos painting of the Lord's Supper superseded hanging curtains, and the figures of the angels first appeared over the great Sanctuary Arch. In 1928 Mr. Bertin built the Cooper Hall which adjoins the church. In 1931 further redecoration was undertaken by Miss Meekings-Johnson, who, at the same time, placed a Memorial in Christ Church to the memory of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. S. H. Johnson, who for many years had been members of the Church. A tremendous amount of pastoral, evangelistic and social work was carried on by Mr. Bertin and his staff, and these commitments were increased when the Church undertook the leadership of the Carpenters Institute which the Company had opened on their estate. Mr. Bertin was also responsible for the erection of St. Aidan's Hall. In 1932 he became Vicar of St. Peter's, Colchester, returning to London as Vicar of Leyton in 1940. When the Bishop's Post-War Needs Appeal was launched, Mr. Bertin became Organising Secretary, and in 1944 his great services to the Church in Essex were appropriately recognised by the bestowal of an Honorary Canonry. Canon Bertin became Rural Dean of Leyton in 1949, and his sudden death in the February of our Centenary Year was a tremendous shock to his many friends. No man could have been a greater tower of strength to his old parish, and we at Christ Church are deeply conscious of all that he has meant to us here

The Reverend Walter Darling Topping was instituted to the benefice on 16th January, 1933, having come from a curacy at Harlow. To Mr. Topping fell the task of carrying on the very large parochial activities that had been so firmly established, and how well he did this may be judged by the real affection his ministry is spoken of still. In 1936 he became Vicar of St. Andrew's, Westcliff-on-Sea, and in 1944 was appointed to the Rectory of Magdalen Laver, near Ongar.

Mr. Topping was succeeded by the Rev. Herbert Henry Griswell who came in September, 1936, from Grays Parish Church where he had been on the staff of the now Canon Stafford Morris who himself was to return to West Ham in 1939. Like his predecessor, Mr. Griswell ably carried on the ever-increasing tide of parochial work in this heavily populated area, and subsequent history shows that his ministry was to be the last at Christ Church under normal conditions. When in 1938 he accepted the living of Alvaston in Derbyshire, the clouds of war were already gathering over Europe. Towards the end of his Vicariate, plans for the new choir stalls to the memory of the late Captain A. H. Shaw, of the Church Army, were approved, and subsequently dedicated in his successor's first year of office.

The Munich Treaty had already been signed, when the Reverend Thomas Henry Hollingdale, Curate of Upminster, was instituted to the living on 12th October, 1938. Since then the work at Christ Church has been carried on under the attendant difficulties of threatening war, evacuation, bombing, post-war unrest, and gradual movement from the area. Mr. Hollingdale had been Vicar barely a year when the world was plunged into a second World War on September 3rd, 1939. General evacuation became the order of the day, and organised parochial activities on any former scale were forced to an end. The great Dock Fire of 1940 is now history, and in subsequent air-raids the parish suffered heavily, many lives and homes being lost. The Carpenters Institute was destroyed, but with this exception, the parochial buildings escaped without immediate serious damage. To my predecessor, Mr. Hollingdale, full tribute must be paid as the one who had the leadership of the parish through the most momentous years of its history when it suffered what has since proved to be virtually a knock-out blow. Never again has the parish and church been anything like its pre-war strength, either in population, congregation or parochial activities. In 1948 Mr. Hollingdale accepted the parish of St. Peter's, Colchester thus following in the footsteps of Canon Bertin who had gone there himself from Christ Church in 1932.

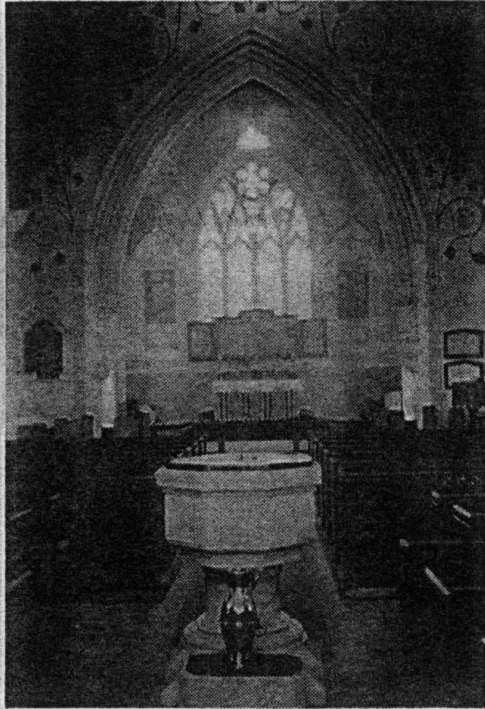
The Reverend Herbert Reseigh, Rector of Chesterton with Haddon, was appointed by the Trustees in 1948, and his ministry has been marked by the fact that each parochial building in turn has had to undergo major renovation and restoration. The Cooper Hall has been repaired and new lighting installed. St. Aidan's Hall has been almost rebuilt, and St. Aidan's Church itself cleared of its furniture and fittings. The windows of Christ Church have been restored, and an electrical blower fitted to the organ. The crowning blow fell in 1950 when an Architect's report revealed a serious outbreak of dry-rot in the Church roof. Christ Church had to close for nine months, and from Lent 1951, all services were held in St. Aidan's Hall, this building being licenced by the Bishop of Chelmsford as the temporary Parish Church. Christ Church was re-opened by the Bishop of Barking on October 15th, 1951, in the presence of a vast congregation. During the temporary closing, while work was in progress on the roof, opportunity was taken to have some of the Church re-decorated, and an entirely new lighting system installed. The present Vicar has had the task of leading the preparations for the celebrations of the Centenary. To mark this historic occasion, the names of the Incumbents of Christ Church with the year of their institution, have been drawn up and framed by Mr. R. C. Miller, and in addition, a new Lectern Bible will have been dedicated by the Bishop of Barking in Centenary Week, as a memorial to the late Canon Bertin.



THE REV. HERBERT RESEIGH
(OUR PRESENT VICAR)

No parochial history could be really complete without affectionate mention of the work that has been carried on for so long at St. Aidan's Church, Ward Road. The District of St. Aidan was formed on 1st June, 1895, and the Church dedicated on 2nd June, 1899. A faithful ministry, under a succession of able Priests-in-Charge, established St. Aidan's as a flourishing daughter Church, and it was duly consecrated on 7th July, 1921, War only causing the Church to be closed in 1940. With the advent of peace, it became clear that work would not again be possible on any pre-war scale, and in 1949, the Parochial Church Council, under a Faculty, had the Church furniture removed, and sold to the Diocese. Those who have previously worshipped in St. Aidan's will rejoice to know that a good deal of the equipment of this hallowed spot has gone to furnish Churches in the new areas of Essex. St. Aidan's Church Hall is much in use, and a Sunday School was re-established there in 1948.

In 1948 the present Vicar launched the Million Farthing Fund in order to meet some of the cost of the impending Centenary celebrations. Although the target has not been reached, this has not been through lack of effort. Congregations and Sunday Schools (including Free Churches) from all over England have helped towards a goodly proportion of our target, and we gratefully record our thanks.



INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH

The Church has always enjoyed a high place in the esteem of the Diocese, and no one could write adequately of all the help that has been given by the past and present Bishops of Chelmsford and Barking, a succession of kindly Rural Deans, the staff of Church House, the administrators of the London-over-the-Border Church Fund, and members of other Diocesan Committees.

Christ Church, Stratford, has borne witness to the Gospel of Christ for one hundred years. Its tradition has always been unashamedly Evangelical, and the Patrons of the living are Simeon's Trustees. During its history, an innumerable host of dedicated men and women have served the parish both in a full time and voluntary capacity. Impossible as it is to name them all here, we honour their memories and work as we look back over the years. Mention should be made of two members of Christ Church who have served the parish faithfully over a long period of time. Mr. H. W. Doran (Senior), was Churchwarden from 1922-1949, and Mr. L. Richards has been a member of the Church for no less than 55 years. Our parochial life has been strengthened and enriched by these, and many other examples of devoted service. A large proportion have passed to that Wider and More Glorious Church—some who in earlier times have borne the burden and heat of the day will happily be with us at this Centenary time. May it be that wherever we are called to serve, the example of this one hundred years of faithful witness will inspire us all with a new sense of Christian discipleship, in our world both of today and tomorrow.

“And here we give thee most high praise and hearty thanks for all thy Saints who have been the chosen vessels of thy grace and lights of the world in their several generations, and we pray that rejoicing in their fellowship and following their good examples, we may be partakers with them of Thy Heavenly Kingdom.”

INCUMBENTS OF CHRIST CHURCH STRATFORD, E.15

- 1852 Edward Cridge, B.A.
1854 Stopford James Ram, M.A.
1858 J. M. Kennedy
1861 John Strickland
1864 James Wray Carter
1878 Charles William Servante
1923 Reginald Brackstone Bertin
1933 Walter Darling Topping
1936 Herbert Henry Griswell
1938 Thomas Henry Hollingdale, A.K.C.
1948 Herbert Reseigh, A.K.C.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Vicar desires to express his sincere thanks to all who in any way have provided valuable information for the publication of this History. Beyond the actual Baptismal and Wedding registers, there have been no other immediate records to work on, and invaluable help has been rendered by many who have so willingly thrown light on past events. The writer is particularly indebted to the Oxford University Press who have allowed him free and unrestricted access to their first copies of "Crockford's Clerical Directory"—a kindness which has proved of the utmost value in reconstructing what we hope is an accurate list of past incumbents of the parish. Acknowledgment must also be made to the authorities of the Free Church of England who so graciously have allowed us the use of the photograph of Bishop Edward Cridge (our first Vicar), and also to the Reverend Anthony E. Thorpe, Minister of Stratford Congregational Church, who very kindly undertook the photography in connection with the three other pictures we reproduce.

The printing and production of this History has been undertaken by the West Ham Printing Company, of Mark Street, who for many years have been the Church printers, and to Mr. Hamilton and his staff we tender our thanks for their unfailing courtesy and advice.

*In years to come this page will help you to remember
what took place in Centenary Week*

SERVICES AND PREACHERS

Sunday, 11th May—

- 8 a.m. Holy Communion.
- 11 a.m. Morning Prayer. The Rev. D. A. Rooke, M.A.,
Vicar of St. John's, Stratford.
- 6.30 p.m. Evening Prayer. The Rt. Rev. The Lord
Bishop of Colchester.

Monday, 12th May—

- 3 p.m. Service for Women. The Rev. W. D. Topping,
Rector of Magdalen Laver.
- 8 p.m. Service for Youth. The Rev. T. H. Holling-
dale, A.K.C., Vicar of St. Peter's,
Colchester.

Tuesday, 13th May—

- 7.30 p.m. District Guide and Brownie Parade. The Rev.
H. H. Griswell, Rector of Wivenhoe.

Wednesday, 14th May—

- 3 p.m. Darby and Joan Club Service. The Rev. J. J.
Wright, B.D., A.K.C., Vicar of
Emmanuel, Forest Gate.

Thursday, 15th May. Our Centenary Day—

- 10 a.m. Holy Communion.
- 8 p.m. Service of Thanksgiving. The Rt. Rev. The
Lord Bishop of Chelmsford.

Friday, 16th May—

- 8 p.m. "Overseas" Service. The Rev. J. B. H.
Britter, A.L.C.D., Vicar of St. John's,
Walthamstow.

Saturday, 17th May—

- 7 p.m. Centenary Reunion Social in Cooper Hall.

Sunday, 18th May—

- 8 a.m. Holy Communion.
- 11 a.m. Morning Prayer. The Rev. E. H. Steele, Vicar
of St. Paul's, Stratford.
- 3.15 p.m. Service for Children. The Rev. H. J. Mar-
shall, Vicar of Chadwell Heath.
- 6.30 p.m. Evening Prayer. The Rt. Rev. The Lord
Bishop of Barking.
Dedication of Memorial to the late Canon
Bertin.

