

## Back to Beginnings -Almost

Article by Kev Reynolds on Rochester Diocesan website March 2014



Nestling below the greensand hills on the Kent/Surrey border between Westerham and Edenbridge, there are times when Holy Trinity Church in Crockham Hill seems marooned as a distant outpost of the Rochester Diocese...

Built in 1842 by Charles Warde of Squerryes, the church was first served by a Curate through the direction of the Vicar of St Mary the Virgin in Westerham, but within three years of its consecration, Crockham Hill became a separate ecclesiastical parish with its own Vicar, whose Patron for the next 130 years or so would be a member of the Warde family.

The list of incumbents during that period includes the Rev'd J E Colquhoun who, many years before Winston Churchill came there, lived at Chartwell, now one of the busiest of all National Trust properties on the parish boundary. The Rev'd Colquhoun was Vicar at Holy Trinity for only five years (1865-1870), but he subsequently served as churchwarden for the next 45, until shortly before his death in 1918. During his short incumbency he was largely responsible for the establishment of the village school 'built for the teaching of the children of this Parish in useful knowledge and the Christian Religion according to the Faith of the Church of England.' With this the Rev'd Colquhoun made his mark, and today the school continues to enjoy a strong link with the Church of the Holy Trinity which stands next door.

Despite its critics the Church of England does not stand still; its needs – and those of its clergy – evolve, as do those of even the most conservative of parishes, and following the retirement of the Rev'd John Boyd Roberts in the late 1970s it was decided ( three decades on, no-one is quite sure where that decision came from) that Holy Trinity should no longer be a 'stand alone parish' but be linked – not with Westerham, its civil parish partner, but with Edenbridge, three miles to the south. An Associate Vicar would look after the needs of Crockham Hill, and be overseen by a Priest-in-Charge who would be the Vicar of St Peter and St Paul in Edenbridge, while Patronage by the Warde family of Squerryes in Westerham would be suspended.

At first, news of such a change was not exactly welcomed by the parishioners and some lively PCC meetings ensued, but over in Rochester, Bishop David played a master-card by appointing the Rev'd Richard Mason (later to become Archdeacon of Tonbridge), as the Priest-in-Charge who would organise the transition and live in the Vicarage in the heart of Crockham Hill. For the next three years Richard became a very visible presence throughout the village. A one-time journalist on a national newspaper, he was the ultimate communicator and diplomat; he could smooth feathers before they were ruffled, and under his leadership the change was made with surprising ease.

With the parish now comfortable with its new situation, Richard was moved to Sevenoaks, thereby making way for a series of Associate Vicars to live and lead worship in the Parish, and at the same time assist with the growing demands of the ever-expanding town of Edenbridge. Among them was the Rev'd Fr Stephen Mitchell who, following his own three-year term as Associate Vicar, was promoted to Priest-in-Charge and moved to Edenbridge where, for the next 23 years he not only juggled the needs of his own Parish, but kept a loving eye on Holy Trinity while Fr Bob Jones took care of its regular worship.

After Bob Jones retired at Easter 2013, a question mark hung over the future of the Parish. It was suggested that another Associate Vicar was unlikely to be appointed, and the continuing link with Edenbridge was uncertain. Would Crockham Hill once again be teamed with Westerham? Would it become part of a larger team ministry? Some even feared that Holy Trinity's doors would close altogether.

Once again the distant voice of Rochester was heard. Surprisingly, since ordained clergy are in such short supply, it was decided that the formal link between the church in Crockham Hill and the parish of St Peter and St Paul in Edenbridge, would cease, and Holy Trinity would once again be gifted with its own priest.

God, and the Diocese of Rochester, move in mysterious ways. And those who care for the Church of the Holy Trinity in Crockham Hill rejoice!

And rejoice they certainly did at the Institution and Induction of the Rev'd Sue Diggory, formerly of St Mark's in Tunbridge Wells – a joyful service that took place on 26th March, conducted by Bishop Brian of Tonbridge, in which John Warde, a descendent of Charles Warde who built the church in 1842, once again took the place of Patron of Holy Trinity.

What goes around, comes around; the church in Crockham Hill has (almost) gone back to its beginnings.

And under Sue's leadership the future is full of hope.

**Kev Reynolds**

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