

A HUNDRED YEARS IN A CAMBRIDGE PARISH by GEORGE TIBBATTS O.G.S.

CHAPTER VII ST. AUGUSTINE'S

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century the town developed rapidly in the angle between Histon Road and Huntingdon Road. though Oxford Road was about the end of Cambridge, and the terminus of the No. 2 bus service run by the Ortona company -- later to be absorbed by Eastern Counties. As late as 1921 there was country between Oxford Road and the village of Girton. This triangle formed the nucleus for a new church district, and there was great need for some sort of a school.

In May, 1897, Canon Churton of King's College. and a generous benefactor and helper of St Luke's died and at the same time the Vicar, A. J. Micklethwaite, decided to see. if a mission district could not be formed to take in this part of the parish. In the previous February the Reverend T. J. Puckle, an old friend of the Vicar, had resigned his Oxfordshire parish to come and help at St. Luke's in a voluntary capacity. This priest purchased a site in the Oxford Road in June and held it, with permission to the Vicar to use it for a church.

The Vicar then formed a committee with the idea of building a mission church in memory of Canon Churton. As might be expected, the committee included the Bishop of Ely (Lord Alwyne Compton), the Provost of Worcester College. Oxford, the Provost of King's, the President of Queens', the Master of Selwyn and Professor Swete - a very typical Cambridge committee of the period. In July the Vicar and Mr. Puckle secured a site in Richmond Road communicating with the site in Oxford Road already purchased - the whole large enough for school, church and playground. This piece of land was subsequently conveyed to the Ely Diocesan Trust with Mr. Puckle, the Vicar and Churchwardens as administrators, and could only be used for the benefit of the parish. In December an architect, Mr. Fawcett, was called in to build a room suitable for a school, and which could be used on Sundays as a church - and in March, 1898, the building contract was let to Coulson & Lofts for £1,140. Work commenced in May and on 21st November the mission church of St. Augustine was dedicated by the Bishop of Ely. The Reverend T. J. Puckle was placed in charge of the new district. He worked there devotedly until after the resignation of Fr. Micklethwaite and left the parish in October, 1905, to be Vicar of St. Peter's, Barnsley. Shortly after leaving he wrote as follows a timely warning: "I'm afraid from things that were said to me before I left that some of you are inclined to lose your interest in St. Luke's or St. Augustine's, because it does not seem the same now that Mr. Micklethwaite and I are gone. I want you to remember that though

the ministers may be changed, yet the Church continues the same. The Church is the congregation of the faithful in any place; it is the Body of which the ministers are only some of the members. To them, as to the various members of the human body, particular functions are assigned; but those functions can be discharged by any duly ordained and appointed priest. St. Peter speaks of the whole church as a "holy priesthood," for, being the Body of Christ, His eternal Priesthood is exercised through it on earth. If this truth were only realised as it ought to be, there would be no room for the jealousy which is so often felt for the ordained members, nor would the changes which must from time to time occur in the ministers appointed to particular churches, cause so much unsettlement and dissatisfaction among them. I have, since you so kindly allowed me to exercise my discretion in the matter, applied your generous present to the Clergy Stipends Fund, in order that any difficulty which there may be in filling my place at St. Augustine's may be the sooner overcome."

There can be doubt that the warning given by Mr. Puckle was largely ignored, and 'that there crept in a coolness between St. Augustine's and the parish church. As in so many matters of this sort involving personalities, no particular individuals can be blamed. One important factor was the shortage of money in a poor parish - it was almost impossible for the Vicar to find a curate who would undertake the work more or less for love. The population was expanding and so the pastoral demands were more and more exacting. It was no longer realistic for young Fellows of Colleges in Holy Orders to give their spare time to the parish, for the University was expanding also and academic demands increasing. Obviously Mr. Hird wanted a curate for St. Augustine's, but there was no money to pay him. At the same time his other curate moved in 1905 to St. Clement's parish, and he was for the moment single-handed. Obviously the next curate must give priority to the parish church. And so St. Augustine's had to do with an irregular ministry until in 1907 Westcott House started providing students for Sunday evensong.

This situation was really the outcome of an unhealthy dependence on the University which was there from the beginning. All the poorer districts in the suburbs of Cambridge suffered from it, and no one at the time was aware of the atmosphere which was being inevitably created. From the time when Charles Mackenzie took services in the Victoria 'Asylum' in 1845 to the departure of James Micklethwaite in 1904, church work depended on more or less voluntary clergy. Even the Vicar of St. Luke's had only £3 a year endowment at the creation of the parish in 1881. No wonder that he felt bitterly when the Vicar of Old

Chesterton collected an extra £200 a year from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners by including the population of St. Luke's in his returns! This is in no way to belittle or underrate the heroic work done by many a young University priest over the years: in the social conditions of the nineteenth century they did as best they knew, and it was a very good best. But the people who lived in the district were encouraged by force of circumstances to take clerical ministrations for granted, and it was a shock when they found that the supply was coming to an end. And at the newer St. Augustine's they felt the draught very severely, for the mission church had been built by outsiders and Thomas Puckle had bought and given them the site, and then served them faithfully for some years on a voluntary basis. He had come to work in St. Luke's parish because he was a close friend of the Vicar, but when Fr. Micklethwaite's health broke down and he had to resign, Puckle accepted the living of St. Peter's, Barnsley. Truly Fr. Hird had a problem on his hands. Even as late as 1952 there were still traces of the old Victorian ways, and the Vicar financed the parish magazine to keep it on its feet.

In the years that followed there was little reference to St. Augustine's in the records or in the parish magazine, and the general pattern was one celebration of Holy Communion a month, or more if a clergyman was available, and evensong fairly regularly. But there was a gain in having Westcott House students, and many a young man who was to become distinguished in the Church of England served a minor apprenticeship at St. Augustine's. These included Eric Abbott, who resigned the Deanery of Westminster in 1974 : the late Archbishop of Central Africa (Oliver Green-Wilkinson) ; the Bishops of Ripon (John Moorman) and Lichfield (Stretton Reeve) ; the former Bishop of Masasi (Mark Way : and many others. And there were devoted parishioners as well, notably Miss Ethel Croxall who organised and ran a very successful Sunday School for a number of years. So an unrealistic situation was partially saved. There was also the long and loving service given to the St. Augustine's area by Miss Barbara Webb, with her remarkable bicycle basket and her determined cycling round the parish. Her house in Oxford Road was a centre for all sorts of activities and she was as valuable as a couple of curates. But apart from Westcott House and these devoted ladies and others not mentioned by name, and the monthly communions, the place subsisted on Sunday Schools and whist drives.

By 1952 there were two celebrations a month taken by the Reverend Gerald Savory, a retired priest living in Milton Road, and it became the policy to integrate St. Augustine's into

the life of the parish, and so the connection with Westcott House was reluctantly severed. A curate was put in charge and the parish clergy officiated at all the services. It was the deliberate policy of Canon Tibbatts, who came from Sidney Sussex College to be Vicar of St. Luke's in October, 1952, that the parish should be a unit consisting of the parish church and any district churches such as St. Augustine's. He took Evensong himself once a month and also his turn at the Sunday Eucharist, for it was important that the Vicar should be seen to be following his own policy. As soon as Eric Simmons was priested in 1954, there was a weekly celebration and occasional weekday ones as well. It was a great encouragement that in 1954 the Bishop of Ely (Edward Wynn) preached on St. Augustine's Day in May - the first time since the dedication that the Diocesan had been seen in Richmond Road. St. Augustine's people were encouraged to stand for the Parochial Church Council and to come to parish occasions such as the Patronal Festival in October and parish parties at the Vicarage. The clergy - Vicar and curates - became known as "the Staff," and St. Luke's folk came to St. Augustine's functions. In Holy Week the whole parish worshipped together at the Parish Church, emphasising the essential unity of the whole.

The arrival of Robert Waddington hot from Australia was another blessing for St. Augustine's, for he was able to build on the foundations which Fr. Simmons had laid so well. Moreover he was an accomplished choirmaster, and trained a fine choir of boys, which contributed richly to the Holy Week liturgy in the parish church. Few people who heard them will quickly forget the Palestrina Reproaches on Good Friday - and St. Luke's acoustics are very good. Fr. Waddington introduced a Sung Eucharist every Sunday and the congregation grew steadily - as it had been doing since 1953. The new faces had none of the hang-ups about keeping apart from the parish church.

One of the things which greatly helped the integration was the united parish activity of raising funds for the new church on the Arbury Road Estate. Everyone worked hard at this and many ingenious plans for revenue were devised to the great advantage and benefit of the whole district. Also there was the great blessing of the arrival of the Sisters of St. Margaret, East Grinstead, at Neale House in Huntingdon Road, who helped in all sorts of ways and had discussion groups in their house. There was also a flourishing Youth Group by the time Fr. Waddington returned to Australia to be Head-master of a Boys' Boarding School in Queensland.

For many years the Trustees of St. Augustine's Church, as originally determined by Fr. Puckle, had let the premises to the local Education Authority for use as a school, which produced an income to pay for repairs. But the district was still financially dependent on the parish church. In 1964 there was drawn up a scheme by which St. Augustine's achieved financial independence by agreement with the Church Council and the Diocesan Board of Finance, and accepted a separate quota for diocesan funds, as well as raising a considerable portion of their priest's stipend. And they have had a priest of their own for just over twenty years.

St. Augustine's has provided an interesting episode of local church history. It started in 1898 by the generous benefaction of a priest to which nothing had to be contributed, and gratefully accepted his voluntary service for some years. In 1974 it stands on its own feet within the parish family of St. Luke's and does very well, and grows through its healthy independence.