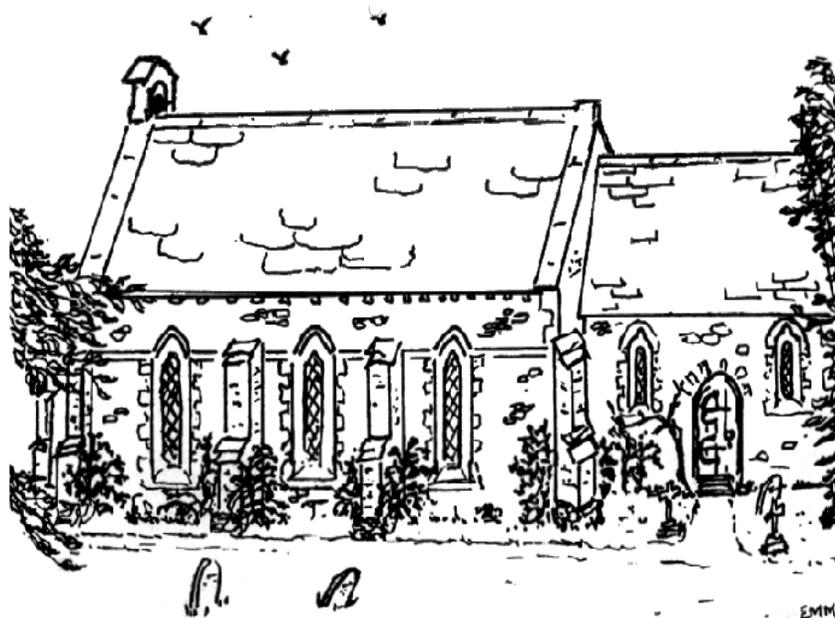


**THE CHURCH OF
THE HOLY ASCENSION
LITTLEWORTH 1839 – 2020**



1839 - 2000 Elizabeth Mackworth

2000 - 2020 Jill Woodward

LITTLEWORTH CHURCH 1839 – 2020

In the year 1800, Edward Bouverie Pusey was born at Pusey House. By his early twenties he was a learned and God-fearing young man, and very fond of riding. He often rode to the Thames at Radcot and to Fairford to see his friend John Keble whose father was vicar of Coln St Aldwyn. These rides often took him through the hamlet of Littleworth. In the early nineteenth century, Littleworth had no church of its own. It was part of the Parish of Faringdon, and considered a dirty and lawless place. Those who might wish to attend church had to walk the two miles along Church Path, across the fields to Faringdon Church. When there was a death in the village, the coffin was carried along the same footpath, for the funeral at Faringdon.

Church Path was not very well trodden and many waited until they were carried in their coffins to make their first and only trip along it! On his frequent rides through Littleworth, Edward Pusey noted the lack of a church, and this concerned him greatly. He was determined that these ungodly people should be provided with a church in their village. Thus, in 1823, when he was elected a Fellow of Oriel College in Oxford, it was said that his first action was to propose the building of a church in Littleworth.

From his correspondence, the following letter, from one of the Fellows, the Rev. J.E. Taylor, survives:

“Now my good fellow, I want to know whether you have done anything, and what? The first thing to attend to is the actual size of the village. How many in all? How many attend Church? How many can read? Have been baptized? Have received the Sacrament?.....These are points which by hook or crook I must have ascertained before audit, or I shall be told my motion is premature.....Keble tells me you have told him of our plan; he will not consent unless we undertake to have a handsome building.”

This was dated 20th August 1823.

These stories underpinned the belief that Pusey was the founder of this church in Littleworth. The fact was that the Provost and Fellows of Oriel College Oxford, the principal landowner in the area, owning Wadley Manor and all the land right down to the Thames, refused to help at this time even though Pusey and his friends, Keble and Newman were Fellows. Actually, nothing was done for the next fifteen years. It was when Rev. Charles Page Eden, previously a Fellow of All Souls, Oxford and Vicar of St Mary Oxford, took up the cause when he was elected Dean of Oriel, that things began to happen.

John William Burgon, at one time Dean of Chichester, wrote a book about the life of Charles Page Eden and had this to say about his connection with the church at Littleworth:

“The Deanship of his college,” (Oriel College Oxford) “to which he was elected in the same year, was of course incompatible with the necessary demands of a curacy. Eden had given his heart to his sacred calling, and his zeal was as conspicuous when he was without a parish as when he was in charge of one. Oriel College had recently purchased the Littleworth (then called the ‘Wadley’) Estate – a hamlet of Faringdon which was as yet unprovided with either Church or Chapel. As a necessary consequence, the peasantry were almost in a heathen state. An aisle of Faringdon Church used to be known as the “Littleworth Aisle”, and a short cut across the fields (still called Church Path) was made for the convenience of the inhabitants. But they were utterly neglected. Eden, finding the college indisposed to build a church at Littleworth, at once set about soliciting subscriptions with a view to erecting one; and was so strenuous in his canvass that, in the end a church was erected. The Provost and Fellows, with other members of the College, contributed in all upwards of £1300 towards the Building and Endowment Fund.”

So, although it was Pusey who originally saw the need for a church in Littleworth, the real founder was undoubtedly Rev. C. Page Eden, Dean and Fellow of Oriel, who worked very hard to obtain enough funds to build the church and endow a new parish. It was he who persuaded Oriel to give three sums of money totaling five hundred pounds. He collected donations from all the Fellows, including Keble and John Henry Newman. Fifty pounds was donated by Edward Bouverie Pusey, who by then had been appointed Professor of Hebrew and Canon of Christchurch at the early age of twenty eight. He lived frugally, giving much of his money for the building of new churches. He also collected donations from his mother and his elder brother, Philip Pusey, MP, author of the hymn “Lord of our life and God of our salvation.”

H.J. Underwood was a pupil of Sir Robert Smirke (architect of the British Museum) and practiced at Oxford. Underwood has several Oxford buildings to his credit. In 1835 he designed the porter’s lodge, library and lecture room at the Botanic Gardens and the Church at Littlemore. In 1836 he designed St Paul’s Church in Jericho, Oxford, and in 1845 the Broad Street front of Exeter College, Oxford. This was followed by designs for chapels at St Cross, St Sepulchre and Osney and several parsonages in places near Henley, including Medmenham and Remenham. Sadly, he committed suicide on 22nd March 1852.

By May 23rd 1838 the contracts and subscriptions were completed and the foundation stone was laid. In 1839, only the Nave of the church was built and its roof is worthy of notice. It has a fine hammer-beam construction with decorative shields at the ends of the beams, each of which has a symbol of Christ. IHS (Greek for JESus) and a crown; XPT (Greek for ChRisT); Alpha (first letter of the

Greek alphabet); and Omega (the last letter of the Greek alphabet) the beam ends therefore read – “Jesus Christ the beginning and the end”.

At eleven o'clock on the morning of Wednesday 29th May 1839, the new church was consecrated as “The Church of the Holy Ascension”. It was in fact, three weeks after Ascension Day so there must have been a cause for postponement. The Rev. Richard Lynch Cotton, Provost of Worcester College Oxford and incidentally brother-in-law of Edward Pusey, preached the opening sermon. The patronage at this time was vested in the Bishop of Oxford.

At first we did not have a Vicar of our own, but Rev. Joseph Moore was appointed Curate-in-Charge. Four years later he became Vicar of Buckland. However, he kept responsibility for Littleworth until his death in 1876, and it is interesting to note that the responsibility for the church in Littleworth had been taken away from Faringdon, remaining for its first thirty seven years with the Vicar of Buckland. This could well be explained by the fact that Oriel College was the centre of the high- church “Oxford Movement” of which Pusey and his friends Keble and Newman were leaders. Undoubtedly Joseph Moore wore a surplice and used high-church practices when he conducted a service, and this would have appeared shocking to the austere, calvinistic, protestant Vicar of Faringdon.

The funds for the living at Littleworth came first from a sum vested in Queen Anne’s Bounty; afterwards Rev. Moore bought the tithes of Wicklesham for about £104, and in 1844 a grant of £18 a year was made by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. Later several further sums were invested in Queen Anne’s Bounty, these amounts were collected from various sources by Rev. Thorp and generously supplemented by Oriel College and the Poor Benefices Society. The two cottages in front of the church were demolished when Oriel College allowed the churchyard to be enclosed by a wall. The cost of building the wall was borne by Mr Thomas Goodlake and Mr West.

During the time that Moore was Vicar of Buckland and also in charge of Littleworth, a series of “Stipendiary Curates” did the work of the parish. The last of these Curates was Rev. Edward Thorp. In those days all the villagers were agricultural workers and their many children attended the village church school, some of them walking fair distances to school across the fields from Thrupp, Haremore and other outlying parts of the parish.

In 1876 much was happening at Littleworth Church. Joseph Moore died and Rev. Thorp, having been Stipendiary Curate for two years, was appointed Vicar, a post he held for forty one years. The Chancel and Sanctuary were built, at a cost of £800. The building of the Chancel and Sanctuary was actually gifted by Moore but it was not finished until after his death. His wife, Sarah, also made a gift to the church of a large brass alms dish.

Heating in the form of a large Patent stove was installed at a cost of £7, which was paid for by Lady Guest of Barcote Manor. She also gave five new pews, three on the South side and two on the North. It was noted that these pews were “*all free and unappropriated*”. Some new blue hangings were given by Mr Thomas Leinster Goodlake when in 1885 he caused the church to be distempered blue inside, which must have made it very dark!

An important event was when the old organ, being considered unworthy of its position in the church, was given to an Institute in Faringdon and a new one was installed, positioned to the left of the new chancel. The new organ was built by Charles Martin of St Frideswides Oxford, who also built one at Buckland. £102 was needed to pay for it. Rev. Thorp, greatly assisted by Mrs Bennett of Faringdon House, organized a huge and successful bazaar in Faringdon. They also held an auction and a concert. The Harvest Thanksgiving collection, a collection on the opening day and many subscriptions and donations from well-wishers all went to the cause.

There was no Vicarage at this time, but eventually, Thorp was able to persuade Oriel College to give the site and to donate £500 towards the cost of building one. They also paid £100 for the Patronage to be transferred to Oriel from the Bishop of Oxford. The building costs were augmented by £400 from various funds and about the same was raised by the P.C.C. and the parishioners, Mr Southley of Carswell gave £10 as did Mr Goodlake. A further £50 was given by Mr West of Barcote. The house and a coach-house with a “bothy” beside it with a room over the top was built by Cooper of Aylesbury, and completed in 1884. Rev. Thorp had a coach and horses to get about his parish and because he was crippled, he had a handyman, Fred, who did the garden and looked after his horses. He lived in the room above the bothy. The horses were kept tethered by chains and the village children used to go and get them for him.

It was through the enthusiasm of Edward Thorp and the generosity of Mr George Adams of Wadley Manor, who gave the land, that the Mission Room, named the Mission of The Good Shepherd, was built in 1904 in Thrupp. Rev. Thorp canvassed well and the subscriptions amounted to £108-19s-9p. Thrupp was a hamlet at the lower part of the village near Thrupp Common, which was farmed by several farmers. Unfortunately, the position was in the extreme corner of the parish, and not on the road where it would have been more accessible. The road running from Littleworth to Thrupp was built towards the end of the nineteenth century. Previously there had been only a cattle track linking Littleworth with Thrupp Common and the hamlet of Thrupp. The man who dug the road, Alec Richens, set his line by two large trees, probably elms, one down by the pub called the Spotted Cow, and another which was at the top of the hill. This explains why it is so straight. Up by the village, the road curled round near the top to

accommodate the field where the vicar's horses were kept. The road was then known as the New Road. Unfortunately the landmarks have gone, but the road bears witness to where they stood.

The year after the building of the Mission Hall, another rather expensive project was undertaken, to enlarge the organ and install the big pipes at the front, at a cost of £43. In 1910 Charles and Clara Cooper donated the wooden font cover. The stained glass window next to the pulpit depicting the parable of the Sower was gifted to the church in the same year, in memory of George Adams of Wadley Manor. The other stained glass window, the central panel in the East end of the church, depicting the Ascension of Our Lord, was put up by a Mr Clark of Faringdon, in memory of his wife Harriet who died on 8th July 1875,

Unfortunately, during Rev. Thorp's old age, the church fell into great disrepair and neglect. When he died in 1917 he was buried at Littleworth.

The Rev. Godfrey Thomas Bent, an ex-army chaplain, was appointed Vicar. He stayed only five years until 1922. Nonetheless, he realized that there was much restoration to do. A report with recommendations on the condition of the church, structure and fabric was prepared by an architect, Harold S. Rogers. He described it as being "*architecturally mean, its appointments are poor and its atmosphere depressing.....The present sacristy accommodation is inadequate. While none of the furniture throughout the church is good, most of the nave benches would seem positively to hinder rather than serve the purposes of worship.....The ceiling between the rafters is blue which casts a gloom over the interior and the windows which are few, have faulty glazing.*" This was neither a good nor flattering report. Rev. Bent himself had a further litany of ills to add. He wrote that "*the chancel steps were very bad, those in the sanctuary were flaking off, that the tiles were deplorable, the pulpit was a very cheap and nasty one and the base of the font, a mixture of wood and stone, was cracked and wobbled when touched!*" The front half of the nave had box pews and the back ones were ordinary open bench pews. Each box pew had on it the name of the family who was entitled to use it. The wealthier families had box pews and the family at Wadley Manor had a pew bigger than the rest which had a tortoise stove in it. A little anecdote told by an ex-schoolboy of Littleworth School, Archie Viner, was concerned with the joys of a box pew. "On Good Fridays all us school kids used to have to go to church and then we were allowed the rest of the day off. So, when we arrived at the church, we all used to make a dash for the biggest and warmest pew. You could get right down out of sight and nobody could see what you got up to!" His wife added that her family had a box pew and the children loved it. I suppose it is always good to think you can do something without being observed by those in authority. I expect that Rev. Bent probably had a fair idea of what went on as he knew all the children and took prayers every day in the school. Little was done in the way of restoration during his time, despite the architect's report and even

his own observations of the situation, but it was whilst he was incumbent that Oriel College started selling off their land, and he purchased the sites that became the Vicarage garden, the School House garden, the land on which the Reading Room was built and some extra churchyard space. Whilst this did not improve the church decorative order, it did improve the lot of the Vicarage and the church school and provided land for a village amenity.

Rev. Herbert G. Elton became Vicar in 1922. I think he rather shared Harold Rogers' sentiments about the condition of the church and he started to tackle the matter of fundraising for repairs in earnest. His first priority was to repair the chancel roof. On his Institution the rain was coming through the roof to such a degree that they had to use umbrellas in the church! In 1924 a new heating system was put in with a large solid fuel boiler in a boiler room under the church. This heated the water that circulated through pipes to heat the church. Windows were restored and a sanctuary carpet laid. The old pews were stripped out and some clergy stalls and some new open pews were installed. Gone for ever were the children's favourites, the box pews, no more unseen fun during the services! Many of the old pews were chopped up for firewood, but some of the parishioners bought the old pews and used them as garden benches. A villager even cut one in two and had half either side of his front door!

So impressive was the effect of all this restoration, that on the 13th August 1927 the following article appeared in the Faringdon Advertiser:

"Much has now been accomplished towards the restoration of this (Littleworth) Church. A complete heating apparatus has been installed, the Chancel entirely re-roofed, the Church re-lighted with powerful oil lamps and nine new windows erected in the Nave, the old ones being beyond repair; besides many lesser improvements; and most important of all the services of the Church are now as ordered in the Prayer Book. The main roof of the Nave has now to be put in order; and then it may be possible to do something towards making the interior of the Church more worthy of its high purpose."

It was during Elton's time here in 1929, that it was decided to move the organ to its present position. This was to help the congregational worship and also to give a better sized vestry. There being no electricity, the organ was powered by manually operated bellows.

Again, there was a relevant article in a 1929 edition of the Faringdon Advertiser:

"Reference is made in the Diocesan Magazine to the improvements recently carried out at Littleworth Church. Fifteen new pews have been placed in the Nave, and the organ and the choir, placed originally away from the main body of worshippers,(up in the Chancel) are now at the West end....The organ was moved by Messrs. Phipps and Sons, builders of Oxford. The blocks of choir seats,

he had to exercise them and to this end he regularly used a bicycle. His first undertaking for the church was to extend the churchyard at the back, where up until now had been allotments. The land was given by Mr Haines and Archie Viner ploughed it down to make it as level as possible with the rest of the churchyard. This was done in 1950 and the land was consecrated by the Bishop of Reading at 3.15pm on 9th September that year.

Morris used to take a Sunday school in the Mission Room at Thrupp once a month and for this he was paid the princely sum of £19 per year. The fifteen or sixteen children from Thrupp would ride their bicycles up to meet him and they would ride down together singing hymns all the way. The children loved him. He was always singing. When the floods were up, which happened often in the winter, Rev. Morris used to carry the children through the water to the Mission Room like a latter day St Christopher. In those days it was literally standing-room only in the church at the festivals of Christmas, Easter and Harvest Festival. The silver chalice, flagon and patten which had been with the church since its consecration are large and the chalice is not very user-friendly so, in 1952, Alice Clack's family donated a smaller, silver chalice and patten in her memory. This is still in use today. The parishioners subscribed for a frontals chest, a vestry chest, two sanctuary stools and a chancel carpet in fond memory of their Vicar, who died in 1957. He is also buried in Littleworth.

1958 saw Charles S. Hardy inducted as Vicar, and very soon there were discussions about church heating. In his newsletter at Whitsun 1959, Hardy wrote "*We must have a new heating boiler before next winter. The present one – over 30 years old – has been 'coaxed' by Mr Fox for several years past, but now it is useless...*" so on 6th May, the P.C.C. decided to accept estimates from Messrs. Bowler of £81 for a new boiler and pipes, and also to have a mains water pipe put into the churchyard wall as a facility for those tending graves and arranging church flowers. They got the work done in the hope that sufficient donations would be made to the Churchyard Fund to cover it. The fete that year was so successful that they could afford some new carpeting for the Nave as well as the boiler and water pipe! At the end of his first year, Rev. Hardy was able to write: "*I have now been here for a year. During that time with the help of many, much has been done for our Church. We have new Service Books, new carpets and Church furniture, a very clean Church and a new heating boiler...*" The people went on raising money and more improvements were made, the cracked chimney rebuilt, the buttresses repaired and the windows attended to. A new purple frontal, especially made in London was given in memory of Violet King in 1962. On 2nd November, that same year, the licence for Divine Service and Holy Communion was withdrawn from the Mission Room in Thrupp. This was probably because the Vicar found the journey irksome as much as for any other reason. The winter that year was exceptionally cold, in fact it was the worst for a hundred years, so it was small wonder that the radiators in the church froze up and

split, because they had become rusted and thin with age and as the Vicar reported in his newsletter: "*For several Sundays it was impossible to hold Evensong although Holy Communion was maintained in Artic conditions.*" Obviously it was all going to be very costly. The radiators were removed whilst they were still frozen so that the church would not be flooded in the thaw. There were great discussions at the P.C.C. meetings about what to do and different types of heating, including electric were compared. Then, Mr Young the Headmaster of St Hugh's School Carswell together with many of the children's parents, offered to give twelve overhead heaters to replace the damaged heating system. In those days children from St Hugh's came to Littleworth Church every Sunday during term time. It was a very generous gift and the electric heating was installed in 1963. Everyone could have a warm head but such a system could never afford warmth to the feet. Fortunately it proved to be cheaper than the costs of the coke and stoking for the old boiler, and Frank Fox would be relieved of the tiresome job of tending it! In 1964 the organ had a complete overhaul carried out by the son and grandson of the man who built it. It was Easter 1965 that Charles Hardy announced his intention to retire. His ministry in Littleworth had been very positive and much had been achieved. The kitchen garden of the Vicarage had been sold for the benefit of the Benefice and even with all the improvements and restoration, both in the church and churchyard the financial situation was still healthy. However, it was sad to see the note in his final newsletter "*BUT ALAS no really increased congregations.*"

Later that year, 1965, Rev. Norman J.C. Greenfield with his wife Catherine and two daughters came to Littleworth. In 1966 a faculty was granted to level the uncared for graves to make the churchyard upkeep easier. At the time a firm was contracted to mow the grass twice a year, and the expense was creeping up. It was hoped that when some of the grave mounds and kerbstones had been removed, it would be possible to use an ordinary mower....and so it proved. Encouraged by the Vicar the clearance was effected by parishioners, and a mower was purchased for £25 in 1967. Norman Greenfield mowed the churchyard himself, once a week in the growing period. Inside the church, during another re-decoration of the Sanctuary, the two panels at the back of the altar, which had been given in 1933 were examined and found to be riddled with woodworm, so they were taken down to prevent spread to other furniture. At the same time, the words of the Institution were also removed from the central panel because they were no longer in current use. By then the Alternative Services, Series 2 had been introduced. The three panels were then emulsioned to match the walls of the sanctuary. In his last newsletter before he moved to another living, Norman Greenfield had this to say: "*Incidentally, if no further Vicar is appointed, there will have been only nine vicars of Littleworth in the 132 years of the existence of the parish. The first two vicars stayed a total of 78 years between them!* In those 132 years, the population of the parish has steadily dwindled to the

present figure of about 160. In the last year, however church attendance has been at least one tenth of this figure most weeks, and the total acts of communion in 1970 was the largest since 1947, when the population was treble the size it is now."

The note of uncertainty in the first sentence reflects that it was around this time that a plan was being developed for the re-organisation of the rural parishes in the five Deaneries of West Berkshire. The time was fast approaching when Littleworth Church alone could no longer be considered a full-time job for a clergyman. The Archdeacon decided that the answer to this problem was to arrange for a Plurality of the three parishes of Littleworth, Buckland and Pusey. With this arrangement each of the three parishes remained an independent entity but shared a Vicar.

Rev. John Phipps became the first Vicar in late 1971 and moved into Littleworth Vicarage as was ordered in the Plurality document. In 1973, wishing to live in the centre of the three parishes, he and his wife Olive, moved to a house in Buckland. Despite all suggestions for possible alternative use by clergy, the Vicarage in Littleworth was sold. Nor was the Vicarage the only building connected with Littleworth Church to be sold. Because the licence had been revoked in 1962, the Mission Hall at Thrupp which had been a well supported outpost of the church had fallen into disuse, and was sold to Mr John Bolter, the farmer who owned the land surrounding it. It was to have been pulled down, but in fact it never happened and the ruins still stand today. The proceeds of the sale were divided equally between the Littleworth P.C.C., the Playing Field Fund and the Reading Room Fund (about £55 each!) In 1974 the church lighting and heating installations were rewired by Mr W.J. Brown from Fernham.

Rev. Jim McGowan had been a bachelor schoolmaster before he took the living of the Plurality in 1979, at a time when the Parish Share (the money sent to the central church fund to go towards paying clergy stipend and pensions) stood at £240 per annum, and the services in the church had been reduced to approximately two a month. By now the wall surrounding the churchyard was in need of repair and again the roof was developing troubles. Unfortunately Jim McGowan, due to poor health, was unable to stay long and left at the end of 1980.

Once more the question of Deanery re-organisation was in the air and a lengthy interregnum ensued. It was after much uncertainty, that Rev. Eric Wood was made Priest-in-Charge in 1981. The repair of the wall put in hand by Jim McGowan, was done by Keith Boswell, a stonemason living in the village. The unfortunate pulpit, so vilified by Rev. Bent and the architect Harold Rogers, was replaced by an oak one considered more worthy of our church. Dating from 1924, it came from a redundant church in Kingston Blount. The Latin inscription around the top reads "*We preach Jesus crucified.*" In order to put in the new pulpit, a painted metal plaque was taken off the wall. This was one of several painted in the style of a mid-nineteenth century Book of Hours. (No dates or donors of these plaques could be found). On the West

wall is the illuminated Lord's Prayer and the Creed, and on the North East corner of the nave are two plaques of the Ten Commandments one of which was that moved for the pulpit installation. There is an inscription over the West door (porch side) in similar lettering. The re-roofing of the South side of the church was also done by Keith Boswell. Most of the stonemason slates needed were donated by Archie Viner from one of his old farm buildings. The money for these repairs was collected due to the enthusiasm and hard work of Eric Wood. In 1984, the brass processional cross was presented to the church by Geoffrey Billinge, landlord of the Fox and Hounds pub which was on the main road at the end of the village. After three years as Priest-in-Charge, Eric Wood was inducted as Vicar of Littleworth, Buckland and Pusey. Now the Parish Share had risen to £799 per annum.

A large painting of the presentation of Christ in the Temple was given to Littleworth Church on a long-term loan. It was painted in about 1928 and depicts the Virgin Mary passing the infant Jesus to Simeon. (It was he who described Jesus as "*A Light to lighten the Gentiles*"). The artist was Mother Maribelle of the Convent of Saint Mary the Virgin in Wantage. It is interesting to note how all the light in the picture emanates from the baby and the further parts of the picture are dark – a reminder that all the true light of the world comes from Jesus Christ. Also note that Simeon's hands held out to receive the baby are like those of a communicant to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion. It was hung above the frontal press in the Baptistry.

In 1986, Keith Boswell repaired the bell-turret, and the bell, having been silent for some years, was re-hung. The North side of the church was re-roofed by H.S. Knapp of Stanford in the Vale in 1987 at a cost of £3,250. Eric Wood continued his fundraising activities right up until he retired to Bruton in Somerset in 1988.

Rev. Colin Rudd was the twelfth and last incumbent of the plurality. Archie Viner and his late wife Nancy, who lived in the community all their lives knew all twelve. Colin was inducted by the Bishop of Reading, the Rt. Rev. Graham Foley on Wednesday 22nd March 1989 at 7.30pm in Littleworth Church. The year was an important one in the history of The Church of the Holy Ascension, as 29th May was the 150th anniversary of the foundation. In honour of the occasion, Elizabeth Mackworth made a commemorative cushion for the old carved chair known as "the Bishop's chair". It depicted the coat of arms of Oriel College Oxford, and the two dates 1839 -1989. In 1993, she also made a new green frontal and super-frontal for the altar, a green chasuble and veil, and a white chasuble. New blue carpeting was bought for the chancel and the sanctuary and to go along the communion rail. The centre cushion at the altar rail was also embroidered by Elizabeth with a design of a central cross with wheat and grapes symbolizing the elements of the Sacrament. There is a small cat embroidered at the right corner.

This was because her ginger cat had followed her into the church whilst she was measuring for the kneeler, and unknowingly she had shut him in. It was only at the end of the Sung Eucharist seven days later that he was discovered, very weak, but thankfully alive. When the embroidery was finished, Joanne Broughton, an upholsterer, also of Littleworth made it up into the kneeler.

In January 1991, it was recorded at the P.C.C. meeting that the church building was supposed to be inspected by an approved architect every five years. The Archdeacon had been pressing for some time to know when the last inspection was, and wanted to see a report of it. No one could remember and no report could be found, so plans were made for one to take place.

Fundraising in 1991 included a fete at Old Smokedown, home of Archie and Nancy Viner. This was a great success, and was repeated every summer until 1998.

Colin Rudd had previously been Chaplain at Toc H (Talbot House in Poperinghe, Belgium). In the First World War, the men who went to the Front at Messines, who had to live through life in the trench system, needed some relief from this, and would be periodically rotated back through the 'rear areas' for rest, training etc. One of those rear towns was Poperinghe, and the army was persuaded by the senior Chaplain, Rev. Neville Talbot to rent a house there. It became Talbot House and was named after his brother Lt. Gilbert Talbot who was killed in 1915. It soon became known to the soldiers as 'Toc H', Toc being the army signallers' code for 'T'. Colin Rudd led a party from the parishes to Messines in 1992 to present a gift of a copy of a book which came from Messines Abbey. At Easter 1993, Colin and others did a sponsored bike ride to Messines. Gainfield became twinned with Messines until 2007, when the Chaplain there died.

In 1992, Helen Kane and Claire Berry started a Sunday School for children aged between the ages of three and nine years old. Activities included an outing to Weston Super Mare in 1993. They stopped the Sunday School in 1997 as their own children were growing older and their needs changing. Also in 1992, Colin Rudd bought an old ambulance to transport his disabled daughter in. It was painted blue, and he made weekly trips to Faringdon, picking up passengers in the three parishes to do their shopping. Later, with fundraising, it was replaced by a minibus, driven by volunteers, and named RWMT in memory of the late Richard Wellesley of Buckland. The bus was later used for "Happy Wanderers" outings, which took place on a monthly basis. A RWMT bus is still in use today.

From 1992 until 1998, the churchyard was mown regularly by Christopher Viner. His father, Robert then took over and continued until 2004, when Michael Poole took over, and still does it very well today. He maintains the mower and cuts the grass fortnightly.

In 1993, Elizabeth Mackworth suggested devoting one service annually to raise funds for a charity. Littleworth adopted The Church of England Children's Society. Originally, the collection from the Mothering Sunday service was donated, but this was soon replaced by that from the Carol Service, together with toys given by the village children.

The Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure came into effect on 1st February 1994. At a P.C.C. meeting in June that year, members of the P.C.C. had to vote on whether a woman priest would be acceptable in this parish. It was unanimously accepted.

In 1996, Rev. Sonia Hall joined Littleworth Church as a Curate, to help the Vicar who was experiencing health problems. She took the services, ran courses and meetings and visited many of the parishioners.

In 1997, on the day of the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, in full daylight, the church was burgled. The thieves took the old, carved-oak Bishop's chair. It was never recovered and a modern replacement chair was made by Crowdy's of Faringdon. Also in 1997 a small portable P A system was set up, partly funded by donations in memory of Edna Rees. In this year, new hymn books 'Hymns Old and New' were bought for the church by means of sponsorship. Colin Rudd also reluctantly discontinued using 'The Peace' in services as most people said it made them feel uncomfortable.

In 1998 discussion groups 'Heretics Anonymous' were started in Littleworth and Buckland, inspired by Sonia Hall. The group thrived in Littleworth with as many as fifteen people at most meetings, which took place at Pat King's house. They took place every two weeks over ten or twelve week 'terms'.

After much deliberation by the three parishes, the Plurality Order was revoked in 1998. The Royal assent was granted for the union of the three parishes of St Mary the Virgin, Buckland, The Holy Ascension, Littleworth and All Saints, Pusey in October 1998. Technically these three ecclesiastical parishes ceased to exist on 1st November 1998, but because the date was so close to the year end, the Diocese agreed that the newly authorized parish of Gainfield would operate from 1st January 1999.

In February 1999, it was decided that each church should form a 'Friends' group. The Friends would be the responsibility of the Church Warden, who would either be the Chairman or a mandatory member of the group with specific responsibility for the organisation and work of the committee. The prime purpose of each group would be:

- Maintenance and upkeep of the church building
- Funding for the building
- Arranging of the quinquennial inspection and overseeing the work to be done.
- Maintenance of the churchyard

Littleworth Friends was formed later that year, chaired by Liz Mackworth.

Colin and Sonia moved to Somerset in May 1999.

At the Gainfield P.C.C. meeting in June 1999, it was reported that the Church Wardens had met the Archdeacon the week before and he had told them that Gainfield Parish would most likely join Cherbury Parish, whose churches included Longworth, Hinton Waldrist, Charney Bassett and Lyford. Cherbury's Vicar was Rev. Roy Woodhams, who would be overall responsible. The Vicarage at Buckland would be used rent free by a suitable Non Stipendiary Minister (male or female), who would live in the Vicarage in exchange for duties in our parish. The Church Wardens had met Roy Woodhams and voted unanimously to agree to the 'suggestion'. In August 1999, a letter from the Diocese was pinned on each church noticeboard confirming that no priest in charge of Gainfield Parish would be appointed for next five years.

On Friday 8th October 1999, the Bishop of Reading, Bishop Dominic, conducted a service at St Mary's Church, Buckland, licensing Roy O. Woodhams as our Priest-in-Charge. He and his wife and young family lived in the Rectory in Longworth.

In January 2000, Rev. Tony Lynn, NSM joined him and came to live in Buckland Vicarage.

At the P.C.C. meeting in June 2000, Roy Woodhams spoke of the Deanery Pastoral Group concerning possible re-organisation. It suggested a reduction from eight stipendiary ministers to five, with, in addition an 'Area Dean' who would not have a parish to administer, but who would be involved in training including laity. The reasons for the proposed re-organisation were:

- Money and running costs of clergy
- There had to be a limit on the number of churches each clergy could reasonably manage
- There needed to be much more lay involvement assisting the clergy in the services and pastoral work
- Each church would be responsible for the fabric and maintenance of the building
- Closures of churches would be by agreement of its parish and not by orders from the Diocese.

It was proposed to break up the current Gainfield Parish and for Littleworth to move to join Stanford in the Vale or Faringdon. If implemented it would take effect in the next three to five years. Public meetings were held and Littleworth parishioners felt strongly that it should remain paired with Buckland, especially as it was within the catchment area of Buckland Church of England School. Their

views were reported back to the Deanery. In October 2001 the Archdeaconary Pastoral Committee agreed that Littleworth would form part of the Cherbury and Gainfield Benefice along with Buckland and Pusey. The United Benefice of Cherbury with Gainfield came into legal existence on November 1st 2002 with Rev. Roy Woodhams as Rector of the Benefice.

Tony Lynn moved to Yattendon in April 2003 to be Team Vicar at Hermitage, Berkshire. Rev. Joy Hance came to the Benefice as NSM Curate on 26th April 2003 and moved into Buckland Vicarage with her husband Nick. She was ordained as a Priest in September 2003.

At the beginning of 2004, Gainfield PCC decided to support the Joshua Orphan Care Project as its charity for that year. The charity supports 20 communities in southern Malawi. Its principle activities are running feeding centres for over 2000 children, schools where no provision previously existed and sponsoring over 150 children to pay fees for their secondary and vocational education.

The Benefice Council was formed in March 2004, each village being represented by one Churchwarden and one parish member. It was set up to provide a communications link among the churches.

In April 2004, Roy Woodhams moved to Fleet in Hampshire and the Benefice entered an Interregnum. Rev. Joy Hance ably guided the Benefice through this difficult time. During the Interregnum Littleworth dropped its 9am service on the third Sunday, and retained only its 10am service on the first Sunday.

In 2004, an Electrical Inspection of Littleworth Church resulted in the wiring of the church being condemned. The Friends, now chaired by Jill Woodward, agreed that new more effective heaters should be installed at the same time as the re-wiring was carried out. A faculty was applied for, and the work carried out in 2005. In 2004 the tall Leylandii hedge at the north border of the churchyard was cut back by a group of volunteers from the village, the trimmed branches contributing greatly to the Village Bonfire. In June 2004, repairs to the chancel roof were carried out by Keith Boswell and Andrew Radcliffe, and a new crèche area was introduced at the rear of the church. In October 2004 the P.C.C. passed a resolution to use Fair Trade coffee and tea after church services and at other functions. In the November, a long overdue quinquennial inspection carried out.

In 2005, the Interregnum came to an end with the arrival of Rev. Sally Welch, the new Rector. Sally had previously been Vicar at Kintbury, and moved into Longworth Rectory with her husband Jeremy and four children. Her induction service on 18th May at St Mary's Church, Buckland, was conducted by Bishop Stephen.

Also, in 2005, a stone memorial seat, made by Keith Boswell, was erected in Littleworth churchyard, in memory of Ivy Fox. The Friends continued to meet regularly and started a new fund raising venture, the 200 Club, under the leadership of Jenny Winter. They also started sewing new cushions for the church each with a general theme of flowers with religious connotations, worked in cross stitch.

July 2005 saw the start of Morning Prayer once a week in each of the churches in the Benefice. Joy takes Littleworth's prayers on Thursday mornings at 9.15am.

Sally started the monthly KHAOS services in 2005 (Kids here Adults Out) at Lyford, involving children from almost every village in the Benefice. It was designed for under 11's, and was led by the KHAOS team (aged 11 – 16). Parents met for tea and cakes in a nearby house while the service took place in the church. It has now stopped as many members of its congregation have moved on to the KHAOS Youth Group, which meets monthly at different venues.

The third Sunday in the month service was re-instated at Littleworth, taking the form of a 6pm Evening Worship Service.

The Benefice Council had two Away Days to discuss its vision for the Benefice. One result of these Away Days was the establishment of a Benefice Pastoral Team under the direction of Joy Hance.

In 2005, Robert Viner, who had mowed the churchyard for several years handed over the task to Michael Poole.

In September 2006 Littleworth's Sunday School was re-started by Jo Broughton and Nicki Simpkins, meeting once a month during term times.

On 4th November 2006, Meg Terry was licensed as a Licensed Lay Minister at Christchurch Cathedral, Oxford, and joined the Benefice ministry team. She often took services at Littleworth.

In December 2006, the Friends held the first of a series of Christmas Concerts in the Church, with Louise Woodgate and The Faringdon Singers performing.

Plans to launch the BFG (Benefice Fellowship Group) were announced at a wine and cheese evening at the Vicarage in February 2007. It was launched after Easter with a series of weekly meetings hosted by different members of the Benefice. These meetings include Bible studies, discussions, social activities and outings.

In April 2007, the Friends held the first of a series of Nancy Viner Sponsored Memorial Walks from Littleworth to Smokedown Farm across the fields. Here, they were welcomed with tea and cakes by Archie, David and Janet Viner and their family.

On 30th September 2007, at the Benefice Service, the Benefice Pastoral Team was

commissioned. This team is supervised by Joy, with help from experienced counsellors and priests. It undertakes pastoral and occasional office visiting. It provides visits to the sick and housebound and enhances such areas as baptism, weddings and funeral visiting.

2007 saw the installation of new handrails at the chancel steps and at both church doors, paid for with donations in memory of Nancy Viner. Ramps were also bought for the main doorway access with donations in memory of Joan Weal.

In 2007 the first of the Benefice Quiz Nights was held. This is an annual event, and in 2010 it was won by the Littleworth team.

In 2008 two of the clear glass windows in the chancel area of the church were reglazed, and the stone guards over the two stained glass windows replaced.

The Sunday School stopped due to lack of leadership and support.

In October, the Harvest Festival Service was combined with a Back to Church one. Invitations were sent out to all villagers, past and present, and to anyone who had a connection with the village eg if they had been married here. This was such a success that it has been repeated every year since, with our visitors being invited to join us for Harvest Lunch.

By 2008, Littleworth's share of the Parish Share had risen to £5,780, and in an effort to raise significant funds towards this, the Friends re-introduced an annual fete, this time to be held in the village Playing Field. They took advice from Little Coxwell and combined it with a Dog Show.

In 2009 a plan of the churchyard was drawn up by Isabella de Vere Hunt from Thrupp Farm as part of her Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award.

In June 2009, Sally Welch left the Benefice to move to Oxford, and we entered another Interregnum.

This ended in July 2010 when we welcomed Reverend Neal Phair to become our new rector. He joined us with his wife Lucy and baby Emily. His Induction Service was held in Buckland Church on 1st July and was conducted by Bishop Stephen. Neal was previously rector of Balintoy Parish on the coast of Northern Ireland, and chaplain of the Institute of Technology in Dublin.

Meg Terry (Licensed Lay Minister) joined the Wantage Church team and stopped taking services in our benefice.

On September 25th, Neal launched a new Benefice Youth Club for young people of secondary school age with a BBQ at the Rectory, Longworth. This is held on Friday evenings, alternately at Longworth and Buckland.

In February 2012, the Parish Magazine was replaced by a Benefice magazine 'Seven Voices'. This is free to every house in the Benefice, and paid for by

advertising.

In January 2014, Joy Hance left the Benefice to move to work in Witney.

In July 2014, Neal Phair left to move to Castleblayney, Ireland, and we entered another Interregnum.

The Benefice was very grateful to be supported during this time by Rev. Tony Lynn, Cannon Michael O'Connor and Lay Minister Richard Waterhouse.

After a long interregnum, in June 2015, a new Rector was appointed, The Reverend Talisker Tracey-MacLeod. Her Institution was carried out at Buckland Church on 29th September, by the Right Revd. Colin Fletcher, Bishop of Dorchester. Talisker had previously been a curate at All Saints in Hove.

She continued to be helped by the same team who had offered support before her appointment. Cannon Michael O'Connor left the area in June 2016, to move closer to his family in Devon.

The Benefice advertised for a new House for Duty Priest in January 2017. In July that year, Alice Margey became our second Churchwarden.

In the meantime, two problems needed to be addressed in the churchyard and church. It had become apparent from 2013, that the churchyard wall was in need of repair. The ivy was removed from it, and advice was sought on its repair. The second problem was a leaking church roof on the south side of the nave. In February 2016 we applied for a grant from the Listed Places of Worship Roof Repair Fund, and in July, heard that we'd be awarded a grant for the full cost of the repair. The entire south roof covering the nave was replaced by Heritage Roofing Company, the work being completed in February 2017.

Talisker was on maternity leave March to September 2018, giving birth to Miranda, in April. Again, Tony Lynn and Richard Waterhouse provided excellent support to the Benefice.

Work started on repairing the churchyard wall in August 2018, by Andrew Radcliffe, a stonemason living in the village.

In 2019 Tony Lynn moved to Norfolk, and on October 9th, Reverend Cannon Jim Mynors was licensed as Associate Priest in the Benefice. In February 2020, Lucy Guildersleeves became a Licensed Lay Minister, and Richard Waterhouse stood down, as he was about to move house.

On 31st January 2020, the first case of Covid 19 was diagnosed in the UK. Who would have thought that it would affect a small village in rural Oxfordshire? In March, the whole country was plunged into lockdown, and all churches were closed. In April, services were livestreamed weekly to the Benefice. Live services recommenced in Buckland from July, which were livestreamed, but no services were held in Littleworth. By June, we were allowed to open the church for private prayer, and following Covid precautions, we opened our doors every Thursday. Our first service since February, was held at the beginning of October.

Our fundraising activities for the year were cancelled – no sponsored walk, Fete, Harvest Festival/Back to Church, or Safari Supper. Instead, we improvised. We held a virtual Dog Show, sold plants, vegetables and flowers from the Village Hall wall all summer, held a Harvest Picnic in the churchyard with bring and buy veg, and asked villagers to do their own sponsored walks anytime in October. Obviously, we couldn't match our intended income, but we more than raised the minimum amount needed to keep our church open.

VICARS OF LITTLEWORTH 1839 – 20

1839 – 1876 Joseph Moore
1876 – 1917 Edward Thorp
1918 – 1922 Godfrey T Bent
1922 – 1930 Herbert G Elton
1930 – 1934 Clive E Boulton
1934 – 1949 Frederick W Aldous
1949 – 1957 Edward Morris
1958 – 1965 Charles S Hardy
1965 – 1971 Norman J C Greenfield
1971 – 1979 John M Phipps
1979 – 1980 Jim McGowan
1981 – 1988 Eric B Wood
1989 – 1999 Colin R Rudd
1996 – 1999 Sonia Hall (Curate)
1999 – 2004 Roy O Woodhams
2000 – 2003 Tony Lynn (non stipendiary Curate)
2005 - 2010 Sally Welch
2003 - 2014 Joy Hance (Assistant Curate,
Associate Priest 2006)
2010 - 2014 Neal Phair
2015 - Talisker Tracey-MacLeod
2019 - Jim Mynors (Associate Priest)