

Revd JOHN PRICE ALCOCK

By Alfred T. Walker (with later editing by Jennie Burgess)

He was the first Vicar of Birchington: 1871-1888. He is believed to have been born in Strood, Kent in 1840. His father, also John Price Alcock M.A. of St John's College Cambridge, was firstly a curate at Otford, then a minor canon of Rochester Cathedral, followed by service as the vicar of Strood. He then moved to Ashford in Kent in 1847 and became Rural Dean of East Charing in 1848. He was made a Six Preacher of Canterbury Cathedral in 1858 and an Honorary Canon of Canterbury in 1866. He left Ashford in 1888, making him the second longest serving vicar there. The longest serving one was Rev. James Bond (1774-1826). His younger daughter ("our" John's nearest sister) Fanny Elizabeth, born 16 December 1838 died 22 June 1857 aged just nineteen.

John (snr)'s wife Hannah, was born 20 February 1808 and died in Ashford 4 July 1877.

"Our" John Price Alcock began his ministry as the first (junior) curate in the newly built St. George's Church at Bickley. Before coming to Birchington, he had married Katherine Furley, who was born in Bombay, the third daughter out of eight, of John Furley, a member of the East India Company. Her mother was Wilhelmina Deey and had married Katherine's father in 1835. The Furleys were related to the Mercers, who were bankers in Maidstone, before being taken over by the National Provincial Bank.

Poor Katherine went on to have nine more children in Birchington, three of whom died in infancy. (Plaques to commemorate these sad events are in the vestry entrance porch). Apparently the doctor in Birchington (probably Dr Worthington) remonstrated with John about the frequent arrival of all those children, but as their grandson, Mr du Croz states "the couple both survived to celebrate their golden wedding"! (1915)

When John and Katherine came to Birchington, he was only 31 and she was just 28. Up until 1871, Birchington had been just a daughter chapel of Monkton, with a Curate supplied by Monkton's Vicar. This arrangement dated back to at least the 14th century, when a deed was drawn up stating that the Vicar of Monkton must supply two priests, one for Woodchurch and one for Birchington. They were to minister the daily services and Sunday and Holy Day Masses. With the advent of the railway and the station at Birchington in 1863, the population of the village grew very rapidly from 800 in 1861 to 1100 in 1871. The Vicar and Churchwardens applied for a parish status and with the granting of it in 1871, the Revd. John Price Alcock became our first Vicar.

He was a most enterprising man, very innovative and not afraid to venture into uncharted territory. Previous Curates, under Monkton's wing, were singularly unadventurous and stolid, but John Alcock began all sorts of new ventures with both young and old, men and women and with the village in general. He was one of the guiding lights in getting our first "Village Centre" off the ground. Together with Major Morrison Bell and the Gray's of Birchington Hall, he began raising funds to open a community centre in what became known as "The Institute", behind the shops at the north side of the Square.

The Institute was opened in 1878 and provided a much needed venue for meetings, Parish events, evening classes and entertainment, as well as a reading-room and the villagers' first library. The funds to start the centre were added to by a loan of £500 which was backed by John Alcock, Major Morrison

Bell and Mr C. Moore. An article in the Birchington and Westgate Almanac of 1883 stated,

“The Reading Room is well supplied with daily, weekly and county papers; the Library already boasts some 100 volumes of excellent books”.

The formation of the first Village Centre gave the village a real sense of community spirit, which is still very much alive and well over 100 years later, (1999!) and is one of the lovely hallmarks of Birchington.

He became very involved with the National School in the Village, being the first minister to attend Manager’s meetings at the School and working very hard for better funding and conditions for both the teachers and the children.

When he left Birchington in 1888, he moved on to Crayford. Of his twelve children, only one boy, John Mark, survived and, carrying on the family’s clerical traditions. In later years he became a canon of Wells Cathedral. He died in 1956. Only one of the eight surviving girls married. She was the third daughter and married Mr Du Croz in Crayford in 1905. It was her son who contacted me (JMB) to find out about his Grandfather’s time in Birchington and the names and dates of the children born here.

John Alcock’s father, Canon Alcock, married for a second time, after his first wife’s death. His second wife was a niece of Charles Swaisland, very prominent in the history of Crayford and its church. She was the patron of the living of Crayford and in 1888 presented it to Canon Alcock’s son (“our” John). John inherited the advowson at her death in 1897 and exchanged the patronage with the Bishop of Rochester in Southfleet.

Mrs. Joyce Bishop writes of John’s time in Crayford:

“He introduced candlesticks into the church. The Protestant Truth Society were about protesting at the growing ‘Roman’ practices and a leader came from Crayford Bridge for an open-air meeting. Various police constables in the audience frequently interrupted and violence was threatened, when a police constable on point duty intervened”!

John and Katherine appear to have moved to Southfleet in 1908. They celebrated their Golden Wedding there in 1915, and Katherine died there later that year. John lived until 1919 and when he died, they were buried together.

CHILDREN OF JOHN PRICE ALCOCK AND KATHERINE (nee FURLEY).

John Mark	pre-1871	Bickley?	Later canon of Wells d. 1956
Mildred	pre-1871	Bickley?	Unmarried d. 1952
Fanny	pre-1871	Bickley?	Unmarried d. 1940
Ethel Mary	bapt. 30:11:1871	Birchington	Married du Croz in 1905: son (J.P.) wrote
Winifred Dorothy	bapt. 24:5:1873	Birchington	Unmarried
Mabel Gertrude	born 22:5:1874	Birchington	d. 17:9:1874*
Margaret Marion	bapt. 24:8:1875	Birchington	Unmarried
Muriel Hannah	bapt. 27:5:1877	Birchington	Unmarried
Beryl Constance	born 25:6:1878	Birchington	d. 15:12:1878*
Leonard Michael	born 23:8:1879	Birchington	d. 19:1:1880*
Verna Gladys	bapt. 25:4:1881	Birchington	Unmarried
Milgitha Lettice	bapt. 13:4:1884	Birchington	Unmarried

* These are the children commemorated by brass plaques in the vestry porch in All Saints Church, Birchington, Kent.

There is a small item about the Rev ALCOCK at the Sunday School Outing:

Keble's Gazette 11 July 1885 (p.8)

“A Sunday School treat for about 300 children, parents, friends and teachers took them all to Whitstable by train. Included in the party were the Vicar (the Revd. Alcock), Mrs and the Misses Alcock, Mr and Mrs Moore, Mrs Harris, Dr Brown, Miss Peacock, Miss Scott, Mr Blackwood, Mr Amies, Mr J.M. Alcock, etc. etc.”

There is also an A3 sized photo of Alcock and some of his church staff outside the churchyard gate in about 1880 (see below for a part of the photo with Alcock on the r. of the group).

