

# A LITTLE HISTORY OF SOUTHCHURCH

By Mike Penry

## Episode 16: WHAT OUR VICTORIAN RECTORS DID FOR US

Our five Victorian rectors were a credit to the parish: that is, they were gentlemen who ate well, drank well and acted with dignity and propriety. Some of them at least were also undoubtedly very wealthy.

We begin with a little scene setting. Charles Henry Bazeley (rector, 1828-1836) was not a Victorian, but he performed a clearly important task by demolishing the old rectory and building a new one. Of his successor, Charles Chisholm (1836-1849) I confess I know nothing but his name.

The long Victorian midsummer began in 1849 when the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Bird Sumner, made his son, John Sumner, rector of Southchurch. Nothing could have demonstrated more clearly that Southchurch was a very desirable living (large income, few people). Was Sumner junior up to the task? Absolutely - he enlarged the rectory.

The star turn of the Victorian age was William Vallance (1854-1873), who bore much of the cost of the major 1850s "restoration" of the Old Church. (The work cost £600 towards which the vestry contributed a shilling rate, equalling £102 over three years; the rector paid the rest.) He did more to change the appearance of the Old Church than anyone since the Reformation, and we still enjoy many of the fruits of his work:

- The musicians' gallery was demolished, and the west wall taken down and re-erected. The choir and musicians were so incensed by the destruction of the gallery that they went on strike. A memento of the gallery is the date 1856 inscribed high on one of the pillars.
- One of the two medieval bells disappeared, and some chancel monuments were destroyed.
- The south porch was built, heating provided and new pews installed (which are still in use).
- The exterior of the Old Church - which had for a long time been covered in plaster - was taken back to the original stonework. (Should we do the same to the interior?)
- The area behind the altar table was decorated with an unusual tile and ceramic ornamentation. The tiles came from the Crimea - probably from a Russian Orthodox church - and a tablet records that the screen was erected and dedicated to the memory of James Vallance, the rector's brother, who died in October 1858. It may be that James Vallance served in the Crimean war.
- New windows - complete with stained glass - were erected (in the old church, the new church was yet to be built) in memory of members of the Vallance family:
  - The East Window, depicting the Crucifixion, was erected in memory of Mary Ann Vallance, the rector's mother, who died in 1855,

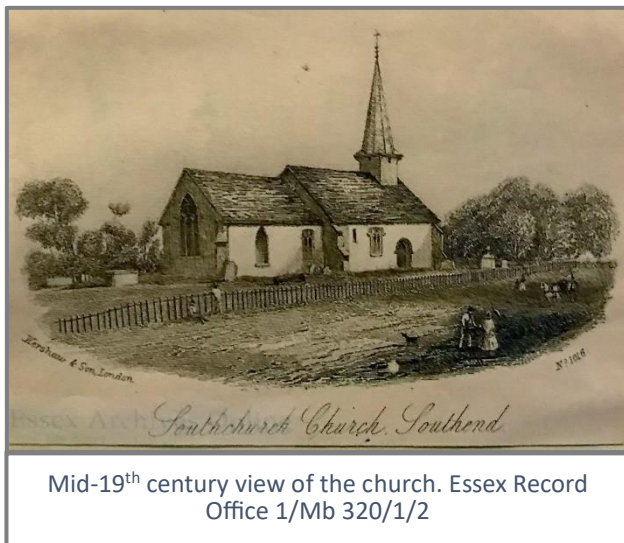


Altar in the Old Church showing the East Window and the tile and ceramic ornamentation

- moving westwards along the south wall, the next window, depicting Christ's victory over death, was erected in 1856 in memory of Thomas Sargent Little (who is buried in India), the husband of the rector's third daughter,
- the window behind the book of remembrance was erected in memory of Cecilia Ann, the rector's second daughter, who died in 1839,
- the window on the remaining part of the north wall (near the aumbry) depicting the death of Christ was erected in memory of Katherine Denne, mother of the rector's wife, Elizabeth, who died in 1859 aged 92,
- finally, the Old Church west window was erected in 1873 in memory of William Vallance himself.

Stained glass was very popular in Victoria's reign. This was partly because of the Gothic Revival. People wanted to revive the art and architecture of the Middle Ages when buildings had richly carved pointed arches. Medieval churches had stained glass in their windows, so the Victorians wanted it for their churches and sometimes for their houses.

Is Victorian stained glass worth celebrating? Well, yes and no. The craftsmanship was certainly much better than in the eighteenth century, when rectangles of clear glass were painted with pictures. Victorians such as A. W. N. Pugin revived the 'mosaic' method of making stained glass, in which pieces of coloured glass were cut to shape and leaded together; but before such masters of the art as William Morris emerged in the 1860s little of the work was truly inspired.



Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century view of the church. Essex Record Office 1/Mb 320/1/2

But beauty is in the eye of the beholder: you decide. Sadly, we haven't been able to find any pictures or descriptions of the interior of the Old Church before the mid-Victorian restoration, nor discover who designed our Victorian stained glass. If anyone knows of such material we'd be pleased to hear from them.

Canon Josiah Bateman was 70 when Archbishop Tait made him rector of Southchurch in 1873, and he remained rector for twenty years until his death in 1893. Like William Vallance, he was buried in Holy Trinity's churchyard.

Our final Victorian rector was Canon John Nigel Philpott, who outlived Queen Victoria. The changes to the church in his incumbency were greater even than those wrought by William Vallance, and we shall talk more about Canon Philpott in a future episode.

**Come back in a couple of weeks' time for Episode 17: "Victorian Southchurch – Village Life".**

- Why were Southchurch kids bunking-off school?
  - Barnham and Bailey visit Southend.
- Discover Southchurch celebrities – a naturalist and a poet.

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