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## A KENTISH CLERICAL DYNASTY: CURTEIS OF SEVENOAKS

PART II: 1874-1907

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In an earlier paper in this journal I traced the role played by four generations of the Curteis family, who with one brief gap in 1775-77, held the rectory and subsequently the vicarage of Sevenoaks from 1716 until 1861. In 1861, in order to keep the living warm for another member of the Curteis family, the aged Henry Francis Sidebottom became rector, resigning in 1874 so that Thomas Samuel Curteis could succeed him.<sup>1</sup> This paper deals with this last member of the family to hold the living of Sevenoaks until he himself resigned it at the comparatively early age of 59 in 1907. He had been ordained in 1872 and served a brief curacy at St. James, Southampton, for two years before moving to Sevenoaks.

Curteis is important in the annals of Kentish church history for he was a Tractarian, with strong ritualist inclinations. Although he did not, in the long term, succeed in establishing his own brand of churchmanship at Sevenoaks parish church, his ecclesiastical memorial is the daughter church of St. John for which he and his wife established patronage arrangements that resulted in it becoming one of the leading Anglo-Catholic parishes in Kent, a position it retains to this day. Whereas the earlier paper concentrated on the relationship of members of the Curteis family to Sevenoaks, this paper uses Thomas

<sup>1</sup> W. N. Yates, 'A Kentish Clerical Dynasty: Curteis of Sevenoaks, Part I: 1716-1861', *Arch Cant*, cviii (1990), 1-9

Samuel Curteis as a focus for a more general study of the impact of Tractarianism and ritualism on Kentish parishes in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

In the history of the Oxford Movement, Kent is significant in that there were early manifestations of Tractarian activity in the county before 1850 at Brasted, Chislehurst and East Farleigh. On the other hand these early manifestations of Tractarian activity did not in Kent lead, as they did in the dioceses of Exeter, London, Oxford and Ripon, to the emergence of significant groupings of ritualist parishes in the 1860s and 1870s. In view of its proximity to London one might have expected more in the way of ritualistic activity in Kent, though in this respect the paucity of ritualist churches in the county was remarkably similar to that of other counties bordering on London, notably Essex and Surrey. The first edition of the *Tourists' Church Guide*, published in 1874, the year of both Curteis' appointment to Sevenoaks and the passing of the Public Worship Regulation Act, lists only three churches in Essex and seven in Surrey in which candles were lighted on the altar or eucharistic vestments worn, compared with nine in Kent. Seven of these churches (two in Kent and five in Surrey) were in the London suburbs.<sup>3</sup>

Of the pioneer Tractarians in Kent only one, Francis Henry Murray of Chislehurst, was still beneficed when Curteis went to Sevenoaks in 1874, and he was to remain at Chislehurst until his death in 1902.<sup>4</sup> The Tractarian experiments at Brasted and East Farleigh had been cut short, at Brasted through the actions of Archbishop Sumner followed by the early death of William Hodge Mill in 1853 and at East Farleigh through the secession of Henry Wilberforce to the Roman Catholic

<sup>2</sup> For earlier work on the same topic see W. N. Yates, *Kent and the Oxford Movement*, Kentish Sources VII, Maidstone 1983.

<sup>3</sup> The listed churches were as follows: in Essex, Foxearth (candles), St. John's in Harlow (candles) and St. Mary Magdalene's in Harlow (candles, vestments); in Kent, St. Margaret's in Canterbury (vestments), Chislehurst (candles), St. Andrew's in Deal (candles), Buckland-in-Dover (candles, vestments), Charlton-in-Dover (candles, vestments), St. Michael's in Folkestone (candles), St. Peter's in Folkestone (vestments, candles), St. Stephen's in Lewisham (candles, vestments), Northfleet (candles) and St. Philip's in Sydenham (candles); in Surrey, Beddington (candles), Christ Church in Clapham (candles, vestments), St. James in Hatcham (candles, vestments), All Saints in Lambeth (candles, vestments), Reigate (candles, vestments), St. Peter's in Streatham (candles), and St. Peter's in Vauxhall (candles, vestments).

<sup>4</sup> See W. N. Yates, 'Francis Henry Murray, Rector of Chislehurst', *Arch Cant*, xcvi (1982), 1-18.

Church two years earlier.<sup>5</sup> By 1874, the two most prominent ritualists in Kent were C.J. Ridsdale and H.L. Jenner. Ridsdale had for some the distinction, for others the notoriety, of being the first clergyman in the provinces of Canterbury and York to be prosecuted under the Public Worship Regulation Act. This Act had been introduced immediately after the general election of 1874 by the incoming Conservative government, following pressure from constituents opposed to ritual, from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and from Queen Victoria herself. It was seen by some at the time, and not just ritualists, as a panic measure. Within five years it was being written off, even by the bishops, as a mistake. Many ritualist clergy took the view that it was only the church and not the state that could legitimately legislate on doctrinal and liturgical matters, and the provisions of the Act had not even been discussed by, let alone obtained the approval of, the Convocations of Canterbury and York. Some of those prosecuted refused to appear before the courts and, when sentence was pronounced against them, ignored it. Five clergymen were imprisoned for contempt of court and portrayed in the pro-ritualist section of the press as 'martyrs of conscience'. The public remained strongly anti-ritualist but were also appalled by the imprisonment of the clergy involved. The bishops used their powers under the Act to veto prosecutions, and it quickly ceased to have any value in the control of ritualism.<sup>6</sup>

Ridsdale, however, as the first clergyman prosecuted under the Act, was unable to foresee this eventual outcome and was, therefore, more accommodating than those prosecuted after him. Since 1868, he had been the incumbent of the new church of St. Peter in Folkestone. Folkestone became one of the chief centres of the high church movement in Kent after the appointment of Matthew Woodward to the vicarage of the parish church in 1851. Woodward had been seen at the time of his appointment as an Evangelical and local commentators expressed surprise when a few years later he sought to introduce a far

<sup>5</sup> For East Farleigh, see Yates, *Kent and the Oxford Movement*, 10-13, 37-51, 61-72; for Brasted see W. N. Yates, *Buildings, Faith and Worship: the Liturgical Arrangement of Anglican Churches 1600-1900*, Oxford 1991, 138-9, and *Salvation by Haberdashery: Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain 1830-1910*, forthcoming

<sup>6</sup> The most detailed recent study of the Act and its consequences will be found in J. Bentley, *Ritualism and Politics in Victorian Britain: the Attempt to Legislate for Belief*, Oxford 1978

greater degree of ceremonial into the services of the parish church.<sup>7</sup> Woodward was also extremely active in the establishment of new churches for what was a rapidly expanding seaside resort and was able to use his position as vicar of the parish church to secure the appointments of his curates, most of them committed ritualists, to the new livings. Ridsdale was Woodward's curate and later married his eldest daughter. St. Peter's was ritualist from its opening in 1868. In 1875, a suit was brought against Ridsdale under the Public Worship Regulation Act alleging his use of the eastward position, wafer bread, and vestments in the communion service. Ridsdale lost the case but appealed to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. When judgement was finally given in May 1877, it was slightly more favourable to Ridsdale. The use of eucharistic vestments was still declared illegal. So was wafer bread, but it was ruled that the complainants had not proved conclusively that Ridsdale had actually used it. The eastward position was permitted provided that the manual acts of the consecration could be seen by the congregation. Like other ritualists, Ridsdale considered these technically illegal practices to be the proper use of the Church of England according to the ambiguous and much disputed Ornaments Rubric in the Book of Common Prayer. However, much to the disgust of some of his fellow ritualists, Ridsdale decided that he would accept the judgement, once he had persuaded Archbishop Tait to grant him a dispensation not to use the ritual declared to be illegal.<sup>8</sup>

H.L. Jenner had begun his clerical career as a minor canon of Canterbury cathedral and was in 1854 appointed to the chapter living of Preston-next-Wingham. There he might have settled down to a fairly unadventurous incumbency, interspersed with activities on behalf of the Ecclesiological Society, whose Secretary he was from 1854 to 1866, had it not been that in the latter year he was consecrated by Archbishop Longley to a bishopric in New Zealand. The circumstances of his consecration were both confused and irregular. The long-serving first bishop of New Zealand, G.A. Selwyn, had in 1865 suggested to the Standing Committee of the Otago and Southland

<sup>7</sup> Editorial in *Folkestone Chronicle*, 3 October, 1863

<sup>8</sup> See P. T. Marsh, *The Victorian Church in Decline: Archbishop Tait and the Church of England 1868-1882*, London 1969, 220-5; Bentley, *op. cit.*, 97-100; Yates, *Kent and the Oxford Movement*, 17-18, 91-7

Rural Deanery Board that he should write to the Archbishop of Canterbury, C.T. Longley, asking him to nominate a suitable person to be Bishop of Otago and Southland. Longley both nominated and consecrated Jenner, but the Rural Deanery Board decided not to establish a bishopric at that time for financial reasons. Jenner, who was a member of several ritualistic societies, including the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament and the Society of the Holy Cross, used his episcopal status to help out ritualist clergy in England who were having difficulty with their own bishops. On 10 April, 1867, Arthur Stanton, curate of St. Alban's, Holborn, one of the leading ritualist churches in London, wrote to his sister.<sup>9</sup>

Yesterday we had a confirmation . . . The Bishop of Dunedin by permission of the Bishop of London confirmed, and must have astonished our people by his enthusiastic praise of our teaching and ceremonial.

In the same year a member of the Rural Deanery Board, on a visit to England, attended a service at another ritualist church, St. Matthias', Stoke Newington, at which Jenner presided and 'witnessed the most extravagant scenes and heard the grossest doctrines . . . that ever disgraced a so-called Protestant church'. There were lighted candles on the altar and a procession with incense. When reports of Jenner's beliefs and practices reached New Zealand, the General Synod of the New Zealand church tried to persuade the new bishop to resign. Longley denied that he knew that Jenner was a ritualist. Selwyn, who by this time had returned to England, and was later to become Bishop of Lichfield, supported Jenner, who in 1869 travelled to New Zealand to claim his bishopric. Selwyn's successor as Primate of New Zealand, Bishop Harper of Christchurch, inhibited Jenner from carrying out any ministerial functions and was himself acting as Bishop of Dunedin. The clerical members of the diocesan synod voted by four votes to three to accept Jenner, but the laity voted by fifteen votes to ten against him on the grounds that they could not 'sanction the appointment of a bishop in whose religious opinions and practices they had not full confidence and assurance'. Jenner had tried to reassure them by stating that, 'as to my intention of introducing extreme ritual, or any ritual, except what people are prepared for and desire, I altogether disclaim it'. Jenner appealed to the new

<sup>9</sup> G. W. E. Russell, *Arthur Stanton: A Memoir*, London 1917, 94.

Archbishop of Canterbury, A. C. Tait, who admitted Jenner had a just claim to his diocese but advised him to abandon it. Jenner, however, wrote to Harper, re-asserting his claim and enclosing Tait's letter. When the General Synod of the New Zealand church met in February 1871, it refused to support Jenner's nomination to the diocese of Dunedin and in March 1871 the diocesan synod of Dunedin elected another English clergyman, S.T. Nevill, instead of Jenner. Nevill was consecrated a few months later as Bishop of Dunedin. Jenner never acquiesced in this decision and never formally renounced his claim to the diocese. As late as 1875 he was still claiming that he had been wrongly deprived of the see to which he had been entitled.<sup>10</sup>

Jenner's assertion to the lay members of his would-be diocesan synod that he would not impose extreme ritual on an unwilling congregation seems to have been genuine. Certainly he never did at Preston-next-Wingham, which he had carefully managed not to resign during the protracted negotiations over his New Zealand bishopric, and which was to be his only preferment. The church had neither lighted candles nor vestments in 1874, though Gregorian chant was used in the services. Holy Communion was celebrated every Sunday after Morning Prayer and at 8 a.m. on Holy Days. Morning Prayer was said daily in church.<sup>11</sup> Jenner, however, felt very keenly his status as bishop and in 1875 wrote to Archbishop Tait to seek his guidance on the wearing of episcopal vestments. Jenner pointed out to Tait that, as a result of the recently passed Public Worship Regulation Act, he was in a very ambiguous position. As a bishop he could not be prosecuted under the Act, and indeed, in his view, he was obliged by the ornaments rubric in the 1662 prayer book to wear a cope or vestment and either to carry a pastoral staff or else to have it carried for him by a chaplain; the canons of 1604 stated that he must, as a bishop, wear a cope if celebrating in cathedrals and collegiate churches. Tait declined to make a ruling, but advised Jenner not to wear vestments that others might consider illegal. Jenner responded to the effect that it was very unsatisfactory that he should be in a position where he could be prosecuted, as an incumbent, for wearing vestments that, for a bishop, were ordered by canon. In view of the fact that Tait would

<sup>10</sup> H. J. Purchas, *History of the English Church in New Zealand*, Christchurch (NZ) 1914, 212-14; W. P. Morrell, *The Anglican Church in New Zealand*, Dunedin 1973, 90-6.

<sup>11</sup> J. C. Waram, *Tourists' Church Guide*, London 1874, 62-3



not give a ruling he would have to take counsel's opinion. He pointed out to Tait that at least two English diocesan bishops were now wearing copes when celebrating in their own cathedrals.<sup>12</sup> That Jenner later adopted the use of vestments when officiating outside his own parish, and therefore in his eyes as a bishop, seems fairly certain. On 28 March, 1887, the rural dean of Dover, John Puckle, wrote to Archbishop Benson to point out that he had seen a photograph of Jenner taken after a service at St. Bartholomew's, Dover, in which he was dressed in full pontifical vestments including a mitre. A note appended to the letter suggested that Benson should disregard the complaint and thought that Jenner might only have worn a mitre for the benefit of the photographer.<sup>13</sup>

Eventually Jenner found an outlet for his episcopal orders by acting as visiting bishop to the Gallican Catholic Church founded by Hyacinthe Loyson (1827-1912). He was not the only Anglican bishop to support Loyson; others who did so included Dr. Cleveland Coxe of Western New York and two Scottish bishops, Henry Cotterill of Edinburgh and Robert Eden of Moray, Ross and Caithness. Loyson was a former Carmelite friar, who resigned from his order in 1869, married in 1872 and opened a chapel in Paris in 1879.<sup>14</sup> Although by that time Jenner was no longer a member of the Society of the Holy Cross, his actions in supporting Loyson were condemned by the Society on 9 May, 1883. A motion stating that Jenner's actions constituted 'a grave violation of the discipline of the church' was defeated by thirteen votes to nine, but one describing it as a 'schismatical intrusion' was carried by fifteen votes to eleven.<sup>15</sup>

In terms of his ritualism, T.S. Curteis was very much in the same league as Jenner. He belonged to all the ritualist societies, including

<sup>12</sup> L[ambeth] P[alace] L[ibrary], Tait papers, vol. 239, ff 53-60. The letters from Jenner to Tait are dated 19 and 21 July, 1875. The draft reply from Tait is undated. The two bishops are not named by Jenner but were probably Magee of Peterborough and Wordsworth of Lincoln; see J. C. Macdonald, *Life and Correspondence of William Connor Magee*, London 1896, ii, 82, and J. H. Overton and E. Wordsworth, *Christopher Wordsworth*, London 1888, 266, for the use of copes by these two bishops.

<sup>13</sup> LPL, Benson papers, vol. 47, ff 410-12. Puckle had been vicar of St. Mary's, Dover since 1842, rural dean of Dover since 1846 and canon of Canterbury since 1869. The note to Benson was initialled RTD and may have been from his former chaplain, R. T. Davidson, then Dean of Windsor and later himself also Archbishop of Canterbury.

<sup>14</sup> P. F. Anson, *Bishops at Large*, London 1964, 93-6, 141-2, 304-5

<sup>15</sup> C[entre for] K[entish] S[tudies, Maidstone], Ch. 71 A5, pp. 270-5; see also J. Embry, *The Catholic Movement and the Society of the Holy Cross*, London 1931, 167-9.



the Society of the Holy Cross, but was himself very restrained in imposing ritualist innovations on his parishioners at Sevenoaks. He inherited a church which still preserved its early nineteenth-century liturgical arrangements, with box pews and a three-decker pulpit placed in the middle of the seating. His first actions were to arrange for the church to be restored along ecclesiological lines, as had already happened at the majority of Anglican churches in the county.<sup>16</sup> A report by Ewan Christian, dated 22 August, 1876, recommended the removal of the galleries and the complete re-seating of the interior, though it was thought that the existing font and pulpit might be re-used. The cost of the restoration was estimated at £6,788. A restoration committee was set up by the vestry and a printed appeal notice was circulated. This revealed that Curteis himself had promised £1,000 towards the restoration of the chancel.<sup>17</sup> On 17 February, 1877, the proposals of the restoration committee were approved by the vestry and it was agreed to petition for a faculty to enable the work to be carried out.<sup>18</sup> The faculty, dated 3 September, 1877, stated that the church was 'out of repair and the internal arrangements thereof . . . inconvenient for the decent performance of Divine Service'.<sup>19</sup> It authorised the removal of the galleries and the organ in the west gallery; reseating the interior with open benches; the cleaning of the font, to be re-set on a new step; the preservation and refitting of the 'old pulpit'; and the installation of a moveable lectern and prayer desks, screens between the arcades of the chancel and an organ at the east end of the north aisle, screened off from the chancel and with space behind it for a choir vestry. A somewhat old-fashioned feature of the restoration was the erection of a gallery for children under the west tower. The refurbished church was reopened in November 1878 and all 800 sittings were free and unallocated. A contemporary photograph shows a very typical moderate high church interior of the period.<sup>20</sup> All the monuments that had formerly cluttered the chancel had been moved to other locations, the new altar was raised

<sup>16</sup> On church restoration in Kent, and the earlier arrangements at Sevenoaks parish church, see W. N. Yates, R. Hulme and P. Hastings, *Religion and Society in Kent 1640-1914*, Woodbridge 1994, 46-8, 75-83

<sup>17</sup> CKS, P 330/6/9

<sup>18</sup> CKS, P 330/8/6

<sup>19</sup> CKS, P 330/2/3

<sup>20</sup> CKS, P 330/28/3

on three steps and the fifteenth century *piscina* had been restored for use.<sup>21</sup>

Curteis also made significant changes in the services at the parish church. Whereas his predecessor had always worn a black gown for the sermon,<sup>22</sup> Curteis preached in a surplice. He followed the customary Tractarian practice of introducing both daily services and weekly communion, but the pattern of services he began in the 1870s changed little during his incumbency of more than thirty years and were certainly never of the advanced ritualist type. Morning and Evening Prayer were said daily in church. On Sundays the Holy Communion was celebrated early at 8 a.m. and after Morning Prayer. On the first Sunday of the month there was an additional celebration at 7 a.m. Holy Communion was also celebrated during the week on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Holy Days. On weekday festivals there was Choral Evensong at 8 p.m.<sup>23</sup> After Curteis' resignation of the living in 1907, his successor as rector abolished the additional early celebration on the first Sunday of the month and the celebration on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but it was noted that the choral services were still 'of the cathedral type' that Curteis had inaugurated.<sup>24</sup>

No complaint seems to have been made against Curteis on the score of liturgical or ritual innovation, and his restoration of the church in 1877-78 seems to have been universally popular.<sup>25</sup> The last member of this distinguished clerical family seems, however, to have manifested some of the high-handedness and reputation for lethargy that had been characteristic of his great-grandfather, rector from 1777 until 1831. On 5 June, 1893, a formal complaint was made to Archbishop Benson, describing Curteis as 'impossible'. It was alleged that he never visited his parishioners, was unable to keep a curate for more than a few months, was not on speaking terms with the other clergy in Sevenoaks and took no notice of the rural dean. The writer stated that he kept the church plate in his own house and expressed concern that it might, therefore, easily be incorporated into his own possessions. He also claimed that, when he was without a curate, Curteis did not

<sup>21</sup> J. Rooker, *Parish Church of St Nicholas, Sevenoaks* 1910, 79

<sup>22</sup> J. Dunlop, *The Pleasant Town of Sevenoaks*, Sevenoaks 1964, 174

<sup>23</sup> *Salmon's Guide to Sevenoaks and the Neighbourhood*, Sevenoaks 1898, 26; CKS, P 330/28/14, parish magazine February 1901

<sup>24</sup> *Salmon's Guide to Sevenoaks and the Neighbourhood*, Sevenoaks 1913, 28

<sup>25</sup> Dunlop, *op. cit.*, 175

always turn up for the services that were publicly advertised. The letter enclosed a newscutting alleging that Curteis had influenced the trustees of Lady Boswell's Girls School to dismiss a teacher on the grounds that she was a Baptist. The most serious complaint, as far as the diocesan authorities were concerned, was that in November 1892 Curteis had closed down the parish Sunday school. Benson referred the complaint to Archdeacon Smith of Maidstone who, in a letter dated 19 June, 1893, confirmed that Curteis ignored the rural dean and described him as 'self-complacent'. The archdeacon doubted, however, whether any specific instances could be found of Curteis declining to visit parishioners in need and thought that the dismissal of the school teacher may have been entirely justified, if the terms of the trust required all teachers to be committed members of the Church of England. He advised the archbishop to concentrate on the question of the Sunday school closure which he thought required an explanation. The complainant did indeed confirm, in a letter dated 19 June, 1893, that he could not quote specific instances of pastoral neglect. Curteis himself dismissed the complaints as inaccurate and motivated by malice. In a letter to Benson, dated 16 June, 1893, Curteis stated that he had closed the Sunday school as he could not find adequate teachers. He had instead substituted a special service for children, with catechising, on Sunday afternoons and thought this perfectly adequate.<sup>26</sup> The complaint seems not to have been pursued any further.

When Curteis arrived in Sevenoaks in 1874 the new church of St. John, founded in 1858, was still a mission to the parish church. In 1878, a separate parish was created for St. John's, with the rector of Sevenoaks as its patron. The service pattern was similar to that at the parish church with daily evensong, weekly communion and one weekday celebration. The church was, however, kept open for private prayer, and the Three Hours' Devotion on Good Friday, then a clear indication of strong high churchmanship, was observed. Curteis was anxious to ensure that there should always be one high Anglican church in Sevenoaks. In 1878, he had persuaded Archbishop Tait to permit him to transfer the advowson of St. John's from himself as rector of Sevenoaks to himself as a private individual, with the result that, when he died in 1912, it passed to his widow. In 1913, Mrs

<sup>26</sup> LPL, Benson Papers, vol. 115, ff. 349-65

Emma Curteis presented the advowson to the Guild of All Souls, who in 1920 presented an advanced Anglo-Catholic, Edward Hawkes, to the vicarage of St. John's, where he remained until his retirement in 1957. Hawkes introduced a daily celebration of Holy Communion, a Sung Eucharist as the main service on Sundays, eucharistic vestments, incense and reservation of the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>27</sup>

In 1874, when Curteis became rector of Sevenoaks, there were only eight churches in Kent with lighted candles on the altar and five in which the eucharistic vestments were worn. When he retired in 1907 the picture was very different. In the diocese of Canterbury 47 per cent of the churches had lighted candles on the altar and in 12 per cent the eucharistic vestments were worn. The comparable figures for the diocese of Rochester were 30 per cent and 14 per cent. Incense was used at Egerton, St. Saviour's in Folkestone and St. Mary's in Strood.<sup>28</sup> Curteis had been careful not to offend his parishioners and so had not introduced more ritual than they would find acceptable, but in his own moderate way he had been a significant contributor to the ecclesiological and liturgical revolution that transformed the Church of England, in Kent as in the rest of the country, in the second half of the nineteenth century. His incumbency was a fitting end to the connection of the Curteis family with the parish church of Sevenoaks which, by the date of his resignation, had lasted for the best part of two hundred years.

<sup>27</sup> D. Clarke, *A Brief History and Guide to the Church of St John the Baptist, Sevenoaks* 1970

<sup>28</sup> W. N. Yates, 'Bells and Smells: London, Brighton and South Coast Religion Reconsidered', *Southern History*, v (1983), 146, 151