

# Canon JOHN PUCKLE, M.A.

Vicar of St. Mary-the-Virgin, Dover, 1842 –1896

J. G. HARMAN

JOHN PUCKLE came to St. Mary's in 1838 as assistant to the Reverend John Maule and when the latter resigned he was elected and became the Vicar. At that time St. Mary's was in a very dilapidated condition and John Puckle decided on some form of restoration. He pledged himself to raise £3,000 by subscription if the Vestry would vote £1,600 towards the estimated cost.



He and his architect found the floor of the church to be honey-combed with burial vaults which had not spared the foundations of the columns themselves and on going down to four or five feet they found Roman baths with collapsed heating chambers running across the West End, roughly under the six Norman pillars. These pillars were carefully taken down and the stones numbered prior to replacement when the foundations had been restored.

It would have been quicker and cheaper to have built a completely new Nave and Chancel but the Canon and his architect were determined to retain the Norman and Early English work. They fought particularly hard to retain the Early English window in the Chancel (Ship Window).

During the middle to late nineteenth century many old churches were completely rebuilt and the story goes that the



opposition decided to build Christ Church in Folkestone Road because the Canon was going to "Raise the Roof".

Well before John Puckle's time at St. Mary's – in 1829 – the church was visited by Sir Stephen Glynne, a noted authority on old churches and his subsequent comments were that the church had been sadly neglected, many frightful windows had been inserted and the roof was too low.

Returning to Canon Puckle one notes that in 1869 he was presented with a piece of silver and £1,200 by parishioners and townspeople. He was a great worker for the Dover Hospital and was Chairman of the Governors from 1863 until just before his death in 1894.

On the first of January 1894 Canon Puckle collapsed whilst celebration Holy Communion and after another seizure he died on the twenty-sixth of February. His remains were conveyed to St. Mary's Cemetery, followed by Clergy, the Mayor and Corporation and a vast concourse of the townspeople. The grave is close to the path next to the lower entrance to Connaught Park. The base of his memorial cross is still visible though it was damaged by a shell in the last war. The Nativity painting by Heaton and Butler was put over St. Mary's Tower Arch to commemorate his fifty years of service to the church.

*Illustrations:*

Canon Puckle, from an engraving in 'Dover Day by Day', a year book dated 1895  
and

Vaults under the floor of a church in Bristol, similar to those found under St. Mary's Church, Dover in 1843.

*References:*

John Bavington Jones. *Dover Year Book*, 1895

Sir Stephen Glynne. *Kent Churches*.

*Archæologica Cantiana*, Volume XX p119

Miss Mary Horsley. *St. Mary's, Dover*, 903 – 1903. ◇

# Deadline for CONTRIBUTORS

The Editor welcomes contributions and illustrations, particularly line drawings, or other appropriate visual materials.

The deadline for issue No. 16 for publication on 1st April 1993, is 26th February. The producer would prefer "copy" to be typed and, in any case, asks that it be double-spaced. Single spacing, especially in manuscript, is a frequent source of typesetting error.

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