
Buckland, a Catholic stronghold

The story of the first post-Reformation Catholic church in the Vale of White Horse, a precursor of others at Abingdon, East Hendred and Wantage.

THE FORMER BERKSHIRE village of Buckland, since 1974 in Oxfordshire, lies near the ancient ridgeway that once formed the Gloucester to London road and is now the A420. On 26th October 1846, in the heart of the village, the foundation stone was laid for a Roman Catholic church.¹ The architect was the Yorkshire Catholic Charles Francis Hansom. He was the brother and sometime collaborator of architect Joseph Aloysius Hansom, inventor of the eponymous cab and founder of the journal *The Builder*.

The new church was funded by ‘the pious munificence’ of Sir Robert Throckmorton, Baronet.² In accordance with the cisalpine sentiments of the Throckmorton family, who sought to distance themselves from excessive papal influence, the church was dedicated to St George. From parts of their Buckland estate, the Throckmortons could see the Uffington White Horse, seven miles to the south. Just below the horse, they could also see Dragon Hill, on which St George was said to have killed the Dragon.

Sir Robert’s chaplain, Canon Daniel Rock, conducted the foundation-stone ceremony. Bishop Thomas Griffiths, the highest ranked Catholic clergyman in England, granted him a special faculty to do so.³

At the Reformation, all former Catholic dioceses in England and Wales became Anglican. Thereafter, for nearly 300 years, there was no formal Catholic hierarchy, because the state would not allow it and thus the Vatican regarded England as missionary territory. There were no dioceses and instead of parishes, the church operated a network of covert ‘missions’, often based in the country house of a Catholic family. From the late 17C onwards, the Catholic church in England was overseen by four missionary bishops, known as Vicars Apostolic, each responsible for a missionary region. Each Vicar Apostolic was a titular bishop, meaning he was given the honorary episcopal title of a ‘dead diocese’ from times past. Thus, Thomas Griffiths was titular bishop of Olena (a Greek see suppressed in 1432) but his real job was Vicar Apostolic of the London district, which included Kent, Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire, Berkshire and the Channel Islands.

The foundation stone at Buckland was laid 17 years after Catholic emancipation and four years before re-establishment, in 1850, of a formal Catholic hierarchy. The old London District was then subdivided, Buckland falling within the newly created Diocese of Southwark. In a further subdivision in 1882, the Catholic diocese of Portsmouth was created as part of the Province of Southwark, and Buckland has been part of that diocese ever since.⁴

The foundation ceremony

The foundation ceremony began about 11 o'clock on the last Monday morning in October 1846. The procession set out from the Throckmorton family's imposing residence, Buckland House, and walked through the gardens towards the 'picturesque and well-chosen spot' set aside for the new church. At the head of the procession, carrying a 14C silver processional cross, was the heir to the ancient house of Throckmorton, Robert Charles Courtenay Throckmorton. He was followed by three of his brothers: John carried the salt (symbolic of cleansing) on a silver plate; Richard conveyed a silver holy-water bucket donated to the church by his mother, Lady Throckmorton; and William brought the trowel and mallet. Choristers followed them 'in full flowing surplices in the true old English form' singing psalms in Latin, followed closely by Canon Rock, the celebrant. Bringing up the rear was the architect, Charles Hansom, wearing a black velvet gown and bearing the plans of the church.⁵

A large crowd gathered to witness the scene. Canon Rock laid the first stone at the south-east corner of what would become the chancel arch. Then Sir Robert and Lady Throckmorton, their daughter and three sons each laid a stone. Canon Rock concluded the ceremony with an explanation of the sacred rite. Five days later, the Catholic weekly *The Tablet* reported that 'the touching and majestic strains of the Psalms, the Litany, and "Veni Creator," poured forth on such a gladsome occasion and in such a sweet spot, by a choir not to be surpassed in any country congregation for richness of voice, knowledge of music, and correct taste in chanting the services of the Church, produced a solemn effect.'⁶

The Yates

A scene such as that described above was a comparative rarity in the English countryside at the time. Why was it happening at Buckland? The answer lies in the strong survival of Roman Catholicism in that parish from pre-Reformation times until the 20C. That survival would not have been possible without the active support of Buckland's leading gentry families: the Yates and later, their successors through marriage, the Throckmortons. A survival strategy for Catholicism in England had been devised at a conference held in July 1586 at Harleyford Manor, home of Richard Bold, Catholic former Sheriff of Lancashire, on the Thames near Marlow. It centred on the country homes of Catholic gentry from which a clandestine priest could minister, disguised as a tutor or steward. The Yates and Throckmortons were among the families in the Vale of White Horse who provided this facility.*

* During the reign of Elizabeth I, a significant minority of gentry in the Thames Valley had Catholic sympathies. Those families who were most ardently Catholic often had links to the regime of Queen Mary or numbered Catholic martyrs among their associates and relatives. Catholic sympathies persisted in some Oxford colleges, especially St John's, founded in Mary's reign to provide well-educated Catholic priests. William Allen, former principal of St Mary's Hall, Oxford, became the head of the English Roman Catholic church in exile.

The Yate family came to the Vale as wool merchants. Their heraldic arms featured three gates with the bracing in the form of a letter Y: party fesse-wise and battled argent and sable three gates countercoloured. Yate, variously spelled, was a widely occurring dialect form of 'gate', as in the place name Symonds Yat.⁷

In the mid-1400s, Richard Yate settled in Charney Bassett, a village a few miles south of Buckland. His son John traded from there as a highly reputed merchant of the Staple at Calais. John Yate owned sheep farms in Wantage and Lambourn; in 1538, he bought the former Abingdon Abbey grange at nearby Lyford and moved there. His son James was also a merchant of the Staple and moved to Buckland some time after 1523. James married into the well- and widely-connected Fettiplace family and died in 1544. That year, James's son, John Yate II (also married to a Fettiplace), bought the principal manor of Buckland from the king.⁸

A decade later, in July 1554, John Yate II was granted the manor of Faringdon, jointly with Sir Francis Englefield.⁹ This was nine months after the coronation of Mary Tudor and just four months before the English church was formally reconciled with Rome. Sir Francis of Englefield near Reading was one of Mary's most ardent supporters and a leading member of her Privy Council. He, too, was married to a Fettiplace. Sir Francis went into exile on the Continent after Mary's death in 1558.

With the accession of Elizabeth, the English church again split from Rome. In common with members of several other Vale of White Horse and downland gentry families involved in the wool trade, including Winchcombes, Hydes, Fettiplaces and Eystons, John Yate II became a recusant, i.e. someone who refused to attend Anglican services.

In 1564, John Yate II was declared by the Bishop of Salisbury to be excommunicate, having never received Holy Communion according to the Anglican rite since Elizabeth acceded. In 1577, he was listed officially as a recusant. At Candlemas (2 February) that year, a priest-hunter called Hodgkins raided the Yate residence, Buckland Manor. John Yate's secret chaplain, Fr William Hopton, had a narrow escape: his gown was found, still warm under the armpits. John Yate died the following year, aged 68, leaving 12 children.¹⁰

John Yate II was succeeded by his son Edward Yate, who married Jane Giffard. He thus became brother-in-law to the Archbishop of Reims. This was a powerful link with Catholic Europe, not least because French kings were crowned at Reims cathedral. In common with the male heads of many Catholic gentry families at this time, Edward Yate avoided being listed or convicted for recusancy. It seems he was a 'church papist', i.e. he outwardly conformed to the requirements of the state church so as to avoid fines, prison or worse, while secretly supporting a Catholic household. It is known that he absented himself from Anglican services at the Middle Temple where, like his father, he had studied law. His wife was listed as a recusant in 1592–93. It was probably his brother John who was listed as a Catholic fugitive at Leuven (Louvain) in what was then the Spanish Netherlands.¹¹

In 1581, during Edward Yate's lordship of Buckland manor, one of the defining events in English recusant history took place nearby at Lyford Grange. This moated manor house, now a shadow of its former self but then similar in scale and general arrangement to Baddesley Clinton near Warwick, had passed from John Yate I via his son Thomas to Thomas's son Francis Yate. It was here at Lyford Grange that the Jesuit priest and intellectual Edmund Campion was captured after the covert publication in Oxford of his book usually known as *Decem Rationes*. The abbreviated Latin title (shown on the title page in the reversed form *Rationes Decem*) translates as 'Ten Reasons' and in the book Campion puts forward ten reasons for being a Catholic. The volume was clandestinely printed at Stonor Park near Henley-on-Thames, the eponymous home of another recusant family. Campion and fellow Jesuit priest Robert Persons were the leading figures of the first mission of the Society of Jesus into England.¹²

Campion was captured after a protracted search instigated by the spy George Eliot, who had witnessed more than forty Catholics attending mass at Lyford. The search was conducted by a reluctant justice of the peace, a member of the Fettiplace family, and thus a relative of the Yates. The raid revealed that the Yate family already had two Catholic chaplains at Lyford. Even more surprisingly, they were harbouring eight Brigittine nuns, members of the order founded by St Bridget; they were the rump of the community which had been at Syon Abbey, Middlesex (later Syon House), until its dissolution more than 40 years earlier.^{13 14} (The main community originally went into exile in the Spanish Netherlands, returned to Syon Abbey during the reign of Mary; then, exiled again, settled in Lisbon in 1594; they returned to England in 1861.)

In the aftermath of the raid on Lyford, Edmund Campion was tortured, subjected to a show trial, then hanged, drawn and quartered. In 1959, an Agnus Dei (a wax religious medal bearing the lamb and flag motif) was found in the attic of Lyford Grange. Such medals were rare, as importation was a serious offence with severe penalties. As the medal's inscription states it was made in regnal year seven of Pope Gregory XIII's reign (i.e. 1579-80), and Gregory sent Campion to England, it is highly probable that Campion brought the medal to Lyford and hid it in the attic. The medal is now kept at the Campion Hall in Brewer Street, Oxford, which is the permanent hall of the Society of Jesus within the University of Oxford.¹⁵

In 1970, Edmund Campion was formally declared a saint by the Pope. It had taken 389 years for the church to canonise him; there was no fast-track to sainthood (in the manner introduced for the canonisation of Pope John Paul II) for the English martyrs.

Of the fifteen or so other Catholics apprehended in the Lyford raid¹⁶, one other priest was executed; another was imprisoned then banished; three nuns apparently died in gaol; other lay people were imprisoned and at least one layman was banished.¹⁷ But the Yates of Lyford, like their cousins across the fields at Buckland, continued to maintain a Catholic presence.

The creation of martyrs is often counter-productive, and for the Yates Campion's death proved to be an inspiration rather than a deterrent. Lyford was part of Hanney parish and in the parish church of St James the Great at West Hanney are two monuments to Yates from Lyford, each clearly emphasising their 'entire Catholicke Faith'. These were John (grandson of Francis Yate) and his son Charles, who died 90 and 115 years respectively after the raid. Neither did the family relinquish its support for nuns after the Lyford raid. Thomas, son of Francis Yate, had three daughters who were variously nuns at Gravelines (between Calais and Dunkirk), Rouen and Brussels. Thomas's son, the John Yate commemorated in Hanney church, had three daughters who were choir nuns with the Augustinians in Paris.¹⁸ Furthermore, in 1690, in the anti-Catholic clampdown after the accession of William and Mary, an informer discovered that a small estate at nearby Garford had been reserved as a site for a convent, should Catholicism 'come in again'.¹⁹ Lyford Grange passed in 1713 to William Dunn, whose wife Mary was a daughter of Charles Yate.²⁰ Thereafter it ceased to be a recusant centre, unlike Buckland.*

Edward Yate of Buckland was succeeded by his son, also Edward, who was made a baronet by James I. Edward Yate II was Sheriff of Berkshire (1628–29) and was recorded as a recusant during the Civil War. His son, Sir John Yate, succeeded him and married Mary Packington who came from a Worcestershire recusant family. She inherited Harvington Hall, near Kidderminster, where she harboured Catholic priests.²¹ Harvington Hall is now owned by the Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham and has the best collection in England of priest's holes accessible to the public. Four are thought to have been built by the Oxford-born joiner Nicholas Owen.†

Sir John Yate died in 1658 and is commemorated by the monument erected in the family chapel on the north side of the Anglican parish church of Buckland, St Mary the Virgin. The inscription boldly states, albeit in Latin, that Sir John 'died piously with the sacrament of the Holy Roman Church' (*in Sancta Romanae Ecclesiae communione pie defuncti*). The widowed Lady Mary retired to Harvington Hall. In 1674 she endowed the secret Catholic chaplaincies at Harvington Hall and Buckland Manor via a rent charge on 52 acres on the Isle of Dogs in London.²²

Sir Charles Yate, son of Sir John and Lady Mary, succeeded to the baronetcy. He had been convicted for recusancy and married into the recusant Gage family of Firle, Sussex. The Gages also held Shirburn Manor, near Watlington, Oxfordshire. During Sir Charles's time at Buckland, it had more recusants than any other parish in Berk-

* In the 17th century, several Yate sons emigrated from Lyford to the American colony of Maryland, which was founded by Catholics. There are still Catholic Yates in that part of America.

† Nicholas Owen 1562-1606. Born Oxford, a joiner by trade and a Jesuit lay brother. Travelled the country building priest-holes. He was never, as one myth suggests, Campion's servant but acted for many years as servant to Fr Henry Garnet, the Jesuit superior. Captured in the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot and died under torture. Canonised 1970.

shire—32 according to the 1676 Compton census.* Sir Charles died four years after the census and was succeeded by his son, Sir John Yate II, who was in Rome at the time. In 1684 he travelled back to England with Fr Thomas Codrington, who may have been chaplain at Buckland before becoming court chaplain to James II.²³

On 5 November 1688 the Dutch army landed at Brixham, Devon, and two days later the Catholic gentry of the Thames Valley declared for James II. They included Sir Henry Browne, Sheriff of Oxfordshire. He and Sir John Yate II of Buckland ‘came into Oxon at night to raise a troop of horse to goe against the invaders. They took only papists.’ However, no skirmish with the Dutch army seems to have resulted from this endeavour.²⁴

After the Glorious Revolution, Sir John went into exile with the Jacobite court and died in Paris in 1690. As he was unmarried, the baronetcy became extinct and his sister Mary succeeded him at Buckland. She married Sir Robert Throckmorton (1662-1721), third baronet of Coughton Court, Warwickshire and Weston Underwood, Buckinghamshire, who became the new lord of the manor of Buckland.²⁵

The Throckmortons

Sir Robert Throckmorton spent relatively little time at Buckland. His son, Sir Robert II (1702-1791), succeeded him, becoming the fourth baronet. Like his father, the second Sir Robert initially spent little time at Buckland but that changed in 1757. In that year, work started on the erection of a new mansion, Buckland House. The construction was designed and directed by John Wood the younger of Bath. It comprised a three-storey rectangular building with long single-storey side wings, terminating in octagonal rooms. At the same time, Sir Robert converted the old Buckland Manor into stables and embellished them with a castellated facade in the fashionable Strawberry Hill Gothick style. To ensure a visual match with the Anglican parish church, immediately south of the manor, the Catholic Sir Robert added a similar parapet to the church’s roof and tower.²⁶

In 1767, the *Returns of Papists* listed 42 Catholics resident in Buckland. This was ten more than in 1676 but Buckland was no longer the most recusant parish in Berkshire, that honour having passed to Woolhampton, with 84 resident Catholics.²⁷

Sir Robert II, the fourth baronet, held the manor for a record-breaking 70 years and died in 1791. He lived during the reigns of three German-speaking Protestant Hanoverian monarchs but would no doubt have preferred English-speaking Catholic Stuarts. Nonetheless, the first two Catholic relief acts (1778 and 1791) were passed in his lifetime, the latter giving legal recognition to Catholic places of worship.

In 1725, early in his time as lord of the manor of Buckland, Sir Robert II’s domestic chapel was dedicated to St George. It would have been

* The census was organised by Henry Compton (1632-1713), Bishop of London, in order to ascertain the relative strengths of Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Nonconformists.

an adapted domestic room, first in Buckland Manor and later the western octagonal room at Buckland House.²⁸ After the collapse of the 1745 Jacobite rebellion, the authorities took a more relaxed attitude towards Catholics and the Throckmortons' chaplain felt it was safe to keep registers of baptisms from 1753 onwards; from 1783 he also recorded marriages and burials.²⁹

Buckland passed to Sir Robert II's grandson, Sir John Courtenay Throckmorton (1753-1819), who became fifth baronet. His chaplain was Joseph Berington, whom he had met via the Catholic Committee, formed in 1782. Both men were radicals, arguing for major reforms to church governance. In 1788, the strongly cisalpine committee produced a 'protestation' denying papal temporal powers, which was signed by three of the four vicars apostolic and 240 priests. In 1790, Sir John published three tracts arguing for a lay voice in the appointment of Catholic bishops, an ambition that seems as far from fulfilment today as it did then.³⁰ The following year, Fr Berington was 'un-facultied' for his outspoken and radical views. Six years later, his priestly faculties were restored but two years later he lost them again for a further four years.

Joseph Berington enjoyed a friendly correspondence with John Wesley during a period when the co-founder of Methodism's view of Catholicism was decidedly hostile. Joseph Priestley, the dissenting clergyman, scientist and philosopher, also corresponded with Fr Berington and even dedicated a book to him. When Berington died, just two years before Catholic Emancipation, the Vicar of Buckland described him as 'truly venerable ... sincere, pious, just and true ... respected and beloved'.

Sir John Courtenay Throckmorton died childless in 1819 and Buckland passed to his brother, Sir George Courtenay Throckmorton (1754-1826), the sixth baronet. He died five years later, also without issue. Sir Charles Throckmorton (1757-1840), a third brother, then succeeded to the Baronetcy as seventh baronet. He held it until his death in 1840, when his nephew Sir Robert George Throckmorton (1800-1862) succeeded him, becoming eighth baronet. Sir Robert III, as we shall call him, was the son of William Throckmorton, a brother of Sir John, Sir George and Sir Charles. In 1831, Sir Robert III became one of the first Catholic MPs since the Reformation, representing Berkshire until 1835. He was High Sheriff of the county in 1843.³¹

It was from this unusually strong recusant background that the Catholic church of St George came to be built, by which time the Catholic congregation exceeded 200.³²

The new church

The new church was designed in the Decorated Gothic style exemplifying the Victorian idea of a small country parish church of the 14C. It had a nave 45 feet long by 20 feet wide, with a chancel 20 feet by 15 feet. On the north side was the Lady Chapel, 20 feet by 12 feet, dedicated to St Elizabeth and reserved for the use of the Throckmorton family as a family chantry.³³ A list of 21 different beneficiaries for

whom masses were to be said annually was later specified in an arrangement formalised in 1864.³⁴

On Low Sunday, the second Sunday of Easter 1848, Canon Daniel Rock blessed the new church in accordance with a faculty given to him by the bishop. The church was then formally opened for divine service.³⁵

The total bill for construction, fitting out, decoration and professional fees was £2019 12s. 11d. This equates to about £1.5m at 2014 prices, according to the labour earnings comparison tables produced by MeasuringWorth.* The builder, George Taylor, was paid £1302 13s and Charles Hansom received £157 10s. 7d. for the architectural and supervisory work. John Taylor was paid £22 7s. 6½d. for the bell. For providing the stained glass in the chancel and Lady Chapel windows, William Wailes received £116. The stone altar was supplied by George Strawbridge for the sum of £27 11s. Messrs Hardman supplied the sacring bell, altar cards and high altar candlesticks for £20. 17s. George Myers supplied the carved reredos in the Lady Chapel, the Gothic reredos for the high altar, the tabernacle, the ornately carved font and other carvings for £194 17s. 6d. The heating system cost £40 15s. and was installed by Abraham Seeward. Francis Hunt made the seats and other furniture and was paid £24 7s. 6d. Messrs Chubb & Sons were paid £6 1s. 6d. for a patent fireproof safe in the sacristy. There were a few other minor items of expenditure.³⁶

The Lady Chapel porch was built by a Mr Fisher for £49 to the design of another architect, Charles A. Buckler, who was paid £5. A window in the Lady Chapel, in memory of Robert Charles Courtenay Throckmorton (1831-1853), who predeceased his father the eighth baronet, was provided by Mr A. Gibbs for £23 10s.³⁷

The road on which the church stands and which runs past the front of Buckland House was renamed St George's Road after the new church. On 28 May 1850, John Haines, Superintendent Registrar of the Faringdon District in the counties of Berks, Oxford and Gloucester, registered St George's for the solemnisation of marriages.³⁸

The Throckmortons must have been pleased with Charles Hansom's design and supervision. In 1851, he designed for them a similar church for their Coughton estate in Warwickshire. It was completed in 1853.

From estate chapel to parish church

We learn from a statement of income dated 1855, that the Buckland mission had an annual income of £110 6s. 4d. (worth about £9,200

* The website MeasuringWorth (www.measuringworth.com) provides more nuanced present value estimates of historic sums of money than the calculators provided by the National Archives and the Bank of England. For the St George's church building project, I have used MeasuringWorth's labour cost calculator as the most appropriate comparator. For the parish income comparisons, I have used MeasuringWorth's historic standard of living calculator.

today), £100 of which was donated by Sir Robert Throckmorton III, the eighth baronet. The remainder was from a fund left for the mission by Lady Mary Yate, who died in 1696. The stock comprised £438 (worth about £54,000 today) in '2½ per cent formerly Old South Sea Stock'. The other fund left by Lady Mary Yate, based on income from the Isle of Dogs, had suffered a sad fate, as the statement of income revealed: 'There was another Fund left for the Buckland Mission by Lady Mary Yate of Buckland but the money was put in the French Funds and it was lost in one of the Revolutions.' Had that not happened, the income today from that rent charge on 52 acres of London's new financial district might have made the mission very rich indeed.³⁹

In 1854, Fr Francis Azzopardi briefly replaced Canon Rock as Buckland's Catholic priest. On 19 January 1856, he signed a certificate issued by the Registrar General of Births, Deaths, and Marriages in England (No. 7088) confirming that St George's Catholic Church was used as a place of worship before 30 June 1852 and would continue to be used for Roman Catholic worship. This was in accordance with a new Places of Worship Registration Act.⁴⁰ Later in 1856, Fr Azzopardi recorded 104 Easter communicants. In the same note, which is headed Synod Scrutiny 1856, he recorded that the altar had been consecrated.⁴¹

Over the years priests came and went. The eighth to follow Canon Daniel Rock was Fr Charles Arthur, who arrived on Saturday 31 October 1903. He was a York Catholic from a family of mixed Christian denominations: thus one of his uncles was Prior of Ampleforth, while another was secretary to five successive Archbishops of York. Charles Arthur had been a military chaplain; he was a keen cricketer and for many years captained the Buckland village team. He later turned to golf and also enjoyed shooting and fishing. He travelled to the USA, Canada, India, Japan, Russia, Palestine, Spain, France and Germany, and was reputed to speak six languages. Fr Arthur was to oversee the mission through one of its greatest changes—the difficult transition from the beneficent patronage of a Catholic gentry family to a modern parish, attempting to stand on its own feet, with very little income.⁴²

In 1908, Sir William Throckmorton (1838-1919), the ninth baronet, put the Buckland estate up for sale. The Throckmortons' Buckinghamshire residence, at Weston Underwood, had been demolished in 1827, Harvington Hall in Worcestershire was mothballed and it seems that they could no longer afford to maintain both Buckland and their ancestral seat at Coughton Court in Warwickshire. On 3 April 1909, the Buckland estate was sold to Sir Maurice Fitzgerald Bt, Knight of Kerry and his wife.⁴³ * A sale was held of furniture, paintings and other items formerly owned by the Throckmortons.

* The Knight of Kerry is one of three ancient Anglo-Irish hereditary knight-hoods.

They included a 14C Sarum-rite* missal, probably the very one used in the parish church of St Mary the Virgin before the Reformation.⁴⁴

Sir William Throckmorton continued to maintain the presbytery in the village. Although St George's church was sold with Buckland House, and the new owners were not Roman Catholics, on 30 May 1909 Sir William told Fr Arthur that he had arranged that Catholic services could be held there 'until the death of the children of the present Prince of Wales' – a bafflingly eccentric and imprecise formula, which appears to have been ignored or supplanted by a more sensible arrangement. At 11 o'clock on the morning of 23 June 1909, Sir William Throckmorton left Buckland. After 351 years during which, since the death of Queen Mary, the lords of Buckland manor had nurtured the survival of Catholicism, the last one had gone.⁴⁵ The following day, at 2.30 in the afternoon, the Fitzgeralds arrived. They proved well disposed towards the Catholic community. In March 1914, Lady Fitzgerald had the doors of St George's re-varnished and a year later, Sir Maurice had the perished lead roof of the church repaired.⁴⁶

Less than a decade later, the financial situation for the Catholic mission was bleak. Sir William Throckmorton had died in 1919 and in April 1923, notice arrived from the Throckmorton trustees that they could no longer help the mission in any way. Fr Arthur wrote bleakly 'That means—No Money—No house—No Church.'⁴⁷

A sale of work was swiftly organised by the Hon. Miss Ethel Dormer (a member of another notable recusant family) and Miss Constance Bouverie-Pusey (a Roman Catholic relative of Dr Edward Bouverie Pusey, the Anglican co-founder of the Oxford Movement) to help raise funds.[†] Gifts were received from as far away as Japan and a total of more than £90 was raised. On 5 January 1924, Fr Arthur heard from the Bishop that the lease of the presbytery had been transferred to the diocese and Bishop William Timothy Cotter, the third Bishop of Portsmouth, promised £80 a year towards the rent.⁴⁸ In June that year, St George's church acquired a satellite—a Catholic oratory (a small chapel, principally for private prayer) at the nearby village of Pusey, instigated by Miss Bouverie-Pusey. Mass was celebrated there every week.⁴⁹ Miss Dormer and Miss Bouverie-Pusey both lived in Pusey.

In September 1932, Canon Arthur, with the support of the Bishop, obtained the agreement of Lady Fitzgerald's trustees to sell the leasehold of the presbytery. However, the trustees wanted £900, whereas the local surveyors, Messrs Chambers & Co., considered £800 a fair price. Negotiations dragged on while Arthur's health declined. On 14 July 1934 he submitted his resignation to the bishop, who sadly ac-

* The Sarum Rite, or Use of Salisbury, was a liturgical form of the Catholic mass widely used in southern England before the Reformation. The Church of England's *Book of Common Prayer* draws heavily on the Sarum Rite.

† In the 19C there were strong social ties between the Throckmortons and the Puseys, despite differences of religion and politics. The Throckmorton's chaplain, Fr Joseph Berington, has been credited with forming Dr Pusey's Catholic sympathies. See *Catholic Gentry in English Society*, edited by Peter Marshall and Geoffrey Scott, Farnham, 2009.

cepted it. Nine days later, Canon Arthur sent his own cheque for £850 to the bishop so that the presbytery could be purchased for the diocese. A week later, he paid £24 for a new lavatory and fittings for his successor.⁵⁰ When the new priest, Fr Francis Philips, arrived he found that the much-loved and widely-respected Canon Arthur had been living in very Spartan conditions. The bed coverings were old curtains and there was hardly any furniture. Fr Philips promptly paid to have three rooms, the hall and stairway painted, and the bishop funded installation of electric lighting. That Christmas, midnight mass was celebrated at Buckland for the first time in living memory.⁵¹ Perhaps the Throckmortons had not favoured such a late service and the tradition of not celebrating midnight mass continued, long after their departure.

Towards Faringdon

On 24 March 1935, Fr Philips celebrated mass in Faringdon, the nearest market town, four miles away. Thirty people attended and the priest hoped that this would become a regular event. Little did he know that eventually the parish that grew out of the Buckland mission would become centred on Faringdon.⁵²

That July, a set of stations of the cross was erected on the interior walls of the nave of St George's church. The stations of the cross are Christian devotional visual aids, each representing a stage in Christ's last journey, from his judgement by Pilate, through his crucifixion and death, to his entombment. Each station comprises a three-dimensional representation of an event in the story (e.g. 'Jesus falls the third time'), featuring Christ and two or more other figures. The stations in the Buckland set appear at first sight to have been carved or sculpted in high relief and painted, then mounted on an ornate timber plaque. In reality, the whole assemblage is made of skilfully painted cast plaster. The set of fourteen stations was supplied by the church furnishers Vanpoules at a cost of £35 and paid for by parishioners.⁵³

For Christmas 1935, Captain George Eyston, a member of the notable East Hendred recusant family and a descendant of Sir Thomas More, had new altar rails installed in St George's. Captain Eyston was born across the Thames in Bampton, Oxfordshire, and was best known as a famous racing driver. Only four months earlier, he had broken Malcolm Campbell's 24-hour record at Bonneville Salt Flats, Utah.⁵⁴

On 20 July 1938, the death occurred of another member of the Eyston family, Charles Eyston of Stanford Place, near Faringdon. Charles was the estate manager at Buckland. He had maintained a private Catholic chapel in Stanford Place since he acquired the place in 1911. That chapel was now closed and the altar stone, tabernacle, two chalices and various other liturgical items were given to St George's.⁵⁵

Abingdon and Shrivenham

Following the death of Abingdon's parish priest, Fr James Doran, on 9 July 1939, the bishop merged Buckland into Abingdon parish. Fr Philips was moved to Abingdon and ran the enlarged parish from there, supported by an assistant priest, Bernard Sheeran. On 11 August all the furniture and books were moved from Buckland presbytery to

Abingdon and the house was let. The following month, Britain declared war on Germany. Throughout the war, Buckland continued to be served from Abingdon.⁵⁶

After the war, from Advent 1946, Buckland parish was taken over by Fr Henry Donnelly, chaplain to what was then the Royal Military College of Science at Shrivenham. Midnight mass was again held at Buckland after a break of some years. Weekday masses were held on Fridays and Saturdays and there were occasional evening services. At Easter 1947, two buses were specially laid on, one from Faringdon, the other from Kingston Lisle and district. The exceptionally cold winter had reduced the size of congregations for some time, but Fr Donnelly was pleased by the Easter attendance, boosted by the two busloads and a sizeable contingent of German prisoners of war. In May, Bishop John Henry King visited the parish to confirm a dozen children. A German POW choir from Shrivenham provided the music and was entertained to tea in the War Memorial Hall.⁵⁷

Centenary

On Low Sunday, 4 April 1948 at 11 o'clock, the centenary of the opening of St George's church was celebrated with a high mass. Bishop King was the president, supported by his chaplain, and the celebrant was Fr E. Coheiro, who, for reasons unrecorded, represented the Archbishop of Malta. Also taking part, as deacon and sub-deacon, were two Salesian priests from Cowley and the parish priest from Lechlade, Gloucestershire. Fr Donnelly was the thurifer. The choir of the Sisters of St Clotilde, Lechlade, provided the music. Three descendants of Sir Robert Throckmorton III, eighth baronet and founder of the church, were in the congregation.^{58 59}

But as soon as the celebrations were over, Fr Donnelly faced the ongoing problems of church maintenance and shortage of funds. The buttress at the north-east corner of the building had been sinking for many years and was pulling on the wall, causing a dangerous crack from roof to foundation. The condition of the roof was very poor and a bodged repair, effected by cementing the slates, was all that could be afforded. So, from August to November that year, the church placed desperate advertisements in Catholic newspapers appealing for funds: 'One of the "MOTHER" parishes of post-Reformation Catholicism is now destitute. Unavoidable debts are steadily mounting so high that we cannot do without EMERGENCY AID. Please do help us if you can afford to.'^{60 61}

Thus ended the first century of St George's Catholic Church, Buckland. The transition from recusant roots to diocesan parish had been made. The future was not assured but the church continued to serve the Catholic community of the district into the early 21C. In the mid 20C, the freehold of St George's church was donated to the Diocese of Portsmouth by Major Richard Wellesley, MC, a generous Anglican who inherited the Buckland estate in 1947. He was a grandson of the fourth Duke of Wellington, the first Duke being the prime minister under whom the Catholic emancipation act was passed.

The church today

When the United Reformed and Methodist churches in Faringdon merged to form Faringdon United Church, the former Congregational church in Marlborough Street, Faringdon, became vacant. It was bought by the Catholic diocese and became a chapel of ease for St George's, known as the Church of Blessed Hugh Faringdon, after the martyred last abbot of Reading. The Catholic parish served by these two churches stretched from Buscot in the west to Kingston Bagpuize in the east, and from the Thames in the north to Stanford in the Vale in the south.

In the early 2000s, it became apparent that the parish could no longer sustain two buildings. Unusually for the Catholic Church, the decision as to which building to retain was made by a democratic vote of the parishioners. By a narrow margin, they opted to sell St George's. It was bought by Irish former racing driver Paddy McNally, the current owner of Buckland House, who made his fortune in Formula 1 track-side advertising and corporate entertainment.

In 2016, St George's is still standing. It is mothballed and no longer in regular use as a church but Mr McNally has looked after it well. What its future will be remains to be seen. Meanwhile, the parish it nurtured is still going strong, now centred on Faringdon, with an average Sunday mass attendance of seventy people. As there are now so few Catholic clergy, the parish has been merged into a vast 'pastoral area', along with the Catholic parishes of Wantage, Lambourn and Hungerford. In 2016, just two priests administer this huge area: a canon based in Wantage and a former missionary priest who lives in Faringdon.

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