

# *The Bowdon Sheaf*

A BOWDON HISTORY SOCIETY PUBLICATION

No. 27 February 1996

50p

Contents:

Thirty-Eight Years Vicar of Bowdon by Myra Kendrick.  
Body Snatchers of Bowdon by Maurice Ridgway.  
Brief Notes.



ISSN-0265-816X

## **Thirty-Eight Years Vicar of Bowdon** **by Myra Kendrick**

Well over one hundred years ago the Reverend Arthur Gore was appointed vicar of the parish of Bowdon in Cheshire. He was of Irish extraction, born in Kilkenny in 1829. the only son of Henry Gore JP. His mother was the daughter of Nathaniel Alcock, MD. He was educated at Kilkenny College and Trinity College, Dublin, where he had a distinguished career, becoming Classical Scholar in 1850 and, two years later, Senior Moderator in Mathematics and Physics and Gold Medallist. In 1858 he graduated Bachelor of Arts, became Erasmus Smith's Exhibitioner and gained the Divinity Testimonium, first class. In 1858 he was awarded the degree of Master of Arts and in 1890 the degrees of both Bachelor and Doctor of Divinity. Clearly, he was a scholarly and gifted man.

He was ordained deacon in 1855 and priest the following year. His subsequent career was almost entirely in England. In 1858 he was appointed Clerical Superintendent of the Liverpool Church of England Readers' Society, so he came to live in the diocese of Chester, which then included Liverpool within its boundaries. In 1861 he became vicar of St Luke's in Liverpool. The next step was an honorary canonry in Chester Cathedral in 1867 and in 1873 he moved to Bowdon as vicar of the ancient church of St Mary the Virgin, on the hill dominating Watling Street and the Cheshire plain.

While working in Liverpool he married Ellen Anne, daughter of the Liverpool merchant, H V Bushell, and the older members of his numerous family (he had three sons and six daughters) were born in Liverpool. At Bowdon the vicarage on Park Road was spacious enough to accommodate the growing family and three resident servants.

The church Canon Gore came to had been substantially rebuilt in 1860 under his predecessor, Archdeacon Pollock, vicar of Bowdon from 1856 to 1873, and looked much as it does at the time of writing. Its size reflects the needs of a growing congregation after the opening in 1848 of the railway from Manchester to Altrincham and Bowdon. which enabled an increasing number of Manchester business and professional men to move away from the fog and soot-polluted industrial atmosphere of Manchester to the cleaner, healthier air of north Cheshire. Yet the actual parish boundaries of Bowdon, as a result of similar suburban development in its component villages, were contracting, as new churches were built and new parishes formed, broken off from the original enormous country parish of Bowdon.

Canon Gore was deeply involved in this movement, being responsible for a scheme of development which included the formation of the new parishes of St Peter's, Hale, and St Elizabeth's, Ashley. St Peter's was originally a daughter church of St Mary's, Bowdon, so under its care; and Canon Gore encouraged wealthier members of the Bowdon congregation to contribute generously to an endowment fund for the upkeep of St Elizabeth's, which had been built at the expense of the then Earl of Stamford.

The new vicar of Bowdon was a man of tireless energy. He came to a well attended, active church with clubs, societies, Sunday school and day schools. He gave these his encouragement and further development followed. The Church Council, founded under Archdeacon Pollock, evolved further under his successor, increasing in numbers. The Mothers' Meeting had about one hundred members. Early in Canon Gore's Bowdon days, in 1875, a new organ was installed, built by Jardine's of Manchester; this, itself replacing the first organ given by Lord Stamford in 1822.

It remained in service until 1960 when it was rebuilt and electrified. Another major overhaul followed in 1990. An important development in parish life was the building; in 1880, of St Luke's Church in Bowdon Vale, known at first as the Vale Mission Room. The cost of the building, £350, in those days a substantial sum, was raised by subscription, often in quite small amounts. It was very much a parish effort. At first St Luke's was under the care of the Reverend J Davies, one of the curates at St Mary's. A popular club for working men met in this building until the Church Institute was opened in the Vale and club activities were transferred there.

Other parochial activities included the "Bowdon Lectures", held monthly in the Church School in Richmond Road. The lectures were often about foreign travel, and were illustrated in their early days by lantern slides. A Lads' Club also flourished, merging in time with a branch of the Church Lads' Brigade and, I suspect, ousted after some years by The Boy Scouts movement.

At St Mary's Canon Gore followed his predecessor in developing a pattern of church services, which is the basis of the present scheme. He established the weekly 8 a.m. celebration of Holy Communion in place of less frequent afternoon or evening ones and introduced daily evensong. For children there was a monthly Sunday afternoon service, with Sunday School on the remaining Sundays. A flower service for children was also started and the first Carol Service was held in 1881. In 1901 Sunday evening services began at St Luke's with sizeable congregations.

Gradually Canon Gore introduced a greater degree of dignity into the Sunday services. The congregation rose at the entry of clergy and choir. Numbers of the all-male choir increased; they were robed and processed in from the vestry, then situated under the tower. In these matters, the influence of the Oxford movement was felt in Bowdon.

Church finances came under Canon Gore's review. He encouraged reliance for church funds on weekly offerings rather than pew rents, which were insufficient for the church's needs. One result was a rapid increase in the number of free, unallocated seats. But the vicar was still complaining, up to his retirement, about the preponderance of small coins in the collection boxes. Church finances were not yet on a sound basis.

A decline in congregational numbers in the early nineteen hundreds he attributed to increased scope for weekend travel.

Before the vicar's retirement, the church day school on Richmond Road had been largely reconstructed and a new infants' school had been built in the Vale. A plan for enlarging the chancel at St Mary's was mooted but rejected although it would have improved acoustics. Improvements were made, however; a new pulpit and clergy-and choir-stalls among them, all still in use. The ornamental list of vicars in the choir, dating back to the middle ages, belongs to this period. A gold chalice and patten were the gift of Canon, Mrs and Miss Gore.

Meantime Arthur Gore's sphere of service in the diocese of Chester was widening. He held successively the offices of Bishop's Chaplain (1877 to 1884), Proctor for the Archdeacon of Macclesfield (1881 to 1884 and again in 1893), Archdeacon of Macclesfield (1884 to 1893) and examining Chaplain to the Bishop of Chester from 1889. In 1893 he was made a Canon Residentiary of Chester Cathedral, which meant periodic absences from Bowdon lasting three months. Fortunately Bowdon was allowed several curates. The title of Archdeacon continued to be applied to him to the end of his days although the office was short term.

Outside the diocese he was a Select Preacher at Trinity College, Dublin, in 1890 and '91. In retirement in Chester, although already in his eighties, he was actively involved in the affairs of the province of York.

His energies overflowed into many local channels. His active local interests included the Altrincham and Bowdon Literary Institution and Altrincham Library. He was for thirty years president of the Cheshire branch of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and was also a keen supporter of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the Police Court Mission, as well as local educational causes and the Altrincham Hospital. He wrote many articles for the press pleading for support of such good causes.

Bowdon shared in two royal occasions while Canon Gore was vicar. In 1897 special services at St Mary's and other events marked Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Then three and a half years later a service of mourning for the Queen's death on 22 January 1901 was timed to coincide with her funeral service at Windsor.

All members of the Bowdon congregation were clothed in black. The year 1910 saw the Golden Jubilee of the reconstructed church of St Mary the Virgin. There were daily celebrations of Holy Communion, a performance of Mendelssohn's "Hymn of Praise" and social gatherings. This was the year in which Archdeacon Gore retired.

What of the man whose influence extended so widely in the parish, deanery and farther afield? Scholar, fine preacher, incisive writer, his obituaries spoke of his sense of humour and wit, ready sympathy and understanding, and the love of his parishioners for the vicar who had served them for so long. He died on 25 April 1913, St Mark's Day, and was buried in the area of the churchyard known as "the vicars' plot". His grave, under the oak tree, is marked by a tall stone cross with Celtic style decoration. His wife Ellen Anne who survived him by three years shares his grave.

He had been a major influence on Bowdon life under the reigns of three sovereigns, Victoria, Edward VII and, briefly, George V.



*Canon Arthur Gore, D.D.*

## **BODY SNATCHERS OF BOWDON** **by Maurice Ridgway**

About 1840 the partiality for alcoholic beverages was very strong in the bell ringers of Bowdon. When unable to raise enough money to purchase this the solemnity shown in their faces was most impressive and it made people quite mournful to look at them. It was on such an occasion that thirst sharpened a hitherto undisplayed inventive power. The plan put forward was that they should go into the corpse-line business. In other words that of body snatcher and sell it to one of the Altrincham doctors, always glad to have such a prize for research. When this story was related there were people living in Bowdon who remembered watching all night after a funeral of a relative and for several nights in the shade of the old yew tree to see that the grave remained intact. The man who put forward this idea did not have the full backing of the fellow ringers however thirsty, so they put forward a counter suggestion calculated to have the same desired effect. Namely to put forward a counterfeit corpse, one of themselves, and sell it to the doctor! They would by this not only get some money but also indulge in a lark for "they were a gradely warm lot, that they were". But "Whoa's to be th' corpse?" one asked "We'n ha' to draw short cuts, aw reckon". "Nay" says another "th' Bodkin's th'mon for that job, he's leet, an' can easily carried, an' he's pluck enough for owt has that chap. "They all agreed Bodkin, was a diminutive person and called Bodkin because he was by trade a tailor. He too agreed when plied with the question "Wilt do it. Bodkin?" and "we'n carry thee very gently lad just as if tha' wur really dead." All arrangements were made, they got a fairly large box and Bodkin laid himself in it. "As tha any message to send tha friends before we screw thee down?" they asked him. "Na, but ha summit warm to sup when aw comes to life agin". The ringers promised and hoisting him shoulder high proceeded down the sandy track then called Burying Lane (now The Firs) to Normans Place and into Altrincham where they rang the bell at the surgeons. "We'n browt you a body, he's a gradely fresh collart un." The doctor was delighted. "Put him in the cellar," he told them. Which they Did, leaving poor Bodkin in the dark with the words "If tha finds thysel gettin' low spirited, whistle the Owd Hundredreth to thysel occasionally."

His friends then collected their pay and made off. Later that evening the doctor came to see his purchase but on unscrewing the lid Bodkin sprang out and a terrified Doctor made for the stairs quickly followed by Bodkin who escaped through the door and joined his companions over a pint or two.

It is not related how the Doctor eventually reacted to this escapade of Bowdon's Ringers.

## BRIEF NOTES

A plaque to the late Ronald Gow, local dramatist, educational film pioneer and husband of Dame Wendy Hiller, was unveiled on the 17th July 1995, by his daughter Ann and son Anthony, in the presence of his niece Carolyn, the Provost of the Court Leet and representatives of both Altrincham and Bowdon History Societies and Hale Civic Society.

During a commemorative luncheon after the ceremony it was recounted that Ronald Gow's father, who was in charge of several local banks, often transferred large sums of money, in the form of gold sovereigns and florins, from one branch to another in horse drawn cabs. On one occasion the weight of the money was so great that the wooden floor of the cab collapsed and the money poured all over the road. Bystanders ran out and collected all the money and handed it back to Mr Gow and not a single penny was lost, such is the honesty of Altrincham folk.

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A communal pump in Bow Lane, which served local cottages, the farm and game Keepers Lodge for many generations of inhabitants was finally removed by the Bowdon Urban District Council in 1957, but a replica of the original one has been replaced on the site.

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When Catherine the Great of Russia placed the order with Wedgwood for the, now famous, frog dinner service, she stipulated that it was to be decorated with scenes from English Life including stately homes and manufacturing enterprises. The Earl of Stamford who had previously commissioned engravings to be made of his property provided views of Enville which were included in the set, which is now kept in the Hermitage in St Petersburg.

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Following a recent archaeological examination the big mound in Dunham Massey Park, previously thought to be a tumulus, and marked as such on Ordnance Maps, is now considered to be a glacially formed hill rather than a man-made tumulus.

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The Griffin Inn in Bowdon was formerly called the Green Dragon and is a hostelry with a very long history. A preliminary examination of the roof, panelling and timber framing tends to indicate that the present building incorporates part of a former timber framed structure of a very early date.

The inn served Bowdon parishioners in former times but its prestigious rating was reduced when the adjoining property was rebuilt as a more modern inn and allowed to take the name of the local landowning family, thus the Stamford Arms served the needs of the gentry and the Green Dragon, renamed the Griffin, served to upgrade the latter during the following century. Nothing has been written on this subject and Mrs Kinder, of the Griffin, is now undertaking research and it is hoped that some very interesting historical material will be published.

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Many readers of Bowdon Sheaf will remember the pre-war practice of displaying newspaper placards outside newsagents, giving details of the main events covered by the current issue of the newspaper concerned. The placard illustrated here advertises the issue of the Altrincham, Bowdon and Hale Guardian for Friday October the 14th 1932, price two pence, and it is interesting to note that the wedding of Miss Gow to Mr A L Okell was the first feature. It is also interesting that domestic helps were referred to as servants at that time.

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