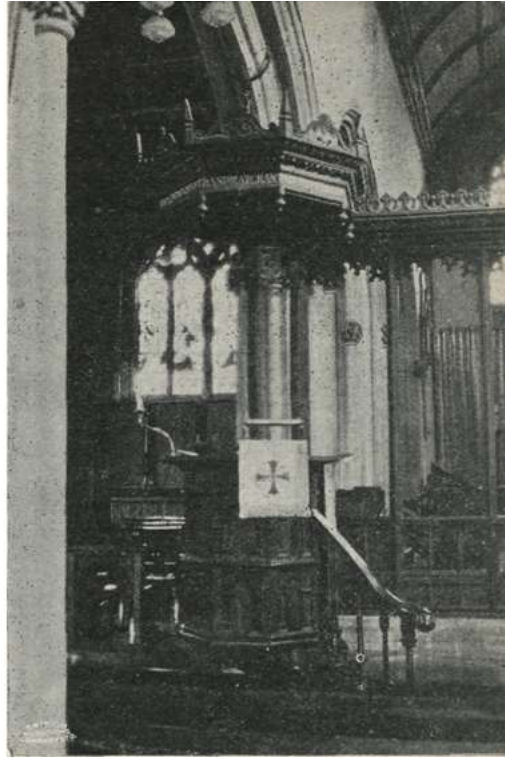


# LYME REGIS

By

*the Revd. G. L. Tiarks*

*The Vicar of a holiday parish writes of his church and of the efforts being made to preserve it by the congregation to whom he is a familiar figure as he preaches from this handsome pulpit at Sunday worship.*



This article by the Rev G L Tiarks has been taken from the September edition of *The Sarum Gazette* in 1955.

The Rev Geoffrey L Tiarks (1909-87) was vicar at Lyme Regis from 1954 to 1961. In 1969 he became Bishop of Maidstone and Senior Chaplin to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

" I should very much like to see Lyme again," said Anne. " There is real beauty at Lyme: altogether my impressions of the place are very agreeable." So wrote Jane Austen in her novel *Persuasion*, in 1817, and how many of Lyme's sons and daughters, now in far off lands all over the world, must echo those words, when they think of the lovely view of Lyme Bay, of Stonebarrow and Golden Cap, of Start Point and Portland Bill, that rejoices the heart of those who know and love this outpost of the Diocese. Only half-a-mile from the Devon boundary and our neighbouring Diocese of Exeter, we are very much Dorset folk here, and the 65 miles between us and Salisbury do not seem to prevent us from a feeling of lively affection and loyalty towards our mother cathedral and diocese.

Sometimes we are happily visited by the "great men from Sarum," and when they tell us, as sometimes they do, that the South West corner of the Diocese is one of the staunchest, I am afraid we do not greet such compliments with any great surprise, though we are glad to know that distance really does lend enchantment. I am not sure that the Bishop felt that when he came for a Confirmation a few years ago in the winter and was snow-bound and had to go back without his car, but at least we know that he never forgets Lyme, and that we have added to his collection of traveller's tales.

Sometimes people ask me what I think about living in Lyme (what a question !), and I always tell them that I think it is the ideal parish. For here we enjoy so many blessings — one of the fairest corners of England in which to live, plenty of hill to keep us slim and to save us from monotony, a parish which can be covered on foot if need be, and as loyal and faithful a congregation as one could hope to find anywhere. With a population between three and four thousand in the winter (it almost doubles in the summer), it is not so large as to be impersonal. There is a sizeable housing estate which the Council has developed over the last few years, Church schools, and a large sprinkling of people who have lived here for many years and have grown up with the place and love every stone of it.

As you come over the hill from Charmouth it lies beneath you in all its beauty, with the ancient Cobb jutting out into the sea at one end of the front, and the parish church standing

up four-square at the other, with only about thirty yards between the East end and the edge of the cliff. This cliff has caused us serious anxiety in the past, and may well do so again, for sitting as we do on blue lias subsoil there is constant erosion, and within the memory of many people living in Lyme, the cliff has receded a long way and brought the Church into danger. Large sums of money have been spent in building a wall under the cliff, which has stopped the damage for the present, but which needs continual watchfulness and costly maintenance.

From the outside the Church has no special beauty, but once the visitor enters the porch which has twelfth century columns in it, and walks through the baptistry, illustrated opposite, into the nave, the unique character of this lovely building unfolds itself at once. The main part is thought to have been completed in the early sixteenth century, and is built on a slope so that one walks up towards the chancel and sanctuary, which is higher by several feet than the west end of the church. The whole effect is striking and beautiful, and with its lovely Jacobean pulpit, given in 1613 by Richard Harvey of London, Mercer and Marchant Venturer and three times Mayor of Lyme, and its unusual architecture, is one of the treasures of our beautiful town. But it is much more than just a lovely building; Sunday after Sunday it is filled with worshippers, and we are fortunate in having services which meet the needs of everyone. There is a simple Sung Eucharist every Sunday as well as full Mattins, and in the summer large numbers of visitors as well as our own people fill the pews. It is very stimulating to serve such a parish church; scarcely a week passes in the summer without some old friend appearing from nowhere., bringing greetings from others all over England or in distant parts of the world. I have no space to do more than mention our lovely peal of bells, which many of you may have heard when we broad-cast Evensong in July, nor the Peek Chapel, given to the parish by its generous benefactor, the Reverend Edward Peek in 1884, where we have a daily celebration of the Holy Communion, and where Evelyn Underhill loved to worship when she visited Lyme for her holidays. The list of Vicars goes back as far as 1329, and in one of our early sixteenth century registers there is written in the flyleaf, "The Church was dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel in 1284."

So our lot is fallen in a fair ground, and if we have our problems we are confident we can tackle them. This year we have to find over £800 to re-slate the roof, and as soon as that is done the outside fabric must be repaired, and that will cost about £500. Lyme is not one of the so-called wealthy parishes, but its people have strong sense of responsibility towards their parish church. Last year they produced £350 for repairing the sea wall; this year they are paying for the roof; two years ago they found £1300 for re-casting and re-hanging the bells. It all comes in small sums from a great many people, and as well as all this they support eight missionary societies and other activities of this wider Church outside their own parish boundaries. Perhaps it is as well that we are said to have one of the youngest teams in the Diocese; the average age of Churchwardens. Secretary of PCC and clergy is assessed by the statisticians as 38, for what that is worth.

We have much to be thankful for, and we try. to remember it, and to look outwards, not inwards. Like Jane Austen's heroine, Anne Eliot, many who read this will be lovers of Lyme, whose impressions of the place are very agreeable, and who remember it with affection and nostalgia. To all such we send greetings, and ask for your prayers for clergy and people, that we may be strengthened and encouraged by the knowledge of this fellowship with you all. September 29th, Michaelmas, is our Patronal Festival Day, and we would like to know that you are remembering us then.

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