

Past Clerics of Lyme Regis – including the “Bishop of Lyme Regis”.

By G D Martineau

This newspaper cutting (Museum archives), transcribed by Graham Davies, January 2020, had no date or indication of which newspaper. The reference to the departure of Rev Tiarks from Lyme Regis indicates 1961. [\[See some of the newspaper reports\]](#)

The announcement that the Vicar of Lyme Regis (the Rev G L Tiarks) is to leave Lyme Regis in October has saddened us all. It moves us to reflect on the remarkable service which he and Mrs Tiarks have rendered to the parish during the past seven years and more, and also prompts the minor historian to glance back at the records of other distinguished incumbents.

As far as we can tell from the list, there have been thirty-five Vicars of Lyme Regis, going back to Roger Danyell in 1375 – when a small cruciform church occupied part of the present site. Of these, passing over the unestablished period of Peter Greve’s incumbency, which lasted from 1425 until, as the mysterious legend runs, ‘before 1514,’ we find that Timothy Hallett gave the longest service – 1663 to 1729, for 66 years.

Referring as always to Lyme Regis: A Retrospect by C Wanklyn I can discover reference to Hallett (still a well-known name in the town) and perhaps Mr Wanklyn may have doubted the dates.

The earliest Vicar he mentions is John Geare (1608-1650, the latter date being open to question). Geare was a Puritan schoolmaster, an M.A. of Queen’s College, Oxford, a strong Parliamentarian, and he remembered for two things: he had his preaching licence withdrawn soon after his appointment, and he was sufficiently influential to bring about the suppression of that riotous, 250-year-old celebration. The Cobb Ale.

He was also, according to the above date, Vicar during the siege, but as we hear nothing of what he had to say about it and only of two long sermons (morning and afternoon) preached in honour of the town’s deliverance by a queer character named Hugh Peters, it seems likely that there was some kind of interregnum before the induction of the Rev Amos (or Ames) Short in 1650.

This Devon stalwart was a Presbyterian, which makes it all the more peculiar that he should have preached strongly in favour of the Restoration in 1650. The sermon he delivered before the Mayor and Corporation contained 12,000 words, and seems to have been perfectly sincere – not just a piece of time-serving in the spirit of the Vicar of Bray.

This borne out by the fact that, in 1662 when the Act of Uniformity came into operation, Short refused to conform and was deprived of his living which was next held Emmanuel Sharp for a year before the induction Timothy Hallett. Short at once organised an independent religious community in Lyme, and he and other dissenters suffered persecution for many years, in fact until the Revolution of 1688.

We are told by Mr Wanklyn that the Congregational Chapel in Coombe Street is ‘the lineal descendant of the place of worship established by Short in 1688, where he and his followers at last held their services in peace.

Thereafter no Vicar seems to have stamped his personality memorably upon the town until the time of Dr Hodges, whom Mr Wanklyn describes as ‘The Bishop of Lyme Regis.’

Frederick (sic) Parry Hodges was a Dorset man, born in 1800, educated at Winchester and New College, Oxford, and a Doctor of Civil Law. He was related to the Fane family and the living being then in their gift, came to Lyme in 1833.

A man of striking appearance, whose silhouette makes one think of the Duke of Wellington, he lived first in furnished lodgings, then at Portland Cottage (afterwards Portland Lodge), but finally at the new Vicarage, whose foundation stone was laid in 1851. The site of this building was on prebendal ground and was given by one of the Fanes, a Prebendary of Salisbury Cathedral. It eventually became Coram Court.

Dr Hodges was a rich man, and the Church benefited by his generosity: renovations were carried out largely at his expense, and he gave the East window, though the height of this was subsequently reduced by other renovations four years after his death.

As a character he seems to have been an aloof sort of person, not a good mixer, and it is improbable that any of his parishioners ever addressing him as 'Fred.' He remained a bachelor. In matters of religion he was an Evangelical, delivering powerful sermons which usually lasted more than an hour against Romanism. This undoubtedly gratified his flock as did the further demonstration his principles in never preaching in a surplice. The silhouette already mentioned shows him standing in the Jacobean pulpit wearing a severe black gown.

A dignified and deeply respected figure in the borough, he also rose to the occasion in time of tragedy, as for example in the last days of 1852, when thirty-eight destitute people from the abandoned Heroine landed at Lyme Regis. Led by Dr Hodges, the town showed its sympathy with the victims in a practical manner, and they were lodged at the Pilot Boat Inn.

After forty-seven years in the parish Dr Hodges died in 1880 at his vicarage, which for a time was to become St Michael's College. The cemetery had come to use as early as 1856, but it was unthinkable that 'The Bishop of Lyme Regis' should be laid in any other place than the churchyard, and his was the last grave to be opened there. It lies close to the church on the south-east, the pinkish marble being more arresting than congruous with the weathered stones about it.

Comparisons are out of place. A man belongs to his own age, and his way of life speaks for the time in which he lives. One can no more picture Dr Hodges entertaining all and sundry to a Vicarage at Home, leading a non-denominational Procession of Witness through the town, or co-operating with the BBC to produce a broadcast of the service from the Church of St Michael the Archangel, than one can imagine the present Archdeacon-elect of the Isle of Wight spending over an hour in his pulpit denouncing Romanism to a grimly approving congregation.