

## REVD THOMAS BONIFACE (1845–1931)



In the choir vestry of SS Peter and Paul, there is a photograph, dated 1906, where the Vicar, the Revd Thomas Boniface, sits the solemnly in the midst of his choir, somewhat dwarfed by a row of ladies – in quite formidable hats. (Just imagine our present choir ladies trying to reach a top 'A' wearing such hats!) After the first 'Trial by Congregation' at the Christmas Matins service 1896, ladies were tolerated in the

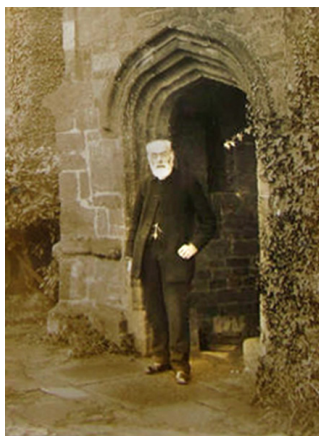
men and boys' only choir on special festival and feast days. Judging by his reports in the monthly magazine the Vicar was a stern traditionalist of great honesty of purpose. No doubt his honesty swayed him to accept what 100 years ago was anathema to traditionalists – ladies in church choirs!

The ladies' place was in the hubbub of church support systems – organising jumble sales, children's parties, meat teas, washing church linen, adorning the church with flowers and regularly cleaning the gas standards. For the latter a special body of female workers was welcomed in January 1898.

In 1896 the Rev Boniface completed his 20th year in the parish. Having an obvious love of statistics, he records that there had been 795 baptisms, 189 marriages and 656 burials since his arrival. The death toll among the very young was still so high that once a year (maybe to reassure his flock) he prints a list of those over 70 who have been 'called away'. In 1899 this list includes the Revd E Marshall, in charge of the parish for six months before Rev Boniface's induction, the writer of a very interesting and valuable history of Deddington.

*Ruth Johnson, May 1999*

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Voting on who will be thought the 'Greatest Briton' is at present very much in the News. So why not try a similar exercise confining ourselves to Deddington? On top of my list must be the Revd Thomas Boniface. Here's the obituary written in the *Deddington & Deanery Magazine*, May 1931 by the Vicar, Dr Maurice Frost, his successor:

'It is difficult for one who only knew him for six years to write adequately of all he did for Deddington during his incumbency of 46 years (1879–1924). He had become as much part of the Parish as the Church itself. Looking through the registers one finds that while he was Vicar there were 1,398 baptisms, 410 weddings and 1,235 burials – most of which he conducted personally. Of his many interests, the Day Schools were one of his dearest and he remained correspondent – to the great relief of his successor – until his death on Easter Monday evening. The efficiency with which he performed the task was shown by the balance sheet issued a week or two ago to subscribers.

We may be thankful that after such a long life of loving service he was spared a lingering illness, and also was able to make his Easter Communion on Monday morning. He has left the Church a complete set of Parish Magazines

from 1879–1930, which will be kept in the Church chest. Also a roller and mowing machine for use in the churchyard, for the upkeep of which, a few years ago, he left £200 in trust with the Diocesan Board, the interest being paid to the PCC. The funeral was on Saturday, April 11th, when a large congregation attended, both from the Parish and outside. In spite of the announcement in the local papers of 'No flowers', several friends in addition to the relatives sent offerings: the churchwardens, and sidesmen, the choir etc, while the good people of Clifton all joined in giving a very handsome floral cross.'

*Ruth Johnson, December 2002*