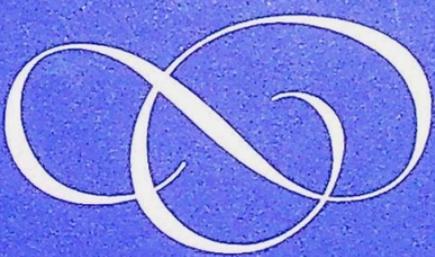


The story of



St. Agnes'  
Church



Newmarket

*The Story of*  
**St. AGNES' CHURCH**  
NEWMARKET

by

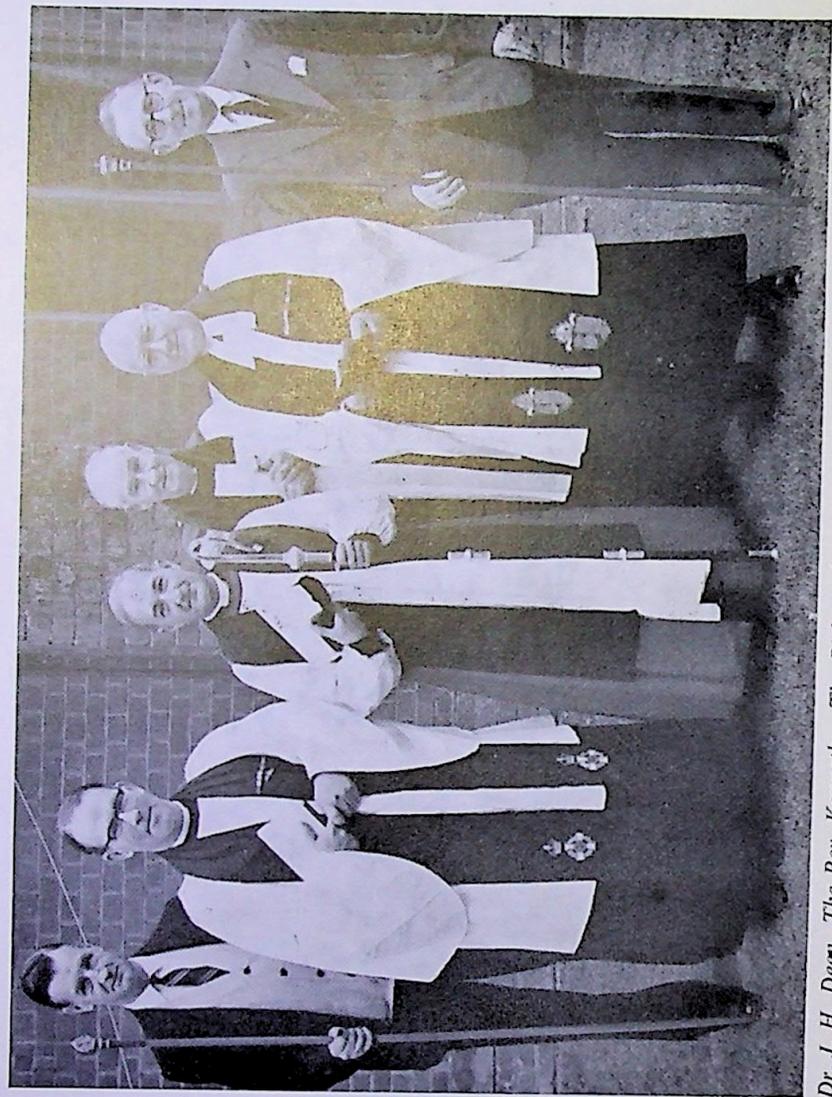
The Revd. Kenneth Child  
*Rural Dean of Newmarket*

*With an anti-  
copyist*

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Dr. J. H. Dean    The Rev. Kenneth Child    The Bishop of St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich    The Rev. H. D. P. Malachi    The Archdeacon Mr. W. E. Stuart

Photo : Newmarket Journal

## The Story of St. Agnes' Church Newmarket

Not many people notice the little Church of St. Agnes in Bury Road as they roar past in their lorries and cars on their way to Norwich or Bury or Brandon. At one time this was a very peaceful neighbourhood and it is said that in 1885 when the Church began to be built there were approximately only 25 houses and cottages in the parish, the land was almost entirely undeveloped, and there were "only two or three training establishments and private residences".

The story begins in 1885 when we read in the *Newmarket Journal* for Saturday, November 28th, that "the mausoleum which Her Grace the Duchess of Montrose (who lived at Sefton Lodge) has had prepared in the churchyard, concurrently with the erection of the Crawford Memorial Church, for the exclusive interment therein of members of the family, but more especially for the immediate reception of the remains of her deceased husband, tentatively interred at Cannes, where he died, received its first occupant on Saturday, when all that is mortal of W. S. Stirling Crawford, Esq., was re-interred there.

"The remains had been removed from Cannes under the superintendence of M. B. Spinabelli, ex-Capitaine d'Etat-Major, Pavilion de la Ferrage, Cannes, and arrived at Newmarket by the 10.46 p.m. train from Cambridge on Saturday. The package in which the coffin had been conveyed was removed at the Station and the later transferred to an open hearse. The body was enclosed in a case draped in black cloth with silver mountings and plain silver bearing the engraved name of deceased: STIRLING CRAWFURD.

"The *cortege* then moved off across the Heath to the entrance to the Memorial Church grounds, the single mourning coach containing Her Grace the Duchess of Montrose and the Marquis of Breadalbane. The Duchess had desired that strict privacy should have marked the obsequies and chose that the route across the Heath

should be followed by the funeral procession for this reason; but the news of the intended interment had spread throughout the town and there was a numerous gathering both at the Bury Road and Heath entrances to the churchyard.

“The corpse was removed from the hearse at the Heath-gate entrance, and here her Grace alighted and placed two beautiful wreaths of ferns surmounted by white flowers at the head of the coffin, in addition to the floral cross in the centre. The Revd K. B. Venner, Vicar of Exning, and the Revd E. H. Littlewood, Vicar of Newmarket All Saints, were the officiating clergy, and received the corpse at the entrance, the former repeating that portion of the service apportioned for the procession to a chapel on the way to the mausoleum. The sides of the grave had been hung with evergreens, starred with chrysanthemums.

“The bell of the Memorial Church was tolled throughout the funeral, and in the Church, Mr Peck presided at the organ and played extemporised music of a funereal nature. The Revd E. H. Littlewood read an abbreviated service at the graveside, and at the close of the ceremony, the Duchess was led by the Marquis of Breadalbane into the church, which they shortly afterwards left and entered Sefton Lodge by Her Grace’s private walk. Mr W. Sparrow, Sen., and Mr Wm C. Manning, to the latter of whom the Duchess had entrusted the sole control of the proceedings, were present at the interment, at the close of which the public were admitted both to the grounds and the church. The funeral arrangements were admirably carried out by Messrs F. Hammond and R. Arber.”

## THE CHURCH IS OPENED FOR WORSHIP

Although the story of St Agnes’ Church begins in this macabre way, with the mysterious procession across the Heath in the darkness of a cold, November night, it was built not primarily as a mausoleum, but as a place of worship and the Duchess spared no effort and no expense

to make it a worthy building. The fact that it is still hailed in 1967 by architectural experts as a "gem of its period" is no small tribute to the Duchess's taste and sense of what is fitting for the worship of Almighty God.

Although the church was still "extra-parochial" and still a private chapel, it was opened for public worship at the end of 1885. There were certain features not quite completed. Although the "lych-gate" at the entrance to the grounds, erected on brick and stone pillars, with a roof of teak and oak, covered with oak shingles, was finished in September 1885 and the grounds had been "tastefully laid out with grass plots and flower beds and planted with shrubs and trees" the Duchess's own private chapel inside the church together with the choir seating and the sculpture for the chancel were still to be completed.

In addition, there was still the final work to be done in the organ chamber, although the reader will have noted that it was capable of being played at Mr Crawford's funeral. Incidentally, the organ, which has just been restored (1966) at a cost of over £400, was designed by Sir Arthur Sullivan of "Gilbert and Sullivan" fame.

Mr Peck was appointed as organist and the church was opened on the 11th December 1885.

## A MISUNDERSTANDING

It would be interesting to read the correspondence which passed between the Duchess of Montrose and the Bishop of Ely at this time. One of the matters of dispute seems to have been the sculpture of the "Assumption of St Agnes" which now rises above the altar. Apparently, the impression had got abroad that this depicted the Assumption of our Lady. Indeed guide books are to be found which describe it in these terms. Boehm was the sculptor and it is a very fine piece of work. Although the details of this dispute are obscure, it is fairly certain that for a time the carving had to remain at the side of the chancel covered with a cloth.



*The High Altar*

*Photo : John Slater*

Churchmen in Newmarket were preoccupied during 1886 with anxious considerations about national issues in regard to Church Defence and it is interesting to see that Mr A. M. Ellis, father of a later patron of the living of St Agnes, was a doughty chairman at some of the public meetings which were called in Newmarket about this "wicked matter".

A new Bishop of Ely, Lord Alwyne Compton, was installed in his Cathedral on March 16th and paid his first visit to Newmarket on June 5th. It must be assumed that by this time there was some arrangement between the Duchess and the church authorities about her church. It had come to be known as "St Agnes' Church" and the Duchess was allowed to have a priest to conduct services there. What more natural thing than that a devoted Scots Episcopalian like Caroline Agnes, Duchess of Montrose, should choose her own Patron Saint to be the Patron of the Church she had built?

It would appear that by this time, the area around St Agnes' Church had been designated as an "Ecclesiastical District" within the parish of Exning and the curate-in-charge was the Revd A. B. Sharpe, who was known as the "Chaplain" to the Duchess and of the Memorial Church.

## EVENTS IN 1886

There was a sad event on the 17th of June in 1886 when, we read, the organist and choirmaster at St Agnes' Church, Mr George Stanley Peck, committed suicide.

The year 1886 was notable, too, in the annals of Newmarket for the death of the renowned jockey, Fred Archer. The town had been *en fete* nearly four years earlier when he had married Miss Nellie Rose Dawson, eldest daughter of Mr John Dawson of Warren House, and niece of Mr Matthew Dawson. The ceremony was at All Saints' Church; the bells of St Mary's rang out as well; a Ball was held at the Rutland Arms and a prize bullock, presented by Lord Hastings, was roasted whole on the Severals.



*The Nave*

*Photo : John Slater*

Tragedy followed, however, and the jockey's young wife died two years later. She is buried in Newmarket Cemetery. After his bereavement Archer took a trip to America. Although he rode 246 winners in 1885 and 170 in the season of the year he died, it was generally agreed that he was never the same man after his wife's death.

After being taken ill with typhoid fever on November 6th, he shot himself two days later, his weak state and high fever being responsible for the unbalanced state of his mind. He was 29 years old and left a small daughter.

The Duchess of Montrose was represented at the funeral, as was the Prince of Wales. In one of the funeral carriages was Mr Martin Gurry, whose name is commemorated on the alms dish which is still in use at the church and inscribed "Martin Gurry gave this to God".

"Seldom has the usually cheerful little town of Newmarket presented a more dismal and dispiriting appearance than it did when the remains of the lamented Frederick James Archer were consigned to their last resting place in the Cemetery by the side of his beloved wife and infant son."

### WHY EXNING ST AGNES?

It is often asked why in official directories St Agnes' Church is referred to as "Exning St Agnes"—and this title does lead to a good deal of confusion in regard to the direction of letters and so on. It has to be remembered that the ancient parish of Exning included all that part of Newmarket which is north of the High Street, and that when St Agnes' District was established in 1886 by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for England, acting in pursuance of the "New Parishes Act 1843", a part of the new Parish was taken from the parish of Exning proper in addition to the part which was taken from St Mary's.

Whatever the official title may have been, Newmarket at the beginning of 1887 knew the church as St Agnes' Church or the Duchess of Montrose's Private Chapel. In the Journal's Almanack for 1887 the information was given that the Chaplain was the Revd A. B. Sharpe,

M.A., and that services were held on Sundays at 11 a.m. and 7 p.m.

There was a Watchnight Service at St Agnes' as 1887 dawned and the "building was crowded in every part": the service was taken by the Revd A. B. Sharpe and the discourse delivered by the Revd J. Imrie, Rector of St Mary's. The hymns included "A few more years shall roll".

## THE YEAR 1887

There was much to talk about in Newmarket during the early part of 1887. Fred Archer's Will was published and there was little surprise that his estate amounted to the sum of £66,662. Outside the gates of St Agnes' Church on January 25th the Prince of Wales' carriage, in which he was returning from Herringswell, collided with a fish cart. Bury Road was dangerous even in those days!

The Rector of St Mary's was Chairman at a meeting called to discuss the ways in which Newmarket could celebrate Queen Victoria's Jubilee. One of the suggestions was that they might modernize Market Street. We seem to have heard this suggestion more recently.

When the excitement caused by the sale of Fred Archer's effects at Falmouth House which drew over 1,000 people was subsiding, attention was focussed on the reopening of the extended and restored St Mary's Church when the Chaplain of St Agnes' preached at the first service after the opening by the Bishop of Ely on a very stormy day.

Easter 1887 was celebrated at St Agnes' with a full church which was beautifully decorated with "choice exotic plants from Her Grace's conservatories, arranged under the direction of Mr W. Taylor, the head gardener".

In July, the Duchess was in London, appearing as a defendant in a case in the Queen's Bench Division, successfully countering a claim brought against her by a Mr and Mrs Ashby, the owners of house property at Ascot, for sixty guineas which they claimed that she owed in respect of rent for a house and stables during Ascot Week. She came back to Newmarket to make plans for the next chapter in the history of her little church.

## PRIVATE CHAPEL TO PARISH CHURCH

The first week in October 1887 was a busy one for the Vicar-designate of St Agnes. On Sunday, the 2nd, he conducted five services at the Crawford Memorial Church for the Harvest Festival. Mr D'Sousa was the organist and the preacher at night was a Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge. The Head Gardener at Sefton Lodge had once more supervised the decoration of the Church and there were large congregations which included the Duchess.

On the Thursday he read one of the lessons at a special service at St Mary's for the reopening of the organ after reconstruction. On the Friday evening he had time to scan the pages of the local newspaper and to note that the Falmouth House Estate, belonging to the late Fred Archer, would be put up for auction at the Rutland Arms Hotel on the following Wednesday.

On the Saturday (October 8th) at 10.30 a.m. his preparations for the service of consecration began to be fulfilled. The Bishop of Ely together with his Archdeacon, Registrar and various clergy (who included the English Chaplain at Cannes) robed at the Vicarage (now St Agnes' Cottage) and were led by the choir to the south door of the church.

One of the choirboys who was present at this service is Mr F. R. Jeffery, of Exning, who, at the age of 94 still recalls the scene. The choir of St Martin's, Exning, led the singing of Stainer's *Te Deum* after the procession had entered the church singing a psalm and the Duchess of Montrose had presented the deeds of the building to the Bishop.

The sentence of consecration was read aloud by the Registrar; it was then signed by the Bishop, who ordered that it should be enrolled and preserved amongst the muniments of the Registry.

After this, the Revd Alfred Bowyer Sharpe, M.A., was presented to the Bishop "by Caroline Agnes Stirling Crawford, Duchess Dowager of Montrose the true and undoubted Patron of the living" and he was instituted



*Mr. Crawford's Mausoleum*

*Photo : By courtesy of Mrs. J. G. Taylor*

in and to the "new Vicarage of Saint Agnes Exning".

The new Vicar was then inducted into the actual and corporal possession of the Church by the Archdeacon of Sudbury (the Ven. F. R. Chapman).

And so the Consecration of our Church of St Agnes, Bury Road, dates from the 8th of October, 1887.

## A NOTABLE MINISTRY

The first Vicar had established good traditions but resigned the following year and his place was taken by the Revd William Colville-Wallis, who was inducted into the living of St Agnes' by the Revd John Imrie, Rector of St Mary's, Newmarket, on the 4th August 1888; this was by Mandate from the Archdeacon of Sudbury. One of the churchwardens at that time was Mr W. C. Manning.

Mr Colville-Wallis remained as Vicar until he retired in 1934. He had been ordained deacon in Ely Cathedral on Trinity Sunday, 1880 and had served a curacy at Holy Trinity Church, Ely.

One of the first tasks he had to tackle when he took up his appointment was to raise the necessary money to build a Vicarage house and by 1896 the funds were sufficient to start the building of a parsonage house on land adjoining the church which belonged to the Duchess's family. It was finished in 1898; it is still a fine house with a lovely staircase and excellent woodwork, although its design hardly fits in with the living requirements of most clergy of the 1960's. The cost of its building was about £2,000.

A more melancholy task which fell to his lot was to officiate at the funeral of the Duchess of Montrose, who died on the 16th November, 1894. Her death took place at her London residence at 45 Belgrave Square. Her body was brought back to Newmarket for interment in the private burial ground at the back of St Agnes' Church, beside the body of Mr Stirling Crawford, her second husband.

Upon arriving at Newmarket the body was placed in the chancel of the church and during the night the Verger, Mr R. W. Hicks, kept vigil. Mr Colville-Wallis conducted the service at the funeral which was held at mid-day on Tuesday, the 20th. A great crowd of mourners filled the church to overflowing. Mr H. Milner, the Duchess's third husband, together with her son, the Duke of Montrose, led the mourning party. Mr A. J. d'Albani was Churchwarden at this time.

## THE ENDOWMENT OF THE LIVING

Not only did the Duchess found and build St Agnes' Church at her own expense on her own land (at that period she owned most of the land comprising the parish) but she also endowed the living. This endowment consisted of a rent charge on property belonging to the Duchess: subsequent to her death her son redeemed the rent charge at a cost of £8,500, and this money was paid to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and invested by them to form an endowment for the benefice. Most of this is in 3% gilt-edged stock and brings in about £300 per annum. By 1963 this endowment income had to be augmented by nearly £700 p.a. from other sources to provide a living wage for a clergyman, so much has the cost of living risen in the last 70 years.

In 1911 the Bishop of Ely appointed the Vicar of St Agnes' to be Rural Dean of Fordham. This Deanery stretched from Soham to Brinkley. Three years later his Deanery was dismembered when the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich was formed and Newmarket passed out of the care of the ancient Ely Diocese.

It was with the new Bishop of St Edmundsbury that the Duke of Montrose negotiated the conveyance of the land surrounding the church together with the Vicarage upon it in 1915.

The *London Gazette* of the 19th February 1915 records that in consideration of this benefaction by the Duke, the Church Commissioners would pay to the incumbent of St Agnes' a yearly sum of £30.

## THE YEARS BETWEEN THE WARS

We are now passing to the times about which many of our readers may have clearer recollection than could be conveyed by any amount of detail supplied by the writer. Our story must come to its end. But we will make mention of various attempts to merge the life and ministry of St Agnes' parish and its ministers with other parts of the Church in Newmarket.

In 1923, when Mr Colville-Wallis was Vicar, a Commission sat to enquire into a proposal by the Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich for the union of the benefices of Exning St Agnes' and Newmarket All Saints; it was at this time also that an adjustment between Newmarket St Mary and Exning St Philip was proposed. The Commission reported against the proposed amalgamation.

It is difficult to see exactly why this proposal was mooted. The Vicar of All Saints said that the proposal certainly did not emanate from that quarter. Mr J. G. Taylor, who was at one time Secretary of the Parochial Church Council at St Agnes', was one of the Commissioners and still recalls that at the Enquiry there was nobody in favour of such an amalgamation.

Life went on smoothly up the Bury Road. Every Sunday at the Duchess's Church there was a full programme of services. At the evening service it is said that there was an average attendance of 100 and the number of communicants at Easter varied between 130 and 150. This was in a parish where the equine population exceeds the human population, which was at that time no more than 450.

It was in 1934 that rumbles began to be heard once more—rumbles about amalgamation and reorganization of parishes. The Revd W. Colville-Wallis approached the Bishop with regard to retiring, after holding the benefice for 46 years and the Bishop procured the appointment of another Commission which should again enquire into the Union of the benefices of Exning St Agnes' and Newmarket All Saints'. At this time the Churchwardens at St Agnes' were the Hon. George Lambton (whose

widow, we are happy to say, still worships at St Agnes') and Mr Herbert Otto Madden (whose daughter still sings in the choir Sunday by Sunday).

The Commission sat in August 1934 and reported in favour of amalgamation. The Vicar resigned the living in October and very speedily the Ecclesiastical Commissioners prepared a "draft scheme" which was submitted to the Parochial Church Council and others concerned.

However in view of the opposition expressed by the P.C.C., the matter was shelved temporarily and the Bishop agreed to institute a new Vicar on the presentation of the Patrons. He was the Revd Charles Cecil Leighton Buckwell, M.A. He was Vicar from 1935 to 1938 and is now Vicar of St Michael's, Croydon.

### ST AGNES' DEFENCE FUND

It is to be noted that this Fund was only wound up in 1966 when a happy issue out of all the afflictions which have dogged those who have had the interests of the parish of Exning St Agnes at heart since 1923 was reached. It ought to be recalled that after the enquiry in 1923 when those interested in the parish thought that "this bogey of amalgamation" had been satisfactorily laid, money was raised to buy the right of presentation to the living from the Duke of Montrose. The Hon. George Lambton, Canon Farmiloe, who was at that time Archdeacon of Sudbury, Miss D. M. B. Ellis and Mr G. Dudley Smith found the money, and became the Patrons of the living.

More money had to be raised after another decade when the Parochial Church Council contested the Draft Scheme and it became obvious that ultimately legal counsel would have to be employed.

### ST AGNES' IS SAVED

It would be tedious to set out in detail the legal complexities of the events which must have overshadowed the years of Fr Buckwell's incumbency. Suffice it to say that Miss Ellis and Mr Taylor were doughty champions

and another Draft Scheme prepared by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for the union of St Agnes' and All Saints' never became law. In 1939 there began another long and notable ministry. The Revd H. D. P. Malachi was presented to the living by the Hon George Lambton, Miss D. M. B. Ellis and Mr S. J. M. Sampson and canonically instituted by Bishop Maxwell-Gumbleton, acting for the Bishop of the Diocese, on the 8th of February 1939.

He remained Vicar until 1964 and now lives in retirement at Exning. His devoted ministry is recent enough to need no tribute from the writer. The greatest tribute to his priestly humility is that he is now prepared, after a quarter of a century at St Agnes', to act as honorary assistant curate to a Rector who could quite easily be *his* assistant.

## A NEW CHAPTER

The 1960s brought new problems of finance and manpower to the Church of England and it was obvious that some new arrangement would have to be made which would preserve St Agnes' Parish and its traditions. The Bishop consulted with the Parochial Church Council and the only surviving Patron of the living, Miss D. M. B. Ellis, about the best course of action. We can be grateful that the transference of the Patronage of the Living to Bishop Morris and the Union of the Benefice of St Agnes' with that of Newmarket St Mary's was effected with unanimous approval and the Order in Council to that effect was published on March 1st, 1966. The new Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich (Dr Leslie Brown) instituted the Revd Kenneth Child, Rector of St Mary's, as Incumbent on March 25th, three days after his own Enthronement in Bury Cathedral (see photo on page 4).

## THE END (PERHAPS THE BEGINNING) OF THE STORY

As we approach the 80th Anniversary of the Consecration of the Church, perhaps we may quote from the recent report of the Diocesan Inspector of Churches (Mr Cecil Beadsmore Smith, A.R.I.B.A.) . . . "the Church was built by Carpenter in 1886 for the Duchess of Montrose and is a splendid almost untouched example of the taste in the late Victorian Gothic style. Inside the walls are wainscoted with coloured Spanish tiles, and above, in the nave, red brick. The chancel has finely designed mosaics on north-east and south walls and an elaborate Reredos, incorporating a beautiful white marble bas-relief of St Agnes by Boehm . . . on the north wall of the nave there hangs a large Italian painting of the Last Supper in a finely painted and gilded frame. The whole effect is opulent and a good representation of the taste at the end of the nineteenth century".

### BUT THERE ARE OTHER THINGS

in the Report which cause deep concern. A great deal of money will have to be spent on the roof, on the guttering, on the brickwork if this treasure is not to decay. That is why we shall be writing to you in due course. That is why we ask you to be generous with your 80th Birthday gift to St Agnes'.

KENNETH CHILD, *Rector*  
C. C. BOYD-ROCHFORD } *Church-*  
W. E. STUART } *wardens*  
L. MOON, *Vice-Chairman of the P.C.C.*  
JOHN DEAN, *Hon. Treasurer*

March 1967