

A NOTE ON OLD FULHAM VICARAGE AND ITS ASSOCIATIONS

THE impending demolition of the ancient Vicarage in Church Row—the very heart and centre of Old Fulham Village—is viewed with deep regret by many lifelong residents of the borough, and especially by members of the Fulham History Society who, both by petition and deputation, have urged the Borough Council (as purchasers of the property) to utilise this gracious old building for what Fulham has far too long lacked—a Museum and Muniment Room.

That a Vicarage house existed at a remote period on the present site is evident from entries in the Court Rolls of the Manor of Fulham as early as 1430, while in a mid-seventeenth century Commissioners' Report it is pleasantly stated that "the Viccaridge house wth Orchard and Garden is worth Sixteene poundes p. Ann." The actual date of the present building is unknown, but its mellow red brickwork and tiled roof mark it as an early eighteenth-century structure which is certainly indicated in Rocque's map of 1741-5. In the spring of 1758 the Rev. W. Cole described it as "an exceedingly handsome Brick House" with "a good garden running to the Thames." Though many of the garden trees, in which of old crows were wont to build, have disappeared, the interior still preserves its handsome staircase running centrally through the house, fluted wooden columns and well-carved capitals, while quite recently Mr. Percy Lovell (Secretary of the London Survey Committee and of the London Society) made the interesting discovery that certain of the upper rooms retain their original eighteenth-century panelling behind a frontage of stiff canvas and wallpaper.

Within the pleasant and spacious apartments have lived many "reverend champions" whose fame was known far beyond the circle to whose spiritual needs they ministered long and lovingly. Among these may be mentioned the Rev. Denison Cumberland (1757-63), who afterwards became successively Bishop of Clonfert and of Kilmore. He came from Stanwick, Northamptonshire, to the "tolerably good parsonage house in Fulham," partly for the convenience of his son Richard, poet, dramatist, and private secretary at the Board of Trade during the administration of Lord Halifax. In Richard Cumberland's *Memoirs* are to be found intriguing pen-portraits of the personalities of the period. His estimate of George Bubb Dodington, Baron of Melcombe Regis, who lived in the neighbouring mansion of La Trappe, is unforgettable. This Vicar was succeeded by the Rev. Anthony Hamilton, M.A., F.R.S., F.A.S., afterwards Prebendary of St. Paul's and Archdeacon of London.

Old inhabitants of Fulham yet speak of the Rev. Robert George Baker (1788-1878), who was a lecturer and antiquary of some note. A fellow student at Trinity College, Cambridge, and a life-long friend of Bishop Blomfield, he was admitted to the vicarage of Fulham in 1834, and nine years later engaged as his curate the famous Prebendary Rogers—"Hang-Theology Rogers"—with whom he had interviews in the old Vicarage which were not always of the most cordial character, for both were men of decided opinions (*vide* Rogers' *Reminiscences*). It was the Rev. R. G. Baker who not only rebuilt the east end of the parish church, erected the school in High Street, and founded the Fulham Friendly Society, but married, in his 77th year, Mary Sullivan, niece of Lord Palmerston. Among famous residents who must have known the Vicarage well may be mentioned Samuel Richardson (who in 1754 removed from the Grange, North End, to Parson's Green partly from a desire to be nearer the church), Dr. William Sharp of Fulham House, the eminent

surgeon to George III, and a pioneer of inoculation, and his philanthropic brother, Granville Sharp, who, as Chairman of the Committee for effecting the Abolition of Slavery, "established for the negro race the long-disputed rights of human nature." The brothers rest together in the neighbouring churchyard of All Saints.

Too many of the stately homes of Fulham have disappeared before the blows of the housebreaker, and it is a sad thought that this gracious old house, hallowed by so many happy memories, is not to be preserved for the delight and instruction of our fellows and of posterity.

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