

St. Cyprians Chapel

Ugbrooke

The History of the Chapel

At the time of the reformation the Cliffords joined the established Church of England like the great majority of Devon families. But this was to change in 1673.

Thomas Clifford became head of the family at the age of 10 when his father Col. Hugh Clifford died in 1639. He became very active in public life and was appointed Treasurer of England and a Peer of the Realm with the title of Lord Clifford of Chudleigh in 1672

For some time Lord Clifford was making up his mind to become a Catholic. In 1673 he finally did so, resigned as Lord Treasurer and retired quietly to Ugbrooke, only to die there later in the year.

Much work was done extending the house and the Chapel of St. Cyprian was consecrated in 1671 by the Bishop of Exeter, Dr. Sparrow, while Thomas was still an Anglican. On his becoming a Catholic, the chapel, because it was his own private chapel became a Catholic place of worship, and together with Chideock became one of the first Catholic Churches in the westcountry, and where Mass is still celebrated today.

In the early years of Catholic Ugbrooke, there are no records of how many local catholic people might have attended, or indeed if there were any at all. Neither is there any record of the names of any of the Priests to the new mission.

The Jesuits had been the main support of Catholics in the Devonshire District, known as the "Residence of St. Stanislaus" founded by Father Richard Blount, S.J. in the early 17th century. We know there were as many as six or eight Jesuits in the Residence in the first half of the 17th century, but these were reduced to three or four later on. The first priest we know by name was a Fr. Thomas Risdon (who sometimes went under the alias of Blewett) who was at Ugbrooke in 1701.

Priests of religious orders other than Jesuits were appointed chaplains at St. Cyprian's. Fr James Price a Benedictine in 1757 and James Frost, a Fransiscan in 1858. The best known was Fr. James Dominic Darbyshire, a Dominican. There is a register kept personally by Fr. Darbyshire, as he had already served on a number of missions. He Came to Ugbrooke in 1736 and stayed for the greater part of his life, dying there in 1757.

So, the 18th century came to an end and, with it, much of the harshness of the penal laws with the passing of the relief acts of 1780 and 1791.

"Joseph Reeves of Ugbrooke a Catholik Priest" was the first to take the oath of Allegiance to the King on 20th July 1791; and St. Cyprians was one of the first Catholic Chapels in Devon to be registered for worship.

The Catholic Vicar Apostolic of the Western district, Bishop Bernard Collingridge. O.F.M., reported to the propaganda of Rome in 1813 that there were 100 souls at Ugbrooke. One of the French Emigré priests, a Fr. Felix Vauquelin lived at Ugbrooke.

In 1840 Bishop Peter Baines O.S.B., gave the number as 330 with 165 communicants; William Cotham S.J, was the priest.

The official Religious Census of 1851, commissioned by the government, gives the attendance at "Ugbrooke Chapel" as 151 in the morning and 85 in the afternoon; Charles Lomax S.J. was the priest.

One of the duties of the Chaplains of Ugbrooke, as it was in all the old Catholic missions, was to teach the children of the family and also the children in the neighbourhood.

About a quarter of a mile from the Chapel is "Biddlecombe" which was a small Catholic School, records show that in 1824 there was a single mixed class of 30 children; although it had probably been in existence for many years prior to then. At the turn of the century Teresa Higginson, whose cause for canonisation has been introduced, was the teacher, ending her days there. The school was part of the mission for well over 100 years, closing in 1964 when the long serving headmistress Miss Hart finally retired.

(She is commemorated at the entrance to the Chapel).

In the early days of the Diocese there was no Cathedral or indeed a Church of any size in which there could be held large gatherings. The Bishop was therefore happy to accept the invitation of Lord Clifford to hold important meetings at Ugbrooke. On the 14th, 15th, and 16th of February 1854, the First Synod of the Plymouth Diocese was held at Ugbrooke.

It was an important meeting ,setting up the organisation of the infant diocese.
**(There is a plaque on the sanctuary wall of the Chapel to mark the event)*

The priests at Ugbrooke continued to serve the small communities of Catholics in the neighbourhood. In Teignmouth in the late 18th century, one of the emigré priests I'Abbe Prêre, had said Mass in the town. In 1884 the Rev. Charles Lomax said Mass in a room at the "Jolly Sailor" Inn in West Teignmouth.

Lewis, the 9th Lord Clifford was deeply involved in bringing back the Benedictines to the medieval Buckfast Abbey. He was one of the main benefactors of the Abbey and chairman of the committee that planned the restoration of the Abbey on the actual pre-Reformation foundations. He has been called "the quasi-founder of the restored Abbey"

The family connection with the Abbey remains as firm today, and Abbot, David Charlesworth celebrated Sunday Mass at St. Cyprian's for most of 1999



When the redemptorist Sisters left Chudleigh in 1990 Fr. Kenneth Levers, whose health was not good, was unable to continue his work of serving the small parish of Chudleigh and Ugbrooke and after a short time he had to retire. Since then many unsuccessful attempts had been made to find a priest to live in the area and look after the Chapel and provide Pastoral care.

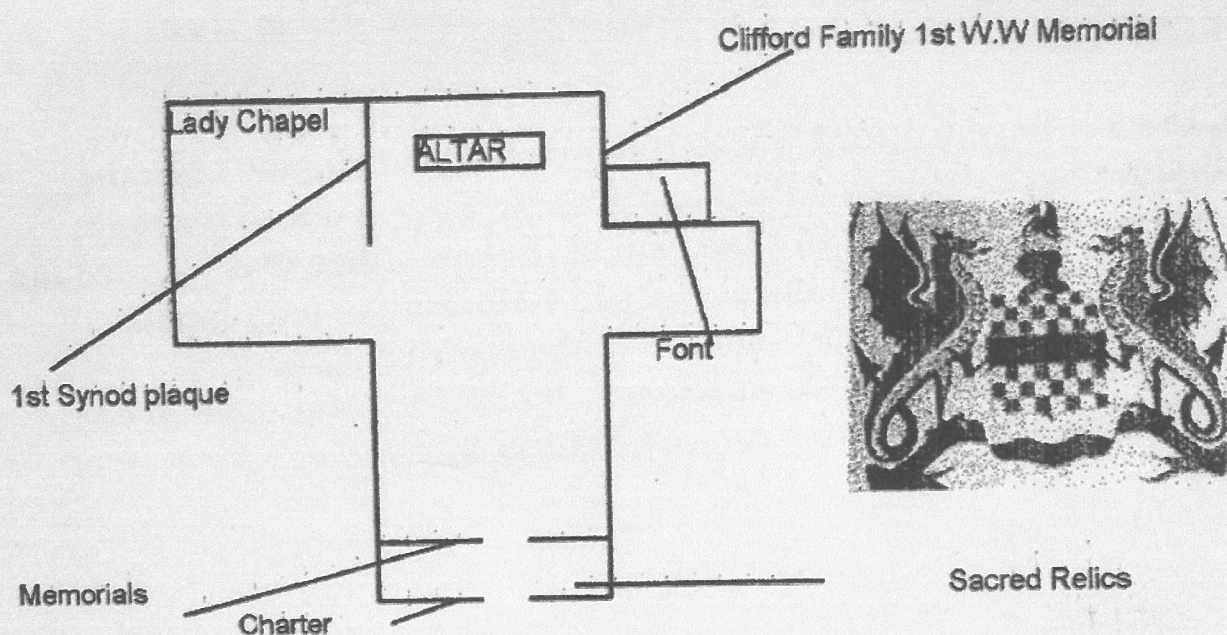
Thankfully the Lord answered the prayers of the small but enthusiastic band of worshipers, and the day was saved by the kindness of Buckfast Abbey.

Abbot David used to drive over to celebrate the 9am Mass, and be back at the Abbey in time for the Monastic Conventual Mass. We are deeply grateful for his commitment to ensure the continuance of Mass at St Cyprian's.

We then started the year 2000 with a new priest, Mgr. Adrian Toffolo, who left us in 2003 to go to Barnstaple. We have now welcomed to Ugbrooke Monsignor George Hay, who ministers to us and our neighbouring parish, Bovey Tracey.

So we continue today, where a growing and regular congregation look upon St. Cyprian's with much love and a sense of belonging. This is in no small way due to the warm welcome extended by Lord and Lady Clifford, which makes St. Cyprian's a Family Chapel in every sense of the word.

The present Chapel was executed to a design by Robert Adam in 1760, the Italiante Lady Chapel was added by the 8th Lord Clifford in Victorian times. (Join us for Sunday Mass at 9am)



The Religious Sisters of Chudleigh

Chudleigh has also been a place to welcome Convents of Religious Sisters. In 1887 the Bridgettines moved to a Convent on the Old Exeter Road from their temporary home at Spetisbury in Dorset. They are the only continuous English religious family from pre-Reformation days still in existence. They had led a nomadic existence on the continent until they settled down in Lisbon.

Returning home to England, to Spetisbury in 1861, they moved on to Chudleigh in 1887 and finally to Marley Head near South Brent, where they still are today.

Their place in Chudleigh was taken by the Redemptorist Sisters in 1925, but they have now moved on to Manchester since 1990.

There was also a Convent of Ursuline Sisters who were expelled from France - from Carhaix in Brittany - and settled in 1907 at Oaklands in Chudleigh, setting up a small boarding school. They were able to return to France, so their Convent closed in 1922.

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