

**Address by Very Revd Philip Need, Dean of Bocking, following the Friends of Essex Churches Trust AGM – 14 May 2009**

On behalf of myself and my colleague, Tristan Chapman and the team here at St Mary's, it is indeed a great pleasure to welcome you all to Bocking this afternoon. When I was invited to address this meeting and talk about St Mary's Church, I think my response was something like "try and stop me". This Church is a buildignn which has become increasingly important to me over the years and I hope to be able to share something of my enthusiasm with you this afternoon. However a lot has already been said today about tea, I can promise you there is a lovely tea waiting for you in the Church hall after this meeting and if I suddenly look up and find the Church empty I shall know that I have gone on rather too long.

It is said that the first Saxon lord to whom the inhabitants of Bocking owed their allegiance was a Viking by the name of Bocca – so it is usually assumed that the name of the village is derived from his name "Bocking" is the place of "Bocca's people" and it is recalled that he came to these shores during the sixth century, from across the north sea and established his family settlement here. Bocca was not a Christian and is reputed to have worshipped the sun, moon and stars along with the gods of storm and thunder. He must have established a good relationship with his gods because even as recently as a week last Monday, the day of our May Fayre, the gods of sun, storm and thunder were still at work here in this village.

So much for folk lore. It was not until the late tenth century that records show that the lord who ruled the area was Aetheric Worthfulman, whose residence was at Bocking Hall - the fine building which stands next to this Church today is the successor to the home which he enjoyed a millennium ago. Now he was a devout Christian and after winning a few battlers which made his rather pleased with God, he gave the bulk of his wealth to the Archbishop of Canterbury to make provision for a Church to be built here. He reserved a life interest in some of his money to one of his friends Leofwine and if you look at the great Window at the back of me, you will see in the top right hand corner Aetheric and Leofwine depicted by the Victorians, Leofwine is in red, looking very manly with a beard and particularly hairy legs. It took a researcher in the last century, long after that window was installed to discover, to our amusement and embarrassment, that Leofwyne was, in fact, Aetheric's wife.

So it is reckoned that it was in the year 995 land was given by Aeltheric of Bocking in order that a church may be built on this site and by the Year 1006 the first Church was dedicated here and we pray regularly in thanksgiving for the generosity of our benefactors and all whose heritage has enabled us to witness here to Christ for over a thousand years Over the years other Christian Lords bequeathed their lands to the Archbishops of Canterbury and this resulted in a number of parishes coming directly under his jurisdiction and being known as the "Archbishop's Peculiar" – there are just six such left today and as Bocking is the oldest established, I reckon I am able to count myself to be the most peculiar clergyman in the Church of England. Certainly in those days Bocking was considered to be an important and thriving weaving town. Because of the poor state of the highways, and the threat of marauding highwaymen, travel was quite perilous and Archbishops could not travel as freely as they do today – so the Primate appointed the incumbent of Bocking as his Dean and representative or Commissary - he was given powers similar to an Archdeacon today and was

empowered to hold courts for trying ecclesiastical and moral offences and to grant probate of wills.

It was in the Year 1232 that Peter de Wakering took office as the first recorded Dean of Bocking and became responsible for the ten local parishes in the Archbishop's Peculiar. Six in what we now call Essex and four in what is now Suffolk. One of which is St Mary's Hadleigh where, interestingly enough to this day the Rector is also known as The Dean of Bocking. It should be noted that in those early days few people other than the wealthy had the benefit of education. To be able to read and write was considered a privilege. The clergy also had to be fluent in Latin which allowed them to administer the law (and indeed much of the Church service and its legal terminology was written in Latin). So the priest at Bocking had a great deal of work to do on behalf of Lambeth Palace and eventually it became one of the most prestigious livings in the land and its Dean one of the wealthiest clergymen. I suspect that the present Archbishop of Canterbury wishes that all he had to worry about was the possibility of being attacked by a highwayman on his way to Essex

In the Year 1362 John Doreward founded a Chantry in Bocking generously providing support for the Church and the work of education. His son later endowed the Bocking Almshouse. The Dorewards were an important family in Bocking for many generations and the second John Doreward was twice speaker of the House of Commons in the early fifteenth century. His remains are buried at the top of the South aisle alongside his second wife Isabella. And Dorewards Hall is an important house in the Village to this day. In the Year 1596 Queen Elizabeth the First granted the Seal to the Deanery of Bocking incorporating the plain cross of the Christ Church Shield. Of this there has been no trace for many centuries but later the Church was presented with its own coat of arms superseding the original and being "argent, a cross rouge between four dolphins proper". An armorial which the Dean of Bocking is entitled to use to this day.

The original wooden Church that Aetheric and Leofwine endowed was replaced shortly after the Norman conquest by a church constructed from stone and rubble of which only tiny parts remain. The Church as we see it now is the product of changes and developments over many generations. There is 13<sup>th</sup> century ironwork on the south doors and it is reckoned that the south aisle was also added in the thirteenth century with the east wall of the chancel coming along in about 1340. In 1381 William Courtney became Archbishop of Canterbury and at once instituted a scheme for enlarging this Church. He had previously been Bishop of London and had a country manor in Chapel Hill in Braintree and had thus always taken an interest in this Parish.

Towards the end of the fourteenth century the north and south aisles were rebuilt and chapels added to their ends. The one on the south, now partly occupied by the organ, is dedicated to St Catherine – you will see the symbol of the Catherine wheel in the embroidery on the front of the altar and the north chapel, the site of the first school room in Bocking, is dedicated to St Nicholas, the patron Saint of children. The work of education continued apace and records tell; that in 1548 two priests were in post to assist the Dean, namely running schools and teaching the boys and girls of the village to read and write. Part of the Doreward endowment provided for a Chantry priest, in other words a curate, whose contract obliged him to dwell in the parish continuously and not absent himself from the Church for more than thirty days in any one year and only, then for the proper causes, of visiting his friends, obtaining medicine, defending the rights of the Church and, last but not least, going on pilgrimage. He was to hold no other post,

receive no other stipend from any other source and was to assist the Dean on Sundays and Holy days. The Dean's interests were guarded by the provisions that the Chaplain must hand over any offerings collected when he was on duty. At the same time the assistant priest was forbidden under pain of dismissal, to frequent taverns or other suspicious places where scandal might arise and not to be too familiar with disreputable or suspicious people or indulge in other unseemly conduct – present curate of Bocking please note!

About the year 1415 the two lower stages of the tower were built in a rich and costly manner, the beauty and splendour of which can be best appreciated by standing outside the west door. The west face of the church is built entirely in freestone, an expensive material because of the long distances it had to be transported on the backs of mules from Barnack, near Stamford, interestingly another of the Archbishop's "Peculiar" Parishes. Then in 1450 extensive work of reconstruction was undertaken and the whole church was heightened and lightened and greatly beautified, as we see it today. The old Norman arcades were removed and rebuilt on their present beautiful lines making what has been called "an anthem in stone", as this Church has been described. New taller windows were installed in both aisles and the tower completed. The money for these works was raised by general subscription, the greater part being given by the clothiers of the town who were to go on to make great fortunes in the textile industry. Deans of Bocking over the centuries continued to serve the parish well and have been a colourful collection of clerics – another tradition which we hope continues to the present day. In the Year 1642 John Gauden became Dean of Bocking, and was also Chaplain to King Charles 1<sup>st</sup> at the time of his execution. In 1674 Nathaniel Sterry became Dean of Bocking and welcomed to the Deanery his friend John Bunyan, writer of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Bunyan made many visits to Bocking, including after his release from Bedford Gaol. He stayed at the Deanery and also at a house in Church Lane. A school today bears his name. The "John Bunyan School" serves many children in the Bocking area, across this parish and the parish of St Peter's carved from St Mary's in 1987. In the Year 1808 the exiled French King Louis 18<sup>th</sup>, living nearby at Gosfield Hall, was entertained by Dean Charles Murray-Aynsley at Bocking Deanery, all the parish taking part in the fun and celebrations. A job was found for everyone in the village so that they could share in the royal celebration. On the day in question it snowed heavily, so some people had the honour of clearing the snow for the King's procession. In more recent times Gosfield Hall, now used for corporate entertainment, was the venue for one of our large fund-raising activities when we launched our restoration appeal in 1998, so the present Dean at least felt he had got his own back and (almost) been back to dinner with the King. Indeed much eating and drinking takes place in this Church as a way of raising funds and celebrating fellowship together. When we considered a modern window to depict the success of our Restoration project it was suggested that it should depict a bottle of red wine, as this was how much of the funding had been raised. But more about our funding and our windows in a moment.

Also in the Year 1808 Christopher Wordsworth, younger brother of the poet William came to occupy the Deanery with his large family, earning the respect of the people of Bocking with his simple tastes, high principles and dedication to hard work His mother, Priscilla, is buried outside the Church under the east window. It was Christopher's son, also Christopher, who was born in the Old Deanery and who became a Bishop, who wrote many of the hymns which appear in our Hymns books under his name and which are still popular today.

In the Year 1845 Henry Carrington was appointed Dean of Bocking. He was 31 and had only one lung. He came here because it was a quiet living and he was not expected to survive very long. In fact he became the longest serving Dean on record dying in 1906 at the age of 91. His wife ran the parish, appointed the curates and signed her husband's correspondence. It was on his watch that a certain incident occurred in the Church. Records tell us that it was on Sunday December 13<sup>th</sup> 1896 during morning service that a portion of the roof of the nave suddenly began to collapse, much to the alarm of the parishioners who rushed outside as quickly as they could "*without finishing the hymn*". The Diocesan Surveyor was called in and his genius saved this Church for posterity. Steel joists were added to the old timbers to support the roof and the total cost of the work was £741 in old money. Dean Carrington, let me tell you, was away in Italy at the time, as he frequently was. When he heard of the near calamity he immediately sent a cheque for £100.

In the Year 1906 Dean Brownrigg arrived in Bocking in time to celebrate the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Church. During his stay many improvements were made to the Church including the installation of electric lighting, new gates at the entrance and choir stalls, reredos and chancel screen. The War Memorial was also built in the Chapel at the back of the Church which now bears his name. This area was re-ordered in 2005 in order to provide space for our with children, to allow a place for refreshments, displays and other meetings. We named it after his to commemorate the work he had done and because there was little else which remembered him in the parish although I am glad to say that now, one of the new roads across from the Church on the old Courtauld factory is rightly called Dean Brownrigg Close.

That factory had closed its doors in 1981 after serving the parish for over 180 years, the Courtauld family providing employment, security, housing and benevolence to the village for many generations. The Church, fortunately and gratefully became the custodians of the old workman's hall, or canteen and it became St Mary's Church Hall where you will shortly be invited to tea. Recent renovations to the entrance hall have provided us with a small meeting room which we are to call "the Courtauld Room" in tribute to the link between Church and factory and the Courtauld family over many generations and remembering their generosity to this building at many points in its recent history. One such family member was August or Augustine Courtauld the explorer, navigator, mountaineer, philanthropist, and public servant who spent six weeks alone on the ice cap and who died just fifty years ago in March 1958 The Courtauld Bell (one of ten splendid bells which ring out regularly from this Church) was dedicated in his honour in 1973 and the Courtauld Trust has been generous to the fabric of this Church for many years. We were delighted to host a service in commemoration of August on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death and were thrilled that it was attended by two hundred and fifty people amongst whom were many people who had known him personally and all six of his children who took part in the service.

In the late 1980's under my immediate predecessor Fr Alistair Haig an appeal was launched to raise funds for necessary repairs to the fabric of the Church. A certain amount of money was raised and some work done to the nave roof and the tower. I had the privilege of being appointed Dean of Bocking in 1996 and two years later we launched the final Phase of the Restoration Appeal which we estimated would need £300.000. In fact over a fourteen year period the sum raised and spent was closer to half a million and some part of the Church was shrouded in scaffolding at some stage for

many years, much to the annoyance of that wonderful breed of ladies called "The Brides' Mother".

Since 1998 work has been completed on the roofs of the north and south aisles and chapels. No longer do you have to bring an umbrella when you come to a Christmas Carol Service. We have repaired the building itself, the Maysent Tomb outside the Church just beyond the South Chapel and restored many of the fine stained glass windows. A great deal of fund-raising was done by parishioners, Church goers and benefactors at St Mary's and projects to bring in money included the minting of a Millennium Coin, a Benefactors' Book, a challenge to make a trail of coins from the Church gate to the door, a balloon race, summer lunches, winter lunches, autumn lunches and spring lunches. A jazz party, in the rain, an evening soiree with food and wine, in the rain, and many other concerts, drinks parties and discos. The highlight, in one sense, was a Chinese luncheon and auction which, during the course of one Sunday afternoon, raised the splendid sum of twelve thousand pounds. Its not what you know, its who you know, and by Monday morning that week, I don't think we know very much at all. But as well as fundraising we were grateful to be considered worthy of support by such bodies as yourselves, the Friends of Essex Churches, who made a considerable number of generous contributions over the years as the work went on. English Heritage supported us with a grant from the Millennium Lottery Fund as did the Essex Heritage Trust and the Essex Environment Trust. Other local bodies and trusts also made many small but significant contributions. During this time we had also stripped out and re-built the Church organ which you see on your right. Built in 1902 by Norman and Beard it was a fine instrument but in much need of urgent attention. It happened, in a way co-incidentally, that all this work was finished and the scaffolding finally went away in the early part of 2006, we realised that November 2006 would be a good time to celebrate and give thanks as it was on November 25<sup>th</sup> one thousand and six that the first Church here was dedicated to the glory of God. So we had our own Millennium celebrations, we confused everyone else, of course, who simply thought that Bocking was about six years behind the times! But a thousand years to the day we gave thanks to God with a great service in this Church celebrating the fact that Christian worship has been offered on this site for one thousand years and that we had completed and paid for a major programme of restoration and repair.

To mark this amazing achievement we had decided, as I said, to install a commemorative window. But costs and the ability to decide what kind of modern image would work here meant that we had put this on the back burner. Then one of our discovered the existence, in London of a kind of hospital for poorly stained glass windows. They are taken in when Churches are demolished or bombed etc and we could have some of it to use here. So our next project was to work some available glass into a suitable window for St Mary's to mark our history and recent achievements. The result is here on my right and was dedicated on Sunday May 4<sup>th</sup> 2008. Three central panels, depicting the *Salvator Mundi*, Christ the Saviour of the World, flanked by St Peter and John date from about 1848 and were originally placed in St John's Hallen, Bristol. They were saved by the London Stained Glass Repository and worked into a special design for St Mary's Bocking by the Lincolnshire Stained Glass Studio. Under the central figures are the instruments of the passion alongside the Alpha and the Omega. The background and borders pick up the design and colouring of other windows in the Church not least those about the Choir stalls to the left of the High Altar. Other windows of note include the two Nativity Windows in the South aisle over here on my left, the Transfiguration window upstairs in the Bell ringing Chamber and opened up for view in

1996 by the installation of the glazed oak screen, a gift from the Friends of St Marys. In the sanctuary are highly coloured windows depicting, above the choir stalls on the right, women from the Bible and at the side of the altar a series of eight Old Testament Prophets and Kings surrounding the Lord Jesus Christ. All these windows, along with those in the south chapel and Brownrigg Chapel were all extensively cleaned and repaired in 2005/6. The other window which repays investigation is in the north chapel, the Lazarus window, depicting not only the Lord Jesus calling the dead man from his tomb and the started faces of the sisters Mary and Martha, but, also, we are told, the interested and concerned faces of local people at the time of its installation. Next tom it is our newest window over the strangely shaped north door. The central lozenge depicts the Crucifixion flanked two other traditional Crosses and even members of St Mary's congregation have not seen it yet as it was installed yesterday. So you are at the cutting edge of the story of the history of this Church.

The central wooden screen behind be with its beautiful rood figures, along with the reredos at the back of the altar are all by Sir Ninian Comper who installed these about the time of the first world war. He is also responsible for the fine Majesta, or figure of Christ in glory, which you can see as you stand up and turn round to leave the Church. High above the bell chamber screen, this fantastic image was Comper's last piece of work in England before his death. It arrived here in Bocking Church in 1955.

So what of the Church today? It is very firmly a living Church with an interesting past. It is not a museum. Open for services and worship most days of the week this Church also hosts a great number of concerts, school assemblies and other visitors. Our Sunday congregation is between 120 and 150 each week and we have an increasing wedding ministry to and beyond the area. Last year saw 46 weddings take place in St Mary's. This year expects to see 62. Our vision statement is that we believe our Church is the spiritual and social focal point for the Parish. We aim to build up the life of the Community by using our resources and opportunities to the full. We don't make people jump over hurdles or through hoops. All are welcome here whatever their story or their circumstances. A local priest made a joke about me some years ago. "Philip says 'the answer's yes, what's the question?'" Well I wouldn't mind that on my tombstone and it's the way we have engaged people from far and wide with the story of this Church today. To paraphrase the words which hang on the wall in the Chapel at the Diocesan House of Retreat at Pleshey our prayer, as we seek to welcome others, build up the Church and go forward into the future is:

Father fill our Church with your Holy Spirit:

Here may the strong renew their strength and seek for their lives a noble consecration;

Here may the poor find riches; and the friendless, friendship;

Here may the tempted find power, the sorrowing comfort  
and the bereaved the truth that death has no dominion;

Here may the fearful find a new courage, and the doubtful find faith and hope;

Here may all be drawn to your love and may we go out:

With our doubts resolved,

Our faith renewed,

Our fears at rest,

Our courage high,

Our purpose firm,

And our hearts aflame with love.

We thank all who help us to address and realise this prayer and I thank you, the Friends of Essex Churches, for your help and support over the years and for listening to me today.