

Rev. Fr. Charles F. P. Collingridge

Founder of St. Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School
Puckeridge, Hertfordshire

A Brief Biography rev. 16

Charles Francis Peter Collingridge was born on 9 December 1844 at Godington, Oxfordshire. He was baptised by Fr. Alfred Maguire (his mother's cousin) on 19 December 1844 at Hethe, Oxfordshire (1).

His parents were William Aloysius and Louisa Josephine (nee Maguire) Collingridge. He was the eldest of five children. His siblings were Alfred, George, Mary and Arthur (1).

His family were descendants of Collingridge de Tourcey family (originally Colyngrype of Towersey and Thame) gentry of Buckinghamshire who maintained their ancestral Catholic religion during the years of oppression and were one of the more distinguished recusant families during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI and Elizabeth I (2).

Charles and his family were the last of the Collingridges to leave Godington. His father William began selling their farming equipment, crops and stock in 1850. The 1851 census has them in the Parish of St. Pancras living at 3 Fortess Terrace, Kentish Town, London staying with Louisa's sister – Martha Brownrigg (1).

Following the birth of Arthur in 1853, the family relocated to Paris living in Passy then Parc-de-Neuilly before settling in Fountenay-aux-Roses on the outskirts of Paris (2). It's likely that Charles and his siblings were educated in Paris. Probably at the Jesuits' Pension Petit in Vaugirard (4). Charles and his brother Alfred would have entered the school around 7 or 8 years of age (3).

Later he studied at St. Edmund's College, Ware, Herts and on 27 May 1862 aged 17 years he returned to Paris to study at the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice located on the Ile-de France, Paris. (5)

In a letter Fr. Charles wrote in April 1871, he was at the Pontificio Seminario Romano in Rome. It seems that he completed his studies at this Seminary before returning to Saint-Sulpice for Ordination in 1871 (1)

Alfred, who was studying for the priesthood in Rome, left the Seminary in 1866 and enlisted in the Papal Zouaves, followed a year later by brother George (2). During the attack on Rome by Garibaldi, Alfred was mortally wounded at the battle of Monte Libretti and died at Nerola Camp on 13 October 1867. He was buried at the Church in Nerola.

The Collingridge family returned to London living in Haverstock Road, Hampstead, as the German Army laid Siege to Paris in September 1870 (part of the Franco-Prussian War) (3). Following the Siege, which ended in January 1871, and the subsequent Communard Uprising (18 March to 28 May 1871) the family returned to their home at Fountenay-aux-Roses in 1872 (3).

After Ordination Fr. Charles, returned to St. Edmund's College, and was appointed Parish Priest at St. Edmund of Canterbury and the English Martyrs, Old Hall Green in 1871(6).

Fr. Charles instructed John Francis Bentley (1838-1902) to draw up plans for a Catholic Elementary School in Puckeridge. *'The drawings show a single gabled building, with two porches and a tiled bell turret. It comprises a single large school room, provided with a platform at one end. The materials for this pretty little school house are red brick and tiles and the cost was £520' (7).*

'In 1872 the primary school at Puckeridge was built to the design of Mr. Bentley, the architect of Westminster Cathedral. Some thirty years before, Mrs. Ward, wife of W. G. Ward of Oxford fame, had established the 'old school' at Old Hall Green to meet the needs of the many Irish settlers, as the marriage registers reveal. These go back to 1812. This 'old school' eventually burnt down and to replace it the present Puckeridge school was erected on a small scale, but is now considerably enlarged with playing fields accommodating some 140 children'(31)

The school is described as *'A simple red brick building with a tiled roof hipped at one end. Shingled bell turret placed diagonally on the ridge. Mullioned-and-transomed windows under the eaves. Extensive post-war flat roofed additions' (9).*

Following the Elementary Education Act 1870 there were sanctioned Voluntary Schools each of which had Trust Deeds to establish them and to guide Managers representing the Trust that owned the School (32). We believe that the Puckeridge R.C. School (the original name of St. Thomas') was thus established by the Archdiocese. There is no record of the Trust Deed in the Diocesan Archives but we do know that Managers were appointed to manage the School and from this we

may assume that there was a Trust Deed for the School. We do not know when Fr. Charles received authority from Archbishop Manning (10) , nor how the provision of the School was financed (possibly from the Catholic Education Crisis Fund 1870 - 1871 established by Lord Howard of Glossop and the 15th Duke of Norfolk (11) and administered by the Catholic Education Committee (32).

We have established that the school was built by George Handy and Sons of Buntingford (30).

The school was named the Puckeridge Roman Catholic School. In 1909 it was renamed St Thomas of Canterbury R. C. School.

The first Mistress in 1873 was Miss Mary Donohoe. Fr. Charles Collingridge - Parish Priest.

An extract from Kelly's Directory of 1874 states: Puckeridge: Erected in 1873. Here is a small Roman Catholic School - Miss Anastasia Richardson – Mistress

According to the 1882 entry in Kelly's Directory, Catholic mixed school erected in 1873 for 120 children. Average attendance 60. Miss Sarah Gerrard – Mistress. (8).

On 23 July 1873, 'The Fourth Provincial Council of Westminster' opened at St. Edmund's College. As Parish Priest, Fr. Charles attended. (12).

Fr. Charles left the Parish in 1874. He became Parish Priest at St. Joseph's Church, Epsom, where he stayed from 1875 until 1876 (13).

In 1876, he was appointed by the Cardinal Archbishop with full jurisdiction over the Roman Catholic Mission at Dunmow, Ongar and Bishop's Stortford (14). He was at St. Helen, Ongar (5). In December he presided over the re-dedication of the Church in Dunmow.

Having been specially ordained in Rome for the Australian Mission (15), he sailed from London on 28 February 1877 on 'St. George' arriving in Melbourne, Victoria on 29 May 1877, then transferred to the 'City of Melbourne' arriving in Sydney, New South Wales on 13 June 1877 (1&5). His brother Arthur (with his young family) arrived on the 10 November 1877. His brother George arrived on 24 January 1879 (3). His father died at Fontenay-aux-Roses, Nr. Paris on 17 November 1885. His mother Louisa and sister Mary arrived in Australia on 5 November 1886 (1).

He was appointed Assistant Priest at St. Mary's Cathedral. From March 1878 until January 1879. Fr. Charles became Roman Catholic Chaplain at Darlinghurst Gaol in Sydney (Salary £120 p.a.) (5).

It appears that there was some friction between Fr. Charles and the Colonial Secretary regarding the hearing of confession from Catholic prisoners which he heard on Saturday afternoon in preparation for Mass on Sunday. These had been curtailed as the prison authority wanted the prisoners to attend lectures instead (17). It seems that Fr. Charles was living at the Presbytery of St. Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, New South Wales.

In September 1879, Fr. Charles tried his vocation as a Jesuit at the Mission at Sevenhills in Clare Valley, South Australia, the birthplace of the Jesuits in Australia. He was one of the early Fathers and with other Priests set up a Novitiate and Scholasticate for young men entering the Jesuit Order (16).

He returned to St. Mary's Cathedral in 1880. He was on the staff of Archbishop Roger Vaughan, a Benedictine, from 1882 until 1885 (5). While he was with the Archbishop, Fr. Charles took up Benedictine affiliations (3).

He served as Chaplain to the Society of the Sacred Heart at their Convent at Claremont, Rose Bay, Sydney from 1882 to 1885 (5).

In 1885, Fr. Charles became Chaplain (Salary £200 p.a.) to the New South Wales Contingent who served in Sudan with the British forces. The Contingent took part in the Suakin Expedition and fought at Tamai and Takdul.

Having arrived in Sudan on 29 March they departed on 17 May following a British Government decision to abandon the Campaign. They arrived in Sydney on 19 June 1885. The Contingent was subsequently disbanded (18). In 1886, Fr Charles was awarded the Second Sudan War Medal (1885) with Clasp 'Suakin 1885' and the Khedive Star (1884-1886). As he was on his way to Bodalla, it was accepted on his behalf by his niece, Maud Collingridge (1).

Returning from Sudan, Fr. Charles was Assistant Priest at The Sacred Heart Church, Darlinghurst (5). Until March 1886, Fr. Charles was living at 408 Victoria Street, Sydney.

Fr. Charles took charge of the new church in Bodalla, New South Wales in March 1886 till April 1887 (1). He left Bodalla and joined the Marist Fathers at Villa Maria, Hunters Hill, Sydney, New South Wales.

In June 1888 he was in Lismore, New South Wales officiating on behalf of Bishop Doyle who was incapacitated.

From late 1888 until 3 July 1889 he was Pastor at Maclean, Clarence River, New South Wales acting on behalf of the Bishop of Grafton.

Until he returned to England, he was at St. Mary, Rocky Mouth in the Diocese of Grafton (5)

On 3 August 1889, Fr. Charles sailed on the 'Brittania' and returned to England (19). In 1890 his book 'The Civil Principality' was published by Hansebooks (20). Also published was his paper 'Temporal Princedom of the Vicar of Christ'.

In 1889, he was appointed Parish Priest at St. James the Less and St. Helen in Priory Street, Colchester (5). In December that year he gave a series of lectures titled 'Moses, Christ and the Decalogue' (22). In 1892 the Archbishop of Westminster made a Pastoral Visitation to the Parish (23). He left the Parish in 1892 (5).

In late 1892 he was at St. John's R. C. Industrial School in Shernhall Street, Walthamstow, as Chaplain (5). He officiated at a number of Baptisms at Our Lady and St. George Church, presumably during the absence of Fr. Thomas Walsh, Parish Priest (24).

In 1893 he became Chaplain at the Convent of The Dames de St. Maur, The Green, Southgate (5).

From 1894 to 1895 he was at Our Lady of the Martyrs, Dorchester where his is recorded as Parish Priest and on sick leave (5).

He was Chaplain to the Sisters of the Temple, Clifton Wood Convent, Bristol from 1895 to 1896 (5).

In 1896, he was appointed Chaplain to St. Charles School in Brentwood, Essex (25). In November that year, with other Priests, he said Mass for those souls buried at St. Helens cemetery, Halstead (26). He left in 1898 and was Assistant Priest at Holy Redeemer, Chelsea until 1899 (5).

In 1899 he became a Fellow of the Royal Colonial Institute (27). Also, in June that year he preached on three consecutive weekly occasions at the Catholic Church in

Tottenham, London. From 1899 until 1900 he was at Dames de St. Giles, Oxford on sick leave (5).

In 1900 he retired and became Chaplain to the Convent of Maria Reparatrice in Chiswick Lane, Chiswick, London (5).

The 1901 Census has him living as a boarder in the house of Richard and Harriet Butt at 53 Linden Gardens, Chiswick (5)

In 1906 he submitted to the 'Institut Catholique de Paris' a pamphlet entitled 'The Sovereignty of Christ and His Vicar' (5).

He died at 138 Chiswick High Road, London on 26 July 1907 (28). His name is recorded as Peter Charles on his death certificate. It seems that he preferred to be called Peter. The authorship of his several publications has him as Fr. C F Peter.

His Requiem Mass was celebrated by Fr. Gilbert Dolan OSB in the presence of Archbishop Bourne at the Convent Chapel on 30 July. He is buried at the Chiswick Old Cemetery, Corney Road, Chiswick. (29).

Sources.

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4. *Colleges in Controversy – The Jesuit Schools in France from Revival to Suppression 1815-1880' by John W. Padberg*
5. *Fr. Stewart Foster, Archivist Diocese of Brentwood.*
6. *David J. S. Kay President Emeritus and Archivist 'The Edmundian Association'.*
7. *'Westminster Cathedral and its Architect' Vol. 2 Page 521 Published in 1919. A Biography of John Francis Bentley written by his daughter*
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14. *'Roman Catholic Mission'. The Hertfordshire Mercury 25/11/1876 (from Newspapers by Ancestry)*
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17. *The Sydney Morning Herald - 26 /06/1878 (from National Library of Australia)*
18. *Wikipedia – New South Wales Contingent*
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23. *'Pastoral Visitation'. The Essex County Standard 3/09/1892 (from Newspapers by Ancestry)*
24. *Canon Niall Harrington, Parish Priest at Our Lady and St. George Walthamstow*
25. *Essex County Chronicle 10/04/1896 (from Newspapers by Ancestry)*
26. *Essex County Chronicle 27/11/1896 (from Newspapers by Ancestry)*
27. *British Australasian 9/11/1899. The British Newspaper Archive (from British Library and Find my Past)*
28. *General Register Office – Death Certificate*
29. *Obituary - The Tablet. Saturday 3/08/1907 (from the British Newspaper Archive)*
30. *Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies*
31. *Extract from 'The Edmundian' printed in 1911 and later that gathered by Canon Parsons in 1969*
32. *Catholic: Encyclopaedia :Schools*

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Some details are taken from cuttings in various Australian Newspapers.

Tony Walker
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