

Building and Planting – Anglo-Catholic links between Prestbury and Prinknash

By Roger Beacham (copyright)

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When in 1860 the Reverend John Edwards (afterwards Baghot De la Bere) succeeded his father as Vicar of Prestbury, near Cheltenham, he came to a typical village church which, though still bearing its medieval form, had been stripped of its ornaments and spoiled by galleries.

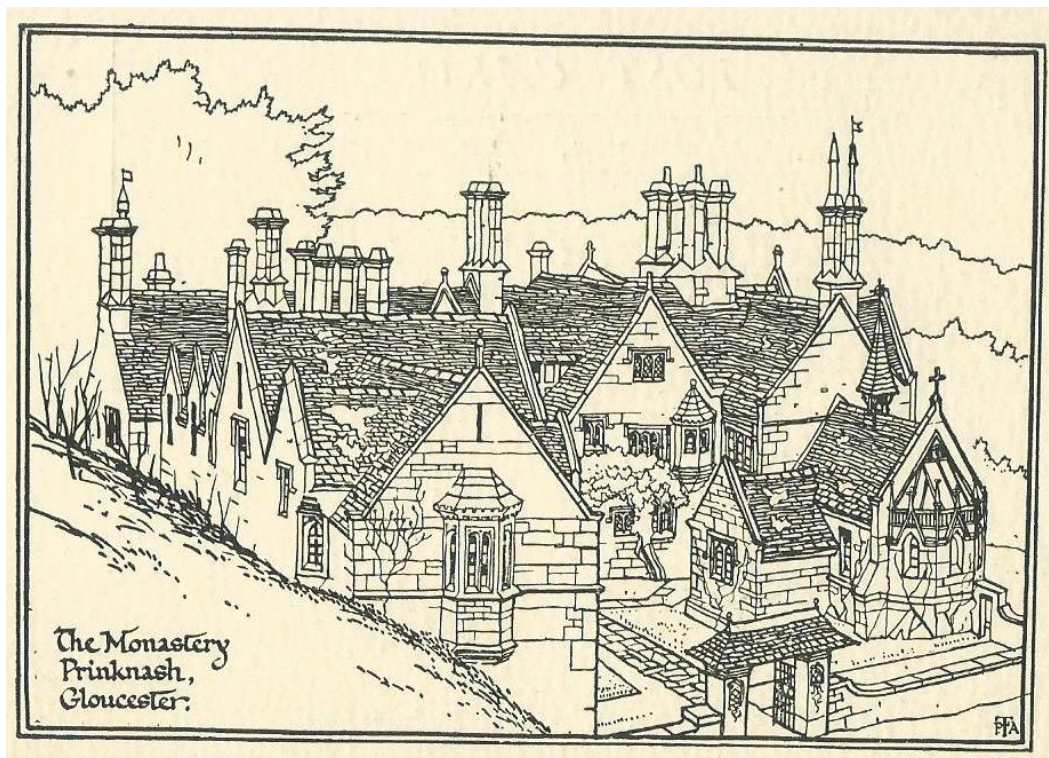
Father Edwards had been assistant curate of St Paul's, Knightsbridge, one of the first parishes in London to translate the principles of the Oxford Movement into practice. Edwards immediately made plans to restore the church at Prestbury to accord with the teaching of the Tractarians. The work proceeded in stages with the removal of the galleries, the extension of the aisles, the replacement of the east window, and the restoration of the chancel with a greatly enriched sanctuary and new high altar, the focus of the new vicar's teaching.

The work was completed in 1868 and the church re-opened on the Feast of the Transfiguration which was afterwards kept as the Dedication Festival. From that date Saint Mary's, Prestbury, became a noted centre of Anglo-Catholicism with vestments, incense, altar and processional candles and a daily celebration of the Eucharist.

Many of the leading Anglo-Catholic clergy preached and celebrated at Prestbury and Father Edwards played an active role in the Catholic Movement in the Church of England. He was

present at Newman's investiture as cardinal in 1879, and was among the more militant members of the English Church Union.

Another active member of the English Church Union was Thomas Dyer Edwardes, a layman who bought the ancient estate of Prinknash in 1888 and immediately began extensive alterations to the house and park. He employed as his architect John Coates Carter who was in partnership at Cardiff with a noted ecclesiastical architect, J. P. Seddon. However, it was not Coates Carter but F. W. Waller, who added an apsidal sanctuary to the chapel in 1890-91, taking the design from a chantry in the Lady Chapel of Gloucester Cathedral (i).

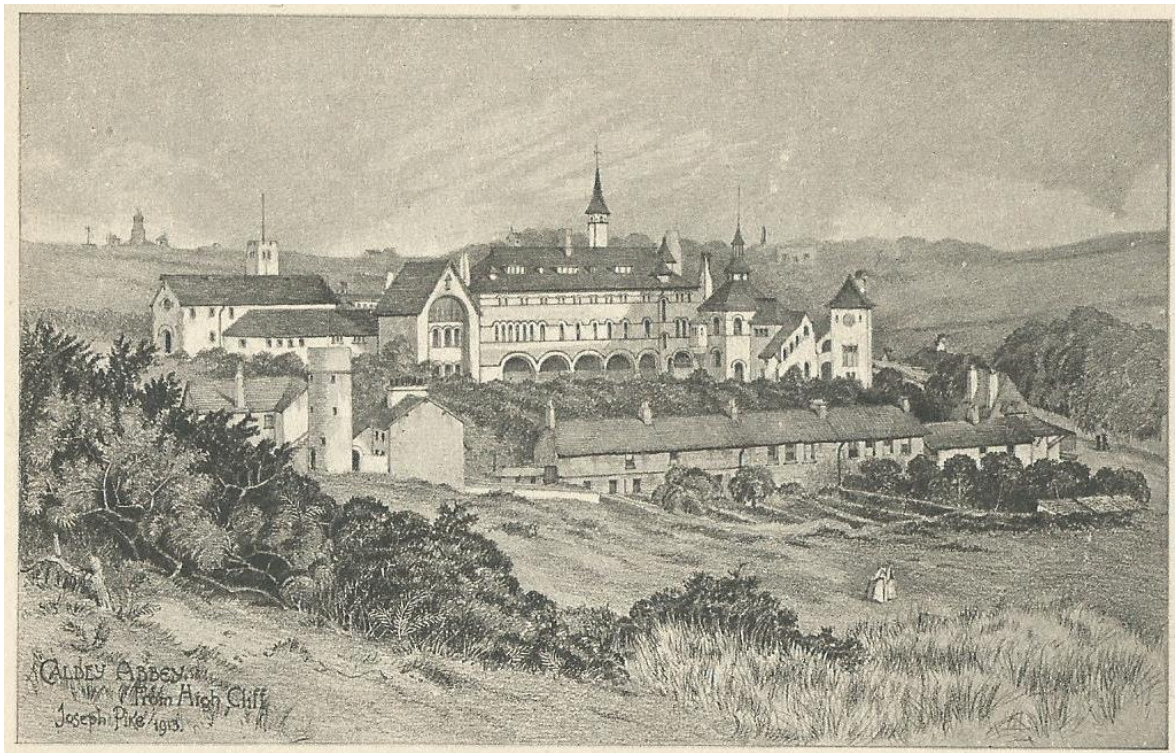


On August 10th 1889 the chapel had been re-dedicated and Dyer Edwardes' old friend, Father Dolling of the Winchester College Mission at Landport, Portsmouth, celebrated and preached a homily on the text "Behold I make all things new". Father De la Bere's successor, Father Gurney, and some of the Prestbury acolytes and choir were present. Prinknash, like Prestbury, was to become a centre of Anglo-Catholic activity.

Dyer Edwardes had first met the Reverend Robert Dolling when he had preached at the Anglican church in Nice. Dyer Edwardes later wrote that he was "at once captivated" by Dolling's "bright and then almost boyish personality" (ii). Dyer Edwardes visited the Landport Mission and the Mission clergy were afterwards regularly invited to Prinknash for rest and change. Dolling became one of Dyer Edwardes's closest friends and an honoured guest at Prinknash on numerous occasions. During his last illness his thoughts are said to have turned often to Prinknash and the peace and serenity of its house and park. After Dolling's death

Dyer Edwardes acted as chairman of the appeal to establish a convalescent home for working girls at Worthing in Dolling's memory.

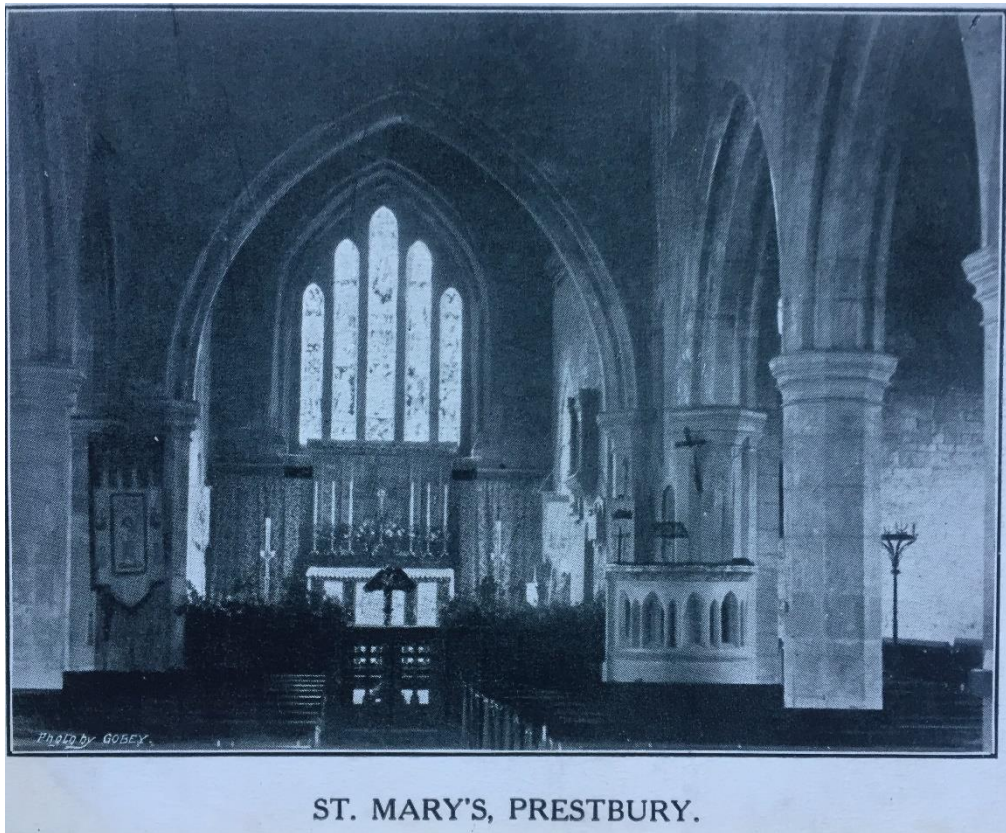
Among other leading Anglo-Catholics entertained at Prinknash was Abbot Aelred Carlyle of the Caldey Community in September 1910. When the Anglican Benedictines had returned to Caldey plans for a monastery had been drawn by one of the novices, Brother Jerome Hawes, but the need of greater experience was soon discovered. Abbot Aelred was introduced to John Coates Carter who soon became in the Abbot's words "not only our professional adviser, but a warm friend of the Community" (iii). While the architectural writer Bryan Little has described Coates Carter's abbey as being in the "Romantic Romanesque", Peter Anson in *Abbot Extraordinary* has described "the whole thing as exotic and eclectic and quite without parallel". Be that as it may, the abbey is surely unique in being built for Anglican Benedictines and now used by Roman Catholic Cistercians. Coates Carter's drawings for the abbey were exhibited at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition between the years 1907 and 1911.



Caldey Monastery

The Benedictines were supported by both the prayers and the alms of a number of Anglo-Catholics. At Prestbury, in common with a number of other churches, a collection was taken for Caldey on Saint Benedict's Day, and Prestbury was remembered regularly in the Community's prayers. Both the Vicar of Prestbury, the Reverend Henry Urling-Smith and the assistant curate, the Reverend Richard Sorby, sent gifts from their own purses. Father Sorby later became the Community's neighbour for in 1924 he became Rector of Cranham, and he was one of several Anglican clergymen to attend Dyer Edwardes' funeral at Prinknash.

Thomas Dyer Edwardes is commemorated by a simple plaque in Cranham Parish Church of which he had been a considerable benefactor.

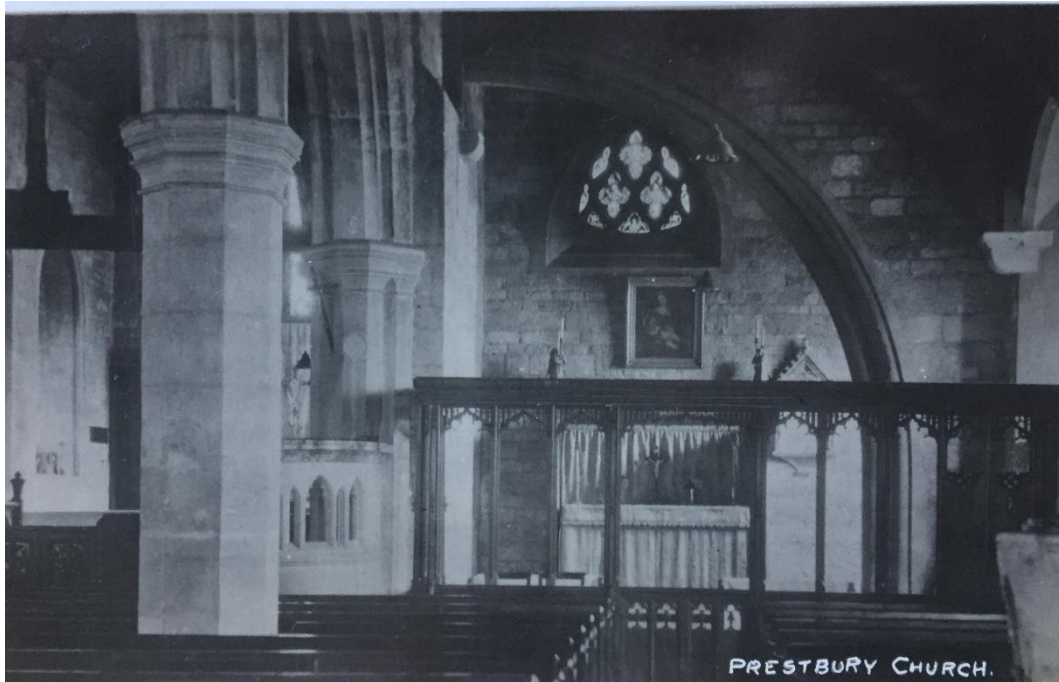


At Prestbury, though fully supported by his parishioners, the Reverend John Baghot De la Bere was harassed by Protestant extremists and prosecuted in the Court of Arches for ritualism. In 1884 he resigned the living to allow his father, the patron, to appoint a like-minded priest in his stead.

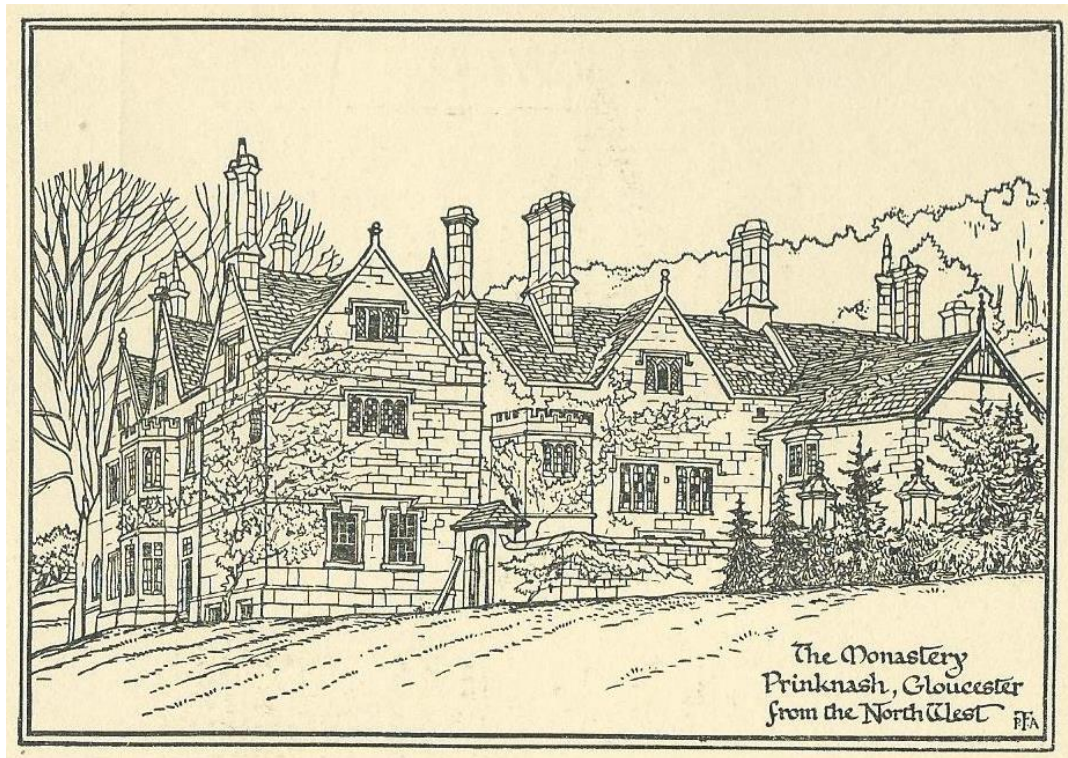
In 1919, to Prestbury's joy, Father Baghot De la Bere's son, also the Reverend John Baghot De la Bere, was appointed Vicar and in a less spectacular way he was to accomplish as much for Saint Mary's as did his father. Incense began to be used every Sunday instead of merely on high days, and Prestbury became "renowned as a model of what a country parish should be". A chapel was formed in the south aisle in 1922 including a confessional prie-dieu with screen.

The designer of the new chapel was John Coates Carter who had moved from Cardiff to Prestbury about 1908. In 1919 he designed the rood beam with its figures and the panelled screen below, part of a more grandiose scheme in memory of the Reverend Henry Urling-Smith which was never completed. Coates Carter's designs still survive in the parish chest. From 1925 the Blessed Sacrament has been reserved at Saint Mary's, and Coates Carter designed the elaborate Sacrament House or Tabernacle, together with a number of other furnishings in the church, including the pulpit. The church's present appearance owes much to his good taste. During these years he continued to design furnishings for Anglican churches in South Wales and elsewhere, and after the First World War it was his sad task to design a number of memorials

to the Fallen, of which that at Prestbury is a particularly beautiful example. From 1922 until his death in October 1927 Coates Carter served as churchwarden at Saint Mary's where there is a memorial in the chapel (now dedicated to the Good Shepherd) that he had designed. His architectural practice continues as Roiser, Whitestone and Bartosch of Cheltenham.



When in 1913 the Caldey Community was received into the Roman Catholic Church, Denys Prideaux, who had lived on the island as an oblate, formed a new Anglican Benedictine community at Pershore. Towards the end of 1922 Dyer Edwardes offered Prinknash to Dom Denys as a home for this community but it moved instead to its present home at Nashdom four years later. In 1923 Prinknash was offered to the Bishop of Gloucester rent free on an annual basis, first as a retreat house for the clergy or as the home for a community, and later as a residence for the Bishop. Regretfully, the Diocese declined the offer, and when in 1924 Dyer Edwardes was received into the Roman Church his offer of Prinknash to the Caldey Community came as an answer to their prayers.



Thomas Dyer Edwardes died at Naples on February 10th 1926. His body was brought back to Prinknash where a Requiem Mass was offered by Dom Wilfrid Upson. Members of both Communions, that into which he was born and that in which he died, attended the funeral. Dyer Edwardes died at a time when many were despondent at the seeming failure of the Malines Conversations. Can we not but believe that he rejoices at the continuing of the ARCIC talks and the new spirit of ecumenism?

Footnotes:

- (i) Chris Brooks in his revision of the Gloucestershire volumes of the "Buildings of England", gives F. W. Waller as architect, Pages 89-90. See also N. Kingsley "Country Houses of Gloucestershire" Vol One, 1st edition, Page 150 – "Waller enlarged chapel". 1913 Coates Carter made further alterations to the chapel (and afterwards). See "Country Life", 22nd September 1906, for reference to chantry, Gloucester Cathedral Lady Chapel.
- (ii) C. E. Osborne "The Life of Father Dolling" (Edward Arnold, London 1903).
- (iii) PAX 12/204 June 1907.