

## WALTER J. LAWRANCE: FIRST DEAN OF ST ALBANS

Walter John Lawrance was appointed as the first dean of St Albans in 1900, twenty-three years after the foundation of the diocese, and remained in office until his death in 1914. But his ministry in St Albans went back much further for he had been rector of the ancient Abbey church since 1868 and, additionally, archdeacon of St Albans since 1884, offices he retained when appointed dean.

### Early Life

A cutting from the *Illustrated Church News* of 15 April 1893, pasted in a scrapbook about Lawrance which is now in the Abbey archives, tells us that he was born at The Grove, Kentish Town in 1840 and baptised at St Pancras Church. He was the third son of Edward Lawrance a solicitor who became President of the Incorporated Law Society for 1870. Lawrance was educated at St Paul's School where he was described as quiet and studious, and a good speaker in the school Debating Society; he was captain of the school in 1858. He went on to Trinity College, Cambridge. Here too he distinguished himself in debate and was a frequent speaker at the Union. He received his BA in 1862, being placed third in the second class of the classical tripos, and his MA in 1865. Another cutting in the scrapbook from the issue of the *Herts Advertiser* recording Lawrance's death noted that he was originally intended for the law, which is consistent with his family background, but does not explain when or why he decided to enter the church.

The 'traditional' Church of England parson was an educated gentleman, meaning in effect that he had a university degree, generally from Oxford or Cambridge, which included a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. Such background had never been universal, and as the nineteenth century wore on the ordained ministry came to include more non-graduates and a wider social spread but Lawrance, entering the ministry mid-century, had all the traditional qualifications. Training of the modern variety was not essential or widespread. A few colleges for non-graduates had been founded earlier in the century, and when Lawrance graduated theological colleges for graduates were coming into being, Wells (1838-9), Chichester (1840) and Cuddesdon (1854) being the earliest. But they received very few students and Lawrance followed the long established custom of 'reading' with a tutor until he reached the age of twenty-three and could be ordained deacon. Lawrance read with the Master of the Temple, a church in which he was often invited to preach in later life.

Lawrance was ordained deacon in 1863 by Bishop Wigram of Rochester. St Albans was in the Rochester diocese at this time and Lawrance's first curacy was in the parish of St Paul's, Chatham where the rector was Sir John Caesar Hawkins. The following year Lawrance was ordained priest and for the next four years became curate to the Venerable Anthony Grant, who was vicar of Aylsford and archdeacon of St Albans with responsibility for the whole of Hertfordshire. During this period Lawrance's former rector, Sir John Hawkins became rector of St Albans Abbey Church following the death of the Revd. Dr. Henry Nicholson in 1866, but resigned the living in 1868. Bishop Claughton, the new bishop of Rochester, offered the living to Lawrance. Here he was to stay for the rest of his life. In 1871 Lawrance married Caroline Grant, the

archdeacon's second daughter. They had five children: two sons, Alban and Denis, and three daughters Doris, Gertrude and Iris.

### **Financial Matters**

As rector of the Abbey Church Lawrance had a small stipend and huge problems of finance. The Post Office Directory for 1874 gives the annual value of the Abbey living as £180, compared with St Michaels £300, St Peters £330, and St Stephens £514. This must have been the income from the endowment: there were evidently some other sources of income as a list of receipts in the Abbey archives give totals which vary slightly from year to year. In this the total receipts for 1874 were recorded as £276 to which would be added the Easter offering from the congregation which in 1874 amounted to £50. Still not riches! From this income Lawrance was ultimately responsible for raising the finance for the stipends of his curates. The Abbey church had one curate when Lawrance was appointed and a second was added in 1878. Eventually there were three. There were two or three national societies, such as the Additional Curates Society, which might help with the cost but their sources were limited. The Abbey had its own Curates Fund and Lawrance evidently hoped that the Abbey congregation would be able to raise the necessary sums. There was no set rate for a curate's stipend. In a sermon on behalf of the Fund, preached when he was archdeacon, Lawrance commented that in ideal conditions a rector would not be expected to pay £80 out of his own pocket or a Society asked to give £40 a year towards a curate's stipend.

### **The Abbey Restoration**

Lawrance was also faced with the need to raise huge sums for the restoration of the Abbey church. The church has the longest nave in Britain and its total length is exceeded only by Winchester cathedral: it was an expensive building to maintain. When Henry V111 dissolved the monastery of St Albans the buildings were sold to Sir Richard Lee who proceeded to pull them down. The Abbey church would also have been demolished if the inhabitants of the town had not bought it to be a parish church at a cost of £400. A pathway was cut between the shrine of St Alban and the Lady Chapel, the latter being sold for use as a school – successor to the monastic medieval school and ancestor of the present St Albans School.

The parishioners had been unable to maintain the fabric of their large church. William Bray, a topographer writing in 1777, related that a scheme was formed to pull it down and build a smaller church. Matters had begun to improve in 1818 when the church received a grant for repairs from a fund newly authorised by Parliament. The interior was re-ordered but in 1832 there was disaster when a section of masonry wall collapsed and fell through the south aisle roof. The cost of repairs was estimated at £14,000. A public subscription raised only about £4,000, of which £1,700 went on expenses.

Fortunately Henry Nicholson who became Rector in 1835 succeeded in arousing much interest in the Abbey. This coincided with discussions in the Anglican Church concerning the need for new dioceses to meet the problems of the increasing population, with St Albans being one of the places suggested as sites for cathedrals. The two strands of interest were brought together in 1856 when a public meeting

concerning the restoration of the Abbey was held in the Town Hall; the aims included a resolution 'to press upon the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and upon Her Majesty's Government, the pre-eminent claims of this venerable church' to be raised to cathedral status. The appeal raised over £4,000 and from 1860 the repairs began in earnest under the direction of the architect Sir George Gilbert Scott.

Nicholson had died suddenly in 1866 and Lawrance had become rector in 1868. Two years after his arrival the Abbey met with another crisis. This time it was found that the Norman tower was in imminent danger of collapsing. Recalling the event in an article in a local paper celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of Lawrance's arrival, the writer commented how Lawrance had acted promptly 'as he always did' and moved the services into the nave borrowing seats from the parishioners. The tower was quickly shored up.

Scott was able to save the tower and continued his programme of restoration. The hopes expressed in 1856 that the Abbey would become the cathedral church of a new diocese had not so far been realised and St Albans was still in the diocese of Rochester but the bishop Thomas Legh Claughton was determined to split up the unworkable combination of Hertfordshire and Essex with the remains of the original diocese of Rochester, and achieve the creation of a new diocese for the two counties. There had already been unsuccessful efforts by the authority known as the Ecclesiastical Commission to persuade Parliament set up a new diocese in this area. Lack of money was a major problem but there were strong hopes that Clayton's efforts would succeed and that the Abbey would become its cathedral so fully justifying the restoration programme. In 1871 an Abbey Reparations Committee was set up and a new appeal was made for funds. Letters to Lawrance in 1871 show that he had written personally to people who might be able to contribute generously to the Restoration Fund.

### **The Abbey Path Problem**

Lawrance was particularly anxious that the new cathedral would have as its Lady Chapel the one originally attached to the monastic church, which had been used as a school since the Reformation and had been separated from the main building by the public pathway. When the school moved out into the Abbey Gateway in 1871 Lawrance considered a move to close the pathway. In 1874 the Town Council agreed to a temporary closure while the Lady Chapel was being restored but this aroused the fury of the townspeople. In later years Lawrance was a highly popular figure but on this occasion he was seen as a villain! The following poem appeared in a local paper and is preserved in the scrapbook of the Rev. Alfred Gray:

### **OUR RIGHT OF WAY**

Up! Townsfolk to the rescue!  
Our right of way is closed,  
And when it may be opened,  
Ah, that there's no one knows.

Unless you take the matter up,  
And that without delay,  
Henceforth at Priestlings' bidding,  
You must go some other way.

Up! Townsmen to the rescue!  
For their underhanded tricks  
Shall not avail them better  
Than the Vicar of Richmond's bricks.

Shall we give up this Right-of-Way  
Our fathers for us won?  
For that excuse - "tis dangerous now",  
Perhaps so their game's begun.

For like the Chimes, they're not restored,  
But Shrines and things to be abhorred;  
And shall we now give up this way,  
For mariolatry to play?

No, not for that, nor aught beside!  
Let every legal means be tried;  
Then, Townsmen, should not this avail,  
Down with the hoarding and bricks like hail!

The *Herts Advertiser* describes the attack, perhaps with some exaggeration, as that of 'a mob, exhibiting a strong determination to overcome all obstacles in effecting a thoroughfare right through' which broke down the barriers.

Lawrance knew when he was beaten and endeavoured to restore good relations. The following announcement, preserved in the scrapbook, appeared in a local paper:  
'We have much pleasure in complying with a request from the Rector to give publicity to the following:-

"The Rector and Churchwardens of the Abbey Parish desire to inform all whom it may concern that they have decided to reserve a free passage for the public through the Abbey, protected as far as possible, during the repairs of the Ante Chapel and Lady Chapel.

"...[T]wo distinguished counsel... have both advised that it is in their power to close the path entirely for a time, if it be declared by a competent authority to be necessary for repairs....

"Notwithstanding, the Rector and Churchwardens are willing to waive this right...in order if possible, to allay the hostile feeling that has sprung up, which is so detrimental to the best interests of the town.

"But, in making this concession, they regret to state, that it will be impossible to carry on the repairs as at first intended, and that a very important section of the works must be left unfinished.

"St Alban's, June 10th, 1874."

The only satisfactory solution to the immediate problem would be to divert the path but the Abbey did not own the land that would be involved and the impasse continued. Then in 1876 the land, part of a garden, came up for auction. A public appeal was made for funds, and land for a path and its surroundings was purchased. The Lady Chapel could now be reunited with the rest of the Abbey building as it became a cathedral, the Act giving authority to create the diocese having been passed in 1875 and the diocese being established in 1877.

### **Lawrance and Beckett**

The restoration of the Abbey was far from complete and the south wall of the nave was in a very dangerous state. Scott repaired it and was engaged in further restoration when he died suddenly in March 1878. His place was taken by Sir Edmund Beckett, better known by his later title of Lord Grimthorpe. There appears to be some uncertainty about the method of his appointment. Eileen Roberts in *The Hill of the Martyr* notes that he claimed to have been invited to take over by the Town Committee dealing with the restoration.

Beckett had designed the new rectory that had been completed for Lawrance in 1879 at the bishop's request. A cutting in the scrapbook of John Watkins notes that the bishop had expressed concern that the accommodation in what is now known as the Old Rectory was not large enough to give Lawrance space for his own meditation and study or to provide the hospitality now necessarily devolved on him. Beckett had offered to meet the costs if he was allowed to design the rectory. There was a little difficulty over a request for a laundry room to be added which Beckett rejected as too expensive but it does not seem to have created one of his angry outbursts. He observed that at his sister-in law's vicarage, with a family of twelve children, they managed the laundry in the kitchen and there would be plenty of room to do the ironing elsewhere. Beckett's design for the new rectory was not to everyone's liking: some years later when he offered to provide land to build a secondary residence for the bishop in St Albans, Lord Aldenham commented privately that his offer would be welcome provided he did not offer to pay for the building since he would then insist on doing the design!

As always, money for the Abbey restoration was short and in 1879 Beckett offered to meet all the costs provided he had a faculty allowing him complete freedom. He had already been involved in a storm over the details of rebuilding the roof of the nave: he had argued his views forcibly and got his own way despite considerable disagreement. Lawrance was not happy to see Beckett being given *carte blanche* although most members of the Restoration Committee accepted the idea. He expressed his doubts in a courteous letter to the bishop:

May I mention to express my earnest hope that your Lordship will pause a while before giving your consent to this?

I cannot but feel that there is the greatest objection to granting a Faculty to any individual *be he who he may* ... I should beg to have the opportunity of consulting with the Churchwardens on so momentous a proposal as this seems.

The bishop, mindful of the financial situation, replied that he believed that Beckett genuinely intended using the younger Scott as his architect. Lawrance then wrote to

Beckett to explain that there had been nothing personal about his objection and received a bombastic reply.

You need not imagine that I undertake this job for amusement. There is not much amusement in repairs. I should get much more out of building a new church somewhere else, and probably do more good. But I gradually learnt last summer that after all we have done 'the church is in danger' still, and that the West end is actually on the move now, and the Decorated pillars too, with the vaulting over them. I doubt if anybody yet knows how much will have to be done. If you like to take a 'solemn responsibility' of letting this continue, that is your look out. Like most cases of clerical and dissenting conscience it means a conscientious conviction that you ought to have your own way - and other people's money, as I told you and Davys once before. You will not get mine on those terms. Rather than have to fight every inch of ground as I have had for the last year and a half, and should again if I allow anybody else to have a veto, I will see the Abbey and you on and under the ground...

[B]esides your normal hastiness and bumptiousness and assumption that nobody knows anything as well as you (which I used only to laugh at) you have during the last year become so ostentatiously contradictory and rude and so often treated me as if I were as much younger than you as I am unfortunately older ...

If you prefer doing this job yourself, or leaving it alone, do: only you won't do it at my expense; and now that I have gone so far I shall not recede without a decision against me.

Lawrance's fears were justified and controversy concerning the granting of the faculty to Beckett, the design of Beckett's work and his preference for rebuilding rather than restoration led to a great deal of correspondence between the bishop, who believed that Beckett could be trusted, and Lawrance and Archdeacon Grant who were not at all happy with the power given to Beckett. The whole affair was very time-consuming. The Kalendar of Correspondence concerning Lawrance, transcribed by Jane Kelshall, contains twenty items from November alone when the controversy was at its height. Most of these are addressed to Lawrance but only four of his own letters are preserved here. He must have written many more but since all were written by hand, without the assistance of a secretary he would not have had the time to keep copies of most of them. Beckett got his own way: disputes over his work continue to this day but at least the Abbey was no longer in danger of falling down.

From 1883 there was further controversy, this time over the project of Henry Gibbs, better known by his later title of Lord Aldenham, to restore the High Altar Screen, concerning which Jane Kelsall has produced a thorough and most interesting account. The restoration of the figures on the Screen annoyed Beckett who had firm protestant views on statues in churches but the chief issue was whether it would be permissible to restore the centre of the Screen, originally a crucifix, as crucifixes had been regarded as illegal since the Reformation. Lawrence's personal view is clear from a letter to Gibbs in which he wrote: 'I don't see how you can do otherwise than restore the central figure'. An alternative design by Beckett was opposed by the bishop and many of the clergy in the diocese. Again there was much correspondence on the whole project including a number of letters to Lawrance from Gibbs and others which he no doubt needed to answer though, as before, his letters are not in the Kalendar.

Towards the end of 1888 there was a further controversy on the provision of an altar for the Screen. Gibbs wished to use a marble slab, apparently a former altar somewhere in the Abbey, which he would enclose in a wooden surround to make it a Holy Table (as officially laid down in the Book of Common Prayer). Beckett promptly erected a plain wooden table that did not go down well with Gibbs or Lawrance. Gibbs brought matters to a head in 1889 by appealing for a faculty to legalise the work he had already done and, among other things, to complete the work on the Screen. Beckett was furious but failed to stop the work on the Screen though, at the same time, he won the right to restore, but not rebuild, the Lady Chapel. Other concerns led Gibbs to shelve the completion of the Screen for several years during which time official attitudes to crucifixes placed for architectural purposes was modified, a faculty was granted and the Screen was completed in 1899.

### **Cathedral, Parish and Money**

Although Lawrance was not directly involved in the legal controversy it must have added to the many pressures he faced, as rector of a place of worship which functioned as both parish church and cathedral. The structure of the diocese made it very difficult for the cathedral to act as a centre of unity. Geographically, communications between Hertfordshire and Essex were slow and difficult. The people of Essex were unlikely to regard their new cathedral at St Albans as much more accessible than their former one at Rochester. One good result was that the work of the Abbey parish remained of the greatest importance. As yet the cathedral had no dean but Grant, archdeacon until his death in 1883, had seen the Abbey parish as a model one which had made the cathedral a 'centre of spiritual influence which other cathedrals are not.'

Lawrance was anxious to maintain the Abbey's parish role while equally desiring to develop its work as a cathedral but he still had only his income as rector of the parish from which to finance the work. His income had improved somewhat in 1878-9, for in each of these years the Ecclesiastical Commission gave a grant of £1500 towards the building of the new rectory. Beckett had matched the grant of 1879 thus helping to finance the building and enabling £1500 of the Commission's grants to become part of the rectory endowment, providing an additional income. Beckett also paid a further £550 to meet the rest of the building costs. Even so, with the new cathedral status Lawrance continued to be faced with many new costs. A well known figure, Mr. H.J. Toulmin, owner at that time of the Pre, and earlier of Childwickbury, began an effort to raise an appeal to increase Lawrance's income to £800 a year. Toulmin was a leading member of the Town Council, and of the Abbey Restoration Committee. The replies he received from those he sounded out in confidence were sympathetic but not optimistic, as most emphasised other commitments both personal and diocesan; the latter included appeals for the Bishop of St Albans Fund to aid the poorer parts of the diocese, the majority of which were in Essex, and for a fund to raise endowment for another suffragan bishop. Toulmin does not appear to have worked out the project very thoroughly: the Rector of Welwyn commented that he had not given much attention to 'ways and means'. Archdeacon Grant wrote to Toulmin advising that the appeal needed to be on a diocesan scale with the bishop showing an active interest, and that the list of rector's responsibilities should include increased hospitality for diocesan matters as well as the maintenance of two curates and of 'services befitting a cathedral.' A partial solution was to appoint him as archdeacon of St Albans

following the death of his father-in-law Anthony Grant in 1883. It was expected to provide an additional £200 a year. Although he seems to have been eminently suited to the post the increase in his workload must have been daunting, still covering the whole of Hertfordshire.

### **Twenty-Fifth Anniversary**

In 1893 Lawrance celebrated twenty-five years as rector of St Albans Abbey. He was greatly respected and appreciated. The growth of the Abbey congregation was noted in the local press: at his first Easter service there had been 121 communicants, at Easter 1893 there were 774. When he had arrived there had only been services on Sunday mornings and Wednesday and Friday afternoons. From 1872 there was a regular Sunday evening service, made possible by the introduction of lighting. In his first sermon at this service Lawrance had spoken of opportunities lost earlier by the Church of England 'because she refused to relax the rigidity of her rules, and because she refused to adapt herself in any way to the interests of a people increasing in numbers, intelligence and a desire for spiritual life and enlightenment from the Mother Church.' He said that the Nonconformists had recognised these wants and thus created so much of the Nonconformity they saw about them. Now the Church was stirring. He reminded his congregation that money was needed to meet the costs of the extra service but he was disappointed when the collection at the end of the service amounted to only £3 16s. 01/2d, " a sum, considering the large congregation assembled, far below the amount anticipated."

However, by 1893, the Abbey held each Sunday the two services together with an early Communion and there was a midday Communion twice a month. In the week there were daily said services of Morning and Evening Prayer. It was Lawrance's hope that the cathedral should have daily Choral Evensong but money was not available and it was 1904 before it became possible to have even a weekly service. Nonetheless a comment in Gray's Scrapbook notes that the music of the Sunday services had 'wonderfully improved' with a good organist and choir. Lawrance was anxious that the music should not in any way distract the congregation from worship and in 1884 he produced a list of the words of anthems used in the cathedral which was compiled by Gaffe, the organist and choirmaster, so that the congregation could follow the words 'and thus by devout attention bear their part in that which is to be regarded not as merely a musical performance but as an act of worship.'

A cutting in the 'Lawrance' Scrapbook gives an appreciation of Lawrance from the *Illustrated Church News* in April 1893.

'He is endowed with a great capacity for organisation and the power of attracting workers. He makes an excellent chairman at meetings, showing a ready appreciation of the points of a debate, and summing up in a very lucid manner. As a preacher he is much sought after; his sermons, always well delivered, exhibit a wide and varied range of reading with a masterly grasp of his subject. He frequently occupies the pulpit at the Temple Church...During his tenure of the rectory the services have undergone a great change, and are now carried on in a manner well befitting the dignity of a cathedral church, though the pecuniary means at the archdeacon's disposal are very inadequate, there being no endowment for the purpose. The average number of people present at the different services has more than doubled since the rector's appointment, and for a town of only 13,000 inhabitants with four other churches, it is unusually large.'

## Lawrance's Letters

Reference has already been made to some of Lawrance's letters. The surviving letters in the Lawrance Kalendar are addressed to the bishop or Beckett. His letters to the bishop were naturally courteous but in the autumn of 1879 he made his views on the granting of a faculty to Beckett very clear as has been seen and also sent the bishop a letter from the churchwardens supporting his views. The bishop's answer chided Lawrance for the wording of his letter which seemed to the bishop to imply that he was forgetting Lawrance's past services with regard to the restoration problems and had disregarded him over the faculty. Lawrance endeavoured to pour oil on troubled waters:

My dear Lord Bishop

No one can be more sensible than I that you have always treated me with a kindness far above my deserts, and it was just this that made me feel hurt to have been told nothing of what was contemplated. I entreat your Lordship to attribute any strong expression on my part to this feeling only – and to pardon them.

However Lawrance did not back down entirely and expressed a hope that the Faculty would include a provision that the work should follow the younger Scott's designs. Nothing came of this.

The following year there was correspondence on Beckett's plan to completely replace the medieval West window, a much-loved feature of the Abbey church. Lawrance, endeavouring not to upset the bishop again, wrote:

Your Lordship knows already how utterly wrong I think this will be...Of course I can, if you should wish it, and will, if necessary make an *official* representation to your Lordship on the matter: but I have thought that in the first instance you would prefer to use your great personal influence with Sir E. Beckett to induce him to hold his hand – as being your own wish.

Lawrance ended his letter as 'Yours affectionately and obediently'.

Sadly, the window was not saved!

Letters from Lawrance to Beckett were generally much sharper. Their first controversy, in June 1879, concerned Beckett's work on the rebuilding of the roof of the nave which had aroused much local controversy. Lawrance had been shown a letter from Beckett to Mr Toulmin which he believed to be factually incorrect. In a terse letter, apparently addressed to Beckett, he enclosed a statement from the Clerk of Works stating that it showed by a reference to dates that Beckett was 'greatly mistaken in some important particulars'. Lawrance continued: 'Your letter contains an imputation against me of inappropriate interference, which I trust you will see the propriety of withdrawing.' There is no reply preserved in Lawrance's correspondence but the dispute may be partly responsible for Beckett's outburst over Lawrance's attitude to the granting of a faculty to Beckett later that year, though on this occasion

Lawrance had adopted a more conciliatory approach. The only other letter from Lawrance to Beckett (Grimthorpe as he was by this time) copied (in part only) in the Kalendar of Correspondence concerning Lawrance, is anything but conciliatory. It concerns the 'Toulmin plot' in 1886, which was a petition against the destruction of the Norman Turret of the Abbey.

Toulmin had nothing whatever to do with what you are pleased to call the 'plot' nor had your humble servant. It was an independant (sic) movement started spontaneously by several who grieved, as I grieve, at the destruction of the Norman Turret and who thought that a respectful and friendly reformulation would at all events do no harm... The Mayor has just shown me your reply. I was unfortunately a witness of the demolition of the turret, and the force which had to be used to destroy it and I can say, and if necessary swear and so can my Churchwarden and my curates and a few other people, that it was a precious deal stronger than you have [been] led to suppose, although you may have seen a few buckets of rubbish.

Yours truly  
W J L

It is pleasing to note that there are a few later letters from Grimthorpe to Lawrance concerning work on the Abbey which are more relaxed in attitude and a letter of 1891 which appears almost to be teasing Lawrance by informing him that his 'tax collectors' gathering the collection at the evening service had missed the area where Grimthorpe's wife was sitting!

### **Two Sermons**

Lawrance could be direct in his sermons as well as his letters. In the Hudson Library, there are printed copies of two of Lawrance's sermons that were given on the Sundays following the funerals of two well known inhabitants of St Albans. He does not refer to either directly by name and it is clear that Lawrance intends his sermons to edify and instruct his congregation and that they are not to be taken simply as eulogies. The characters of the two persons commemorated differed considerably and the messages of the sermons were directed towards different elements in Lawrance's flock, one focusing on assurance for the faithful the other containing a strong warning to the unprepared.

The first sermon was given in 1871 on the Sunday after the funeral of Mrs Elizabeth Sarah Lipscomb. She was the sister of Henry Nicholson, rector of the Abbey from 1835 to 1866; their father had been rector from 1796 to 1817. She was evidently an exemplary and much loved wife and mother, and the text for the sermon was 'Behold I and the children God has given me.' (Heb 2.13)

Lawrance begins by saying that we consider all that is best in human life to be a foreshadowing of the life to come. So the great society of souls, the Church, is seen as a family and the Family is sanctified. It becomes a portrait in miniature of the Church, in due subordination to its head, in loving and cheerful obedience, mutual dependence and trust and above all through union. Almost always, all depends on the head of the family. So all must remember the charge of God: 'Your children - God has given

them to you. You may evade your duty but you CANNOT evade your responsibility. There will be the most awful accounting on the Great Day of reckoning.'

But, continues Lawrance, no duty is also more blessed than that of the Christian parent, especially the one to whom necessarily the home training most naturally falls - the mother. We shall never fully learn 'of her who is in our thoughts today' but the radiance of such lives cannot be hid. Our praise is for God but we should remember those who constantly strove to walk in His Ways and 'the one we remember today' had the closest association, attended Divine Service even when her strength had almost gone, and lies nearby till the Resurrection of the Just. Those who suffer loss now will look forward with assured hope to the gathering together of the great family of Jesus Christ.

The second sermon dates from 1875, the Sunday after the funeral of Thomas Ward Blagg who had been town clerk of St Albans for forty-eight years. The text was the well known statement from Psalm 90.10: 'The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off and we fly away.' Lawrance spends a long time on his introduction to the passage emphasising how it shows the transitoriness of human life and our duty of dependence on God and he reminds them that death is 'the wages of sin'. Seventy is seen as the point where activity, if not life itself, ceases. However he 'whose loss has cast a gloom over this town' was noted for his energy and activity when most showed signs of failing but the end came suddenly. He had been a trusted and valued legal advisor for nearly half a century; he took the lead in every scheme of benevolence or usefulness. He was unsparing of his time and had been a constant attendant at church. He took an active part in the movement for the restoration of the Abbey Church.

Lawrance had given credit where credit was due. However it is clear that Blaggs had another side of which the clergy did not approve, for the sermon continues: 'He would not wish his faults to be omitted. His errors were not concealed, those frailties, often seen in easy-natured, open hearted persons, were for all who chose to see, for all who cared to censure'. No more is said of them but no doubt the congregation knew and Lawrance presses home the moral message. 'We shall all need mercy on that day.' But Lawrance was confident that when Blaggs knelt at the Holy Table at Christmas Communion he was expressing unfeigned repentance. 'God rest his soul.'

Lawrance's conclusion to this sermon was very different from that of the previous one. He said they should take to heart the lessons which flowed from this departure. Many failed to attain seventy and had therefore even less time to prepare to meet God. 'Plead humbly for pardon in the all availing Name through the all cleansing Blood "before the night cometh when no man can work"...From every new grave there is the message, "Remember my judgement, for thine also shall be so: yesterday for me, and today for thee."'

### **Numerous Activities**

Returning now to the details of Lawrance's career we find that in 1895 Lawrance was further honoured by being appointed a chaplain to the Queen, which involved service on a rota for the Royal Chapels, and in 1898 he was promoted to chaplain-in-ordinary,

a post he had to give up on becoming dean. He took all his work very seriously. In his sermon at the twentieth anniversary of his arrival in the parish he had said: 'Life is for work... the work is God's work... the time for doing it is short.' This did not prevent him or his family from joining in with the lighter side of parish life. The Lawrance Scrapbook records three (undated) examples of the family's activities at the 'Christmas performances' for the Abbey Sunday School. The first notes that Mrs Lawrance was at the piano for the pantomime and two of the daughters, Doris and Gertrude were in the cast. On the second occasion Lawrance had helped to write several of the songs. When he addressed the children he raised a laugh by referring to the quantity of cake left over which made him 'very glad'. On the third occasion 'Miss Lawrance' had taken a leading part in the whole organisation of the event and in the making of costumes and three of the family took part in the play. Doris the eldest daughter was married in 1903 to the Reverend A.P. du Cane who had been chaplain to Bishop Festing and was now chaplain to his successor, Bishop Jacob. The local paper gave a detailed account of the wedding and a list of the 250 presents received by the happy couple.

Lawrance's interests and activities extended far beyond his immediate duties as rector. As parish priest he found friends in every grade of the social scale and was very good with children. He attended at his parish Sunday Schools morning and afternoon and also took the catechising in church for many years on Sunday afternoons. He became president of the Sunday Schools Teachers Association.

The scrapbooks show his interest in all aspects of education. They mention his 'active educational concern' for the elementary schools in the parish and state that he was responsible for the building of the Boys' School and of a Youth Institute which provided instruction for school leavers in activities including woodcarving and gymnastics. He was one of the very early supporters of the School of Science and Art and helped to re-establish the Hertfordshire County Music Association, becoming Chairman of the St Albans School of Music. He was Chairman of Governors at the Grammar School and it was noted that under him the numbers rose from a handful in the Lady Chapel to over 200 with fine modern buildings. Lawrance supported the foundation of the Girls' High School in 1889, which had equally good buildings and over 150 pupils. His daughters attended the school. He also supported the establishment of a local branch of the Girls' Friendly Society and of guilds for women and men.

As well as his widespread support for education he took a sustained interest in the St Albans and mid Herts Hospital and Dispensary, becoming chairman of its Committee of Management. On Christmas afternoons he brought the boys of the cathedral choir to sing carols. On these and other visits 'his cheery presence and dry humour...were greatly appreciated'. It is not surprising that Lawrance's incumbency was described as the 'most important since the Reformation.' His activities were not confined to his parish for he was a member of Convocation for many years and spent some time on the standing committees of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) and the Additional Curates Society. He was also chairman of the Herts and Essex Clergy Fund for distressed clergy and their dependants.

A photograph of Lawrance in the Abbey archives shows him with a serious face which does not really reveal his sense of humour, well known in both public and

private life. He was said to have had ‘few rivals as an after-dinner speaker.’ In the tributes after his death it was said that his sense of humour was irrepressible even under dispiriting circumstances but it was always kindly. Stories of what to us might be regarded as ‘very corney’ jokes were told with apparent affection and appreciation. One tells how he was once given a box of cigars with the brand name of ‘Young Ladies.’ His letter of thanks assured the donor that he would try to find a ‘match’ for each of them. Another anecdote relates that, awaiting the start of a meeting of the St Albans Archaeological and Architectural Society, of which he was the President, he was seen to be looking intently into a box of fossils. When the Treasurer, his friend Mr Toulmin, came up to him Lawrance said to him ‘Oh here you are; I was just looking for you!’

### **Establishment of the Dean and Chapter**

During the early 1880s a Committee on Capitular Organisation, set up by the first Diocesan Conference, had worked to produce a Parliamentary Bill to achieve a dean and chapter for the cathedral. This had raised the question of the relationship of the rector and dean. Archdeacon Grant was particularly anxious that the importance of the parish church should be maintained. He wrote to Lord Aldenham, who headed the Committee, that he wanted to see the deanery as a ‘crown’ to the rectory instead of the rectory being merged in the deanery as some might expect. This view was supported by most of the other members. The Committee’s initial attempt failed and no further action was taken until 1891. The possibility of the rector becoming the dean was considered which again raised the question of the definition of the two roles. This attempt to gain a dean and chapter ran into many difficulties but was eventually authorised by the Queen through Letters Patent in 1900. As there was no money to endow a dean the rector would be appointed dean: the Queen decided that the appointment was to be always in the gift of the crown, as it still is. Lawrance was therefore to be dean; this delighted most people and the news was received by him with typical modesty and humour: he thanked Lord Aldenham for the ‘precious news’ and hoped that the Queen would not openly state that she appointed him dean ‘only because she can’t help it, or you will see me no more.’

The initial excitement subsided somewhat when it was realised how little had actually been given. The Letters Patent granted ‘such rights and powers ... *as we may from time to time provide by any Order in Council*’ [my italics]. So no powers were given at this point and it was evident that endowments would have to be raised for the major canons for which the cathedral had no resources. All the existing canons were ‘honorary’ canons who had received the title as a remark of respect and appreciation for their work in the diocese mainly as parish priests. They could meet as a Chapter which would form a link between the different parts of the diocese, providing a place for the exchange and development of ideas, but would have no powers.

Meanwhile, cathedral and city were eager to celebrate the installation of Lawrance as Dean of St Albans that took place on 18 July 1900. The local papers described the service in great detail and commented approvingly on the choice of Lawrance. The *Advertiser* spoke of ‘the great regard in which the new Dean has been held throughout his long residence in St Albans. He has not only endeared himself during a long connection with the city, to the citizens, but is also known to be an energetic and able administrator, and eminently qualified to fill the important and dignified office’. By

then the number of communicants at the cathedral was said to be something like 1,000 and the amount of work in the parish had justified the appointment of an additional curate. Lawrance had 'at all times shown a very keen anxiety not only for those who have come beneath his ministerial care, but for the general well-being of the whole community in which he dwells. Genial in his manner, he has won the hearts of all, and is looked up to by those who know him best as an able counsellor and friend, ready at all times to use his influence in any good cause.'

The rejoicing was not entirely universal. Beckett, now Lord Grimthorpe, wrote to the local *Standard* expressing amazement at its account of the installation of 'our newly patented Dean', (referring to him at the end as a 'sham Dean'). Earlier he had responded to the appeal launched by the bishop to raise money for endowments for a dean and chapter by informing Lawrance, 'I won't give a penny tithe to the endowment of a Dean and Chapter'. (Relating this in a letter to Lord Aldenham Lawrance replied, typically, 'I never asked him to!') Grimthorpe argued that the term dean was only titular and that more endowment could not legally be achieved under the existing legislation. The sour note was typical of Grimthorpe but his estimate of the legal position was unfortunately correct. However Lawrance, despite the difficulties, proved by his activity to be anything but 'sham' and showed his ability to cope with a very heavy workload and inadequate finance. Among his expenses it seems that he received a bill from the Crown of £20 for his appointment (at that time this was equal to a quarter of the annual stipend of one of his curates). The bishop wrote with concern that Lawrance should have to 'pay for his privilege' and Lord Aldenham sent Lawrance a cheque for £25. The strictly honest Lawrance returned the additional £5 saying that it would otherwise 'burn a conscientious hole in my pocket.'

### **The Archdeacon's Charges**

Because of the shortage of money Lawrance continued to be the archdeacon of St Albans, responsible for the whole of Hertfordshire. Each year each archdeacon issued a 'charge' in which he gave details of matters with which he expected the parish clergy to be concerned; some were duties which required more attention, others arose from recent or proposed government legislation. From 1898 the 'charges' were recorded in the monthly Diocesan Gazette. Lawrance was particularly interested in the social and religious effects of education and of the hours of licensing and on the whole these topics were given more detailed attention in his charges than in those of the archdeacons of Colchester and Essex. In 1898 it was proposed that public houses should be closed on Sundays but allowed local authorities to make exceptions. Lawrance wanted pubs to be closed for much of Sunday but, unlike a number of clergy, opposed a total ban believing that such an action would lead to a multiplicity of sham 'private' clubs and facilities for secret drinking.

His great interest in education was reflected in detail in his annual charges. In 1902 the Balfour Bill included the proposal that the new local education authorities should take responsibility for secular education in the voluntary denominational schools which would now receive support from the rates. Lawrance said that he had not given the Bill detailed examination but none the less spent over half his charge on it. The Bill became law the same year but provoked tremendous opposition from the Nonconformists who objected to paying rates to support the schools of the established church, which provided the majority of the schools in question. In 1906 the new

Liberal ministry of Campbell-Bannerman introduced an Education Bill which proposed that only the schools provided by the local authority should be recognised as public elementary schools, the implication being that voluntary schools would no longer receive public aid. Not surprisingly all the archdeacons were opposed to the Bill as was the Anglican Church in general. The matter was discussed by the canons of the diocese in the meeting of the General Chapter that year. This meeting was always chaired by the bishop but Lawrance as dean generally introduced the resolutions. In a unanimous resolution the Chapter urged 'the most strenuous opposition' to the Bill in its present form on the grounds that it would do nothing to promote the cause of education; would endanger the very existence of religious education; and would stir up religious strife everywhere. Lawrance proposed a discussion on the points that the church 'had a right to demand' in all legislation concerning public education, which led to further resolutions. These concerned the right of parents to have children instructed in the principles of their faith; religious equality ('we ask nothing for the Church of England which we are not prepared to grant to other religious bodies'); that trust deeds be respected; that religious teaching be given in regular school hours and by general school staff when able to give it with genuine conviction. The cathedral Chapter had certainly demonstrated its concern with the education of children, seen as one aspect of the traditional function of a cathedral's concern for learning. In the end the bill was so drastically amended by the House of Lords that it was withdrawn.

Lawrance's charge of 1908 criticised what he saw as inadequate provision for the maintenance of religious teaching in schools, but typically, he did not confine his concern to the needs of the Church of England: he emphasised the need for a 'just measure' which would secure the needs of the Nonconformists for the religious teaching they desired, especially in single school areas, (in which the school was likely to be Anglican.) In the same year Lawrance commented on a new Licensing Bill, welcoming the reduction of hours of opening on Sunday but concerned about the exclusion of the vast Metropolitan area and private clubs. He would have liked earlier closing hours on weekdays. His comments make an interesting contrast to those of the Archdeacon of Colchester who wrote that he felt it scarcely belonged to his office to speak on the bill and advised that the clergy should leave the bill alone and devote themselves to Temperance work by moral and religious methods.

This was Lawrance's last charge for in 1909 he was at last able to retire as Archdeacon. In the Diocesan Gazette of July 1909 the bishop wrote: 'The Dean after 25 years of service as Archdeacon of St Albans in which he has won the respect and affection of all the Archdeaconry, has resigned that office with effect from June 30th, that he may obtain in later life some respite from labour.' He was succeeded by Canon Gibbs, one of the sons of Lord Aldenham. Gibbs included a brief, sincere tribute to Lawrance in his first archdeacon's charge, calling him 'a wise and helpful guide and counsellor.'

### **Choral Services**

There was still a great deal to occupy Lawrance. He had always been anxious to introduce a daily choral evensong, so strong a feature in many of the older cathedrals, but the cost would be very considerable. Nothing had been achieved before Lawrance had been made dean, efforts to raise money having focused at first on the cost of

restoration and later on the hope of establishing a traditional chapter with three or four endowed canonries. At Easter 1901 Bishop Festing launched a new appeal to raise funds for a daily choral service. In the accompanying pamphlet he wrote: 'People come to this Cathedral and Abbey Church ...from all parts of the world. They ... should find in this, as in other Cathedrals in England, a Service which, in its form and circumferences, accords with the dignity of the building, and the traditions of the Church of England.' In 1902 the chapter of honorary canons was informed that there was enough money invested to meet the minimum of £100 required annually to establish a weekly choral service. The dean suggested that it should be held on Saturdays. After a delay to allow the installation of new choir stalls the services began in 1904 and occasioned great rejoicing. In 1909 the dean reported on the satisfactory nature of the music but said that a daily service would require a minimum of £700 a year and the present annual income was barely £200. An increase in the choral services remained a priority for Lawrance. Although the main restoration of the Abbey had long been completed it was always possible to suggest further improvements and in 1909-10 there was a proposal for vaulting the roof of the north aisle, but after investigation it appeared that though it might be desirable in the future the existing roof was quite sound. Lawrance's view was that 'anything calculated to adorn and beautify the cathedral had his sympathy and support, but that the scheme could scarcely be spoken of as approaching the same importance as the provision of services filling the Cathedral'. Despite his hopes, there was not enough money to increase the provision of more choral services during the remainder of his life.

### **Final Years**

Lawrance continued his active interest in all aspects of local life and remained as mayor's chaplain, a position he held for a total of 46 years, being presented with a portrait as a token of appreciation in 1913 when it was said that 'No legitimate cause has been too small for his concern'. By this time changes were occurring in the diocese. Bishop Festing, the second bishop of the diocese had died at the end of 1902. He was succeeded by Edgar Jacob, the Bishop of Newcastle which was another new diocese, who came with a good reputation for his organising ability. By 1905 he had decided that the combination of Essex and Hertfordshire was unworkable and suggested that Hertfordshire should be combined with Bedfordshire (then in the diocese of Ely) united as they were by the Midland railway, and that Essex should become a new and independent diocese. This proposal was unanimously accepted by the Chapter of honorary canons and the process began of an appeal to Parliament to pass the necessary legislation. Verulam House was bought as a suitable residence for the bishop and he moved there in June 1910 but the bill creating the new diocese was not passed until August 1913, to take effect the following April.

Lawrance was now in his seventy-fourth year. He appears still to have been very active and on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1914 he preached in Bedford as part of the welcome to the new diocese. The following day he was taken ill following (said) Evensong at the Abbey. He appeared to be improving over the next fortnight but then suffered more heart attacks. He remained conscious to the end and is said to have discussed various matters with remarkable clearness on the day of his death, dying peacefully in the afternoon of 12<sup>th</sup> August. At the Abbey's morning service the following Sunday the Archdeacon spoke of his 'familiar face and cheerful, friendly greeting.' Referring to Lawrance's sermons the Archdeacon spoke of the 'remarkable felicity of his terms of

speech and even more of his terms of thought'. He commented on 'how strikingly well he read the Bible' and on the 'quiet reverence and unbroken attention with which it was his custom to follow the service in church.'

A very large congregation assembled for the Dean's funeral. The St Albans Times noted that the service was attended by the Mayor and Corporation 'in state', and by representatives of many of the public bodies with which the Dean was associated. The paper commented particularly that the 'Nonconformists bodies of St Albans by the attitude of their ministers and by sending deputations, bore witness to their esteem of a tolerant, broad-minded son of the Church, a wise counsellor and friend.' The widespread tributes which were paid to Lawrance accord with what had been said of him for most of the time he spent in St Albans. A cutting from the *Herts Advertiser* describes him as 'the friend of all' and continues: 'He made the joys and sorrows of the people of St Albans his own concern...His cheery presence and his guiding mind will be sorely missed...Something of a diplomat, he has been able to handle many delicate problems concerning the Cathedral and the Deanery with the touch of the master hand, and his genial optimism and tactful resource have solved many difficulties that had in them all the elements of controversial hatred.' There was reference to his 'thoroughness', and the way in which he kept in touch with 'every section' of the community. He was 'broad-minded, tolerant and, above all, keenly sympathetic.' His concern for the poor was emphasised. The Mayor, speaking at a Committee of the City Corporation after the death of the Dean, said: 'When he first came to St Albans there was hardly a place of worship that was fit to attend; they were cold and cheerless; but the Dean, by his superior management, brightened up the Abbey, warmed it and made it cheerful for those who attended it.' This had resulted in similar improvements in the other places of worship. The Dean's genial companionship and friendship had made everybody love him.

At a period when relations between the Established and Nonconformist churches were often strained Lawrance had been a striking exception. The *Herts Advertiser* commented that 'his relations with Nonconformists were always cordial and while a strong Churchman he worked with them in many ways.' That his attitude was appreciated is shown by the fact that during his illness prayers were offered for him in Nonconformist churches. On the Sunday following the Dean's death the minister of Trinity Congregational Church prefaced his sermon with an appreciation of the Dean: 'It is impossible to say how much we owe to the life and labours of such a man...a high pure conscience moving in the midst of the community as a manifest minister of God.'

### **Appreciation**

Lawrance had been rector of St Albans Abbey for forty-six years and dean of the cathedral for the fourteen years following the creation of the office, twenty-three years after the formation of the diocese. For twenty-five years (1883-1909) he combined the role of archdeacon with his other duties. His influence on the role of the cathedral was immense. He cherished its dual role with that of a parish church and made sure that the sense of community and pastoral care of the parish role was not swallowed up by the distance and formality associated with some cathedrals. The quality of worship was paramount as the foundation on which everything was laid and as Archdeacon Grant had noted St Albans Cathedral was a 'centre of spiritual influence' in a way he

had not found in other cathedrals. Lawrance laid the foundation for the ethos of the Cathedral and Abbey Church as we find it today. The origins of the many and varied activities catering for all ages and temperaments, the pastoral care, involvement with the local community and ecumenical outlook may all be seen in the work of Lawrance, despite the differences between our period of history and his.

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