

Revd and Hon Henry Vesey Bligh



Revd Henry Bligh

Introducing Revd Henry Bligh

Revd and Hon Henry Vesey Bligh was appointed as the second vicar of New Hampton in 1881. He was son of the Earl of Darnley, of Cobham Hall, near Gravesend and was originally vicar of Abingdon. Even though he was not as wealthy as his predecessor, both he and the Hon Mrs Annie Bligh, a granddaughter of Lady Ward, gave generously to all the various parish subscription lists and, during the hard winter of 1891, when some workpeople who had lost their employment because of the severity of the weather asked him for help, he gave them ten shillings each and set them to lay the path which runs from the 'kissing gates' by Burton's Road railway bridge to what was then Slade's Farm but now is Fulwell Golf Club. Not only that, he also paid the expenses out of his own pocket.

In those days vicars were able to leave their parish for long periods and in 1888 Revd Bligh sailed for Naples in March, popped back for some personal business in May, and then went back to Italy until August. Then again in 1891 when he was suffering from overwork, he went to Cairo for three months. However, in spite of these absences abroad, he was extremely popular. He made sure that the system of parish organisation worked smoothly and efficiently, and as President of the Hampton Total Abstinence Society he worked with men who were not church-goers as well, therefore promoting temperance throughout the village.

Appointment and induction

After Revd Fitz Wygram's death the popular feeling was to appoint Revd Studholme Wilson, who for three years had *"most faithfully discharged the duties of curate"*. *"A memorial"* to this effect was sent to Revd Burrow, vicar of St Mary's, Hampton. However, in spite of this testimonial which described him as being *"a hard worker, earnest and eloquent preacher and a good organiser"*, he was not appointed and Revd Bligh was appointed instead. At his induction, the Surrey Comet reported that he *"formally took possession and rang the bell furiously for some time, after having been led to the door-step by the Archdeacon"*.

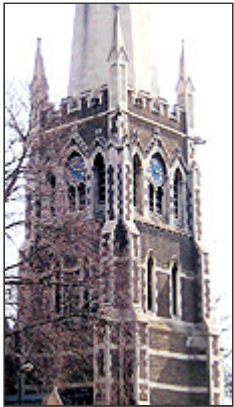
Significant developments during Revd Bligh's incumbency

Revd Bligh saw it as his mission to continue and expand the work started by his predecessor. He provided paid work for the local unemployed at times of great hardship and encouraged beekeeping as a means of providing extra income and nourishment for working families. As President of the Hampton Total Abstinence Society, he worked with men who were not church-goers as well as those who were, thus promoting temperance throughout the village. St. James's also cared for the poor, the old and the sick by providing alms houses and soup kitchens. More social organisations were founded or supported by St James's, with a good deal of assistance from the first vicar's widow, Mrs Fitz Wygram, who then lived opposite the church.

In the mid 1880s, about twenty years after their foundation, the day schools were no longer solely the concern of St James's Schools Committee, a local and parochial matter. They had to conform to what was becoming a national system. Their expansion brought financial problems and fears about their takeover by the secular authorities, although this was not to happen for some years to come. The Sunday School flourished, with the June 1885 magazine reporting: *"The numbers still continue to increase, and in addition to some fifty older ones who attend classes at Mrs FitzWygram's and at the Vicarage, there are now two hundred and ninety two*

upon the books."

The Hampton Hill Parish Magazine was started in November 1884. The original aims, set out by Revd Bligh in the first editorial, have not changed very much over the years.



Alterations and improvements to the church continued and were paid for mainly through subscription lists, although some new stained glass windows for the north aisle were a memorial gift and the marble pulpit was a gift from Revd Bligh. The vestry door was moved from the chancel to the south aisle which made room for more choir seats in the chancel and improved the layout of the vestry. The main building project was the addition of the [tower and spire](#) as a celebration of Queen Victoria's Golden

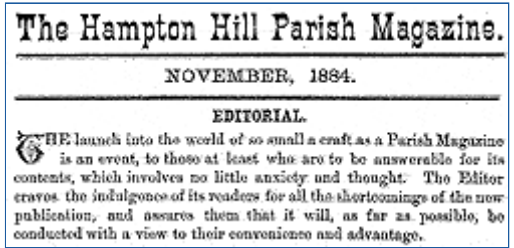
Jubilee in 1887. Revd Bligh argued that the work was important for two reasons: *"first, it would be taken in hand as an expression of loyalty . . . to the Queen, and secondly, if they had a tower and spire which could be seen for many miles round, attention would be drawn to the place . . . and people would know they were approaching the village of Hampton Hill"*. Following its completion and repayment of the debt through various fund-raising activities, the clock and bells were installed in 1893.

As the population of the new parish was growing, the original churchyard surrounding the church was found to be too small. As the cemetery at Hampton was thought to be impractical, in 1882 the vicar of Hampton gave an acre of land in Park Road next to the church to be used as the parish burial ground. In 1889 about eighteen acres of glebe land adjoining the vicarage grounds and churchyard were annexed to the living of Hampton Hill as the village contained nearly half the population of the old parish but had been insufficiently endowed at the start.

The end of Revd Bligh's incumbency

Revd Bligh, who for some time had been suffering from the strain of over-work, went abroad for a rest and change in the winter of 1891, travelling with his wife to Paris, Rome, Naples and Egypt. However, he decided to leave the parish altogether in 1893 for Fareham, hoping that the climate there would be better for his wife's health and that *"the duties would be rather less exacting than the very numerous offices that fell to his lot at Hampton Hill"*.

He had become so popular that within three days over a thousand parishioners signed a petition appealing him not to go. This was described by the Surrey Comet as *"a remarkable demonstration of the esteem in which the Vicar is held, not only by his own congregation, but very generally by non-church goers also"*. The appeal was described by the Surrey Comet as *"a Valentine from the good people of Hampton Hill to their Vicar which said with a thousand tongues Don't Go"*. In an address given by the Churchwarden, Mr WCB Hall, a further earnest appeal was made to him to remain with this address receiving *"a prolonged ovation"* and Revd Bligh answering *"with great emotion"* to this *"spontaneous expression of the affection and goodwill of his parishioners"* and told them that he would *"pray to God to aid him to make a right decision"*. However, he remained firm in his decision and left Hampton Hill. He later replied to the pleas of the village, in the Parish Magazine, saying how touched he was at such expressions of good feeling but *"after prayerful consideration felt they must leave, albeit with a hard wrench to their feelings and a deep sorrow to depart"*. The



The first edition of the Hampton Hill Parish Magazine
Read the whole [first edition](#)



Revd and Mrs Bligh's graves

parish presented a precious and handsome grandfather clock to him, and he also received three altar vases, an altar desk and altar book for his new church of Holy Trinity, Fareham.

"He was welcomed back with affectionate demonstrations when, in response to the parish's invitation, he returned for the inauguration of the clock and bells, which was the culmination of the ambitious project, instigated by him, that started with the erection of the Victoria Tower and Spire." During the service, held on December 23rd 1893, he preached a sermon about the texts on the bells. After retiring from his church in Fareham, he lived for a few years at Winchester.

Revd Bligh died in April 1905, aged seventy, twelve years after he left St James's, and was buried in St James's churchyard. The April 1905 magazine reported: *"Besides his own relations a great number of his old parishioners and friends from far and near were present to show their regard for him and their sympathy with those who had suffered the loss. He dearly loved the Church and the people of Hampton Hill. I believe it was one of the greatest joys of his life to help to improve and beautify St James's Church. His genial disposition, and his great kindness of heart, will always be remembered by those who knew him. The tokens of regard which covered a large space in the Churchyard showed the estimation in which he was held. The tower and spire, in the erection of which he took such a prominent part, stand forth as a striking memorial of his devotion and zeal."* 'St Mary' was one of the windows erected in the baptistry as a memorial to him.