

## Local history notes

### A history of St Elizabeth's Church by Joanna Bogle

When I was asked to write the full history of St Elizabeth's Church in Richmond, to mark its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I accepted with enthusiasm. This is a church with which we have a strong family link. My mother and her brothers attended St Elizabeth's in the 1930s, and were confirmed there. Many years later, living on the other side of suburban Surrey in Wallington, I applied to every local newspaper within reasonable distance of my home, asking to be taken on as a junior reporter – and ended up on the *Richmond Herald*.

The *Herald* was owned by the *Surrey Comet* and in due course I was transferred there, but not before I had become very much involved with Richmond and had come to know St Elizabeth's well. But when, in 2023, I started working on the history, I realised there was much more to learn.



*Photograph of St Elizabeth's Church taken from Lancaster Park, c1910 (our reference: LCF/15417)*

*Photograph of St Elizabeth's Church, 1908 (our reference: Photographs, Vineyard, Richmond, 22)*

## The beginnings

The parish beginnings lie partly with French aristocrats, who settled in Richmond after escaping from the Revolution in France. The early congregation was a curious mix of these people plus local farmhands and kitchen-maids who travelled from quite far off in order to be able to attend a Catholic Mass.

The church itself, funded by Miss Elizabeth Doughty, was a sturdy Georgian building, opened in 1824. The parish thrived throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially following the arrival of the railway, and the church was extended considerably. Notable parish priests included one who was a chaplain in the Crimean War and whose letters home from the front helped to reveal the suffering of Britain's courageous soldiers in the bitter Crimean winter.

## Later years

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century war also, of course, played a major role in the story – in 1914-1918 there was a heavy toll of young men, their names now commemorated on the War memorial which occupies a special side chapel near the sanctuary, and in the 1939-45 war there was also the bombing, and the housing of evacuees from the East End and elsewhere.

The book, *St Elizabeth's church, Richmond – a Bicentennial History* was published in November 2024 and carries a Foreword Archbishop John Wilson of Southwark. The story of course continues - even while working on the book I was discovering about the latest developments in the refurbishment of the crypt, the expansion of the parish's strong musical tradition, and more.



*Photograph of the wedding of Princess Victoria Marie of Mecklenburg-Strelitz at St Elizabeth's Church, 1899, published in the Illustrated London News 1 July 1899*

## Family ties

My mother had some particular memories of St Elizabeth's, one of which was of her father whispering to her, indicating to her a man sitting up at the front, who had just been shown into a pew "You see that chap? He's the king of Portugal!" And he was right – the exiled King Manuel of Portugal, who lived in Twickenham, was usually a faithful attender at St James church, but on this particular occasion had come to Mass at Richmond. The church, of course, is dedicated to St Elizabeth of Portugal, one of his ancestors.

## Memorials

St Elizabeth's has no War Memorial for WWII – plans to create one were postponed as funds were needed for urgent work, and then somehow the years went by and other things intervened. But my mother's oldest brother, Flying Officer John Campbell, is commemorated on the War Memorial at Tiffins School and now also in a park in The Netherlands, after his crashed bomber was found in a lake there in 2022. He is buried with his crew in the Commonwealth War Cemetery at Jonkerbos. His early amateur cine films of Richmond were the subject of a "Know your place" talk in 2023. Somehow, he is also part of the story of how I came to write the history of the church his family attended.

## Further reading

Want to know more? The book is of course available (Gracewing Books 2024 – can be ordered online or bought from [St Elizabeth's](#)) and I'm happy to give a talk to any local group. The story really is a fascinating one.



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