

The Tractarian Movement and All Saints' Boyne Hill

by Fr Neil Bryson

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this section of the All Saints' Boyne Hill website, which explains how this church came to be built, and why it had – and has – an Anglo-Catholic churchmanship. In the course of my research I recalled another family link: my late father-in-law, the Rev. Sidney Doran, was the Vicar of Bray 1958-1977, and it was one of his predecessors who was instrumental in setting up Boyne Hill as a parish separate from Bray's.

All Saints' was a new church in what became known as the Tractarian tradition, which developed from a movement whose influence persists: the Oxford movement. I hope to show the reader how to understand the main features of the Oxford movement, including its underlying theology and increased embracing of Ritualism. Mission is a given here, for otherwise how did All Saints' Boyne Hill come to be purpose-built as a Tractarian hill-post, visible from the railway and serving a growing population at a time of urban expansion? What, I wondered, can I learn about the Anglo-Catholicism underpinning this thriving parish church's life, witness and mission?

The Oxford Movement: Mission and Conflict

It must be emphasized that Ritualism was not merely a matter of external rites and ceremonies. It was felt to symbolize and safeguard deep doctrinal convictions, especially about the presence of Christ in the eucharist. The strength of Ritualism lay in its devout sacramentalism and its encouragement of a disciplined and winning spirituality that seemed to be lacking in ordinary, conventional Anglicanism. (Vidler (1971) p 160)

The mild beginnings of the Oxford movement irritated other churchmen who were not minded to keep to the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer, such as the daily offices. This was as nothing when it developed into more overt Ritualism and doctrinal differences. Nowadays Anglo-Catholics may view the surplice and black tippet as being too Low Church, but in the 1830s such dress was regarded as suspiciously Romish. The controversies ebbed and flowed over the movement's first forty years, but influential evangelicals were so vehemently opposed that public feeling was stirred up and recourse to the Law was sought as a means of ending these Ritualist high-jinks. After all, the perpetrators had sworn unconditional allegiance to The Queen and were serving in the Established Church.

During this time, a second generation of Anglo-Catholics became respected for their mission to the urban poor, who, if they attended church, saw the rich favoured in their rented pews whilst they languished at the back. Inspired by St Vincent de Paul, mission priests launched parish missions. Charles Lowder founded the Society of the Holy Cross (SSC) in 1885 'to strengthen the spiritual life of the church, defend its faith and carry on mission work – the latter by adapting Catholic practice to supplement the parochial structure.' (Parsons (1988) p 227.) In 1886, R. M. Benson founded the Society of S. John the Evangelist (SSJE), which began training mission priests at Cowley.

(Missions) were themselves a symbol of the determination of second generation Anglo-Catholics to take the sacramentalism of the Oxford Movement ... into the urban, working-class environment. Colour, ritual, music, processions, eucharistic worship, the renewal of baptismal vows and the confessional were attempts to embody Tractarian *ideas* in forms and actions which were accessible to poor, uneducated and theologically unsophisticated people. (Parsons, *op.cit.* p 229)

The Twelve Days' Mission to London in 1869 was run jointly by the SSC and the SSJE. It covered 112 London parishes. Its aim 'to locate the convert firmly within the structure of local parish life. The style of the mission was liturgical and sacramental.' (*Ibid.* p 228). There were instruction classes; sacramental confessions; renewal of baptismal vows; spiritual direction. The London Mission of 1874 saw bishops' involvement: they tried unsuccessfully to broaden its churchmanship.

Rather than rejoicing that these areas had been reached by the gospel, the Evangelical response under the aegis of the militant *Church Association* was fiercely condemnatory. They took advantage of the 1874 *Public Worship Regulation Act* to mount prosecutions, which their bishops could veto (cf. I Cor 6:6f). What followed was imprisonment of Anglo-Catholic priests for infractions of this law, such as wearing vestments. Ritualists dug their heels in: they would suffer rather than support a secular court's jurisdiction in ecclesiastical matters. Public revulsion was widespread: imprisoned priests were skilled and devoted pastors, often in slum areas. The Church Association overplayed its hand: they even prosecuted Edward King (Bishop of Lincoln): this was a gross error for he was noted for pastoral devotion and personal saintliness. Bishops' vetoes were subsequently exercised, encouraging further ritual advances. Within 25 years, c. 400 churches used incense; over 70 reserved the blessed sacrament.

The controversy died down, such that the 1904 Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline reported in 1906 'that existing limitations on ritual were too narrow and should be broadened to officially accommodate the greater

range of spiritualities and devotional styles which, *de facto*, now flourished within the Church of England. ... The report was ... an official recognition that in worship and spirituality, as well as in doctrine and theology, the Victorian Church of England had developed an internal pluralism.’ (*Ibid.* p 56). This served to keep the Church firmly established: a positive move away from the Erastian moves of the 1830s, which persisted throughout the Victorian era, reached a peak in 1869 with the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland, and led to Denison’s call for English disestablishment in order to protect it from state tyranny. The question of disestablishment of the Church of England was now off the agenda.

But slum-ritualism was not the centre of Anglo-Catholicism: taken as a whole the movement was more rural than urban ... in the poorest parishes the Anglo-Catholics were more successful than others, largely because lives of voluntary poverty won confidence and appealed to the imagination - but even then their churches were largely filled by people from other districts and of a higher class, attracted by the stir of religious life. (*Ibid.* p 233)

As you read on, you will see that mission can also be the setting up of new parishes with a purpose-built church. All Saints’ Boyne Hill began as rural but is now urban, attracting people from wider than its own parish bounds.

All Saints’ Boyne Hill: an expression of the Oxford Movement.

“On the whole, there are few churches so original in character, so effective in design, and so perfect in every detail, as All Saints, Boyne Hill.”¹

I have set out the development of the Oxford movement, tracing it through Tractarianism and Ritualism. I look next at establishment of a new parish in Boyne Hill and evidence of its further growth in 1911. I go on to describe the church complex at Boyne Hill, the architecture being a manifestation of the Anglo-Catholicism of its time. I close the piece with a description of the church’s contemporary expression of the catholic tradition.

The exciting cause of the Oxford movement was not, as may be thought, a call for the Church of England to return to its pre-Reformation state, either in ritual, ornament or doctrine. At first sight it seems odd that its beginnings were to do with disestablishment of the Irish Church: it was the Government’s attempt in 1833 to do so that prompted John Keble to take a public stand against it. In July of that year, he used his Assize Sermon (*National Apostasy*) to Oxford University to denounce the Government’s plans as nothing less than Erastian (i.e. state supremacy in ecclesiastical affairs).

¹ From the *Illustrated London News of the World* quoted in Kerry (1861), p 134

The Oxford movement in its first phase was not ritualistic, i.e. concerned to introduce new forms of service or ceremonial. The original Tractarians were quite content with the Book of Common Prayer, and were punctilious in observing its directions. They appeared restorers of the old ways, not as innovators. It was not until about 1840 that Tractarianism began to have a startling impact on the worship and adornment of parish churches by the introduction of unfamiliar rites and ceremonies. (Vidler (1971) p 14.)

Keble and his clerical colleagues John Henry Newman and Edward Pusey issued a series of ninety articles known as *Tracts for the Times*², the last of which was published in 1841. Initially these were true tracts, but they developed into substantial works of theology and theological history, catholic and clerical in orientation. They progress from *Tract 1* on 'apostolic descent' to *Tract 90* on a Catholic interpretation of the 39 Articles. Between these, among other topics, the *Tracts* set out the place, role and importance of liturgy, the sacraments, priesthood, apostolic succession and clerical and episcopal authority. To place all this firmly within the Church of England, they stress continuity with earlier High Churchmen and beyond them to the Church Fathers. They also address questions of church architecture as an expression of the conduct of worship.

Tractarianism was, however, much more than merely an Oxford or a University phenomenon, and in time made an impact on every dimension of life, worship and belief of the Church of England. The explanation of this immense impact lies in the way in which the Tractarians set out to challenge the doctrinal and theological consensus which then prevailed within the Church of England and to argue that the true identity of the Church of England was essentially Catholic, not Protestant. (Parsons (1988) p 31.)

Besides the *Tracts* a great deal of other activity went on, including the setting up of religious orders. There were also sermons, of course, and scholarly lectures and monographs. Poetry and hymnody (for example that of J. M. Neale) were added to a growing body of devotional literature. It was Neale in 1839 who, together with Benjamin Webb, formed the Cambridge Camden Society (renamed in 1846 the Ecclesiological Society) aiming to build new Gothic-style churches *à la* Pugin as well as to return existing churches to their original purpose as vehicles of catholic worship. Actions urged in their journal, *The Ecclesiologist* 1841-1868, included the following:

- Cleared chancels and proper sanctuaries
- Raised and clearly visible altars
- Pulpits and lecterns moved to the sides of the chancel
- Choir stalls

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All 70 Tracts can be read here: <http://anglicanhistory.org/tracts/index.html>

- Robed choirs
- Lighted candles
- Altar frontals
- Side-chapels
- Representational stained glass
- Organ removed from the chancel

The move encouraged at this stage was away from the predominance of what we now call services of the word towards Eucharistic worship, with the enhancement of the altar and more congregational participation.

'It was ... only a short way from such architectural matters to liturgical ones, and indeed the combined architectural and liturgical dimension of the Oxford Movement was an essential element in the Tractarian assault upon the Protestantism of the pre-Victorian Church of England. *Ibid.*, p 33.

The movement, as can be seen, was now becoming occupied with liturgy, earning its supporters the title of Ritualists. The main features were hymn-centred devotion as an expression of popular piety; increased frequency of Holy Communion; the celebration of the Church seasons; the observance of the daily offices by the clergy.

Just as they sought to recover older traditions of church architecture, so also the Tractarians sought to rediscover and re-introduce ... what they took be the older Catholic traditions of church music, chanting and hymnody. ... Hymnody ... offered the Tractarians a way to present their own highly liturgical view of the church and its calendar, the opportunity of writing new devotional hymns for this purpose, and of presenting to the modern Anglican worshipper Catholic hymns and devotions of the past. It also offered a further opportunity for congregational participation... (*Ibid.* p 49)

Of these four features, hymn-singing they shared with their Evangelical opponents who did not, however, support the others. This persists today with a typical Low Church parish focussing on services of the Word, with Holy Communion at 8 a.m. for, as some neighbours told us, "those who like that sort of thing". Although they celebrate Christmas Day, Easter Sunday and Whitsunday, the seasons themselves – never mind saints' days – are ignored more or less completely.

From the modest changes of the 1840s (intoning; preaching in surplice; robed choirs; lighted altar candles), which were themselves widely opposed, the 1850s saw clergy laying the foundations for later, more advanced ritual. By the 1860s, Anglo-Catholic parishes had already adopted, or were in the process of introducing, a variety of changes which, looking back 150 years later, seem mild,

but stirred up much controversy. The chief six common to most catholic parishes, were: eastward-facing celebrant; vestments; lighted candles on the altar; wafer breads; incense; mixing water with wine in the chalice. Bolder innovations were coloured frontals; crucifix; holy water; elevation of consecrated elements; statues; credence table; confessions.

Many of the early Tractarians had been moderate, even conservative, in their attitude towards ritual... What caused the furore was the enthusiasm among some of the early Tractarians, and many of their second and third generation Ritualist successors, for highly Catholic forms of ritual and ceremony ... the development of Ritualism out of early Tractarian and ecclesiological concern over the sacramental life and architecture of the church was entirely logical, even inevitable. (*Ibid.* pp 51f.)

This provoked hostility from many quarters, in the van of which were evangelical members of the *Church Association*. This body was vehemently opposed to Ritualism and spent a great deal of energy in working against it. In response the Society of the Holy Cross (SSC) and the Church Union were set up to defend Ritualist clergy, which I wrote about earlier. Opposition can serve to steel the backbone and attract new supporters, as well as to make adherents go further still. Vidler (1971) adds these to the list:

...making the sign of the cross... genuflections, preaching in a surplice instead of a black gown, surpliced choirs, much singing and chanting... fixed stone altars instead of movable wooden ones, crucifixes and statues, cultus of the Virgin Mary and saints, reservation and adoration of the eucharistic sacrament, and auricular confession. Some of these, for example surpliced choirs, were eventually adopted almost universally in the Church of England, but most continued to be peculiar marks of Anglo-Catholicism.' (p 158)

We now turn to Boyne Hill, for it was an example of the influence of the Oxford Movement in new parishes.

... the growth of Victorian cities subjected the Church of England's parish system to intolerable strains; it required that a great many new churches be built, giving the movement an opening that it exploited. ...improvements in transportation and communication contributed to changes in the Church that allowed for mobilization at the national level, turning what might otherwise have remained parochial disputes into skirmishes in a larger conflict between parties in the national Church. (Reed (1996) p 95)

The "mobilization" referred to was more to do with gaining solidarity with like-minded individuals because the railways and other transport improvements made it possible to attend congresses for inspiration and encouragement. The railways, too, enabled the ready movement of both people and goods so that expanding populations were fed and housed with greater facility. By the 1850s,

the Vicar of Bray, in whose widespread parish was Boyne Hill, became concerned about the residents' access to their distant church. Brunel built his bridge with the famous sounding arch, and the railway came to Maidenhead (1858) heralding the age of the commuter, who set up home there and whose needs, material and spiritual, had to be met, the latter of which would have been neglected but for the foresight of the Vicar.

The parish of Bray is very large, and its need of extended church work, when our father became its vicar in 1852, was so great as to make the post he had accepted both anxious and arduous... (There arose the important) question how to bring Church services and education to the old and young in the distant parts of the parish... The first advance in this direction came through an offer made by three sisters, daughters of the Reverend W. Hulme... The Miss Hulmes offered to build a Church, schools, and parsonage in any part of the Oxford diocese where the soil was gravel... The Bishop... recommended Boyn (*sic*) Hill as a suitable spot, and they agreed to build it there... and on November 23, 1855, the Bishop laid the first stone of the church of Boyn Hill, a district that was to be cut off from Bray and become a separate parish. (Leigh, c 1880)

The first vicar was William Gresley, agreeable to the Misses Hulme who shared his advanced churchmanship. The Church was consecrated on 2nd December, 1857 in time for the expansion of Maidenhead. Kerry (1861) calls it a 'magnificent church' which was in keeping with Ritualist principles. He continues, 'The altar is the most prominent object in the church, and can be seen from every part of it... There are three sedilia on the south side; the arcades of which are supported by pillars of polished marble. There is a well-placed credence in the north wall, the hood-moulding of which terminates in a well-carved *Agnus Dei* and *The Pelican in her Piety*.' To the credence has been added an aumbry, this photograph of which I took on 26th March; and next to it is a picture of the High Altar,³ referred to above.

³ Andrew, R. (2009). *Interior* [online]. [Accessed 24 March 2012]. Available from: <<http://www.allsaintsboynehill.org.uk/history/photographs>>.



The pulpit is stone and on the left of the chancel steps, with the choir beyond it. The High Altar is, indeed, visible from everywhere, and this marks the church at once as a place where the Eucharistic sacrament is the *raison d'être*. In the appendix to Yates (1999), there is a reproduction of a 1874 list of Ritualist churches and clergy. This shows that All Saints' Boyne Hill used lighted candles and celebrated Holy Communion at least every Sunday. It is listed as a new church, using linen vestments (rather than coloured), and boasting Gregorian chant. The population at the time was 1,554. The first incumbent was W. Gresley, a prebendary of Lichfield since 1840. No clergy were listed then as members of the SSC.

Apart from ritual, a feature of Tractarianism was that a church should avoid class distinctions. All Saints' had from the outset no segregation of worshippers. The beautiful building, striking tiles and brickwork, its stained-glass windows⁴, stations of the cross and participatory ritualistic services (not least the central and frequent Holy Communion) all gave the congregation a taste of heaven through the beauty of holiness. The table of the Word, through the Bible readings and preaching (in the nave), prepared for participation in the table of the sacrament (in the sanctuary). Note, however: 'Although ordinary distinctions between laymen were to be disregarded in the Church's services, proper ritual would recognize "different ranks" based on liturgical function and proximity to the altar.' (Yates (1999) pp 140f.) All Saints' has steps up from the chancel into the sanctuary, and more up to the High Altar; but communicants would all ascend these steps to receive Communion close to the altar.

To reinforce the Tractarian mission towards all of the people the complex originally included a church school, which remained on the site for over 100

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<http://www.flickr.com/photos/12608538@N03/sets/72157625783368586/> <accessed 26 March 2012> has a photo tour of these windows.

years. The architectural importance of the site is recognised by Grade 1 and Grade 2* listing as buildings of historic importance. In 1858 through donation by Misses Lamotte, an almshouse designed by Street was built on the boundary of the site for 6 needy ladies of the parish over the age of 60.⁵

The quadrangle south of the church also had clergy housing: the parsonage and accommodation for three curates. The architect was G. E. Street, influenced by the Puginesque Gothic favoured by Anglo-Catholics of the time.⁶ The incorporation of stations of the cross was highly controversial at the time, as a result of which some of these beautiful Bath stone sculptures are rectangular and set in the walls somewhat above eye level; others are high up in the clerestory. Two have never been finished, seemingly because the sculptor commissioned to do so was killed in the First World War.

Church buildings are one thing, but they only live through the worship of the people who attend them. The growth of the parish was striking, as shown by this newspaper article reporting the dedication of an extension in 1911:

... when the present Vicar (Rev. Canon Drummond) came into residence there was not a house between the Vicarage and the railway station on the one hand, and the Vicarage and Ockwell's Manor on the other, or even between the Vicarage and Maidenhead Thicket. In 1856 the population of the parish was only 800 ; in 1861 it had grown to 1,071 ; and in 1872 to 1,497. The population of the parish is now between 5,000 and 6,000. It is difficult to realise, when one visits this now populous neighbourhood, that when the present Vicar came to Boyne Hill the church was surrounded by cornfields, and it was in every sense a rural parish. The growth of this, the western part of the town, may therefore be said to be contemporaneous with the incumbency of the present Vicar, who may not inaptly be designated, "The Father of the Parish."⁷

Is All Saints' still an expression of the Oxford Movement? This can be answered not only by viewing its interior but also in its activities. A church that tries to remain in the past seldom survives, to say nothing of thriving.

There are holy water stoups as you enter the church. The High Altar has the "big six" tall candles and crucifix typical of Anglo-Catholic churches; it is mostly used now at Evensong and Benediction and is hung with a frontal in the correct liturgical colour. The blessed sacrament is reserved in the north wall of the

⁵ Moss, M. (1997). *All Saints Church Maidenhead* [online]. [Accessed 24 March 2012]. Available from: <<http://www.allsaintsboynehill.org.uk>>

⁶ Street's work was intimately bound up with his religion... Truthfulness in design, as the medieval builders practised, and as Pugin believed, resulted from the exterior reflecting the internal arrangements and uses. This 'beauty of usefulness' made a much more effective building. Elliott & Pritchard (1998) p 22

⁷ Unattributed article (1911). All Saints' Church, Boyne Hill Jubilee Commemoration. *Maidenhead Advertiser*, 19 February.

sanctuary, signalled by the perpetual sanctuary light. The Lady Chapel has a small statue of Our Lady of Walsingham on a windowsill near the altar; there is an annual parish pilgrimage to Walsingham.

On a platform in front of the chancel arch stands a newer altar now used for most Eucharists to allow westward-facing celebration; to the left and right with lamps and candles are statues respectively of Our Lady and of S. Paul (a daughter church with this dedication was demolished in 1966 to give way, prosaically, to a relief road). On high days and at Solemn Evensong the Angelus or Regina Coeli is sung at Mary's statue. Incense is used at the main Eucharist every Sunday. The male clergy are called Father. Corpus Christi is solemnly celebrated and there is a monthly Mass of Our Lady as well as a monthly requiem. Coloured vestments are worn at every Mass; Sunday Mass features, in addition to the celebrant, a deacon (when one is available), sub-deacon, four servers and a cassocked (not surpliced) choir.

During the time of the previous vicar of All Saints' (Fr Norman Brown), ITV used Bray church to film an episode of *Morse*. It had been tricked out as what was supposed to be typically Anglo-Catholic, with fourteen gold moulded plastic stations of the cross displayed. Afterwards Fr Norman contacted the producer to secure the purchase of these stations, which are now affixed to the walls for the devotional service of Stations of the Cross weekly in Lent. Below is a photograph showing old and new together, which I took in 2012.



This is evidence of the continuing Anglo-Catholic tradition of the church, but it is also progressive. There have been two women curates since the turn of the

century, and it has a female Licensed Lay Minister (LLM). There is an increasing number of lay-led initiatives, from Tiny Saints (toddlers), to Bible studies, to Alpha, the latter bringing in new Christians at a steady flow and the LLM in charge of it has recently run her twentieth course. Rock Shop is always Eucharistic, and it attracts those who do not attend any other church services. There are baptisms every other Sunday at the Bath stone font by the south door. One main Sunday service each month is Worship for All – again Eucharistic – which has a mixture of modern worship songs and traditional hymns; the celebrant continues to vest in chasuble. Another monthly main Sunday Eucharist runs alongside Café Church for younger people, who join the congregation for Holy Communion.

I have shown, through a brief history of the Oxford movement, how All Saints' Boyne Hill came to be an architectural and ritual expression of that movement. I have also described its present continuation and further progress within that tradition.



Andrew, R. (2009). *Spire* [online]. [Accessed 24 March 2012]. Available from: <<http://www.allsaintsboynehill.org.uk/history/spire>>

CONCLUSION

When I began reading about the Oxford movement, I thought I already knew a reasonable amount. It fast became apparent that I knew fairly little. It was therefore a journey of discovery into a phenomenon both fascinating in itself and illuminating for my understanding of what one would otherwise take for granted in the contemporary Church of England. What we now accept as at least unremarkable in ritual, ornament and practice is due largely to those who advanced the Oxford movement. In 1830, it could scarcely be imagined that few in 21st Century England would bat an eyelid at lighting candles in church to pray. Indeed, only 30 years ago, starting Lent with ashing would only have been found in the most extreme Anglo-Catholic churches.

Being conscious in a more informed and disciplined manner of the Oxford movement's history, rationale and philosophy are of immense value as I serve at a church that came out of the Tractarian times. I have been answering churchgoers' questions concerning, for example, why Stations of the Cross cannot follow the stone sculptures; why the church is built in a quadrangle (taking the church to the people); why we have catholic ritual. This study has also sparked my interest in the integration of mission into the movement and how All Saints' can respond to the Lord's call to reach the people of the parish today. To that end, there is scope, for example, for industrial chaplaincy for the nearby factories and firms, hitherto untouched.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Elliott, J. and Pritchard, J. (eds). (1998). *George Edmund Street: a Victorian architect in Berkshire*. Reading: University of Reading

The architect of All Saints' Boyne Hill, his philosophy and his work in general, as well as specifically pertaining to this church, is portrayed in this book which also has an informative chapter on the church in question.

Hole, B. L. (2009). *All Saints' Parish Church Boyne Hill Maidenhead Tour Guide*. 3rd Edition.

A well-thought-out and nicely produced handbook for touring the church. It has useful background and description.

Daughter of Leigh, J. E. A. (c 1880). Beginning of Life at Bray - Church Building. In: *James Edward Austen Leigh a Memoir*. Chapter XIV. Bray, Berkshire: Church Archives.

An important primary source written by one of the Vicar of Bray's ten children; Leigh was vicar when the Boyne Hill area was in his parish and then was given its own church and parish.

Kerry, C. (1861). *The History and Antiquities of the Hundred of Bray, in the County of Berkshire*. London: Savill and Edwards.

This would be a useful book for anyone researching the Bray area. It draws on evidence from the Conquest onwards. It has a description of All Saints' architecture.

Parsons, G. (ed). (1988). *Religion in Victorian Britain Volume I Traditions*. Manchester: Manchester University Press

This book was of great help in tracing the stages and filling in details of Anglo-Catholicism's growth.

Reed, J. S. (1996). *Glorious Battle: the Cultural Politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism*. London: Tufon Books

I found this book to be a good read: interesting, engaging and painting a clear, informative picture of the growth of this movement.

Vidler, A. R. (1971). *The Church in an Age of Revolution*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd.

Although I drew on material from chapter 14 Ritualism and Prayer Book Revision, I used the whole book as an undergraduate. The context of the European revolutions, and Britain's own response to it, is important to understanding the evolving role and state of the Church in Britain.

Yates, N. (1999). *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain 1830-1910*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Yates uses careful research, evidenced by charts and data, to produce a readable and reliable analysis of the impact of Ritualism on the Victorian Church of England and on Anglicanism beyond the period and across the world.