

The Missing Diaries of the Venerable Alfred Pott, BD (1822–1908), First Principal of Cuddesdon College and Archdeacon of Berkshire

By NIGEL HAMMOND

SUMMARY

Archdeacon Pott assembled this manuscript derived from his diaries as a memoir, solely for the use and interest of his family and descendants (1903). Few copies were circulated: this article contains extracts from what may be the only surviving text. The author of Pott's entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography believed the Memoir to have been 'lost'. For those who would wish to read it, I intend to offer a copy of the complete Memoir to the Bodleian Library, Oxford.¹

Samuel Wilberforce (1805–73), Bishop of Oxford, established Cuddesdon College at the beginning of his episcopate: it opened 150 years ago (1854). Wilberforce appointed the Revd Alfred Pott Principal of the new theological college.

Pott was briefly curate at Swallowfield, Berkshire; curate, vicar, rural dean of Cuddesdon and principal of Cuddesdon College (1852–58); rector of East Hendred (1858–69); rural dean and vicar of Abingdon (1869–74); vicar of Clifton Hampden (1875–82); vicar of Brightwell (1879); vicar of Sonning (1882–99), serving also as Archdeacon of Berkshire (1869–1903). His early career was as a boy at Eton, undergraduate at Balliol, then demy and fellow at Magdalen: he graduated BA (1844), MA (1847) and BD (1854). Ordained by Wilberforce as deacon (1845) and priest (1846), Pott remained the bishop's chaplain and protégée throughout Wilberforce's episcopates at Oxford and Winchester, and was made honorary Canon of Christ Church (1858).

Pott's text follows. I have retained his spelling, punctuation and capitalisation. Editorial interpolations appear in square brackets. The section headings are the editor's.

CUDDESDON (1847–58)

1846. At the Christmas ordination I received Priest's Orders, at the hands of Bishop Wilberforce and after the ordination he asked me to become his curate at Cuddesdon. This was another very great turning point in my life.

At Cuddesdon I had to form my own scheme of parochial organization. I lived in the little house still called the Old Vicarage. Retaining my Demyship,² I kept up frequent intercourse with College. It was a pleasant ride across Shotover into Oxford, and I was a rider in those days. The Palace too, was a frequent resort, when the Bishop was at home.

1847. In February 1847 I moved to Cuddesdon. It was and still is a rough agricultural village. My only neighbour of my own class of life (outside the Palace) was the Revd W Sneyd a clergyman without cure, who lived at Denton. He was at that time unmarried, but later on married his cousin and ultimately at the death of his brother succeeded to the family estate of Keele in Staffordshire.

¹ Alfred Pott, *Memoir of my Life, 1822–1903*, a typed document for private circulation.

² At Magdalen.



Fig. 1. Alfred Pott. (Clifton Hampden church). Photograph kindly provided by the Revd Edward Tildesley, vicar of Clifton Hampden.

I was assisted in parish and church work by the Revd Emelius Bayley, an old Eton contemporary: he was a man of great earnestness and considerable preaching ability, but of rather narrow Low Church opinions. He did not remain long at Cuddesdon, but received several pieces of preferment, St George's, Bloomsbury, St John's, Paddington and ultimately succeeded to a baronetcy from his father.

1852. Meanwhile my work at Cuddesdon had gone on quietly with but little variety. I had been Bishop's Inspector of Schools for the Deanery and also Secretary for the SPG for the Archdeaconry. [When] the vicarage was separated by Act of Parliament from the Bishopric I became Vicar. This was thought to necessitate the building of a better house and in the ensuing year the present Vicarage was built by Mr Street.³ It was built in an open field but the upgrowth of the trees, which I planted, has been rapid.

Riding one evening across Shotover with the Bishop, he suddenly asked me whether I would undertake with the Vicarage, the headship of a College for training men for Holy Orders, which he greatly desired to establish. The offer came upon me suddenly: I did not fully realise what the acceptance of such an offer involved, nor how unequal I really was both physically and intellectually for the work. But I did accept it ignorantly. The next year was spent in getting plans and subscriptions and in meeting difficulties and objections, raised in Oxford and elsewhere against any such scheme. This was the beginning of Cuddesdon College. The first stone of the building was laid in the spring of 1853, the building completed and opened for use at the end of 1854.⁴

³ George Edmund Street, 1824-81, Oxford diocesan architect.

⁴ See: *Cuddesdon College 1854-1904, a Record and a Memorial* (1904): Owen Chadwick, *The Foundation of Cuddesdon* (1954) and Mark D. Chapman, *Ambassadors of Christ: Commemorating 150 Years of Theological Education, Cuddesdon, 1854-2004* (2004).

1854. The first two students C F Porter⁵ and Edward Sturges lived at first with me in the Vicarage. But the next term brought an accession of inmates and an addition to our staff. Our first Vice-President was Henry Parry Liddon,⁶ to whom the tone and character of the College from its first beginnings owes far more than to myself.⁷

I am now looking back nearly half a century, and those now connected with the College can hardly realise the difficulties of those days. The bitter and malignant animosity of many in the University, the coldness of some of the Bishop's own friends all combined to make our position an uneasy one. The press raised its voice against us. In Oxford itself many an effort was made to prevent graduates coming to us. I remember a probationer fellow of a large College being called into close residence in order to prevent him coming to Cuddesdon. I remember a Bishop in the North telling a candidate for Orders, that without absolutely refusing, he had serious objections to admitting any candidate from such a place. I have still in my possession a bound volume of pamphlets and tracts all but two attacking us.⁸

1855. We were married in Clifton Hampden Church by Bishop Wilberforce,⁹ just before taking possession of the new Vicarage at Cuddesdon. The College was augmented by the addition as Chaplain of the Revd Albert Barff.¹⁰

EAST HENDRED (1858-69)

1858. The living of East Hendred became vacant, which I accepted and read myself in on Advent Sunday. But we did not move until Easter 1859 [and] did not occupy the Rectory at Hendred till later in the year. Liddon left Cuddesdon at the same time as myself.¹¹

The parish of Hendred was at a very low point of morality and culture. The Squire, [Eyston] was Roman and many [villagers] of the same persuasion. No School worth anything: the Church in a miserable state. We began work by building Schools and attempting to train a Choir.

In July we began the restoration of the Parish Church under Henry Woodyer,¹² but it was not completed for nearly twelve months. My dear boy was born at Hendred and baptised in the temporary Church, Bradfield's Barn. The Church was reopened, July 22. The Bank in which the Restoration Fund was placed, stopped payment and we lost some £150. Also one of the Aisles suddenly collapsed. It became and still is a very good specimen of a village Church.

⁵ Later vicar of Banbury.

⁶ The Revd Henry Parry Liddon, 1829-90, canon of St Paul's Cathedral and Ireland Professor of Scripture, Oxford University.

⁷ 'The tea-pot with the lid on', a well-known appellation used to describe early Cuddesdon's leadership, came from the combined names of Pott and Liddon. Equally, Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, known as 'Soapy Sam', a somewhat derogatory but, perhaps, descriptive nickname, was derived from the conjoined initials Samuel Oxon and his young protégé, Alfred Pott (SOAP).

⁸ See: John Jackson, DD, Bishop of Lincoln, *Rest before Labour: the Advantages and Dangers of Theological Colleges: a Sermon Preached on June 21, 1859.*

⁹ Pott married Emily Harriet Gibbs, daughter of the Revd Joseph Gibbs, vicar of Clifton Hampden, on 5 July, 1855.

¹⁰ The Revd Albert Barff, 1828-1913. Barff remained at Cuddesdon until 1858, when he took the living of North Moreton. He was then preferred as vicar of St Giles, Cripplegate (1886), becoming Prebendary of St Paul's Cathedral and head of the Choir School. See: Gerald Howat, *A History of North Moreton* (2000), which offers considerable detail of Barff's ministry at North Moreton.

¹¹ To become Vice-Principal of St Edmund Hall, Oxford.

¹² See: John Elliott and John Pritchard, *Henry Woodyer: Gentleman Architect* (2002), and Harry Redfern, 'Some Recollections of William Butterfield and Henry Woodyer' in *Architect and Building News*, 14 April 1944.



Fig. 2. Alfred Pott. (East Hendred church). Photograph kindly provided by the Revd Rita Ball, rector of East Hendred.

1862. Our curate Charles Smith left and was succeeded by W C Porter, who however remained but a short time. He left in January. I became Rural Dean of Abingdon in succession to the Revd N Dodson. George Robertson became my curate and settled with his wife and children in the village. It was the beginning of a life-long friendship with all of them.

1863. Edward King¹³ succeeded Swinny as Principal of Cuddesdon.¹⁴ But for the first term of the year, I returned and took the management of the College, my wife and children living with me at the Palace, the Bishop being away.

1865. In the Parish the usual routine went on. I undertook the office of Guardian, a thankless and unprofitable one. My Diocesan work steadily increased. For thankfulness this year, was my recovery after a bad fall from a horse while riding to Wantage, June 27.

ABINGDON (1869-74)

1867. On August 13, Mr Dodson for many years Vicar of Abingdon,¹⁵ died. The Bishop strongly urged me to take his place, and most reluctantly I at last yielded. The loss of income was not inconsiderable, the charge of such a town I greatly shrank from, and there was no house ready. Still it seemed a call, and we determined to try. But we did not move till 1868.

1868. We left Hendred not without much regret in January, in some ways we left the parish better than we found it. Church well restored and schools built. The people were sorry, I think, to lose us and gave us a very pretty tea and coffee service in silver. There was no house

¹³ Edward King, 1820-1910, Bishop of Lincoln, 1885-1910.

¹⁴ The Revd Henry H Swinny, Principal, Cuddesdon College, 1858-63.

¹⁵ The Revd Nathaniel Dodson, vicar of Abingdon, 1824-67.

ready at Abingdon. We took a small villa at the top of the Vineyard, very insufficient and uncomfortable. Money was raised for building the present Vicarage in Albert Park. A very good house was built from Dolby's plans which we occupied towards the end of the year.¹⁶

In the parish we had all to begin. Mr Dodson had been Vicar for many years and during the latter part of his life – blind. All had been left to indifferent Curates. St Helen's Church was well filled, but in a miserable state of dilapidation. I began with four excellent Curates, Causton, Kelly, Cobham and Jervis. We had two Churches always to provide for, sometimes three. St Nicholas' was usually taken by a Chaplain from Oxford, at that time the well-known Tom Short of Trinity.¹⁷

The Schools were beneath contempt. The best teaching in the place was at the British and Foreign. A good Infant School had been recently provided in the Conduit Road through the exertions of Charlotte Godfrey.

Our first important Parish work was to build Schools. The Governors of Christ's Hospital pulled down a number of tenements quite unfitted for inhabitation behind the Queen's Hotel, and gave us the site for our new Schools, Boys, Girls and Infants. This was the special work of 1868-9.

In 1869 we began to agitate the question of the restoration of St Helen's, a work of great cost and difficulty. It was a long while before we ventured to begin it.

At the close of this year Bishop Wilberforce was made Bishop of Winchester and was succeeded at Oxford by Mackarness.¹⁸ I continued to be examining Chaplain to the former at Winchester.

At about this time Bishop Wilberforce offered me the Archdeaconry of Berkshire, which Archdeacon Randall had resigned. This office I have held ever since and am still holding in 1900.

1871. The restoration of St Helen's was begun under Woodyer.¹⁹ All through the year I was a good deal with the Bishop of Winchester in his Diocese.

1873. On July 19 my dear friend Bishop Wilberforce was killed by a fall from his horse in Surrey while riding with Lord Granville. It was an overwhelming blow. I was one of his earliest ordained, and for many years his Chaplain both at Oxford and Winchester. He was buried at Lavington, Friday July 25. I was able to assist at the funeral.

St Helen's was opened after a very complete restoration on Wednesday July 30, by Bishop Mackarness. Looking back on my short incumbency of Abingdon my first feeling is my own physical unfitness for such a charge. I undertook it wholly and entirely under pressure from without. During that period we provided an excellent Parsonage House, good and sufficient schools, and restored to its original beauty the grand Church of St Helen.

I am quite sure, looking back, to 26 years ago, that I was right in leaving Abingdon, when I did. I was thoroughly exhausted and broken down alike in mind and body. I remember some years before I took Abingdon, that Butler [of Wantage] said: 'Anyone who goes to Abingdon must expect to be burned in the Market Place before much can be done.' I found

¹⁶ Edwin Dolby, 1838-1900, architect, of Park Crescent, Abingdon.

¹⁷ The Revd Thomas Short, MA, BD, lecturer at St Nicholas, Abingdon, 1832-72.

¹⁸ John Fielder Mackarness, 1820-89, Bishop of Oxford, 1870-89.

¹⁹ Henry Woodyer, 1816-96, church architect.



Fig. 3. William John Butler (1818–94), vicar of Wantage, founder of the Wantage Order. Dean of Lincoln.

this prophecy wholly untrue. Nothing could exceed the kindness I experienced all round, especially from the middle class.²⁰

CLIFTON HAMPDEN (1875-82) & BRIGHTWELL (1879)

1875. We began this year in a new home, which was the old. My dear wife born there, we were married there, her Father and Mother lay in the Churchyard. The house built for her Father had been enlarged and altered by John Gibbs.

1878. In December the previous year Archdeacon Clerks for many years Archdeacon of Oxford died. There was a great expectation that I should succeed him at Christ Church. *Dis aliter visum*. Bishop Mackarness elected Edwin Palmer. I was a little disappointed.

1879. On February 6, my brother in law Willy Gibbs,²¹ was married. He was now Vicar of Abingdon, and in our old home. Early in the year the living of Brightwell became vacant and the Bishop pressed it upon me. Most reluctantly I was persuaded to accept it, and was instituted on May 7. But within a few days came the great sorrow of our lives. Our dear eldest boy was killed by an accident on the 11th [May] and lies in Clifton Hampden Church Yard. After our great sorrow I gave up Brightwell.

1882. The Bishop pressed me very much to accept Sonning. After more than one refusal, we were fairly forced into it.

²⁰ The Revd William J Butler, 1818-94, vicar of Wantage, 1846-80, founder of the Wantage Sisterhood, 1850, Dean of Lincoln, 1885-94. The obituary to Alfred Pott in *The Abingdonian* notes that he was a governor of Abingdon School from 1869 until 1902, for a large part of the time acting as chairman. In all the decisive changes, which followed the *Report of the Public Schools Commission* of 1866, his authority did much to guide the educational policy of the school (*The Abingdonian*, Abingdon School magazine, April 1908, pp. 147-8 and 161). James Townsend observed in his *History of Abingdon* that the respect Pott won in the town came, 'by his great business capacity, by his authority as a scholar, and by the tact and vigour of his character.' (James Townsend, *A History of Abingdon*, 1910, republished, 1970).

²¹ The Revd William Cobham Gibbs, vicar of Abingdon, 1878-84.

SONNING (1882–99)

1882. And thus a new epoch of our life began. Most unwillingly did we change our home, but it seemed ordered for us. I was now sixty and in very poor health. My dear wife still more feeble.

1883. We moved into the enlarged Vicarage on Saturday April 7. Sonning was a great change from Clifton Hampden. We hardly foresaw how little it would have agreed with my wife's health, nor did I realise my own unfitness for fresh work. But we were very kindly received and had many sources of happiness during our seventeen years continuance there.²²

1888. In the Parish our principal work was the erection of a Parish Room. The cost was defrayed partly by a bequest of £500 from my predecessor Hugh Pearson, partly by gifts from Mr Golding Palmer and myself.

This year was marked by the prolonged illness of Bishop Mackarness, resulting in his resignation of the See. He and I had been much thrown together: at Eton in the Sixth Form, at Oxford and now for some years as Bishop and Archdeacon.

1889. [Mackarness] was succeeded immediately by Bishop Stubbs,²³ who had been for some years Bishop of Chester. No consecration was needed, but he was enthroned in Christ Church on January 31. The Bishop of Reading and myself earnestly pressed our new Bishop to nominate a suffragan to help him with his work. Privately I urged the Bishop to put Leslie Randall's name first of the two [nominees], and myself only second. Leslie was then Archdeacon of Buckingham, and was consecrated Bishop of Reading on November 1 at Westminster.

1890. The Clergy and Laity of the County asked me to sit for my picture to W Richmond²⁴ presented to me in Reading by the Bishop on September 22. Of the character of the picture there was and still is more than one opinion.

1892. This year found us still at Sonning, although we were constantly contemplating a change. Both I and my wife constantly ill.

1899. We had long since talked about resigning Sonning. The events of the past year led me to tell the Bishop that I should place the living in his hands towards the end of 1899. Perhaps we ought to have taken this step several years earlier but for a time retaining the Archdeaconry.

Of my work of seventeen years at Sonning I am hardly to judge. I went there unwillingly and looking back I feel I was really too old when I went there to undertake such a parish. But others thought differently and these things are ordered for us.

1902. Every month makes me more and more certain that I was right in giving up Sonning. I am really unequal to the work alike in mind and body. So far I have continued to act as Archdeacon at the end of Bishop Stubbs's Episcopate, and the beginning of that of the

²² Although Woodyer had altered Sonning vicarage (1854), it was enlarged by Edwin Dolby (1882), who designed work for Pott at Abingdon. Woodyer's considerable work at East Hendred and Abingdon is likely to have been derived from a friendship with Pott at Eton. Many of Woodyer's early commissions came from family friends and associates. Thereafter his clients included friends he had met at Eton and Oxford.

²³ William Stubbs, 1825-1901, Bishop of Oxford, 1889-1901.

²⁴ Sir William Blake Richmond, 1842-1921, portrait painter.

present Bishop. Bishop Stubbs died in 1901 and was succeeded by Bishop Paget.²⁵ But the Archdeaconry I also propose to resign after the present year.

1903. On January 1st I resigned the Archdeaconry of Berkshire after an incumbency of thirty-three years. On the 21st of the same month my dear Wife was taken to her rest in peace after much suffering. RIP.²⁶

²⁵ Francis Paget, 1851-1911, Bishop of Oxford, 1901-11.

²⁶ I have throughout referred to Crockford's *Clerical Directory*, 1903. There are some discrepancies in dates between Crockford and *Pott's Memoir*, but I have retained Pott's record of dates.