

## How Interesting!

During 2011, Magna will publish notes about twelve notable and interesting graves and headstones, in and around Holy Cross Church and environs, written by Neil Richardson.

For January, we look into the legacy of the Reverend Edward Betham

In and around our parish church and graveyard may be found areas of floral surprise, vistas of breath taking beauty and many very interesting and even moving headstones, set in and around the poise and grace of the Old Church, and with the splendour of the New Church beyond. Everywhere it is possible to see a headstone telling stories from the past which now we may only glimpse at. Why not take a closer look?

This headstone marks the place where the Revd. Edward Betham is buried on the north east of the church.



He was rector from 1769-1783, when he died. Betham is revered in Greenford because of the generous manner in which he used his wealth to found a charity school for 30 poor boys and girls, and which he also endowed with £1600 in Bank Stock to perpetuate the work he started. Now a maintained Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Edward Betham School continues in very good spirits today some 230 year after its foundation. The school thrives as a very popular local school, much sought after by parents from far and wide. The school is very over-subscribed each year and the Governors need to operate an over-

subscription policy which is nice in one way, but also involves us saying no to many parents, which we do not enjoy. The school continues Betham's vision of an educated population, educating 460+ children in a safe and caring environment to the best of their ability.

The grave has a simple headstone, bearing the names also of Betham's family members and he didn't need a flashy grave because his monument is to be seen in the lives of the many thousands of children who have been educated at his school from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

The school's original house is now a domestic dwelling in three separate sections and a land mark in Greenford. In 1878, a new school was built to replace the old one and this has a clock tower which rings the hours in day time. For many years the clock tower had to be ascended in order to wind up the action on a weekly basis. In 2005, the Trustees had a modern radio-controlled action installed, with night silence to keep the neighbours happy! It is really nice to hear the bell, although the noisy Oldfield Lane sometimes drowns out the gentle chimes completely.

In 1975, the original school house was sold by the Trustees and with the proceeds, and a loan from the London Diocesan Board for Schools, they purchased Coston School for Boys and opened it as Betham Middle school. I am sure Edward Betham would have applauded the enterprise of the rector, Malcolm Smart, and the supporters who made



such a bold step towards providing an all-through Primary education under the Betham banner! The loan was still being repaid in 1982 when I arrived as rector of the parish.



Here is a portrait of the Betham school house, painted by Lawson Petingale. There are three other Petingale paintings which hang in the rectory and belong to the trust of which the rector of the day is a trustee. The other paintings depict the New Church during construction and then an interior in c. 1945, the Old Church font, complete with oak cover which was stolen in the 1980s, and a view of Hanwell. The front of the house bears a blue plaque telling everyone why the house was built and in Latin. For an English language account, one needs to visit the Old Church to read the Betham plaque, with the following text :

1780  
EDW<sup>D</sup>. BETHAM  
Rector of this Parifh, built a Charity  
School  
with a Houfe for the Mafter & Miftrefs  
& endowed it with £1600 Bank Stock.  
£10 part of the Dividends to go towards  
Cloathing Ten Poor aged Men & Women  
of this Parifh, who fhould attend  
the Sacrament on Xmafs Day:  
£30 to the Mafter for Instructing 30  
Poor Boys & Girls, to Read, Write,  
Caft accompts, & Know the Principles  
of the Xtian Religion;  
the Girls to be Taught alfo  
to Work, Sew and Knit;  
£30 in Coals for the School;  
Other part in Cloathing the Children,  
& the Remainder in Repairing  
the School & Houfe, & in buying  
Spelling, -Prayer-Books, Teftaments, &c.  
Inroll'd in Chancery Nov.16<sup>th</sup>. 1780

How remarkable that the essence of the 1780 curriculum is the same as in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – literacy, numeracy and RE. Of course, we now teach a lot more than the core. They learn everything from managing their own feelings and the behaviour this creates to managing the intricacies of the internet and we now need to help pupils understand more than one faith in addition to the Christian religion so that they may love their other-faith neighbour and understand their religion and culture.

The social aspects of the legacy from Betham involving the elderly are now transferred to the Greenford Parochial Charities and they dispense cash to elderly people just before Christmas, although we do not still insist on them attending the Sacrament on Xmafs Day! Perhaps we should?