

Revd Fitzroy John Fitz Wygram MA



Sir Robert Fitzwygram



Lady Selina Fitzwygram



Revd Fitzroy Fitz Wygram

Introducing Revd Fitzroy Fitz Wygram

Revd Fitz Wygram was born in 1827, the fifth son of Sir Robert Fitzwygram (1773 - 1843) who owned estates at Leigh Park,

near Havant. He was brought up in a caring, generous and responsible family and he himself became a wealthy man with considerable private means. Following his education at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, he was ordained and began his clerical life at Sittingbourne, in Kent.

A cavalry officer, he had served with the Inniskilling Dragoons in the Crimea and later commanded the Cavalry Brigade at Aldershot, being Inspector-General of Cavalry 1879/84. He was also a member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, of which he was president 1875/77. From 1885 to 1900 he was Member of Parliament for South Hampshire in which constituency Havant was then included. He was active in public life and took a benevolent interest in the affairs of the locality and we are told that the extensive grounds of Leigh Park were frequently thrown open to the public and there used to be numberless excursions from Portsmouth and the surrounding countryside to enjoy the amenities of the Park.

After moving to Hampton Hill, Revd Fitz Wygram fell in love with and married a local girl, Alice. Alice was daughter of Lady Ward, who lived in the Grace and Favour Apartments at Hampton Court Palace, and Henry Ward RCMG, Governor of Madras at the time of his death. She came to Hampton Hill when she was twenty two and her husband thirty four. She moved into Larkfield Lodge across the road from the vicarage after her husband's death and proceeded to make it another centre of church life, in addition to the vicarage. She lived thirty one years as a widow, much loved for her kindness and generosity. She died in 1912.

Appointment and induction

Revd Fitz Wygram was invited by Revd J Burrow, vicar of St Mary's, Hampton, to take over the new outlying parish then known as New Hampton. Its new church was completed in 1863 and consecrated in honour of St James on December 11th that year by Bishop Tait, Bishop of London. The Bishop at the induction ceremony is reported as having said: *"It is a barn of a church and a wilderness of a place."* At the same occasion Revd Burrows described the area as *"a wilderness with a number of habitations of the most wretched kind, inhabited by a still more wretched class of people"*.



Mrs Alice Fitz Wygram

Significant developments during Revd Fitz Wygram's incumbency

The inhabitants of the community were described by the Hampton historian, Henry Ripley, as being *"destitute of every social and useful institution"*. Revd Fitz Wygram's response was to say that *"if people are taught to say thanks to God, they must have something to give thanks for"*. He and his wife then dedicated their lives and a good deal of their money to improving the

unpleasant living conditions and poor prospects of the parishioners. As he was a man of considerable private wealth, he became a local benefactor and worked relentlessly on social reform, particularly trying to end the drunkenness which was a major national problem at the time. He did this by buying up slums in his parish, demolishing them and replacing them with new cottages with rents that working people could afford.



The church in the 1880s with the new south aisle and new south porch

At the beginning of the 1880s Revd Fitz Wygram started a Working Men's Social Club and Coffee House, the village's first community centre, with the parish library being housed in its club room. There the men could play chess, draughts and dominoes, read the daily papers and buy reasonably priced refreshments. It was described by Ripley as *"a commodious block of buildings"* which was *"replete with every feature essential to the edification and amusement of the working man, and is an institution of which any village might be proud"*. The Surrey Comet stated that it was established mainly *"to encourage habits of temperance and to counteract the evils of strong drink"*.

Revd Fitz Wygram founded or encouraged many other community ventures in order to improve the lot of his parishioners. He was a keen sportsman, encouraging his parishioners to start a football club and to play cricket in the St James's Cricket Club of which he was president. In fact, his enthusiasm for the game and his *"modern"* ideas were such that he encouraged his parishioners to play on Sundays provided that they attended at least one church service. These advanced ideas did not, however, prevent his appointment, even in Victorian times, as Rural Dean.

Early on in his incumbency, Revd Fitz Wygram discovered that only thirteen children out of a population of 1,100 went to any sort of school. Having a keen interest in education, he made a grant of land in Mill Lane to the vicar and churchwardens *"on trust for the education of children and adults, or children only, of labourers, manufacturing and other poorer classes, and for no other purpose"*. The boys' school was where the Greenwood Centre stands today. The girls' and infants' building was where there are now houses, opposite the Greenwood Centre.

The original church building was remodelled, with large contributions from his own pocket. These developments started in 1873 with a northern aisle, together with an outer porch at the west entrance. A new vestry and organ chamber were added to the church in 1874 and the chancel was enlarged in 1876. The organ, originally built by Bishop for St Peter's, Eaton Square, in the 1830s, was bought for £150 by the vicar. The late east window was removed to the west end of the church and a new beautifully stained glass window took its place. The south porch and south aisle were completed in 1879.

The end of Revd Fitz Wygram's incumbency

The completion of the nave was the last improvement under Revd Fitz Wygram's supervision for he died two years later, on August 12th, 1881, whilst on a visit to Ilkley, Yorkshire. His death was sudden, although there had already been signs that his health was deteriorating. His passing caused a great loss to the district, the Surrey Comet saying that *"in him the parish had lost a great benefactor, and by his death a void had been created that, at present could hardly be realised."*

The Surrey Comet also stated that after his death the church was packed for his funeral, *"giving affecting testimony of the deep respect in which the late Vicar was held,"* with *"nearly all places of business both at Hampton and New Hampton being wholly closed for the occasion."* He was referred to *"as a guiding spirit, a trustworthy friend, a safe adviser . . . he stood alone in the possession of faculties and experiences that we rarely see combined in a single character."* The Revd Studholme Wilson, the curate, said that Mr Fitz Wygram had brought *"his energy, his liberality and excessive care to foster any scheme that might add to the spiritual welfare of this parish or make this temple a more worthy*



Revd and Mrs Fitz Wygram's grave

dwelling-place for the most High".

He was buried in the churchyard where his grave is still standing near the entrance into the vestry. £500 was collected by public subscription to install memorials for him. A window, called 'The Transfiguration', at the west end of the church, above the original porch which was also built in his memory. The plaque is inscribed *"To the Glory of God and in loving remembrance of Fitzroy John Fitz Wygram, first vicar of this parish, 1863-1881. This window is erected by his parishioners and friends for 'A faithful man and feared God'."* The south aisle series of windows based on the Parables were also added together with the original west porch, with a gable and stone cross replacing the old bell turret, and the single service bell was re-housed.