



10. Father Sear, St Peter Parmentergate, the Rectory in Dragon Hall

St. Peter Parmentergate in the early 1960s was High Church - all the Catholic things going on with the incense burners and the Hail Marys and robes. Fr. Sear always wore his robes. The parishioners were just ordinary working-class people; you put on your Sunday best coat or your Sunday best suit, and you came to church. After the services we would all meet on the pavement outside the main gate and Fr. Sear would be there and talk to everybody; it used to be boring for me as a child, I suppose we'd be standing there half to three-quarters of an hour, adults chit-chatting and I just wanted to go home! We all knew each other; I can remember Mr and Mrs Rogers and their daughter Susan, Mr and Mrs LeFevre and their daughter Jackie, Mr. and Mrs. Leverett and their son Michael. There was another young man, Michael, who went on to become a priest. My brother Michael was the organist. My mum also used to come to something midweek and she would also come down to St. Julian's [from Dereham Road] if anything was going on there and she used to clean the brasses there on a Friday afternoon and I'd get hauled in for that as well. It was the same families always there, right to the time I got married and moved away. Everybody had to travel in to the city to come here, nobody lived round about, it was a "gathered congregation".

Fr. Charles Sear was born in Swainsthorpe; a very nice man. I do remember he had angina and sometimes during the service he would have an angina attack and that would stop the service until he had recovered. Not a very tall man. I do remember coming into Dragon Hall

which was then his home, because it was the rectory, with my husband-to-be, because you go and see your priest before you get married, and it was a tiny little dark front room because you stepped into it right from the street and I remember thinking how dark and poky it was. He always said it was haunted - who knows? Doubtful whether he ever painted the walls - I don't think he was a handyman! There was a sideboard and on it was a wonderful old music box, with the barrel and the little spikes on it and you put the big wheel discs in - I remember him putting that on for us so we could listen to it. He was a nice man, a kindly man. I know he took me and Susan Rogers under his wing because my dad had died and her dad was very ill most of the time and he sort of made sure we were OK. Fr.Sear performed my wedding service in October 1969. Just a tiny wedding, held in St. Julian's. I can't remember why, but my mother wouldn't let my brother play the organ and I don't know who played but they actually couldn't play the organ and it was a disaster! Anyway, a nice little ceremony in a nice church and we signed the register in Mother Julian's cell and had the photos taken in the garden at the back of the church and then we went on to the Lads' Club for our wedding reception, in a big room at the back of the building. My mum had moved to Old Catton but continued coming to the churches and I had my eldest daughter christened in St. Julian's by Fr. Sear. He was living in Dragon Hall up to the time of his death.

Mary Secker

I went into the Rectory [in Dragon Hall] quite a lot because we used to go and have breakfast there after Mass and also help do things like make church magazines. You went through the little door with the stained glass in it and straight into the Rectory sitting room, up a couple of wooden steps on the left to the area

they used as their study, where there is a blocked-off front door in the wall, and then you went out through his sitting room - and this is where it got really complicated - because there was a corridor running along to a 1920s style building as a kitchen. You could see the arches as you went along this corridor, just painted over. I am sure you could go down into the cellar round a twisty staircase and you got the vaulting, but presumably it was all separated off between the pub, the rectory and the butchers. I remember going upstairs where there was a sort of shaky corridor and bedrooms. The Roneo-Gestetner was up there and we would spend a morning duplicating and stapling the parish magazine. The ceiling was all covered up - I don't think you could see the glorious roof - but you kind of thought there must be something there. One of the priests says he remembers the dragon, but he would have gone into the bedrooms, which we didn't. It was small and cramped and knowing how vicarages and rectories are usually appointed, it is quite surprising that this was one. I suppose it was one before they reorganised the finances in the Church of England and things became more centralised. Now vicarages are paid for by the diocese. It was a nice rectory, though, because in its way it was very cosy I can remember when we were young teenagers, we'd be invited in after Evensong and sit in the front room and play canasta. And go into this more modern kitchen and have breakfast a lot. So it was a very open house kind of feel. They weren't grand houses although they had all the beams and you did have the sense of history. It wasn't separated from the community and I think this has been one of the glories of the Church of England, to have their priests living there in the middle of the community. For me that is the whole point of priestly ministry, to be there with your people.

Reverend Frank Nichols

Additional info re Father Sear from Nick Leatherland (2012) who lived in The Old Barge:

I can remember I used to climb out of the landing window onto them (they had a flat concrete roof). Father Sear on seeing me up there one day dared me to jump into his garden. When I did I could see the fear in his eyes, he nearly had kittens. When I landed my knees hit my chin with a loud crack and loosened a few teeth. My dad who had heard this going on swore at father Sear and gave him a right ticking off. But really I dont blame Father Sear he was just kidding, how was he to know I would be so daft as to do it. Never tried it again though.