

Henry Taylor Cafferata 1849 – 1922



A Young Rev. Cafferata

Henry Taylor Cafferata was born in Birkenhead, Liverpool on June 23rd 1849, the fourth of nine children. He was educated at Stonyhurst, then in Belgium at Liège, Roulers and the Grand Séminaire, Bruges.

He was ordained for the Nottingham Diocese on May 29th 1874 and worked as the Bishop's secretary at St. Barnabas' Cathedral. He also ministered at Market Rasen, St. Mary's Derby, and Retford before moving to the Diocese of Southwark in 1887.

Rev. Cafferata served for a short time at Battle (1887) before moving to Mortlake (1888-93), and Southwark Cathedral (1898-1905). He was Rector at Sutton from 1905, before moving to Wallington in 1908 where he founded the church of St. Elphege. He then went to Streatham in 1913 and Englefield Green from 1915 until his death on the 26th March 1922.

He was Army Chaplain at Chatham for eight years, and a member of the Medway Board of Guardians.⁽¹⁾

He was appointed Canon in 1900 and Canon Penitentiary in 1904. He was, for many years, chaplain to the Comte De Paris, father of Queen Amélie of Portugal.⁽²⁾

At the time Canon Cafferata was priest there, Retford didn't have a Catholic church so the Canon was based in Gainsborough, Lincolnshire, about 12 miles away. There he was worked with, and was influenced by, the Rev. Michael Gorman, who had grand ideas but less financial sense. Along with the Sisters of the Convent of Mercy they built an "iron church" in the rectory garden, bought land and built a school called "St Joseph's Collegiate Seminary for the Sons of Gentlemen". To finance this, they borrowed £4,000 from benefactors including the Duke of Norfolk and the sister of the Archbishop of Glasgow, Mrs Anna Maria Grainger.⁽³⁾

They advertised extensively for pupils for the school, which had fees of 30 guineas per year and offered "Latin, Greek, and French Languages, Arithmetic, Euclid, Algebra, History, and all the branches of a sound English education." The school promoted itself as ideal for parents travelling abroad and promised that "Great attention is paid to the health of delicate children."⁽⁴⁾

Unfortunately, the school wasn't a success and by 1886 both the Duke of Norfolk and Mrs Grainger demanded their money back, so Revs. Gorman, Cafferata and the Mother Superior were all made bankrupt.⁽³⁾

Given the timing of the Canon's move to the diocese of Southwark, I wonder if this may be a contributory factor?

This wasn't the last time in his life that the Canon was involved in controversy. In 1909 his housekeeper, Annie Dewey, was twice charged with libelling another woman, Annie Tugwell. The first time the case was thrown out because Tugwell didn't appear in court and the second time Dewey was found not guilty. It subsequently turned out that Tugwell had written the letters and sent them to herself! She obviously had quite a campaign going against the Canon and Annie Dewey as, in 1910, Annie Tugwell was tried for libel against them! The substance of the libel was that Canon Cafferata was behaving in an improper manner with Ms. Dewey! The libels included posting a marriage notice in the Daily Express stating that Henry Cafferata had married Annie Dewey on August 11 1909.

The Times was quite restrained in its coverage of the affair, not revealing many details, but the case was extensively reported, even reaching the papers in Australia and New Zealand. Some of these were much more open in their reporting. The Adelaide Argus of 15th September 1910 made it known that one libel was the accusation of fathering an illegitimate child. A postcard that Canon Cafferata received said "You really must keep up payment for your child. It is growing very much like you."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Mrs Tugwell was found guilty and sentenced to 12 months imprisonment with hard labour as well as paying the prosecution's costs.

These cases were a heavy drain on Canon Cafferata's resources and a support fund, to assist him financially, was set up by clergy in neighbouring churches of several denominations.⁽⁵⁾

Ms. Dewey was a loyal servant, remaining with the Canon as he moved around and she managed his affairs right up to his death in 1922, signing his cheques once he became too ill to sign them himself in 1921.⁽⁶⁾



At the end of his life, Canon Cafferata became too ill to sign his own cheques so he signed an authority for Ms Dewey to do so on his behalf.

Aside from his legal issues, Canon Cafferata had a successful career in the church, the highlight of which was writing "The Catechism Simply Explained" which remained in print for around 80 years, long after his death. He also wrote "The Catechism for Little Children" and made many contributions to "Land and Water" and the "Fishing Gazette" on his favourite pastime, fishing.⁽¹⁾

He was involved in a number of high-profile services including assisting with the funeral mass of the Victorian explorer Sir Richard Burton.⁽⁷⁾ Henry Cafferata is buried next to Sir Richard Burton in St Mary's Cemetery, Mortlake, London.⁽⁸⁾



Canon Cafferata's grave in Mortlake, London

Notes:

1. The information to this point is an amalgamation from The Catholic Who's Who, 1908 p57 and information supplied by St Joseph's Church, Colliers Wood, 1995
2. Obituary in The Times 30th March 1922
3. Lincolnshire Archivist's Report 24, 1/3/1972 -31/3/1973 p13
4. Freeman's Journal, Dublin 20th December 1884
5. Reports about all the libel cases in The Times, 1909-03-20 p12, 1909-06-29 p14, 1910-03-04, 1910-04-22 p4, 1910-04-22, 1910-04-22 p4, 1910-07-16 p4, 1910-07-29 p4, 1910-07-30 p4, 1910-08-01 p2, 1910-08-02 p2, 1910-09-08 p4
6. Personal Cheques from Canon Cafferata, in my possession.
7. The Times 16th June 1891p8
8. If you look at this link: http://www.stmarymags.org.uk/church/burton_tomb.html the Canon's grave is on the left.