

Revd Maurice Frost, Vicar of Deddington 1924 - 1961

Born in 1889, Maurice Frost entered the priesthood on graduating from Cambridge University. He served as curate in Buckingham from 1911 to 1916, he was Vicar of Bladon with Woodstock from 1916 to 1924, and was then Vicar of Deddington for the rest of his life, from the politically unstable climate of the 1920s and 1930s, through the turbulent years of the Second World War, the post-war period and into the rapid social changes of the 1950s. Throughout this time he provided stability in the parish both as a much respected priest and through his extensive service as chairman of the Parish Council.

Surprisingly little is known of Maurice Frost's background and personal life. He was a quiet, private man; an only child who came to Deddington with his mother and married his cousin Kathleen. When Kathleen died in 1948, her sister Dorothea gave up her home in Bournemouth to become his housekeeper and she remained with him until his death. He had a house full of dogs, kept bees and a jackdaw; he was a talented woodworker and craftsman; he employed a cook, cleaner and gardener, he was known for his generous hospitality and charitable giving and he had a boxing ring in his house. A heavy smoker, he had a fondness for whisky and lapsang souchong tea, was very particular about the temperature of his bath water and collected clocks. He died on Christmas Day 1961, after 37 years in post, and was buried in Deddington churchyard with his wife. Dorothea died soon afterwards and was buried in the same plot.

He is remembered above all for the two things which defined his life: his academic work – for which he was awarded a D. Litt. from Cambridge – and his support of the church choir and the nurturing of the choristers.

The considerable academic work as a hymnologist resulted in the significant publication of the much respected 'Historical Companion to Hymns Ancient and Modern' and 'English and Scottish Psalm and Hymn Tunes', as well as the discovery, in 1946, of a new manuscript of the Christmas Carol *Adeste Fideles*. He had his own private printing press in the vicarage and published a history of Deddington Church Schools from 1550-1950, the substance of which contained an appeal for funds for the school – the leaflet was printed with a tear-off covenant form. Other leaflets and pamphlets followed, most of which were connected with fund raising for the school, the church, and the bell ringers. He also printed the labels for his home-made honey, and a distinctive calendar personalised with details provided by local residents.

Maurice Frost and the Church Choir

As a hymnologist of some note Maurice Frost was a strong supporter of the organist, choirmaster and choir, and guided them safely through years of great changes. Many choirboys of his time remember him with affection. A strict disciplinarian, he thought nothing of breaking off his sermon to admonish a row of fidgety choirboys, ordering them out of their stalls into the front seats of the nave until the end of his sermon. But he never bore a grudge and always saw to it that there was a healthy balance between Choir duties and fun for the youngsters. He taught them woodwork in the Vicarage loft where he also rigged up a small boxing ring, letting them work out much youthful exuberance under the supervision of the local GP. During the three hour Good Friday Service the choirboys were allowed to file out through the Vicar's vestry for a 10 minute break with milk and buns in the Vicarage.

In May 1929 Dr Frost discussed with his PCC complaints from certain members of the congregation about hymn tunes. He elicited the interesting figures that since the previous Advent 125 hymns had been sung: of these 95 were to tunes from the Ancient & Modern Hymn book, the remaining 30 from the English Hymnal and of these none were 'new'. A few months later experiments with a microphone by the organ and loud-speakers under the tower were made "to produce the illusion of an organ behind the congregation and to make it possible for the congregation to sing in tune and to the beat of organ and choir".

It was with Maurice Frost's encouragement that the choir, in 1937, became an affiliated member of the School of English Church Music (later to become the Royal School of Church Music) whereby "undertaking to do its best to promote the cause of good Church Music and in this to be guided by the principles set forth by the SCM". Choristers followed the motto "I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the understanding also".

Choirboys of the 1930s remember being driven by Dr Frost, in his much admired 1927 Austin 7 Tourer, to training courses run by the School of English Church Music. They were as thrilled by being treated to a journey in an open tourer as by having the chance to train under Sir Sidney Nicholson, founder of the SCM.

A Choirboy's Memories of Maurice Frost

"The Vicar was a nice man, very tolerant, and we knew how far we could go playing him up. He would take the boys' choir practice with Miss Weaver on the organ. He was a very good musician himself.

One day my friend Joe Cowley had filled his water pistol with water from puddles on his way to choir practice. The vicar was at the organ. Joe decided he was a good target and so he aimed and fired, catching the Vicar in the face. He stood on the pedals, the organ roared, he got up and chased Joe around the church. He did not catch him but on returning down the aisle he was muttering 'boys will be boys'.

On Mondays the Vicar had a boys' woodwork class in the old vicarage loft. It did not matter what denomination you belonged to – Church or Chapel – you were welcome. The Vicar and Mr Bert Sykes, both of them excellent carpenters, taught us a great deal. We made folding chairs and a stage for use at the school, where pantomimes and concerts were held. There was also a boxing ring where the boys were taught boxing. Dr Hodges gave his time to oversee the boxing, making sure it was sporting and safe.

We boys would wash the Vicar's car, cut the lawn and help him with the bees or all kinds of small jobs to earn six pence. We also used to get up to mischief: the old water butt in the yard held six or seven hundred gallons of water. It was getting rusty and would leak, sometimes we would help it leak, then we would tell him we had stopped it leaking. He would then get out the chocolates, which was a great treat: there was always very dark chocolate.

His car was an Austin 7 1927 open tourer soft top with celluloid windows. At times he would say: 'Wash your hands and face: we are going to Oxford.' It did not matter if you had no backside in your trousers, we still went to Oxford. He took us to the Cadena Café for tea and cakes. It was a lovely treat. Then we would go to Blackwell's and buy books – I remember my first hymn book which he bought me.

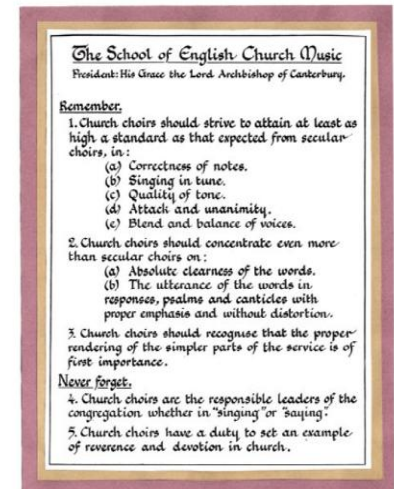
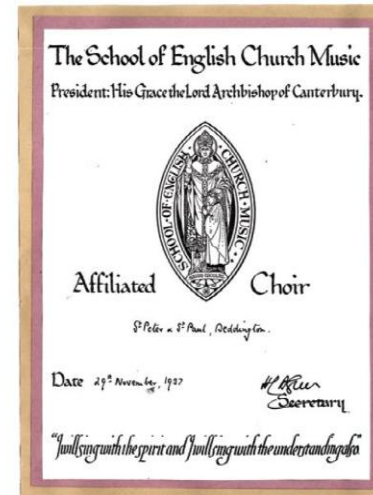
I look back with joy to a man who was so kind and involved with the choir, and who gave his time and trouble to the mischievous boys with real Christian love."

In the Living of Maurice Frost MA

1924~1961

The Reverend Maurice Frost, to the delight of his choirboys, occasionally mixed up the deacon side with the cantoris, dishing out punishment to the innocent.

In 1924 the new vicar, Dr Maurice Frost, was approached with a motion proposed by the RCC members that the music selected for psalms and hymns be of such a character that the congregation could join in easily.



The Reverend Maurice Frost became vicar in 1924. He died in office in 1961. He ruled his boys-only choir like a father. During long Easter services, he would send them across to the vicarage where they were given hot cross buns. He also ran a boxing club for them in the vicarage, which was supervised by the local doctor.