

Herbert Edward Sawyer

Vicar 1907-1923

Herbert Edward Sawyer came from a military family. His father, Edward, served in the 1st Warwickshire Militia. His grandfather on his mother's side, Henry Baynes Ward, had been in the navy, purchasing his commission as an ensign, the lowest ranking commission in the British Navy, in October 1816.

Herbert's parents, Edward Sawyer and Emma Louisa Ward, married on 7th August 1856 at the parish church of Havant in Hampshire. At the time, Edward was a captain of militia, but he eventually rose to the rank of Major and retired in 1881 as an honorary Lieutenant Colonel. At the time of their marriage, Edward was 32 and Emma Louisa 19. Although both sets of parents were British citizens, neither Edward nor Emma Louisa was born in the UK. Edward was born on 5th June 1824 in Amsterdam and Emma Louisa was born in 1838 in Switzerland.

Herbert was born on 12th November 1864 in Marchwood, Hampshire, the fifth of seven children. According to the 1871 census, the family employed a governess and six other servants, including a cook-housekeeper and a lady's maid. By 1881, Edward Sawyer had retired from the navy to Hinton St George, near Chard in Somerset, where he became a Justice of the Peace and Herbert was a boarder in the 'Hodgsonites' house at Charterhouse School in Godalming, Surrey. From there, he went to Lincoln Theological College. He was ordained deacon in December 1887 in the very first ordination service to take place at Truro Cathedral and was licenced to a curacy at St Teath in Cornwall.¹

In June 1889, Herbert Sawyer was ordained priest at Worcester Cathedral and licensed as curate to St John's, Dudley, in the West Midlands.² From there, he went on to a curacy in Dorchester, near Wallingford in Oxfordshire. In the 1891 census he was a lodger to Ann P Cook, the 'Church Sweeper,' at her house in Rotton Row, Watling Street, Dorchester. By June 1893 he was curate at St Peter's, Vauxhall, in London.³

On 1st November 1894, Herbert Sawyer set sail on the *Dunottar Castle* for Durban (Port Natal) in South Africa, a 65 day voyage from the Port of London. He came home for a four month visit in January 1897, returning to Durban on the *Norman* in May, and finally back to Southampton on the *Goorkha* in February 1898. Whilst in Natal, he worked under the leadership of Arthur Hamilton Baynes, Bishop of Natal from 1893-1901. Baynes was a family name on his mother's side, so it's possible that he was related to the Bishop. An article about Herbert Sawyer in the Leicester Evening Mail in 1922 noted that "*He did great work out there (in Natal) and acquired a vast experience during his four years' sojourn in South Africa.*"⁴

On his return to England, Sawyer took up the post of chaplain to the Sisters of Mercy at Bussage, near Stroud in Gloucestershire, where he remained until his appointment as vicar of Ashby de la Zouch in December 1906. Houses of Mercy were Anglican institutions ostensibly set up to house 'fallen women', the inmates considered to be sexually promiscuous, working in prostitution or in the

¹ Royal Cornwall Gazette, 23 Dec 1887 (FMP)

² Birmingham Daily Post, 17 June 1889 (FMP)

³ Daily News (London), 26 June 1893 (FMP) – report of his cousin's wedding.

⁴ Leicester Evening Mail, 13 March 1922 (FMP)

case of many, simply unmarried mothers, a situation considered unacceptable at the time and necessitating moral and domestic training.⁵ This particular home closed in 1949.

Sawyer was to remain in Leicestershire for the next 28 years. He was vicar of Ashby until 1923, before moving to Thurlaston, near Earl Shilton, as Rector. The Leicester Evening Mail wrote in March 1922 that *"Since he has been in his present vicarage he has exercised a great influence throughout his parish and has always taken the keenest possible interest in all public affairs in and around Ashby."*⁶ Details of what he did in Ashby, however, are vague. He never married and mostly lived alone in the vicarage with two servants, a married couple, Clara and Henry Pickering. However, the 1921 Electoral Roll listed his elder sister, Ethel Margaret Sawyer, as resident at the vicarage with him. She remained there until he left for Thurlaston in 1923 and she wrote and published a guidebook for St Helen's Church.

In September 1923, Herbert Sawyer became rector of All Saints, Thurlaston. His predecessor there was Basil C F Andrewes, who succeeded him at St Helen's, Ashby. Sawyer remained in Thurlaston until ill health forced his resignation in October 1935 at the age of 69 years. He was appointed a Canon Emeritus of Leicester Cathedral and retired to Ferndene, Clevedon, near Bristol until his death on 1st May 1945 at the age of 80, leaving £2706.⁷

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<https://www.chalfordparishlocalhistorygroup.org.uk/parish/bussage/#::~:~:text=Houses%20of%20Mercy%20where%20Anglican,necessitated%20moral%20and%20domestic%20training>. (Accessed 17.4.2023)

⁶ Leicester Evening Mail, 13 March 1922 (FMP)

⁷ Probate Calendar 1858-1995 (FMP)