

# TREASURES OF THE ROSEAU CATHEDRAL: THE CRYPT part 1

By Bernard Lauwyck

## THE CRYPT of the CATHEDRAL



One of the generally unknown and most mysterious spaces in the Roseau Cathedral is the CRYPT, where several Bishops and clergy were buried. I had the privilege to give some priests, architects and friends the opportunity to visit the crypt and get some feedback from them. I learned much from Dr. Lennox Honychurch during his visit, but still many questions remain to be answered. The translations of the Latin and French texts, faded with age, were also quite a challenge, but with the help of many learned minds, I am confident that we got as close as possible to the exact version.

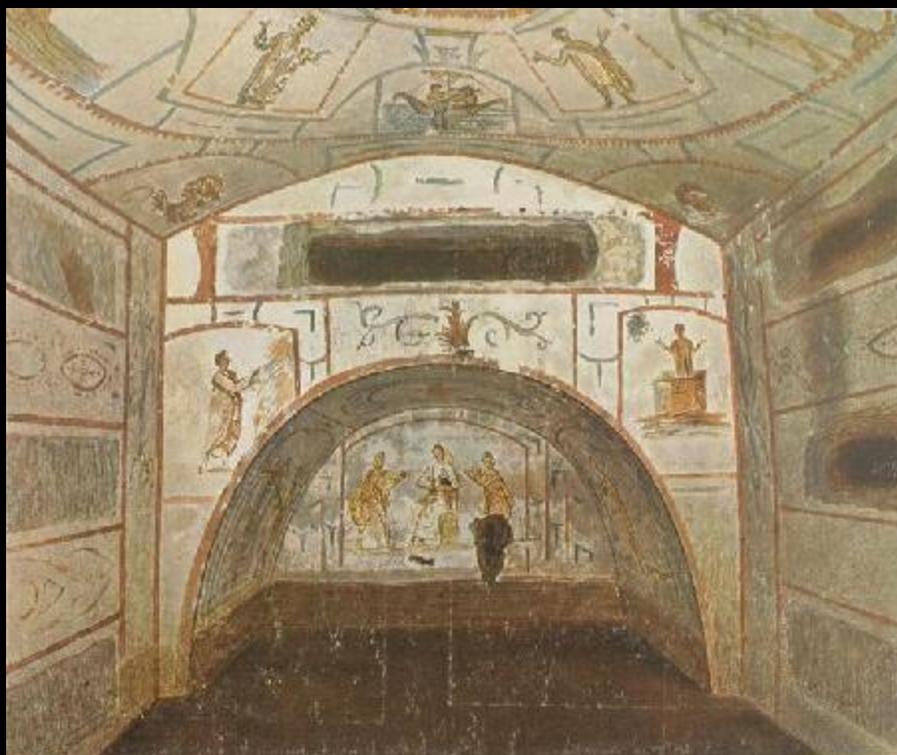
But before I go further, I wanted to add something new to the history of the triptych of “OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL SUCCOUR”, a gift from LOUISA POTTER.

The Ecclesiastical bulletin of Roseau mentions “*An unusually impressive ceremony took place on Sunday, May 1, 1921 at 4 p.m. : the Blessing of the new picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, the gift of a late parishioner whose dying wish was to have the picture placed in the Roseau Cathedral.*”

I thought that was worth mentioning.

In architecture, a **crypt** (from the Latin “**crypta**”) designates any vaulted building partially or entirely below the ground level, such as sewers, the stalls for horses and chariots in a circus, storage cellars.

It was natural, therefore, for the early Christians to call their catacombs “cryptae”, which means “hidden places” in Greek. When churches came to be erected over the tombs of saints and martyrs, underground chapels, known as crypts, were built around the actual tomb. Notice this beautiful example of the catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter.



The most famous crypt is St. Peter's, built over the circus of emperor Nero, the site of St. Peter's martyrdom.

As early as the reign of the Roman emperor Constantine (AD 306–337), the crypt was considered a normal part of the church building. Further incentive to the building of crypts was provided by growth of ecclesiastical sanction of burials within the church walls. The Council of Mainz (813AD) officially approved the interment of bishops, abbots, worthy priests, or loyal laymen in a church, and from that time burials within the building, usually in the crypt, multiplied.

The practice was that the crypt had small burial slots called loculi (“little Places).

Our Cathedral crypt has 18 burial slots, three still vacant. That means that 15 persons are buried in this crypt. The crypt is 8 feet wide and 14 feet long. The height from the floor to the apex of the vaulted ceiling is 7'-6". The vaulted ceiling is constructed out of red bricks and from the look of them, they seem to be homemade bricks and not the industrial hard, solid, sharp-edged bricks which were used as ballast in ships crossing the ocean, as are everywhere evident in the town of St. George's in Grenada.

The chapel above the crypt, which was built by Bishop R. M.C. Poirier, third Bishop of Roseau, was consecrated on the 19<sup>th</sup> March 1873 so one can assume that the vaulted crypt was from the same period.

The date is inscribed in a large marble plaque set into the wall of the chapel, which was at that time called the St. Joseph chapel, establishing in 1873 the "perpetual cult" of St. Joseph. Saint Joseph the Worker was a powerful saint for Catholic workers. Ten years after Karl Marx' "Das Kapital", "**Rerum Novarum**" was issued by Pope Leo XIII on May 15, 1891, establishing the Catholic workers movements as an answer to the socialist movement.



The use and name of this space or chapel has changed many times ever since.

After the damage done by hurricane DAVID on August 29, 1979, the marble Baptismal Font was placed in this chapel and it became the Place for Baptism.

During the renovations leading up to the September 7, 1994 ordination of Bishop Edward Gilbert, it was redesigned as the Blessed Sacrament chapel as the two stained glass windows depicting grain/bread and grape/wine still testify.



Bishop Edward Gilbert relocated the Blessed Sacrament and the space became the Marian or Lady's chapel with the statue of OUR LADY OF FAIR HAVEN.

On the floor in front of Her statue, a plywood sheet covered with carpet hides the stairs to the crypt.



Upon descending the 14 red tiled steps towards the crypt entrance, one notices two marble engraved memorial stones, set upright in the walls.



Memorials are a focus for mourning and remembrance of our loved ones. In a Protestant Christian context, the very wealthy often erected elaborate memorials within churches rather than having simply external gravestones.

Memorial stones are very old as one can read in Joshua 4:1-9. *After the nation crosses over, God commands Joshua to set up a memorial of the crossing. “And it came to pass, when all the people had completely crossed over the Jordan, that the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying: “‘take twelve stones from here, out of the midst of the Jordan, from the place where the priests’ feet stood firm. ...Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant stood; and they are there to this day.”*

As our engraved marble memorial stones were not exposed to rain and sun, they are fairly well preserved, but still difficult to decipher. They are the memorial slabs for the first two Bishops of Roseau:

- Most Rev. Michael MONAGHAN was the first Bishop of Roseau, from his ordination on February 16, 1851 in Port of Spain till his death, at the age of 42, on July 14, 1855 on the Island of St. Thomas. He was buried there.

Michael MONAGHAN was Irish, from the County Longford, Diocese of Ardagh, and was the bishop responsible for the purchase and installation of the magnificent pure marble HIGH ALTAR, adorned with 7 splendid brass statuettes: St. Peter, St. Paul, Jesus as the Good Shepherd and the 4 evangelists. He designed, planned and erected the Cathedral's imposing central church tower and steeple, which still dominates the skyline of Roseau today. On January 30, 1855 the wall plate was placed on the new tower.

On March 1, 1855 “the cross was placed on the belfry to the great delight of the whole community”.

The two small towers were added long after his death.



The second Bishop of Roseau, Most Rev. Michel VESQUE was French, born in Honfleur, Normandy and was ordained bishop on October 26, 1856 in the Redemptorist community at Clapham, London. He died scarcely 2 years later, at the age of 40, on July 10, 1858 on the island of St. Kitts. His body was brought back to Roseau where bishop Théodore-Augustin Forcade of Guadeloupe, among others, attended the funeral service on August 25, 1858 in the Roseau Cathedral.



Bishop Michel Vesque's body was exhumed in March 1860 and brought to the UK to be reburied in the cemetery of the Sisters of the Faithful Virgins in Norwood, close to London, where he had been their pastor and spiritual leader for 8 years before becoming Bishop of Roseau.

Michel VESQUE made a huge impact on future catholic education in Dominica by bringing the Order of the Faithful Virgins to Dominica. They started the Convent High School in his own "palace", and later in St. Yves, with 6 students on February 2, 1858. Bishop VESQUE also introduced the Redemptorists to the Danish islands of St. Thomas, St Croix, which was the beginning of a tremendous missionary trust into all the English speaking islands.

The initiatives of a man who was barely two years Bishop of Roseau shaped and still shapes, up to this day, the destiny of thousands of our young people .

Next week, we will enter the crypt chamber itself and describe its contents . Join me in the chronicle next week.

Additional information not published in the Chronicle of the 11<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

Translation of the Memorial stone of Michael Monaghan

**MOST ILLUSTRIOUS AND REVEREND**

**D.D. MICHAEL MONAGHAN**

**BORN IN THE DIOCESE OF ARDAGH IN IRELAND**

**THE VICAR GENERAL OF PORT OF SPAIN**

**FIRST BISHOP OF THIS SEAT**

**CONSECRATED ON FEBRUARY 16, 1851.**

**HE BEAUTIFIED THIS CHURCH WITH THE SPECTACULAR**

**MARBLE ALTAR AND A CUT STONE TOWER.**

**ON HIS WAY TO HIS NATIVE FATHERLAND**

**TO RECUPERATE FROM HIS ILL-HEALTH**

**HE PASSED, AS GOD WOULD HAVE IT,**

**OVER TO HIS HEAVENLY HOME**

**ON THE ISLAND OF ST. THOMAS ON JULY 14, 1855**

**AT THE AGE OF 42.**

**ERECTED IN MEMORY OF**

**A PIOUS HUMBLE SOFTHEARTED HARDWORKING**

**MOST DESERVING MAN**

**BY R.M.C. POIRIER, THIRD BISHOP OF THIS DIOCESE,**

**THE CLERGY AND PEOPLE.**

X  
P

ILLUSTRISSIMO. ET. REVERENDISSIMO.

D. D. MICHAELI MONAGHAN.

EX. DIOECESI. ARDACADENSI. IN. HIBERNIA. ORTUENDO.

QUI

EX. VICARIO. GENERALI. PORTUS. HISPANIAE.

PRIMUS. HUIUS. SEDIS. EPISCOPUS.

DIE. XVI. FEBRUARII. MDCCCLII. CONSECRATUS.

ECCLESIAM. HANC.

ALTARI. MARMOREO. ET. TURRI.

LAPIDIBUS. SECTIS. SPECTABILI.

DECORAVIT.

QUIQUE. DUM. SANITATIS. RECUPERANDAE. CAUSA.

PATRIAM. TERRESTREM. REPETERET.

AD. CAELEM. DEO. MELIUS. PROVIDENTE.

EST. EXEQUITUS. IN. INSULA. S. THOMAE.

DIE. XIV. JULII. MDCCCLV.

ÆTATIS. XLII.

PER. VIREM. PIO. DISCRETO. MANSUETO. LABORIOSO.

BENE. MERENTI.

R. M. E. POWELL. EJUSDEM. SEDIS. TERTIO. EPISCOPUS.

GLORIOSUS. POPULISQUE. VERMONENSIS.

POSUIT.

Or in Latin

ILLUSTRISSIMO ET REVERENDISSIMO

D.D. MICHAELI MONAGHAN

DIOCESI ARDACADENSI IN HIBERNIA ORIUNDO

Q

XX VICARIO GENERALI PORTUS HISPANIAE

PRIMUS HUIUS SEDIS EPISCOPUS

DIE XVI FEBRUARII MDCCCLI CONSECRATUS

ECCLESIAM HANC

ALTARI MARMOREO ET TURRI

LAPIDIBUS SECTIS SPECTALBILI

DECORAVIT

QUIQUE DUM SANITATIS RECUPERANDAE CAUSA

PATRIAM TERRESTREM REPETERET

D. CAELESTEM DEO MELIUS PROVIDENTE

EST EJECTUS IN INSULA S THOMAE

DIE XIV JULII MDCCCLV

AETATIS XLII

PP ..... PIO DISCRETO MANSUETO LABORIOSO

BENE MERENTI

R. M. POIRIER EJUSDEM SEDIS TERTIUS EPISCOPUS

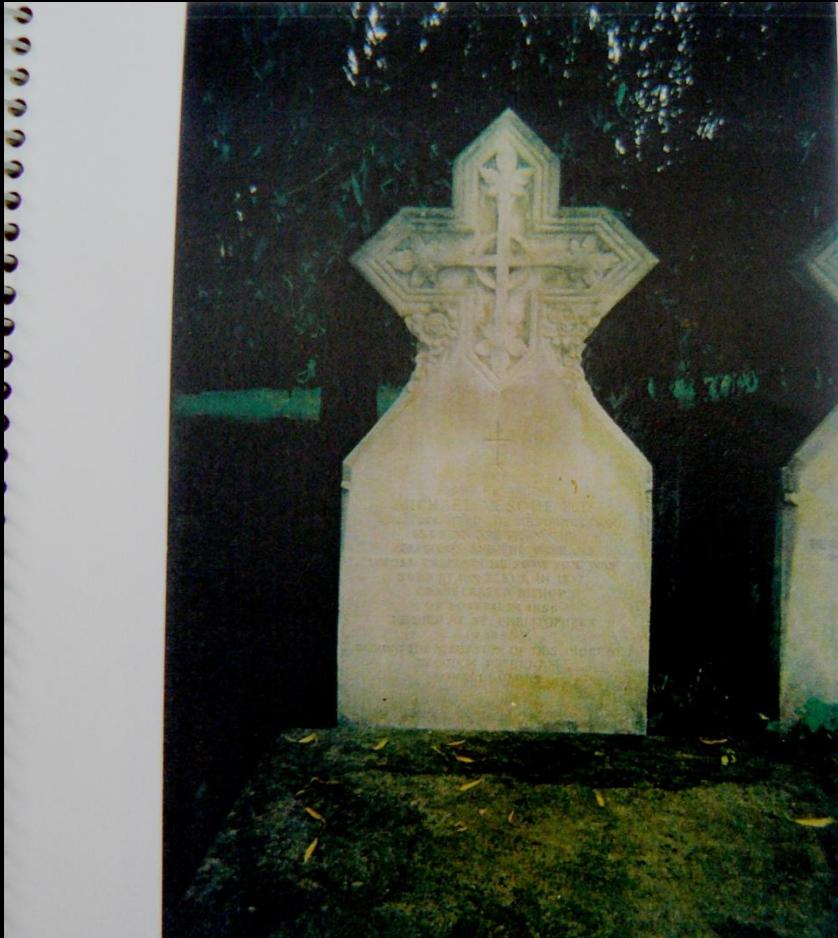
CLERUS POPULUSQUE MEMORES

POSUERE

**MOST ILLUSTRIOUS AND REVEREND  
D.D. DESIDERATO MICHAEL VESQUE  
BORN IN THE CITY OF HONFLEUR IN NORMANDY  
ON THE SEVENTEENTH DAY OF NOVEMBER, 1817  
WHO  
TOOK EIGHT YEARS OF ESTABLISHING AND DIRECTING  
NORWOOD MONASTERY IN ENGLAND,  
A HOLY AND EXHAUSTIVELY ACTIVE MAN.  
  
HE WAS CONSECRATED BISHOP OF ROSEAU  
OF THIS ISLAND  
ON THE 26 DAY OF OCTOBER, 1856.  
HE WAS INSTALLED ON THE 19<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF APRIL, 1857  
AND WHILE  
HE PERFORMED HIS MANY DUTIES DILIGENTLY  
FOR THE GOOD OF THE FUTURE OF THE DIOCESE,  
HE SUFFERED GREATLY AND  
WAS OVERCOME BY DEATH  
ON THE TENTH DAY OF JULY, 1858  
AT THE AGE OF 40  
ON THE ISLAND OF SAINT CHRISTOPHER  
HE WAS LAID TO REST AS AN ILLUSTRIOUS MISSIONARY**



REVERENDISSIMO. ET. REVERENDISSIMO.  
FRANCISCO DESIDERATO. MICHAELI. VESQUE  
IN. URBE. HONFLEUR. IN. NORMANNIA.  
DIE. XVII. NOVEMBRIS. MDCCGXVII. NATO.  
QUI.  
POST. ANNOS. OCTO. IN. ERIGENDO. ET. MODERANDO.  
MONASTERIO. NORWOODENSI. IN. ANGLIÆ.  
PIE. ET. STRENUË. EXANTLATOS.  
EPISCOPUS. ROSENSI.  
DIE. XXVI. OCTOBRIS. MDCCCLVI. CONSECRATUS.  
IN. HANC. INSULAM.  
DIE. XIX. APRILIS. MDCCCLVII. APPLICUIT.  
ET. DUM.  
HÆRESULIS. INDEFESSI. MUNIA. IMPIGRE. AGERET.  
MULTAQUE. PRO. FUTURO. DIOECESI. BONO.  
MENTE. SOLLICITA. VOLVERET.  
MORTE. PRÆVENTUS.  
IN. INSULA. SANCTI. CHRISTOPHORI.  
QUAM. MISSIONARIUS. JUSTICABAT.  
IN. CHRISTO. OUBVIT. DIE. X. JULII. MDCCCLVIII.  
ÆTATIS. XL.  
SACRO. PATRI. PASTORI. BENE. MERENTI.



The Tomb of  
Bishop Vesque  
Norwood Cemetery  
June 2000

The TOMB OF BISHOP VESQUE IN THE CONVENT AND ORPHANAGE CEMETERY OF NORWOOD, CLOSE TO LONDON, UK. Photograph taken by Very Rev. Mark OWEN C.Ss. R. in June 2000.