

THE ROSEAU CATHEDRAL

and what we found underneath the Cathedral floor

part II

by Bernard Lauwyck



Previously unknown tomb found under the Roseau Cathedral floor

Last week I shared with you the fact that the Roseau cathedral is located on a pre – existing grave yard. One exciting discovery was the accidental find of a previously unknown masonry tomb, with a well preserved skeleton, under the altar of the Blessed Virgin in the eastern aisle.

As we know from my 2 articles on “THE CRYPT AND THE ROSEAU CATHEDRAL” (available on CD) , the crypt and chapel above it , built by Bishop R. M.C. Poirier, third Bishop of Roseau, was consecrated on the 19th March 1873.

We also know from Bishop James Moris’ writings and a drawing of Dr. Lennox Honychurch that Fr. Capoulade added the side aisle in which the Altar of Our Lady is located in 1847.

Based on this, we can assume that the tomb was constructed sometime between 1847 and 1873. This would rule out Fr. Jean de la hoz Ximeo, a Spanish priest who was buried in the Roseau Cathedral on the 9th May, 1828. At that time the church building had only one aisle or nave.

I will continue the search for the identity of this deceased clergyman as the burial under the altar of Our Lady is obviously a place of high honour. I will keep you informed.



detail of the marble Altar of Mary in the Easter aisle of the Roseau Cathedral

Interestingly, the red and yellow bricks used in the construction of this tomb are very similar to the ones which were used, a few years later, in the vaulted ceiling of the crypt. The Roseau Cathedral crypt contains 18 burial slots, 3 of which are still vacant.

The time of the construction of the crypt corresponds with the arrival of members of a new missionary order, the French “Fils de Marie Immaculée” or FMI.

Bishop James Moris described this in his **HISTORY OF THE DIOCESE** : “ *the Sons of Mary Immaculate, or Fathers of Chavagnes, as they are called. On February 7th, 1872, they arrived at Roseau: 3 priests, a Brother and a secular priest, Fr. Camille Marchal. They were followed on February 25th, 1873, by two more. Some of the newcomers were sent [by Bishop Poirier] to the Cathedral of Roseau, of which Fr. O'Reilly remained Parish Priest, and of which Fr. Andrew Rigaud, the Bishop's nephew, had become curate on November 10th, 1870.*

In 1873, July 15th, Father John Bisson, another curate of the Cathedral, died in Roseau at the ripe age of 78 years. Meanwhile, in February of the same year, Father Alexander Rondard, one of the pioneers of the Sons of Mary Immaculate in Dominica, had been appointed private secretary to His Lordship and Father August Fort, F.M.I. was attached to the Roseau Cathedral. Those french priests, all young and strong men, united their efforts to gain souls for heaven and were instrumental in doing no small amount of good in the parish. They were also the right hand of Bishop Poirier during the declining years of his life, and his support during troubles.” **HISTORY OF THE DIOCESE** by James Moris.



This order of highly dedicated French priests, from one small rural region in France, dominated more than 100 years the Catholic missionary activities in Dominica. They served parishes from Grandbay & Soufriere in the South to La Soie and Vieille Case in the North of Dominica, especially the most isolated places in Dominica. They are still fondly remembered by the many people they inspired and helped : Hilaire Maupetit, Jean Guéry, Jean Martin, Michel Baty and Pierre Chauvet.

Lennox Honychurch describes it well *“The British Government may have held sway in Roseau and, on the map at least, possessed the island, but to all intents and purpose it was the Church, through the FMI priests, which provided leadership in the mountainous wilds of Dominica. For, to the people in these districts, Roseau and the colonial administration were as foreign as another country”* THE DOMINICA STORY page 176.

One cannot write the history of the people of Dominica after 1872 without acknowledging the great contribution these few men gave to the common good in Dominica. The first three FMI to arrive in Dominica were Frs. Boisdet, Rondard and Couturier.

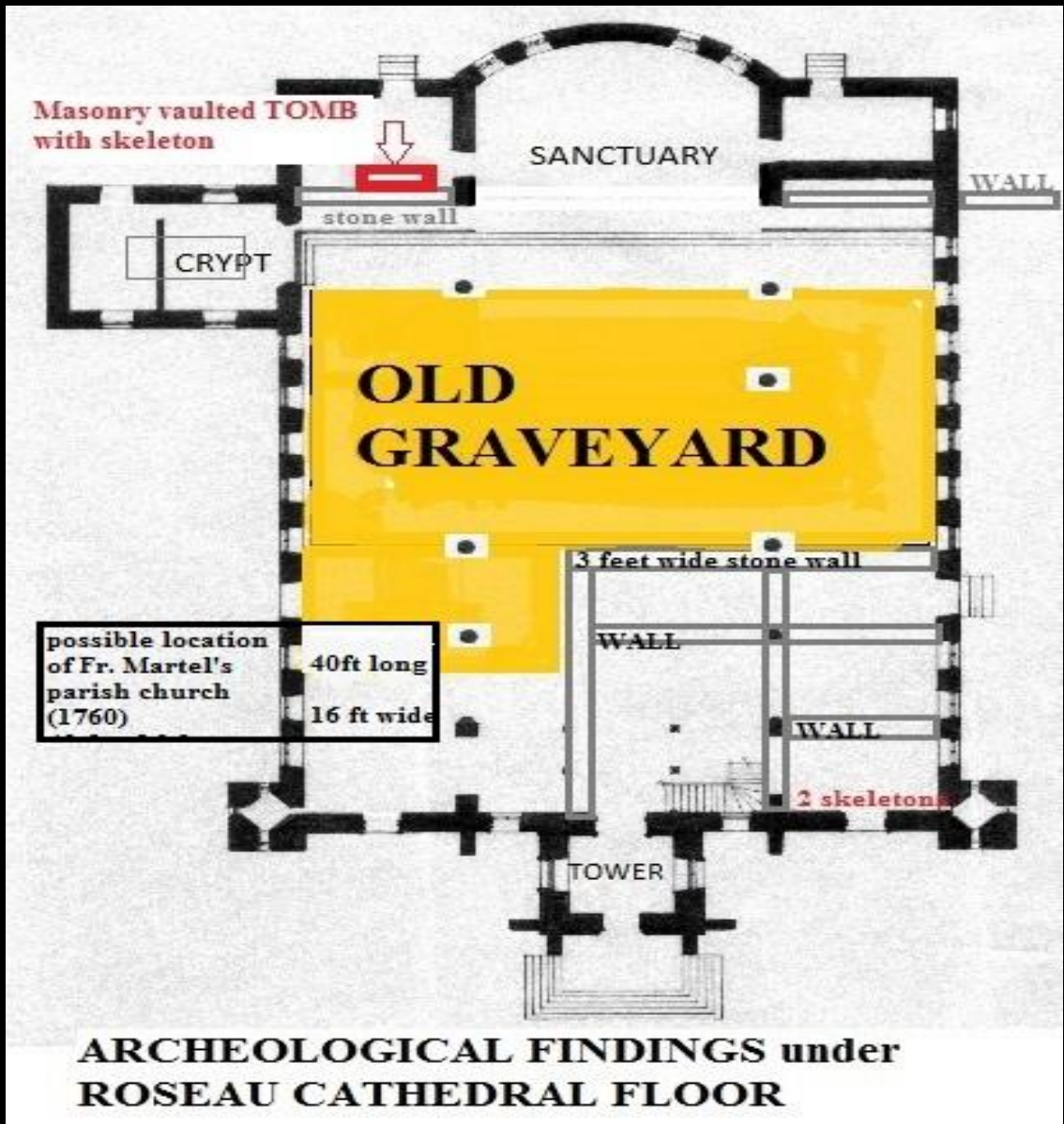
Sixteen of the FMI missionaries were buried in the very parishes where they lived and worked among the people: Grandbay, Wesley, Vieille Case, La Plaine , Portsmouth, Soufriere. Some of these burials were in the churches, as in La Plaine, Soufriere, Wesley and Portsmouth so I would not be surprised and indeed delighted if future research tells us that a French priest was buried in the Cathedral under the altar of Mary, Marie Immaculée. I hope to tell you more about these church burials in the future, if you are interested.

On another note, I had somehow hoped to find some evidence of the mass grave of the 800 refugees from the revolutionary terror in Martinique, who died of yellow fever in the month of July 1793 in the streets of Roseau. (see my article THE

ROSEAU CATHEDRAL AND TERROR IN THE STREETS OF ROSEAU part one). Here I was disappointed and I am sure the reader will be also.

In a next article I want to tell you about the catholic lands, called “the 10 acres, granted by Queen Victoria” on which the Roseau Cathedral was located.

Read me next week in the Chronicle.



candle in the opening of the tomb, with well preserved skeleton.