

New rector of St. George's Church drawn to history of region

Native of England finds much to like in Schenectady and his new parish

BY BILL BUELL
Gazette Reporter

The Rev. Paul Frederick Blanch loves history, so when he first saw St. George's Episcopal Church in the Stockade neighborhood of Schenectady, he was duly impressed.

Not awed, mind you, but impressed.

"I've always been keen on church architecture and historic buildings, so I really do appreciate what's here at St. George's, and you can't help but be impressed by the specific local history here as well as the entire Mohawk Valley," said Blanch, who became rector at St. George's in December.

"But I've been at parishes on the very beautiful west coast of

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England, where one of the church buildings was 1,000 years old. At Ufford, the church had one of the most famous font covers in the world. Thousands of tourists came to see it each year."

Blanch, 56, was born in the village of Durham in northeast England and quickly realized he would be devoting his life to religion.

"Every Tuesday, the rector would come to school and celebrate Mass and we'd have music, the vestments, incense," he said. "It was a very elaborate affair and it touched me greatly, apart from what I saw in church on Sunday morning. Even at about 7 or 8, I felt and knew that I wanted to be a priest."

His father, grandfather and great-grandfather all served as church wardens and sang in the choir in the small community where they grew up, and Blanch would take his family's spiritual devotion a step further. But, it wasn't easy.

"My father had the family business and I was the only son, so there was a lot of pressure on me to take over," he said. "We were butchers. I did it for a while, but I hated it. Fortunately the church won. I got the opportunity to work at a church, got some further training, and then I went to seminary. I never wavered, but it did take me a while to get ordained."

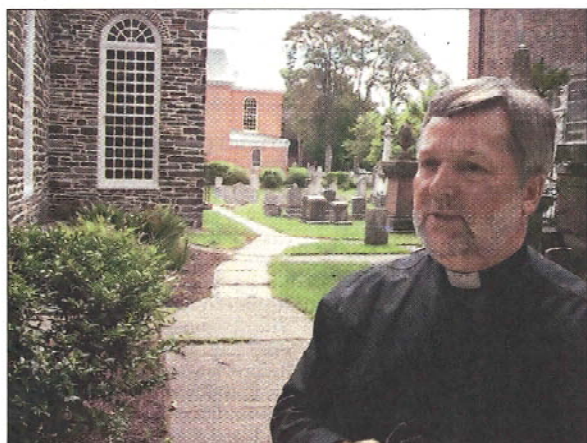
By the time he was done with his seminary work at Chichester Theological College in West Sussex, England, Blanch was 30. He

also went to Durham University and earned a degree in theology, and then went to work as an assistant rector at St. Philip's Church in Derby, in the English Midlands. He landed his first senior position at a church in Edinburgh, Scotland, and went on to serve parishes in Ufford and Melton in Suffolk County, England, before landing in Stoke-on-Trent in Staffordshire, England.

"It was a very busy and large congregation," he said. "It was the kind of place where you had 200 baptisms a year and five or six funerals a week. I was there for four and a half years before I felt the call to come to St. George's."

Although it meant leaving his home, family and friends, Blanch

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BILL BUELL/GAZETTE REPORTER

Paul Blanch, the new rector at St. George's Episcopal Church in Schenectady, stands outside the church building in the Stockade section of the city.

