



The Rev. Henry Jardine

The Ghost

of St. Mary's

By John H. Heuertz

St. Mary's Church, in downtown Kansas City, Mo., was built in 1888 at the corner of 13th and Holmes streets. Today it's in the midst of huge government office buildings, freeways and a generous number of homeless people.

The rector, the Rev. Paul Cook, says the parish's mission is to provide worship in the Anglo-Catholic tradition and outreach to the poor and marginalized people around it.

But St. Mary's was built in suburbia, and everything about it suggests an older, greener and better time. This large, squarish brick building is a church with *gravitas*. An hour after High Mass, the rich and heavy fragrance of incense still lingers in the air. Beams of colored light slant across the dark, wide-planked floor.

There's a Mary altar and a granite baptismal font. There's a magnificent rood screen. There's a narrow, angular staircase in a far corner at the back of the nave.

Everything is calm and orderly. So halfway up the staircase, the Rev. Henry Jardine's ghost raises its hand in a silent blessing. *Ora pro nobis*.

"I don't believe in it for a minute," Betty Herndon is saying. "I'm a scientist and there's no evidence."

Ms. Herndon, St. Mary's outgoing, unofficial historian, is skeptical that the ghost of former rector Fr. Jardine haunts a church built two years after his death 250 miles away. But is she right?

Fr. Jardine began his six years in Kansas City in 1879. His tenure in the still-raw frontier city would prove to be very mixed, with a sad, ambiguous ending.

He was a key founder of St. Luke's Hospital, still a leading area medical institution. He started a parochial school to educate the children of the women at the bawdyhouse down the street.

But Anglo-Catholic liturgical changes Fr. Jardine favored were divisive. He may have been dependent on chloroform to treat a chronic nerve condition of some kind, and he seems to have thought it his pastoral duty to spank some of his female parishioners after their confessions.

Fr. Jardine was controversial enough that he sometimes felt the need to keep a gun visibly handy when he preached or celebrated.

Finally in 1885, an ecclesiastical court found Fr. Jardine guilty of improper conduct toward a girl, indecent conduct toward women in the confessional, and of using narcotics.

Along the way, it was further learned that Henry Jardine had served a two-year prison term as a young man for stealing from a relative's store in New York state.

Fr. Jardine's appeal failed. He was disgraced and probably ruined, and on Jan. 10, 1886, he

was found dead in a St. Louis church with a bottle of chloroform at his side and a small handkerchief over his face. A chain that had embedded itself in his flesh was found welded around his waist when Fr. Jardine's body was prepared for burial. He was interred in Forest Hills Cemetery in Kansas City, but odd things began to happen inside St. Mary's after Fr. Jardine's death.

'Some wonderful spirit has helped us to restore the church.'

One night, organist Keith Gottschall saw a figure moving quickly past an upstairs music office window from the parking lot. He says he was no more than 35 feet away.

"So I went up the back stairs and up to the door," he says, "and I felt a cold space in the stairway that made my hair stand up. Frankly, I didn't go into the office." The office door was locked then, but unlocked a few minutes later when he returned.

Mr. Gottschall also says that on more than one occasion, his dog Sadie carefully tracked an invisible object across the sanctuary while he worked at the organ. He never had any bad experiences, but he doesn't practice there at night anymore either.

Off and on through his 50-plus years at St. Mary's, the Rev. Edwin Merrill heard someone coming up the back steps to his living quarters at night, when he knew no one else was in the church. His living quarters later became the music office.

Fr. Merrill also heard nocturnal knocks, creaks and thumps around the high altar, which is dedicated to Fr. Jardine. He told Maurice Schwalm, a well-known Kansas City psychic investigator, about these experiences and his belief that they were related to Fr. Jardine.

The priest's death had seemed an accident to some, a suicide to others. But Mr. Schwalm, a member at St. Mary's for more than 50 years, thinks the rector may have been murdered — and that either he or his chain was secretly buried in the church's basement.

Mr. Schwalm says the presence of ghosts increases the strength of magnetic fields. His gauss meter buzzed like a honeybee on steroids halfway up the back staircase. A monk wearing a white habit and carrying a candle appeared in infrared pictures he took around the altar.

The clincher for Mr. Schwalm came one afternoon in 1977, when he says he actually saw Fr. Jardine's ghost in the sanctuary, clad in a monk's habit, smiling and levitating slightly.

Mr. Schwalm now thinks the ghost is still around, but in a much better mood because Fr. Jardine's name has been partially vindicated.

"I think Fr. Jardine's definitely functioning as a guardian spirit for the parish," he says.

Senior warden Thomas Atkin's view is slightly different.

"I've been up those back steps hundreds of times, and a cool breeze would be welcome in the summer," he says. "There's nothing to be afraid of in there. But there is something different. Some wonderful spirit has helped us to restore the church."

Fr. Cook, an Englishman from Australia and

still in his first year at St. Mary's, seems pleasantly bemused by it all.

"Fr. Jardine has nothing to do with our mission," he says. "But the story is a pleasant diversion."

One thing is clear. Fr. Jardine seems to divide church opinion in death as effectively as he did in life, though in a far more good-natured way. Even parishioners who don't believe in a ghost seem a little pleased at the idea.

"I'm not sure it's really Father Jardine's ghost on the steps at all," said one. "I think it's probably Father Merrill's ghost instead." □

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St. Mary's Church in downtown Kansas City, Missouri, was built in 1888.

