

The Greek Church in Great Britain

*** This information was taken from the Website of the*

Diocese of Thyateira,

(<http://www.nostos.com/church/>)

Greeks have lived in Great Britain since time immemorial. They originally came here as sailors and merchants, then as missionaries, later as mercenaries (especially after the Fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453) and subsequently as students during the long years of the Ottoman rule in Greece and the Greek Islands (1453-1821).

The first organised Greek Orthodox Community, however, was established in London in the 1670s, when a group of some 100 refugees, probably from Mani, led by a priest named Daniel Voulgaris, sought permission from the Church and State Authorities of England to create a Greek Orthodox religious centre in the heart of London. The permission was finally granted in 1677 to Archbishop Joseph Georgirines of Samos who had come to London to have one of his books published. A church was eventually built in Soho Fields, Soho, on a site offered by the then Bishop of London Henry Compton, and with money collected by Archbishop Joseph from various donors. This church, however, was confiscated without reason by the Authorities in 1684 and handed over to the Huguenots to the dismay of the Greek Archbishop who gave vent to his anger over this flagrant injustice in a pamphlet, a copy of which is now in the British Library.

After this setback, the Imperial Russian Embassy offered its hospitality to the Greek community for its religious and

communal activities in London until 1837, when they created their own Greek Orthodox Chapel in Finsbury Circus, in the City of London. In 1850, however, they built a new church of their own in London Street in the City, and in 1877 the magnificent Church of the Divine Wisdom (St. Sophia) in Moscow Road, Bayswater.

In the meantime the number of Greeks who settled in Britain increased, particularly during the first decades of the nineteenth century, and this not only in London but in other major commercial cities such as Manchester, Liverpool and Cardiff. In the first two cases, churches were built in the 1860s, while in Cardiff a church was built in 1906. So, with the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, in Great Britain there existed four thriving Greek Orthodox Communities, all centred around a Greek Church of their own: London (Saint Sophia), Manchester (The Annunciation), Liverpool (Saint Nicholas), and Cardiff (Saint Nicholas).

Up to this time, however, these four Greek Orthodox communities had no direct connection with any of the Greek Patriarchates or Autocephalous Churches, although theoretically and canonically they owed their allegiance or came under the jurisdiction of the Oecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. For a short period of time (1908-1922), the Oecumenical Patriarchate transferred its rights to the Church of Greece. This irregularity was finally settled when, in 1922, the Holy Synod of the Oecumenical Patriarchate, through the initiative of Patriarch Meletios Metaxakis, created the Diocese of Thyateira, named after the famous See of Thyateira in Asia Minor. London was chosen as its seat, with jurisdiction over Central and Western Europe, and the eminent theologian Germanos Strinopoulos (at that time Rector of the Chalki Theological Academy) was chosen as its first bishop

(Metropolitan). Germanos was succeeded after his death in 1951 by Archbishop Athenagoras Kavadas (1951-1962); after his death by Archbishop Athenagoras Kokkinakis (1963-1979) and after his death by Archbishop Methodios Fouyias (1979-1988), who was replaced in April 1988 by the present incumbent of the Archdiocese, Archbishop Gregorios Theocharous (who for the previous 18 years had been Bishop of Tropaeou, serving in North London).

In the meantime, however, with the number of Greeks increasing rapidly throughout Western Europe after the end of the Second World War, Greek Orthodox Communities were established all over Great Britain, and in continental Europe it was found expedient to create new dioceses in France, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland and Italy. The number of organised Greek Orthodox Communities in Great Britain itself increased from four in 1922 to over 100 to date. At the same time, the Archbishop of Thyateira and Great Britain, and Exarch of Western Europe, Ireland and Malta (as his official title now is), is assisted by six suffragan Bishops, and has over ninety priests and deacons under his direct authority.