

THE ADVOWSON OF HITCHAM CHURCH, BUCKS

Second edition

The advowson of a parish - the right to appoint the vicar - was highly valued and indeed it had a commercial value. The term, which dates from 1215, was used because the holder was held to be more of an 'advocate' or protector than simply the owner. Sometimes it was owned by a religious institution, sometimes by the lord of the manor and sometimes by the sovereign. Nowadays the advowson of Hitcham resides with the Bishop of Oxford recommending a short-list of candidates for selection by the parochial church council. Up to the reformation the uniquely-powerful Merton Priory held the advowson to about 60 churches, including, locally, Hitcham, Taplow and Upton and others like the more obviously-named church of St Peter de Merton in Bedford and the important St Mary of Patricbourne near Canterbury.

The following is a list of those legally entitled to appoint rectors to the living at St Mary's Hitcham in Buckinghamshire.

1167 Merton Priory in Surrey

Merton Priory presented rectors #1 (John the Clerk) to #23 (Thomas Beake)

1538 The Crown (Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth)

Henry VIII presented rector #24 (Robert ap Griffith)

Mary I presented rectors #25 and #26 (Thomas Story and Bartholomew Green)

Elizabeth I presented rector #27 (John Ball)

1560 Thomas Stephyns (1510-1562), Gent. of Inglesham and William Coxe *by Pat. 2 Eliz x m 14*, 22nd Jan 1560. Thomas Stephyns of Inglesham Manor, Swindon acquired a good number of advowsons in one lot from Elizabeth I including the parish of Swindon. The Hitcham advowson was sold two days later to Elizabeth Clarke (nee Ramsey), Lord of the Manor of Hitcham.

"Advowson bought of Qu(een) Eliz(abeth) on 22nd January in the 2nd year of her reign by Thomas Stephens of Inglesham in the Co of Berkshire and sold on 24th of the same January to Elizabeth Clark of Hitcham, widdow." [*Church register*]

1560 Elizabeth Clarke/Alford (nee Ramsey) and heirs, lord of the manor.

Her family had been lords of the manor, through various marriages, since 1231.

Elizabeth Alford presented rectors #28 and #29 (Thomas Hall and Lancelot Dethicke)

William Clarke, her son presented rector #30 (Robert Floyd)

Francis Clarke, his brother presented rector #31 (William Serjeant)

1660 Charles Doe and heirs, lord of the manor

Charles Doe presented rectors #32 and #33 (James Herring and Philip King)

John Doe, his son presented rector #34 (George Evans)

1700 George Evans and heirs, presenting Eton College's nomination

The Evans family acquired the advowson, but promised always to present Eton College's nomination.

Rebecca Evans, his widow presented rectors #35 and #36 (William Montague and Richard Sleece)

Thomas Evans, her son presented rector #37 (his nephew, Thomas Archer)

Benjamin Archer, his nephew presented rector #38 (Edmund Gibson)

King George III (on behalf of Catherine Archer, Benjamin's widow) presented rectors #39 and #40 (Henry Sleece and Thomas Pulton)

Thomas Archer, her son or nephew presented rector #41 (Joseph Goodall). Thomas appears to have insisted it was his own independent nomination one suspects to head off criticism because Goodall was an 'establishment' figure at Eton.

1833 Eton College in its own right.

Eton College presented rectors #42 (Henry Grover) until possibly #47 (Edward Carter)

Eton College lost control of the advowson on their abolition in 1923.

1916 Bishop of Oxford

The Bishop of Oxford presented rectors from possibly #48 (Harold Wilson) to #59 (Susan Sampson), in each case after consulting both the parochial church council and the provost of Eton College.

A NOTE ON THE EVANS & ARCHER FAMILIES

The Evans and the Archer families were related.

Benjamin Archer (1668-1732) was born in Newington Oxford. He was the son of Edward Archer and the grandson of Rev James Archer (1588-1675).

Anne Evans (1668-1733) was born in Hitcham the daughter of George Evans (1628-1702) rector #34 at Hitcham and Rebecca Buckler (1635-1712).

Benjamin Archer and Anne Evans were married in Hitcham in 1692.

Their children included Ann, Winwood, Benjamin (1696-), George, Gilbert and Thomas (1703-1767) all born in Quainton near Aylesbury where Benjamin was rector.

Rebecca, widow of George Evans, held the advowson and appointed rectors #35 and #36.

On Rebecca's death the advowson passed first to her son Thomas Evans, who presented his nephew Thomas Archer (1703-1767) as rector #37 at Hitcham.

The advowson next passed to her grandson Benjamin Archer (1696-) who presented rector #38, and to his wife Catherine, who as widow had the advowson but succumbed to lunacy, so the presentations of rectors #39 and #40 were made by the King.

Subsequent generations were as follows, but the Archer's involvement with Hitcham seems to have ended between 1811 and 1833.

Thomas Archer (1756-) who held the advowson and appointed Joseph Goodall as rector #41

Stephen Archer (1775-1850)

Samuel Archer (1810-1876)

Compiled by Alan Woodley, 6th March 2023