

THE HITCHAM CHRONICLES

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A CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF ST MARY, HITCHAM, BUCKS. AND ITS RECTORS

Ninth Edition

GLOSSARY

AB = Bachelor of Arts
advowson = the legal right to appoint a rector
AM = Master of Arts
benefice = the income due to the rector, especially from glebe land
BCL = Bachelor of Canon Law
CIK = Clerk or Cleric in holy orders
DD = Doctor of Divinity
DL = Deputy Lieutenant (of a county)
faculty = permission from the chancellor of the diocese to modify a church
glebe land = land reserved to provide income for the local clergyman
occurs (date) = happens to have been recorded on (date)
Ordinary = official such as a bishop with legal powers
pr and pres = are short for 'presented', meaning presented to the bishop and appointed
prebendary = a canon of a cathedral with his own prebend or 'living'
precentor = leader of music in a cathedral or college
preceptor = head of a community of monastic knights
STP = Professor of Sacred Theology

CAVEAT

Much of the information here is factual. However, some items are pure conjecture, awaiting more research to confirm or refute. It is to be hoped that the text makes clear which is which.

INTRODUCTION

It is thought that the first church at Hitcham was built in 1126, as a wattle and daub structure, though it could have been built much earlier. Over time the church was endowed with valuable land, and the rich 'living' or benefice of Hitcham, together with its huge rectory at Hitchambury, made it a highly desirable posting for a clergyman, being richer than either of the neighbouring (but larger) Burnham or Taplow. Furthermore, acquiring the advowson, or right to appoint the rector, enabled the holder of the advowson to exert useful patronage. This all came to an end in 1923 when the benefice (or what remained of it) was acquired by the Oxford diocese, and in 1973 when the 'new' rectory (nowadays called the 'old' rectory) was sold and replaced with a modest house in Burnham.

St Mary's Hitcham had close historic ties to the powerful Merton Priory and also latterly to Eton College. Merton Priory and Eton College are both associated with the Augustinian monastic order.

The historical information is listed under the headings for each of the 59 rectors and vicars, numbered **#1 to #59**. The dates and information in quotes after each name is as recorded in the parish registers, and are often incomplete and may be the date of induction, the date of death, or even just one particular date on which the incumbent is recorded as being in place. It is worth noting that early rectors did not need to be ordained clergymen or even theologians, only 'likely to become ordained'.

It is often thought that the parish church was a centre of stability and continuity, but far from it. As governments changed so forms of worship changed and rectors had to adapt. In addition, rectorships have evolved from a very lucrative position to one today of relative modesty.

THE DEDICATION NAME OF THE CHURCH

It had been assumed that the church has always been dedicated to St Mary, but this may not be correct. There is very little use of the dedication name before the 19th Century; the only mention in medieval times is in 1412 when the church is clearly named **St Michael's** [see below]. Lipscomb, normally concise, doesn't mention a dedication name in 1847. After the Reformation the veneration of saints was deprecated so that dedication names fell into disuse for many years, only to be revived

from the late 1700s. By then the original dedications had often been lost leading to local congregations having to devise new ones. [Ref 11]. If we could find a figure of St Michael (a winged figure with a sword) etched on a wall or in a window somewhere in Hitcham Church that would be a very significant find.

THE KEY PERSONALITIES

There are four key people in the history of a church - the lord of the manor, the holder of the advowson, the rector and the bishop and the relationship between them can vary from harmonious to vexatious.

You will of course be familiar with the ancient feudal hierarchy :

King
Overlord, the barons
Lord of the Manor
Knights and freemen
Villeins
Serfs (ie slaves)

where each owes service to the lord above him in return for some modicum of 'protection'. In practice the serfs could be murdered on a whim by the lord of the manor and the king could be murdered by his barons. Life was precarious.

Aside from this social structure was the church, with its own hierarchy, with priests theoretically directly under the protection of the Pope, and answerable only to the Church for their crimes.

Separate documents detail the Lords of the Manor and the Holders of the Advowson in more detail.

Lords of the Manor of Hitcham

The lords of the manor administered the locality, originally at the pleasure of their overlord, but later the manorial rights could be purchased. The dates listed here are approximate, as few accurate records exist. The lords of the manor latterly lived at Hitcham House which was situated on the north-east side of the church but is now long gone. All that is left is a line of sweet chestnut trees and a walled garden.

- .1042 Haming, under Edward the Confessor
- .1066 Ralph and Roger, under Miles Crispin of Wallingford, who died 1107
- .1200 Miles Neyrant, under the Bishop of Carlisle and Robert, Earl of Cornwall
- .1300 Miles Beauchamp, under Edmund, Earl of Cornwall
- .1350 Beauchamp family, under Edward the Black Prince
- .1377 Sir Adam Ramsay, related to Beauchamp, under Richard II, Sir Thomas Ramsey (1474-1520)
- .1524 Elizabeth Ramsay wife of Nicholas Clarke (1500-1553) and then wife of Robert Alford
- .1598 Sir William Clarke (1598-1625) son of Elizabeth Ramsay
- .1618 King James I, and then back to the Clarkes.
- .1660-1678 John Clarke sold to Sir Charles Doe, who had bought Upton in 1635. Doe was Sheriff of London in 1665 and was instrumental in saving the treasures of the Goldsmiths Company during the Great Fire of 1666.
- .1696 -1704 Edward Nicholas secretary of State to Charles II, and his family
- .1704- Bishop Stephen Weston (1665-1742) who was a master at Eton and Bishop of Exeter.
- .1713 Samuel Travers (1655-1725). From a Puritan family and so denied a 'living' he became a lawyer and MP and surveyor-general of the Crown lands.
- .1714 the Freind (or Friend) family. John Freind (1675-1728) was physician to Queen Caroline and third son of William Freind rector of Croughton.
- .1780 the Grenville family, including the Prime Minister who signed the act abolishing slavery throughout the Empire.
- .1864 until 1936, the Fortescue family of Dropmore Park, related to the Grenvilles.

From 1866 the Hanbury family, though not lords of the manor, had lived at Blythwood now called Hitcham House and have been the principal benefactors of the parish. The family made its fortune in iron, tobacco, brewing and banking.

Holders of the advowson for the rectorship of Hitcham

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 but consulting Eton College. 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 St Mary of Patricbourne near Canterbury.

Advowsons were abolished in 1923, leading in some places to a panic sale as their value quickly vanished.

.1167-1538 Merton Priory
.1538-1553 King Henry VIII and King Edward VI
.1553 Queen Mary I
.1558 Queen Elizabeth I
.1560 Thomas Stephyns and William Coxe, possibly on behalf of Queen Elizabeth
.1566 advowson sold by Elizabeth I to Elizabeth Ramsay, Lord of the Manor, who married Nicholas Clarke and then married Robert Alford
.1592 Sir William Clarke
.1660-1678 Charles Doe
.1700 George Evans and then his widow Rebecca Evans
.1730 Given by Thomas Evans to the Provost of Eton College and the Archer family, heirs of Thomas Evans
.since 1923 the Bishop of Oxford (on abolition of the advowson)

The Bishops

Until 1542 Hitcham was right on the border of Salisbury diocese and Lincoln diocese, marked by the Thames, and was actually within Lincoln, although Lincoln was 160 miles away and Salisbury only 80 miles. It is likely therefore that, when it was deemed necessary, Salisbury might have interfered in the parish of Hitcham. In 1542 the Oxford diocese was created, but it was not until 1836 that Berkshire churches were transferred from Salisbury to Oxford and 1845 when Buckinghamshire churches were transferred from Lincoln to Oxford. In any case, the rector of Hitcham could be reasonably independent of any bishop. In principle the

Bishop of Lincoln could veto a rector, but one appointed by Merton Priory or the sovereign or Eton College was unlikely to be challenged.

The Rectors

The two main sources of the list of rectors are Lipscomb [Ref 15] (based on parish records) and the Clergy Database [Ref 14] (based on diocesan records). Both appear to be slightly incomplete. Lipscomb omits Lancelot Dethicke and Philip King. The Clergy Database omits Thomas Story, Bartholomew Green and John Ball.

#1 John the Clerk 1167

John the Clerk arrived in Hitcham in 1167 during the reign of Henry II as the appointee of Merton Priory. It is tantalising and perhaps fanciful to hypothesise that John the Clerk might just be an ancestor to the Clarke family whose origins are obscure and who became lords of the manor in 1524. Priests were not required to be celibate until as late as 1390, and could remain married if they had been married before ordination. [Ref 5].

"[In 1167] William, Prior, and Convent, granted to John the Clerk the church of Hucham and its appurtenances in perpetual gift, he paying in recognition one bisant *[a gold coin of the Byzantine Empire or its equivalent]* and tithes of wood; as also the Bishop's and Officials' fees. On his death the church to revert to the Canons." [Ref 1]

It was around this time that the rectangular stone nave at Hitcham was built (early 12th C), replacing a wooden building. Some have dated the stone nave to even earlier, perhaps soon after 1066.

#2 John de Chiswick 1186

John de Chiswick's appointment was contested.

"[In 1186] Richard, Prior and Convent, addressed 'Decreta' to the Venerable Sirs and Friends in Christ, Ranulfus, Hugh by Divine Grace Abbot of Rading, Ripon de Hert and Master *[a graduate]* K de Burnham; making known that the Church of Hucham being theirs then the Canons had granted it to John, Clerk of Chieswic that he might minister therein and possess it in their name, that they had not in anywise granted it to Saloman, Clerk in perpetual benefit of temporality. They beg special attention to this that they may faithfully preserve their right uninjured; for it is apparent that it is not just or safe that he should be admitted to these things without their consent."

[Ref 1] *[Up to 1400 AD the Pope was frequently trying to impose his candidate on a parish and this was resisted locally. This could be happening here.]*

It has been claimed that the 'Norman' ie rounded arch which now separates the nave and the chancel (the altar area) is late 12th C (ie from this time). It was possible that a semi-circular apse was added to the east end to accommodate the altar and so it was necessary to insert an arch where the eastern wall had been. This was a very common 'improvement' carried out in this period. The apse has long gone but the arch remains. Apparently traces of the foundations of the apse have been found.

#3 John de Merton

1210

"[In 1210] Walter, Prior, reciting a charter of his predecessor William *bon memorie* giving to John the Clerk *[who at Hitcham was known as John of Merton]* the Church of Hucham for life or until he should take the habit of religion, one bizant per annum granted and confirmed the same under the seal. But if it should happen that he died, or God being favourable he should take the habit of religion in their church, then they should be free from all further claim. Concerning these things. John took an oath of fidelity in the Chapter." [Ref 1]

Around 1260 Walter de Merton, Prior of Merton Priory, founded Merton College Oxford still one of the country's richest colleges. Thomas Becket, later Archbishop of Canterbury, and Walter de Merton were both educated at Merton Priory.

The Priors also continued to manage their land holdings in Hitcham. "[During the time 1249 to 1263] Eustace, Prior, and Convent held themselves bound to exonerate Sir W Maudit and his heirs from all services of lands in Hicchum as contained in his charter in their possession, he paying 29s 9d per annum and the twelfth part of a knight's fee for scutage *[a fee paid in lieu of military service]*. And they do pay him one pair of gilt spurs or 6d per annum and the Prior to make homage and have relief for the same and as much as pertained to the twelfth part of a knight's fee." [Ref 1]

#4 Robert "died Rector 1269"

#5 Robert de Acle "pres 13 Feb'y 1269 by the Prior and Convent of Merton in Surrey".

Acle is near Great Yarmouth, and at that time was a coastal village. It had an Augustinian institution called Weybridge Priory.

#6 Richard de Herringswell, "pres 5th March 1277"

Herringswell is near Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk, and so Richard was possibly from the *Benedictine* abbey of Bury St Edmunds. His apparent tenure of 47 years, which is just about believable, suggests he arrived in Hitcham as a young man.

The semi-circular apse was removed and the present rectangular chancel was added and the painted chancel windows date from this time. Two larger windows were inserted in the nave in addition to the original four very small windows.

#7 Edmund de Burnham "pr as Rector of Taplow Feb 4th 1312", "pr as rector of Hitcham 5 March 1324"

Edmund de Burnham was in fact lord of the manors of Bulstrode and Wycombe, having in 1313 seized them from the Templars under authority from King Edward II. [Ref 2] This is consistent with wider history. From 1307 to 1314 the Templars were systematically destroyed on orders from the French-controlled pope in Avignon. Edward II was reluctant, but did use the opportunity to seize their land. This points to Edmund de Burnham being himself a warrior-monk, capable of leading a small troop of soldiers.

#8 Elias de Sco Edmundo "pr 7 Jan 1342"

Sco Edmundo or St Edmunds presumably refers to the *Benedictine* abbey at Bury St Edmunds, a second break from the Augustinian tradition. The year 1342 is reported to have been severe in Cambridge and even worse in Buckinghamshire so Elias would have had a hard time. However he avoided the purge in 1345 of the Benedictine abbey at St Edmunds which was accused of 'scandalous immorality'. The Black Death arrived for the first time in 1349.

The Black Prince (1330-1376, son of Edward III) was lord of the manor of Hitcham.

#9 Thomas "died Rector 1361"

Thomas' death could have been caused by the second Black Death outbreak of that very year 1361.

#10 John de Wroxton (or Wroston) "pr 14 Feb 1361"

This refers to Wroxton Abbey near Banbury, an Augustinian priory destroyed in 1536.

The following is a likely reference to John de Wroxton .

"In Oct 11th 1380 at Westminster John Rokeston was summoned for not appearing to answer Bartholomew Chaundeler of Cambridge when sued with Edmund Pacche touching a debt of £10." [Ref 4]

This could also be John Roxton the lord of the manor of Wyboston near Cambridge and father or grandfather of John Roxton (born ca 1390) head of the Augustinian priory of Dunstable from 1413 to 1473.

It is possible that the turmoil of the following years meant that Hitcham effectively had no rector for some time. The years 1361 to 1405 included the Hundred Years War, several outbreaks of the Black Death and the Peasants Revolt. So this long period of 44 years sees just two named rectors - John de Wroxton and John Akerman.

Meanwhile in 1387 the Bishop of Winchester severely criticised Merton Priory for allowing many of its parish churches to fall into disrepair.

#11 John Akerman "exchanged for Thorley Herts with John Barton"
There is a John Akeman/Akerman/Acreman a churchwarden or questman in Swindon, apparently of some stature because he is four times referred to in the 'Register of John Chandler, Dean (*and later Bishop*) of Salisbury 1404-1417', though quite how he could have become rector at Hitcham is difficult to explain. It is just possible that with a small troop of his soldiers he was sent to Hitcham by the Bishop of Salisbury to maintain order in the surrounding chaos before stepping aside for John Berton, but this is conjecture. At this time Hitcham was in the Lincoln diocese.

#12 John Berton (or Barton) " 2 June 1405. He exchanged for Rowberrow Co Somerset with Lewis Kindersley"
John Berton is listed as becoming rector of Thorley, Herts 18th April 1401, but there is no record of John Akerman ever becoming rector at Thorley. In fact John Grey succeeded John Berton at Thorley. Rowberrow records do not record Lewis Kindersley either, so **both recorded exchanges are inaccurate.**

*From the Thorley historians' records **John Berton** was:*

"20th July 1393 rector of St Nicholas Rawreth, Essex
30th Oct 1400 rector of St Marys Fairsted Essex
18th April 1401 exchanged Fairsted for Thorley Herts
2nd June 1403 exchanged Thorley for Hitcham, Bucks
1406 exchanged Hitcham for Rowberrow Somerset"

#13 Lewis Kinnersley (or Reinerdesley or Kindersley or Kinnerdesley) "19 Sep 1406"

The transcriptions of the record lead to a number of possible surnames. The most common modern surname that could match this one is Kinnersley/ Kindersley a name rooted in Herefordshire.

He supposedly came from Rowberrow in Somerset as an exchange, but Rowberrow has no record of him.

In October 1412 a thief, Nicholas Burne, was caught 'red-handed' after stealing church property. Interestingly. in the case that ensued the church is called **St Michael's**, Hitcham, Buckinghamshire. [See note above on dedication names]. Most of the goods were recovered and benefactors paid for the shortfall. Burne claimed to be a priest, and so subject only to church authorities. He was shown a bible which he was able to read, and this was deemed enough to prove he was indeed a priest, and so he was beyond the King's power and was handed over to the Church authorities for punishment.

This is a list of the items stolen. "One chalice of silver and gilt, one ordinal, two missals, one corporal cloth, one vestment of red and black silk, one chasuble, one alb, one amice, one stole, one maniple, one cape of red silk with all the parure thereof, one surplice, one primer, one dyed cloth for the lectern with a picture of St Michael painted on it, one reredos and one foredos for the altar of the aforesaid church and two curtains for the said altar, to the value of twenty marks.. " [Ref 3]

What is remarkable about this is not the fact that the record still exists, but the sheer value and quality of the goods stolen. Hitcham was clearly a wealthy parish.

Church attendance was compulsory through the medieval era and right up to 1689, with fines imposed for non-attendance. Consequently quite a few in the congregation were not happy to be there, resulting in reports of mild disruption of services. People would bring their dogs, would walk about the nave, engage in conversation and only pause momentarily while the wine and bread were held aloft signalled by a ring of the Sanctus bell. Men were supposed to stay on the south side (right) of the church and women to the north side (left) but this rule was widely disregarded. Common people were not supposed to enter the chancel but this rule too was often ignored. The preacher must have had trouble keeping order. [Ref 5]

#14 Robert de Manfield "was admitted 19 Feb 1439"

Robert was also later Rector of Taplow up to 1462, and is presumed to be a member of the Manfield family who were lords of the manor of Taplow at this time.

#15 Thomas Nordrym "resigned 1444"

#16 Robert Rokesey (or Kokesby) "pr 14 May 1444 He resigned"

The de Rokesey family (also known as de Wande) were prominent in St Nicholas' Hospital Salisbury, three recorded clerics there being William, Robert and Henry Rokesey. This helps support the notion of the influence of Salisbury and of John Akerman having come from Salisbury about 40 years earlier.

#17 Robert Whithead "pr 4 Dec 1477"

There was a Richard Whithead, rector of Hedgerley briefly in 1475, so presumably Robert could be his brother or, *equally likely*, the record has been mis-transcribed.

#18 Richard Appulton "died Rector 1483".

Richard was Rector of Hedgerley from 1475 to 1476. Richard is extremely elusive. There was a "Mabel, wife of Richd Apulton" buried 1456 in the chancel of St Mary the Less Norwich, and several other Apultons held rectorships in Norfolk and John Apulton was rector of Halton near Aylesbury, Bucks until 1447. We also know there is a deserted village of Appleton near the Sandringham Estate in Norfolk. But there are no other records of Richard.

#19 Richard Spurman or Spearman "pr by the Bishop by lapse 30 Nov 1483" . Presumably presented by the Bishop of Lincoln.

In the will of Thomas Ramsey he is referred to as Sir Richard Spearman, but the 'Sir' here is an honorary title given to senior clergymen at this time.

King Henry VIII becomes king in 1509.

#20 William Sampson "pr 4 July 1515"

William was very likely the son of Richard Sampson, a close colleague of Cardinal Wolsey and at that time Dean of the Chapel Royal, Windsor.

Merton Priory also owned Taplow (purchased in 1196) (and also St Laurence, Upton) and for a while, from 1517 until the dissolution, the Taplow and Hitcham churches were united. This didn't seem to last long and the two churches kept separate rectors - indeed by this time no person was allowed to hold two rectorships simultaneously.

" [In 1517] Letters Patent were issued granting licence in Mortmain *[perpetuity]* to unite the livings of Hucham and Taplow Buckinghamshire and to present, to the Ordinary, one of the four Canons of the Priory who with a secular scholar should be

supported by the said Prior, in the College of St Mary of Richmond in the University of Oxford founded by King Henry VI *[but later destroyed by Henry VIII]* and also licence to elect priests in pursuance of letters from Pope Alexander to the former Prior Robert. Dated at Westminster April 21, 8 Henry VIII." [REF 1]

#21 Richard Erington (or Eryngton) BCL "pr 6 June 1522 He resigned"

Richard graduated 16th Nov 1510 from Oxford, then presumably after a few other posts went to Hitcham, only to move to Somerset where he was in 1534 precentor (choirmaster) of Crediton and **vicar** of Wookey in 1535 (where there was a separate **rector**) "Woky – Ricardus Eryngton, Vicarius Vicaria ibidem" [REF 17]. He also held posts as Commissioner of Wells Cathedral Estate, Receiver of Bruton Abbey, vicar of Westbury (on Severn) and prebendary of Barton. "On July 28th 1534 *[in Crediton]* Richard Erington precentor, and canons Walter Mugg and George Mason subscribed to the King's supremacy" (ie they accepted Henry VIII as head of the Church). He was considered the King's tax collector in the area. He is also known to have assembled records for the use of Thomas Cromwell who was at that time Dean of Wells and Henry's Chancellor of England. He died 1545 in Wells as a residentiary canon of Wells Cathedral.

#22 John Belfield (or Belfeld) AB "pr 5 Jan'y 1531; occurs Rector 1534" The following probably relates to this rector. It suggests that the Abbot mentioned had already found a benefice for his charge well before he was due to pay him a pension as required by the King.

"John Belfeld, clk. To have the pension which the abbot of the monastery of Burton-on-Trent is bound to give to a clerk of the King's nomination towards his exhibition to school, till the said abbot shall promote him to a competent benefice. Greenwich, 11 Oct. 25 Hen. VIII. Del. Westm., 18 Oct.—P.S. Oct 1533" [Ref 9]

In 1534 Henry VIII declared himself head of the church in England. From that moment until as late as 1791 any religious non-conformity could be regarded as treason. Hitherto clerics had been under the protection of the Pope but from now on preaching became a very dangerous occupation. Mary I executed 300 heretics and Elizabeth I nearly 200, mainly priests.

After leaving Hitcham, John Belfield went to Eton as a fellow in June 1536 and stayed there until 1558, evidently able to accept the puritanism of Edward VI and the Catholicism of Mary I. From 1550 to 1552 he was

the precentor and so in charge of the choristers and also probably in charge of the chapel itself. [Ref 8]

Merton priory was surrendered to the crown in 1538 during the Dissolution under Henry VIII. Although most of its buildings were then demolished, some remained standing. Stone from the monastery was used to build Nonesuch Palace and when that was subsequently demolished its stone was widely distributed.

The 16th C tower at Hitcham was built around this time. and housed two bells, apparently the minimum legal requirement. One of these bells (cast by John Sanders of Reading) was in use up to 1919 when it was replaced. The other one or maybe two were replaced in 1755. Until this time there were no pews but these were added in this period. Hitherto the congregation had knelt on straw in the knave, while the lord of the manor sat in the chancel. Later people started bringing their own stools.

#23 Thomas Beake "succeeded 22 Aug 1536"

In 1536 Thomas Beake was examined by the Abbot of Reading.

"Examinations before Hugh, Abbot of Reading, Thomas Vachell, J.P. in co. Berks, John Whytt, mayor, and Thos. Beke, Walter Barton, and Henry Watts, inhabitants, of Reading, 2 Sept., (sic) 28 Hen. VIII." [Ref 10]

A letter addressed to Thomas Beake of Reading was sent by the King on 30th November 1536.

"(1) Sir Nich. Wagstaff describes how William Wyre gave him, 24 Nov. last, a bill "devised in the name of one Robt. Aske," to copy for 2d. (2.) Wm. Wyre, of The Cardinal's Inn in Reading, shows how Geoffrey Gunter, late of Shrevenham, Berks, lent him the bill to have a copy made. (3.) Sir Richard Snowe, vicar of St. Gyles, Reading, says that on the 28 Nov., Richard Turner sent him a copy of a letter made by Robert Aske, to deliver to John Eynon, a priest of the church, to make a copy of.

On St. Andrew's day last, he gave a copy to Nich. Strystram, son-in-law to Thomas Beke the King's servant, to be delivered to his father-in-law and also to his uncle John Beke, one of the baileys of Reading. (4.) John Eynon confirms the foregoing. (5.) Richard Turner got the copy of a bill from John Bourne. Lent it to Sir John Eynon, priest, to copy, at Eynon's request. As the lord abbot and Mr. Vachell were in London he kept the copy of the bill. On St. Andrew's day last, hearing Mr. Vachell was home, he delivered his copy to Thos. Bewell, serjeant of the town, to take to Mr. Vachell. Signed by the justices. Each deposition signed by the witness. Pp. 3. Endd.: Thexamynacon for the bill found at Reading." [Ref 10]

There is no clear evidence here, but it looks plausible that the abbot had interviewed five candidates for jobs and then the King sent out appointment letters. Vachell was made High Steward of Reading. Chillingly, Abbot Hugh was executed in 1539 and the Abbey was seized by Vachell.

There is also a Henry Beke with an elaborate memorial in Shinfield church Reading, who died 1580 and who might be brother or son of Thomas. This family is remarkably undocumented considering their evident wealth. A Thomas Beak had been Mayor of Reading in 1458.

#24 Robert ap Griffith (or Gryfye) "pr 2 July 1538"

It is not clear if Robert was the last Rector presented by Merton Priory following the Dissolution of the Monasteries or a new broom imposed by Henry VIII. In any case Robert must have been accommodating of Henry's new role in the church and a Protestant. "Robertus Gryffith" was recorded as rector of "Hycham" in 1540 and as "Robertus Griffiz" he resigned from "Hichame" in 1552.

Around 1545 it is believed a small 'service' or Sanctus bell was installed, made by John Saunders of Reading and weighing 3.25 cwt. It is still there to this day but is very rarely used.[Ref 16]. The total bells recorded in 1552 was 2, the statutory minimum. The other church assets were simply 1 silver chalice and 2 surplices. [Ref Grimes, 1926]

From 1547 to 1553 the reformation accelerated under Edward VI's ministers, veering towards puritanism.

#25 Thomas Story (or Storey or Storie or Storye) "pr by the Queen [Mary I] 1553"

Queen Mary I came to the throne in 1553 and lost no time in returning the national orthodoxy to Catholicism, so in that year a new, and for her presumably a more congenial, rector was appointed. The burning of heretics had been unlawful from 1547 to 1554. However Latimer, Ridley and Cranmer were burned at the stake as Protestant martyrs in 1555 in Oxford.

Thomas Story was ordained 27th Mar 1540 in Lincoln. In 1551 he is listed as Vicar of Tathwell near Lincoln (the year he left) before arriving in Hitcham in 1553. He is possibly the same man who turns up as absentee rector of Ardilthorpe (*Addlethorpe*) in Lincolnshire from 1555 to 1574 or 1576.

"Sir Thomas Storie rector of Ardilthorpe (£9.10s.21/2d) of the patronage of the Queen [*Elizabeth*] does not reside, but dwells within the diocese of Chichester (1576)" [Ref 6]

Firstly, if the same man, Thomas clearly adapted quickly to the new order and secondly it is of note that absentee rectors were common especially in remote Lincolnshire at this time.

#26 Bartholomew Green (or Grene) "pr 9 Sep 1555 by the King and Queen [*Philip II of Spain and Mary I*]"

Just possibly this could be Bartholomew (or Bartlet) Green born 1530 in London, a devout Catholic, who graduated from Oxford 1547 where he was converted to Protestantism. He was curate at Prices Risborough in 1552. He was burned at the stake in London in 1556 as a Protestant martyr, having written in a letter 'The Queen is not dead', it being treason to speculate on the sovereign's health. In his trial he expanded in detail on his profound theological principles. [Ref 7] However in his examination there is no mention of a rectorship or of Hitcham and of course our rector had been presented by the King and Queen themselves so was presumably believed to be a sound Catholic. Curiously he was examined for heresy by Dr John Storey who was himself later executed for treason by Elizabeth I, thereby becoming a Catholic martyr. It would be an interesting twist if our rector #25 Thomas Story just happened to be Dr John Storey's brother (both Thomas and John lived in Sussex).

However, since finding that record we have now found a Bartolomeus Grene who became vicar at Kilsby in 1565-7 and rector of Southam 1566-71 both near Coventry [Ref 14] – so maybe our rector kept out of trouble after all.

#27 John Ball "pr 2 Oct 1556"

Queen Mary died in 1558 resulting in Elizabeth becoming queen and England again switching to Protestantism, though backtracking on Edward VI's puritanism. Elizabeth sold the advowson to Elizabeth Clark (nee Ramsay) soon after her accession presumably part of the effort to raise money for the defence of England from the menace of Spain, but the register entry below clarifies this. She must have been comfortable with John Ball's theology.

"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*]

John Ball Rector of Hitcham 1556 to 1566. There are several clerics called John Ball, Balle or Bawl in the clerical database [Ref 14], but none readily identify with these dates. As with Lancelot Dethicke #29 below this is clearly a bad time for record-keeping.

The parish registers, now stored in Buckinghamshire Record Office, date from 1559 onwards there being a new edict to record births, marriages and deaths.

#28 Thomas Hall "pr by Roger Alford and Eliza his wife 25 Dec 1566". Roger Alford was the son and heir of Elizabeth Clarke/Ramsey. *Roger Alford the lord of the manor died 1580 and is buried at Hitcham.*

Thomas Hall was educated at Peterhouse Cambridge, was rector of Hitcham from 1566 to 1585 and was buried 7th Sept 1592. Henry Reynolds was made 'clerk and farmer to the parish' from 25th Sept 1589 and probably took services.

#29 Lancelot Dethicke is recorded by one source [Ref 14] as resigning as rector of Hitcham, Bucks on 4th Nov 1606 but had previously been discounted as there are no other records of his ministry. The important Dethicke family of Derbyshire was related to the Babington family discredited by the infamous Babington plot in 1586 against Queen Elizabeth and so potentially he could have been simply 'written out of history', or perhaps he and Robert Floyd #30 were two rival rectors as they overlap for 14 years from 1592 until 1606!

There was a John Dethick rector of Upton 1586 until his death in 1589.

#30 Robert Floyd (or Lloyd or Floide or Fludd) AM "pr 13 Oct 1592 He occurs Rector 1607, Sir William Clarke being returned as Patron, and was living in 1625. He was buried 3rd Aug 1629" Ordained 1593. He was at Hitcham from 1592 to 1614 but then took on the lesser role of preacher at Hitcham until his death in 1629. During the time of these last three rectors Henry Reynolds - a 'clerk and farmer of this parish' - served as priest under the rector.

At a survey in 1627 the parsonage was described as of 7 bays, 2 storeys, 15 rooms (of which only 2 were bedrooms).

When Queen Elizabeth visited Sir William Clarke during her Summer Progress in 1602 he apparently 'so behaved himself that he pleased

nobody, but gave occasion to have his misery (or miserliness) and vanity spread far and wide.' [Ascribed to John Chamberlain] .

James I succeeded in 1603, and Charles I in 1625.

Sir William Clarke died 1624 **and the church contains an elaborate 17th C alabaster memorial.** Under the new floor are comemorative plaques and slabs to Sir William Clarke's family, including to his daughter Dorothy who married Thomas Garrard, son of the lord of Dorney, to the extreme displeasure of both sets of parents. The Clarkes thought Dorothy could have married aristocracy and the Garrards thought the Clarkes were mercenary.

Sir William Garrard, Lord Mayor of London, bought Dorney Court in 1537. A few years later Martha, his daughter and the sister of Thomas Garrard, married Sir James Palmer of Wingham (Kent) and, Thomas Garrard having been disinherited, the Palmer family have owned Dorney Court right up to the present day.

Charles I was executed in 1649 at the end of the Civil War, marking a fresh turn in official doctrine.

During the Civil War or the following Republic the church was damaged by Cromwellian soldiers attacking images of saints. The helmets (now reproductions) that are high on the walls of the chancel are thought to belong to Royalist Clarke rather than to Cromwellian troops.

#31 William Serjeant "pres 1629 by Sir Francis Clarke He occurs Rector 1650 when the value was returned £80. He died 13th Aug (or May) 1657" Rector from 4th Jan 1630 until his death but he was still recorded as rector by the diocese until 9th Nov 1660.

Clearly from 1657 until 1660 there was no recognised rector, the church probably being under control of puritan lay preachers.

One of William's sons was a benefactor of Kings College Cambridge. Apparently this son, another William Serjeant AM STB, was born in Hitcham, attended Eton and was Rector of Fyfield, Hampshire sometime around 1672.

The year 1660 saw the restoration of the monarchy with Charles II and in 1660 Sir John Clarke sold the lordship of Hitcham Manor to Charles Doe,

confirmed by Act of Parliament. The Clarkes were royalists and had had property taken by the republic. It is likely that Charles Doe was a puritan and was taking his last chance as the republic collapsed.

#32 James Herring or Heming AM "pr 9 Nov 1660 by Mr Chas Doe, James Herring *who surrendered to D Phil King* who died March 1667 [*From register transcripts*]" James Herring was probably a puritan. It is curious that he was appointed the same year as the restoration of monarchy, but he failed to adjust to the new order and like many puritan clergy was 'retired' or chose to stand down over the Act of Conformity in 1662.

He was born in Coventry in 1634, was a King's Scholar at Eton 1649, graduated in 1657, ordained in 1660 at Chichester and was a priest at Windsor Castle.. He was rector of Hitcham 1660 to 1667 (according to the diocese!) and then in Suffolk. [Ref 12, which lists him as *Heming*]

Julines Herring (1582-1644) was a noted puritan preacher. He had a lot of children so these may well have included James Herring and also John Herring puritan preacher at St Brides Fleet St

#33 Philip King DD 1662

As noted above, James Herring (presumably a puritan) surrendered the rectorship to Dr King, who died soon after in March 1667. John Evelyn the diarist refers to "a sermon by D Phil King at the Abbey" in 1661. It is plausible that D Phil means Doctor of Philosophy but apparently his first name was Philip.

Dr Philip King (1603-1667) was awarded a DD at Oxford in 1645 and lived at Langley, Berkshire with his sister. He was treasurer of the diocese of Chichester and archdeacon of Lewes. He died 4th March 1667 in Langley.

#34 George Evans DD "inst 28 March or April 1667 on the pr of John Doe, Gent. Died March 2nd 1701" "Dr George Evans came to Hitcham and read the 39 Articles as rector of the parish 28th April 1667"

Dr Evans was buried at Hitcham, though there is apparently no memorial there. He was ordained in 1661 in Salisbury.

"George Evans, D.D. (1630?–1701/2), was an English antiquary.

Evans was educated at Jesus College, Cambridge, where he graduated B.A. and became a fellow of Jesus in 1650, and graduated M.A. in 1653. He became vicar of New Windsor, and was installed Canon of Windsor 30 July 1660. He proceeded D.D. at Cambridge in 1665; was licensed to St. Benet Fink, London, 16 May 1663; and was also rector of Hitcham, Buckinghamshire. His son, George Evans, also a fellow of

Jesus College, Cambridge, succeeded him at Benet Fink in 1693. He was a friend and correspondent of Elias Ashmole, and made collections relating to the history of St. George's Chapel, Windsor, printed in Ashmole's 'Berkshire,' 1719. He died 2 March 1701–2. "[Source : Wikipedia].

Another record has his death as 20th March 1702 at Hitcham. It was Dr Evans who managed to obtain for Eton College the advowson to nominate subsequent rectors.

In 1681 Edward Nicholas paid for three sides of the wall around the churchyard to be built, the fourth (north) side being paid for by the parish. The present 17th C Jacobean pulpit and sounding-board date from this time. In 1696 Edward Nicholas, secretary of state to both Charles I and Charles II, was buried at Hitcham.

Edward's burial is of additional interest because there was a fine that had to be paid.

"Ed. Nicholas Esq was buryed in linnen at Hitcham ye 23rd of May 1696 p(enalised). ye five pounds for not being buryed in woollen according to law, was thus disposed of vis fifty shillings to William Martyn the informer and fifty shillings to ye poore of ye Parish of Hitcham. April 22 1697 Geo Evans, rector" [Ref 13].

Hitchambury rectory was enlarged in 1685.

In 1688 William Prince of Orange replaced James II to once again restore the Protestant ascendancy.

#35 William Montague AM "pr 20 March 1701 by Mrs R Evans of Windsor Castle and, on his resignation, Richard Sleech"

Rebecca Evans was the widow of George Evans, and presented the new rector in her own right.

William was probably a member of the influential Montague family of Boveney whose male children attended Eton College and many of whom were clergymen. He was born in Somerset, graduated 1694, and was ordained 1701. He was rector from 20th March 1702 until 2nd July of the same year when he suddenly resigned. He then went to be vicar of Sturminster Marshall until he died there 29th June 1745. It is likely that he was simply a stop-gap after the death of George Evans #34.

#36 Richard Sleech (or Sleeck or Kiech) AM or DD "inst 6 July 1702"

Richard Sleech was also Rector of Farnham Royal from 1721. His step-father, John Newborough, was headmaster of Eton. He died 1729-30 and was buried at Windsor being Canon there.

Richard Sleech was born 1679 at Eton College. He was educated at Queens College Cambridge, ordained 1702 at Ely and was presented for Hitcham by Rebecca Evans in her own right on 6th July 1702. until his death on 1st April 1730. He was at the same time domestic chaplain to the Bishop of Ely and rector of Farnham Royal from 1721 until his death.

“RICHARD SLEECH January 28, 1715. Was admitted into King’s College in 1693; A.B. 1697; A.M. 1701; S.T.P. 1720[was born at Eton, son of Mr Sleech, the organist of the College Chapel. His mother, when a widow, married Mr Newborough of the year 1673, the celebrated Head-Master of Eton; and his sister [Lucy] married Bishop [Stephen] Weston [Lord of the Manor of Hitcham] , of the year 1682, then Under-Master of the School. He was an Assistant at Eton School; and married a daughter of Stephen Upman, of the year 1661; by whom he had many children. He was Rector of Hitcham in Buckinghamshire; and died March 2, 1729. His eldest son Stephen was afterwards Provost of Eton--his daughter Ann married Mr Charles Hawtrey of the year 1706--Catherine, married Dr Cooke, the present Provost of King’s College--two more daughters kept a milliner’s shop in St James’s Square--John his second son, of the year 1729--Edward, his third son, was Clerk of the Pell Office, in the Exchequer--and Henry, his fourth son was of the year 1741. He was succeeded at Hitcham by Mr Archer, of the year 1715 *[incorrect!]*. He had a daughter also married to George Harris, of the year 1706.” [Ref 12, which also claims John Newborough was a rector of Hitcham and is buried there]

Canon of Windsor 1722-1730

Assistant master at Eton 1715

Rector of Hitcham 1702-1730

Chaplain to the Bishop of Ely 1721

Rector of Farnham Royal 1721-1730

Died 1729 and buried at Windsor 4th March 1730

His first son Stephen was rector of Farnham Royal and chaplain to George II

His fourth son Henry was rector of Hitcham

He had 9 children in all

Hitchambury rectory was further enlarged in 1702. The chancel at the church was re-tiled in 1707.

In 1714 John Freind bought the manor of Hitcham. He was born in Northamptonshire in 1675, and after graduating he became a doctor as well as Member of Parliament. He was put in the Tower of London in

1722 on suspicion of Jacobite sympathies where he started his famous book 'The History of Physick'. In 1726 he became physician to Queen Caroline He died 1728 and is buried at Hitcham but there is a monument to him in Westminster Abbey.

#37 Thomas Archer BA "succeeded 1729 on the presentation of Thomas Evans , CLK *[Clerk in holy orders]* and inst 2 April 1730"

"(This Advowson was given to Eton College by Dr Evans whose heirs on his death he obliged always to present the Eton College nomination)".

Thomas Archer studied at Merton College, Oxford and was ordained in 1727 in Oxford. He resigned from Hitcham in 1743 and was chaplain to the Countess of Orkney, and rector at Finchley and at Ludgate as well as prebendary at St Paul's Cathedral. Thomas Archer was buried 30th Jun 1767. He was the son of Benjamin Archer STP, rector of Quainton, near Aylesbury and grandson of George Evans #34 rector of Hitcham.

#38 Edmund Gibson AM "inducted 1st or 13th Dec 1743"

He was ordained in 1738 in London. He was presented for Hitcham by Henry Bland, Provost of Eton and Benjamin Archer (brother of Thomas Archer #37) Provost of Stone in Dorset after serving as vicar in Broomfield and at Willingale.

Edmund Gibson (1713-1771) was the son of Edmund Gibson, Bishop of London. He served as canon of Windsor from 1742-1746 and at the same time was prebendary canon and precentor of St Paul's Cathedral. He was also in 1771 made Sinecure Rector of Llanfawr.

Two new bells were installed in 1755 cast by Thomas Swain of London. They were replaced in 1919.

#39 Henry Sleech or Sleeck AM "nominated by the Provost and College of Eton to the King *[George III]* and by him presented 27th Aug 1771 for this turn by reason of the lunacy of Cath. Archer and inducted 3 Nov 1771".

Henry was the fourth son of Richard Sleech (described earlier #36). He was born 1722 at Eton, educated at Aberdeen, ordained 1771 in London and was rector at Hitcham from 1st Oct 1771 until his death on 1st Dec 1784.

#40 Thomas Pielton AM (or Pulton) CLK "pr by the King [George III] for this turn by reason [the insanity of Catherine Archer] as before, May 5th 1784 and inducted 17 May 1785".

Thomas Pulton was educated at Pembroke College Oxford and was ordained at Gloucester in 1757. He served as rector of Southmere , Chattisham and Titchwell before arriving at Hitcham late in 1784 and remaining until his death in 1810 or 1811.

Thomas was buried at Hitcham Dec 7th 1810 or January 1811.

Note that Thomas Poulton of Witney (1737-1817?) married the daughter of Benjamin Wheeler the chancellor of the diocese of Oxford.

There is of course a distinguished family called Poulton or Polton who were lords of the manor of Desborough. These were generally devout Catholic and some were Jesuit priests, so any connection is tenuous.

In 1797 Thomas Pulton, by Act of Parliament, exchanged some of the glebe land for land belonging to Lord Grenville.

The following two rectors are both described as being 'too busy when young and too feeble when old' to have attended to church affairs.

#41 Joseph Goodall DD "pr 7 May 1811 by Thomas Archer of South Church Co Essex the true and undoubted Patron thereof in full right on the nomination of the Provost and College of Eton"

This Thomas Archer was very likely son of the earlier rector #37 Thomas Archer.

Joseph Goodall (1760-1840) was educated at Cambridge and ordained 1788 in Lincoln. He was rector of Hedgerley 1788 to 1797 and of Sessay, Yorks. 1797-8 and was headmaster of Eton 1801-1809 and provost of Eton 1809-1840. He then was vicar of Ellingham Hants from 1804. From 1811 he was rector of Hitcham and also rector of Ilsley Berkshire from 1827 until he resigned from Hitcham in 1833. He was reputedly too busy to attend to church matters.

Dr Goodall is mentioned twice in *'The Black Book: an exposition of abuses in Church and State'*, published in 1831 by John Wade which vilified absentee rectors, as well as Eton College, and this probably was the cause of his resignation in 1833.

William IV once said "When Goodall goes I'll make [Keate] provost"; to which Goodall replied, "I could not think of 'going' before Your Majesty." He died on 25 March 1840, and was buried in Eton College Chapel on 2 April. A statue in the College Chapel was raised to his

memory by a subscription headed by the Queen Dowager. He founded a scholarship of £50 a year, to be held at Oxford or Cambridge

#42 (Henry) W M Grover AM SCL (1791-1866) was inducted March 1833 (on the resignation of Dr Goodall). He was presented by the Provost of Eton College. He died Aug 27 1866 aged 75 and is buried at Hitcham. Henry Montague Grover worked as a London solicitor before going to St Peters Cambridge to study theology, being ordained 1829 and after a brief spell as curate in Nottingham became rector of Hitcham in 1833. He wrote a number of books. Because of ill-health he later became a recluse.

The history of Hitchambury manor includes :

"The Rev. W.N. Grover (Rector from 1833-1866) should not go unmentioned. He was described as "at first too busy with other things, and then too feeble". When he was elderly he was wheeled to church in a Bath-chair by his manservant only to find that no parishioners had shown up so the good Reverend was promptly pushed back again!"

However there is a parishioner who in 1926 remembers Grover as exceptionally kind to the children at Christmas.

An 1851 ecclesiastical census shows average attendance was 18 on Sunday mornings and 12 on Sunday afternoons.

In the 1851 census there is a record of Henry Montague Grover, widower, rector of Hitcham, apparently living alone, born 1791 or 2. He oddly does not appear in the 1861 census of England as might be expected.

He was buried at St Mary's having died 27th Aug 1866 age 74 or 75.

The medieval rectory at Hitchambury Manor was damaged by fire a number of times so the house was rebuilt on the same site in the 1860s and this is the building that remains today.

#43 (William) W A Carter 1866 (resigned 1868 or 9)

William Adolphus Carter (1815-1901) was son of Thomas Carter a fellow of Eton College and vicar of Burnham. He was the father of Edward Carter who would become rector in 1905. It is said that he extended Hitchambury to accommodate his large family only then to up and leave for the Burnham rectorship after only three years, in 1869, staying at Burnham until 1878. This is borne out by the 1871 census for Burnham which shows William, his wife Gertrude Rogers, eleven children and

eight servants, a total of 21 people. In 1878 William left the area for the rectorship of Worplesdon.

William's father Thomas Carter was vicar of Burnham from 1833 and was in office in 1863 when St Peter's was heavily restored.

#44 Edward Balston DD 1868, "who resigned immediately upon appointment in order to effect an exchange".

Balston was offered the rectorship of Hitcham, having been married in 1850 to Harriet Anne Carter, sister of the previous rector. Harriet wanted a move to the Burnham area, but Edward believed there was not enough work for a young man at Hitcham, so another Eton master called Cornish suggested Edward accept Hitcham but immediately exchange with Cornish's elderly father who was incumbent at Bakewell. So Balston attended Hitcham, rang the bell, read the 39 articles, preached a sermon and then left for Bakewell and the elderly Cornish came to Hitcham.

"Edward Balston (26 November 1817 – 29 November 1891) was an English schoolmaster, Church of England cleric, head master of Eton College from 1862 to 1868 and later Rector of Hitcham, Buckingham-shire, Vicar of Bakewell, Derbyshire, and Archdeacon of Derby.

Balston was the son of William Balston, a paper-maker, by his marriage to Catherine, daughter of Thomas Vallance, of Cheapside, wholesale stationer. He was born at Maidstone, Kent, on 26 November 1817 and baptised on 23 December. He was educated at Eton, then admitted to King's College, Cambridge, on 21 November 1836, matriculating in the Lent term of 1837. He was the Browne medallist every year from 1836 to 1839 and won the Davies Scholarship in 1839, unusually being elected a Fellow of his college in 1839 before graduating Bachelor of Arts in 1841 and proceeding Master of Arts in 1844. In 1841 he was ordained a deacon of the Church of England and in 1842 a priest.

Although Balston held his Fellowship at King's until 1850, in 1840 he returned to Eton as an assistant master, where in 1860 he became a Fellow and on 25 February 1862 Head Master. In 1865 his university honoured him with the degree of Doctor of Divinity.

Questioned by the Clarendon Commission on 9 July 1862, Balston came under attack for his view that in the classroom little time could be spared for subjects other than classical studies. Lord Clarendon said to him -

Nothing can be worse than this state of things, when we find modern languages, geography, history, chronology and everything else which a well-educated English gentleman ought to know given up in order that the full time should be devoted to the classics; and, at the same time, we are told that the boys go up to Oxford, not only not proficient, but in a lamentable deficiency in respect of the classics.

Balston replied that there were occasional lectures at Eton on scientific subjects and that some time could be spared for the French language, conceding that it might be possible to make that a compulsory subject in some forms of the school, but that he

would prefer to teach English rather than French. It remained his view that in most lower forms of the school the boys' time should be devoted entirely to classical studies.

In 1868 Balston left Eton (while remaining a Fellow) to take on a parish benefice as rector of Hitcham, Buckinghamshire, and in 1869 moved on again to become vicar of Bakewell, Derbyshire, where in 1872 he was appointed a rural dean and in 1873 as Archdeacon of Derby, remaining as vicar and archdeacon until his death in 1891.”
[Wikipedia]

In the 1881 census he was in Bakewell with his wife and six servants. He died at Bakewell on 29 November 1891 and was buried at Eton.

The original oak box pews were removed and replaced with Victorian pews. The porch was added in the 19th C. Parts of the old oak pews were used to panel the porch at the main door where they can still be seen. External buttresses to the chancel also date from around this time.

#45 Hubert Kestell Cornish 1869

Hubert was 66 when he arrived at Hitcham from Bakewell. Hubert died 1873 and is buried at Hitcham.

Hubert Kestell Cornish (1803-1873) was born in Salcombe, Devon. He had married Louisa Warre in 1833 and had a daughter Sarah and became vicar of Merton, Oxfordshire. He later married Theophasia Lucy Vernon (who was born 1830 on St Helena), and had eight more children and became vicar of Bakewell in 1840. In the 1861 census in Bakewell he had three female servants. One of his sons, a master at Eton, suggested the exchange of rectorships in 1869 between his father and Edward Balston. In the 1871 census in Hitcham he had his wife, seven of his children and two servants.

Hubert was closely connected with the Oxford Movement of High Church Anglo-Catholics led by John Keble after whom Keble College is named. He wrote several books on the interpretation of biblical text.

The church was now in poor condition but was assisted by the first of many donations by the Hanbury family.

In 1870 and again in 1884, whilst digging new graves, two chalk sarcophagi were uncovered south of the nave, and oriented east-west, thought to be late Roman or early Anglo-Saxon.

#46 Rev George Frewer MA 1873

George Frewer (1822-1907)

In 1886 he was rector at Fullerby in Lincolnshire and then at Brede in Sussex. He officiated at the marriage of his nephew Henry Frewer to

Louisa Goodall in St Pancras and the Frewer family were connected with the Goodall family, possibly descendants of Joseph Goodall the earlier rector #41, but this needs clarifying. He was a mathematics master at Eton and is fondly remembered in the memoirs of one his pupils.

In the 1881 census George Frewer, born in London 1822, was living with his wife Elizabeth Lydia Frewer nee Simmons of the same age and their two unmarried daughters and four servants. By the 1891 census Elizabeth had died, and George was living at Dropmore Park Road with his still-unmarried two daughters, 2 grandchildren and four servants. George died 26th May 1907 and was buried in St Mary's churchyard with a large modern-looking marble slab tombstone. There are commemorative plaques to George and his wife inside the church.

His daughter Ellen Elizabeth Frewer had been well educated and was a translator of Jules Verne's works.

There was apparently some considerable restoration work done in 1876, mostly by James Rutland who, whilst being a builder by trade, was also an enthusiastic local historian who manually duplicated some of the most interesting pages of the church registers and also uncovered the famous Taplow Hoard.

The door to a cast-iron vestry (now gone) was knocked through the wall of the chancel without the approval of the diocese which caused great alarm in Oxford.

#47 Edward Carter 1905

Edward Carter (1856-1917) was born and died in Eton. In the 1911 census Edward Hobhouse **Proctor** (*indexed as Printier*) Carter was living at Hitcham Rectory (then known as the 'New' Rectory the one now known as the 'Old Rectory') a single gentleman born 1856 in Eton, with his sister Janet and two servants (a married couple). He was grandson of Thomas Carter a vicar of Burnham and fellow of Eton and son of William Adolphus Carter (1815-1901) rector #43 of Hitcham and vicar of Burnham.

In 1909 the church sold the rectory at Hitchambury Manor to Mr. Charles Selwyn Awdry for £4200 and with it four and a half acres for a further £3429 and the rectory moved to what is now known as the 'Old Rectory' across the lane from the church.

In 1915 Kelly's Directory quoted the benefice for the rector as the use of the rectory plus £450 per annum in income. This £450 equates to £55,000 pa in 2022 RPI adjusted but a handsome £228,000 per annum in 2022 when adjusted relative to average incomes. The equivalent living at Burnham Parish was £384 pa plus use of the Burnham vicarage. The equivalent living at Taplow was £320 pa (incl 190 acres of Glebe) and a rectory. So Hitcham was easily the best living of the three parishes. Edward Carter leased the Glebe Lands to Walter Fryer.

The Dolgorouki Tomb

"The weather-worn coat of arms and the fading inscription on the flat tombstone to the west of the south porch of St Mary's Church in Hitcham Lane hide a romantic story. It is the final resting-place of His Highness Prince Alexis Dolgorouki and his wife Princess Francis.

Alexis and Fanny were an autumn love match, marrying when both were just reaching 50. Their marriage ceremony in July 1898 was a two-part celebration at the Russian Embassy Chapel and at St Margaret's Church, Westminster Abbey.

Fanny was the only child and heiress of the rich industrialist Mr Fleetwood Wilson of Wappenham Manor in Northamptonshire. Prince Alexis, a Chamberlain to the Tsar of Russia, came from a long and distinguished noble family in the direct line of descent from Prince Dolgorouki of Suzdal, the founder of Moscow in 1129.

The Dolgoroukis lived a happy social life, entertaining lavishly at their home in Upper Grosvenor Street in Mayfair. Fanny wanted to have a country house in the Thames Valley suitable to hold weekend river parties and Prince Alexis commissioned Sir Edwin Lutyens to build a house on a site in Taplow. The result was Nashdom - in Russian, 'Our Home'.

After Prince Alexis died in June 1915, Fanny spent most of her days abroad at her villa on the shores of the Mediterranean continuing to be a very generous hostess. She died in August 1919."

[Karl Lawrence]

The glebe land was sold in ten lots, some near the old Rectory, and the rest with two exceptions were in the south of the parish. The areas varied from 1 to 39.5 acres, and the sale prices varied according to the farming and gravel qualities of the land, gravel being a valuable commodity.

#48 Harold Wilson

1916

Harold Francis Wilson was born 1873 in Nenagh, Co Tipperary. In 1911 he was living as a clergyman in Aylesbury with wife Dorothy (born in Tasmania) and their 2 daughters and a cook.

"In the 1920s when the incumbent was the Rev Harold Wilson the attendance at Hitcham fell to near vanishing point." *[Geoffrey Cocks.]*

The congregation was not to return to a good level until The Rev James took over after the war.

In 1919 the peal of four bells was replaced with a new set of six paid for by Colonel Lionel Hanbury in thanksgiving for the safe return of himself, his son and his daughter from the war in France. The bells were erected in 1919 at a cost of £587.7.6. They replaced bells cast in 1540 and in 1755. They were cast at the Whitechapel Foundry where the Liberty Bell and Big Ben were cast. The Foundry sadly closed in 2017.

(The Germans had started to melt down church bells for weapons manufacture in 1917, but this was forbidden by the Hague Convention and British church bells avoided this fate.)

As described earlier under rector #24 there is, in addition to the normal peal, in the tower what appears to be a Sanctus service bell (possibly cast in 1545 by John Saunders of Reading) though that date (post-reformation) suggests a low church protestant use.

In 1921 Rector Wilson applied for a faculty to replace the choir stalls with new ones but was refused by the diocesan Chancellor. The Rector sought legal opinion and was advised that, whilst the Chancellor's position was questionable, proceeding without a faculty would endanger the Rector's benefice.

"The wire doors to the porch were fitted in 1910, the Positive Organ was fitted in 1914 and was hand-blown until 1959, when an electric blower was fitted. In 1920 the War Memorial was erected" *[Mervyn Eden]*

#49 William George 1923

William Henry George (1863-1930) was born in Worcester. In the 1911 census he is a clergyman in Bushey Herts living with his wife Constance and 2 servants. He is buried at Hitcham.

Installation of choir stalls. It was not until 1927 under the next Rector, William George, that the choir stalls were finally approved and installed. They were removed during the Hewson incumbency 1992-2011.

A vestry was added in 1926. It was paid for in part from the proceeds of the sale of the school, so that it is in trust terms an educational building, for that was the restriction placed on the disposal of the school funds. The Hanburys also made a contribution to this cause, and thus the old iron vestry was taken down. The 800th anniversary was celebrated in 1926, and to celebrate that it was decided to remove the old 1866 pine choir stalls and replace them with oak stalls. This was done, in 1928

following public subscription, though the cost of clergy stalls (£12 each) was considered to be too great. The pews in the nave were replaced at the gift of Col. Hanbury in 1938.

The old gas lights had been replaced by newer ones with round white globes in 1907; in 1938 this was changed to electric light, though the present large central chandelier was a gift of Col. Hanbury in 1953, the year before he died aged 90.

The advowsons of parishes were abolished in 1923. However, Eton College seems to have retained a 'stakeholder' interest in the appointment of incumbents right up to the present day.

#50 Lewis Herbert Evans 1930

Lewis was born 29th Oct 1870 in Oxford. He was son of Evan Evans, Master of Pembroke College, Oxford. He was Canon in the Cathedral Church of Christ in Oxford. He was married to Geraldine Horatia and in 1911 was living in Eton.

Canon Evans improved the Rectory with a mortgage on the Glebe Lands from the Governors of the Bounty of Queen Anne.

"Rev. Lewis Herbert: M.A. (Oxon) ; Vicar of Eton and Rural Dean of Burnham; s. of Rev. Canon; educ., Eton. Publications: "Stories from Fancy Land". Add.: Windsor" [*Eton College records*].

Lewis died 22nd May 1942 and is buried at Hitcham.

#51 Bernard Harvey 1943

Bernard William Harvey, born 1875 in Wallingford, son of Charles Wigan Harvey the rector of Throcking, Herts. He died 1948 aged 73 and is buried at Hitcham.

He married in 1907 and in 1911 was curate in Cheshunt.

Throughout the Second World War it was forbidden to ring church bells except to warn of invasion.

#52 Godfrey James 1949

Godfrey Hamlyn James ('Jimmy' James) was rector from 1949 to 1962. He had previously been the priest at St Laurence Church Reading. He successfully rebuilt the congregation, including the Astor family from Cliveden.

Born 1890 and died 15th July 1962 and buried in Hitcham churchyard with a simple small headstone. There was a subscription raised for a memorial to him in 1962 consisting of a cross and candlesticks, a tribute to his popularity. The service of remembrance was conducted by Eric Graham formerly Bishop of Brechin and a close friend.

The church tower had been covered with plaster in 1912, but the tower was restored at a cost of £500 in 1953; over half the cost was raised by one sale of work

The parish registers were now transferred to County Hall Aylesbury over a period from 1940 to 1967.

#53 Frank de Jonge 1962

Frank Hermann de Jonge MA DTheol. Frank was inducted December 8th 1962.

Frank was born in 1903 in British Guyana, though his surname is clearly Dutch or Afrikaans. His mother had been born in Madras. His father was a merchant. In the 1911 census he was with his widowed mother in Kensington.

Frank died 1992 aged 89 and is buried at St Andrews Church, South Stoke, Oxfordshire.

He was the last Rector of Hitcham as a result of the transfer of the benefice to the diocese in 1973.

In the aftermath of the war he was part of a Christian charity mission to Germany, an immediate precursor of the charity Christian Aid. He received an honorary D Theol degree from Kiel University in 1949 as recognition of his post-war aid efforts.

"The size of the parish had led the diocese to review its clergy allocation and in due course it is probable that Hitcham might become part of a 'Group Ministry' in the Burnham and Taplow area. With this in mind no Rector was appointed when the Rev. Dr. Frank de Jonge retired in 1973, but a Priest in charge was appointed who had most of the functions of a Rector, but without 'freehold for life'." *[Mervyn Eden]*

Priest-in-charge

#54 Denham Bayly-Jones 1973

Gilbert Denham Bayly-Jones (always known as Denham) was born 26th Oct 1926 and died 2nd March 1988. He is buried in Chalfont St Giles.

Denham was extremely popular for his jolly demeanour, wry humour, and for his generosity with his home-made beer. He once said 'Congregationalists are not that keen on bishops, and neither am I'.

It was also once observed that Denham kept only two books - the bible and a big volume to keep the front door open.

"In 1975 for the first time the church came onto mains water supply - we had done without for the first 849 years." *[Mervyn Eden]*

In 1978 all remaining glebe land in England was transferred to the appropriate diocese.

Vicars

#55 Peter Judd DL

1981

Peter Somerset Margesson Judd was born in 1949 in Calgary, Canada. Peter was noted for his learned sermons accompanied by a pile of reference books-very different from Denham. It was under his incumbency that the Hitcham Players flourished. Peter also built the parish room to replace the community function of the rectory.

"Another aspect of the changes within the church is that it is felt that the present Rectory might be too large, but at the present moment it also finds a use as a homely church hall, suitable for social gatherings if not for anything too well-attended. The joy, and yet the despair of the Rectors of Hitcham is its Rectory garden, which is of considerable extent - about 6.5 acres all told, containing a most exciting variety of plants and tress, large and small: even a fig tree and vines."

[Mervyn Eden]

The vestry and meeting room and toilet were built on at this time to link the vestry with the church. Peter vacated the rectory for a modest house in St Peters Close, and the rectory was sold.

Peter had a later distinguished career :
1988 Rural Dean of Cowley, Oxfordshire
1997 Provost of Chelmsford Cathedral
2000 Dean of Chelmsford Cathedral
Retired 2013
He was Deputy Lieutenant of Essex

#56 Philip Derbyshire

1988

Philip was ordained in 1981 and worked as a prison chaplain in Reading and Holloway gaols and in Zimbabwe before coming to Hitcham. After he left Hitcham he went as team rector to Stewkley near Milton Keynes. He retired in 2020.

#57 Thomas Hewson

1992

Tom was responsible for modernising the church by removing the choir stalls (mentioned above), the pews and in 2005 the existing pipe organ and replacing them with movable chairs and an electronic organ. Also the medieval floor was covered with a suspended modern floor with a new

heating system. This was in 2008. Ironically, in modernising the church it has been returned much more to its medieval appearance.

In 2011 Tom and his wife Rosie, also ordained, moved to Ashurstwood near East Grinstead.

#58 Nicola Pledger 2011

Hitcham's first female vicar, Nicola retired in 2016 and she and husband Alan are now staff chaplains at St Andrew's Chorleywood.

#59 Susan Sampson 2017

Susan was curate at Haywards Heath and priest-in-charge at Stowe before coming to Hitcham in 2017. She is now a volunteer preacher at Salisbury Cathedral.

#60 Chris Hassell 2024

Chris was for a time the youngest ordained priest in the Church of England, having been ordained in 2013 at Lichfield at the minimum age for ordination. He arrived in Hitcham and was licensed 12th June 2024 by the Bishop of Oxford, Stephen Croft, having formerly been priest in Truro.

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