

Patrons of Stoke Gabriel Parish Church

The patronage of English parish churches began in ancient times and an understanding of its historical evolution is essential to understanding the patronage of Stoke Gabriel church.

Historical Introduction

During the early mediaeval period, many landowners, typically Lords of the Manor, having been converted to Christianity, decided to build a church for their families, tenants and serfs. They provided the land and funds for it to be accomplished, and also provided the priest with a house as his residence and glebe land for his support. Having gifted all this, the landowner would reserve to himself the choice of priest. In this way, the system of patronage established itself across the country in which the right to present a priest to a benefice (otherwise known as the living) became a distinct and valuable right, known as the advowson.

The patron was the holder of the advowson. A right capable of being inherited, auctioned, leased or sold in whole or in part, it was just like any other form of property. Leases in particular could be limited to a single exercise or to someone's life before the right reverted to its owner. The advowson could be held by anyone - lay or ecclesiastical - but could only be exercised in favour of an ecclesiastical body, such as a priest. While the bishop still had the right to install the priest, he had little choice in the candidate unless he was the patron himself.

Having been installed, the priest was the incumbent of the benefice and was required to care and nourish the souls of his parishioners (the cure of souls), which included religious instruction, administration of the sacraments, and pastoral care to the wider community. In return, he acquired the freehold of the church and churchyard, the parsonage and any glebe land, which he could farm himself or lease in return for a rent. He would receive fees for services of baptism, marriage and burial, and would also receive tithes.

A scripturally based payment of 1/10th of the year's product of land and labour, tithes were originally a voluntary gift from the people of the parish to their incumbent. Their purpose was to provide him with additional funding for his ministry, to maintain the church fabric, to provide service books and vestments, and to help the poor. The recipient of tithes became known as the rector, the tithes as rectorial property, and the benefice as a rectory. In due course, the payment of tithes became compulsory and the tithing system continued essentially unchanged until 1836 when, following a rising tide of discontent, tithes were replaced by a cash payment. The system was finally abolished a century later.

During the early mediaeval period, tithes became separated into greater tithes (crops, hay, wool, livestock, timber etc) and lesser tithes (eggs, garden produce, honey etc). The rector directly received all the tithes, in return for which he was required to provide a ministry to the benefice and to discharge his other obligations. The provision of a ministry could however be delegated by the rector to another priest who would carry it out on his behalf - to minister vicariously. In such a situation, the benefice became a vicarage and the priest became the vicar, and the rector would typically divert the lesser tithes (the vicarial property) to fund his office. Livings were thus either a rectory or a vicarage, simply depending on the tithed income of the incumbent.

Following the Norman Conquest, William I not only gave the monasteries lands and money but also the advowsons and rectorial property of parish churches. In addition, the monasteries acquired advowson-containing estates themselves from landowners. Once the benefice became vacant, usually through the death of the incumbent, they exercised the advowson in their own favour, an option that was available because they were an ecclesiastical body. As a result, they became rector, as well as patron, of numerous parish churches. The monastery could not undertake the cure of souls itself but it could appoint a priest as vicar to minister on its behalf. The vicar was provided with some of the tithes for his support, but the monastery retained the balance for their own use and became rich and powerful.

Like the monastic houses, the church also acquired much land and property, providing it with a financial base to fund its work and lifestyle. The see of Exeter was one of the richest in the country, holding some thirty-five manorial estates within and beyond the county. The bishop was the patron and rector of numerous churches, installing priests as vicars into the benefices and supporting them with the lesser tithes.

Following the English Reformation and the break with Rome in 1534, there was an increased risk of war. Henry VIII needed funds to build the country's defences. In the second half of the 1530's, he dissolved the monasteries and appropriated their lands and assets for the benefit of the nobility and gentry who in return lent the king their support. Towards the end of his reign, the king was still financially challenged and, to prosecute the war with France, he began to plunder the ecclesiastical estates. The bishops were obliged to dispose of their lands and assets that were outside the city of their see. Any objection that they had was futile given that the king was now the head of the church. In 1545, the Bishop of Exeter forfeited the first of his manorial estates and within ten years was left with just a handful. His annual income had fallen by two thirds and the see of Exeter had become one of the poorest.

All in all, the dissolution of the monasteries and spoliation of the church estates resulted in a transfer of about 40% of the landed wealth from ecclesiastical to lay ownership. Accompanying the transfer of the manorial estates, many lay people acquired not only the advowsons for the churches, but also the rectorial tithes and the obligations to maintain the chancel and to provide the essential requisites for services. These lay people represented a new class, referred to as lay rectors. The consequences were far-reaching; as many as 50% of all parishes in England were affected by the change from an ecclesiastical to a lay rector. The net result for many parishes was that less funding was available for their incumbent, the choice of whom was likely to be made with even less regard to their interests.

Stoke Gabriel

From the earliest times, Stoke Gabriel was part of the Manor of Paignton along with Marldon and Paignton. The manor had been owned by the Bishop of Exeter since at least 1050 when Bishop Leofric relocated his see from Crediton to Exeter. It was an ecclesiastical estate in which the Lord of the Manor was the Bishop of Exeter.

In the early 13th century, the bishop provided manorial land and funds for the building of a church in Stoke Gabriel. The bishop became both patron and rector of the church and was thus able to choose and install a priest as the incumbent vicar, the living being a vicarage from

the outset. The vicar received the lesser tithes, glebe land and a parsonage in support of his office and the bishop, as the rector, retained the greater tithes.

In the 1540's, the Bishop of Exeter, Bishop Veysey, was forced to dispose of the Manor of Paignton. The manorial estate passed into lay ownership, together with the separate advowsons for Stoke Gabriel and Paignton churches. By the early 19th century, the manorial estate had become fragmented and the advowson for Stoke Gabriel church had become divided, leading to a complicated picture. In the late 19th century, the bishop re-acquired the entire interest in the advowson (but not the estate), restoring his power both to choose and install the priest.

Patrons of Stoke Gabriel Church

Principally compiled using the registers of the Bishops of Exeter, the following table provides a list of patrons of Stoke Gabriel church at the time a priest was presented to the benefice. The accompanying notes provide background information on the patrons and the historical origin and nature of their interest.

Patron	Advowson		Note
	used in favour of:	in year:	
Bishop of Exeter (Lord of the Manor of Paignton)	Unknown, if any	Early 13 th century	1
Chancellor of Exeter Cathedral	Robert de Crydetone through to Thomas Cowte	1281 to 1545	2
Sir Thomas Speke & his son	None	-	3
William Herbert, 1st Earl of Pembroke	William Bowden	1556	4
William Adams and John Cowminge ("Agricolas") having been granted a limited advowson from Henry Herbert, 2 nd Earl of Pembroke, via Thomas Cowte	John Cowte	1573	5
Countess of Pembroke having been granted a limited advowson by her husband, Henry Herbert, 2 nd Earl of Pembroke	Adrian Cowte	1601	6
William Herbert, 3rd Earl of Pembroke	None	-	
Philip Herbert, 4th Earl of Pembroke	None	-	
Sir William Waller of Winchester Castle	Daniel Getsius	1636	7
Susanna Terry of Paignton having been granted a limited advowson by Sir Henry Cary of Cockington	William Stephens	1672	8
John Kelland of Painsford House, Ashprington, and his guardians, Thomas Drew, John Fownes, John Garde and Robert Symons	Peter Osborne	1705	9
Kelland Courtenay of Ashprington and Tremere, Lanivet, Cornwall	Samuel Belfield	1733	10
Sir Stafford Henry Northcote of Pynes, 7 th Baronet	Hugh Northcote	1777	11

Samuel Belfield , former vicar of Stoke Gabriel, having been granted a limited advowson by Rev'd John Templer	Finney Belfield	1787	12
Mary Glanville Hodson , widow and merchant of Plymouth, having been granted a limited advowson	Robert Bowden	1845	13
Sir Stafford Henry Northcote of Pynes, 8 th Baronet, 1 st Earl of Iddesleigh	John Henry Napper Neville	1881	14
Bishop of Exeter	Hugh Lindsay Pigot & all subsequent vicars	1915 to present day	15

Notes:

1. The bishops did not keep registers of their activities before 1258 which is when Bishop Bronescombe took office. Consequently, there is no record of Stoke Gabriel vicars before this time even though they existed from the time when the parish church was first founded in the early 13th century.
2. The bishop created the office of chancellor in 1225. It was one of the most senior positions within the Diocesan hierarchy and was occupied by a priest who was also a lawyer. He presided over the consistory court and also had responsibility for the theological education of the clergy. To endow the office with the requisite financial support, the bishop transferred to the chancellor the advowson and rectory of the benefices of Stoke Gabriel and St Newlyn, Cornwall. In Bishop Quivil's register, the chancellor is identified as the patron on the occasion of the installation of the first recorded vicar of the parish, Robert de Crydetone:

"STOKE-GABRIEL, Vicar of-
Robert de Crydetone, priest, inst. 18th July, 1281; Patron, Sir Clement [de Langeford], Chancellor of the Cathedral"

The chancellor continued as both patron and rector of the two churches until 1545-49 but thereafter continued only as rector. He was the recipient of the tithes until their abolition in 1936. The 1839 Tithe Apportionments for Stoke Gabriel, which converted tithed produce into tithed rent, reveal that the rental value of all the tithes from the parish was £495 (equivalent to £52,000 in today's money). Of this, the chancellor's greater tithes had a value of £297 (60%) and the parish vicar's lesser tithes had a value of £198 (40%). To the chancellor's income has to be added the tithes of St Newlyn church.

3. Following the Reformation, Bishop Veysey disposed of the Manor of Paignton. It was first leased in 1545, and then transferred in 1549, to Sir Thomas Speke of White Lackington, MP for Somerset and one of the king's favourite courtiers who held the manorial estate and advowsons in trust for the crown. The right to the tithes was retained for funding the offices of the chancellor and the parish vicar, but there was no retention of the advowsons. Sir Thomas Speke died in 1551 and his son, who inherited the trust, finally transferred it in 1555 to William Herbert.

4. William Herbert was the 1st Earl of Pembroke. He had married Ann Parr, sister of Catherine Parr, the sixth wife of Henry VIII. He received valuable grants of land and built their ancestral house at Wilton, Wiltshire. A prominent and powerful person, he was a Guardian of Edward VI. Upon the young king's death, he initially supported Lady Jane Grey but changed his allegiance to Mary when it became clear that she would succeed to the throne. It was William Herbert who in 1567 arranged for a survey to be carried out of all his estates including the Manor of Paignton. The resulting report provides a valuable insight into manorial life in Stoke Gabriel at the time of Elizabeth Tudor.



*William Herbert, 1st
Earl of Pembroke*

5. Upon the death of William Herbert in 1570, his numerous estates and advowsons passed to his son, Henry Herbert, the 2nd Earl of Pembroke. He made a limited grant of the Stoke Gabriel advowson to Thomas Cowte who in turn transferred it to two local men, William Adams and John Cowminge, who were probably the churchwardens. In a seemingly pre-agreed arrangement, the death of Thomas Cowte triggered the resignation of the incumbent vicar, William Bowden, and the presentation by William Adams and John Cowminge of John Cowte. The advowson then reverted to Henry Herbert. The Cowte family appears to have courted a successful relationship with the Herbert family since the next incumbent, presented by another member of the family, was also a Cowte.



*Henry Herbert, 2nd
Earl of Pembroke*

6. As a political union, Henry Herbert was initially married in 1553 to Lady Katherine Grey, sister of Lady Jane Grey. The marriage was never consummated and was dissolved as soon as Henry's father realised that Princess Mary would be queen. His second wife was Lady Catherine Talbot but she died in 1575 without issue. His third wife was Lady Mary Sidney who he married in 1577 and who became the Countess of Pembroke. She bore him several children including William and Philip, both of whom succeeded in turn to the Earldom on



Countess of Pembroke

the death of their father. One of the principal Ladies-in-Waiting to Elizabeth I, the Countess of Pembroke was an acclaimed author and poet; she is alleged to have been the true author of some of Shakespeare's plays. A lady of many talents, the Countess of Pembroke was given responsibility by her husband for managing a number of his estates including the Manor of Paignton. In 1601, she presented Adrian Cowte to the vicarage of Stoke Gabriel, but later that same year her husband died and she withdrew from public life and from her estate management responsibilities. The estates were inherited by her elder son, William, 3rd Earl of Pembroke.

In 1630 William Herbert died and he was succeeded by his brother, Philip Herbert, who became the 4th Earl of Pembroke, Lord of the Manor of Paignton and patron of Stoke Gabriel church. It was Philip Herbert who initiated the break-up of the manorial estate, as far as Stoke Gabriel is concerned, by selling off parcels of land within the parish to local tenants. His actions culminated with the sale of all the residual estate lands and advowsons. The Pembroke Earldom had exercised management control over the Stoke Gabriel advowson for well over half a century, allowing others - at cost - to acquire a limited interest in it from time to time.

7. The nature and extent of Sir William Waller's interest in the Stoke Gabriel advowson are not clear. There is conflicting evidence as to whether he had been granted a limited



Sir William Waller

- advowson, following which the advowson reverted to Philip Herbert, or whether he had acquired the advowson outright along with the manorial estate. What is clear is that Sir William Waller presented Daniel Getsius to the living in 1636 and so by that time had acquired an interest in the advowson sufficient to qualify him as the true patron of the church. A military commander and supporter of the Parliamentarians at the outbreak of civil war, Sir William Waller was MP for Andover. He actively supported the Presbyterian-Royalist opposition to the Republican Commonwealth and was imprisoned on several occasions. He facilitated the return of Charles II and the restoration of the monarchy.
8. In 1644, Sir Henry Cary, the Lord of the Manor of Cockington, purchased the residual manorial estate and advowson. It is not clear whether he purchased it from Philip Herbert (*Magna Britannia*, 1822, Volume 6 (Devonshire), Daniel Lysons and Samuel Lysons, (Thomas Cadell, The Strand, London)) or from Sir William Waller (Devon Heritage Centre, 48/13/1/2/8 & 9). A staunch royalist, Sir Henry supported Charles I during the Civil War but, following the establishment of the Republican Commonwealth, was forced in 1654 to sell his estate lands and property. Before the sale, however, Sir Henry had granted a limited advowson to Susanna Terry, about whom little is known. She exercised the advowson in 1672 after which it reverted to the new Lord of the Manor.
9. In 1654, the wealthy Kelland family of Painsford House, Ashprington, acquired the manorial estate and advowson from Sir Henry Cary. It is not clear whether the acquisition was made by Samuel Kelland (*Magna Britannia*, 1822, Volume 6 (Devonshire), Daniel Lysons and Samuel Lysons, (Thomas Cadell, The Strand, London)) or his brother, John (Devon Heritage Centre, 48/13/1/2/10). Nonetheless, neither had need to exercise the advowson and in due course the estate and advowson passed to John Kelland's son, Charles, who was MP for Totnes. On his death, the estate and advowson passed to his son, John Kelland, who was 15 when he presented Peter Osborne in 1705. His young age probably accounts for the mention of guardians in the bishop's register.
10. John Kelland died a bachelor in 1712 and his interest in the Stoke Gabriel advowson was inherited by his aunt, Susanna Kelland, giving her a two-thirds interest in the advowson. The other third interest was held by her sister, Katherine Kelland. Susanna Kelland had married William Courtenay of Tremere, Lanivet, Cornwall, and they had a son, Kelland Courtenay, MP for Truro and Huntingdon. On the death of his father in 1716, Kelland Courtenay inherited the two-thirds interest in the advowson, and he presented Samuel Belfield in 1733.

In 1735, Sir Henry Northcote, the 5th Baronet of Pynes (Upton Pyne, a village and manor north of Exeter), purchased a one-third interest in the Stoke Gabriel advowson from Kelland Courtenay. In 1741, Kelland Courtenay restored his two-thirds interest in the advowson by purchasing the residual one-third interest from Susanna Prideaux, the daughter of Katherine Kelland and Peter Prideaux.

Kelland Courtenay died in 1747 and the two-thirds interest passed to his son, Charles Kelland Courtenay. He died in 1761 and the interest (along with the manorial estate) then passed to his two sisters and co-heiresses, Isabella and Ann, who married William Poyntz and the Earl of Cork, Edmund Boyle, respectively.

11. In the late 18th century, George Templer of Stover, the builder of the Haytor Granite Tramway, and his uncle, Rev'd John Templer of Lindridge, the rector of newly restored



George Templer

Teigngrace church, acquired the manorial estate and two-thirds interest in the Stoke Gabriel advowson from William Poyntz and Edmund Boyle. As a result, there were three patrons of Stoke Gabriel church, namely Sir Stafford Northcote, the 6th Baronet of Pynes, who had inherited the one-third interest acquired by his father, and George Templer and Rev'd John Templer. They agreed among themselves to take turns in exercising their right of presentation. Following Samuel Belfield's resignation in 1777, Sir Stafford Henry Northcote, the 7th Baronet of Pynes, having inherited his father's interest, took the first turn and presented his uncle, Hugh Northcote.

12. In 1782, the former vicar, Samuel Belfield, had acquired Rev'd John Templer's interest in the advowson limited to the next presentation. In 1787 Hugh Northcote died and Samuel Belfield presented his son, Finney Belfield, to the benefice of Stoke Gabriel, following which the interest reverted to Rev'd John Templer.

13. Finney Belfield died in 1845. It had been George Templer's turn to present a priest to the vicarage and Mary Glanville Hodson of Plymouth seems to have acquired George Templer's interest in the advowson limited to the next presentation. She presented Robert Bowden, following which the interest in the advowson reverted to its owner. Mary Glanville Hodson's maiden name was Hawker and her nephew was Robert Stephen Hawker, the eccentric vicar of Morwenstow who famously introduced Harvest Festival into the liturgical calendar. Robert Bowden, who in his formative years lived in the same part of the county as his patron, seems to have courted a close relationship with her since one of his sons was named Robert *Hawker* Bowden and one of his daughters was named Mary *Hodson* Bowden. He was also one of three executors of the will of Mary Glanville Hodson.

14. Sir Stafford Henry Northcote of Pynes (1818-1887), the 8th Baronet, was the inheritor of the Northcote one-third interest in the advowson. A Tory MP, he served as President of the Board of Trade in the Earl of Derby's government, Chancellor of the Exchequer in Benjamin Disraeli's government and Foreign Secretary in the Marquess of Salisbury's government. He received the Earldom of Iddesleigh for his public service. Upon Robert Bowden's resignation in 1881, it was Sir Stafford Henry Northcote's turn to exercise the advowson and he accordingly presented John Henry Napper Nevill. He was the last lay patron to exercise the advowson for Stoke Gabriel church.



*Sir Stafford Henry Northcote
of Pynes, 8th Baronet*

15. In 1833, the son of Finney Belfield, John Finney Belfield, sometimes called Finney Belfield Jr and a stipendiary curate of the parish of Stoke Gabriel, leased the greater tithes from the chancellor. Over the next decades, he acquired the Templers' interest in the

advowson, firstly from George Templer and then from the Executors of the late Rev'd John Templer. He also acquired the residual estate of the Manor of Paignton.

By the mid-1880's it had been agreed that the entire interest in the Stoke Gabriel advowson would be transferred back to the Bishop of Exeter. The lawyer acting for the bishop confirmed in 1886 that no-one had any interest in the advowson except John Finney Belfield (who held two-thirds) and Sir Stafford Henry Northcote (who held one-third). By the time the agreement was ready to be signed, Sir Stafford Henry Northcote had died and his interest had been inherited by his son, the Right Hon Walter Stafford Northcote, 2nd Earl of Iddesleigh. In 1887, following Queen Victoria's approval, the advowson for Stoke Gabriel church was transferred back to the Bishop of Exeter by John Finney Belfield and the Right Hon Walter Stafford Northcote, 2nd Earl of Iddesleigh. The transfer agreement was also signed by Cecilia Frances, Dowager Countess of Iddesleigh and mother of the 2nd Earl of Iddesleigh, presumably to address any doubt as to whether she had held any interest. The bishop has continued to be the patron of the church to this day.

Since the Reformation, the lay patrons of Stoke Gabriel parish church have included the Earls of Pembroke, the Earls of Iddesleigh, the Earl of Cork, members of the Kelland, Courtenay, Templer and Northcote gentry families who counted several Members of Parliament amongst their number, and the Belfield family who also contributed two vicars (and a curate) to the living. The earliest lay patrons were courtiers to Tudor and Stuart monarchs and the last but one lay patron achieved high political office. For over three centuries the advowson was under lay control.

Originating as an instrument for choosing the priest, the advowson became the means by which the valuable rectorial tithes might be accessed. Increasingly, it was seen as an investment vehicle for delivering a rich source of income to fund an office or a lifestyle. It was also seen as an opportunity to secure a living for a priest who was a member of the family or someone to be rewarded for services rendered. In the case of Stoke Gabriel, the rector was the chancellor throughout the period of lay patronage, which denied the patrons access to the tithes. However, they were able to exercise nepotism; examples of such include the Cowte, Northcote and Belfield families.

Early modern England was not a society in which people could advance by qualification, abilities and experience. Patronage of other, more powerful and influential people was key to individual advancement. In this respect, the church patronage system was little different to wider society and Stoke Gabriel church was little different to any other church. What is clear is that the advowson was a valuable commodity and its ownership attracted interest from the nobility and gentry alike. The interest of the parishioners in the choice of vicar, however, was rarely, if ever, taken into account.

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