

Absentee Vicars of Stoke Gabriel

During the 18th century there was a surfeit of clergy, a polarised mix of a small number of wealthy clerics and the many who were poor and ill-trained. At the parochial level, the imbalance was often experienced through the exploitation of curates by incumbents for their own financial benefit. Reform was coming but did not arrive until the 19th century and meanwhile the abuse adversely affected the spiritual and pastoral life of parishioners, including those of the parish of Stoke Gabriel.

There were three types of parochial clergy who were responsible for the cure of souls in the 18th century. They were rector, vicar and curate and they differed from each other in how they derived their income. A rector directly received all the parochial tithes (the rectorial property), which he used to support a ministry to the parish and to discharge his obligations of maintaining the chancel and parsonage and providing service books and vestments. Sometimes the rector would appoint another cleric to provide a ministry on his behalf, for which he would divert a portion of the tithes, typically the lower value (lesser) tithes, in support of the office while retaining the balance (the greater tithes) for himself. Delivering a vicarious ministry, the appointed cleric was known as a vicar and the tithes diverted to him known as vicarial property. Livings (or benefices) were thus either a rectory or a vicarage, simply depending on the tithed income of the incumbent. In contrast to both rector and vicar, a curate was not instituted into the living and thus was not an incumbent. The tenure of a curacy could be short or long but his stipend, which was paid by the incumbent, was often meagre and did not necessarily come with glebe or parsonage. Nonetheless, in the 18th century there were many who embarked on a clerical career with the result that curates made up to about half of all clergymen.

The value of livings in the 18th century was highly variable and depended on the level of the stipend, the availability of glebe land as a source of sustenance or rental income, and a parsonage as a place of residence. Richly endowed livings were already occupied by the wealthy and a number of incumbents of questionable integrity and moral rectitude used their endowment to fund a lifestyle beyond that required to deliver a parochial ministry. In rural livings, they would associate themselves with the local landowners and the gentry class, and would often aspire to join them. Some acquired the advowson of a church to secure the right to present a priest to the living, thus becoming its patron. In due course when the living became vacant, they exercised the right as a favour for a friend or member of the family. At the other end of the spectrum, there were many livings that were insufficiently endowed to sustain an incumbent and his family. Incumbents of these poorly endowed livings were often compelled by their circumstances to look for opportunities elsewhere to supplement their income.

During the same time frame, the payment of tithes was becoming increasingly contentious, especially in rural parishes. It fostered a belief that incumbents should be accountable to their parochial paymasters, creating a constant source of tension. Disputes were common but parishioners were unable to bring about any change regardless of the breadth and quality of the ministry that they received. That is until the 19th century.

The tithing system and the availability of many curates created a situation that enabled some incumbents to abuse their office. Various types of abuse arose as follows:

1. Pluralism is the practice of an incumbent holding multiple livings at the same time, each with its tithed income. The increased income may have been required to maintain the incumbent in the dignity appropriate to his office but some rural clergy held three or more livings, assuring themselves of a very substantial income and rich lifestyle more akin to a country gentleman than a cleric. The practice was widespread and was facilitated by wealthy ecclesiastical and lay patrons; moreover, it became self-sustaining and effectively excluded many from the lower classes joining the clergy.

The challenge for a pluralist incumbent to provide a full ministry was impossible even if all his livings were nearby. The incumbent needed help and would typically hire a curate to provide a ministry to one or more of the parishes while he ministered to the other(s). Curates were hired on a part-time or full-time basis and may or may not have resided in the parish. The temptation would be to pay a stipend to the curate which was less than the tithed income, enabling the incumbent to pocket the difference. Many of the curates at this time were badly educated and were exploited by incumbents to their detriment and that of the parish.

There were circumstances however in which pluralism worked to the benefit of a parish. A poorly endowed living, which on its own might be insufficient to support an incumbent, could benefit from a shared ministry with a better off neighbour. Even where two parishes were remote from one another, there might be another incumbent in a similar position who could share a reciprocal arrangement. The two priests would thus be an incumbent of one parish and a curate of the other. The arrangement could work only with parishes that were within walking or riding distance of each other but, for the many poorly endowed parishes, it at least provided some form of ministry.

2. Non-Residency is the inevitable consequence of pluralism; the incumbent could only ever reside in one place and so was absent from the other. Incumbents typically chose to reside in the parish with the better parsonage or where there was a family home. Across the country, as many as half of the 10,000 benefices had no resident incumbent, whether because of pluralism or otherwise. An effective ministry requires the incumbent to live among those to whom he ministers. Absent incumbents could not meet this requirement and so resorted to the hiring of a curate for the purpose. They were often poor, not up to the task, and were in plentiful supply, costing as little as £30-40 per year.

By the 19th century there was a general recognition that the worst effects of pluralism and non-residency needed to be eliminated. The government passed a succession of laws restricting the clergy from holding more than two livings unless they were within 4 miles of each other with the annual value of one being less than £200. Any such pluralist arrangement also required dispensation from the Archbishop of Canterbury.

3. Nepotism is the practice of one having the power or authority to favour a family member or friend with a job. Livings were lifelong and came with a regular stipend, and often a parsonage and glebe, and were much in demand. Nepotism was rife amongst the clergy

and resulted in the ministry to the parish being a secondary consideration to the grant of the favour. The sincerity of faith was not a barrier to ordination among those with the right connections. Ownership of the advowson was an essential pre-requisite to enable the favoured cleric to be presented at the time a vacancy arose, but advowsons could be acquired for cost. The bishop had the right of induction into the living but otherwise had little say in the choice of candidate, as long as he was a priest.

4. Sinecure is an ecclesiastical benefice without responsibility for the cure of souls. The incumbent - rector or vicar - derives the financial benefit without direct responsibility for a ministry. From a parishioner's perspective, sinecures were costly overheads which contributed nothing towards their salvation. They were abolished in 1840.

All these abuses flourished throughout the country in the 18th and early 19th centuries to the detriment of the church and parishioners.

The living of Stoke Gabriel was a vicarage from the time that the church was first founded in the early 13th century. Under peculiar jurisdiction, the Bishop of Exeter was the rector and thus the owner of the rectorial property of tithes and glebe land. He also held the advowson, enabling him to choose a priest for installation into the living whenever a vacancy arose. By 1281 he had transferred ownership of the rectorial property and the advowson to the Chancellor of the Cathedral, a newly created office which needed to be endowed.

Following the Reformation and the break with Rome, the Bishop of Exeter was obliged by the King to transfer the assets associated with his estates outside the city into lay hands. One of the most valuable assets, the Manor of Paignton comprised Paignton, Marldon and Stoke Gabriel, and the bishop was the Lord of the Manor. The transfer of the estate in the 1540's included the advowson and subsequently included the parsonage after it was determined to be part of the manorial estate, held under copyhold tenancy, and not part of the living. The lay owners of the advowson thus acquired the right to present a priest to the bishop for installation into the vicarage. This arrangement continued for the next three centuries during which period the advowson was sold, leased and inherited among a succession of lay parties until 1887 when the bishop re-acquired the advowson.

The rectorial property was not included in the transfer of the manorial estate but remained vested in the Chancellor to fund his office and that of the vicarage of Stoke Gabriel. Of the total value of the property, that is tithes and glebe land, about 60% was used to fund the chancellorship and 40% the vicarage. Stoke Gabriel was never one of the wealthier livings.

A measure of the extent of Stoke Gabriel's experience with clerical abuse may be obtained in several ways:

1. One measure is to assess the extent to which the incumbent led services for baptism, marriage and burial since the officiating minister typically signed the bottom of each page of the parish registers and also received the fees. Indeed, from 1813 onwards, the minister added his signature against each entry, and not just each page. While such information does not strictly correlate with the extent to which the incumbent took the principal

weekly services of worship, they do offer a basis for inference. A better measure may be obtained from the register of banns of marriage, which were read at the services of worship, but the register is not complete for the relevant period. The results of such assessments are provided in the Appendix and to provide some context include incumbents of the parish either side of the 18th century.

2. A measure of the level of pastoral care provided by an incumbent can be obtained simply from their residential location since effective pastoral care requires him to live among his parishioners.

The vicars of Stoke Gabriel during the relevant period are provided in the following table together with their terms of office:

Vicar of Stoke Gabriel	Period of Office
William Stephens	1672-1705
Peter Osborne	1705-1733
Samuel Belfield	1733-1777
Hugh Northcote	1777-1787
Finney Belfield	1787-1845
Robert Bowden	1845-1881
John Henry Napper Neville	1881-1915

William Stephens and Peter Osborne (Vicars of Stoke Gabriel 1672-1705 & 1705-1733)

There is little historical information about these two incumbents but the registers are complete and reveal that both personally signed the pages. A few pages were unsigned but none was signed by any other person, which suggests that both vicars were the only officiating ministers. There is no evidence that they officiated elsewhere.

In 1705, shortly after the start of Peter Osborne’s term of office, a questionnaire was addressed to the incumbent of every parish in the country which included questions relating to the value of the living. Peter Osborne wrote in reply that:

“The yearly Value of the Vicarage (excluding the Augmentation) is about £40 per annum. There has been since the Restoration of King Charles II by Means of his Martyr’s Letter for the augmentation of poor Vicarages paid out of the bounty of Anne by Way of Augmentation. There is left to the Church only the Small or usual Vicarage Tithes, there being no Glebe at all for the Vicar, not so much as an House.”

The living at £40 per year, without any parsonage (which had been ceded to the lay Lord of the Manor) or glebe land (which had been retained by the chancellor), was poor. The incumbent qualified for a supplement to his income under the scheme, known as the Queen Anne’s Bounty, introduced in 1704. The absence of a parsonage meant that he would also have to bear the cost of rented accommodation somewhere, probably in the village.

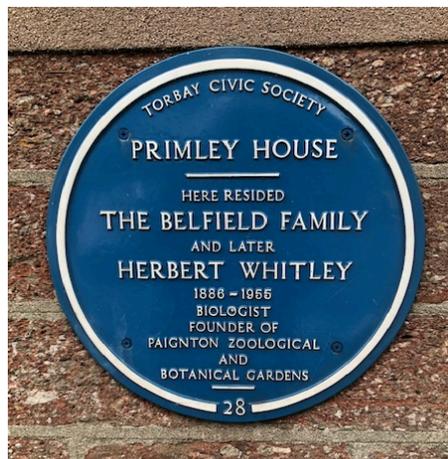
Samuel Belfield (Vicar of Stoke Gabriel 1733-1777)

A major landowner, Samuel Belfield (b1717-d1793) was the rector of Exbourne, some 50 miles north west of Stoke Gabriel, from 1732 to 1777, the rectory value being £130. He was the

vicar of Paignton from 1732 to 1793, the vicarage value also being £130. The advowson for Stoke Gabriel was held by Kelland Courtenay of Ashprington who exercised it in favour of Samuel Belfield. He was thus installed as vicar of Stoke Gabriel in 1733, the vicarage value being £47. In 1777, aged 60, he resigned from the benefices of Exbourne and Stoke Gabriel but continued as vicar of Paignton until his death.

Samuel Belfield did not reside in Stoke Gabriel during his period of office but at Primley Hill, Paignton, about a mile from the parish boundary. In 1748 he married Eleanor Churchward, a member of the Churchward family whose ancestral home is in Stoke Gabriel. Samuel Belfield is buried in an unmarked grave in the parish churchyard of St John, Paignton.

The parish registers reveal that Samuel Belfield did not take any services at Exbourne parish church, using curates for the entire period he was rector. Similarly, the registers for Paignton parish church indicate that he used curates for services apart from the years 1770-73. Stoke Gabriel parish registers reveal that he officiated at all the services in the period 1733-54, but for the next 23 years, apart from the odd occasion, used a succession of curates.



Memorial plaque outside the Belfield family home of Primley House

Hugh Northcote (Vicar of Stoke Gabriel 1777-1787)

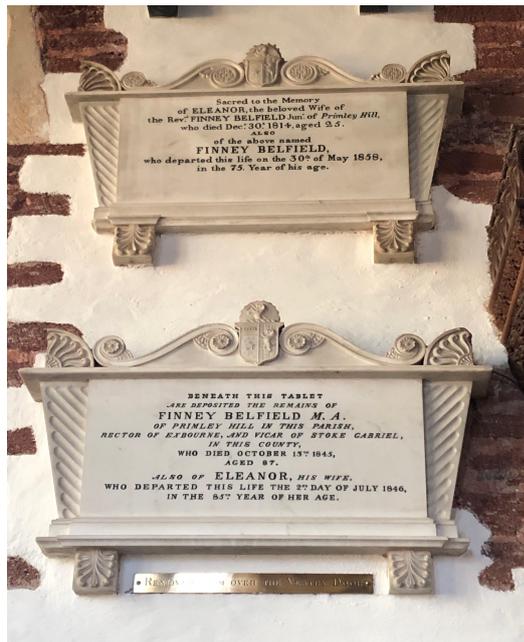
The son of Sir Henry Northcote, 5th Baronet of Hayne and Lord of the Manor of Iddesleigh and of Upton Pyne, Hugh Northcote (*b1741-d1787*) was ordained as deacon in 1764 and as priest in 1765. He was rector of Upton Pyne, some 30 miles north of Stoke Gabriel, the rectory value being £160. His nephew, Sir Stafford Henry Northcote, the 7th Baronet of Pynes, jointly held the advowson, which he exercised in favour of his uncle. Hugh Northcote was thus installed as vicar of Stoke Gabriel in 1777, the vicarage value being £70. In 1765 he was also appointed as domestic chaplain to James, Earl of Lauderdale. He held all three offices until his death in 1787.

Hugh Northcote did not live in Stoke Gabriel. He had been granted dispensation by the bishop in October 1777 to be absent on the basis that he already possessed the rectory of Upton Pyne where he lived. Notwithstanding that he plainly had no intention of delivering a ministry himself, the bishop still inducted him into the vicarage of Stoke Gabriel the next month. The vicar's absence was so complete that it was the subject of a remark by the respected historian, George Oliver. He is buried in the parish churchyard of St Cyr and St Julitta in nearby Newton St Cyres.

The parish registers confirm that Hugh Northcote did not take any of the services at Stoke Gabriel but used the curate, Richard Churchward, to officiate throughout his ten-year term of office. In contrast, Hugh Northcote took most of the services at the parish church of Our Lady, Upton Pyne.

Finney Belfield (Vicar of Stoke Gabriel 1787-1845)

Born in Paignton, Finney Belfield (*b1758-d1845*) was the son of Samuel Belfield. He was ordained as deacon in 1781 and as priest in 1783. He succeeded his father as rector of



Memorial tablets for Finney Belfield and his son, John Finney Belfield

Exbourne until his resignation in 1793. He was licensed as a curate of Paignton in 1781. The advowson for Stoke Gabriel was held by Rev'd John Templer of Lindridge who assigned it to Samuel Belfield for one life in 1782. Five years later, Samuel Belfield exercised the advowson in favour of his son, Finney Belfield, who was installed as its vicar. He was appointed as domestic chaplain in 1793 to Richard Howe, 1st Earl Howe. He continued to hold all three offices until his death in 1845.

Like his father, Finney Belfield never resided in Stoke Gabriel but at the family home at Primley Hill, Paignton. His remains are deposited beneath a memorial tablet in his name in the church of St John, Paignton.

Stoke Gabriel parish registers reveal that the curate, Richard Churchward, took the services from 1787 to 1793 and that Finney Belfield took the services from 1794 to 1817. He continued to take the services of baptism, marriage and burial from 1818 to 1830 but thereafter used curates for all services until his death in 1845.

Three of Finney Belfield's curates justify particular mention. They are Richard Churchward (*b1741*), his son, John Finney Belfield (*b1783-d1858*), who was also known as Finney Belfield Jr, and James Buller Kitson (*b1811*).

1. Richard Churchward (Curate of Stoke Gabriel 1777-1795):

The nephew of Samuel Belfield and Eleanor Churchward and cousin of Finney Belfield, Richard Churchward was borne in 1741 in or around Stoke Gabriel. He was ordained as deacon in 1764 and as priest in 1767. He never secured the living of Stoke Gabriel or any other parish but was the curate of Stoke Gabriel throughout the entire period of Hugh Northcote's incumbency and continued to officiate on and off until 1795.

2. John Finney Belfield (Curate of Stoke Gabriel 1806-34):

John Finney Belfield was borne in Berry Pomeroy but lived with his family at Primley Hill (*Censuses of 1841 and 1851*). He was ordained as deacon in 1806 and as priest in 1807. He was licensed as a curate of Stoke Gabriel in 1806 for an annual stipend of £50 and as Assistant Stipendiary Curate in 1833 for an annual stipend of £60. He officiated at its services for several years, notably from 1831 to 1834. He was licensed as a curate of Churston Ferrers and Brixham in 1808 and held the office until 1833. He was licensed as a perpetual chaplain in 1811 of Tormoham and Cockington and was appointed as domestic chaplain in 1814 to William Orde-Powlett, 2nd Baron Bolton. He also held the rectory of St Martins, near Looe, but resigned in 1830 (*Western Times, 30th January 1830*). In return for monetary consideration,

he leased the Stoke Gabriel tithes and glebe land from the Chancellor and assumed the role of rector in all but name. In the 1851 Census, he described his occupation as "Clergyman no cure". He died in 1858 and is buried in a vault in the churchyard of St John, Paignton and also has a memorial tablet in the church immediately above that of his father.

3. James Buller Kitson (Curate of Stoke Gabriel 1834-36)

James Buller Kitson (*b1811*) was ordained as deacon in 1834 and as priest in 1835. Following John Finney Belfield's resignation in 1834, he was licensed as Stipendiary Curate of Stoke Gabriel for an annual stipend of £75. His licence to officiate required him to reside in the parish. He resigned two years later, having secured the living of St Veep, Cornwall.

James Buller Kitson lived among the parishioners for 2 years and was evidently much-loved. The day after his last service in church, the parish gathered under the ancient yew tree in the churchyard to say their farewell. Mr H Studdy of Waddeton Court, Stoke Gabriel presented him with an inscribed silver tea service as a token of their gratitude and respect for his ministry, especially in his devotions to the sick and poor of the parish. Mr Studdy remarked that the parish appreciated him even more "from our having been deprived for nearly half a century of a resident pastor among us" (*The Western Times*, 6th August, 1836).

Robert Bowden (Vicar of Stoke Gabriel 1845-1881)

Robert Bowden succeeded Finney Belfield as vicar of Stoke Gabriel but resigned from office in 1881. His installation marked a break from the previous three incumbents in that he was now required by law to reside in the parish and to hold no other benefice during his term of office. There was still no parsonage (or glebe land) and he lived at Barnhay Castle (*Censuses of 1851, 1861 and 1871*), a private residence for which he would have had to pay a rent. He moved to Cornwall after his resignation.

Apart from a couple of years of absence for which he had been granted dispensation by the bishop, the parish registers reveal he took all the services.

John Henry Napper Nevill (Vicar of Stoke Gabriel 1881-1915)

Following the resignation of Robert Bowden in 1881, he was succeeded by the Irishman, John Henry Napper Nevill. Initially residing in the village at Rosemount (*Census of 1891*), he moved into a new purpose-built vicarage (now called Old Vicarage) at the turn of the century (*Census of 1901*). He held no other benefice during his incumbency of Stoke Gabriel and had no glebe land. He died in office in 1915 and is buried in the parish churchyard.

The parish registers reveal that he took all the services during his period of office without using a curate at any time.

Of the Stoke Gabriel vicars of the late 17th to early 20th century, there were three who abused their office and they were Samuel Belfield, Hugh Northcote and Finney Belfield.

All three vicars were pluralists, holding multiple ecclesiastical offices including several livings. Samuel Belfield had three livings - one rectory and two vicarages. He used a curate for the remote rectory of Exbourne and divided his own time between the vicarages of Stoke Gabriel

and Paignton while also using curates for both. Hugh Northcote had two livings - one rectory and one vicarage. He officiated full time at Upton Pyne while using a full-time curate for the vicarage of Stoke Gabriel. Finney Belfield also had two livings for 6 of his years in office - the rectory of Exbourne and the vicarage of Stoke Gabriel. He used a curate for Exbourne and also used curates for Stoke Gabriel for 20 of his 58 years in office.

All three vicars lived outside the parish of Stoke Gabriel, which was thus without a resident vicar for a continuous period of 112 years. The living of Stoke Gabriel did not come with a parsonage, which meant that incumbents had to find and pay for their own accommodation. But the same was true for the vicars who came before and after, yet they still resided in the parish. Samuel and Finney Belfield and Hugh Northcote all chose to live at their family homes. At a Devon County meeting on tithes in January 1834 (when Finney Belfield was vicar), Mr Studdy of Waddeton Court, Stoke Gabriel a leading advocate and promoter of the need for the reform of the tithing laws, remarked that:

“though they paid four or five hundred a year for the parson, all the benefit they had from him, was when he came over once a week to preach to them” (Western Times, Saturday 11th January, 1834).

The figure of “four or five hundred a year” corresponds to the total value of rectorial tithes and, according to the Tithe Apportionments of 1839, is actually £500 per year, of which £200 was used to support the vicarage while the balance of £300 was retained for the chancellorship. Mr Studdy was especially aggrieved at the “*middleman ... living in Exeter*”, that is the Chancellor, receiving the great tithes “*whilst the vicar, who had the small tithes, was compelled to make the most of it*”. Nonetheless, Mr Studdy felt that the parish was still being short-changed by Finney Belfield whose residence outside the parish clearly limited his ability to provide a full ministry to parishioners concerned for their well-being and salvation.

Some 30 miles north of Stoke Gabriel, Hugh Northcote’s home was too far away for him to provide any kind of meaningful ministry to the parish. Throughout his period of office, he used the same curate, Richard Churchward, which at least provided the parish with some stability and continuity. The parish was Richard Churchward’s ancestral home and it is likely that he lived and worked among its community. In contrast, the family home of Samuel and Finney Belfield was about a mile from the parish boundary and within walking or riding distance of the parish and its church. Neither of the Belfield vicars was absent from the parish all of the time and used a succession of curates, each curate moving on after a year or two, the time it would take to establish themselves among the community. Whereas Hugh Northcote used one curate during his 10-year term of office, Samuel Belfield used ten curates for half of his 44-year term, and Finney Belfield also used ten curates for about 15 years of his 58-year term.

The use of curates delivered a varied outcome for the parish, depending on their residential base and the breadth and quality of their ministry. Not all the curates lived in the parish and some may have been poorly educated, but not all were inadequate to the task. In particular, there is a sense from James Buller Kitson’s farewell that he brought an exceptional skill set to his ministry in addition to being locally resident.

One curate who did not reside in the parish was John Finney Belfield, the son of the incumbent vicar, Finney Belfield. A curacy appointment favoured by his father, it seems that John Finney Belfield did little more than take the services in church for a period of 5 or 6 years. His appointment as assistant curate in 1833 provided him with a stipend not much less than the full-time, resident curate, James Buller Kitson who succeeded him the following year.

The curacies of both John Finney Belfield and Richard Churchward owed much to their family connections. Whether any of the other curates were family members or friends is not known. Nepotism was widely prevalent among the clergy at this time and no less at Stoke Gabriel. Hugh Northcote owed his office to his nephew and Finney Belfield to his father. Both the Belfield and the Northcote families had several generations of clerics among their number. Clerical dynasties were not uncommon in the 18th century with the opportunity for a secure, lifelong post with stipend, parsonage and glebe often being the preferred choice for the first or second son.

In conclusion, like many other rural parishes, Stoke Gabriel had been poorly served by its vicars in the 18th and early 19th century. The use of curates deputising for the absentee vicar for over a century led to variable outcomes. Reform arrived in 1838 and the new legislation and standards obliged the clergy to be resident in their (one) benefice. The 19th century was a period of rapid change for English parish churches and the parochial clergy. The prohibition of clerical abuse that characterised the previous century represented a critical turning point in the spiritual and pastoral wellbeing of parishioners, not least in Stoke Gabriel.

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Appendix - Officiating Ministers Recorded by their Signatures in Parish Registers

Parish of Stoke Gabriel

Incumbency of Vicar William Stephens (1672-1705)		
Baptism Register	Marriage Register	Burial Register
Pages signed by vicar 1672-76 & 1679-81, otherwise unsigned	Pages signed by vicar 1672, otherwise unsigned	Pages signed by vicar 1672-1705 with few pages unsigned

Incumbency of Vicar Peter Osborne (1705-1733)		
Baptism Register	Marriage Register	Burial Register
Pages signed by vicar 1705-26, otherwise unsigned	Pages signed by vicar 1705 & 1722-30, otherwise unsigned	Pages signed by vicar 1705-12 & 1715-33, otherwise unsigned

Incumbency of Vicar Samuel Belfield (1733-1777)		
Baptism Register	Marriage Register	Burial Register
Pages signed by vicar 1733-54 & 1765-67, unsigned 1768-77 & signed by curates as follows: Edward Marshall: 1754-56 L Gaverick: 1756-59 Henry Distin: 1759-64	Pages signed by vicar 1733-54, 1761-62 & 1767-69 & signed by curates as follows: Edward Marshall: 1754-58 L Gaverick: 1758-60 Henry Distin: 1761-65 James Trevilian: 1765-66 Delehay Reece: 1767-69 W Terry: 1770-77	Pages signed by vicar 1733-54 & signed by curates as follows: Edward Marshal: 1754-57 L Gaverick: 1757-60 Henry Distin: 1760-66 W Martell: 1766-70 Unsigned: 1770-77

Incumbency of Vicar Hugh Northcote (1777-1787)		
Baptism Register	Marriage Register	Burial Register
No pages signed by vicar, unsigned in 1777-83 & signed by curate as follows: Richard Churchward: 1783-87	No pages signed by vicar & signed by curate as follows: Richard Churchward: 1777-86	No pages signed by vicar, unsigned in 1777-81 & signed by curate as follows: Richard Churchward: 1784-86

Incumbency of Vicar Finney Belfield (1787-1845)		
Baptism Register	Marriage Register*	Burial Register
Pages signed by vicar 1792-1830 & signed by curates as follows: Richard Churchward: 1787-92 Finney Belfield Jr: 1831-34 James Kitson: 1834-36 George Lowe: 1836-38 Joseph Edwards: 1838-39 G Graham: 1839-41 K A Purdon: 1841-45 J W Distin: 1845	Pages signed by vicar 1787 & 1793-1830 & signed by curates as follows: Richard Churchward: 1788-95 Finney Belfield Jr: 1793, 1817, 1831-34 John Rufsell: 1793-96 John Edwards: 1789, 1794, 1800 James Kitson: 1835 George Lowe: 1837-38	Pages signed by vicar 1793-1831, unsigned in 1787-93 & signed by curates as follows: Finney Belfield Jr: 1818, 1827, 1831-34 James Kitson: 1834-36 George Lowe: 1836-38 Joseph Edwards: 1838-39 G Graham: 1839-41 K A Purdon: 1841-45 J W Distin: 1845

	Joseph Edwards: 1838-39 G Graham: 1840 K A Purdon: 1841-45 J W Distin: 1845	
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Incumbency of Vicar Robert Bowden (1845-1881)		
Baptism Register	Marriage Register	Burial Register
Pages signed by vicar 1845-51, 1855-81 & signed by curates as follows: Harriesto Gursitz: 1851-52 Henry John Whitfield: 1852-55	Pages signed by vicar 1845-53, 1855-81 & by curate as follows: Henry John Whitfield: 1853-54	Pages signed by vicar 1845-51, 1855-81 & by curates as follows: Harriesto Gursitz: 1851-52 Henry John Whitfield: 1852-55

Incumbency of Vicar John Henry Napper Nevill (1881-1915)		
Baptism Register	Marriage Register	Burial Register
Pages signed by vicar in 1881-1915	Pages signed by vicar in 1881-1915	Pages signed by vicar in 1881-1915

* For the majority of the Sunday services from 1794-1817, the Banns of Marriage were read by Vicar Finney Belfield with the remainder being read by Curate J Edwards, Curate Richard Churchward & visiting ministers, suggesting that the majority of such services were taken by Vicar Belfield.

Other Parishes

Parish of Exbourne:

Samuel Belfield was rector of the parish church from 1731 to 1777 but a curate, rather than he, signed the parish registers, indicating that he did not take any services there.

Finney Belfield was rector of the parish church from 1777 to 1793 but the parish registers were either unsigned or signed by a curate.

Parish of Paignton:

Samuel Belfield was vicar of the parish church from 1732 to 1793 but signed the parish registers only from 1770 to 1773. Curate Elias Carter signed them from 1732 to 1770, Curate W Nichols signed them from 1773 to 1788, and Curate Thos Compton signed them from 1788 to 1793.

Finney Belfield was licensed as curate of the parish church in 1781, six years before his installation as vicar of Stoke Gabriel parish church. He signed the parish registers only for one year, 1789.

Parish of Upton Pyne:

During his time as rector of the parish church, Hugh Northcote signed all the parish registers with a curate signing only on an occasional basis.