

## THE VICARS OF BRIDGWATER

by JONATHAN CONIBERE & FRANCES PEARCE

Originally written for an exhibition in 1980, and published as a booklet in 2007

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The list of vicars of Bridgwater begins with Ralph the Clerk of Bruges in 1170. From then until the appointment of John Colswayn in 1423, the names and dates are rather doubtful, with various sources giving conflicting opinions. From 1423 to the present time the list is complete, with exact dates of institution.

There is a mass of information about the medieval vicars in the Borough and Churchwardens' records, now in the Somerset & Dorset Heritage Centre Archive, Taunton. A number have been published in the volumes of the Somerset Record Society.

From 1217 the living of Bridgwater was in the Patronage of the Master and Brethren of St John's Hospital in Eastover. This continued until 1498 when the Hospital was closed. For a time the Priory of Taunton was Patron, until its dissolution in 1558. From that date until the present time the vicars have been appointed by the reigning Sovereign, through the office of the Lord Chancellor.

From the mid - thirteenth century and until the Reformation, Saint Mary's had a number of endowed chantry chapels, served by chaplains, deacons and clerks, all subordinate to the vicars. These lived in cottages nearby, but very little is now known about them.

Most vicars had curates, and at earlier stages of our history several at a time. The greater number of them are now unknown.

A number of Saint Mary's vicars were famous in their time as theologians and writers. One was a Fellow of the Royal Society and a few made it to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

The research was done for a major exhibition of Saint Mary's history, held in the church in 1980. The illustrated documentation was deposited in the Somerset Studies Library, Taunton, a few years later, and is published here for the first time, with minor updating from *A History of Somerset*. [Victoria County History], Vol 6, 1992 and later additions. Jonathan Conibere & Frances Pearce. 1980  
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## THE VICARS OF BRIDGWATER

- I. RALPH THE CLERK OF BRUGES c.1170
2. JAMES (no date)
3. WILLIAM (no date)
4. RICHARD (no date)
5. WALTER DE STOCKLINCH c.1296
6. WALTERUS c.1309-1316
7. JOHN PARYS c.1316-1340
8. JOHN TORREBRIAN c.1340-1346
9. RICHARD OF EXBRIDGE 1348
10. JOHN BUTLEIGH c.1349
11. JOHN COMYN c.1377
12. WILLIAM HURST c.1380
13. JOHN CORS c.1415
14. JOHN COLSWAYN 1423-31
15. JOHN COLSWAYN 1431-74
16. RICHARD CROKE 1474-98
17. THOMAS SPENCER 1498-9
18. ROBERT MITCHELL 1499-1520
19. JOHN HOOPER 1520-22
20. OLIVER SMYTH 1522-28
21. THOMAS STRETE 1528-71
22. EDWARD CRAFTES 1571-93
23. CADWALLADER HUGHES 1593-94
24. HENRY WILLS 1594-1605
25. JOHN DEVENISH 1605-44
26. GEORGE WOTTON 1644-45
27. JOHN NORMAN  
Commonwealth Minister 1647-1662
29. GEORGE WOTTON 1661-69
30. WILLIAM ALLEN 1669-1720
31. BENJAMIN BULKELEY 1720-1723
32. LAURENCE PAYNE 1723-1732
33. MOSES WILLIAMS 1732-1742
34. JOHN COLES 1742-1785
35. GEORGE ROWLEY 1785
36. WILLIAM WOLLEN 1785-1844
37. DANIEL NIHILL 1844-1848
38. THOMAS GEORGE JAMES 1848-1857
39. MICHAEL FERREBEE SADLER  
1857-1864
40. WILLIAM GEORGE FITZGERALD  
1864-1896
41. HENRY WILLIAM BIRCHAM  
1897-1901
42. ARTHUR HERBERT POWELL 1901-11
43. JOSHUA JAMES LANGHAM 1912-20

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- 44. HENRY THOMAS DIXON 1920-23
- 45. SEYMOUR BERRY 1923-30
- 46. EDWARD HUGHES-DAVIES 1931-59
- 47. LEWIS CARL SWAN 1959-76
- 48. EDWARD RICHARD AYERST 1977-90
- 49. ROGER PACKER 1990-2000
- 50. CHARLES CHADWICK 2001-2014
- 51. PATRICIA OLLIVE 2015 -



### **RALPH the Clerk of BRUGES c 1170**

Bruges was the ancient name for Bridgwater. It is thought that Ralph was the Vicar, or the then equivalent of Vicar, in about 1170.

### **JAMES (no date)**

James is the earliest recorded Vicar. He is mentioned in a grant of a moiety (share) of a messuage and of a farm, with certain movables. This document is dated 12th May 1245, and is in the Bridgwater Borough Archives. James died sometime before 1276, for in that year a document, which still survives, refers to him as "a former Vicar".

### **WILLIAM (no date)**

William the Chaplain appears to have followed James as Vicar. We know that he too died before 1276 for in that year there is evidence of a dispute over the disposition of his property.

We can assume that he was a wealthy man as he is known to have owned seven messuages and a half, which would have been considerable in those days, when people owning two were very comfortably off.

He owned, inter alia, property in North Street, the rent of which was bequeathed to the Chantry of the Blessed Virgin Mary. William is mentioned in three documents in the Borough Archives, none of which, unfortunately, is dated.

### **RICHARD (no dates)**

Richard is known to have been Vicar in 1280, and there is also evidence that he was a landowner. No dates of his ministry are known.

### **WALTER DE STOCKLINCH c 1296**

Walter de Stocklinch is thought to have been Vicar of Bridgwater from about 1296 to 1309. There is various documentary evidence confirming him as

Vicar after 1296, but the exact dates when he was at Bridgwater are unknown.

### **WALTERUS c 1309 -1316**

Walterus was instituted as Vicar of Bridgwater in 1309. His date is given in the Bishop's Register. He has been confused with the previous Vicar, Walter de Stocklinch, but it seems most likely that they were two different people. Walter de Stocklinch is known to have been Vicar well before the date we are given for the institution of Walterus.

### **JOHN PARYS (or PARIS) c 1316 - 1340**

John of Parys received a licence from the Bishop in 1318 to make a pilgrimage to Canterbury. This would appear to be the main reason for assuming that he followed Walterus as Vicar. In the previous year a legacy was left by one Gilbert Russell for the Vicar to make a pilgrimage to Canterbury. He is thought to have remained Vicar until 1340.

### **JOHN c 1340-46**

John Torrebian was a priest of the diocese of Exeter. The living of Bridgwater was conferred upon him by Bishop Ralph in October 1340, with the Master and Brethren of Saint John's Hospital, Eastover, as his patron. It is probable that he remained Vicar for about six years.

### **RICHARD of EXBRIDGE Vicar 1348**

Richard of Exbridge, described as a poor clerk, was appointed to the Vicarage of Bridgwater in November 1348. He held the living for only about four months. It is reasonable to assume that he fell victim of the plague, which was prevalent in Somerset in the winter of 1348/49, when many people died.

### **JOHN BUTLEIGH or BODELEY c 1349**

John Butleigh is thought to have succeeded Richard of Exbridge as Vicar of Bridgwater in 1349. He is first mentioned in documents in the Bridgwater Borough Archives in 1355. His name appears as Vicar as late as 1303 when he is mentioned in a Quitclaim dated 11 September.

### **JOHN COMYN c 1377**

John Comyn followed John Butleigh as Vicar of Bridgwater, although we have no dates for the beginning or end of his vicariate. It is thought that he is the "Sir John" vicar of Bridgwater mentioned in the Will of Robert Castel, dated the end of

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August 1377. The Will was proved at Bridgwater on 3 March 1385.

### WILLIAM HURST c 1380

William Hurst became Vicar of Bridgwater, some time prior to 1389. In that year he is already referred to as *Typerpetus vicario ecclesiae parochialis B.M. de Bruggewater*. He died in about 1415 and his memory was preserved by the celebration of a yearly "obit" the charge for which is recorded in the churchwardens' accounts.

### JOHN CORS c 1415

John Cors is believed to have followed William Hurst as Vicar in 1415. In 1423 he exchanged livings with John Colswayn and moved to Davidstowe in the diocese of Exeter. John Colswayn became Vicar of Bridgwater in July of that year.

### JOHN COLSWAYN 1423-1431

Born in the second half of the fourteenth century, John Colswayn's first parish was that of Dowstowe in the diocese of Exeter. He went on to be instituted as Vicar of Davidstowe in the same diocese on 15 December 1412. Early in 1423 he exchanged livings with John Cors and was instituted as Vicar of Bridgwater on 2 July 1423, with the Master of Saint John's Hospital as his patron. Whilst he was still Vicar, John Colswayn gave to the Church a Mass Book, which was to rest on the Vicar's stall in the Church. Although the book has disappeared, the Latin Memorandum, formerly inserted therein, survived until fairly recent times. It read:-

*Pray for the soul of Sir John Colswayn, Vicar of the Church of Bruggewater, who, to the end that his soul might be kept in especial memory for the future, made and left this book, prepared at his own costs and labour, to lie in the Church aforesaid before the Vicar thereof of his own free will as also, in part by way of relief of all his parishioners.*

John Colswayn probably died early in 1431, whilst still in office. He was succeeded by another John Colswayn, very possibly his son.

### JOHN COLSWAYN 1431-74

The second John Colswayn was probably born in the early fifteenth century. He was instituted as Vicar of Bridgwater on 11 September 1431, again

with the Master of Saint John's Hospital as patron. The Vicarage at that time was opposite the south porch of the Church, in Saint Mary Street (now the Old Vicarage Hotel & Restaurant). The house of the Chaplain of the B.V.M. Chantry lived next door, although this house has long been demolished.

An interesting document survives dating from about 1480, showing the discipline which Colswayn had over the Chaplains of the Church. It is an attestation made by William Tredwyn, priest of North Newton, that *in his youth he was continually abiding in the Vicarage of Briggewater, with one Sir John Weler, Parish priest of the said town (Chaplain of B.V.M.Chantry 1464-84) to learn to read and sing at the commandment of Sir John Colswayn Vicar of the said town.*

It was through the efforts of John Colswayn that the Borough of Bridgwater came into possession of lands in Dorset, in Stour Eastover or Stour Wake which up to about a hundred and twenty five years ago still brought in a sizeable income to the Church. In his will he left some of the rent from these lands to pay for his yearly 'obit' and also for the maintenance of a lamp in the Church itself, which was to be kept continually burning in his memory.

At some time during his vicariate Colswayn gave a cope to the Church, for in the Churchwardens' Inventory of 1447 we find - *Item i cope of white damask with eglis of gold displayed that Johan Cosyn jaf inne (gave in).*

John Colswayn died whilst still in office early in 1474.

### RICHARD CROKE 1474-98

Richard Croke was instituted as Vicar of Bridgwater on 15 April 1474, following the death of John Colswayn. He remained Vicar until his own death twenty-four years later. He was the first graduate to hold the position.

### THOMAS SPENSER 1498-99

Thomas Spenser was appointed Vicar of Bridgwater at the death of Richard Croke, and was instituted on 5 April 1498. He held the post for only a year when he resigned to be-come the Master and Prior of Saint John's Hospital in Eastover. He remained there until 1538, perhaps when he died.

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### **ROBERT MITCHELL 1499-1520**

Robert Mitchell was instituted as Vicar of Bridgwater on 4 December 1499. He remained Vicar until his death just over twenty years later.

### **JOHN HOOPER 1520-22**

John Hooper M.A was instituted as Vicar of Bridgwater on 5 September 1520, following the death of the previous Vicar, Robert Mitchell. He remained Vicar until his own death two years later.

### **OLIVER SMYTH 1522-1528**

Oliver Smyth was instituted as Vicar of Saint Mary's, Bridgwater on the 24 October 1522. He remained as Vicar until he resigned the living in 1528, when he was succeeded by Thomas Strete.

### **THOMAS STRETE 1528-1571**

Thomas Strete became Vicar of Saint Mary's on 11 August 1528, when the Church was still Roman Catholic. He had been Vicar for only a few years when the King, Henry VIII, proclaimed himself head of a Protestant Church of England. Thomas therefore became the first Protestant Vicar of Saint Mary's. When he became Vicar in 1528, medieval religious customs were in full power. The Church contained several Chantries, each with its own priest; masses and anniversaries were celebrated and the Church was a blaze of colour and light, with probably as many as ten altars.

With the Reformation came many changes, but Thomas Strete obviously accepted these and remained Vicar. The Monasteries and Abbeys were abolished and Glastonbury left a ruin. The Abbot had refused to accept the King as the spiritual leader and was executed. A part of his body was in fact displayed over the East Gate at Bridgwater - a grim reminder to people such as Thomas of the consequences of disobeying the King. Henry VIII died in 1547 and was succeeded by his son Edward VI. During Edward's reign the Chantries were suppressed and all churches were ordered to use the Book of Common Prayer.

After Edward's death in 1553 his Catholic half-sister Mary became Queen, but Thomas Strete survived her reign and was still Vicar when Elizabeth 1 became Queen in November 1558.

Thomas remained Vicar until his death in 1571. He had held this post for forty-three of the most difficult and eventful years in the history of both the Church and the Country. John Bullingham who had been preacher at Bridgwater 1562-3 and Vicar of Creech Saint Michael was later bishop of Gloucester and Bristol (1581-89).

### **EDWARD CRAFTES 1571-93**

Edward Craftes was instituted as Vicar of Bridgwater on 9 July 1571, following the death of the long-serving Thomas Strete. He was the first Vicar to be appointed under the patronage of the Sovereign, then Elizabeth 1. He was Vicar for twenty-two years, being succeeded by Cadwallader Hughes in 1593.

### **CADWALLADER HUGHES 1593-94**

Cadwallader Hughes was born in Denbigh. He entered Balliol College, Oxford, at the age of 17 on 23 September 1580. He gained a B.A. on 14 June 1585 and M.A. in July 1588. He gained a B.D. from Jesus College on 6 June 1597. He became Rector of Heathfield in 1591 and the following year was appointed Lecturer in Bridgwater, becoming Vicar the following year. He was instituted on 24th June 1593. He remained Vicar for just over a year, and in 1595 became Vicar of Skilgate. He was appointed Archdeacon of Llandaff in 1601 and in 1610 became Vicar of Milverton. He died in 1612.

### **HENRY WILLS 1594-1605**

Henry Wills was appointed Vicar of St Mary's Bridgwater on 25 December 1594, succeeding Cadwallader Hughes, who had been Vicar for only a year. Henry Wills was the first Vicar to sign the registers, including the transcript on parchment. He remained Vicar until 1605, when he was succeeded by the puritan, John Devenish.

### **JOHN DEVENISH 1605-1644**

John Devenish was born in about 1574. He entered Saint Mary's Hall, Oxford on 26 June 1591 when he was 17 years old. He obtained a B.A. on 23 November 1594 and M.A. from Magdalene Hall on 6 July 1601. On the 13 June 1605 John Devenish was instituted as Vicar of Saint Mary's Bridgwater.

He was a very active Vicar, well known for his puritan ideas, which he naturally sought to impart to his parishioners. It was a common practice for people of puritan

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beliefs to establish lectureships in parish churches, and such a lectureship was instituted by the Aldermen of Bridgwater. The Bishop, complying with the wishes of the King, tried to suppress these lectures in the diocese, and attempts were made to compel the lecturers to wear surplices and hoods when they preached and to start their lectures by reading the established prayers of the Church.

It was the practice of John Devenish to give lectures to the people of Bridgwater on market days, but in 1636 the Bishop ruled that these lectures were unnecessary, and Devenish was suspended. Humphrey Blake, the church warden, brother of Robert Blake, was also punished for not having informed against his Vicar. Devenish was later pardoned when he promised to abandon his lectures.

The general unrest in the country however continued, with the differences between the King and Parliament culminating in the start of the Civil War in 1642. Opinion in Bridgwater at this time was very divided, with the castle held by Royalists but a large part of the community together with the Vicar, leaning towards the Parliamentarians and their puritanism.

John Devenish however never saw the Civil War reach Bridgwater. He died in late 1643/early 1644.

### **GEORGE WOTTON 1644-45**

George Wotton was curate at Bridgwater under Devenish by 1623 and was appointed vicar in 1644. Following the Siege of Bridgwater in 1645 and the destruction of the castle and much of the town, George Wotton was ejected by the Commonwealth and a Puritan Minister, John Norman, appointed in his place.

### **JOHN NORMAN**

#### **Commonwealth Minister 1647-62**

John Norman was born at Trusham, Devon, on 15 December 1622. He was educated at Exeter College, Oxford, where he gained a B.A. in 1641.

After the defeat of Charles by Oliver Cromwell, Norman was appointed as Minister of Saint Mary's Church, Bridgwater, in place of the canonical Vicar, George Wotton. The appointment was made by the Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses on 1 Jan-uary 1647, and was

signed by the Mayor, Humphrey Blake. Norman was paid a yearly salary of £100, free of rates, taxes or assessment.

John Norman was at this time married to Humphrey Blake's daughter. She was his second wife. His first wife had been the sister-in-law to Joseph Alleine, a celebrated puritan Minister at Taunton. Another puritan Minister who helped both Alleine and Norman, preaching in both towns, was John Wesley, grandfather of John and Charles Wesley.

George Wotton was reinstated as Vicar at the Restoration in 1660, and John Norman was summoned for private preaching. He appeared in Court before Judge Foster in 1665 and was fined £100. He was imprisoned, together with Joseph Alleine, for eighteen months, when the fine was compounded at 6d in the pound.

He apparently retained his connection with Bridgwater for he was buried at Saint Mary's Church on 9 February 1669. He is described in the Register as "Joannes Norman, Presbiter Doctus". George Wotton signed the page on which the entry appears.

### **GEORGE WOTTON 1660-69**

George Wotton was reinstated in 1660, but the corporation continued to pay Norman's salary for another two years. Wotton died in 1669, and was described as a "most vigilant pastor of this parish".

### **WILLIAM ALLEN 1669-1720**

William Allen was appointed Vicar of Bridgwater on 5th March 1669, and remained Vicar for fifty-one years. His long service was considerably disturbed by political events and the Parish Registers during his Ministry are very interesting, reflecting the unrest of the times.

He had a dispute with the Mayor in 1683, over the Poor Rate and a note on the fly-leaf of the Register, written in the Vicar's hand, reads:-

*"In this year (1683) the vicar was rated to the poor which was ordered by Wm. Masey, who was then mayor, as he had been 3 years before.*

*In the time of his first mayoralty he commanded the minister to be rated to the poor tho it was never known in this parish, and when he was made mayor in this year, in perfect spite he commands it again; who ever judges this man a lover of the church,*

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*or any thing that relates to it, knows not the man. This man afterward carryed himself with that insolency and tyranny to all sorts of people, that the inhabitants whether church men, presbyterian or other, joynd together to ring out the bells for joy at his departure into Ireland, where he was preferred and where it is thought he was poisoned."*

The Registers at this time carry several similar entries illustrating the attitude of the people during this difficult period in our history. Allen was the Vicar during the Monmouth Rebellion and at the rejection of James II, with all the ill-feeling which surrounded these events. There is evidence also of disputes with certain churchwardens and two notes concerning the touching for "King's Evil".

In 1678 William Allen was inducted to the Rectory of Chilton, by appointment of Charles II. He was the first to hold the benefices of Bridgwater and Chilton together.

In 1700 a new organ was dedicated in the church. It stood on the rood screen in the chancel arch, and the panels facing the nave were decorated with the Royal coat of arms and the shields of the people who subscribed to it. The sermon at the inaugural service was preached by the Revd. John Shuttleworth, Rector of Oborn and Lillington, in Dorset.

Allen remained Vicar until his death in 1720. He was buried at Goathurst on 19 February where his son, also called William, was the Rector.

### **BENJAMIN BULKELEY 1720-1723**

Benjamin Bulkeley was born at Ludlow, Salop. He was educated at Oxford University where he gained a B.A. in 1710 and M.A. in 1713. He was appointed Chaplain to Viscount Cobham, and in 1714 became Vicar of Wellow, Hants. The following year he moved to Withycombe, Somerset, and on 9 August 1720 was instituted as Vicar of Bridgwater.

He remained at Bridgwater until 1723 after which time he held various posts until becoming Vicar of Chingford in 1741. In 1742 he moved to Saint Paul's London, where he remained until 1757. This is probably when he died.

### **LAURENCE PAYNE 1723-32**

Laurence Payne was appointed Vicar of Bridgwater on 18 June 1723. He is reputed to have been extremely eccentric and at odds with both the Church and the town. He signed the Registers with a large and sprawling hand. There is a curious entry in the burials of 1725, written by Payne, recording the death of Edward Raymond, a former mayor. After the entry on September 30th, Payne had added *a bitter persecutor of the Vicar and a proud attorney*. At a later date someone has added *but not half so proud spiteful and ignorant as the then pretended Vicar Laurence Payne was*. He remained Vicar until 1732.

### **MOSES WILLIAMS 1732-42**

Moses Williams was born in March 1685 at Glaslwyn, Wales. He was educated at Carmarthen Grammar School and University College, Oxford matriculating on 31 March 1705. In 1707 he was appointed sub-librarian of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, where he was able to work on Welsh translations for Edward Llyud, author of *Archaeologica Britannica* (1707)

He gained a B.A. degree in 1708 and was ordained deacon 5 March 1709 becoming curate of Chiddingstone, Kent. He was ordained priest in 1713, and after holding various posts as curate, became Vicar of Llanwernog, Cardiganshire in 1715 and of Defynog, Brecknockshire in 1717. The following year he was incorporated at Cambridge, graduating M.A. from King's College.

He was a very accomplished Welsh antiquary and translator, and had many works published. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1724. He was a great promoter of the Welsh language and editions of the bible and prayer book which appeared in Welsh in 1718 and 1727 passed under his supervision. He was greatly concerned with the welfare of the underprivileged and deprived. He appears to have become discouraged by lack of support for his humanitarian and scholarly work and eventually left Wales and settled in England.

He was appointed Vicar of Saint Mary's on 22 June 1732. Whilst at Bridgwater he became interested in the history of the town and made a catalogue of some of the documents in the Borough Archives.

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He remained Vicar until his death in 1742. He was buried at Saint Mary's on 2 March. His books, manuscripts, transcripts and other papers form the Llanstephan collection of the National Library of Wales.

### JOHN COLES 1742-1785

John Coles was born in Bridgwater, the son of Mr. John Coles, a merchant of the town and a partner in a large distillery. His house and distillery were situated in Chandos Street, which is probably where the younger John Coles was born. His father was also a shipowner, whose ship, *The Snow Queen* traded with Cadiz and other ports. The family was a very old one and in the days of Henry VIII and earlier they spelt their name Colles.

John Coles, the Vicar, was educated at Queens College, Oxford, graduating B.A. in 1733. He later obtained an M.A. degree from Cambridge University in 1750.

He was appointed Vicar of Bridgwater in 1742. He was a man of strong political views and wielded great power in the town, often making himself very unpopular. There is a very characteristic drawing of him by the local artist John Chubb. This shows the Vicar dressed in a tightly buttoned-up coat, with gaiters and a shovel hat and carrying a knobbly stick. Chubb disliked him intensely and described him as a *choleric little man with a knobbly stick which he used on his opponents*. The Town Clerk of the day called him *exceeding busy and clamerous unbecoming to the cloth*.

John Coles remained Vicar until his death on March 16 1785. He was buried in Saint Mary's on 19 March.

John Coles's wife was called Mary and they had several children. The eldest son became a Fellow of Balliol and a rector in Cornwall. James, the second son, was a J.P. for the County and Receiver-General for the Western District. He died at Taunton in 1804.

### GEORGE ROWLEY 1785

George Rowley became Curate of Bridgwater in April 1784 and Vicar a year later on the death of John Coles. He was Vicar for only a year, but during that time he also managed to incur the wrath of John Chubb, who called him a *conceited little man who pretended to teach latin*.

Although he ceased to be Vicar after

such a short time, it would appear that he did not leave the area entirely. He did in fact sign the Register a year after William Wollen took over as Vicar, presumably deputising for Wollen in his absence.

There is an entry in the burial book which reads *26 August 1788, John Rowley son of Rev. Geo and Elizabeth Rowley*. The following year, on 7 June the happy occasion of the christening of his daughter Jane is recorded.

### WILLIAM WOLLEN 1785-1844

William Wollen was born in Castle Street, Bridgwater, the son of James and Sarah Wollen. He was baptised in Saint Mary's Church on 13 June 1759. At the age of 19 he entered Oriel College Oxford graduating B.A. in 1782. He also obtained a B.C.L. in 1788 and D.C.L. in 1815.

He was appointed Vicar of Bridgwater in 1785, and was the last Vicar to follow the clerical custom of wearing a wig. He is said to have been rather a stern man although he was quite a leader of society in the town.

His wife was called Mary, and the Register of Baptisms records the christenings of their five daughters and three sons. One of these sons James born in 1799 was his father's assistant, and has signed some of the Registers. However there is no evidence that he was ever ordained or that he was the official curate.

The west gallery was built in 1823 and the organ moved to it, filling the tower arch.

William Wollen remained Vicar for 59 years, the longest term of office in the history of the Parish. He was still Vicar when he died in 1844. He was buried in Saint Mary's on 2 February.

In 1967 when some of the pews on the north side of the centre aisle were removed, the Wollen family vault was found. A grave slab bore the names of two of his daughters, Anna Maria and Sarah, who both died before him. A third grave recess contained a large coffin lined with lead. Through a hole in the top of the coffin a skeleton could be seen. This was undoubtedly the mortal remains of the Reverend William Wollen.

### DANIEL NIHILL 1844-48

Daniel Nihill was born in Ireland in 1791. He was educated at Shrewsbury and

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Cambridge, where he entered Saint John's College on 7 October 1814. He gained a B.A. in 1819 and M.A. in 1822.

He was ordained priest on 7 March 1819, and his first appointment was as priest-in-charge of Clunbury, Salop, just after his ordination. In 1826 he became priest-in-charge of Forden, Montgomeryshire. During his time at Forden he was also Governor and Chaplain to the Penitentiary at Millbank, London. It was here also that he began his literary career, during which he wrote several books on various topics. One of these, probably inspired by his connection with the penitentiary, was called *Prison Discipline its relation to society and individuals, as deterring from crime and as conducive to personal reformation*. This was published in 1839. He wrote seven books altogether, mostly about religion and society and the relationship between them.

In 1844 Daniel Nihill succeeded William Wollen as Vicar of Saint Mary's Bridgwater. While he was here he was described by a nonconformist minister of the day as *a very good clergyman indeed*.

He remained Vicar of Saint Mary's for four years, during which time it was realised that massive restoration and rebuilding was needed to the Church. It was his successor however who actually initiated the work.

In 1848 Nihill left Bridgwater and returned to Shrewsbury, where he became Vicar of Fitz. It was here that he spent his remaining years. He died on 19 July 1867 aged 76 years.

### **THOMAS GEORGE JAMES 1848-1857**

Thomas George James was born in 1812, the third son of Frederick William James of Manchester. He entered Brasenose College, Oxford, in 1831, graduating B.A. in 1835 and M.A. in 1838. From 1836 until 1848 he was Incumbent of Habergham-in-Burnley, Lancashire, when he was appointed Vicar of Saint Mary's Bridgwater. He preached his first sermon at Saint Mary's on 3 December 1848.

He was responsible for the major alterations and restoration which took place at St Mary's between the years 1849 and 1856. During this time the galleries and box pews were removed, and the latter replaced by benches. The organ was

moved to the north chancel chapel. Much of the south wall was rebuilt, the nave and chancel roofs replaced, the clerestory completely rebuilt and heightened, and new windows put in. The squint was removed together with the wall dividing the north transept, and the present arches inserted in its place. However very elaborate and expensive plans to completely rebuild the tower and spire were abandoned.

It was also during this period that the Churchyard was closed for burials and the Wembdon Road Cemetery purchased and opened. The small vestry, replaced by the present one in 1902, was also built at this time.

In 1851 Thomas James was appointed a Prebendary of Wells Cathedral. He appears to have been a man of strong character, who was very determined to have his own way. He was in conflict with various sections of the congregation over several matters, but he also gathered to himself a party of loyal parishioners who supported him in his plans for the improvement of the Church.

In 1855 he caused a row by refusing to preach a sermon at the Sunday afternoon service. An appeal was made to the Bishop who replied that it was not within his power to force the Vicar to preach in the afternoon.

In 1857 Prebendary James exchanged livings with Michael Ferreebee Sadler and became Incumbent of Saint George's Chapel, Hanover Square, London. He remained there until his death on 27 February 1864, when he was 51 years old. A plaque to his memory, and one to his children, was erected in the chancel of Saint Mary's Church.

### **MICHAEL FERREBEE SADLER 1857-1864**

Michael Ferreebee Sadler was born at Leeds on 14 January 1819, the son of Michael Thomas Sadler, M.P. a social reformer and political economist.

He was educated at Sherborne School and Saint John's College Cambridge, where he graduated M.A. in 1847. The previous year he had the honour of being elected Tyrwhitt's Hebrew Scholar.

He was ordained deacon in 1846 at Peterborough, and priest in 1849. In that

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year he was appointed Curate of Pidley, Hunts, and in 1852 became Incumbent of Saint George's Chapel, Hanover Square, London. In 1857 he exchanged livings with the Reverend T. G. James and became Vicar of Saint Mary's Bridgwater. In 1863 he was appointed to the Prebend of Combe, the 13th, in Wells Cathedral.

During his time at Bridgwater he became well known as a theologian and Tractarian writer, his book *Parish Sermons* being published in 1862. He was a shy man, something of a recluse, and apart from, church affairs, took little active part in the life of the town. He was however described at the time as *an able and absolutely conscientious man*.

In 1864 Prebendary Sadler left Saint Mary's to become Vicar of Saint Paul's Church, Bedford, and in 1870 was appointed Rector of Honiton, Devon.

He wrote several more books, his best known being *Church Doctrine - Bible Truth* first published in 1867. It sold over 30,000 copies in several editions, as did *Church Teachers Manual*. Sadler's *Communicants Manual*, (1872) was published in over 80 editions and sold over 4,000 copies a year during the first twenty years it was printed. His work had a large circulation and did much to popularise the religious ideas of the time. His proficiency as a writer of theology has earned him an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

Prebendary Sadler remained Rector of Honiton until his death at the Rectory there on 15 August 1895. He was survived by his only daughter and several sons, his wife (formerly Maria Tidd Pratt, whom he married in 1855) having died several years earlier. He was buried in the Churchyard of the old parish church on a hill overlooking the town.

His grandson, Michael Sadleir [*sic*] (1888-1957), the bibliographer, was an authority on Anthony Trollope and author of *Fanny by Gaslight*.

### **WILLIAM GEORGE FITZGERALD 1864-1896.**

William George Fitzgerald was born at Saint Pancras, London, and baptised 18 December 1832. He was educated at Cambridge. He was ordained in 1857, and from then until 1860 he was curate of Saint Mary's, Bridgwater, the Reverend Michael

Ferrebee Sadler being the Vicar at that time. In 1860 he was appointed Curate of Tenterden, Kent, and in 1862 Vicar of Bedford.

When Sadler resigned the living of Saint Mary's Bridgwater in 1864, William Fitzgerald returned as Vicar, a post he held for the next 32 years.

He was a kindly and genial man, well liked and respected in the town. He took great interest in public life and served on the Rural District Council. During his time many alterations were made to the Church. The gas lighting was improved and central heating installed. The chancel and some of the aisles of the church were tiled, and the aisles were mostly widened to allow for better access. The black-faced clock was removed and the present one put in its place in 1869, and the old organ was scrapped and the present Willis organ was installed in 1871. The bells were rehung and refitted and repairs made to the tower and the spire. He was appointed Rural Dean of Bridgwater in 1892.

William Fitzgerald died at the Vicarage, aged 63 years, on 4 August 1896.

He was buried at Wembdon Road Cemetery, and a plaque to his memory was erected in the chancel of Saint Mary's Church.

### **HENRY WILLIAM HAVES BIRCHAM 1897-1901**

Henry William Haves Bircham was ordained deacon in 1882 and priest in 1883. He was appointed Curate at Hunslet near Leeds until 1885, when he became Vicar of Gildersome, also Leeds. In 1889 he was appointed to the living of Saint Paul's Morley, Leeds, where he remained until he moved to Saint Mary's Bridgwater in 1897. He was inducted on 22 January 1897, and was Vicar for four and a half years.

He preached his last sermon in Saint Mary's on 20 October 1901, and then moved to Maidstone, Kent, exchanging livings with Dr. A. H. Powell.

Henry Bircham remained at Maidstone until February 1914, when he became Vicar of Barnard Castle, Co. Durham. When the First World War broke out later that year Barnard Castle became a garrison town, and Bircham and his wife worked hard for the troops stationed there. His son Harry joined the local battalion, the

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Durham Light Infantry, and won the Military Cross.

Bircham took an active part in the affairs of Barnard Castle and at various times was a member of the Board of Guardians, a Governor of the local boys' boarding school and twice was the Chairman of the Town Council.

He was Vicar for 21 years and died at the Barnard Castle Vicarage in February 1935, just before he planned to retire. A memorial to him was placed on the wall of the North Transept of the Church. Mrs. Bircham moved to Lincoln after her husband died, and remained there until her own death a few years later. She was buried with her husband at Barnard Castle.

### **ARTHUR HERBERT POWELL 1901-1911**

Arthur Herbert Powell was born at Ramsgate in 1856. He was educated at Cambridge and ordained in 1880, when became Curate of Greenwich. He remained at Greenwich for two years and then became Curate at Saint James the Less, Westminster. In 1886 he moved from Westminster to Battersea and in 1890 from Battersea to Bayswater. He was Curate of Bayswater until 1893 when he was appointed Vicar of Waterloo. He remained at Waterloo for two years and in 1895 became Vicar of Maidstone in Kent.

In 1901 he exchanged livings with the Reverend Henry Bircham and on Thursday 5 December 1901 was inducted as Vicar of Saint Mary's, Bridgwater. During his time as Vicar the present vestry was built and also the Parish Hall, both in 1902. While he was at Bridgwater he wrote two books on the history of the town - *The Ancient Borough of Bridgwater* which was published in 1907 and *Bridgwater in the Later Days* published in 1908.

On 15 October 1911, without any warning, Dr Powell made the announcement during a service that he intended to resign the livings and that the sermon that evening would be the last that he would preach in Bridgwater. Many people tried to persuade him to change his mind, and a petition signed by 3000 parishioners was presented to the Bishop of Bath and Wells. This was not successful as the resignation had already been accepted.

When he left Bridgwater Dr. Powell returned to London and from 1912 until 1917 he was the Curate of Saint Andrew's, Stamford Hill. In 1917 he was appointed Vicar of West Lulworth, Dorset, where he remained until his retirement in 1924.

Dr. Powell was married twice, first on 14 April 1885 to Jeannie Hunt and after her death he married Janet Spens on 1 August 1917. Dr. Powell spent his last years living in Edinburgh, and died there, at Nelson Street, on the 28 October 1928, aged 72 years. His son, Revd J. R. Powell, wrote a biography of Robert Blake, General at Sea, and edited a collection of his letters.

### **JOSHUA JAMES LANGHAM 1912-1920**

Langham was educated at Cambridge and was ordained in 1883. He was appointed Curate and later Vicar of Saint Mary's Bryanston Square, London, where he served between 1883-1886.

In 1886 he was appointed Principal of the School for the Daughters of Clergy at Warrington and in 1889 Vicar of Padgate. He remained at Padgate until ill-health forced him to resign in 1900. After spending some time in Canada he returned to England and was engaged in educational work at Clifton, Bristol, before resuming ministerial duties at Saint Alban's, Westbury Park.

In 1907 he became Vicar of Weston-Super-Mare, where he remained until becoming Vicar of Saint Mary's Bridgwater in 1912. He was then 50 years old and married with three sons. He was inducted as Vicar on Tuesday 30 January 1912, and stayed at Saint Mary's until the autumn of 1920, when he became Vicar of Berrow. In 1928 he moved from Berrow to Crewkerne and was Vicar of Crewkerne with Easthams until he retired in 1931.

During his time at Saint Mary's the South Chancel Chapel was fitted out as a memorial to the dead of the World War.

Joshua Langham died at Weston-Super-Mare on 24 March 1939, aged 78 years and was buried in the Weston-Super-Mare Cemetery. The chief mourners at the funeral were his sons and their families, Mrs. Langham having predeceased her husband by some six years.

### **HENRY THOMAS DIXON 1920-1923**

Henry Thomas Dixon was born in 1874, the son of Jabez Dixon of Millom, Cumber-

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land. He was educated at Saint Bees and Merton College, Oxford, where he gained a B.A. in 1897, M.A. in 1901, B.D. in 1904 and D.D. in 1908.

He was ordained deacon in 1898, when he became Curate of Nantwich, and priest in 1899. From 1899-1902 he was Curate of Saint John the Evangelist, Birkenhead, and from 1902-1907 Curate of Saint Nicholas, Blundell-sands.

In 1907 he became Vicar of Taynton and Great Barrington, where he remained until 1911, when he accepted the living of Saint James's, Taunton. In 1913 he was appointed Examining Chaplain to the Bishop of Bath and Wells, and from 1915 until 1930 he was a Prebendary of Wells Cathedral. In 1915 he moved from Taunton to Christ Church, Clifton, in the diocese of Bristol.

In 1920 he became Vicar of Saint Mary's Bridgwater, and in 1921 was appointed Rural Dean. When Dr. Dixon was Vicar of Saint Mary's the Vicarage was in Dampiet Street, at what is now Unity House.

In 1923 he became Rector of Church Stretton, Salop, where he remained until 1937. During this time he was Rural Dean of Stokesay (1927-32) Proctor of Convocation Hereford (1929-32) Archdeacon of Ludlow (1932-39) and Canon Residentiary of Hereford Cathedral (1936-39).

In 1914 Henry Dixon married Evelyn Mary Lambert Sladen, the daughter of Col. Joseph Sladen and his wife Lady Sarah, daughter of the 8th Earl of Cavan. Mrs. Dixon was born in 1882 and died in 1930. The Dixons had three children.

### **SEYMOUR BERRY 1923-1930**

Robert Seymour Brendon Stirling Berry was an Irishman, the son of the Bishop of Killaloe, Co. Clare. He was educated at Trinity College, Dublin, graduating B.A. in 1907 and M.A. in 1911. He was ordained deacon in 1908 and a priest of the diocese of Manchester in 1909. During the First World War he served as an army chaplain and in 1919 was awarded the O.B.E.

He was Curate of Clevedon for several years before becoming Vicar of Saint Mary's Bridgwater in 1923. He was inducted on Trinity Sunday, and he was then aged 37 years. He was a very popular vicar and was the first one to live in the

vicarage in Durleigh Road.

Seymour Berry was drowned on 23 August 1930, whilst on holiday at Hayle, Cornwall, with his family. The news of his death was given to a shocked congregation at Saint Mary's the following morning by the Curate. Seymour Berry was 45 years old when he died, and left a widow, a son Brendon and a daughter, Doreen. He was buried at Wembdon Road Cemetery, Bridgwater, and a memorial service was held at Saint Mary's Church on 19 November 1930.

A brass plaque to his memory was erected in the chancel of Saint Mary's and a cheque presented to his widow, both the result of a collection made by the parishioners.

### **EDWARD HAMAR HUGHES-DAVIES 1931-59**

Edward Hamar Hughes-Davies was born at Llangurig, Montgomeryshire. He was ordained at Chester in September 1909 and appointed Curate at Saint George's Church, Altrincham. In 1911 he became Curate of Prestbury, where he remained until becoming an army chaplain in the First World War.

His first vicariate was of Rainow, near Macclesfield. He then returned to Altrincham, becoming Vicar of Saint John's for nine years before accepting the living of Saint Mary's, Bridgwater. He was instituted as Vicar in January 1931.

During his time the Chancel was remodelled by the removal of the Victorian ornamentation at the east end. The picture was given more emphasis by being raised, while the sanctuary step and the altar were lowered. Major work was done to remodel the stonework of the top of the tower.

He played a prominent part in the religious and public life of the town and on his retirement in 1959 he was made an Honorary Freeman of the Borough. He retired in September of that year, 50 years after his ordination, and moved with his wife to South Wales. Prebendary Hughes-Davies died at Ciliau Aeron, Cardiganshire, on 13 July 1960, only nine months after leaving Bridgwater.

### **LEWIS CARL SWAN 1959-1976**

Lewis Carl Swan was born at Oxford, Nova Scotia, Canada. He obtained a first

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class honours degree in philosophy at the University of Mt. Allison and graduated M.A. at Dalhousie University. He trained for the Ministry at Wycliffe College, Toronto and during the Second World War served as a naval chaplain, visiting England and serving a short spell at Croydon Church. After several appointments in Canada, he accepted the living of Saint Mary's Bridgwater and was inducted as Vicar on Saturday 28 November 1959. He was then 49 years old.

He took a great and personal interest in the restoration work at Saint Mary's and in raising the money to pay for it. Carl Swan died at Musgrove Park Hospital, Taunton, after a short illness, on 24 July 1976, aged 66 years. The funeral service took place before a packed church, (for during his years as Vicar he became much loved and respected in the town), on 28th July, and was followed by cremation at Taunton. The ashes were interred in Saint Mary's Church. He left a widow, (since deceased) and three children all of whom now live in Canada.

The pews were removed from the North Transept, which was renamed the Swan Transept as a memorial to him and were used as the place where refreshments were served after services.

### **EDWARD RICHARD AYERST 1977-1990**

Edward Richard Ayerst was born in 1925 and received his early education in London. During the Second World War he served in the Navy and took part in the inshore coastal minesweeping of the River Scheldt in the winter of 1944 and was mentioned in dispatches.

In 1951 he graduated from Leeds University with a B.A. degree, and in 1967 a M.Phil from London. He continued his theological education at the College of the Resurrection at Mirfield, and in 1953 was ordained deacon, becoming a deacons prizewinner. In 1954 he was ordained priest, both ordinations taking place in the diocese of London.

He was curate of Saint John's Bethnall Green from 1953-57, during which time he taught in Church Schools and served on the Diocesan Board of Education. In 1958 he moved to Hayes, Middlesex, where he served his second curacy in the Parish of Saint Mary the Virgin. In 1960 he was appointed Vicar of Saint Mary with Saint

John Upper Edmonton, London, where he remained until 1966 when he became Rector of Saint Mildred, Whippingham with Saint James, East Cowes on the Isle of Wight. In 1969 he was appointed Chaplain to the Governor of the Isle of Wight, Lord Mountbatten.

In 1977 he accepted the living of Saint Mary's Bridgwater, and was inducted as Vicar on 20 July. In 1987 he was appointed Chaplain to H. M. Queen Elizabeth II, preaching in the Chapels Royal. Her Majesty and His Royal Highness Prince Philip visited Saint Mary's in May of that year.

During his time at Saint Mary's a scheme of relighting the Nave and Chancel was undertaken, and a floor was inserted into the Tower creating a ringing chamber. The tower arch to the nave was glazed, creating a viewing gallery from the ringing chamber to the east end of the church. A major scheme of refurbishment of the Church Hall in King Square was undertaken.

He was married and he and his wife Pauline have one son and two daughters. He retired in 1990 and moved to Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset. He died in at Burham-on-Sea, 20 October, 2009

### **ROGER PACKER 1991-2000**

Roger Packer was born in 1937. After education at Abingdon School and two years National Service, he went to Pembroke College, Cambridge and studied History and Theology. While at Cambridge he also obtained the Associate diploma of the Royal College of Organists. His training for the ministry was at Cuddesdon and he was ordained in 1962 to become Curate at Saint Andrew's Chippenham. Three years later he moved to Caversham, Reading, where he was in charge of Saint Andrew's Church.

His first incumbency was at Sandhurst, near Camberley, where he was rector for 21 years. He then moved to Saint Mary's Bridgwater in June 1991. During his time in Bridgwater, he helped to raise the money for the restoration of the stonework of the Tower. The bottom of the Tower was fitted out as a Benefice Office which included the introduction of modern computer and reprographics equipment. He oversaw the introduction of the Nave Altar.

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He encouraged the musical life of the Church, occasionally playing the organ for services himself. He was Rural Dean from 1994 and was made a Prebendary of Wells in 1996.

Because of poor health, he retired early and moved to Dovercourt, near Harwich, in Essex in August 2000. He was an occasional organist and a stand-in vicar in nearby parishes. He is married to Gillian and they have two daughters and six grandchildren.

### **CHARLES CHADWICK 2001-2014**

Charles Chadwick, was inducted in May 2001, having served thirteen years in Buckinghamshire before this. Before ordination he had worked in administration for a firm in Reading. He was married and has two children.

Initially he was much involved in organising the funding for the restoration of the stonework of the exterior of the church, which was completed in 2006. From 2002 under his leadership Saint Mary's began to explore its ten year vision which was to develop as a community of the Christian faith — to be at the heart of the town — and to serve the wider area of Bridgwater and beyond.

Central to this is the development of the interior of the church building to enhance it for both worship and mission and to make it more usable in the future by the wider Bridgwater community.

The office was moved to the Vestry area to allow a toilet to be built under the tower and the Church Hall was sold to raise funds towards the reordering.

He left Saint Mary's in 2014, following his appointment to an advisory post with the Diocese of Oxford.

### **PATRICIA OLLIVE 2015 -**

Patricia Ollive (née Twomey) was born in 1955 in Kent to a Roman Catholic family.

She worked as a Private Secretary in London after taking her A levels and obtaining a Private Secretaries Diploma. After marriage to Mike and the birth of their three children Sarah, Nicholas and Rebecca she trained at Exeter University and gained her B.A.Hons in History & Education in 1990. She then taught in primary schools in Devon, Bristol and

Somerset.

In 2003 she started training for ministry at Ripon College Cuddesdon where she studied Theology as part of a B.Th. at Oxford University. She served her Curacy at St Andrew's Backwell with Chelvey & Brockley and her first incumbency was with The Polden Wheel group of parishes where she served the villages of Ashcott, Shapwick, Burtle, Catcott, Chilton Polden and Edington for 6 years between 2009 and 2015 creating, amongst other things, one PCC for 6 churches. The Crown living of St Mary's Bridgwater, with Holy Trinity Chilton Trinity became her responsibility in May 2015. In 2017 she was appointed Surrogate and Commissary for granting Marriage Licences and taking affidavits. In January 2018 she was given the Prebend or Canonry of Barton St David and made a Prebendary of Wells Cathedral and in June of the same year the Archdeacon of Taunton asked her to be Assistant Rural Dean.

During her leadership a large reordering of St Mary's has taken place to enable greater interaction with the wider community and a space for a missional approach to ministry. The work entailed re-flooring the church and adding underfloor heating; in certain areas the floor was lowered to provide a constant-level access.

Up to date lighting and a new sound system was also provided and the font was moved nearer the South door. The catering facilities were much improved

A number of blocks of the Victorian pews were retained, but made mobile. In conjunction with stacking chairs they allow a fully flexible building for several kinds of use, ranging from regular church services to concerts and exhibitions, as well as providing space for smaller events.