THE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST FLADBURY

A brief history of the building, clergy and parish

Frank Bentley

There have been settlements in and around the present village of Fladbury since well before the Christian era but the recorded story of Fladbury and its church begins in 697 when King Æthelred of Mercia granted the Manor to Ægwine, Bishop of Worcester. Æthelred was the third of King Penda of Mercia's sons to succeed him. His father had been a rigid pagan with the result that his kingdom, Mercia, did not regain the Christian faith till after surrounding kingdoms. But prior to marrying into the family of the Christian king of Northumberland some of Penda's children accepted the Christian faith and were baptised and almost at the end of his reign he finally allowed a small group of Celtic priests to enter his kingdom and by the time Æthelred had become king the Christian faith had spread throughout Mercia.

Æthelred's original charter still exists and reads *"For the absolution of crimes whether mine or my (late) wife Osthryth's I have given in possession the land which is called* 'Fledebyrig' *44 hides wide to Oftfor, the Bishop, that just as it was first given again through the diligence of the Monks under the Abbott of most honest men, the use shall be regained...'* This charter shows not only king Æthelred's wish to establish a minster but to provide for an earlier monastery which for an unknown reason had not survived there had been an earlier grant of the land and that land had been made the name 'Fledebyrig' (Fladbury) . 'Byrig' usually means 'stronghold' or town but when combined with a feminine name it can mean minster or monastery. In the case of Fladbury this seems likely as Flede was a common feminine name and the land which had first been granted to provide for a minster had taken that name. At that time despite differing ways of life all religious communities were known as 'minsters' and many were for both men and women and were ruled by a woman.

Æthelred's grant to the bishop was challenged on the grounds that the early manor had been the property of his late wife Osthryth and therefore should have passed to other members of her family. Osthryth was a daughter of King Oswiu of Northumberland and she had both an

older half-sister and a younger sister with forms of the 'Flede' name **making it** possible **that the lost minster had been founded by one of them and that** Fladbury owes **its name** to a northern princess and **its first place of Christian worship** to the northern Celtic church.
Æthelred's new monastery was established but despite his charter speaking of 'Monks under an Abbott' at some point it must again have become either a mixed or women's community as in 780 King Offa confirmed its gift to the Abbess Ethelburga. The bishops seemed to have continued to hold some rights at Fladbury as shortly after Ethelburga's appointment King Offa accompanied by his nobles visited Fladbury where they were liberally entertained by Bishop Tilhere which resulted in Offa granting the bishop a further manor - *"the royal wic called Cropthorne".*
A few years after re-establishing the minster at Fladbury Bishop Ægcgwine also founded Evesham Abbey which in a later century claimed that the bishop had made the manor of Fladbury part of their endowment. A charter supporting their claim still exists, but it seems that the Evesham monks had forged it!

Running along the boundary between the present Fladbury rectory and the adjoining hall is part of a prehistoric ditch which in 1967 was excavated by archaeologists. Nearby they found a pre Christian cemetery and within the ditch evidence of a large and unusually sophisticated building which contained an oven for drying grain. This building must been part of a larger complex and is unlikely to have belonged to anyone other than the minster or the bishop.
Carbon dating placed the oven as still being in use round about 820 just 20 years before King Coenwulf confirmed the reversion in full of the manor to the Bishop following which the minster or monastery simply disappears from the records. It was however the norm that whenever a minster closed its church and a priest remained to serve the local community, so we rightly claim that from those early 7th century minsters right up to the present time the church with its priest has provided an unbroken record of service to the community.
Over the years a steadily increasing number of estates were granted to the 'Bishop and Church of Worcester' and by the 11th century these

were being allocated either to the bishop or the Cathedral Priory. The cathedral gained the manor of Cropthorne but the bishops retained Fladbury, though as late as the 13th century the Cathedral Sacristan still received two parts of the tithes of 'land where vines once grew at Fladbury' a concession which shows the survival here of an early vineyard.

CHURCH AND MANOR FOLLOWING THE NORMAN CONQUEST

Our present church is largely 14th century but the base of the tower is Norman, a style common in the 11th and 12th centuries. It has typical Norman pilasters, a shallow form of buttress, with those to the sides pierced by narrow round-headed windows. In the latter part of the 12th century to enable heightening the base of the tower was strengthened by the inner facing of pointed arches which still frame the small Norman windows. The resulting now central body of the tower is Early English (roughly 13th century) as is the great arch between the tower and nave though the authoritative Pevsner's Guide to the buildings of Worcestershire says "the arch must already have been built by the 13th century".

Following the 19th century restoration of the chancel a newspaper reported the finding of both Norman and Early English work hidden beneath the plaster and the chancel still retains a somewhat restored Early English double piscine but there is no evidence of either Norman or Early English work between tower and chancel in the nave. Before the building of its Norman tower Fladbury would have had an Anglo Saxon church many of which were substantial tall stone buildings without aisles and only a small chancel. Such a church would have been well able to receive the Norman and Early English additions which may account for the lack of pre 14th century work in the nave.

Following the Norman conquest King William ordered a nationwide survey to discover the taxable value of every part of his kingdom. This was completed in 1086 and the record is now known as the Domesday Book. This records a resident priest and therefore the presence of a church building. The priest held half a hide of land, half the amount held by a family household. In addition he would have received various fees

and is likely to have had a Deacon or other assistant as the daily services require someone able to make the various responses.
Domesday also records that Fladbury had 60 households, possibly about three or four hundred people making it the 2nd largest community in the triple Hundred of Oswaldslow, an administrative area of about 300 settlements.

THE THIRTEENTH AND FOURTEENTH CENTURIES

The 13th and 14th centuries were a time of increasing prosperity. The land producing more food than was needed for the bishop's household which encouraged them to lease out a growing number holdings. But bad harvests triggered steep rises in the price of grain and scarcity of food added to the hardship of the poor. In 1247 Bishop Cantelupe authorized grants in alms of 220qtrs of grain from his Fladbury and Treddington stores for the relief of his tenants and those of neighboring villages.
The 13th century was also a time of civil war as the barons sought to control the power of the King and in mid-century Simon de Montfort led a major uprising. Cantelupe attempted to bring about a reconciliation between king and barons but finally sided with de Montfort, following whose defeat at Evesham he was suspended from his bishopric and died the following year.
In the north wall of the chancel is a collection of heraldic glass shields which date from about a century after the Battle of Evesham but have long been associated with that event and were restored in 1965 as part of the commemoration of the 600th anniversary of the battle but not all those commemorated here were involved. Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, Henry de Montfort and Hugh le Despenser were killed and then buried before the Abbey high altar; Mortimer fought on the King's side and survived; de Bosco and Boteler died well after the battle, they may have sympathized with the rebels but there is no record of either being involved at Evesham. The shields are reputed to have come from Evesham Abbey where possibly not all were grouped together.
Following a visit to Warwick in November 1269 the victorious Henry 111 moved on to Fladbury where free provision for his considerable

retinue would have to have been provided by the Bishop as Lord of the Manor. That bishop was Godfrey Giffard who had been appointed the previous year and remained bishop for over thirty years. For much of that time his principal officer was Nicholas de Woodeford who he made Rector of Fladbury and because of his link with bishop we know a great deal about him.

Bishop Godfrey Giffard and Rector Nicholas de Woodeford

Walter Giffard, the Archbishop of York, made his brother Godfrey his Archdeacon and at the same time Nicholas de Woodeford was the Archbishop's clerk. After Godfrey was made bishop of Worcester he made de Woodeford his principal administrator and provided him with a good income by granting him several parishes all of which he held in plurality. Finally in 1278 he gained Fladbury the income of which was about three times the average benefice living and also included the possession of a dovecote. Dovecotes had been introduced into England by the Normans, possession was a symbol of status and usually only the lord had the privilege of ownership. (*The dovecote together with a large barn remained within the Rectory grounds to the south of the church until they were demolished by Bishop Lloyd's son after he became rector in 1713.*)

From time to time Bishop Giffard stayed at Fladbury. Once while here he wrote a letter admonishing the monks at Winchcombe and instructing them that "No brother shall go outside the house, walk about, or lead greyhounds." Many monks enjoyed a comfortable life and some also seemed equipped to enjoy hunting!

Though other churches had been built within its manor Fladbury remained their Mother Church. For centuries Bishampton had been a separate parish with their own rector but their burials remained at Fladbury and their rector disputed Woodeford's right to receive Bishampton mortuary fees. Eventually he appealed to Rome and two abbots were appointed to adjudicate the matter. They recommended that the fee should be divided equally between the two contenders; a decision endorsed by the bishop.

When in 1275 the royal judges made a formal visitation to Worcester the Cathedral Priory brought a plea to their court claiming that after

the death of William their late prior on the order of Nicholas de Woodeford the bishop's seneschal (principal officer) Simon the Chamberlain, William de Soler, Henry, Sergeant of Fladbury, together with many others of the bishop's household went at night to the manors held by the Prior of Worcester at Stoke, Wolverley, Blackwell, Cropthorne and Hardwick and with force of arms beat, wounded and mistreated the prior's men, maiming some and scattering the goods found in them against the peace of the present king.

Woodeford, no doubt at the instigation of the bishop, is accused of being responsible for this assault on the prior's households which included our neighboring manor of Cropthorne. The bishop didn't dispute the facts but refused to make amends. The judges referred the matter to the King where it seems to have rested.

Standing upright against the south wall of the church is what appears to be a 13th century grave cover removed from the chancel during the 19th century restoration. This wealthy incumbent might well have been responsible for providing the Early English work in the chancel and perhaps this grave cover once covered de Woodeford's tomb.

The 14th Century

For almost four decades the 14th century was a time of growing prosperity. Records show Fladbury gaining an increasing number of 'freemen', a named 'High Street' with both freehold or tenanted properties on very long leases. Their improved prosperity increased the influence of the laity within both church and community. Since the 12th century the laity had been responsible for the upkeep of the church nave and they elected wardens who managed church finance and property. Income for church purposes was largely through bequests and voluntary giving and increased lay prosperity and generosity would have been a major factor in providing the aisled nave which with its four bays and typical decorated style octagonal piers is clearly 14th century. Initially the nave would have had no seating for as well as being the area used by the laity during worship at times it could also be used for secular activities.

On the left pillar of the entry to the porch is a mediaeval scratch dial which enabled the priest to know the time for the regular daily round

of services and the daily ringing of the Angelus which called people to pause in their work for prayer.

The present nave is likely to have been completed by 1348 as that year a great plague swept the country killing more than a third of the population. The year before Bishop Cobham issued John the son of Richard Pule letters patent of manumism, which ended his low status as a serf and made him a free man. But farming was severely affected by the pandemic and a later John is listed among other tenants of the Bishop for failure to pay his dues. The loss of labour caused many smaller tenancies to be absorbed into larger holdings including those at Craycombe which had become a separate hamlet but now were absorbed into Fladbury tenancies and the settlement lost.

The pandemic hastened change, by the end of the century within the bishop's demise there were only two ploughmen, the 1389 stock lists shows only 4 horses, 19 oxen, 24 cows, 93 pigs and 241 sheep which were driven the 15 miles to Blockley in Gloucestershire for shearing and the marketing of their wool.

The Rector, William de Everdone, having held the living for 32 years, died in 1349, possibly a victim of the Black Death. The building of the new nave and what Pevsner's guide describes as the church's splendid rib-vaulted porch are likely to have been done during his time.

The church porch has slender round corner shafts supporting its rib vaulted ceiling and stone benches on either side. It would have been in much wider use than today as public penance and the initial ceremonies of baptism and marriage all took place here. It also had an upper chamber which provided a safe place for books, documents, the depositing of wills and it may also have served as a school room. The bishop's registers record a steady stream of Fladbury men being made acolytes, sub-deacon or deacon and ordained priest. Some of these may have been taught Latin by the priest in that upper room which was lost in the 17th century. From inside the church covered with 15th century tiles saved during the 19th century restorations you can see part of the access to the former upper chamber and immediately above the church door is the outline of the chamber window into the nave.

A further 14th century trait was an increase in chantry chapels served by their own stipendiary priest. The present vestry door, which prior to the 19th century restoration was concealed beneath plaster several feet eastward of its present position, seems to be 14thcentury and this may have provided access to a lost chantry chapel and sacristy. There is a 14c record of the appointment of a priest to serve a Fladbury chantry and the remnants of a 14th century piscine remain on the external north wall of the chancel .

In 1840, some years before its rebuilding, Joseph Bentley wrote that *"the vestry features a fourteenth century stained glass panel of Our Lady and Child taken from Evesham Abbey."* That stained glass panel is now set in the memorial cross behind the south aisle chapel. It is rare for such glass to have survived the iconoclism of the 16th century reformers and the wanton destruction of 17th century puritanical troops. The chantry which may also have served as a sacristy is likely to have been dedicated to the Virgin Mary. While tradition has grouped the stained glass panel with the 14th century heraldic shields as having come from Evesham Abbey it may have originated here. It is almost identical to a similar panel in the little church at Warndon and both churches have links with the great Beauchamp family. These panels are of considerable importance and have featured in major exhibitions in both London and Paris.

The 15th Century

Since the 12th century under lease from the Bishop the Throckmorton family held the sub-manor within the parish of Fladbury from which they had taken their name and in the base of the church tower is a large Purbeck marble tomb chest commemorating John Throckmorton and Eleanor his wife. John was an able lawyer who became a considerable land owner and through his marriage to Eleanor the family eventually gained Coughton Court. John's rise in status is confirmed by the inscription on his tomb which tells that *"he was under treasurer of England who verily died the twenty third day of April Anno Domini 1445".* This tomb originally stood in the centre of the nave almost level with a south aisle chantry

chapel founded to commemorate him by son Thomas and widow Eleanor.

In John Throckmorton's time the Rector was Thomas Morden, treasurer of St Paul's Cathedral London, Prebend of Gorewell in Hereford, principal counsellor and high steward of Robert Fitz-Hugh bishop of London. Morden gained a papal dispensation allowing him to hold all his other appointments in plurality with Fladbury. The dispensation gives his full name as 'Thomas Sottewell *alias* Morden' and describes him as 'being of noble race and as having followed the Roman court for a long time'. For much of the thirty years Morden was rector he must have been an absentee who paid 'Vicars' (i.e. Vice-curates' or deputies') to care for his various parishes. He chose to end his days in Fladbury where he died in 1458. His memorial brass showing him vested in the cope of a Cathedral canon can be found in the chancel near the sanctuary step.

Level with that of Morden and showing him wearing full Eucharistic vestments is the memorial brass of William Plowen who was Rector 1479 -1503. During his time John Alcock, a skilled architect, was Bishop of Worcester. The bishop's shield carrying a mitre and three cocks heads, a pun on the Alcock name, has survived on the corner brace of a roof timber above the incumbent's stall. Perhaps Bishop Alcock had some part in the design of the original 15th century chancel roof parts of which were reused in the 19th century restoration.

THE 16TH CENTURY - REFORMATION

Four years after Plowen's death Henry viii succeeded his father. When he fell in love with Ann Boleyn his determination to divorce Katherine to whom he had been married for over 20 years caused him to break with the Pope and declare himself Supreme head of the English Church. Many clergy could not accept this but under the threat of ruinous fines most gave in. In the south louver of the church tower is a mediaeval Sanctus Bell cast by William Culverdon of London. Its inscription reads *"Sancta Katerina ora pro me. Edvardo Gregson"* – St. Catherine pray for me. Gregson was Rector for much of Henry's reign and St. Catherine is the patron saint of lost causes,

the request for her prayers seems to reflect Gregson's unhappiness for the lost cause of amending the King's ambitions.

Despite having to pay the tithe for the maintenance of the Rector and parish church Wyre Piddle had to maintain their ancient chapel and it's priest and on one occasion Gregson was taken to court by William Chaunterell and others of Wyre Piddle for 'Ceasing to find a priest at the chapel of Wyre Piddle, for which complainants contribute in excess of their tithes.'

Despite the dissolution of the monasteries, during Henry's reign people would have seen little change in their parish church, the Latin mass continued and while the Bible in English was allowed for private study it's use in public worship was not permitted. But on Henry's death in 1547 he was succeeded by his 9 year old son, Edward, who was too young to rule and government of the country passed to a regency council which was dominated by determined reformers.

Parish churches now experienced dramatic change. Fladbury's two chantry chapels were destroyed, leaving only the remnants of their piscine. The paintings which once decorated the walls of the nave were obliterated and all statues, ornaments, crosses and candle sticks were thrown out, the stone altar was replaced by a wooden table, the traditional priestly vestments were forbidden as was the ringing of the mid-day angelus . The bible and parts of the service were now read in English and by 1549 Archbishop Cranmer had produced an English prayer book to replace the Latin services but three years later that first Book of Common Prayer was supplanted by a more protestant version. No doubt there were mixed views about these changes but most would have been unhappy at the forbidding of 'Church ales', the parish revelries linked to church festivals which once brought light hearted pleasure into the dull routine of ordinary lives.

The reformist council lasted for just over 6 years then in 1553 Edward died having never reached his majority. The throne passed to his 36 years old half sister Mary, a rigid catholic determined to return the church to where it was before her father's breach with Rome. Edward Heath, the Bishop of Worcester who had been deposed in Edward's reign was reinstated and John Hooper who for a while had

been bishop was imprisoned and then burnt at the stake. Legislation which had allowed priests to marry was repealed, all married clergy suspended and finally those who refused to give up their wives were deprived of their livings and replaced by single men. This process took about 3 years and it could be the reason why the Rectory became vacant in 1556 enabling Seth Holland, chaplain to Cardinal Archbishop Pole to be appointed. The following year Holland was also appointed Dean of Worcester Cathedral. These appointments were short lived as in 1558 having reigned for just over five years Mary died and Elizabeth 1 who had a more reformist outlook came to the throne. Holland was among those who refused to accept Elizabeth's reversal of Mary's changes and was deposed and confined in London's Marshalsea prison where a year later he died.

The Sandys family

In a failed attempt to prevent Mary gaining the throne Edwin Sandys had supported the claim of Lady Jane Grey. He was imprisoned and on release left the country but returned when Elizabeth came to the throne. The bishopric of Worcester was vacant and Elizabeth appointed Sandys who then granted the manor to his brother William.

The records of the Manor Court under William Sandys Snr show the community's responsibility for the care of its people. In 1618 the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor of Fladbury and Bishampton are ordered to, pay 18pence a week toward the relief of John Young, a poor lame man. Then in 1620 Thomas Pirkes and eight others petition the Lord of the Manor of Fladbury seeking him to appoint a place for the erection of a dwelling house *upon the common of the town* for Richard Emmes, Katherine his wife and their family. The request was granted but later a further petition was made to the Justices of the Peace which states that despite a place having been appointed for the erection of a dwelling for Richard Emmes two young men, freeholders of the said town, had threatened to prevent the building unless it was erected where they had chosen. 'Cottages on the waste' are shown on the 18th c. Enclosure map.

Eventually William Snr passed the tenancy of Fladbury to two of his sons one of whom was William 'Waterworks' Sandys who, having spent £20,000 in making the Avon navigable, went bankrupt and fled to the continent where later during the Civil War he was engaged in the purchase of arms for the royalists.

Charles 1st was increasingly at odds with parliament and both he and the church seemed to be moving toward a more Catholic outlook and finally Civil War broke out and almost exactly 90 years after Elizabeth came to the throne Charles was executed and under Cromwell the country became a republic.

During the civil war Fladbury was often a place where the various armies stopped where as well as demanding free board they requisitioned horses and other goods. In April 1644 a parliamentary force under Sir William Waller stopped at Fladbury and Waller who was a Presbyterian allowed or even encouraged his troops to vandalise the church but out of respect for the barons who had opposed an earlier king they left intact the 14c baronial coats of arms which at that time were in the east window. Two weeks after the parliamentary troops left a large section of the King's army troops were quartered at Fladbury and among them was Richard Symonds an antiquarian whose diary records the church and rectory in some detail.

He describes the armorial window, the Throckmorton tomb and other memorials and notes that under the east end of the church there was a charnel house with many bones. Churchyard memorials were almost unknown before the17th century and only very influential people were buried inside the church. The yard was repeatedly over-buried and disinterred sculls and some other bones were stored in the charnel house which still remains under the chancel sanctuary. Symonds also records that within the south wall of the chancel there was an old arch with a shield, also a new Darby memorial. During the 19th century restoration the Darby memorial was moved to the south aisle wall. It dates from 1608 and commemorates George Darby, the latin inscription describes him as meriting the name 'Arborator' – "one who plants trees".

Symonds describes the rectory as *'a faire large old and stately parsonage which had coates of arms in hall and dining room'* and also says that *"the parson's young wife was often seen in the street carrying her milk pail on her head, being totally without pride".*

RESTORATION OF THE MONARCHY

After the defeat of the royalists and the execution of the king England was declared a "Commonwealth" and the Anglican church with its bishops was replaced by a Presbyterian Ministry. In 1660, two years after Cromwell's death, parliament invited King Chales 2nd to return and the Anglican church was reinstated but the repeated upheavals of the previous century had left many of it's buildings in disrepair.

In 1684 Fladbury churchwardens reported that the pulpit was without seat and door and that the stairs were not decent and of difficult ascent also that at the death of their late rector, Mr Elliott, the Rectory house and some of the buildings were so far out of repair that it will cost his successor more than a hundred pounds to make them good"

When Charles 2nd was succeeded by his brother James who attempted to promote Roman Catholicism and published a declaration of indulgence. For their opposition to this seven bishops were imprisoned in the tower and then brought to trial but 'were "gloriously acquitted. Among those imprisoned bishops William Lloyd Bishop of St. Asaph who eventually became Bishop of Worcester. In 1713 he appointed his son William as Rector of Fladbury and possibly helped him fund the building of a new rectory. In his will he left instruction that following his death he should lie in state in Fladbury Rectory and be buried here – *'a state room to be hung at Fladbury, scoured and sealed, with wax candles, tapers and other things fitting for the occasion' and for 'a second room hung from top to bottom and the chairs covered with black'*. Two years after the bishop's death both his wife and son died and were interred with him in the former charnel house. A large marble memorial to Bishop Lloyd can be found against the north wall of the chancel. The

Church authorities sold and replaced the Queen Anne style Lloyd's rectory in 1948 and 20 years later it burnt down.

RINGING THE CHANGES

Soon after restoration of the monarchy the provision of a new ring of bells was put in hand and this, Fladbury's first ring of six, was completed in 1700. In the 1740s' the wooden steeple collapsed but was not replaced. Then between 1750-52 tower was heightened and crowned with battlements and pinnacles. Thirty years later the church lands fund enabled the nave seating to be replaced by box pews most of which were let to various people though some were reserved for servants and free open seating provided for poor women and men and a gallery provided for the 'Psalm Singers". About the same time the nave roof was raised and the interior gained its Georgian coved ceiling. The raised walls were built in brick now visible from the yard but at the time it was hidden as both interior and exterior of the church were plastered.

Much of the above work was done during the forty years Henry Vernon was Rector. Formerly Henry Bund he had married a daughter of the Worcester branch of the wealthy Vernon family and preserving their name may have been a requirement for inheriting estates.

The enclosure of Fladbury lands also took place during Vernon's time. Agriculture was changing and the ancient open field system was seen as a barrier to progress. Farmers needed to group their holdings together instead of having separate strips in various fields. The Rectory homestead was allocated over 3 acres with a further 40 acres of glebe to which was added a further 218 acres in lieu of tithes. The extensive holdings reinforced Fladbury's status as the best living within the gift of the Bishop.

Vernon was succeeded by the Revd. Dr Fotheringham, the Archdeacon of Coventry, which at that time was within the Diocese of Worcester and then in 1793 by Martin Stafford Smith who was a son of Gloucester Cathedral Organist. He was often in residence during the Three Choirs Festival but having married the bishop of

Gloucester's widow who from an uncle had inherited Prior Park, Bath that became his main residence for his 40 years as Rector.
The care of the parish was largely left to curates among whom for his final twenty seven years was William Pruen a friend of Stafford Smith' god son, John Keeble, one of the founders of the Oxford (High Church) Movement who frequently stayed at Fladbury where he is reputed to have composed some of his hymns and poems.
Pruen was a popular and able man. He started a fee paying school and both encouraged and administered vaccination against small pox. After Stafford Smith's death he became incumbent of Snitterfield, near Stratford. A memorial on the south aisle wall tells of his death from a stroke received while preaching the sermon at an Archdeacon's visitation. The epitaph carries the warning 'Be ye also ready'. The font is a memorial to Pruen's wife Margaret who died in 1850.
Stafford Smith was a generous man committed to many Christian causes. He left £1,000 the interest of which was to provide 'coals, books, etc.' for distribution annually to the deserving poor and his widow gave some very fine communion silver in his memory. During his time, in1807 a further new ring of six, cast by Thomas Mears of London was installed. Stafford Smith was the last of the largely absentee rectors as new laws came into force requiring incumbents to reside in their parish.
Following Stafford Smith's death in 1834 the Bishop appointed the Revd. Frederick Gauntlett the first fully resident Rector for several generations. He made a lasting impression on both church and parish. Almost immediately he set about the provision of our first organ The single manual instrument built by Nicholson's of Rochdale was installed in the gallery in 1837 and opened with a recital by the cathedral assistant organist and some members of the cathedral choir.
Gauntlett was a keen supporter of universal education and the previous year parliament for the first time provided grants to assist with the building of parish schools. Fladbury's first National School, supported by subscriptions and children's payments, opened on 23rd March 1841. The master was Mr. James Wilcox and it had an average

of 60 scholars. It is likely that despite the new school a free Sunday School which provided general as well as religious education continued as that September about 130 children attended the annual Treat for School Children.

By the early 1860s the school building was described as being in poor condition, deficient in accommodation and having outgrown its purpose. Gauntlett was anxious to provide well-built National schools in both Fladbury and Wyre Piddle but these were not built until shortly after his retirement in 1863; the foundation stone for our present school being laid the following year. After his death his widow set up a trust fund for the maintenance and support of the Parochial Schools of Fladbury.

His successor **The Revd. John Haviland***,* was also enthusiastic in his support for church schools and became very involved in seeking funds to provide the new building as a result not only was the new Fladbury school opened in 1865 but Gauntlett's proposed school for Wyre Piddle also opened that September. Following the opening the Rector and curates provided church teaching and heard children read the bible while Mrs Haviland, the Rector's wife, went in to teach sewing. During Haviland's time a reading room where books and newspapers were provided to enable adults to develop their reading skills opened near the school.

Havilland was also responsible for a major restorationof the chancel and vestry. Etimated at over £1,000 the cost was the Rector's liability but John Cartwright of Craycombe House gave generous support; the new East window being entirely his gift. The chancel had to be reroofed but internally this was made a copy of the previous 15th century one and where ever possible the architect used the original timbers which included the foliage work in the spandrels and braces and wall posts carved with angels and other images.

The architect for both the new school and the church restoration was **Frederick Preedy** whose family had moved from Offenham to the Chantry House, Fladbury. Preedy became widely respected and built up a considerable practice with a main office in London. He was an able artist and combined with his profession as architect the design

and production of stained glass. Fladbury has ten of his windows, most being memorials to various members of his family. These are of particular interest as they span much of his career and show how his style developed. The chancel East window is regarded as one of his finest.

In 1870, five years after the restoration of the chancel, an agreement was made to end the pew rent system. A faculty was granted *"to remove all galleries, the organ, the pews in the nave and aisles and to reseat with open seats, to move the tomb now in the centre of the church and place it in the tower, to take up the present floors and to repave the same and to a erect a new pulpit."* The organ was moved to a new organ chamber on the south side of the Chancel.

In 1877 Haviland moved to Hartlebury and the new Rector was **the Revd. William Campbell,** a nephew of the bishop. This prompted letters to the press one of which read *"I am disposed to infer that among the clergy in this wide diocese a suitable person could not be found, for I am satisfied by the fact of Mr Campbell being married to a niece of the bishop would not have had any influence on the mind of that prelate in marking him out for promotion.* Throughout his 25 years as Rector Campbell continued to provide the press with good copy, He died in 1903 and is buried close to the chancel of his church. He had lived to see the organ considerably enlarged and opened in 1902 which provides a good note on which to end this account of the church, its building, parish and clergy. Much of the 20th century is well remembered by some who still live here.

FURTHER MATERIAL FROM EYRE.

Other Fladbury cases also appears among the records of the Great Eyre including the murder of David, the son of Robert the Fladbury miller, who was killed when Robert Gorwy struck him on the head with his staff. Gorwy fled to Fladbury church where he swore an oath before the coroner and confessed his deed. He forfeited his goods, valued at 40s. 3d. but then strayed off his path (went outside the area of sanctuary) was pursued and executed.

In a further case Henry of Weston was shown to have killed 'David of Fladbury' but he fled the scene of his crime and was outlawed. His chattels amounting to 10 marks were forfeited. After a time he presents himself to the court and produces a charter by Henry 111 showing that the king had pardoned him. Such charters were often granted as a reward for serving in the King's army and Weston may well have enlisted. He later pays a fine of 10 marks to have his chattels restored