

Inhabiting the space: the first minister

Background

To begin with St Philip and St James was a chapel of ease in a district chapelry staffed by a perpetual curate.

To explain those terms, a chapel of ease was a church building provided for the convenience of the local population, a district chapelry was an area carved out a large parish, in this case Churchdown.

And a perpetual curate was a 19th-century Anglican parish priest who was the permanent minister of a church not served by a rector or vicar. Not a role that made anyone rich. The opposite in fact. You needed a private income in order to be able to live as a perpetual curate. And the Hucclecote living was poorer than most: it was reported at the time that it was worth just the dividends from £1,000 invested in public funds. And in 1856 that amounted to £32.

On the other hand a house had been purchased for the church. This is now 88 – 90 Hucclecote Road, which started out as one house for the minister with attached glebe land, a small holding which included dairies and pigsties intended to provide extra income.

The first minister: Thomas Sherwood

And the first member of the clergy to move in and take up the challenge was Rev Thomas Sherwood, who was a widower in his 50s on his arrival, and who was to stay until 1857.

Thomas Sherwood was born in St Olav's Southwark, London in 1798 the second son of Thomas Edward Sherwood a solicitor and parliamentary agent. He attended Merchant Taylor's, a boys' public school then in the city. He moved on from there to the Inner Temple in 1824 to train to be a barrister. He married Anna, the eldest daughter of Robert Ray Esq of Montague Place in London in 1827 and a daughter, Anna was born in 1831. He was called to the Bar in 1833.

He then had a change of direction and entered Downing College, Cambridge as a mature student in 1835 from where he graduated with a BA in 1839 and MA in 1843. He was ordained Deacon in Gloucester in May 1839, and later that same year he was ordained Priest. Also in 1839 he was appointed perpetual curate of Oxenhall in Gloucestershire, where he stayed until 1848. In 1841 he was also appointed vicar of Pauntley, Gloucestershire.

At some point in the 1840s his wife died, and at the time of the 1851 census he was living in Chipping Sodbury, and described as a clergyman without a parish or other role. However later that same year he was appointed to Hucclecote, and one of his first acts was to loan the church a harmonium. Also soon after his arrival he presented the recently built Hillsley Church, Wotton under Edge with a new Communion table covered in Genoa velvet, and was said to have preached an 'eloquent and impressive' sermon at that church's consecration.

He was also a Steward of the 1856 (Gloucester) Three Choirs Festival, alongside 35 others – among the great and the good of the county - and his daughter was listed among the charity money collectors. At that time the Festival stewards were the sole executive officers, with full responsibility for promoting, organising and advertising the Festivals, but they had the additional burden of making up any financial deficit there might be.

Thomas Sherwood was also present at a Fishpools Diocesan Training College subscriber/donor meeting in 1857 (The school had opened as Teacher Training College in 1853).

And then in the Gloucestershire Chronicle of May 30 1857 he is reported to have resigned from Hucclecote due to ill health. 'Some of his parishioners determined a day or two ago to present him with some mark of their respect. A subscription was immediately entered into to which the old and young, the affluent and poor, alike contributed, and a handsome silver inkstand was purchased, and was last evening presented to the Reverend gentleman in the village schoolroom. A handsome flower stand was at the same time presented to his daughter, Miss Sherwood.'

Thomas Sherwood is known to have kept some property in the village after his departure, and to have occasionally visited his successor in his retirement. He is also known to have spent money on the children of the village.

His son married in 1859 and his daughter in 1862, the latter at Holy Trinity Brompton in London – so clearly a posh do. He eventually sold his Hucclecote property in 1863. By this time he was living in Torquay, but by the time of his death in 1870 he was living in Canterbury.