

# The Advowson of Redmarley D'Abitot

An "advowson" was the right to appoint a person as Rector of a Church of England living, giving the appointee an income (from the tithes, farming the glebe land and any other attached rights) and a rectory to live in, usually for life. An advowson was saleable and accordingly could be valuable if the income was large and the rectory desirable.

In his History of Redmarley the Rev H M Niblett lists the owners of the advowson (the "Patrons") at the time of the appointment of incumbents, but it now appears that the list was slightly inaccurate and had several omissions of patrons during the seventeenth century. It seems he was following the entry for the advowson in the Victoria County History (VCH) for Worcestershire (<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=43157>) which is similarly inaccurate.

We know this thanks to a bundle of deeds relating to the transmission of the advowson since 1598. When the Fowlers bought the Old Rectory from the diocese in 1964, Jeremy Fowler pestered the then Rector, Paul Young, for the title deeds to the house. Eventually he received them and it transpired that they were the deeds relating to the sale and transmission of the advowson (although because appointment as Rector gave the right to live in the Rectory, they probably constituted the title deeds to the house as well).

I have transcribed these deeds and deposited the originals with the Gloucester Diocesan archives which are handled by the County Archive Office in Alvin Street. The descent of the Advowson since 1598 is shown in the following schedule:

	<i>Date</i>	<i>Parties</i>	<i>Transaction details</i>	<i>No of Pages</i>
1	2nd Feb 1598	<i>1st Party</i> Thomas Gresley, Richard Bartlett & William Horton (?? Trustees for the Crown)	Sold for £100	6
		<i>2nd party</i> William Teynton		
2	24th Feb 1627	<i>1st Party</i> William Teynton	Sold for £141	2
		<i>2nd party</i> James Jauncy		
3	15th June 1632	<i>1st Party</i> James Jauncy	Sold for £200	2
		<i>2nd party</i> Thomas Hackett		
4	20th July 1642	<i>1st Party</i> Thomas Hackett	Sold for £600	3
		<i>2nd party</i> Henry Jack(e)son(s)		
5	5th June 1665	<i>1st Party</i> Henry & Mercy Jacksons & Decimus Jacksons	Marriage settlement & transfer to wife's trustees for £300	3
		<i>2nd party</i> Francis Russell & John Russell		
<i>Descent by inheritance is assumed to ↓</i>				
6	23rd Nov 1739	<i>1st Party</i> Thomas Jackson & Mary	Sold for £430	4
		<i>2nd party</i> Francis Morton		
7	26th Nov 1739	<i>1st Party</i> Thomas Jackson & Mary	Quitclaim certificate - 2 identical copies	1
		<i>2nd party</i> Francis Morton		

8	30th April 1754	1st Party	Francis Morton	Gift to son	3
		2nd party	John Morton		
9	25th Mar 1758	1st Party	John Morton	Marriage settlement	7
		2nd party	Anne Bateson		
		3rd party	Wm Skinner & Wm Bateson		
10	2nd July 1788		John Morton	Attested copy of will, leaving advowson to his 2 nieces Fanny & Kitty	9
11	30th Dec 1797	1st Party	Fanny Whitcombe	Deed of Lease prior to marriage settlement	3
		2nd party	John Howe, Jas Brasier & John Grant		
12	31st Dec 1797	1st Party	George Monro	Marriage settlement & deed of Release	21 & 2
		2nd party	Fanny Whitcombe		
		3rd party	John Howe, Jas Brasier & John Grant		
13	28th April 1800	1st Party	James Brasier & John Grant	Fanny's half of the advowson sold to Kitty for £1500	9
		2nd party	George Monro and Fanny		
		3rd party	Kitty Niblett Widow		
14	3rd Nov 1800	1st Party	Kitty Niblett Widow	Quitclaim certificate - 2 identical copies	1
		2nd party	George Monro and Fanny		
15	29th July 1837	1st Party	Kitty Niblett Widow	Sold to son for an annuity of £220 p.a.	3
		2nd party	Daniel John Niblett		

*Thereafter descent by inheritance to the Niblett family is assumed*

Should anyone wish to see the transcriptions, they are readily available as Word documents.

Some interesting points arose during the transcription.

## 1 Corrections to the ownership of the advowson

VCH suggests that the Crown owned the advowson until 1610, when, under James I, it passed to William Teynton. In fact the 1598 deed (Deed no. 1) makes clear that the Crown (presumably represented by the three names mentioned as trustees) sold it during Elizabeth's reign to Teynton and thus he was patron at the appointment of Thomas Baldwin as Rector in 1608.

The "unclear" descent referred to by VCH can now be clarified. The advowson passed by purchase through the hands of James Jauncy (Deed no. 2) and Thomas Hackett (Deed no. 3) before coming into the possession of the Jackson family.

## 2 The Whitcombe sisters

The Whitcombe sisters play an interesting part in the history of the advowson. They were the three daughters of the Rev John Morton's sister, Elizabeth, and were Fanny, Judith and Kitty. Judith made what John Morton, Rector from 1750 to 1789, referred to in his will (Deed no. 10) as an "unfortunate" (and in a parish register entry, "unhappy") marriage to William Hicks. She seems to have left him and according to the same entry in the parish register lived at the "parsonage house" (presumably the present Old Rectory) for 17 years until her death in 1787.

At the time of John Morton's will in 1788, Hicks was still receiving an annuity of £100 from Judith's parents as part of the marriage settlement made some 20 years earlier .

The will left the advowson and landed property at Eastnor and Redmarley to John Howe, Morton's nephew by another sister, with a remainder to the two surviving Whitcombe sisters, Fanny and Kitty (by then married to John Niblett of Haresfield), should John Howe die without issue. The will contained an instruction that his executors should appoint his nephew as Rector after his death and Michael Biddulph duly did so, but as executor and not as patron as VCH implies.

But Fanny's marriage settlement of 1797 (Deed no. 12) reveals that Fanny and Kitty were wealthy in their own right, having inherited from their father (and split the deceased Judith's share between them) land in Worcestershire, Shropshire and Herefordshire, together with land in Norfolk from John Morton's will. In addition to all that, the settlement describes Fanny as being "entitled to a personal estate..... of several thousand pounds".

John Howe, Rector from 1789 to 1800, did die without children and the sisters duly inherited. Thus it was George Monro, Fanny's husband and therefore legal owner of the advowson, who appointed James Commeline Snr as Rector in 1800. Kitty Niblett bought out her sister's half of the advowson later that year (Deed no. 13) and appointed James Commeline Jnr in 1836. In 1837 she transferred it to her son (Deed no. 15).

### 3 The Commelines

Was there a connection between the Nibletts and the Commelines? Presumably the family would know. Commeline Snr's father was vicar of Haresfield for 40 years in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and Haresfield was where the Niblett family, into whom Kitty married at that time, lived for many generations. Both families seemed to have an inclination towards Pembroke College, Oxford. After Commelines Jnr died in 1853, the Rectors were appointed from the Niblett family.

*Postscript:* It is well known that James Commeline Jnr, Rector from 1836 to 1853, burned himself to death while reading in bed. He was a Fellow of St John's College Cambridge before taking up the Rectory here and was a considerable classical scholar, judging from the correspondence he had with Elizabeth Barrett Browning about the metre of ancient Greek poetry. In the late 1990s, Jennifer and Angela Niblett, daughters of the last Niblett Rector, paid a visit to the Old Rectory where they had been brought up. I showed them round and when they came into a room which now serves as a bathroom, one said to the other "Isn't this the room where Jimmy Commeline burned himself to death?" - as though it had been last week rather than 140 years earlier!