

# Our Congham Rectors By Stephanie Hall © 2023

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## Our Medieval Rectors

The rectors of the Middle Ages were rectors but “not as we know them”. These men, who were ordained clerics, were appointed by the lord who bestowed the parish as a living i.e. to give the recipient an income. They were very likely to be of the gentry or nobility, quite probably a younger son, and they gained income from the parish church rather than from tenant’s rents. The rector may have held more than one parish and he probably did not serve the parish in person. There were some rectors who were local men and may have been more likely to serve in person but as they would have had to pay for training they were probably of the better sort. The rector appointed a deputy, a vicar, to serve in the parish and paid him a stipend. The vicar could be of a lower class although neither villeins nor men with a “physical defect” e.g. blindness or disability were allowed. Priests were ordained by the bishop and had to be over twenty-four years of age.

The job encompassed many roles. We may believe the pastoral aspect of priesthood to be a modern invention but in the Middle Ages priests were expected to be teachers (of basic religious beliefs and liturgy) and to guide the congregation on subjects ranging from motherhood to magic neither of which they were presumably expert on. The pay was not large and money from the church land, the glebe, went to the rector. The vicar’s stipend was augmented by small amounts of alms payable on different occasions in the year. Although some medieval writers, William of Malmsbury for instance, described the clergy as inebriate, Chaucer’s parson is described as a genuinely good man, living in poverty but rich in holy thoughts and deeds, making sure to practice what he preaches. He is the only devout churchman in the company and is perhaps Chaucer’s idea of an ideal parish priest. It is to be hoped that Congham was blessed with some of these.

Congham originally had three churches. The late Saxon All Saints’ church, probably the one mentioned in Domesday, has long been lost ; seventy years ago archeology and the excavation of a Saxon cemetery suggested it was probably five hundred yards west of St Andrews Church but recently that has been questioned. St Mary’s, which possibly stood close to St Andrews, opened before the fourteenth century and was amalgamated with St Andrews at the end of the seventeenth century when the church was already described as delapidated.

Sadly there is only sparse information on the men who held the rectorship before the Reformation. John de Staunton, rector in 1349 may not have ever visited Congham as his family lands were in Leicestershire; Richard Peyntour, rector one hundred years later in 1439, does seem to have been a Norfolk man as the evidence on him shows him appearing as a juror in Thetford and in Castle Acre.

The rectors on the biography list are those from 1600 who have been easier to research.

## **Rectors List from 1300**

- 1300, *Ralph de Sprouston*, presented by *Reginald de Sprouston*.
- 1305, *Reginald de Fakenham*, by *Reginald de Sprouston*.
- 1329, *Alan de Wesenham*, by *Reginald de Baldeswelle*.
- 1343, *Peter de Felthorp*, by *Reginald de Sprouston*.
- 1349, *Richard Kiffold*, by *Thomas de Baldeswell*.
- 1367, *Richard Thurkeld*, by *Adam Humphrey of Refham*:
- 1385, *Gregory Bolour*, by *Adam Humphrey of Refham*:
- 1388, *Ralph Gosfeld*, (on an exchange for *North Rungton*) by *Adam Pyk*.
- 1400, *Ralph de Lenton*, by *Edward Belytter*.
- 1416, *Adam Rougham*, by *John Spicet*, burgess of *Lynn*.
- 1448, *Roger Ashton*, by *Thomas Daniel*, Esq.
- 1462, *Thomas Moot*, by the Bishop of *Norwich*, a lapse.
- 1472, *Robert Smith*, by the Bishop of *Norwich*, a lapse.
- 1475, *John Cossey*, by *Henry Woodhouse*, Esq.
- 1479, *William Halysdale*, by *Sir Edward Wodehouse*, Knt.
- 1482, *Nicholas Palmer*, by *Henry Colet*, citizen of *London*.
- 1485, *John Askugh*, by *Henry Colet*, citizen of *London*.
- 1487, *Henry Symson*, by *Sir Henry Colet*, Knt. In *September*, 1497, the Bishop of *Norwich* granted to the inhabitants of *Congham* parish, his letters patent, to gather the alms of the city and diocese of *Norwich*, to re-edify *St Andrew's* church.
- 1504, *Thomas Cook*, by *Sir Thomas Wodehouse*.
- 1522, *Thomas Dale*, by *Sir Thomas Wodehouse*. *Thomas Sele*.
- 1552, *Cuthbert Heymersham*, by *Humphrey Jordan*, Gentleman.
- 1580, *James Dewhurst*, by *Humphrey Bastard*.
- 1595, *Edmund Mundeford*, by *Henry Spilman*, Esq.
- 1619, *Townesend Wilson*, by *Henry Spilman*, Knt.
- 1638, *Townesend Wilson*, by *Sir John Spilman*, Knt.
- 1673, *Valentine Husband*, by *Roger Spilman of Holme*, Esq.
- 1684, *Charles Spilman*, by *Charles Spilman*; in this year, *St Andrew's* church was consolidated with that of *St. Mary's*.
- 1706, *Richard Flack*, by *Samuel Flack*, Esq.
- 1715, *Charles Foster*, by *Dorothy Flack*, widow of *Richard Flack*
- 1731, *Charles Squier*, A. M. on *Foster's* death.
- 1752, *Edmund Nelson*, by *Mrs. Bridget Squier*, widow of *Charles Squire*
- 1795 *John Brett*

1811 *James Nelson by Elizabeth Foster Nelson (his mother)*

1839 *William Hepworth by James Jarvis Gentleman of Lynn*

1841 *Joseph Wright by John Roper (His father-in-law)*

1856 *William Howlett*

1862 *Thomas White Holmes*

1872 *Thomas Kersley by Elizabeth Josephine Kersley (his wife & the daughter of Rev Joseph Wright.)*

1882 *Richard Haking*

1893 *Stewart Roper Kersley*

1940 *David Evans*

The incumbents who followed were rectors of both Grimston and Congham and an increasingly large benefice.

1951 *Thomas Winston Daniel*

1958 *Eric Leslie Fuller*

1964 *Albert Robinson*

1974 *Esdaile Lenox Barnes*

1976 *Andrew Herbert Redding Thomas*

1984 *William Alfred Howard*

2013 *Jane M Holmes*

## Rev Edward Mundford 1542 – 1629

### Rector of St Andrew's 1595 – 1629 and St Mary's 1603 – 1629

Edward Mundford was born into a prosperous and well-known family in Feltwell. His father was Sir Osbert Mundford and his mother was Bridget Spelman. Sir Osbert had three wives with whom he had around a dozen sons and half a dozen daughters, the Cambridge records record Edward as the ninth son of this brood.

Edward entered Christ's College Cambridge in 1579. He followed two brothers – Francis who went to Trinity and Thomas who went to King's. Thomas Mundford (Moundford) became physician to Queen Elizabeth and James I and was knighted for his services. Francis went into the legal professions and practiced at the Inner Temple. Another member of the Mundford family – possibly a cousin – was at Cambridge at the same time as Edward. Francis Mundford was a student at Caius before travelling to the English College in Rome, a training college for Roman Catholic priests. Cambridge records state that Francis returned to England in 1592 and was executed soon after.

According to Cambridge records Edward was ordained in 1599 and became rector at Congham in 1603. This fits with his dates at St Mary's but not St Andrew's; unfortunately the Church of England database shows Congham rectors only from 1603 so this anomaly cannot be resolved. Edward's tenure coincides with the reign of King James and the early years of Charles I. He would have served through the turbulent years following the Gunpowder Plot under the tolerant Bishop Jigon and the not so tolerant Bishop Harsnett. Unusually for the time Bishop Harsnett, who took over in 1618, did not believe in witches; he wrote about witches and demons denying their existence and thus stopped witch hunts in the diocese. He was however anti Puritan and there is evidence that there was some persecution of Puritans in Yarmouth during his time. What Edward's own views were on witches and magic we cannot know but he would have been wise to follow the bishops opinions.

It is most likely that Edward never married as his will, made in 1628, leaves bequests to his brothers, sisters and his many nieces and nephews. Edward died in 1629 and is buried in St Andrew's Church.

## Rev Townsend Wilson 1600 - 1673

### Rector of Congham from 1629 – 1673

Townsend Wilson was not a Norfolk man, he was born in Winchcombe, Gloucestershire and was baptised there on 21st January 1600. The Wilson family were not well-off so Townsend entered Corpus Christi, Cambridge as a sizar which means that the college paid his fees but in return he was expected to take on some kind of work within the college. Sizarers were known to often do better at their studies than gentlemen and Townsend was awarded his MA in 1628.

Townsend Wilson was rector of Congham from 1629 until his death in 1673. During that time he served six Bishops of Norwich. Congham is at the far reaches of the diocese but it was probably always prudent to be aware of – and not too out of step with – the prevailing views at the cathedral. When Townsend Wilson arrived the bishop was Bishop Francis White, a high churchman who dedicated his book called “*A Treatise of the Sabbath Day*” to the powerful Archbishop Laud. Townsend discovered that his clerical neighbour at St Botolph’s Grimston, was Thomas Thorowgood. Thomas Thorowgood must have been a much respected cleric and theologian as in 1643 he became a member of the Assembly of Divines but when Townsend arrived he probably knew or found out only that Rev Thorowgood was a “strong Puritan” and “a man of considerable learning”<sup>1</sup>. Whether the two clergy men ever met or socialised is unknown. From the death of Bishop White in 1631 the diocese enjoyed several years of ease as Bishop Robert Corbet was a man who did not believe in religious persecution. He was a studious and jolly man who wrote poetry and had many friends. In his own day, Corbet's reputation as an author was high and his poems were circulated widely in manuscript. Having this witty and charming man as bishop gave all priests a breathing space in times which were already becoming difficult. As the King became more desperate for money and issued writs for Ship Money, Matthew Wren, Sir Christopher’s uncle – was appointed as Bishop of Norwich. He did not last long. After only four years he left to go and serve Ely from where he was arrested and spent years in the Tower of London. Bishops Wren’s two successors – Bishops Hall and Reynolds – both tried to steer a middle way and were both only rescued by Laud’s intervention although Bishop Joseph Hall did spend six months in the Tower. In truth, bishops, like clergymen and local gentry were wondering which way the wind was going to blow and what would be the outcome. In 1646 the Episcopate was abolished.

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<sup>1</sup> Goodall, “History of Grimston Church” p.10

The unfortunate Rev Townsend Wilson had to lead his parishioners through the most turbulent years the church had ever known and I have simplified this journey to show how the changes would have impacted St Andrew's and the congregation. (see Rev Townsend Wilson's Journey). In an area which was strongly Parliamentary Congham had links with the Le Strange, Morduant and other Royalist families and Townsend had to manage this position. He also had to try to keep his flock calm and Godly.

By 1670 Bishop Reynolds was the new Bishop of Norwich. He had been at the Assembly of the Divines but he was a man who favoured a moderate episcopacy and wrote the prayer of Thanksgiving for the church. The Book of Common Prayer was back, there was some kind of "normality". In 1670, at seventy years old Townsend married. He must have felt quite battle weary so it was especially good that on 2 May 1670 he married Mrs Elizabeth Bircham, a widow of Congham. It is to be hoped that they enjoyed three happy peaceful years together before he died in 1673.



**Rev Townsend Wilson's Journey**  
**Rector from 1629 - 1673**  
**Who led his parishioners through turbulent years.**

**King Charles I**  
**1625 - 1649**

Laud becomes archbishop and church becomes "higher".

Incense and sacred music returned.

Preaching of any Puritan theological ideas banned.



1644 – Book of Common Prayer replaced by Directory of Worship

**Rule by Parliament and Cromwell**

Persecution of Puritan laymen like John Lilburne.

Book of Sports allow sports on Sunday. Fewer sermons.



Rev Wilson listed as "preacher" at the church during interregnum.

1646 – Bishops abolished.

1650 and 1653 – Acts for religious tolerance. No requirement to attend Anglican Church

1654 Cromwellian Church – inadequate priests sacked by "Eiectors"



1900 clergy ejected for refusing to take oath agreeing to Act of Uniformity

Clarendon Code – measures against non-conformists.

Book of Common Prayer back via Act of Uniformity. 1662. Bishops restored.

**1660 – Charles II**



**Rev Townsend Wilson died on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1673**

## **Rev Valentine Husband 1625-1683**

### **Rector of Congham 1673-1683**

Valentine Husband was born in Catfield, Norfolk in 1625. His father was Christopher (1574 – 1625) who attended Caius Collage and was, it seems, wealthy enough to donate to the library and live as a gentleman on estates centred at Honing. At the time of Valentine's birth Christopher was already fifty years of age which at that time would have been regarded as quite advanced in years and he died in 1634 when Valentine was only eight years old. Valentine went to school in North Walsham and in Norwich and in 1644 entered his father's old college, Caius as a pensioner i.e. paying for being at the university. Valentine was awarded his BA in 1647, his MA in 1651 and ordained deacon and priest in 1654 by Bishop Joseph Hall, bishop of Norwich. Bishop Joseph was bishop from 1641 until 1656 and throughout this time of extreme religious turmoil strove to maintain the Church of England in a middle way. He was interrogated by Archbishop Laud's agents (for being too lenient with Puritans) and spent six months in the Tower of London. He was fortunate to retire in 1656 when the episcopacy was abolished.

Valentine married Ann Dey at Little Walsingham on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1657. In 1661 Valentine was appointed rector of Sloley and in 1672 rector of Crostwight close to Honing. It appears that Ann did not live long and that Valentine married a lady called Thomasine. This is clear from baptism records of Valentine Jnr (born 1668) Thomasine (1669) and Nicholas (1672) on which the mother's name is Thomasine. Valentine came to Congham in 1673 bringing his wife the three small children with him. Valentine junior went to school in King's Lynn for several years and to Cambridge the year after his father's death.

Rev Valentine Husband died in 1683 and was buried in Congham. Thomasine died in 1687 and she was also buried in Congham.

## Rev Charles Spelman 1626 – 1706

### Rector of Congham 1684 – 1706

Charles Spelman came from West Norfolk gentry/aristocracy. His paternal grandfather was Sir Henry Spelman, an MP and writer of historical and religious texts who had married into the Le Strange family. Sir Henry was a staunch Royalist and high churchman and an associate of Archbishop Laud. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, a portrait of him remains in the National Gallery. His maternal grandparents were Sir John Townsend and Lady Townsend of Raynham. When Charles' father John and his mother Anne wanted to get married Lady Townsend was not in agreement. It is probable that she thought Anne was marrying beneath her as her objections to the match were financial. By this time Sir John Townsend was dead (he died from injuries received in a duel) and Anne had money which Lady Townsend feared the Spelmans would use to pay off debts accrued by old Sir Henry. Despite this the couple married and by 1621 Sir Henry was financially sound enough to settle a substantial sum on the couple and Sir Roger Townsend (Anne's brother) had four thousand pounds in trust for them. Thus having been them 'a gazing stock and table talk to the whole town' (according to Sir John) the family were more settled by the time of Charles' birth in Heydon in 1626.

Two years later Charles' father set off for "foreign parts" actually France and Italy. Before he left he drafted his will clearly believing a trip to Europe to be a dangerous undertaking but fortunately he returned safely. Although Sir John had studied at Brasenose College, Oxford and had entered Gray's Inn we know little of what he did in the 1630s but he did write a biography of Alfred the Great which was published after his death. In the civil war Sir John supported the king. Some sources say that he was at Oxford in 1641 but in February 1643 he told Sir John Potts that he had always tried to keep the war out of Norfolk. It is claimed that the king had told Sir John to remain in Norfolk but he fled to Oxford, to his old college Brasenose, where he died of Camp Fever in July 1643 and was buried at St Mary's Oxford. The following year Charles went to Oxford to study at Caius. His brother Roger also studied at Caius.

Charles matriculated in 1645 and we have no information about him until 1668. We do not know how he coped with the interregnum apart from the fact that his mother Anne died in 1656. In 1668 Charles married Katherine Swall in Norwich, there is another large gap in his life until his older brother Roger died and was buried at Congham in 1678. His memorial is still in the church.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1683 Charles was ordained priest in his early fifties, in 1684 he and Katherine came to Congham. That year they had their first son called Robert who was followed by two girls – Dorothy born in 1685 and Anne in 1687 by which time her father was sixty. Both of the girls died in childhood - Anne was aged three when she died in 1688 and Dorothy aged seven when she died in 1694. Both were buried in Congham churchyard Katherine, despite being many years younger than Charles predeceased him by one year.

She died in 1705 and was buried at Congham on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1705. Charles died the following September and was also buried in the churchyard; he was aged eighty. Charles' years at Congham encompassed both the Glorious Revolution in 1688 and the Act of Toleration in 1691 but there is no evidence how he reacted to either. During his time as rector Charles was able to see the completion of a Spelman chapel which stood on the north side of the nave until the 1890s.

Charles' son Robert died in 1723 and is also buried at Congham.

**Rev Richard Flack 1675 – 1715**  
**Rector of Congham 1706 – 1715**

Richard Flack was born in 1675, baptised on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1675 in Salle, Norfolk. His father Samuel was rector of the huge church of St Peter and St Paul built by the wealthiest families in the area in the fifteenth century. Even in Samuel's time the population of Salle was never large enough to fill the church but there was some kudos in being incumbent at such a large and erstwhile wealthy church. Richard's mother Bridget was the daughter of Henry Luce. Henry was rector of Oxnead and Buxton, his own grandfather Robert Luce had been one of the original chaplains at Salle so Richard was closely linked to the great church on both sides of his family.

Samuel had been educated at Pembroke College, Cambridge, Richard followed his father there and was ordained in 1699. In 1703 Samuel presented his son as rector of Great Fransham and three years later in 1706, as rector of Congham. Pluralism - holding more than one living simultaneously – was a way for clergy to increase their income. The rector would have used salaried curates to do the extra work. Officially, it was frowned upon but as in the case of Richard Flack it certainly happened – and not as an exception either. To be a pluralist required sufficient “interest” (i.e. patronage) be presented to the second living and to persuade the diocesan bishop to accept and confirm the presentation. The Flack and Luce families clearly had friends in the right places to arrange this.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1708 Richard married Dorothy Burlingham at Salle. In 1709 their son Thomas was born at Thornage near Holt, where Dorothy had family connections and their daughter Bridget one year later in Congham. Three more children followed; Dorothy was born in 1712 but died at birth and was buried on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1712 and Samuel was born in 1713. At the beginning of 1715 Dorothy was expecting another baby when on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1715, Richard unexpectedly died at the age of forty. He had not made a will and Dorothy had to take on administration of his estate assisted by a bondsman, Thomas Burlingham her brother. Richard was buried at Congham on 25<sup>th</sup> March, recorded in the burial register as “Master of Clerks and late Fellow of Pembroke Hall Cambridge”.

The baby, a little girl whom Dorothy named Ellen was born in the summer but sadly died the following year.

## Rev Charles Foster – around 1670 – 1723

### Rector of Congham 1715 – 1723

Little is known about Charles Foster's early life. He was born around 1670 in London; his family must have been well-to-do as before going to Cambridge he was a pupil at Eton College. He entered King's College Cambridge in 1701, until 1861 only Etonians could be admitted to King's. Richard was a fellow of King's from 1704 and was ordained in 1708.



### Kings College

The following year he became rector of Great Fransham, in this he was following his predecessor Rev Flack. In 1715 Richard copied the Rev Flack again and became rector of Congham.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1716 Charles was married in Holt. His bride was Dorothy Flack the widow of Charles Flack his predecessor at Congham. Dorothy was still a comparatively young woman, probably around thirty (Charles would have been well into his forties) and was a potentially good rector's wife having had experience in the role. She and Charles had three children baptised in Congham - Michael baptised 4<sup>th</sup> January 1717, Dorothy baptised 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1722 and between these two Charles baptised 26 April 1718 and buried just before his first birthday on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1719.

Sadly Charles did not have much time with his two young children as he died in 1723 and was buried in Congham on 1<sup>st</sup> June.

Following Charles' death Dorothy presented the next rector Benjamin Squire. She died in 1731.

## **Rev Benjamin Squire 1658 – 1731**

### **Rector of Congham 1723 -1731**

Benjamin Squire was not a local man. He was born in Hoby, Leicestershire in 1658. It is possible that his father was a clergyman (he was a student at Trinity College, Cambridge and was ordained) but this is uncertain. The Squire family were not wealthy; when Benjamin entered Magdalene College he entered as a sizar which means that the college paid his fees but in return he was expected to take on some kind of work within the college. Sizar were known to do better at their studies than gentlemen possibly from necessity of earning a living.

Benjamin was ordained in 1683 in Norwich and was appointed curate at Great Massingham. In 1690 he was given the living of Great Massingham, became rector and appointed a curate. With this assistance secured he took on the role of vicar at Middleton which he retained until 1697. Pluralism - holding more than one living simultaneously – was a way for clergy to increase their income. The rector would have used salaried curates to do the extra work as Benjamin was initially doing at Massingham. Officially, it was frowned upon but it certainly happened and was not exceptional. To be a pluralist required sufficient “interest” (i.e. patronage) be presented to the second living and to persuade the diocesan bishop to accept and confirm the presentation.

During Benjamin’s time at Middleton he married Francesca Franklin on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1693 in All Saints South Lynn. Although the couple married in King’s Lynn Francesca’s father was a priest at Tittleshall. Benjamin and Francesca had two sons born in Middleton – Benjamin Jnr in 1694 and Charles in 1696. A third son, John was born in Massingham in 1700.

Benjamin became rector of Congham in 1723. By that time Charles had followed his father, entered Trinity as a sizar in 1713 and been ordained in 1720 and John was doing his MA at Caius having entered in 1716. There is no evidence of what happened to Benjamin Jnr, it is possible that he died in childhood. Benjamin Snr maintained the two parishes of Congham and Great Massingham until his death in 1731.

Benjamin Squire died in the summer of 1731 and was buried at Great Massingham on 17<sup>th</sup> July of that year. His wife Francesca, although fourteen years younger than her husband, died just nine months later and was laid to rest with him at Great Massingham on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1732.

## **Rev Charles Squire 1696 – 1752**

### **Rector of Congham 1731 – 1752**

Charles Squire was a child of the vicarage; he was born in Middleton when his father Benjamin was vicar there. By the time Benjamin was appointed rector at Congham in 1723 Charles was already away at Cambridge. He went into Trinity College as a sizar (as his father had done before him) in November 1713, was awarded his BA in 1717 and his MA in 1721. He was ordained deacon in 1720 and priest two years later in 1722. Charles did not go straight into the clergy, instead he became a teacher; he was head of the King's Lynn Grammar School for nine years.

In 1730 Charles married Bridget Flack in Congham. Bridget was the second child of a previous rector of Congham, Rev Richard Flack. She had been only five years old when her father died and was raised by her mother Dorothy who lived just long enough to see her daughter married. Charles and Bridget had a difficult start to marriage as her mother and his father died in the same year; it was probably a comfort to Bridget to move back into her early years home when Charles was given the living at Congham.

Bridget was about fifteen years younger than her new husband – this seems to have been quite usual in clerical marriages. Despite being a young wife and being married to Charles for over twenty years the Squires remained childless which must have been a source of sadness to both of them. Charles was a man who was highly thought of. He was, according to his memorial in the church, honest, worthy and learned. He was also said to be a very good friend and a most pleasant companion so we can hope that he and Bridget had a companionable and happy marriage.

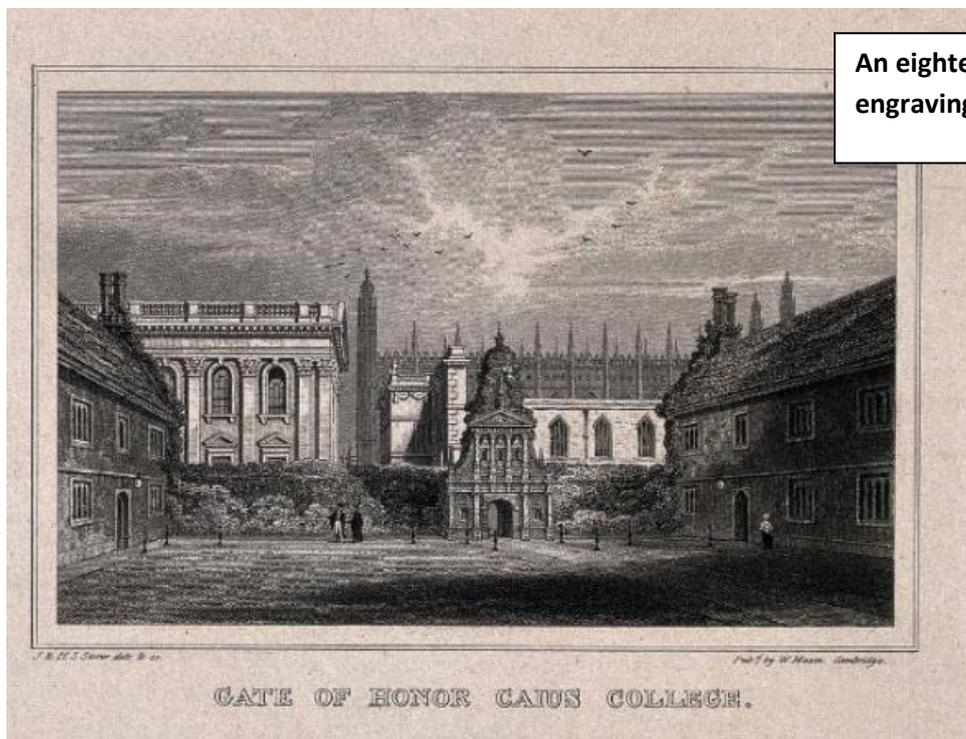
Charles died in 1752; he was aged fifty-six which would have been an expected life span at that time. Charles was buried in Congham and has a ledger stone in the church.

## Rev Edmund Nelson 1725 – 1795

### Rector of Congham 1752 – 1795

The Nelsons were a very large family in Norfolk many of whom were clergymen; Edmund's grandfather William and his uncle Edmund were both rectors in Norfolk and Edmund was a cousin of Lord Horatio Nelson's father. Edmund's parents were Thomas Nelson and Barbara Overman and they were parents to nine or ten children. Barbara died very soon after Edmund's birth on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1725. She was not quite thirty but was no doubt exhausted by a pregnancy every year.

On July 6<sup>th</sup> 1743 Edmund entered Caius College Cambridge as a sizar which appears to be the university route taken by a large number of clergymen. Edmund was awarded his BA in 1746 and his MA in 1750. He was ordained in that same year.



In 1752 Bridget Squire, the widow of Charles Squire the previous incumbent, presented Edmund Nelson as rector of Congham. Three years later on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1755 Edmund married Bridget Squire. At the time of their marriage Bridget was forty-five and Edmund thirty. It is impossible to fathom the reasons behind this marriage (it is after all possible that he had fallen in love with an older woman who was also, in a way, a benefactor) but it is to be hoped that it was a happy one as they were married for twenty-four years before Bridget died on 20<sup>th</sup> November 1779.

On 6th November 1782 Edmund married his second wife Elizabeth Foster at Hillington. Elizabeth was more than twenty years younger than her husband and between 1784 and 1791 the couple had two sons and a daughter – Edmund had become a father in middle age. During that time Edmund took over as rector of South Wootton (in 1789). Rectors of

Congham were inclined to pluralism - holding more than one living simultaneously and the Nelson family would certainly have had sufficient "interest" (i.e. patronage) to persuade the diocesan bishop to accept and confirm the presentation.

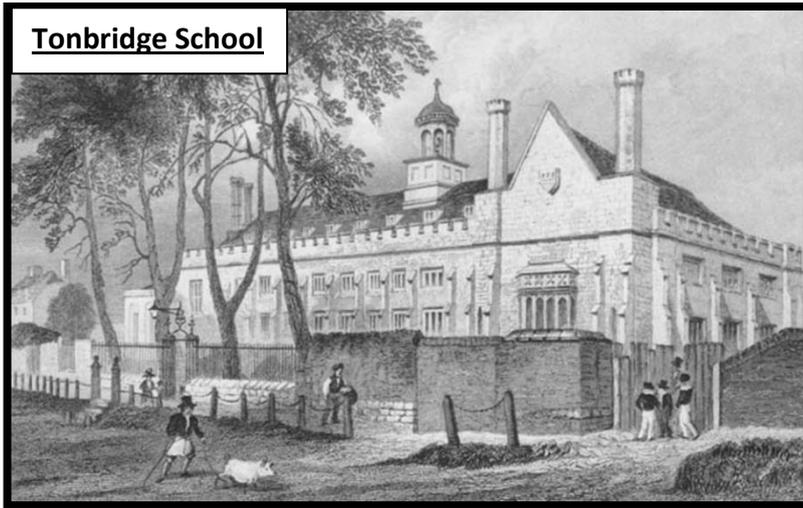
Rev Edmund Nelson died on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1795 and was buried in Congham. His much younger wife Elizabeth lived until 1817; she is buried in St Andrews with a large ledger stone which reads: *Her life was an example of Piety to God and affection to her children which may be equalled but cannot be surpassed.*

Elizabeth and Edmund's daughter married Thomas Hornbuckle, a clergyman and lived until 1870. Their son James Rose Nelson became a clergyman and a rector of Congham; their other son, Charles Foster Nelson, signed up in the navy three weeks before the Battle of Trafalgar. He died in Derwent River Tasmania aged thirty-two in 1823.

## Rev John Brett 1743-1816

### Rector of Congham 1795 - 1811

John Brett was born in Reigate, Surrey and was baptised on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1743 at St Mary's Church. John's father was also called John and He was also a clergyman so, the register notes, was able to baptise his own child. John attended school at Tonbridge. It was not far from Reigate but in the pre-railway days he would have boarded. At that time it was a small school with under one hundred boys. The headmaster in John's time was Rev James



Cawthorne; being interested in literature and seeing himself as a poet in the style of Pope, Rev Cawthorne persuaded the governors to build a large new library which was opened whilst John was at the school and which remains in use today.

In 1762 John entered Queen's College Cambridge and was ordained in 1765. He was appointed curate at Hougham with Mareston, a village in Lincolnshire. Two years later he became the rector there. John stayed at Mareston for nine years and then moved to become vicar at Oakington. John Brett is not the only one of Grimston's rectors to serve time at Oakington because, like Grimston, it was a living in the gift of Queen's College. If John was awaiting a more profitable parish with a rectory rather than a vicarage, it was fortunate that the Rev Cooper of Grimston died and in 1777 John Brett became rector of Grimston. The same year John married Louisa Wright in Hackney, London. The couple had at least three children – those there are records for are Louisa (born 1779) John (born 1780) and Elizabeth (born 1785). In 1795, still rector of Grimston, John also became rector of Congham and he held that job until 1811. As the son of a rector coming from a well-off family John probably had social links which allowed him to hold more than one living. Meanwhile John and Louisa's son John followed his father to Queen's and into the church. He was ordained deacon in 1805 but not ordained as priest until some twenty years later, after his father's death. John Jnr held a succession of jobs as a curate around his home area. In 1805 he was curate at Congham, in 1814 he became a curate covering both Grimston and Ingoldisthorpe (the home village of his wife Marianne Davy) and in 1817 he moved to Dersingham and Wolferton. Whether he had hoped to take on the role of rector

at Grimston after his father's death we don't know but in fact he did not become a rector until 1831 when he became rector of Dersingham and Wolferton.



St Swithun's Church,  
East Grinstead.  
The resting place of  
Rev John Brett

Rev John Brett died on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1816 at East Grinstead in Sussex. He was aged seventy-three. As it is not very far from the area of his birth it is possible he had gone to visit family or was taking a break. He was buried in St Swithuns Churchyard.

## Rev James Rose Edmond Nelson 1784-1839

### Rector of Congham 1811-1839

James Nelson, born on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1784 in Congham, was the eldest son of Rev Edmund Nelson (rector of Congham) and his second wife Elizabeth Foster Rose. James' father died in 1795 so by the time James entered Christ's College Cambridge on December 5<sup>th</sup> 1802 Edmond had been dead for seven years and John Brett, rector of Grimston, had taken over as rector of Congham. James entered Christ's as a "Tancred Divinity Student".

*Christopher Tancred, of Whixley Hall in Yorkshire established 'Tancred's Charity' under the provisions of his will, made in 1746. His five sisters had unsuccessfully challenged his will, but the Charity was recognised by Act of Parliament in 1762. The Charity provided for four Divinity, four Physic and four Law studentships, and for the students to continue their studies for three years after taking a degree. A student from each branch was required to make a speech in Latin, yearly, in the Halls of two Colleges, and Lincoln's Inn, in perpetual remembrance of the Charity.*

With the support of the Tancred grants James received his BA in 1807 and was ordained as a priest on December 18<sup>th</sup> 1808. He became curate at Congham. James' mother had doubtless hoped that her late husband would live long enough to pass the living directly onto his son as Benjamin Squire had done at the beginning of the eighteenth century but this was not to be – John Brett, rector of Grimston, was given Congham. Things were further complicated by the presence to the rector's son John Brett Jnr who was also listed as curate although he was not an ordained priest only a deacon. This situation continued until 1811 when John Brett relinquished the post at Congham – perhaps due to aging or ill health – and Elizabeth Foster Nelson was able to present her son as rector on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1811.

James Nelson did not marry. His mother Elizabeth died in 1817 and was buried on May 7<sup>th</sup> by the Rev John Brett. She has a large ledger stone in the church. James' brother Charles died on July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1823 when he fell overboard into the river Derwent. He apparently fell from his own ship the Duke of York.

James died suddenly in August 1839 whilst he was visiting friends in Lincoln. His estate was auctioned by Mr Cruso at the Globe Inn King's Lynn.

## **Rev William Hepworth 1758-1841**

### **Rector of Congham 1839-1841**

William Hepworth's tenure at Congham is rather unusual lasting, as it did, just two years.

William Hepworth was born in 1758 in Emley Yorkshire. He was baptised in St John's Church on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1758. There is little information about William's parents but the Hepworth family must have been of the better-off sort as William and his older brother Joseph both entered Cambridge as students rather than sizar. William entered St John's in 1779 (his brother was a student at Queen's) gained his BA in 1783 and was ordained the following year.

William became curate firstly of Happisburgh in 1784 and then in 1791 of Botesdale and Wattisfield. He married Mary Postle on the 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1790 at Thurne. Alongside his



The building that was previously Botesdale Grammar School

duties as curate William was headmaster at Botesdale Grammar School. The school was founded in 1561 in the former chantry Chapel (now Botesdal Chapel of Ease) by Sir Nicholas Bacon of Redgrave Hall. He left money for paying staff and maintaining the buildings. The number of students was limited to sixty and the sons of poor men were educated free. The school day was long – from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m – and students attended on Saturdays until 3 p.m. William Hepworth was master at the school from 1791 until his death in 1841.

William and Mary had just one child, a son also

called William who followed his father to Cambridge and into the priesthood. Mary died in 1815 and was buried in Botesdale.

In 1839 William was appointed rector of Congham. This does seem odd as he was in his seventies, not local to the area and still very committed to Botesdale. It is almost certain that William – who probably took the living for financial reasons - very rarely, appeared in Congham but handed this over to a stipendiary curate Rev William Coulcher.

William Hepworth died in 1841. He was much mourned in the parishes of Botesdale and Wattisfield where he had served for so many years.

The parishioners of Wattisfield honoured William's memory in the east window showing the Transfiguration.



At the top are Moses, Christ and Elijah; below St Peter, St James and

## Rev Joseph Wright 1798-1856

### Rector of Congham 1841-1856

Joseph Wright was born around 1800 in Martinscroft, Lancashire. According to Joseph's marriage banns his father William was also a clergyman. There is no record of Joseph on either Oxford or Cambridge sites.

Joseph first appeared in Norfolk when he married Elizabeth Roper of Fring in 1839. Joseph's parish (on the banns) was noted as West Dereham but he was curate at Docking at that time. Elizabeth's father, John Roper was a farmer who apparently owned land in various locations. He must also been a man of some influence as it was he who presented his son-in-law for the living of Congham in 1841.

The Wrights were, for that era, mature newly-weds Joseph being around forty and Elizabeth just over thirty. It must therefore have been a source of especially great joy when their daughter Elizabeth Josephine (named for both of them) was born in 1840 and Joseph was able to baptise his own child on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1840 at Docking Church. With a new baby and Joseph installed as rector of Congham (thus rendering them better off financially) all looked positive for the Wrights but sadly the following year Elizabeth died aged only thirty-four.

The 1851 census recorded Elizabeth Josephine living at a school on Kings Staithe Square. There were only nine students with two teachers and several servants and the school was typical of the small schools set up to accommodate the daughters (and sons in the case of boys schools) of the better off tradesmen and professionals who did not send their children to larger private schools because they could not afford the fees or wished to keep their children close by. Elizabeth Josephine may well have had a nicer life with the other girls than with her widowed father in a country rectory.

Joseph died in 1756 and was buried in Congham churchyard. Elizabeth was aged sixteen, her father had entrusted her care to a retired estate agent named John Beck and the 1861 census recorded Elizabeth living with Mr and Mrs Beck and their three unmarried daughters (all in their thirties) in St Anne's Street. In 1864 she married Rev Thomas Kersley, then vicar of Middleton, and returned to a life in the vicarage and rectory.



*Sacred to the memory of the Rev.  
Joseph Wright. Sixteen years Rector  
of the Parish who died Nov 2nd  
1856 in the 56th year of his age.*

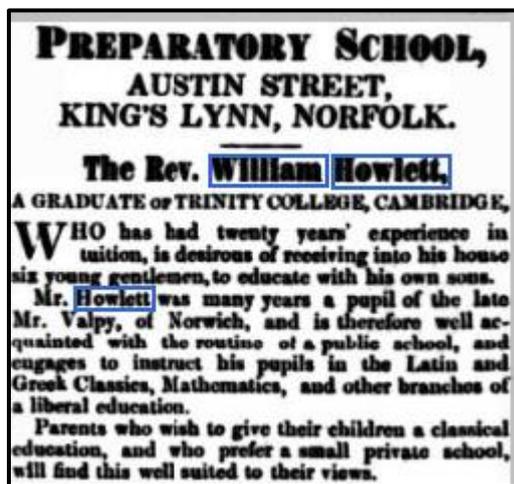
## Rev William Thomas Howlett 1799-1861

### Rector of Congham 1856-1861

William Howlett was born in Hethersett, Norfolk in 1799, he was baptised there on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1799. William's father was John Howlett and his mother Deborah Twiss; the Howletts were well-established tenant farmers in Hethersett. William was the eldest of seven children – three boys and four girls – and as the eldest it seems it was he who had the benefit of education whilst his brothers started work on the farm. William attended school in Norwich and entered Trinity College Cambridge on April 30<sup>th</sup> 1818. He was ordained deacon on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1823 and priest on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1824. Two months later, on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1824 William married Frances Taylor at Shelton in Norfolk.

William became stipendiary curate at Congham on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1824 and thus his eldest two children were born and baptised in Congham. In 1826 and 1829 William took on two more curates posts - at Ashwicken in 1826 and Babingley in 1829. He was not however offered a rectory which would have been very welcome with his growing family.

The first census in 1841 recorded the Howlett family living in Kings Lynn in New Checker Street. William was a clergyman and alongside his curates roles he was also chaplain to the work house in King's Lynn. By the time of the next census in 1851 the family had moved to Austin Street. There were then eight Howlett children at home (two of the boys working as clerks) and in 1852 in a bid to bolster finances William placed an advertisement in the local press. It is interesting that there were at that time no



**PREPARATORY SCHOOL,**  
AUSTIN STREET,  
KING'S LYNN, NORFOLK.

**The Rev. William Howlett,**  
A GRADUATE OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE,  
**WHO** has had twenty years' experience in tuition, is desirous of receiving into his house six young gentlemen, to educate with his own sons.  
Mr. Howlett was many years a pupil of the late Mr. Valpy, of Norwich, and is therefore well acquainted with the routine of a public school, and engages to instruct his pupils in the Latin and Greek Classics, Mathematics, and other branches of a liberal education.  
Parents who wish to give their children a classical education, and who prefer a small private school, will find this well suited to their views.

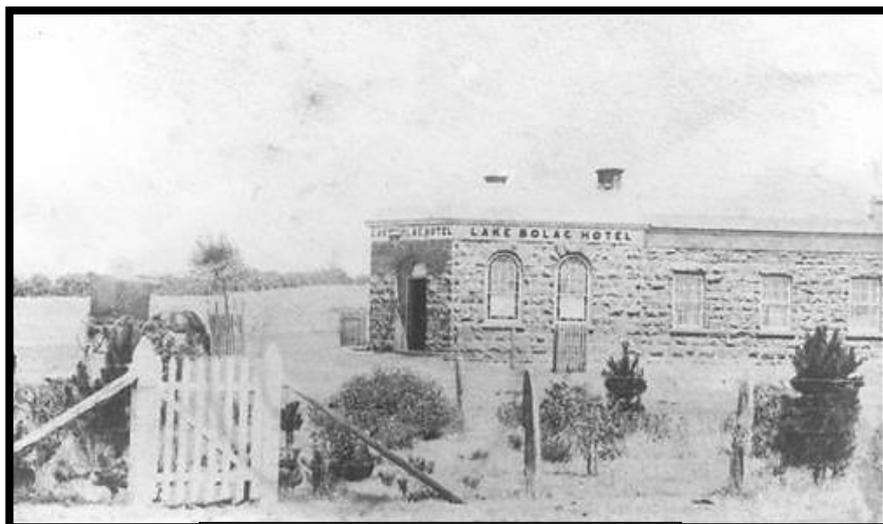
restrictions or rules about setting up private schools.

In that same year the four older sons – John, Horace, Charles and George – set sail for Australia in the ship “Janet Mitchell” their intention was to seek their fortunes in the mines although none of them actually settled on a career in mining. William and Frances must have been anxious and rather saddened by the boys' departure as in those days a relation emigrating to Australia was unlikely to be seen again. Better news came in a few years when

in 1856 William was appointed rector of Congham and the remaining family moved into the rectory.

On 31<sup>st</sup> August 1859 the eldest Howlett daughter, Frances (Fanny) married Robert Huxley Aldham at Congham. William was able to officiate at the wedding along with the Rev William Leeper the vicar of South Lynn. The Aldhams were solicitors in Kings Lynn and William and Frances would have considered this a good marriage. Just three months later, on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1861 William Howlett died and was buried close to the church at Congham.

Frances Howlett lived into her eighties – the 1881 census recorded her living in Gaywood with her son Robert who was a solicitor’s clerk. Her younger daughter Jesse, who was widowed just four years after her marriage to Cheshire brewer Henry Smith, was visiting her mother. Frances had four sons in Australia – one of them Horace opened a hotel which is still standing and open in 2023 – whilst Francis was in Canada. Two of the Howlett brothers remained in England, both in London. William was a chemist (pharmacist) and Walker was a surgeon’s assistant. The Howletts were extremely fortunate in that out of their ten children only Horace (proprietor of the hotel in Australia) predeceased one of his parents.



Lake Bolac Hotel in state of Victoria. Horace Howlett opened the hotel in 1861

William Howlett’s headstone is on the south side of the church near to the Church door.

The headstone reads:

*In memory of The Rev William Howlett. The Rector of this Parish who died 19th November 1861 aged 62 years. By grace you have been saved, through faith Ep 2:8*



## Rev Thomas White Holmes 1790-1872

### Rector of Congham 1861-1872

Thomas White Holmes was born in Gorleston, near Great Yarmouth in 1790. His parents were Thomas and Margaret (nee Bream) and the family must have been quite prosperous, we know that Thomas Snr owned land around Loddon and he and Margaret have an impressive tomb in Martham churchyard. Thomas had just one sister and the family were able to pay for him to have a private tutor. He entered Caius College, Cambridge in 1809 but moved to Corpus Christi from where he gained his BA in 1813. He was ordained deacon that year and priest in 1814.

Having been a curate in Martham and Repps in 1838 Thomas was appointed rector at Chedgrave and at the same time perpetual curate at Langley. Thus the first census in 1841 recorded Thomas living in Chedgrave where he was rector with his widowed mother Margaret and three servants. In 1843 he left Chedgrave (retaining the curacy at Langley) and took another curate role at Hardley . Mrs Holmes was still alive at the time of the 1851 census – she was aged eighty-four – and Thomas was himself in his early sixties. They were living in Loddon and employed a cook, a housemaid and a young groom. Just a few months after the census, in July 1851, Margaret Holmes died and was buried in Martham with her late husband.

On 27<sup>th</sup> September 1853 Thomas got married. His bride was called Anne Webb, she was a maiden lady the same age as Thomas i.e. over sixty. This must have seemed an ideal arrangement as these two aging people would have company in their twilight years. Sadly however, Anne died in 1857 and Thomas was left alone in the house in Loddon. The 1861 census recorded that he had an elderly couple Mr and Mrs Groom working for him (as cook and gardener) and a very young housemaid aged only twelve.

Thomas White Holmes came to the rectory in Congham in 1862 when he was aged seventy-two. He may have been an active and spry old gentleman but he still must have appeared disappointingly aged to his new parishioners whose previous rector (Rev Howlett) had arrived aged sixty and lived only a few years. The church appointments list suggested (in 1865) that Thomas Holmes had a curate called Rev Brookes but here is no mention of him elsewhere.

The 1871 electoral role recorded Thomas living at the rectory in Congham he was aged eighty-one. Rev Holmes died the following year on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1872. He was buried at Hardley where he had been curate for many years.

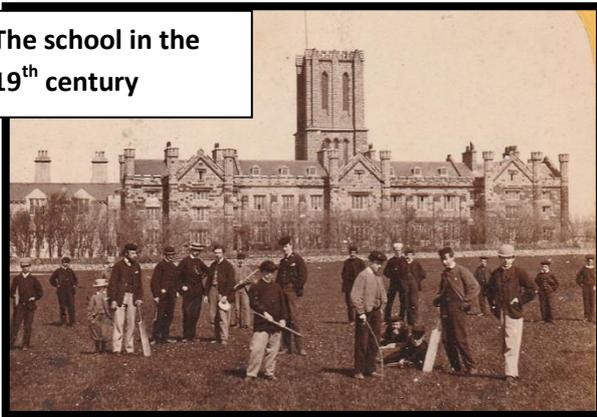
## Rev Thomas Henry Kersley 1826-1882

### Rector of Congham 1872-1882

Thomas Kersley was born in Lichfield in 1826. His mother Anne was a native of Lichfield but his father Thomas had been born in Hampshire and had moved north possibly looking for work in the new industrial towns. The Kersleys had four children - Thomas and three younger sisters. This was not a priestly family; Thomas Snr was recorded on the 1841 census as a clerk in manufacturing so Thomas Jnr would have grown up in a busy urban environment.

Thomas went to university in Dublin. Trinity College has always been an esteemed university but it may not have been an obvious choice for a boy from Lichfield. Having graduated Thomas took up temporary work in a school. The 1852 census recorded him

The school in the 19<sup>th</sup> century



working at King William College on the Isle of Man as an assistant master. The school was opened in 1833. It had been set up by a religious trust and in Thomas' time was relatively small. He was only there for a short time because in 1852 he was ordained by the bishop of Chester and took up a post in Audlem, Cheshire. Two years later he moved to be a curate in Devizes, Wiltshire. Devizes was a much larger parish with a

more prestigious church – it seems that Thomas was always willing to be on the move to better himself. (See Thomas Kersley gets around). At some time between 1854 and 1856 Thomas became a canon at Middleham Church in Yorkshire. It seems possible that this was an ecclesiastical appointment that could be held concurrently with another in the fashion of pluralist parishes. This can be presumed because when in August 1856 the rector of Devizes presented Thomas as vicar of Middleton Thomas was described as “Sub-dean of cathedral church of Middleham.

The 1861 census recorded Thomas, by then vicar of Middleton, visiting his parents in Birmingham. The Kersley family were living in Vyse Street which was the centre of the jewellery industry so Thomas Snr's job as a cashier is likely to have been in those workshops. Thomas Snr had a good job as he was able to donate in 1862, one guinea (one pound and one shilling ) to the hospital fund which supported men injured in industrial accidents of which there were probably quite a number.

On October 6th 1864 Thomas married Elizabeth Josephine Wright in St Margaret's. Elizabeth's late father Joseph had been rector of Congham some years previously; he died in 1856 and Elizabeth had been living with family friends in King's Lynn. The Kersleys set up married home in the rectory at Middleton and the 1871 census recorded that they had two small children a boy called Stewart and a girl called Kathleen. The following year

Thomas became rector of Congham, he had apparently been presented by his wife possibly as daughter of a previous rector. Upon Thomas' departure from Middleton the magazine "John Bull" published a small piece praising the excellent repairs and restorations which had taken place in the church and the establishment of new school buildings.

Two more sisters joined Stewart and Kathleen in the Congham rectory family. In 1881 the census showed that the three girls were living at the rectory with their parents and their governess Miss Leech. Stewart was away at school in Oundle.

Thomas Henry Kersley died on 7th<sup>rd</sup> March 1882 and was buried in Congham churchyard. He was aged fifty-six.

**His memorial Reads:**

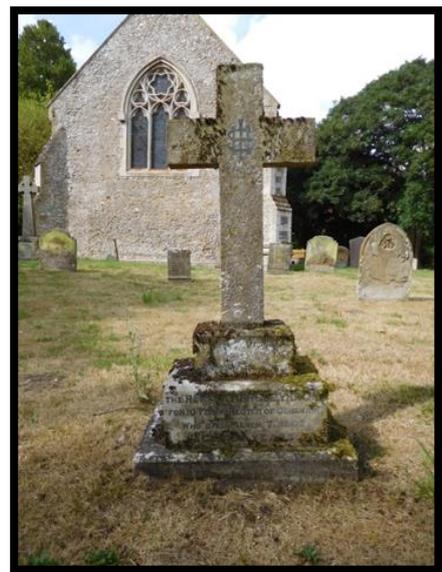
***In loving memory of the Rev. T.H.Kersley. D.C.L***

***For 10 years Rector of Congham, who died  
March 7th 1882, aged 55 years.***

***If thou shouldst call me to resign.***

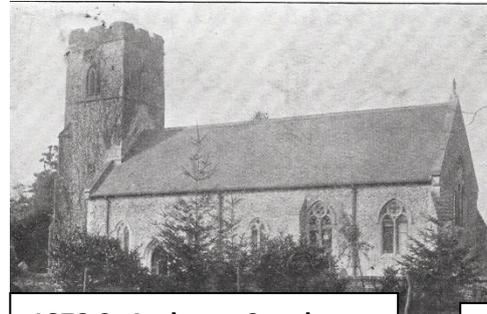
***What most I prize it ne'er was mine,***

***I only yield thee what was thine.***



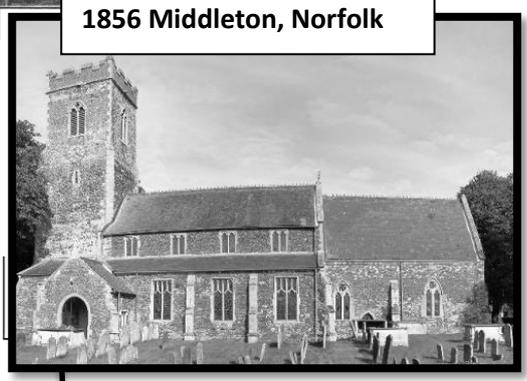


**1826 Born in Lichfield, Staffordshire**

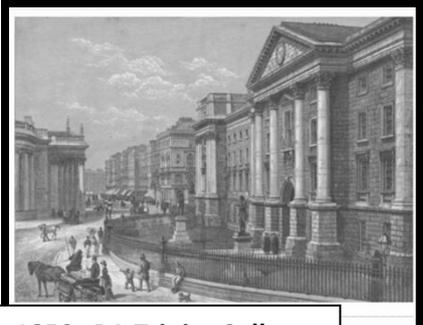


**1872 St Andrews Congham**

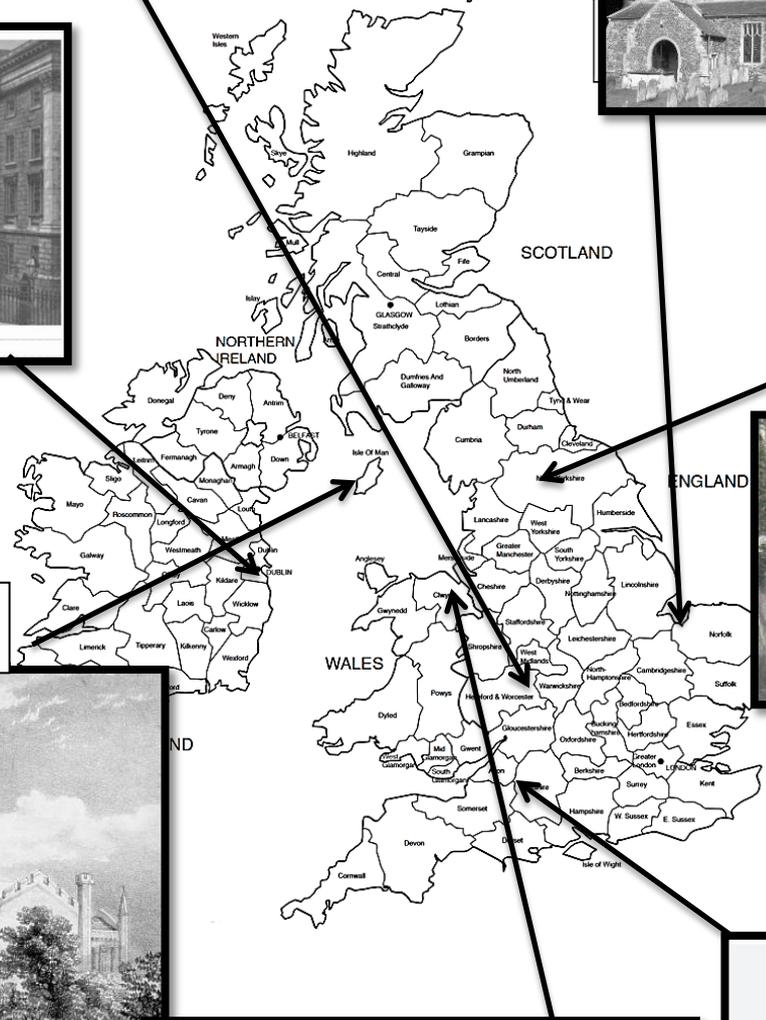
**Rev Thomas Kersley  
Gets Around**



**1856 Middleton, Norfolk**



**1850s BA Trinity College Dublin**



**1855/6 Middleham, Yorkshire**

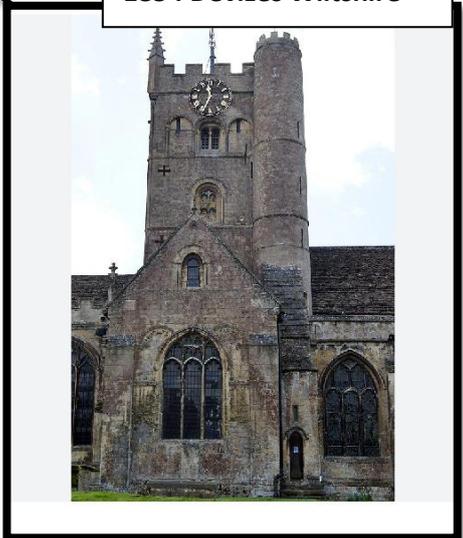


**1851 King William College Isle of Man**



**1852 Audlem Cheshire**

**1854 Devizes Wiltshire**



## Rev Richard Haking 1830-1894

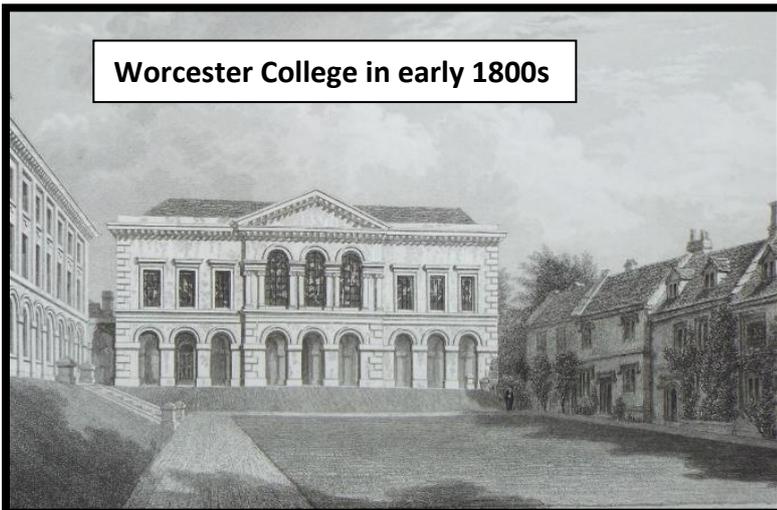
### Rector of Congham 1882-1893

Richard Haking was born in 1830 in Bury Lancashire one of the thriving new cotton towns of the north. His father also called Richard was a machine engineer (presumably in the mills) and his mother was called Elizabeth. The first census of 1841 recorded the Haking family – Richard, Elizabeth and five children – living in the Victorian terraces of Bury.

By the time of the 1851 census the Hakings had gone up in the world, moved to a more suburban area and could now afford to employ two youthful maids. It seems that Richard initially followed his father into engineering; this would have been normal in a Victorian family. On 31<sup>st</sup> August 1854 Richard married Mary Elizabeth Byrne at St Martin's Brighouse in Yorkshire. This was a very good marriage for Richard. Mary's father Henry Byrne was an opportunist who at various time manufactured cards and then wires. He owned Bonegate Hall in Brighouse and then Slead Hall where Mary's unmarried sisters later lived and at the time of Mary and Richard's wedding was quite wealthy. In the early 1850s Richard entered Worcester College, Oxford to read music. Unlike Cambridge, Oxford does not record how students were funded so we don't know if Richard paid for his studies or worked for them. He completed his studies gaining a B Mus in 1855. By that time he and Mary had two little girls. They were recorded on the 1861 census visiting

Richard's parents.

Richard was ordained at Gloucester in 1861 and in 1864 he became vicar of Rodney-Chedbourne in Wiltshire. Richard was an excellent musician and also a composer. In 1865 he wrote an anthem called "Doth Not Wisdom Weep" which was very popular at the time. In 1862 Richard and Mary had a son (Richard)



to join their two daughters. The 1871 census recorded Rev and Mrs Haking at the vicarage with Ethel and Hilda. Richard Jnr was not there, presumably at the age of nine he was already away at school. Between 1868 and 1882 Richard originated and conducted the *Orchestral Guild which from time to time produced high class music at various centres.*<sup>2</sup> He also organised accomplished choirs at his church and hosted visiting choirs from the surrounding area.

Two years later Richard moved parishes and became rector of Easton-Grey in Wiltshire. The church has a medieval tower but was rebuilt in the 1830s so Richard would have

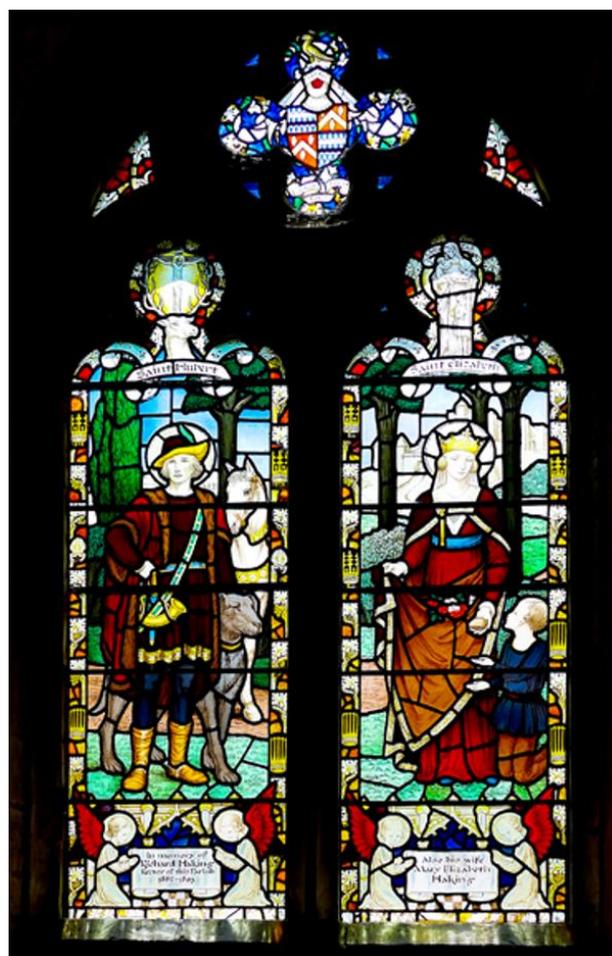
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<sup>2</sup> Guardian, September 1894

found an almost new church. Richard and the family settled in at the rectory and were there for the 1881 census along with two servants. The following year Richard was appointed rector of Congham and the Hakings had to make a move across the country. Richard Jnr was by that time a young army officer and he is recorded on the 1881 census on a troop ship, bound possibly for Burma. In 1887 Mary Haking died aged only fifty-three. She was buried in Congham churchyard on 20<sup>th</sup> June 1887 by the Rev Ffolkes, rector of Hillington. Mary was always caring about the less fortunate in the parish and in her will she left a sum of money to set up a fund for the relief of the aged residents of Congham.

The 1891 census recorded Richard living at Congham; neither of his daughters had married so stayed with him. Richard Jnr married that year, to Rachel Burfold-Hancock daughter of an eminent colonial judge. One year later Richard became very ill. The nature of this illness is not recorded other than that it was lengthy and painful and Richard felt he was unable to continue at Congham. He resigned in 1892 and was given a post at Southacre which was perhaps a much smaller and less demanding parish. He died there in September 1894 and was buried in Congham churchyard on 10<sup>th</sup> September of that year.

Richard Haking was a conscientious clergyman and an accomplished musician. He was also, according to the Swindon Advertiser *"an agreeable companion and a most amiable gentleman"*<sup>3</sup>. He was well-liked wherever he served. Mary Haking was a kindly and caring woman. In the 1930s a window was put in the church in memory of the Hakings. Richard's window is of St. Hubert, patron saint of hunting, his wife is linked with St. Elizabeth of Hungary, who fed the poor, but whenever her disapproving husband found her, the bread turned into lilies. This reflects Mary's kindness to the poor of the parish.



<sup>3</sup> Swindon Advertiser, 4<sup>th</sup> November 1894

## Stewart Roper Kersley 1866-1940

### Rector of Congham 1893-1940

Stewart Roper Kersley was born in 1866 when his father, Rev Thomas Kersley, was vicar at Middleton. The 1871 census recorded the Kersley family living at the vicarage, at that time Stewart had one younger sister. Rev Thomas became rector of Congham in 1871 so as a small boy Stewart moved to the rectory. There were eventually four rectory children – Stewart had three sisters. The 1881 census recorded the three of them with their parents; Stewart was away at school at Oundle. The girls had a governess called Miss Leech. Hannah Leech was also a daughter of the rectory (vicarage) her late father William had been vicar of Sherborne and was no doubt known to Rev Thomas. Hannah had previously worked as a governess in Dorset. Just a year after the census Rev Thomas Kersley died so Mrs Kersley and the girls had to move from the rectory to make way for the family of the new rector Richard Haking. Stewart was not at home, from school he went to Oxford University to study for the church. In 1890 he was appointed curate of Worsborough Dale in Yorkshire, the 1891 census recorded him living in Worsborough with Miss Leech who is described as “aunt”. Presumably Stewart put that down thinking it inappropriate to describe her as domestic staff and needing to maintain respectability.

Stewart had been at Worsborough for two years when his younger sister Antonia died in Matlock, Derbyshire – she was only nineteen. In that same year, 1893, Richard Haking resigned the living of Congham, he had been quite ill for sometime and was living at Southacre. Stewart was offered the post and was installed as rector on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1893. It was probably pleasant to be back in his late father’s parish and perhaps his mother Elizabeth, who lived with one of her daughters, would have visited. Once installed Stewart set about restoring and changing the church. The chancel was re-roofed, the nave refloored and it was planned that the south porch (no longer in existence) be given a new roof. The plans stated that the north transept – possibly housing the Spelman chapel – should be removed; it was in very bad condition. A new pulpit was installed, it is believed to have come from the Sandringham workshop and there is a possibility that the reredos also originated there. Outside Stewart Kersley planted the lines of tree which make the pedestrian path to the church such an attractive walk.

The 1901 census recorded Stewart living at the rectory with Hannah Leech (recorded as a boarder) and one servant. Probably life went on at a gentle pace in the pleasant Norfolk village. Stewart was always keen on music and organised a church choir pictured around 1910.



The 1911 census showed that little had changed at the rectory. Miss Leech who was by then seventy was recorded as housekeeper but was listed as friend rather than servant. Stewart had known her all his life and many people presumed she had been his governess. There was a new servant called Alice Ringer who came from West Newton. As the rectory was recorded as having thirteen rooms the three of them must have had a great deal of space. The First World War was approaching and would bring changes to life in the village and the rectory.

In December 1913 Hannah Leech died. Her death must have been sad for Stewart as she had been with him for the twenty years he had spent at the rectory and was a family friend. The following year the war began and many of the young - and not so young - men of Congham left to fight. Congham was a small village and it is probable that Stewart knew each of the thirty-five men who left. Several of them were workers from the royal estate and joined the 1/5<sup>th</sup> battalion of the Norfolk Regiment – the mythical Sandringhams. The Congham men survived the horrors of Gallipoli although one of them, Billy Watts, came home paralysed. On 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1916 Stewart's mother Elizabeth died in Leamington Spa where her daughter lived. In 1917 his sister Kathleen who was younger than him died; Alice's brother Arthur was killed at Arras on 14th April 1917 he was serving with 1st Battalion Essex Regiment. And it was a sad year for the whole village with seven of their men killed. Three were family men with children, two were their parents only child one of whom was William Rupert Ffolkes from Congham Lodge who was aged only eighteen and had been at the Front for just six weeks. The war must have been a difficult time for village clergymen who had to care for and comfort the bereaved and try to maintain some kind of normal parish life.

In August 1923 Stewart married his house servant Alice Ringer. It would be nice to believe that this was a true love story which it may have been but it might also have been a match between two people who had been in a household together for over ten years and had been caring companions. The marriage was conducted by the Rev Armitage Goodall from St Botolph's and the event caused much joy in the villages. Stewart and Alice remained together at the rectory until his death on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1939. He had outlived all his sisters and had served the parish of Congham for forty-six years. The Lynn News stated that Stewart was well-known in the diocese and recognised as a conscientious priest and a

much-loved village rector. A brass tablet was placed in the church in his memory.



By marrying Alice, Stewart had ensured that she would be provided for after his death. She died in 1947 in Fakenham but was brought back to be buried in Congham with her husband.

They are buried near the East gate of the churchyard and near to the tree line that he planted.

Hanna Leech is buried next to them on the right of this picture.

Hanna's headstone reads:

*In loving memory of Hanna Park Leech who died December 5<sup>th</sup> 1913. "Entered into Rest"*



## Rev David Edward Evans 1894-1971

### Rector of Congham 1940-1951

David Evans was born in 1894 in Ferndale, Glamorgan which was a mining town in the Rhondda Valley. David's father David William was recorded on the 1891 as a Lay Reader and Preacher and on the 1901 census as a Church of England clergyman; it isn't known if he had been ordained by the time of David's birth. By 1901 the Evans family had moved to



St Michaels Church, Llanfihangel

Llanfihangel a small parish in Monmouthshire with a medieval church, St Michael. David lived with his father, his mother Sarah and two younger sisters. The family employed one general servant, a girl aged only fourteen – this would not have been uncommon for the time. The Evans family did not stay very long in one place. The 1911 census recorded them having moved to Garthbeibio, Welshpool where the rectory had nine rooms. David William

may have decided to make this move because the living, recorded in the 1890s at £124 per year, was more money than his previous parish. David was not with the family on the 1911 census. He was away at school at Deytheur Grammar School at Llansantffraid-ym-Mechain near the Shropshire border. Although only opened in 1894 it was a large school by the standards of the day and at seventeen David was the oldest student; it is possible he was acting as a monitor and helping with the younger boys.

When the war started in 1914 David was twenty. It seems, from his enlistment papers, that he was working as a teacher but the address on his army records lists his home as Prior Vicarage, Denbighshire an indication that his father had again moved parishes. David signed up at Worthing in Sussex (perhaps he was working there) and on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1916 he joined the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. He trained at Kimmel Camp near Abergele in North Wales but it was obvious that David was unfit for service in the front line. His eyesight was assessed as 6/60 which modern optometrists might classify as severe visual impairment; due to this David was transferred to the Labour Corps and apart from a short stay in hospital in early 1917 he served until 1919.

The 1921 census recorded that David had returned to teaching. He was working as a teacher as Aldwick Place Preparatory School in Pagham, Sussex. The school must have been quite small as there were only eleven members of staff; David was living with a fellow teacher (Cyril Guy who later became a landscape artist) in a thatched cottage on the school estate.

In 1933 David married Edith Trerise at St Bartholomew's Church in East Ham. Edith was born in Pembroke, Wales but she had lived at several places including Dungeness because her father was a lighthouse keeper. At the time of the marriage David was recorded as living in Blackwood which is in Caephilly. It seems he had not been ordained because there is a record of his possible ordination in 1938. He was definitely in the clergy by 1939 because the 1939 census recorded he and Edith living in Purley, Surrey where David is listed as Church of England clergyman.

In July 1940 David Evans was appointed rector of Congham, he would be the last rector to serve Congham as a single parish, and his successor would serve both Congham and Grimston. During David Evans time as rector the church tower was renovated at a cost of £160. In 1951 Rev Evans announced his intention to leave Congham and take up a post at Cossington in Leicester. David said that he had been happy at Congham but wanted a parish nearer to a large town – Cossington is just six miles from Leicester and in a much busier part of the country than Congham. He had been a popular rector, always ready to help out in other villages as well as Congham and in recognition of this was presented with a clock and a table lamp as leaving gifts.

Ten years after moving to Leicester David's health began to decline and at some time he moved to the village of Thrussington. He was reluctant to resign and died on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1971 aged seventy-seven. Edith died just two months later on September 15<sup>th</sup> and was buried with him.