

VCH Leicestershire draft text

LEIRE**Religious History**

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VICTORIA
COUNTY
HISTORY

Leicestershire

Origins and patronage

There was a priest in Leire in 1086, one of just five recorded within Guthlaxton hundred.¹ The earliest part of the church building is the tower, which is Perpendicular in style.² The dedication is to St Peter; first documented in a will of 1530.³

The rector in c. 1210 was William of Leire, son of Thomas of Leire.⁴ In 1220, William de Leire presented William Walenges to the rectory,⁵ and this may be the same presentation as that noted in 1226, when William de Waleis was presented by William, son of Thomas de Leire.⁶ Further presentations in 1239 and 1240 were made by William de Leire.⁷

Edmund, Earl of Cornwall, acting as guardian of Henry de Hastings, recovered the advowson in the king's court against John, son of William de Leire,⁸ and in 1277, John of Bateford was presented by the earl.⁹ John, son of William de Leire, was presented to the living in 1279.¹⁰ John de Hastings is mentioned again as patron in 1314,¹¹ and the advowson was held by John de Hastings at his death in 1325.¹² The king made presentations in 1334 and 1349, during the minorities of Lawrence and John de Hastings.¹³ On the death of John de Hastings in 1375, it was said that he had disposed of the advowson of Leire church 'long before' his death.¹⁴ That said, the advowson does otherwise appear to have passed with the manor from at least 1541 until 1905,¹⁵ and possibly much earlier, as in 1443 and 1444 four men jointly held the advowson as feoffees in the manors and lands of Sir Edmund Grey and presented priests.¹⁶ The death of the 7th Earl Cowper without issue in 1905 caused the advowson to become separate from the lordship of the manor, passing to the heir

¹ A. Williams and G.H. Martin (eds.), *Domesday Book: A Complete Translation* (London, 2002), 641

² N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Leicestershire and Rutland* (1960), 171

³ ROLLR, Will and Inventory File 1530/25, Richard Symson

⁴ TNA, E 326/2275; J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, IV, 240.

⁵ *Rotuli Hugonis Welles* (Canterbury and York Society, 1909), I, 241,

⁶ *Rot. Hug.* (1907), II, 303

⁷ *Rotuli Roberti Grosseteste* (Canterbury and York Society, 1913), 412, 418.

⁸ J. Nichols, *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, IV, 240 quoting Kennett's *Parochial Antiquities*, 236: from Dodsworth's MS

⁹ *Rotuli Richard Gravesend* (Lincoln Record Society, 1925), 160.

¹⁰ *Rot. Ric.* (1925), 165.

¹¹ *Cal. Inq. p.m.* V, 236.

¹² *Cal. Inq. p.m.* VI, 390.

¹³ *Cal. Pat.* 1330-34, 543; *Cal. Pat.* 1334-1338, III, 42; *Cal. Pat.* 1348-50, 372; V. Gibbs, H.A. Doubleday and Lord Howard de Walden (eds), *The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom* (1910-38), VI, 351.

¹⁴ *Cal. Inq. p.m.*, XV, 158-9.

¹⁵ <http://db.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/search/index.jsp> (accessed 8 November 2014). See above, 'Manors and Estates'.

¹⁶ ROLLR, DE 1425/164, Manwaring, Historical notes

general at law, his nephew Auberon, Baron Lucas, who was killed in action in 1916.¹⁷ The patronage was gifted to Balliol College, Oxford in 1919, where he had been educated, in his memory.¹⁸

In the 20th century the benefice was combined first with Ashby Parva and then also with Frolesworth in 1956, the rector living in Leire.¹⁹ In 1980 Leire was united with Dunton Bassett and Ashby Parva.²⁰ In 2007 Leire became part of the Upper Soar benefice which includes Ashby Parva, Dunton Bassett, Frolesworth, Wibtoft (Warwickshire) and Claybrooke.²¹ As part of the Upper Soar benefice, the college takes its turn with patrons of the other churches united within the benefice.

Income and land

William, rector of Leire, presented Roger de Clifton in 1247 as a canonically instituted perpetual vicar, endowing the vicarage with all small tithes, oblations, and the tithes of hay from four virgates of land in Frolesworth, saving to the rector all tithes of corn, other tithes of hay and wool, and his glebe lands and meadows.²² This arrangement may have ended by the 1370s, when only one priest, the rector, was assessed for tax.²³

In the valuation of 1253-8 Leire was in the lowest quartile of the deanery, being valued at 4 marks,²⁴ and in c. 1291 it had increased to £8.²⁵ In 1344 the valuation was unchanged and 1s. was paid for Peter's pence.²⁶ The value was £9 14s. 9¼d. in 1535, with Leire remaining in the lowest quartile.²⁷ A private enclosure agreement of 1699 had resulted in further enclosed fields and meadow in Leire being allotted to the rector and the yearly income from tithes became £54.²⁸ In 1700, the two watermills were liable for moduses of 3s. and 4s. a year respectively, in addition to a tithe of all eggs, pigs, churchings and offerings. Seven and a half yardlands in Ashby Parva produced £2 16s. 10¼d. annually for the rector of Leire. The Ashby Parva land is not mentioned in earlier glebe terriers.²⁹ Presumably the annual income was assessed at over £50 by Queen Anne's commissioners, as the living was not exempted from payment of first fruits and tenths in 1707.³⁰

In 1785 a curate was appointed with an income of £30.³¹ In 1824 this had risen to £100 and the use of a house.³² In 1831 the value of the living was £294 with a 'good residence', 142 a. of glebe land,³³

¹⁷ Statutory declaration on sale of lordship at auction, in private hands; Gibbs, Doubleday and Howard, *Complete Peerage*, VIII, 244.

¹⁸ Balliol Archive Patronage Papers, Ecclesiastical Patronage, <http://archives.balliol.ox.ac.uk/Archives/sumcatH2.asp> (Accessed 4 April 2012)

¹⁹ *London Gazette*, 4 Nov 1955

²⁰ *London Gazette*, 14 Aug 1980

²¹ ROLLR, Local Studies Biography Files, series B

²² *Rot. Rob.* (11, 1914), 431.

²³ A.K. McHardy, 'Clerical Poll-Taxes of the Diocese of Lincoln, 1377-1381' (Lincoln Record Society), 81, 1992

²⁴ *Rot. Hug.* I (1909), 274

²⁵ *Taxatio ecclesiastica Angliae et Walliae Auctoritate Papae Nicholas IV circa 1291* (1802), 63

²⁶ Nichols, *History*, IV, 243

²⁷ *Valor ecclesiasticus*, IV, 184.

²⁸ ROLLR, DE 2/24/1-2

²⁹ ROLLR, DE 2/24/1-2

³⁰ J. Ecton, *Liber Valorum et Decimarum* (1711), 215

³¹ Clergy of the Church of England Database (2008),

<http://www.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/persons/CreatePersonFrames.jsp?PersonID=77313>, (Accessed 4 April 2012)

and a yearly modus of £17 10s. 9d settled by the Inclosure Award of 1780 for ancient gardens.³⁴ In 1838, 10 a. of glebe land, part of two closes named as Far Ullesthorpe Close and Broad Arse (changed to Broadhurst in 1911), were sold to the Midland Counties Railway Company for £1,561 by the rector, Henry Kemp Richardson.³⁵ In 1877 the income rose to £330 but fell to £220 by 1896.³⁶ Following the collapse of the side of the railway cutting, a further 2 roods and 28 perches of the second field were sold to the Midland Railway Company in 1901 for £135.³⁷ During the first world war the value of the living was £230 and the glebe acreage was 138 a.³⁸ By 1922, when the advowson had passed to Balliol College, Oxford the value had risen to £350 but the glebe acreage was 3 a.³⁹

In 1889 a nearby farmhouse and its buildings were purchased using a loan from Queen Anne's Bounty of £400 over 25 years. The loan was increased by £156 in 1906 for improvements to the farmhouse. The rector calculated the cost of the loan was £37 9s. 6d. when taxes and insurance were included, with the rental income £35 p.a. from the farmhouse, stables and orchard, excluding anything obtainable from the farm buildings.⁴⁰

Tithe disputes

Until rationalised in 1877, the various detached parts of the parishes of Leire, Ashby Parva and Kimcote caused disagreements. The part of Leire that belonged to Kimcote was a cause of dispute in 1524. A resident of Leire who paid tithes to Kimcote insisted on attending Leire church to the annoyance of the other parishioners.⁴¹ In 1780 tithes on four and a half yardlands within the boundary of Leire, described in the enclosure award as reputed to be in the parish of Kimcote, were paid to the rector of Kimcote.⁴² In 1847 a tithe dispute arose between Leire and Ashby Parva. George Beale was paying a modus of 3s. 3d. yearly to the rector of Leire for property and land he held in Ashby Parva. The rector of Ashby claimed that all tithes in Ashby Parva were payable him. The assistant tithe commissioner struggled to solve the issue, as no-one attended the public meetings at Lutterworth and Leire or provided documents to support their case. He concluded in March 1850 that the tithes due from land in Ashby Parva had been commuted by the general Tithe Commutation Act.⁴³ In 1877 the outlying lands of Kimcote in Leire and Leire in Ashby Parva became part of the parish they were within, by Local Government Order.⁴⁴

³² Clergy of the Church of England Database(2008),

<http://www.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/DisplayAppointment.jsp?CDBAppRedID=63751>, (Accessed 4 April 2012)

³³ *White's Dir. Leics.*(1846), 400

³⁴ TNA, IR 18/4535

³⁵ Deed, in private hands

³⁶ *White's Dir. Leics.* (1877), 495, *Wright's Dir. Leics.* (1896), 594

³⁷ Deed, in private hands

³⁸ *Kelly's Dir. Leics.* (1916), 546

³⁹ *Wright's Dir. Leics.* (1922), 552

⁴⁰ Terrier dated 'about 1911' with later additions, Vestry Chest, S Peters, Leire

⁴¹ Leics AAS R&P, 28,(1905-6), 635

⁴² ROLLR, EN/A/198/1

⁴³ TNA, IR 18/4535

⁴⁴ TNA, HLG 66/14

Parsonage

The rector was reprimanded in 1526 as the walls and thatch of the rectory were in a ruinous state and he was non-resident.⁴⁵

In 1601, the two-storey parsonage contained three rooms on each floor and two 3-acre closes were nearby.⁴⁶ A terrier of 1700 describes a brick house of three and a half bays, with a tiled roof. The thatched outhouses included a brew house, stables and a corn barn of three bays, giving a total of ten bays of building.⁴⁷

Revd. Thomas Seagrave, rector between 1674 and 1725, was so 'annoyed by the incursions of souldiers in marchings to and fro all the time of war' that he removed to more peaceful accommodation in the village.⁴⁸ In 1692 Thomas Morris, a baker, of Claybrooke Parva occupied the parsonage house and some glebe land for three years.⁴⁹

In the 1770s the parsonage house needed rebuilding but the renovation took more than four years⁵⁰ to include a combined library and study in addition to the usual accommodation.⁵¹ In 1840, the rectors of Frolesworth and Ashby Parva found that, despite expenditure of between £200 and £300, the age and poor construction of the building necessitated extensive repairs and improvements. Also, due to the poverty of the previous incumbent's widow, the present rector had received no dilapidations. As a result, £862 was made available by the governors of Queen Anne's Bounty for the 'enlarging, altering and repairing' of the building.⁵² This included the addition of day and night nurseries, more extensive domestic rooms and a lavatory on the upper floor.⁵³

In the 1950s, the rectory became a private residence known as the Old Rectory, replaced by a new rectory on the other side of Dunton Road in 1957.⁵⁴ In 2007 Leire became one of six parishes of the Upper Soar benefice, the rector being resident in Claybrooke Parva and the new rectory became a private dwelling.

Religious life: The Middle Ages

The incumbents of this period are described as priests, chaplains or clerks with no mention of educational qualifications. There is no documentary evidence of a chantry at Leire, nor evidence of grants of lands for the maintenance of lights.

In the 1370s Leire had only one priest, the rector, unlike most Guthlaxton parishes, where one or more chaplains assisted the priest.⁵⁵ In 1346, William la Zouch of Haringworth granted messuages,

⁴⁵ Leics AAS R&P, 28, (11905-6), 209

⁴⁶ Lincs. RO, Dioc/Ter/5/419

⁴⁷ Lincs. RO, Dioc/Ter Bundle/Leics/Leire

⁴⁸ J.H. Pruett, *The Parish Clergy under the Later Stuarts: The Leicestershire Experience* (Urbana, 1978), 138

⁴⁹ ROLLR, DE 1425/88c, Settlement bond

⁵⁰ W.A. Pemberton, 'The parochial visitation of James Bickham D.D., Archdeacon of Leicester, in the years 1793 to 1797', *Trans LAHS* 59 (1984-5), 63, 64

⁵¹ ROLLR, 1D 69/18

⁵² ROLLR, ID 69/18/2

⁵³ ROLLR, 1D 69/18/1e

⁵⁴ *Leicester Advertiser*, 2 Feb 1957

⁵⁵ A.K. McHardy, 'Clerical Poll-Taxes of the Diocese of Lincoln, 1377-1381' (Lincoln Record Society), 81, 1992

land and rents in Claybrooke and Leire for two chaplains, but these were for the chapel of Weston manor.⁵⁶ In 1516, the rector was assisted by a parish chaplain.⁵⁷ The rector in 1526 was non-resident.⁵⁸

In 1530 Richard Symson left a brown cow and 9s. to his parish church as well as lesser amounts to the mother church of Lincoln, Frolesworth and Kimcote churches.⁵⁹ Henry Heypey, a rector of Leire left 3s. 4d. to the high altar at Leire as well as 6s. 8d. to the church of Leire.⁶⁰ Others also left sums to the parish church, for general use rather than for any specific purpose.⁶¹

Religious life: Early modern

The rebuilding of the Church in 1868 removed physical evidence of medieval religious life and any changes following the Reformation.



Figure 8: The south side of St Peter's church

⁵⁶ *Cal. Pat.* 1345, VI, 455

⁵⁷ A.P. Moore, 'Proceedings of the Ecclesiastical Courts in the Archdeaconry of Leicester, 1516-35', *AAS R&P*, 28 (1905-6), 136

⁵⁸ *Leics AAS R&P*, 28, (1905-6), 209

⁵⁹ *ROLLR*, W&I 1530/25, Richard Symson

⁶⁰ *ROLLR*, Will 1526-33/49 Henry Heypey

⁶¹ *ROLLR*, Will 1558 A-F/69 (Bloxsun); 1558 G-O/180 (Lord).

The first incumbent with a degree was Nathaniel Baxter M.A., who became rector in 1581.⁶² Subsequent rectors held university degrees in Arts or Law as did some of the curates appointed when the rector was not resident, such as Johannes Cave in 1680.⁶³

A curate in 1605 caused complaints by singing the Lord's Prayer to the tune of a profane song and expressing annoyance that no-one would join in.⁶⁴

One rector was particularly busy beyond the parish boundaries. Reginald Burdin, instituted in 1619, held several positions as well as that of rector of Leire.⁶⁵ Burdin was rector of Carlton Curliou, Leicestershire and Aynho, Northamptonshire. He was also the domestic chaplain of Henry, Earl of Kent, who was the patron of Leire. In addition to these posts he acted as one of the surrogates to Sir John Lambe, commissary-general of the bishop of Lincoln.⁶⁶ Following the death of Reginald Burdin, James Farmer was appointed in 1643. He was a nephew of the patron, and was a Puritan.⁶⁷ He was ejected in 1662, and moved to Barwell.⁶⁸ The visitation of 1662 shows that he did not wear the surplice.⁶⁹ His brother-in-law, William Cooke, then rector of the neighbouring village of Frolesworth and a preacher throughout the diocese of Lincoln, was appointed to the living in Leire.⁷⁰ He was given a dispensation to hold the posts in plurality.⁷¹

Religious life after 1700

In 1721 the long-serving rector was a widower with no children at home, choosing to live in a house in the village rather than the parsonage and going from house to house to teach the children the catechism. He expressed a wish that the church regain its right of Convocation.⁷²

In visitations of 1778 and 1797 numerous faults were found with the state of the church fabric, the books, vestments and the parsonage house.⁷³ Joseph Wilton Pawsey became rector in 1808 but due to the state of the parsonage was allowed to reside in Silsoe, Bedfordshire for seven months.⁷⁴ When appointed to the post of rector of Clowne, Derbyshire in the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield

⁶² Manwaring, Historical notes, 82-102

⁶³ Clergy of the Church of England Database(2008),

<http://www.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/DisplayAppointment.jsp?CDBAppRedID=250405>, (Accessed 4 Apr 2012)

⁶⁴ Lincs RO, Diocesan Records, R.P. 61/1/70 Responsa Personalia

⁶⁵ Clergy of the Church of England Database, Reginald Burdin, (2008)

<http://www.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/persons/CreatePersonFrames.jsp?PersonID=68027>, (Accessed 4 Apr 2012)

⁶⁶ C.E. Welch, 'The Downfall of Bishop Williams', Trans LAHS 40 (1964), 42, 45

⁶⁷ Nichols, *History and Antiquities*, IV, part 1, 243

⁶⁸ Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, 190.

⁶⁹ P. Moore, 'The Primary Visitation of Robert Sanderson, Bishop of Lincoln in 1662, for the Archdeaconry of Leicester', *The Antiquary* 5.10 (1909), 390.

⁷⁰ *Admissions to the College of St John the Evangelist in the University of Cambridge* (1893), 19, Clergy of the Church of England Database, William Cooke, (2008),

<http://www.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/persons/CreatePersonFrames.jsp?PersonID=87497>, (Accessed 4 April 2012)

⁷¹ Church of England Record Centre, FI/Cf116 and FII/3/62

⁷² Lincs RO, Gibson 12, 470-72

⁷³ ROLLR, 1D41/18/21, 1D41/18/22

⁷⁴ ROLLR, DE 1425/24, Copy of license of non-residence

in 1823 he had to end his tenure in Leire. A series of stipendiary curates, the last being his son Frederick, carried out his duties until his death in 1833.⁷⁵

A return for the religious census of 1851 was not received from Leire, but a further request produced the information that there were 60 free seats and 240 other seats.⁷⁶ In 1886 there were 64 communicants registered in Leire.⁷⁷ The average congregation numbered 103 at the evening service, and was, according to the rector, increasing. In 1889 morning and evening services were held every Sunday with an additional afternoon service on the first Sunday of each month.⁷⁸

Early nonconformity

In 1664 seven villagers, including Elisha Lord, were excommunicated.⁷⁹ He was again declared excommunicate in 1669⁸⁰ and it was claimed that a conventicle of about 20 Anabaptist dissenters met each Sunday to worship in his house, led by John Kitchen from Lutterworth, an ejected minister from London. From nearby Frolesworth, William Cooke reported that fortnightly meetings, attended by Leire dissenters, had been held for several years in a house there.⁸¹ In 1682, an inhabitant of Leire informed on a conventicle in Frolesworth.⁸² A census of 1676 recorded 136 conformists, no Papists and eight non-conformists in Leire.⁸³ In 1687 one man of Leire, John Ward, was listed among more than 250 recusants in the county of Leicester.⁸⁴

Four families of dissenters were noted in 1706, consisting of one Presbyterian and three Anabaptists, meeting once every six weeks in one of their houses.⁸⁵ Three years later another family of Anabaptists had joined the dissenters, making a total of 20 people. By 1712, there were four families again and some of the Anabaptist children attended church although not baptised. In 1721 the rector reported that there were seven families of dissenters and that they had a licensed meeting house.⁸⁶ One Papist, 'an old man of 80 years', was recorded in 1767.⁸⁷ The meeting house return of 1829 records 100 Baptists meeting in Leire, as well as a Methodist congregation (below).⁸⁸

Methodism

In 1795 a congregation of Protestant dissenters was registered, using a building owned by William Collins.⁸⁹ It was part of the Hinckley Methodist Circuit and baptisms of Leire Methodists were

⁷⁵ Memorial tablet on north wall of chancel, St Peters Leire

⁷⁶ TNA, HO 129/408

⁷⁷ Northants. RO, X.922, Diocesan Records, Epis. Visitation returns, 1886

⁷⁸ *Wright's Dir. Leics.* (1890), 422

⁷⁹ ROLLR, 1D 41/6/59, 18 Nov. 1664

⁸⁰ ROLLR, 1D 41/13/78, *Liber Detectiones* 3, 1669

⁸¹ R.H. Evans, 'Non-Conformists in Leicestershire in 1669', *Trans LAHS* 25 (1949), 135

⁸² *Loyal London Mercury*, 15 Nov 1682

⁸³ Whiteman, *The Compton Census of 1676: A Critical Edition* (1986)

⁸⁴ TNA, *Cal. SP, Dom.* 1685-89, 379

⁸⁵ J. Broad (ed.) *Bishop Wake's Summary of Visitation Returns from the Diocese of Lincoln 1706 – 15*, pt 2, *Outside Lincolnshire* (Oxford, 2012), 856

⁸⁶ Lincs RO, Gibson 12, 470-72

⁸⁷ Lincs RO, DISS 1A/17/26

⁸⁸ ROLLR, QS 95/2/1/20

⁸⁹ ROLLR, QS 44/2/104

recorded from 1798.⁹⁰ In 1815 a meeting place in the house of Richard Cheney was recorded for the same purpose and in 1817 a barn belonging to Thomas Goodacre was registered.⁹¹

In 1821 a Primitive Methodist chapel was opened on land belonging to Samuel Day.⁹² There were nine members in 1819 and 19 in 1833.⁹³ Initially members at Frolesworth were included with those of Leire. The meeting house return of 1829 records 80 'Methodists' meeting at Leire.⁹⁴ This figure may include both Primitive and Wesleyan Methodists meeting in Leire, whether resident or non-resident. What became of the Primitive Methodist congregation is not known, but it appears that by 1846 this building was being used by a Wesleyan congregation.⁹⁵ In 1863, a new Wesleyan Chapel was built on the east side of Main Street.⁹⁶ In 1899 two services were held there on Sundays, at 2.30 pm and at 6 pm.⁹⁷ In the 20th century the building provided a venue for educational and social events. In 1977, due to falling numbers, the trustees agreed that the chapel should be closed as a place of worship and it is now a private residence.⁹⁸

⁹⁰ ROLLR, N/M/142/22 Wesleyan Methodist Register of Baptisms 1796-1837

⁹¹ ROLLR, QS 443/1/1, 5a, 8

⁹² *Leicester Chronicle*, 3 Mar 1821; poster, in private hands.

⁹³ ROLLR, N/M/142/10 Hinckley Methodist Circuit, Superintendent's Book 1815-1840

⁹⁴ ROLLR, QS 95/2/1/20

⁹⁵ W. White, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Leicestershire* (Sheffield, 1846), 400.

⁹⁶ Tablet on building.

⁹⁷ *Wright's Dir. Leics.* (1899), 116

⁹⁸ ROLLR, N/M/142/191/ Leire Methodist Chapel Minutes Book, 1939-1977