

RELIGIOUS HISTORY

Church Origins and Parochial Organisation

The oldest documentary evidence for a church at Brooksby is mention of the advowson in 1202.¹ The earliest fabric of the present building is from the early 14th century.²

In 1506 according to the will of Sir John Villiers, who wished to be buried there, the dedication of the church was to St Michael,³ and this dedication continued through to 2020 with the addition of 'and All Angels' between 1926 and 1937.⁴

Advowson and Church Endowment

From the 13th century until the mid-20th century the advowson was usually held by the lords of the manor and subsequently the owners of Brooksby, the earliest patron known being William de Sagio i.e. de Seis, who gifted the advowson to his son Hugh in 1202.⁵ The advowson was purchased with the Hall by David Beatty in 1911.⁶

In 1956, at the institution of Thomas Howell Evans, the patronage was with the Bishop of Leicester and Brooksby was linked with Hoby, Rotherby and Ragdale, later to be joined by Thrussington in 1977.⁷ Since 1958 the Leicester Board of Patronage held the advowson of the combined parish.⁸

From 1991 the same board acted as patron to the new Parish of Upper Wreake consisting of Hoby, Rotherby, Ragdale, Brooksby, Frisby on the Wreake and Kirby Bellars, but Thrussington was not included.⁹ In 2007 the Parish of Upper Wreake was linked to ten more parishes around Somerby and

¹ G. F. Farnham, *Leicestershire Medieval Village Notes*, 6 (1929), 248, citing deed in Hastings MS.

² National Heritage List 1188473; Leics County Council, Leics & Rutland HER, Brooksby MLE 12390 (31 May 2016).

³ Transcript in J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, 3 (1800), 192.

⁴ *Peterborough Diocesan Calendar* (1926), 135; *Leicester Diocesan Calendar* (1937), 84.

⁵ G. F. Farnham, *Leicestershire Medieval Village Notes*, 6 (1929), 248, citing deed in Hastings MS.

⁶ ROLLR, DE 1826/21.

⁷ *Leicester Diocesan Calendar* (1956), 138.

⁸ *Leicester Diocesan Calendar* (1958), 100.

⁹ *Leicester Diocesan Calendar* (1990/1), 63.

South Croxton to form the South West Framland Group.¹⁰ They were South Croxton, Pickwell, Gaddesby, Ashby Folville, Thorpe Satchville, Twyford, Little Dalby, Burrough on the Hill, Great Dalby and Somerby, plus the Methodist chapel at Frisby on the Wreake.

In 1291 the total assessed value of the benefice was £4 6s. 8d. which included a pension of 1s. from Haugham Priory in Lincolnshire. This priory was probably founded by Hugh, earl of Chester in the late 11th century.¹¹ The pension may have been instead of an endowment of glebe land, which would suggest that the first church was provided by one of the earls of Chester. Over time, inflation would have left the rector heavily dependent on tithes.

In 1526, rector Thomas Bingham had income of £5 6s. 8d., all but £1 of which he paid to his curate John Litherland.¹² This arrangement still prevailed in 1533.¹³ In 1535, the rectory was valued at £5 12s. 6d.¹⁴

There are no records of any glebe land until 1926, when 47 a. was recorded.¹⁵

Over the three years 1829 to 1831 inclusive, net annual income was £250.¹⁶ This had risen to £300 in 1847, and it was still £300 in 1926.¹⁷ The rector's income was paid out of this amount. Between 1886 and 1898 this varied from a maximum of £262 6s. 6d. in 1887 to a minimum of £203 7s. 8d. in 1898.¹⁸

¹⁰ South West Framland Group Council report (January 2020) within Parish of Upper Wreake Annual Report for 2019; *The Church of St Michael and All Angels Brooksby* (2014?).

¹¹ T. Astle, S. Ayscough, J. Caley, eds, *Taxatio Ecclesiastica Angliae et Walliae auctoritate Papae Nicholas IV c.1291*, (1802), 63; *VCH Lincs.*, II, 240.

¹² H. Salter, ed., *A Subsidy Collected in the Diocese of Lincoln in 1526* (1909), 14.

¹³ A. P. Moore, 'Proceedings of the ecclesiastical courts in the archdeaconry of Leicester 1516–35', *Reports and Papers of the Associated Architectural Societies* (1905–6), 188.

¹⁴ J. Caley and J. Hunter (eds), *Valor Ecclesiasticus temp. Henrici VIII*, IV (1821), 167.

¹⁵ Peterborough Diocesan Calendar (1890), 40 and (1926), 135.

¹⁶ *Return of Net Annual Revenue of Ecclesiastical Benefices in England and Wales 1829–31* (Parl. Papers 1837 (439) xli.115), p. 114.

¹⁷ ROLLR, Ti/49/1; *Peterborough Diocesan Calendar* (1926), 134.

¹⁸ ROLLR, DE 2193/14, re tithes c.1920.

Clergy Houses

The incumbent was not usually resident in the parish, and there is no trace of a medieval rectory house. Since 1945 the former gardener's cottage at the Agricultural College was referred to as the 'Old Rectory', but it was never used for this purpose.¹⁹

Religious Life Before 1660

The living was probably held in plurality. Ralph Barry, a subdeacon who was instituted as rector at Brooksby in 1252 and who continued there to 1290,²⁰ may be the man of that name who was instituted as rector of Keyworth (Notts.) in 1270.²¹

A slab on the floor of the chancel commemorates William Villiers (d. 1480) and his two wives Joan (d.1475) and Agnes (d. 14....).²²

The Leicestershire commissioners for the Valor Ecclesiasticus were John Villiers (d. 1544), lord of Brooksby manor, and his uncle Christopher Villiers. John Villiers was also a commissioner in the trials of the 'Lincolnshire rebels' in 1537, part of the Pilgrimage of Grace, and 'played his part with zeal, if not relish', overseeing executions at Louth and Horncastle.²³ However Sir John Villiers had held two chantries of his own at Tuxford in Nottinghamshire.²⁴

Dom. William Burstoghe was appointed as rector at Brooksby in 1550,²⁵ on the presentation of Sir Edward Hastings, a Catholic, and the guardian of Richard Villiers (d. 1558).²⁶ Burstoghe had been instituted as vicar of his home parish of Wendover (Bucks.) in 1540, and continued to hold this post

¹⁹ Oral testimony of Malcolm Britton, former lecturer at the college.

²⁰ F. N. Davis (ed.), *Rotuli Roberti Grossteste Episcopi Lincolnensis* (Lincoln Rec. Soc. 11, 1914), 439.

²¹ southwellchurches.nottingham.ac.uk/ruddington/hincumb.php (accessed 3 Nov. 2019).

²² Extant 2019.

²³ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1509–1558*, I, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/villers-sir-john-148586-1544> (accessed 2 Mar. 2020)

²⁴ A. Kreider, *English Chantries: the Road to Dissolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1979), 211 citing TNA, E 301/13/18.

²⁵ <http://db.theclergydatabase.org.uk> (accessed 18 Aug 2019).

²⁶ <http://db.theclergydatabase.org.uk> (accessed 18 Aug 2019).

until 1554.²⁷ In January 1554 he resigned his living of Wendover and on the same day another vicar was appointed by the Crown as patrons.²⁸ His rectorship at Brooksby may have ended in October 1554,²⁹ or he may have been the William Brisco recorded as rector, who died in 1558.³⁰

In the 1630s and early 1640s there was a rapid turnover of rectors, with five institutions in ten years,³¹ but Cadwalader Jones remained in post at Brooksby from 1644 until his death in 1676.³²

The stained glass in the east and south windows dates from the 17th century and shows the arms of George Villiers, 1st duke of Buckingham (d. 1628) and his contemporary and past relatives, going back to his great-great-grandfather Sir John Villiers (d. 1481).³³

From 1660

In 1712, rector John Twells lived at Frisby-on-the-Wreake. Divine service at Brooksby was held once on Sundays 'if there be a congregation', and on Litany days and Holy Days if the patron was there. Brooksby's one or two resident communicants attended church in the next parish.³⁴

There were no major concerns raised at visitations in 1777³⁵ and 1793.³⁶

In 1832, rector William Berry lived at Tarrant-Hinton with Blandford in Dorset and acquired a licence for non-residence at Brooksby as there was no rectory house there.³⁷ His curate, Reverend Augustus

²⁷ <http://db.theclergydatabase.org.uk> (accessed 18 Aug 2019).

²⁸ <http://db.theclergydatabase.org.uk> (accessed 18 Aug 2019).

²⁹ <http://db.theclergydatabase.org.uk> (accessed 18 Aug 2019).

³⁰ <http://db.theclergydatabase.org.uk> (accessed 18 Aug 2019).

³¹ <http://db.theclergydatabase.org.uk> (accessed 18 Aug 2019).

³² <http://db.theclergydatabase.org.uk> (accessed 18 Aug 2019).

³³ J. R. Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), 36.

³⁴ J. Broad, ed., *Bishop Wake's Summary of Visitation Returns from the Diocese of Lincoln 1706-1715*, II (Oxford 2012), 812–3.

³⁵ ROLLR, ID 41 18/21.

³⁶ ROLLR, ID 41 18/22.

³⁷ ROLLR, ID 41 32; ROLLR, 245'1850, p. 43.

Packe, lived nine miles away, at Prestwold Hall. The rector from 1835 to 1846 was Colin Alexander Campbell M. A. who was also rector of Widdington (Essex), where he was resident.³⁸

On the floor in the chancel are two flat stones to the memory of Nathan Wright (d.1793) (grandson of Nathan Wright, who had been lord of the manor until his death in 1721) and his wife and first cousin Elizabeth (d.1780).³⁹

In 1851 the attendance at the weekly Sunday afternoon service was between four and six persons, the numbers being low because the Hall was shut.⁴⁰

The rector from 1861 to 1881 was Henry Gregg. In 1860 he married writer Mary Kirby and the following year she and her sister Elizabeth bought a house in Melton Mowbray for the three of them.⁴¹

The spire was struck by lightning on 16 August 1877 and collapsed on to the rest of the building.⁴² It was restored by 1879 at a cost of £800 which was raised and paid for by Ernest Chaplin Esq., lord of the manor.⁴³ In that year there was a garden fete at the Hall to raise funds.⁴⁴ The restoration included a new roof of pitch pine, reseating, an oak pulpit donated by Lady Cardigan (1824-1915), a reading desk given by architect Winter Johnson, and a lectern presented by rector Henry Gregg.⁴⁵ A new organ was installed in 1891.⁴⁶

³⁸ <http://db.theclergydatabase.org.uk> (accessed 18 Aug 2019); W. White, *Hist., Gaz. and Dir. of Leics. and Rutl.* (Sheffield, 1846), 430–1.

³⁹ Extant 2019.

⁴⁰ TNA, HO 129/418/1, Ecclesiastical census.

⁴¹ *The Church of St Michael and all Angels Brooksby*, church booklet (post 2013); M. Kirby, *Leaflets from my Life: a Narrative Autobiography* (2nd edn, London and Leicester, 1888), 171

⁴² *Leicester Chronicle and Mercury*, 25 Aug. 1877, p. 9; M. Kirby, *Leaflets from my Life: a Narrative Autobiography* (London and Leicester, 2nd edn, 1888), 234.

⁴³ *Kelly's Dir. Leics & Rutland* (1899), 46.

⁴⁴ *Leicester Chronicle and Mercury*, 6 Sep. 1879, p. 8 and 13 Sep. 1879 p.8.

⁴⁵ *The Church of St Michael and all Angels Brooksby*, church booklet (post 2013); *Kelly's Dir. of Leics. and Rutl.* (1899), 46.

⁴⁶ *Grantham Journal*, 3 Oct. 1891, p. 8.

Rector Horace Stirling Townsend Gahan (from 1923 to 1956) was also vicar of Thrussington, where he lived.⁴⁷ During the First World War he was a chaplain in Brussels and gave Holy Communion to nurse Edith Cavell the night before her execution in 1915.⁴⁸ He was buried in Thrussington churchyard.

Although the permanent resident population of the parish remained small, the attractive site encouraged people from outside the parish to visit and attend services. Heating was installed between 1897 and 1901.⁴⁹ In the decade 1891 to 1900, there were 18 baptisms of residents and a further eight of non-residents.⁵⁰ The presence of the agricultural institute and college since 1945 helped to give the church a new lease of life, as the building was regarded as the college chapel for students and staff. From 1951 to 2009 there were 27 residents baptised and 41 non-residents.⁵¹ In 2008 the Church of England's residence rules concerning weddings in parish churches were relaxed and the church then had about 20 to 25 marriages each year, with the college often providing catering.⁵² This enabled the church to raise funds to restore to the fabric of the building in 2007–8 and replace the organ in 2012.⁵³

Other internal monuments and furnishings include a bust of Admiral Earl Beatty, the Union flag which was displayed from his flagship, and a memorial to the officers and men who were killed at the Battle of Jutland on 31 May 1916. After the First World War, Reverend Arthur Carter raised money for a new altar.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ ROLLR, DE 7804/1, parish baptism register contains list of priests from 1815 to 2009; gravestone in Thrussington churchyard. *The Church of St Michael and all Angels Brooksby*, church booklet (post 2013).

⁴⁸ C. F. Horne, *Source Records of the Great War*, vol. 3 (Boston USA, 1923), 374-5; *The Church of St Michael and all Angels Brooksby*, church booklet (post 2013).

⁴⁹ ROLLR, DE2121/103, heating at Brooksby Church.

⁵⁰ ROLLR, DE 7804/1, baptism register.

⁵¹ ROLLR, DE 7804/1, baptism register.

⁵² C. Fairbairn, *House of Commons Briefing Paper 00644: Marriage: Residence Requirements* (8 May 2017); *The Church of St Michael and all Angels Brooksby*, church booklet (c.2014).

⁵³ *The Church of St Michael and all Angels Brooksby*, church booklet (c.2014).

⁵⁴ *The Church of St Michael and all Angels Brooksby*, church booklet (c.2014).

Church Architecture

The grade II* listed building is rectangular in plan with the nave and chancel as one. The fabric is ironstone ashlar on the east and south walls, otherwise uncoursed stone rubble with limestone dressings. The roof is made of slate with the south slope particularly of Swithland slate.⁵⁵ The tower was started in the early 14th century and completed in the next century. It is topped with a recessed crocketed spire. The main body of the church is in the Perpendicular style of the 16th century. The church was described by archdeacon Bonney in 1832 as 'particularly neat'.⁵⁶

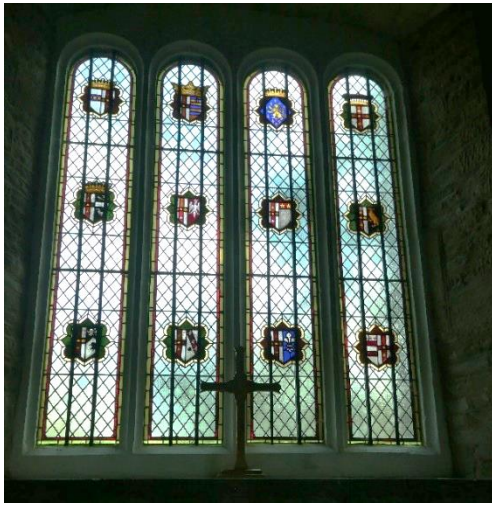


⁵⁵ NHLE listed building entry 1188473

⁵⁶ ROLLR, 245'1850, p. 43.

Church Interior 2019

Wm Villiers and his wife



East window



Battle of Jutland memorial



Bust of Admiral Beatty and the flag from HMS Queen Elizabeth

Protestant Nonconformity

No Nonconformist chapels were ever built in the parish.

