

The Vicars of Bampton in the Nineteenth Century

The parish church and community of Bampton was served by four vicars in the nineteenth century. They were Bartholomew Davey (1785-1841), Edward Rendell (1841-1884), Octavius Camillus Wright (1884-1892) and Henry Forester Holmes (1892-1917). During the century the church underwent a major renovation, while the population of Bampton rose in the early part of the century, then declined with emigration to the industrial areas of Britain and the colonies.

Bartholomew Davey

The local newspaper recorded in July 1841: *"Died, on the 17th instant, at the Vicarage House at Bampton, the Rev. Bartholomew Davey, in his 82nd year."* This would have meant that he was born about 1759 and became the vicar at Bampton when he was 26 years of age. He remained 56 years until his death. His wife, Jane, died in 1850 aged 79 years. The Rev. Davey was responsible for an act of gross vandalism. When the 14th century Rood Screen was moved at the end of the nave it was shortened. The Rev. Davey cut up the remaining pieces and burnt them as firewood!

Edward Rendell

He was followed by The Rev. Edward Rendell and a local newspaper stated in September 1841: *"Rev. Edward Rendell, B.A. has been instituted to the Vicarage of Bampton, vacant by the death of Bartholomew Davey, on the presentation of Thomas Leigh Teale Rendell, of Tiverton, gentleman."*

The 1851 census gives details of his household. With Edward Rendell, vicar of Bampton, aged 41 and born in Devon, were his wife, Jane, aged 27 and born at Aveton Gifford in south Devon. They had one daughter, Cecily, aged one and born in Bampton. Their servants were Sarah Govier, aged 19 and born at Upton in Somerset and Emma Hodge, aged 15 and born in Plymouth.

Edward was baptised at Tiverton on the 4th October 1810 and his parents were Thomas and Margaretta. Thomas died in 1838 and Margaretta in 1849 so they do not appear in the 1851 census and his father did not see him become vicar of Bampton. Six years later, in 1847, Edward married Jane Wise at Stoke Fleming in south Devon with their marriage registered at Kingsbridge in August. Their first child, Cecily Mary, was born on the 18th August, 1849 and baptised, presumably by her father, on the 16th September, according to the Parish Records. Two more children were to follow. Charles Edward was baptised on April 25th 1852 and Arthur Henry on May 4th 1855.

Later that year in July the local press reported that *"a girl, named Hodge, was charged by the Rev. E. Rendell of Bampton, to whom she was apprenticed, with misconducting herself whilst in his service. The Bench granted an order for her discharge from the complainants employ."* What Emma's offence was is not clear, but six years later, in the 1861 census, a 25 year old E. Hodge was a servant at Raglan Barracks in Devonport.

A year later the local press reported in September that *"during the past week a new organ has been erected in the parish church of Bampton. The organ was built by Mr Walker of London. On Saturday, the erection being completed, a selection of music was performed on it, by Mr W. Sergeant of Exeter which proved the instrument to be first rate in tone and quality."* This was part of a major refurbishment of the church which was in such a state that some suggested it would be best to demolish it and do a complete rebuilt. Fortunately, this did not happen! However, the metal rods

that can be seen crossing the church and the angle of the south wall are evidence of subsidence. The drainpipes on the north wall are embossed with "1872", the date they replaced the existing ones and in July 1879 a local paper stated that *"the vicar announced on Sunday last that whilst the interior of the church was undergoing repairs the service would be held at the National School Room."*

The household remained the same in the 1861 census, with everyone being 10 years older except for his wife, Jane who was 41. Jane Wise was born in 1818 in Aveton Gifford, which would make her 43, and as she was 53 in the 1871, and 63 in 1881 it seems that the census records of 1851 and 1861 have her younger than she really was. The two servants were replaced by one, Sarah Hines, 19, born at Sampford Peverell. The 1871 census does not include Charles Edward who seems to have moved away and the servant was Elizabeth Knight, aged 15 and born in Bampton. The 21 year old Cecily was still living with the family and was still a spinster in the 1881 census. By 1891 she had left Devon and was *"living on own means"* in Battersea, London.

Those who have lived in Bampton for some time will know that the River Bathern floods! It did in the winter of 1875 and it is recorded in the press that *"during the past week the vicar of Bampton, assisted by some of the gents of the local Board, have distributed the £100- so generously given by the Mansion House Foundation Relief Committee to the sufferers of the recent flood in the town."* This is also a reminder that the vicar was an important figure in the town.

The 1881 census has Edward, 71, and recorded as a "Clerk in Holy Orders", with wife the 63 year old Jane, son Arthur H., 25, daughter Cecily M., 31, and a visitor, Edward R. Haynes, 25, also a Clerk in Holy Orders. The domestic servant was now Emma Longford, 14, from Morebath.

Edward was to die three years later and was away from Bampton at the time of his death. The local press recorded in August 1884 that *"the sad news of the demise of the Rev. E. Rendell was made known on Thursday when the following telegram was received by the sexton, Mr James Webber, from Miss C.M. Rendell. 'Will you toll the minute bell for our beloved father, who was called to his rest peacefully early this Thursday morning?' "* Cecily was with her father in Highweek, Newton Abbot as is apparent from the National Probate Calendar, which states: *"10 September. Administration of the Personal Estate of the Rev. Edward Rendell late of Highweek in the County of Devon who died 31st July 1884 at Highweek was granted at Exeter to Jane Rendell of Highweek widow the Relict."* The Estate was worth £134 14s 7d. In today's money that would be about £18,000. His wife, Jane, outlived him and died in 1897 aged 75.

Octavius Camillus Wright

Sometime in 1884, probably before Edward Rendell died, the Rev. Octavius Camillus Wright was appointed as vicar of Bampton. He was to remain here until 1892, the shortest spell of any of the vicars in the nineteenth century.

The 1891 census gives us details which can be followed up. Octavius C. Wright, single, aged 41, born in Canada, was living at the Vicarage with Mary Ann Duke, his domestic servant. She was single, aged 47 and born in Westminster. The record of births and baptisms show that she was born on the 25th December 1844 but not baptised until 27th May 1845, at St Clément's Dane, Westminster. In 1871 she was still single, aged 27, and living with her parents in Westminster. However, the 1881 census finds her as the housekeeper to the Rev. Octavius C. Wright, living at 31, Spring Villa, Barry Road,

Camberwell. They moved on in 1884, to Bampton Vicarage, which had held Edward Rendell and his family, now to be occupied by only two people.

The reference to Camberwell is explained by the background history of Octavius Camillus Wright B.A. From 1874-6 he was Curate of Northam in Hampshire, moving on to St John's East, Dulwich, S.E. London, from 1876 to 1884, before moving onto Bampton. He does not seem to be living in the vicarage but in a private house, at Spring Villa, Barry Road, Camberwell, a few miles from Dulwich. The 1881 census records him as 31 years old, born in Canada but a British subject, and with him were a visitor born in Italy, John Edgreen, a Commercial Clerk born in Bodmin, who was a boarder, and his housekeeper, Mary Duke.

According to the local press his short stay was eventful. It is recorded that in December 1885 *"about 600 lb of Christmas beef was distributed to the poorer parishioners of the parish on Thursday. The Rev. O.C. Wright (vicar), Mr J.C. Reckett (church warden) and Dr. T.A. Guinness attended at the Market House distributing the tickets and Mr Richard Vicary supplied the beef."* This act of generosity highlighted the poverty that existed in Bampton.

The following year three women found themselves trapped in the church and had to sound the alarm by ringing the bells!

The Market House, which seemed to belong to the church, is referred to again in October 1886, when it was reported that *"Mr Periam gave notice that the resolution passed agreeing to pay the vicar one shilling a time for the use of the room known as Market House room be rescinded and that the School Board make arrangements to hold their meetings at the White Horse Hotel. Mr Periam asserted that all through the controversy there had been attempts to force the supremacy of the Church and the Lord of the Manor over the local Board."*

The disagreement between the Vicar and Mr Periam was as a result of the 1870 Forster's Elementary Education Act. This made education compulsory for all children aged 5 to 13 and established a new system based on locally elected School Boards who raised local rates to fund them. These National Schools were in addition to the Voluntary schools that may have existed but certainly did not accommodate all the children in the parish. The issue that caused the most controversy, not only in Bampton, but throughout the country, was that of what religious education was on the syllabus. The decision was to make it nondenominational, thus removing any influence from the Established Church. With thriving Baptist and Methodist Chapels in Bampton it is easy to see that Mr Periam and other members of the School Board would resent the interference of the Vicar and Lord of the Manor.

In August 1887 the local press reported that *"Bampton Church, which had been closed for some time during the execution of internal alterations and repairs, was reopened yesterday. There was a fairly large congregation."* In August 1890 it was added that *"during cleaning and repair work to Bampton Parish Church a handsome rood doorway was discovered beneath several coats of plaster. The staircase and entrance have since been opened up. All were well preserved. This was probably the position of the beautifully carved oak screen which is now placed eighteen feet nearer the chancel."* As can be seen Rev. Wright oversaw much of the restoration that took place in the nineteenth century. It is apparent that much or the entire interior was covered in plaster, removed to reveal the stonework we can see today.

Two years later Rev. Wright was to move on again. A report in the press for April 1892 states *“a sum of money was recently collected to purchase a testimonial for presentation to the Vicar (Rev. O.C. Wright) on his leaving Bampton for work as Rector of Barcheston-on-Stour. The Easter offering is a handsome silver salver, bearing in the centre, richly embellished, a suitable inscription. The children of the National School gave a ram’s horn inkstand of new design mounted with silver. The successor to the present Vicar is the Rev. H. Forester Holmes, who with his wife and family will take up their residence at the Vicarage next week.”* It seems that the controversy with the National School had been resolved and the generousities of the gifts suggest that the Rev. Wright was very popular.

Barcheston-on-Stour is a pretty Cotswold village in south Warwickshire, however, The Rev. Wright did not stay there long, until 1896, and the 1901 census found him in Suffolk at Brandeston All Saints. Living with the 50 year old Vicar was Thomas Swales, 35, a boarder and two 15 year old male servants, David Burrell and Gordon Rock. He seems to have dispensed with a female housekeeper. He was to die two years later and was buried on the 21st January, 1903, at Brightlingsea in Essex. The National Probate Calendar records *“Wright, the reverend Octavius Camillus, of Moverone Farm, Brightlingsea, Essex, clerk, died 16th January 1903 . . .the attorney of John Augustus Wright. Effects £237-1s-4d.”* The present day equivalent of that sum is over £110,000!

The Rev. Octavius Camillus Wright died a rich man at a relatively early age and unlike many of his predecessors at Bampton only stayed a sort time. In fact he stayed nowhere for any length of time. At Northam 2 years, Dulwich 8 years, Bampton 6 years, Barcheston 4 years and Brandeston 7 years. One is left wondering why he moved on so much. Could it be that with the development of the railways it was no longer necessary to stay in one place and mobility of labour was now possible?

Colin Wellard.