

Reverend John Dryden Hodgson

As his obituary shows he was vicar in the following Wiltshire parishes, East Grafton, Great Bedwyn and finally Collingbourne Ducis.

Apart from his clerical duties he kept notes on the various members of his parish and these have since been transcribed by the Wiltshire History Society under the titles;

Collingbourne Ducis families in 19th Century

Great Bedwyn Families in the 19th Century

The Obituary to Canon John Dryden Hodgson written 1896

The diocese of Salisbury and the brotherhood of our Chapter will long regret the loss of Canon Dryden Hodgson, rector of Collingbourne Ducis who died on August 19th, 1896 after months and indeed years of weak health and suffering, in his seventy fifth year. He was a man of considerable scholarship and cultivation. After obtaining a fellowship at Saint Peter's college Cambridge in 1844, he studied a while for the Bar, but ultimately determined to devote all his energy of mind and heart to the church. In 1851, he became, under the patronage of the first Marquis of Aylesbury, vicar of East Grafton, in this diocese, whence he removed in 1855 to the adjoining mother parish of Great Bedwyn where he was vicar for nineteen years. From Bedwyn he went in 1875 to Collingbourne Ducis as Rector, by the appointment of the second Marquis of Aylesbury and remained there until his much lamented death. In 1878, he was appointed a prebendary - Canon, (Stratford) of Salisbury Cathedral by Bishop Moberly. He was a member of the diocesan synod from its beginning and held the office of Rural Dean of Marlborough for eleven years. During his incumbency, the nave of Collingbourne church was completely restored, the chancel having been previously built by his predecessor, Mr. Lukis.

Canon Hodgson was well known to his friends as a writer of graceful fugitive verses. Some charming lines of his are well remembered by the present writer as having been produced on the occasion of the consecration, in 1854, of the first of the two beautiful churches which adorn and hallow the glades of Savernake Forest.

In all three parishes of which Canon Hodgson was incumbent, he is and long will be remembered as a much loved and most excellent pastor, spiritual adviser and personal friend, and also as one whose innumerable works of pastoral care and charity were ably and graciously seconded by his faithful and devoted wife.

Rev John and Frances Hodgson of Collingbourne Ducis

In 1852 Rev John Dryden Hodgson had married Frances Thomas, Fanny was the only surviving daughter of Rev. John Thomas and Eleanor Preston. She was born in 1829 at Great Burstead, Essex where her father was vicar, She had three brothers. The eldest John Harris trained for the church and eventually was appointed Arch deacon of Cape Town from 1863-69. Her younger brother Herbert Preston Thomas was my great grandfather. The Hodgson's had two sons, Bernard and John Henry.

Rev John Dryden was the incumbent of various parishes in Wiltshire and in 1874 the family moved into the newly built rectory in Collingbourne Ducis where he was appointed vicar and where he resided for the rest of his life.

Olave Pryke, née Preston Thomas, my grandmother wrote an illuminating account of her aunt, the formidable Aunt Fanny. It is Olave's portrayal that gives such a vivid picture of life at the rectory, for it was indeed to the vicarage at Collingbourne Ducis that Olave was banished as a child.

Aunt Fanny By Olave Pryke (Written about 1965,)

When Aunt Fanny was a child she had a very frightening experience. She was sitting near a window of her father's rectory, when the church spire was struck by lightning and crashed down towards her, its top landing only a few yards or so from the window. When I stayed with her in her old age, the effect of that terror was still with her. During a thunderstorm, she retired to a sofa at the back of the room with a newspaper over her head and I had to tell her when a flash of lightning came, so that she could be prepared for the thunder. I was about twenty or so and not very sympathetic I fear, being glad that she was afraid of something when she had been such a terror to us children long before. She wasn't unkind but somehow we all dreaded her visits. Once when I had been more than usual in disgrace, (I must have been seven or eight), I was sent for the whole of the Easter holidays as a punishment, so as not to be with my five brothers when they came home from school. And even Uncle John's gentle kindness didn't make up for Aunt Fanny's disapproving strictures.

They lived in a pretty village where he was vicar and I have two special memories of them. One was of their strange drinking habits. At breakfast they always started with tea, but half way down the cup they poured coffee into it. This stuck me as very odd, and more so when they put aside two cups of the mixture, which they drank cold in the middle of the morning.

On Sundays, in cold weather, Aunt Fanny had two potatoes cooked for her, which she took to church, one in each pocket. She kept her hands on them in order to play the organ in the unheated church. An admirable and interesting idea; I wish I could remember whether the sacred potatoes were eaten at the Sunday dinner.

Her visits were dreaded by all of us children and I'm sure even my mother found her a trial, though of course she was a perfect hostess to her sister in law. I remember on one occasion when we were all standing round the table before lunch, waiting for my father, who was in his study upstairs with his clerk. He was normally very punctual and we had to be, but this time there was a long wait which became too much for Val, my youngest brother. He suddenly said in his slow drawly voice, "Blessed is the man who sitteth on a pin for he shall rise again". Of course, this was too much for us children and there was a burst of giggles which we tried to check. But Aunt Fanny...O my Aunt! She turned her fiercest glare of shock and horror on my brother, then on the rest of us, 'til we had all gained control of ourselves, then the glare returned to the chief sinner. At last my father's steps were heard on the stairs, in he came, said grace and as usual made a joke or told a funny story. Never was a joke received with more applause, now we could laugh and laugh, which we did... all except Aunt Fanny. She glared alternatively at my brother and my mother expecting no doubt that the boy would be sent out of the room. My mother told me in later years that she couldn't trust herself to speak, with Aunt Fanny's fierce eyes upon her, though of course she had a private talk with Val later.

Another memory when I was about eleven, Aunt Fanny was shocked to find that Val and I had no Sunday lessons. (The bigger boys were away at boarding school, Val at day school and I had a governess). She reproached my mother for not giving us any. Mother's reply was that Sunday was the only day she could see my father, she wouldn't ask the governess as she was teaching all week. So my aunt asked if she might give us a lesson, being sure we would appreciate it. Consent was given, we were dispatched to the drawing room and had the parable of the Good Samaritan expounded to us. At the end I was asked "who is your neighbour?" and I replied, "The person who helps me". "No, the one who needs your help", which caused me to argue fiercely and in the end I went away unconvinced, saying as we returned to the school room, "Thank goodness, another jaw done!" This remark was overheard by my mother as she came down the stairs. She was greeted in the drawing room with the triumphant remark, "There, what did I tell you Marion, the children were so interested, especially Olave with her eager arguments". Mother did not say what she'd overheard!

Some years later, when we were living in Exeter, aunt Fanny and I were on our way to the cathedral and she asked, "What church is that with the beautiful spire?" "The congregational church" I replied. No

comment, until on our way back when the spire had evidently changed from its former beauty for it was now, "A tawdry copy of our own lovely spires, most impertinent of them".

A final memory during her last illness, she had to have a nurse companion. Her son engaged one with excellent references and a charming personality, but with a face that was not even plain but quite distressingly ugly. Bernard was worried as to how his mother would take to her knowing aunt Fanny to be very sensitive to beauty. So with some trepidation, he took the nurse upstairs and introduced her to her patient who took one look at her and muttered, "Horrible, horrible" then turned her face to the wall. This was beyond the possibility of any apology and Bernard was too appalled to attempt anything. Mercifully, the dear woman told him not to worry. She knew all about her face and was sure he and his mother would soon be good friends. And so they were for another nine months, when aunt Fanny died peacefully in her early eighties.

Olave's recollection of her aunt and uncle and their strange habits, give an interesting insight into the lives of two people who were highly respected members of the community and pillars of the church, as the obituary written after John Dryden's demise reveals.

John Dryden Hodgson is buried at the entrance to the churchyard in Collingbourne Ducis. The inscription on his gravestone reads;

In memory of John Dryden Hodgson MA

Canon of Salisbury

The beloved Rector of this parish for 21 years

Died 19th August 1896 aged 74 years

"The Memory of the just is blessed"

Next to him lies his wife, she was to survive him by 16 years.

In loving memory of Frances Elizabeth

Widow of

John Dryden Hodgson

Died July 20th 1912 aged 83 years

"There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God"

Also with the family group was the grave of Frances' mother. Her inscription reads;

In memory of Eleanor

Widow of the

Rev John Thomas MA

Vicar of Gt. Burstead, Essex

Died 7th April 1883

Aged 81 years

"Her children arise up and call her blessed"

And, most poignant of all, three smaller graves marking the burial site of;

Dorothy Frances & Helena Mary

Infant twin daughters of John Henry Hodgson MA

Rector of St. Swithuns, Winchester

Fell asleep Oct. 1886

"Their angels do always behold the face of my father"

And also;

Irene Katherine

Third daughter of

John Henry & Frances Eleanor Hodgson

At rest 17th April 1889

Aged 9 months

"Without fault before the throne of God"

These three little girls were John and Frances' grandchildren.