

The Rev. Francis Potter F.R.S.
Kilmington, Wiltshire
Rector of Kilmington
1626 ~ 1678

Francis Potter the second son of the Reverend Richard Potter, vicar of Mere, was born at Mere Vicarage on May 29th 1594, four years before his father became rector of Kilmington.

He was a commoner of Trinity College Oxford for a number of years and painted a portrait of the founder and designed a fine sundial erected in the Trinity quadrangle, but no longer in existence.

On the death of his father in 1626 he succeeded him as rector and remained in Kilmington for the rest of his life.

This was regretted by John Aubrey, the Wiltshire Historian who wrote of him, "twas a pity that such a delicate inventive Witt should be staked to a private preferment in an obscure corner, without the conversation of ingenious men".

He was described as "a mathematical genius bidden under the bushel of Kilmington Parsonage".

He invented a quadrant with a graduated compass for use at sea, and an instrument for drawing in perspective, as well as some useful types of pumps and water wheels.

About the year 1640 he entertained the possibility of curing diseases by transferring blood from one man to another.

Following his election to the Royal Society in 1663 he passed this idea on to them, and in 1667 a man was paid £1 to be injected with 12 ounces of sheeps blood. A week later he told the Society that he was much better and 2as a new man".

Potter was always sickly and nearly blind, which may explain why the parish registers appear to have been neglected between 1648 and 1662.

Aubrey described Potter late in life as "an old man like a monk pretty long visaged with pale clear skin and grey eye, talking all new and unvulgar ; his house as undecked as a monk's cell but with a pretty contrived garden all fortified, as you may say, and adorned with the finest of box hedges."

In the garden he kept bees and experimented with the amount of honey they produced. In spite of being so nearly blind he fascinated Aubrey by showing him the bees' thighs through a microscope.

Potter died, quite blind, in April 1678 aged 84 and his body lies in an unmarked grave on the south side of the chancel in Kilmington Church.

Source: Kilmington St. Mary