

# THE CHURCH ESTATE OF COMPTON DANDO

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Since the 16th century the small parish of Compton Dando, south of Keynsham, has benefited from the proceeds of an unusual charity. This was founded during the period of turmoil and uncertainty which preceded and accompanied the dissolution of the monasteries. The charity's purpose was, and still remains, to provide for the maintenance of the parish church, its furnishings and ornaments. The attractive medieval church of St Mary, Compton Dando is situated on sloping ground above the village and overlooking the river Chew. Few details have hitherto been easily accessible concerning the foundation and management of this charity. A short history was written by Wilfrid Leighton in c1950.<sup>1</sup> He had become a trustee or feoffee of the Church Estate in 1937 and was chairman from 1943 until 1965. Copies of his history are no longer

obtainable, and since its compilation new sources have been found, especially on the foundation and early history of the Trust.

Throughout the Middle Ages the land at Compton Dando was divided between the Benedictine abbey of Bath and the Augustinian abbey of Keynsham. A long list of those to be prayed for by the monks of Bath in 1316 includes 'Fulco de Anno [Dando] who gave us Compton and the lands at Sortis and land at Kokeredshulle, and the mill of Compton'.<sup>2</sup> The canons of Keynsham possessed the manor house [capital messuage] and land in the common fields of Compton Dando.<sup>3</sup> In the decades before the final dissolution of all the monastic houses during 1536–39, it was obvious to abbots and priors that major change was inevitable. There was increasing interference in monastic affairs by the Crown



*Fig. 1 Church of St Mary the Virgin, Compton Dando*

and local landowners. In an attempt to secure for themselves influential friends the monasteries granted long leases of land to local dignitaries and appointed laymen as stewards, receivers of rents, auditors and agents. On the estates of Bath and Keynsham many of those who were to be the chief beneficiaries of the dissolution were already firmly installed in monastic administration for several years before the collapse came.<sup>4</sup> It was during the years leading up to the dissolution that the prior and monks of Bath agreed to the highly-unusual arrangement at Compton Dando whereby land and property was set aside for the maintenance of the parish church.

The responsibility for this provision was chiefly due to two men. One was the last prior of Bath abbey, William Holloway (prior 1525–1539); the other was a rising local lawyer, Sir David Brook or Broke (c1498–1559). When Thomas Cromwell's official, Richard Layton, visited Bath in August 1535, collecting evidence to justify the suppression of the monasteries, he remarked that Prior Holloway was 'a man simple and not of the greatest wit'. Like many of Layton's verdicts on monks and monasteries, this was quite wrong. Holloway was devoted to the abbey and had continued with great energy and enthusiasm to press on with the major rebuilding project on the abbey church. He was deeply involved in experiments on medicines, herbal remedies and the effects of the Bath waters, although like many others he was seduced into a futile search for the elixir of life and the means of transforming base metal into gold. He was astute enough to realise that the monasteries were vulnerable to attack by the Crown and that he was soon likely to need all the local allies he could obtain. For this reason he granted long leases of the abbey lands to local gentry, corrodies, pensions and offices to influential supporters, and an annual pension to Thomas Cromwell. Gifts to the King included the works of St Anselm and other ancient books from the abbey library and two young Irish hawks to appeal to the King's love of falconry. The Prior's concern to have local opinion on his side was no doubt a reason to enlist the support of an energetic lawyer with many contacts throughout the region such as David Brook.<sup>5</sup> Brook was a member of a family which had long been established at Ashton Phillips in the parish of Long Ashton. He was the third son of John Brook and his wife Jane, who was the daughter and co-heir of the prominent Bristol merchant, Richard Ameryke. The voyage of John Cabot from Bristol to America in 1497 was partly financed by Richard

Ameryke who may possibly have given his name to the newly-discovered continent. This meant that David Brook had good connections with Bristol's mercantile community. His father, John Brook, was a sergeant-at-law and was a steward of Glastonbury abbey, his tomb in St Mary Redcliffe church has a brass memorial showing him in his legal robes. David Brook trained as a lawyer at the Middle Temple and rose rapidly in his profession, finally becoming judge and chief baron at the Court of the Exchequer. As a younger son, David Brook had to make his own way in the world and seized every opportunity for advancement. He took a prominent part in legal affairs in Bristol and Bath, and was M.P. for Bristol from 1529 and recorder from 1540. He acted for Thomas, Lord Berkeley of Berkeley castle and was left an annual legacy of £49 13s 4d at Berkeley's death in 1531. David Brook was on good terms with Thomas Cromwell and was active in the affairs of various monastic houses, notably at Bath. Like so many of those involved with the dissolution and the disposal of monastic lands, he remained conservative in his religious views and was in favour with Queen Mary, being knighted at her coronation in 1553. The Queen granted him the manor of Horton in Gloucestershire for his services. After Queen Mary's death in 1558 he was out of sympathy with the religious changes brought about by Queen Elizabeth, and in his will made shortly before his death in 1559 he asked in vain that his funeral service should be conducted with catholic ceremonial 'yf it maye be suffered'.<sup>6</sup>

David Brook was legal advisor to William Holloway, the last prior of Bath (1525–39) and was highly respected by the Prior. In a legal dispute over the income from St John's Hospital in Bath which was tried before the Court of Star Chamber in 1533 the prior stated that he had sought the advice of David Brook who he described as his close friend ('my nigh frende').<sup>7</sup> It was Brook's influence with the Prior that enabled him to secure the presentation of his relative, Edward Brook (or Broke), to the lucrative benefice of Compton Dando in 1529. Edward Brook had only just graduated with a B.A. degree from Oxford when he was appointed vicar of Compton Dando. This was a rapid promotion for Edward Brook who as a young priest, was only just above the statutory age of 24.<sup>8</sup> As vicar of Compton Dando Edward Brook received an income from tithes in the parish, a vicarage house and a farmstead. The glebe farm included 40 acres of arable, meadow and pasture, as well as access to the commons. There were many unbeneficed priests at the time and this

was a remarkably fortunate appointment for such a young man. He was to remain at Compton Dando through all the religious upheavals of the next three decades. During the reign of Edward VI when clerical marriage was permitted, Edward Brook married Agnes Hunte. He managed to conceal the marriage during the restoration of Catholicism after 1553, but it was finally discovered and he was forced to resign in 1557 at the age of 53.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to securing the benefice of Compton Dando for Edward Brook in 1529, David Brook used his influence with the prior of Bath to establish the trust for the maintenance of the parish church. The income from more than 100 acres of land and several tenements in the parish was provided for this purpose. To ensure the survival of this arrangement, Brook took great pains to appoint a group of remarkably eminent local men as trustees or feoffees to administer the estate. The most distinguished were Edmund St Loe and Sir William St Loe of Sutton Court in the parish of Chew Magna, a younger branch of the St Loe family of Newton St Loe. They were major landowners and Sir William was a prominent courtier, later chief butler and captain of the guard to Queen Elizabeth. He is remembered today as the third husband of Bess of Hardwick, and left her the wealth to build Hardwick Hall.<sup>10</sup> Brook also persuaded two of his relatives to serve as feoffees. His elder brother, Hugh Brook, was a landowner from Long Ashton and John Walsh of Stowey, who was a leading local lawyer, judge and M.P. for Somerset. David Brook thought highly of John Walsh, making him administrator of his affairs and leaving him part of his extensive library of legal books.<sup>11</sup> Such eminent men can have devoted little time to the affairs of Compton Dando, but their influence made sure that the new trust survived the storm which was to sweep away so much else during the 1530s.

For the day-to-day conduct of the trust local feoffees were appointed, although in the absence of detailed records from the early years, only a few of their names survive. Among them were members of the Young family who possessed the freehold estates of Sewardswick (Wick Farm) and Grubbeswick (Knowle Farm). The Youngs had been prominent in Bristol as merchants, lawyers, town councillors and mayors throughout the later Middle Ages. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century Sir John Young was a leading Bristol merchant and landowner. He built the 'Great House' on the site of the former Carmelite friary in Bristol where the Colston Hall now stands, with the Red Lodge at the end of his formal garden. Here he

entertained Queen Elizabeth during her week-long visit to Bristol in 1574. In Compton Dando George Young, who lived at Sewardswick, took a leading part in the establishment of the Church Estate.<sup>12</sup> Members of the Bysse (or Bisse) family of Publow were also appointed as feoffees by David Brook. They were wealthy clothiers who possessed tucking or fulling mills at Pensford and Publow, exporting their cloth to the Netherlands, France, Spain and Portugal. This was a prosperous trade and the Bysse family was able to use the profits to purchase a large amount of the Church land which became available after 1539. John Bysse bought land in the parishes of Wellow and Camerton, and chantry land at Bridgwater. By 1553 he was being described as 'gentleman', and he became a J.P. in 1559. James Bysse acquired former Bath abbey lands at Stoke St Michael, Engliscombe and Chelwood. John and Richard Bysse were among the earliest recorded feoffees, to be followed later in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Thomas Bysse.<sup>13</sup>

From Compton Dando itself early feoffees include John Sutton, who leased the mill by the church. In a survey of 1568 this was described as two mills:

'One of the said mylles is a griste myll, and th'other is a tucking or fullinge mill with two stockes. In winter the said mylles will go contynuallye, yf they may have worke for them, and in the summer they do goo by poundes and the tenante maye well make three goode poundes every daye and night'.<sup>14</sup>

This was a profitable undertaking and John Sutton, was one of the most important tenants, first of the Hungerfords and later, after 1567, of the Smyths of Ashton Court. In the subsidy or tax assessment of 1581 Joan, widow of John Sutton, was shown as managing the mill and her liability for tax was £5 8s 4d, the highest figure in Compton Dando.<sup>15</sup> Two husbandmen who served as feoffees and played an important part in the establishment of the Church Estate were Thomas and John Horsington. They were tenants of Church Estate land and also rented other land in Compton Dando. The detailed survey of Smyth land made for Hugh Smyth in 1568 shows Thomas Horsington holding by copyhold tenure a tenement, barton, garden, orchard, four acres of meadow, some enclosed fields and a modest area of arable land in the open fields. He would also have enjoyed rights of grazing on the common. John Horsington had a similar

holding, and in addition both men rented land from the Church Estate.<sup>16</sup> They were evidently regarded as trustworthy members of the community and in fact played an important part in establishing the Church Estate. The Elizabethan government went to great lengths to retrieve former Church land which had been illegally alienated from the Crown, and made a determined effort to seize the land in Compton Dando which had been dedicated to the maintenance of the parish church. The Horsingtons were among the chief of those who resisted these attempts. In 1572 John Horsington and another tenant, John Browne, were charged by the Attorney-General with illegal entry upon land which should properly belong to the Crown. They contested the accusation, but the resulting case dragged on until 1594 before finally being settled in their favour.<sup>17</sup> The protracted proceedings must have been a great worry and expense for the two husbandmen, and this was recognized by the feoffees in 1582 when John Browne was not charged for the renewal of his copyhold tenement in Cockers Hill 'in consideration of the Labour, Services and Expenses ... about the Lands and Tenements of the Church'.<sup>18</sup> No doubt the contribution of John Horsington was also recognized although the incomplete records of the manorial court do not show this. Other copyhold tenants who served as feoffees during the 16th century included Thomas Harvo, William Lyons and William Reade.

The tradition of appointing influential local gentry as feoffees was established from the beginning and was to continue. Sir David Brook's strategy was evidently successful for the Church Estate was able to resist all attempts by the Crown and by local landowners to encroach upon its property. It is interesting to note that in the early appointments no clergy were included. Likewise, Hugh Smyth, who with his brother Matthew, bought the manor of Compton Dando from the Hungerfords in 1567 was not appointed, although he might have been regarded as an obvious choice. The reason was that Hugh Smyth was a notorious rogue and a constant irritant to his neighbours. He maintained a gang of armed ruffians at Ashton Court who terrorized the district, and there were constant complaints to the Privy Council about his conduct. He was excluded from any part in the entertainment provided for Queen Elizabeth in 1574, although Ashton Court would have been an ideal situation for her stay. He was dismissed as a justice of the peace in 1577 but the complaints about his conduct continued. He died in London in 1580

while awaiting trial for involvement in a murder committed by his followers during a night-time raid on a rabbit warren belonging to his neighbour, Sir George Norton at Abbotsleigh.<sup>19</sup> Clearly Hugh Smyth was regarded as totally undesirable to be a feoffee of Compton Dando Church Estate.

Apart from the fact that he evidently took an interest in the career of Edward Brook as vicar of Compton Dando, it is not clear why Sir David Brook went to so much trouble to establish a Trust for the maintenance of the parish church. The time could hardly have been less favourable with every aspect of church life and property being questioned. Nor is it apparent how the Trust escaped being appropriated by the Crown like other monastic properties. The fact that Sir David Brook's arrangements survived in spite of all the hazards has been of enormous benefit to the parish of Compton Dando and has ensured a continuity of care for the church building.

Having managed to survive the challenges of the later 16th century, the charity continued to fulfil the aims of its founders and provide funds to assist the churchwardens in the upkeep of the parish church. The property which was provided for the Trust by Prior William Holloway consisted of more than 100 acres of arable and pasture land scattered in three open fields, with access for tenants to the large area of common grazing which occupied the western part of the parish. Also included were 18 small farmsteads and cottages. In the absence of any other model of land management, the Trust operated from the beginning as a manorial court with the feoffees regarded as lords of the manor of the Church Estate. The records do not provide details of grants which were made to the churchwardens during the early decades of the Trust's history, but there is ample evidence of the careful management of the lands and properties by the feoffees.<sup>20</sup> Regular courts were held at which tenements and cottages were let by copyhold tenure for three lives, generally at a modest annual rent but with a substantial entry fine for the addition of new lives. Most of the Trust's tenants also held lands from the major estate in the parish. Successive members of the Smyth family held the manor of Compton Dando from 1567 until they were obliged to sell it in 1663, having been temporarily impoverished by their support for the royal cause during the Civil War. The manor was bought by Alexander Popham who had been a prominent supporter of Parliament, raising his own army against the Crown. The Popham family continued to hold Compton Dando until the mid-

20th century.<sup>21</sup> Throughout the 17th century the Church Estate continued to be managed by a combination of local gentry and substantial yeomen and husbandmen. Among the gentry were members of the Harington family from Kelston, Pophams of Houndstreet (later known as Hunstrete), Langtons from Newton St Loe and Branchs from Belluton. The number of feoffees fluctuated and at times dropped to only three or four individuals, but meetings appear to have been held regularly. During the 18th century several of the clergy from neighbouring parishes served as feoffees. The feoffees possessed a small building in Cockers Hill, Compton Dando which was occasionally used as a schoolroom, as emergency accommodation for poor and desperate families, and for a time was rented by a shopkeeper. The building no longer exists, although the foundations can still be seen. Some meetings of the feoffees were held there, but many were held in local hostelries where food and drink was provided. There were beer houses in Compton Dando and Woollard, but these were evidently unable to provide satisfactory hospitality. Instead there are frequent references to meetings being held at the George Inn, the King's Arms and the Rising Sun in Pensford and the Bull Inn at Chelwood.<sup>22</sup>

In contrast to the paucity of evidence concerning payments from the Trust for the maintenance of the church during the early years of the charity's existence, much detail survives from 1750 onwards. This consists of the accounts of the treasurers and churchwardens, although it is often difficult to distinguish one from the other. Inevitably in a small parish there were few individuals with the capacity and willingness to undertake these offices, and the same person often did both jobs. The resulting accounts show the Trust paying for things which were properly the responsibility of the churchwardens. They also reveal large expenditure for building work on the church and the provision of materials. Date stones at various places on the church building show where major repair work was carried out. Annual expenses included the provision of bread and wine for Holy Communion, payments to the ringers and the parish clerk, and for washing the vicar's surplice and the altar cloth. There were frequent payments to the Bilbie family of Chew Stoke for repairing the clock and bells and to the plumber for work on the lead roof. Among these appropriate concerns of the feoffees are references to paying for bodies of hedgehogs, rooks, hawks and sparrows, and for destroying vermin. These were properly the responsibility of the churchwardens

and the overseers of the poor, as were the relief of the poor and references to payments to poor travellers and others who had suffered misfortune.<sup>23</sup>

In 1786 pews were installed in the church, no doubt to replace the old box pews and provide more accommodation for worshippers. The new plain deal pews were bought from Bath for £81 7s 6d. At the same time 15 tons of black slag waste from brass production were obtained from the brass foundries in Keynsham. This was made into triangular blocks and was used as a coping for the churchyard wall where it continues to protect the masonry. The slag cost £2 5s 0d, but carriage of the heavy material cost £5 5s 0d. From the 1790s several other major projects were undertaken by the feoffees and appear in the accounts. In 1794 the church porch was completely rebuilt at a cost of £19 9s 4d.<sup>24</sup> During the next few years expenditure is recorded on numerous unspecified projects, as well as on redecorating the church interior, work on the windows, levelling the churchyard and repairs to the bells and bell-frame. Frequent references continue to be made to payments for repairs to the clock, until in 1832 the patience of the feoffees was exhausted and they purchased a new clock from Wasborough Hale and Company for £93 17s 0d.<sup>25</sup>

These payments were dwarfed in 1820 by massive rebuilding work on the north wall of the church. Information on this work comes from a new and authoritative source. Until the early 19th century the Church Estate charity, like countless others, had been conducted without external audit or investigation. This changed with the gradual creation of commissions to enquire into all aspects of national life. One of the first was a Charity Commission which from 1819 reported first on charity schools and later on all charities. The Commissioners' report on the charities of Compton Dando was printed in 1826 and provides the first detailed account of the purpose, resources and income of the Church Estate.<sup>26</sup> The charity was said to have been established:

'to the intent to repair and maintain the reparations and amendments of the ... church, and to maintain the ornaments of the same, to the honour and praise of Almighty God'.

The original property consisted of eight messuages and 107 acres of land within the parish. The annual income according to a survey which had been conducted in 1814 was as follows:



	£	s	d
The amount of the chief-rents paid upon all the leaseholds for lives and the copyholds are	5	6	6
The average of fines for the last 26 years may be stated at	21	7	8
The amount of rack-rents is	17	10	0
Income from investments	22	11	6
Total Income	66	15	8

The Commissioners' report stated that ten new feoffees had been elected in 1792 but by 1826 only two of these remained alive. They were John Light of West Town, Backwell and William Lloyd of Stanton Drew, who acted as treasurer. It was ordered that new trustees should be chosen and that they should be resident in Compton Dando or within six miles thereof. The Commissioners were critical of the way in which the Trust had been run and the accounts recorded, but they found no evidence of fraud or misappropriation of income. They drew attention to the fact that properties let at rack-rent, that is for the full annual value, were much more profitable than those let by copyhold

tenure for three lives. Like most other landlords, the feoffees had decided to change their ancient practice and agreed for the future to let all their properties at rack-rent.

The Commissioners noted the large expenditure which had recently been necessary to rebuild the north wall of the nave, and complimented the feoffees on the condition of the church.

'The body of the church and the interior are now in a very complete state of repair, as large sums have been within a few years back laid out upon those objects, particularly in the year 1820, when one side of the church, including the side aisle was taken down and rebuilt. A new screen has been also erected in the interior of the church; and a wall has also been partially rebuilt round the churchyard, and three new gates put up'.

The sum of £98 6s 10d had been spent on painting the church and purchasing new covers, cushions and carpets for the pulpit, reading desk and altar. The major expenditure in 1820 was necessary to rebuild the north wall of the nave, although there



*Fig. 2 Compton Dando Church and Vicarage in 1847 by J. Buckler. [From SANHS collection]*

is no indication of the full cost of this project. The report continued:

‘There is no proper foundation for the church, either of stone or brick. It has for its basis nothing but the natural earth. The ground upon which the church stands is upon a slope, so that until the wall of the north side was rebuilt, the structure leaned dangerously upon that side. The tower, which is very old, is going gradually into decay, and before any long time can elapse some considerable repair may be wanting.

The income provided by the Church Estate meant that even during the 18th and early 19th centuries when in many parishes the Church of England was inactive and when church building and maintenance was neglected, Compton Dando church continued to be well cared for by the churchwardens. This was in spite of the fact that several successive vicars were non-resident, and that non-conformity flourished. Although most property in the parish belonged to the Popham family which would have discouraged dissenters, a small Methodist chapel was built in an isolated valley in c1807. The good condition of the parish building was commented on by Edmund Rack in his Survey of Somerset parishes in c1780. Writing on Compton Dando, Rack did not mention the Church Estate Charity, but reported that ‘The Church is kept very decent’. Rack’s Survey incidentally illustrates how little part the parish clergy played in the care of the church building. He states that the vicar lived near Glastonbury and the curate resided in Burnett.<sup>27</sup>

During the 19th century the feoffees were called upon to meet several new demands and additional responsibilities. Following a long and acrimonious campaign by the vicar, the Revd. Richard Boodle, resulting in a court case in Chancery which began in 1832 and dragged on until 1838, the Trust agreed to support a Sunday School, to provide a stove to heat the church and to contribute to the building of a vestry in which the school could be held. The vicar was non-resident, and his son, the Revd. Thomas Boodle, served as curate. The Sunday School was conducted by the curate’s wife and family whose work ‘was attended by much personal suffering to themselves and the children by remaining too long in a cold church without fire’. The congregation would also benefit from a stove in the church, and supplies of coal were easily and cheaply available in the parish. The feoffees argued that there had never been heating in the church and that they had

always managed without a vestry. Eventually, after much discussion, a stove was provided and in 1842 a vestry was built on the north-east corner of the church. Another reason for demanding a vestry was the vicar’s claim that parish meetings were held in the church ‘the house of God is therefore frequently the scene of Parish squabbles and brawls. This ought not to be’. Meetings could now be held in the vestry. In 1846–7 the feoffees spent more than £360 in re-roofing the church, the removal of the gallery from the west end of the nave and work on the tower. In an attempt to increase its income to meet the demands upon it, the Trust came to an agreement with the Popham estate in 1845 whereby a large area of common land was enclosed. The common had been neglected and was frequently over-stocked with cattle. Enclosure made it much more profitable, and the portions allotted to each estate were marked by small boundary markers bearing the initials CC for Compton Church and EWLP for Edward William Leyborne Popham.<sup>28</sup>

A major extension of the aims of the feoffees occurred in 1857 when the energetic vicar, Wilson

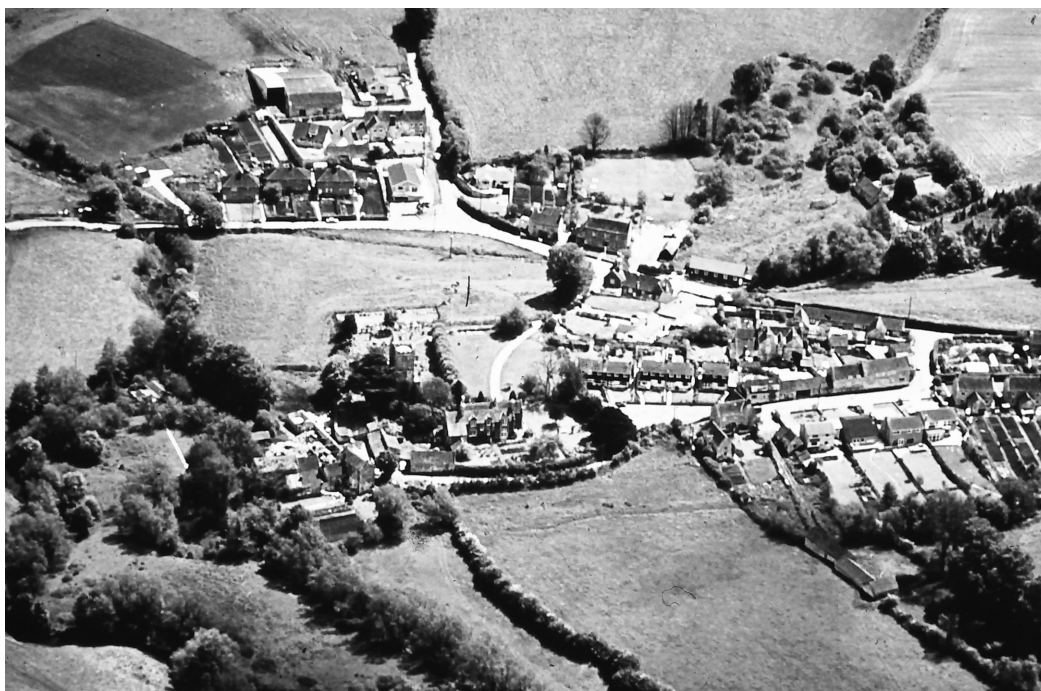


*Fig. 3 One of the numerous stones which formerly marked the Church Estate lands. Similar stones inscribed EWLP defined the Popham estate properties*

Peddar, secured agreement of the Bishop and diocese to build a school in the village to promote the 'Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Church of England'. The Charity Commissioners agreed that the feoffees of the Church Estate could contribute towards the costs of the school and that surplus funds might be distributed to the poor living in the parish of Compton Dando. Another major change came in 1877 when Mr Henry Spackman, a land-surveyor from Bath, was appointed to advise on the sale of some of the cottages on the estate, the rental income from which was very low. Spackman's report stated that most of the cottages had two rooms downstairs and two bedrooms; they were old, with thatched roofs, no drainage and were badly in need of major renovation. The lack of drainage meant that at some cottages the stench was dreadful, and accumulations of dung and filth were close to the wells which supplied drinking water for the tenants. He concluded that any rents which could be charged would never be sufficient to pay for the urgently necessary improvements. The feoffees decided to accept Spackman's advice and sell the worst eight cottages. The sale was held at

the Grand Hotel, Bristol in 1878 and made £463. Most of the cottages were sold to sitting tenants. Later other cottages and some of the lands were sold. The money was invested in government stock, from which the interest more than made up for the loss of rental income. By 1925 most of the cottage property had been sold and during the following years the buildings were completely refurbished and greatly extended by the new owners. Much of the land belonging to the Trust was in small plots scattered throughout the parish and became increasingly difficult to administer because of the progress of enclosure and the creation of larger farms by the Popham estate. Gradually the land was sold by the feoffees and the proceeds invested leaving only a block of 29 acres near the village.<sup>29</sup>

Throughout the 20th century the work of this ancient charity continued with regular further work on the church, generally paid for by the feoffees matching contributions from the parish. This included major projects such as extensive alterations to the chancel in 1905, costing £742, re-hanging the bells, with the addition of a new bell in 1930, new choir stalls, and a new east window



*Fig. 4 Aerial view of Compton Dando showing the church and village. On the left is the river Chew and the mill. [Photograph by the late Jim Hancock]*



in 1963. The stained glass in the east window was dedicated to 'the unnamed founder of the Church Estate'. There was further major work on the roof, a toilet was built in the churchyard for £25,000 and in 2009–10 £27,000 was spent on a new upper floor for the bell-ringers, leaving space below to be used as a kitchen. Funds were raised by the parishioners, and the Community Association, with help from the Church Estate Trust. Feoffees continued to be drawn from local people with an interest in the church and expertise in architecture, care of ancient buildings, building work, church music, bell-ringing and local history.

Sadly, the diocese closed the village school in 1985 and sold the building which was converted to a dwelling. In 1986 the parish ceased to have its own vicar and was amalgamated with Pensford, Publow and Chelwood and the vicarage, including the adjacent paddock for which the vicars had paid rent to the churchwardens during the 18th century, was sold by the diocese. Notwithstanding such problems, the major work of the charity in maintaining the fabric and ornaments of the church has continued. The church is in good condition and excellent decorative order. Whatever their original motivation or intention, the founders of this unusual charity, Prior William Holloway and Sir David Brook, would have been pleased by the way in which it has continued its work for more than four centuries.

Their bodies are buried in peace;  
but their name liveth for evermore.

The people will tell of their wisdom,  
and the congregation will shew forth their  
praise.

(Ecclesiasticus 44, 14-5)

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- <sup>2</sup> William Hunt, ed., *Chartulary of Bath Abbey*, Somerset Record Society, 7, (1893), 152-60.
- <sup>3</sup> *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, 1535, Record Commission (1810-34), I, 181-2.
- <sup>4</sup> J. Bettey, *Suppression of the Monasteries in the West Country*, (1989), 16-21.
- <sup>5</sup> K. Hylson-Smith, *Bath Abbey*, (2003), 89, 112, 117, 118; J. Wroughton, *Tudor Bath*, (2006), 32-43. Letters & Papers of Henry VIII, 9, 42.
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- <sup>7</sup> G. Bradford, ed., *Star Chamber Proceedings*, Somerset Record Society 27, (1911), 160. Bath abbey had at one time been the cathedral of the diocese with the bishop as its abbot. Even after the bishops moved to Wells the abbey continued to be ruled by a prior with the bishop as its titular head.
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- <sup>14</sup> Bristol Record Office (BRO), AC/M6 Survey of Compton Dando 1568.
- <sup>15</sup> *Subsidy Assessment for Somerset 1581*, Somerset Record Society, 88, (2002), 61-2.
- <sup>16</sup> SHC DD/CD1 Compton Dando Church Estate Deeds 1572-1853.
- <sup>17</sup> Patent Rolls, Elizabeth, 30 June 1594.
- <sup>18</sup> SHC DD/CD 24 Transcript of Deeds 1557-1698.
- <sup>19</sup> J. Bettey, 'Hugh Smyth of Ashton Court 1530-1580: Somerset Landowner, Justice of the Peace and Trouble-Maker', *BGAS Trans.*, 136, (1992), 140-8.
- <sup>20</sup> SHC DD/CD 1 Church Estate Deeds 1572-1853.
- <sup>21</sup> J. Bettey, 'The Smyth Family of Ashton Court', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2004), 51, 426-8.
- <sup>22</sup> SHC DD/CD 15 & 16 Payments by treasurers and churchwardens 1750-1859.
- <sup>23</sup> Payments for vermin by the churchwardens were made obligatory by an Act of Parliament in 1566 entitled 'Act against Noyful Fowl and Vermin'. Genuine

travellers and those seeking alms were supposed to have a pass signed by a Justice of the Peace.

<sup>24</sup> SHC DD/CD 15 & 16 Payments by treasurers and churchwardens 1750–1859.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Charity Commissioners' Report, 14 (1826), 329–333. I am grateful to David Bromwich for providing me with a photograph of this Report.

<sup>27</sup> M. McDermott & S. Berry, eds., *Edmund Rack's Survey of Somerset*, (2011), 191–2.

<sup>28</sup> SHC DD/CD 8 Tenancy Papers 1742–1860 including a map of the Common 1845 and details of the income of the Church Estate.

<sup>29</sup> SHC DD/CD 14 Report on the Church Estate property 1878.