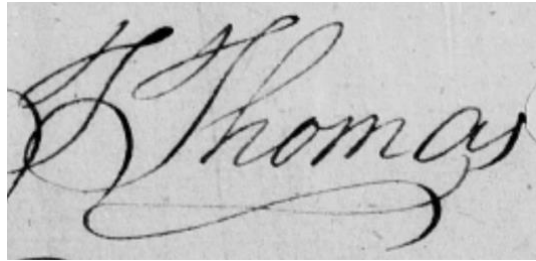


REV. THOMAS THOMAS. Curate 1780s-1824.



The late 18th and early 19th centuries were turbulent times for Britain and the wider world; Britain's loss of the American colonies, the French Revolution, the long-drawn out Napoleonic Wars and the government crack-down which led to the Peterloo massacre which were among the period's momentous events. In these times of change and conflict Thomas Thomas spent his working life as a clergyman in the quiet parishes of rural Northamptonshire, including East Farndon.

Thomas was born in 1741 in Carmarthenshire. It is clear from what Thomas wrote later that he first came to the area in the late 1760s. Post addressed to him at Arthingworth may indicate that his first post was as curate there, though he may not have been there long. He was appointed as curate of Great Oxendon in 1777 and kept that position till 1789.

A curacy was the usual first step on a clergyman's career path and he would hope to be appointed Rector before long. Thomas was appointed Rector of Upper Isham in Northamptonshire (the parish was at that time in two parts) in 1773. He then, in addition to this, was appointed Curate of East Farndon. It is difficult now to establish with complete certainty when this appointment was made; possibly it was in the 1780s when the Rector, Walter Saunders, was in his 80s and early 90s and would have needed someone to whom he could offload some of his duties. Isham is a considerable distance from Farndon or Oxendon and Thomas paid a fee to permit him not to reside in Isham, though as Rector, he went there regularly to conduct services, often staying overnight.

From about 1788 Thomas was living, at least some of the time, at the Manor House, Kibworth Harcourt, with the Foxton family, even further from Isham.

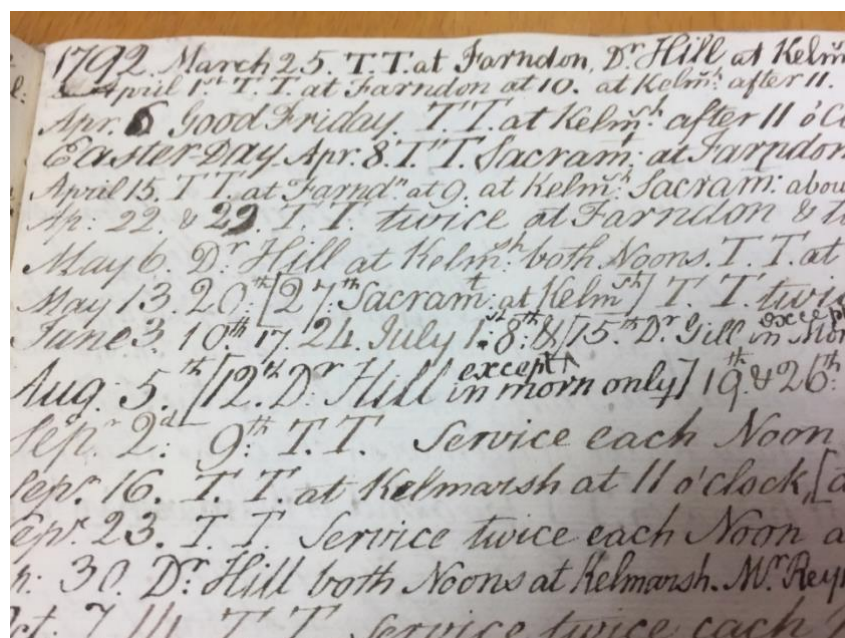
He was conducting services at East Farndon by 1789, for Thomas himself, in one of his surviving papers, records that he gave three sermons at Farndon on 23rd April to celebrate George III's recovery from illness. In the 1780s he also preached on occasion at Lubenham, Clipston and Kelmarsh – a demanding schedule.

The first time we come across him in official documents in Farndon is at the end of 1790. The rector, Walter Saunders, who had held the position since 1734, died at the age of 94. Following his death, the Bishop of Peterborough issued a sequestration order; this is the normal process when a vacancy arises, to ensure that someone is charged with administering the parish's income and looking after the Rectory house. The person who received the instruction in this case was 'our well-beloved in Christ Thomas Thomas Curate of East Farndon'. Notes on the back of the document in Thomas's own handwriting record that he paid Rev. Joseph Gill £27.6s for conducting services between January and June 1791. So Thomas was diligently carrying out his responsibilities to keep things going before a new Rector was appointed and to keep account of church expenses. Walter Saunders's funeral was conducted by Thomas on 2nd January 1791. Thomas would not have been expecting to be appointed Rector of Farndon himself; the patrons of Farndon church, with the right to appoint the Rector, were St. John's College, Oxford, and they always put a St. John's man into the Rectory.

Dr. Gill, who had been at St. John's, was in fact appointed Rector later in 1791 and presumably Thomas Thomas continued to assist him. After Dr. Gill's death in 1797, his successor was William Brooks. The problem with this appointment was that Brooks lived in Coventry: he was Rector of Holy Trinity and Headmaster of the Free Grammar School there. As far as Farndon was concerned, he would be an absentee Rector, only paying the occasional visit. This put more responsibility on Thomas. There are letters from Thomas to Brooks explaining some of the normal procedures. "It has been usual for the Tenants on paying their Rent to have a plain substantial dinner alternately at the Bell and Horseshoes in Farndon. The Expence of which was commonly from 22s. to £1.4s."

By 1796 Thomas was still a bachelor, but on 21st September at the age of 55, he married Elizabeth Foxton, a spinster aged 51, who was one of the family who lived in the Manor House in Kibworth where Thomas had been staying some of the time. This marriage was conducted by Jeremiah Goodman, curate, and was witnessed by John Marriot and James Green at Kibworth Beauchamp church. Their marriage bond names Richard Coltman yeoman, grazier and Churchwarden of East Farndon jointly promising with Rev Thomas Thomas £200 on 14th September 1796. Tragically Elizabeth died on 6th September 1797 aged 52 just within a year of their marriage.

That same year problems began to emerge with the condition of Farndon Rectory and its outbuildings, which Thomas had to take care of in Brooks's absence. "Part of the Stable next to the Lime fell in on the last rainy Monday. Perhaps it may be to your Advantage to be at the Expence of a few Shillings about the Parsonage Premises this Winter.." This proved to be an understatement and in January 1798 Brooks was to come and visit. "To dine at the Three Horseshoes Wed 10 Jan 98". "Dinner ordered Beef...two fowls Apple Pye & Plum Pudding at £2 a head exclusive of Ale". It becomes clear that complete rebuilding of the Rectory is needed. On 8th April 1799 Thomas reports, "Pulling down prevented grazing ye garden." By 1800 there was a new Rectory; it was used as a Rectory till 1951 and eventually pulled down in 1990.



In 1806 Thomas writes, "I have part of the Glebe for my Stipend as Curate of East Farndon, which Glebe is tax'd like the land of other landlords, Mr Thos Hextall being my tenant for the said Glebe". By this time he was also Curate of Kelmarsh and he mentions his stipend there. To what extent he was able to carry out duties in Isham, Farndon and Kelmarsh, travelling on horseback from place to place, is hard to know for certain. The page above, in his own handwriting, gives a snapshot into his

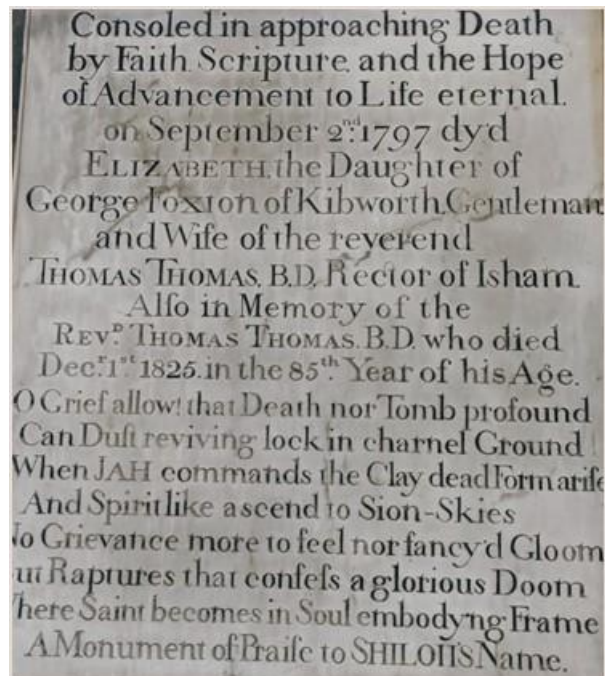
activity for part of 1792. (The right-hand part of the page is not visible). Only Farndon and Kelmars are mentioned; Isham is not mentioned here, but he did go there regularly, despite the distance involved. He received the rents from Isham, as Rector, but then had to pay a curate to carry out most of the duties there.

On December 5th 1805, the turbulent events in the outside world impinged on Farndon to the extent that Thomas held a service of thanksgiving for Nelson's victory at Trafalgar. On October 20th 1809 a service was held to mark the beginning of George III's 50th year as King (we normally mark the end of the 50th year as a Golden Jubilee, rather than the beginning). Sadly, after 50 years George proved incapable of carrying out his responsibilities and had to hand over to his son, the Prince Regent.

By as early as 1788 we know that Thomas Thomas was living, at least some of the time, in Kibworth, over the county boundary in Leicestershire. He must have had to do a great deal of commuting, on horseback, between there and the parishes he was involved in. Letters addressed to him at Farndon have survived, so probably Farndon Rectory was his main home. Nevertheless, all the travelling would not have made for an easy life and is not the image commonly given of the country parson's comfortable existence.

In 1818 he bought a plot of land in his home village in Carmarthenshire, intending to move there in his retirement. He always felt great affection for his homeland and wrote frequently to his relatives there, often in a mixture of Welsh and English. Many of his diary notes are in Welsh.

He retired from his positions in 1824 at the age of 83 and he died on the 20th May 1826. His memorial (below) is in Kibworth church. When he retired, he said he had spent 56 years in the Kibworth and Farndon areas. This implies (given his regard for precision, which is surely evident in his handwriting and record-keeping) that he first lived in the area in 1768.

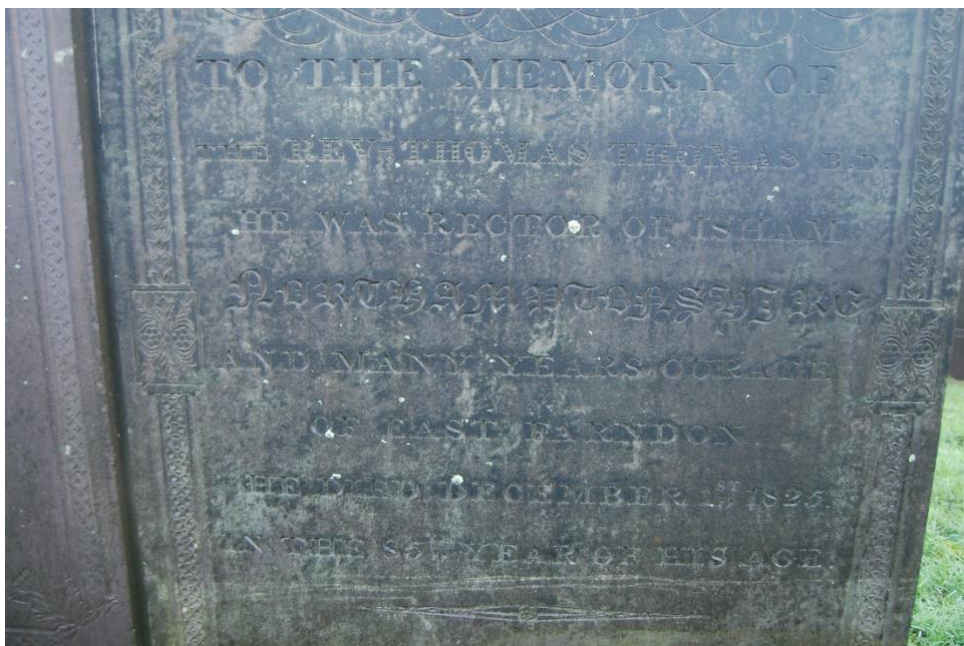


Thomas Thomas seems to have been a hard-working and conscientious man, who had a wide range of interests. He was a collector of old documents and artefacts, including a signature of Queen Elizabeth I. He funded two nephews' education and financially assisted them to become surgeons. He made an anonymous donation to help establish the first Welsh college, at Lampeter, so Welsh

students no longer had to go to Oxford. He must have been sorely missed by his family and his congregations.

Alan Langley (but see below)
November 2020

This life of Thomas Thomas would not have been possible without the research of Jeni Molyneux, a descendant of his family. She generously made the results of her work available for inclusion. The assistance of Pembrokeshire Record Office is also gratefully acknowledged.



Thomas Thomas's grave in Kibworth Beauchamp churchyard