

THE MONUMENTS OF St MARY'S CHURCH, FAIRFORD - 16

ALEXANDER COLSTON (c.1686-1775)



Alexander Colston, attorney at law, was born Alexander Ready the son of Thomas Ready, a cordwainer of Gloucester, in or about 1686. He changed his surname in 1755, 18 years after the marriage to his third wife Sophia Edwards, great niece of Edward Colston (1636-1721) the prominent merchant and philanthropist of Bristol. The first known record of Alexander being in Fairford is dated 1715 when he took the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy which were applied nationwide soon after the accession of King George I.

Alexander's first wife was Mary Chaunler whom he married about 1720 and by whom he had four children. Mary died in 1726 and was buried at Southrop. By this date Alexander was undertaking legal business in Fairford although it was not until 1729 that he was admitted to Serjeants Inn as an attorney at law and was then admitted as a solicitor to the High Court of Chancery the following year. On 18 April 1734 Alexander was admitted to the Middle Temple which enhanced his professional standing and enabled him to act for clients in Hampshire, Wiltshire and Oxfordshire as well as in Gloucestershire.

By 1729 Alexander had remarried to Sarah Townsend, the widow of Thomas Townsend of Sudeley Manor. On 26 July 1730 their son Robert was baptised at Fairford but on 5 October the following year Sarah died and Alexander buried his second wife. Sarah is commemorated by a memorial plaque in the Corpus Christi Chapel in St Mary's Fairford.

Having lost two wives in the space of five years, Alexander remained a widower for the next seven years until, at the age of 51, he married Sophia Edwards in the Temple Church in London on 17 February 1737. Sophia was reported in the newspapers of the day as "an agreeable Lady of £20,000 fortune" being descended from the Colston family of Bristol through Edward Colston's sister whose daughter Mary married Thomas Edwards, a lawyer of the Middle Temple and a Member of Parliament. After their marriage Alexander and Sarah took up residence at Filkins Hall but Alexander still retained his legal offices in Fairford from where he transacted much of his business. Colston

House in the High Street is presumed to have been Alexander's Fairford home and business and he was probably responsible for the rebuilding of the front of the house in the Georgian style.

In 1754 Alexander and Sarah Ready petitioned Parliament for permission to change their surname to Colston. This would have enabled the couple to conform to a clause in Edward Colston's will which stated that any husband of his female descendants would have to change their name to Colston in order to inherit his estate. In 1762 Sophia's older sister Mary died and Sophia then became the sole beneficiary of the Colston fortune.

Sophia gave birth to three sons and a daughter while in her 40s, an achievement not without some risk in the 18th Century. Two of Alexander's sons became clergymen: Robert (born 1730) was the Rector of Buscot and Alexander (born 1742) was the Rector of Broadwell. It fell to the latter to continue the Ready/Colston line into the 19th Century.

Alexander Colston died on 1 December 1775 and was buried in the church seven days later. The inscription on the memorial in St Mary's reads:

Sacred to the Memory
of
ALEXANDER COLSTON,
Late of *Filkins* in the County of *Oxford*, Esq^r
And
One of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace
for this County.
He died December 1st AD 1775 -
In the 89th Year of his Age.
He was always respected for the Solidity
Of his Understanding and Judgement.
Esteemed for his unblemished Integrity,
And beloved for the Virtues of his Heart.
R. R.
P. C.

The monument includes a representation of the Colston family arms depicting an anchor between two dolphins. The monument was made in the workshop of the stonemasons and builders John and Joseph Bryan of Gloucester and is one of the better designs to be found in St Mary's.

Sophia outlived her husband for 15 years until her death on 29 November 1790 and she was buried in All Saints Church in Bristol, close to the grave of her great uncle. Sophia has her own memorial in Broadwell Church close to her last home in Filkins.

