

THE MONUMENTS OF St MARY'S CHURCH, FAIRFORD - 22

THE BETTERTON FAMILY (1755-1781)



For many years the name of Betterton was synonymous with that of Fairford. At least 216 Bettertons are known to have lived in Fairford from the late 16th Century to 1895 and most of them were buried in the churchyard of St Mary's. Several of the Bettertons, particularly those of the 17th and 18th centuries, left behind detailed wills which add a little detail to the basic information that can be found in the parish register. There are four identifiable headstones in the churchyard that commemorate Bettertons and two of these predate the wall monument on the south wall of the church.

The wall monument commemorates Charles Betterton and his wife Jane together with their son Charles and his wife Mary. Charles the elder was the son of another Charles (1657-1722) who was the son of Alexander (born 1633) who, in turn, was the son of Edmund (who died in 1674). The Charles who died in 1722 was known as 'Corner Charles' as he lived on the corner of Milton End; this differentiated him from 'Bull Charles' who died in 1724 and was innkeeper of The Bull. "Corner" Charles was a yeoman farmer and he was succeeded by his only son Charles, the other male subject of the wall monument.

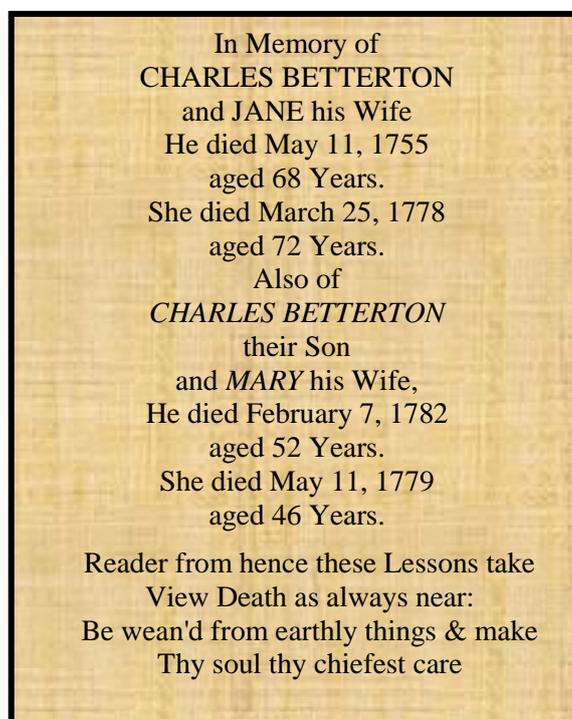
Charles the son of "Corner Charles" was baptised at Fairford on 26 February 1687. On 21 February 1723 Charles married Jane Allen in Cirencester's Church of St John the Baptist. Jane was born in Coln St Aldwyns on 31 March 1701 to Jacob and Jane Allen. Charles and Jane had 11 children born between 1723 and 1744, not an exceptional number for the 18th Century. Their eldest son was Charles who was baptised at Fairford on 30 September 1729. He married Mary Wheeler in St Mary's on 16 October 1758. She was the daughter of John, a glazier and plumber of Fairford, and Elizabeth his wife and was baptised in St Mary's on 19 November 1733. Charles and Mary had six children, one of whom died before she reached her first birthday. The dates of death of the two couples are recorded on the wall monument.

The wills of both Charles, father and son, have survived and both describe themselves as yeomen as indeed did most of the Betterton wills from Fairford although one was a baker and another was a wig maker.

Charles the elder wrote his will on 11 February 1755, three months exactly before the day he died. He divided up what was apparently quite a large house between his wife Jane, his son John, and his son Charles. Each were assigned particular rooms with the common use of the back yard, the pump and the brew house. The wording of the will gives more detail (original spelling retained):

“I give to my wife Jane Betterton for the terme of her natural life the Parlor the Chamber over the Parlor one half of the new Pantery at the East End the use of the Brew House Copper and Brewing vessel for to Brew with and to have a Pasage through the other part of the House from the Parlor to the Brew House at the times of Brewing only and to have the use of the Inward Backside and the Pump”

John was to have the part of the house that had been newly built between the parlour and the old barn and the western end of the new pantry. After his wife’s death (she survived another 23 years after Charles died) her share of the house was to go to five of his children. His eldest son Charles, who was appointed executor of the will, was also left land including some that his father had bought from James Lambe of Fairford Park.



Charles the younger survived his wife for less than three years and died in 1782. He may have been overtaken by a sudden illness as he wrote his will just one week before he died. In his will he describes himself as “... of Ampney” which is most likely to have been either Ampney Crucis or Down Ampney as there is evidence of Bettertons living in both these villages in the 18th and 19th centuries. Charles left all he owned to be shared equally between his two daughters Sarah and Molly. On 1 July 1790 Sarah married John Price and Molly married William Taylor of Bibury on 6 August 1799.

As the monument is situated on the external wall of the church it would seem that the graves were in the churchyard rather than in the church but they have either been taken down or the inscriptions have been worn away as they have not been identified.