

THE MONUMENTS OF St MARY'S CHURCH, FAIRFORD – 4

JAMES OLDISWORTH (c.1640-1722)



The best preserved (and most colourful) of the Oldisworth monuments in St Mary's church is that of James, the long-serving rector of St George's Church at Kencot in Oxfordshire. One of the ten children of William and Mary Oldisworth of Coln Rogers and Fairford, James was born in or about 1640. Several of William and Mary's children were baptised at Fairford but there is no trace of James's baptism there nor anywhere else in Gloucestershire. It is possible that he was born in Coln Rogers as the parish register appears to have no entries between 1641 and 1665, probably due to the disruption resulting from the religious upheavals of the English Civil War and the Commonwealth period.

What is known is that James Oldisworth matriculated at Balliol College, Oxford on 26 November 1662. He was ordained deacon on 9 June 1666 and priest 13 days later by Walter Blandford, Bishop of Oxford. On 23 September 1666 he was appointed to the rectorship at Kencot, a position he would retain throughout his long life. Never a particularly wealthy benefice, the advowson of Kencot had been acquired by the Hammersley family in 1664 but they allowed William Oldisworth to present James to the living in 1666.

On 26 September 1669 James married Ann Mountstephen at St Mathew's church in Coates near Cirencester where Ann's father William was the rector. Over the next 20 years Ann gave birth to seven children. Three girls died in their infancy or childhood, a fourth dying at the age of 30. Their first son, William, was born in 1672 and became a merchant tailor in London and is commemorated by a monument in Fairford church. A daughter, Muriel, was born in 1675, married the Reverend John Logan and is also commemorated by a monument in Fairford church. A second son, named James, was born in 1677 and became the vicar of Worminghall, Buckinghamshire in 1704. All seven children were baptised in Kencot by their father and sadly four of them were buried there as well.

In 1700 James's wife Ann died and was commemorated by a wall plaque in the church of St Peter in the East in Oxford (now the library of St Edmund Hall). On 20 October 1702 James married his cousin Mary

Scott, the daughter of his uncle Giles Oldisworth and widow of the Reverend John Scott of Kempford. Mary died in 1721 a year before James.

James succeeded his father William as Lord Farmer of Coln Rogers parish in 1680 and thereby also came into possession of William's rights and property in Fairford. These rights would pass to James's daughter Muriel in 1722.

James Oldisworth served his parishioners at Kencot for 56 years, a most remarkable record. He maintained a local custom of providing a hearty breakfast for the poor of the parish on the Tuesday before Holy Thursday and also provided a dinner for most of his parish on St Stephen's Day. In his will he left bequests of money to the poor of Kencot, Fairford, Coln Rogers, Northleach, Broadwell and Filkins. He also left money to pave the chancel at Fairford with blue and white stones. Similar paving stones can also be found in Kencot church. This generosity is all the more remarkable as Kencot was quite a poor parish with an annual benefice rated at only £6 9 shilling and 4 pence halfpenny in 1723.

James Oldisworth died on 3 September 1722 at the age of 82. He was buried in his own church along with many of his family members who are commemorated on the paving stones in the central aisle of the church. However, James's main monument is at Fairford where it hangs alongside those of his father William (died 1680), his daughter Muriel Loggan (died 1754) and his son William (died 1714).

