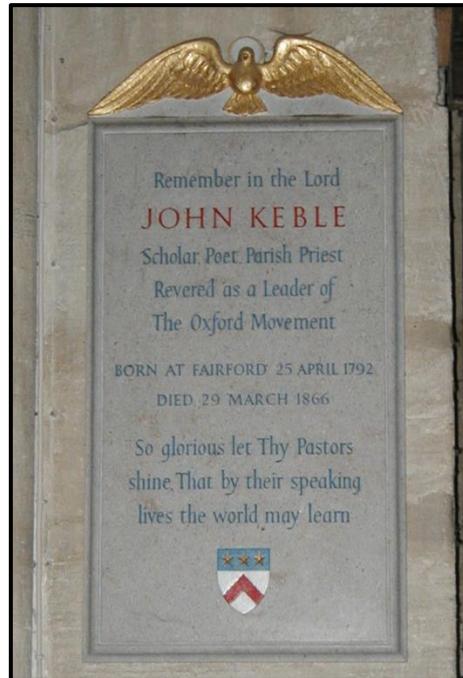


## THE MONUMENTS OF St MARY'S CHURCH, FAIRFORD - 9

### JOHN KEBLE (1792-1866)



Perhaps Fairford's best-known son is John Keble, nationally-acclaimed clergyman and poet. He was the son of the Reverend John Keble, vicar of Coln St Aldwyns, and his wife Sarah Maule, the daughter of another clergyman. John junior was born on 25 April 1792 in Court Close, the house which his grandfather John Keble, a maltster of substantial means, had built.

Educated at home by his father, John was admitted to Corpus Christi College, Oxford on 12 December 1806 at the age of just 14. He was an outstanding student and was awarded double first-class honours in 1811 and a year later was elected a fellow of Oriel College. On 21 May 1815 he was ordained priest and two years later became an examiner and tutor at Oriel.

On 1 August 1816 John Keble was appointed as curate of the twin parishes of Eastleach and Bouthrop (now called Eastleach Turville and Eastleach Martin) where the Keble's ancestors had lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Seven years later he also became the curate of nearby Southrop having given up his position at Oriel College. The two John Kebles, father and son, rode to their various churches to take services from their home in Fairford although John junior later moved into the vicarage at Southrop. They, together with John senior's other son Thomas, also helped out in St Mary's church, Fairford and between them officiated at 45 baptisms, 51 marriages, and 62 burials at Fairford, the final service being performed by John junior in 1831.

Despite his duties as a parish priest, John remained closely involved with his fellow clergymen in Oxford and became particular friends with John Henry Newman and Edward Bouverie Pusey and these three men became the co-founders of the Oxford Movement, whose High Church philosophy, known as Tractarianism, evolved into Anglo-Catholicism.

John Keble is not just renowned for his influence on Anglicanism but also for his poetry and other written work. His best-known work is 'The Christian Year' first published in 1827 and which became one of the best-selling books of poetry in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. By 1873 the book had been published in

no less than 158 editions. John Keble was elected professor of poetry at Oxford University in 1831 but much of his poetry was written while he was living at Fairford and Southrop.

He was a prolific writer, not just of poetry (some of which became the lyrics for well-known hymns) but also of biographies of clergymen, religious tracts, and sermons that were published as books, pamphlets and periodical articles.

John Keble had been offered the living of All Saints at Hursley near Winchester in the 1820s but he had declined in order to stay in Fairford and assist his ageing father. However, his father died in January 1835 and on 10 October the same year John married Charlotte Clarke, the daughter of the rector of Meysey Hampton and the sister of Elizabeth who had married John's brother Thomas ten years earlier. In 1836 John finally accepted the offer of becoming the vicar of Hursley and moved away from his beloved Fairford to the Rectory at Hursley with his new wife Charlotte, who suffered from ill health for much of her life, and John's invalid sister Elizabeth. Most of the profits from the sale of 'A Christian Year' went toward the extensive renovation of John's church at Hursley.

At Hursley John performed much good work for the local community while still taking an active interest in national church matters. His strict, traditional approach to Christian worship did not suit everyone nor was it universally welcomed, especially by many of the Anglican establishment, but Keble's sincerity and passion was apparent to all and he was not one to shy away from controversy when it came to defending what he saw as threats to the Church from liberals and others. The Tractarian movement came under much criticism and started to disintegrate in the 1840s, the conversion of Newman to Roman Catholicism in 1845 was a particularly bitter blow to John Keble.

John died at Bournemouth on 29 March 1866 after a brief illness and was buried near the grave of his sister Elizabeth (who had died in 1860) in the churchyard at Horsley. Charlotte Keble survived her husband for just six weeks and died on 11 May. The day following Charlotte's death a proposal was passed to build a college in Oxford in John Keble's memory. Keble College opened in 1870 and today is one of the largest of the constituent colleges of the University.



Keble House in London Road, Fairford and the plaque marking the birthplace of the Reverend John Keble (1792-1866)

The Keble's family home at Court Close on London Road in Fairford was later renamed Keble House. The last family member to live there, Mrs Dorothy Keble who died in 1996, was the wife of Canon Edward Keble who was the vicar of Fairford from 1946 to 1974 and the great, great nephew of John Keble. Information on Canon Edward Keble can be found in a framed text in the choir.