

The Vicars of Bampton – the Rev. Henry Forrester Holmes

Background and family

In April 1892 the Rev. Wright was succeeded by the Rev. Henry Forrester Holmes who moved to occupy the Vicarage with his family. The census record of 1891 gives details of his family. Henry F. Holmes was 43, a Clerk in Holy Orders, born in Liverpool, so born about 1848. His wife was Edith D. Holmes, aged 46, born in Bengal, India, so born about 1845. They married in April 1870 at Pentonville, Middlesex, and her maiden name was Edith Deborah Radcliffe. She had been living in Cheltenham. Their children were Edith S. aged 20 and born in Marylebone, London, Muriel S. aged 13, born in Ontario, Canada, and Edward L.R. aged 11 and born in Snitterfield, Warwickshire. This was where the Rev. Holmes was Vicar before they moved to Bampton. The 1881 census adds two further children. Gertrude E.M. was born in 1874 and Clement E.K. was born in 1876, both in Ontario, Canada.

The family were staying in Canada at an interesting time. Canada had been granted Dominion status within the British Empire in 1867 and the Canadian Pacific Railway was starting its movement west in 1875. Although they probably lived in Eastern Ontario they would have heard the news in July 1876 that the charismatic and ambitious General George Armstrong Custer had been defeated by the Lakota Sioux and Cheyenne Native Americans at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, 25th June, 1876. Following this Sitting Bull moved his tribe north from Montana into southern Canada seeking protection from Queen Victoria.

The U.K. Clergy List for 1897 gives details of the background of the Rev. Holmes. He gained his degree at Jesus College, Oxford, married in 1870 and after Edith was born moved to Canada. Here he was at Stukley, 1873-4, Bedford, 1874-6 and St Catherine's, 1876-8. All were in Ontario. There was a son as well, Charles, who does not appear in British records, as he probably never lived in Britain. The local newspaper for September 1894 records that "*great sympathy is felt by the parishioners of Bampton for the Vicar and Mrs Holmes at the sad news from Hong Kong of the death of their son, Mr Charles W.F. Holmes, from an attack of typhoid.*" Charles is commemorated in a stained glass window in the chancel which adds that he was aged 22, which meant that he was born in Canada in 1872.

Next to the window is one dedicated to The Rev. Holmes' parents, John and Mary Anne Holmes. Henry was born on the 12th July 1847 and baptised at St Peter's, Liverpool. By the 1851 census his father had died and Mary Anne Holmes was the head of the household, a 37 year old widow, born in Broughton, Lancs. She was recorded as a "Gentlewoman", living with her older sister, Esther Bagley, who was recorded as a "Land and House Proprietor". Mary Anne had two sons, John W. aged 5, and Henry F. aged 3, both born in Liverpool. The household had three servants. By 1861 the household was reduced. They were still living at St Paul's, Broughton, Lancs. Mary Anne was 47 and a "Fund holder", John was 15 and Henry was 13. Both were students and there were two servants.

After their return from Canada the Rev. Holmes took up a post at Snitterfield in Warwickshire, a few miles from Stratford upon Avon. The 1881 census records that the family were living at 9, Smith's Lane and not at the Vicarage. Henry Holmes was 33 and Curate of Snitterfield, Edith D. was 36 and born in India, Edith L. was 10 and born in Marylebone, Middlesex, and Gertrude, Clement and Muriel

were all born in Canada. Their youngest son, Edward L.R. was only one and was born at Snitterfield. There were three servants, a governess, cook and housemaid.

By the 1901 census the family were living in the Vicarage, Bampton. Henry was now 53 years of age and recorded as "Clergyman, Church of England." Edith was 56 and Bengal was added to her birthplace in India. Edith L. was the only one of the children living with her parents and she was 30. Their servants were Lucy Ford, parlour maid, 26 and born at Upton and Annie Warren, cook, 19, born at Bishop's Hill, also in Somerset. The 1911 census gives Edith her full name, Edith Lilian and at 40 she was still living with her parents. She was not to die until the 7th August, 1936, aged 66 and living in Exeter. She left £12,791 11s 10d, so she was a reasonably wealthy woman.

The other children had moved away. The next eldest, Gertrude Emily Mary - the 1911 census gives her full name - was a teacher at Apsley Heath, Woburn Sands in Bedfordshire and she was there for the 1901 census. She was to marry Ernest Vyvyan Cox in Tiverton, April 1916 when she was 42 years old. The local press reported that:

"The marriage was solemnised at Bampton Parish Church on Tuesday (June 20th) of Miss Gertrude Emily Mary Holmes, second daughter of the Vicar of Bampton, Rev. H. Forrester Holmes and Mrs Holmes, and the Rev. Ernest V. Cox, assistant curate of Bampton. The ceremony was performed by Rev. F. Bingham, of London (uncle of the bride) and Rev. A.V. Cox (Vicar of Stockland, father of the bride-groom). The only bridesmaid was Miss Ada Cox, sister of the bride-groom. The "best man" was Rev. C. Cox (Bridport)."

Her husband was to succeed the Rev. Holmes at Bampton.

Clement E.K. was a scholar in Tavistock in 1891 and seems to have continued his education as the 1901 census records that he was Civil Servant at Law. He was married, as well, his wife was called Lilian. They lived in Hampstead, London. Muriel Stainforth also married. Her husband was Francis Walter Thelwell and they were married at Evesham, Worcestershire, in the summer of 1915. She was 37 years old and lived until she was 72, dying at Littleham in East Devon.

A year after Gertrude married the Rev. Cox the local news reported the sad news of her mother's death in April 1917:

"Just before 6 a.m. on Good Friday (April 6th) Mrs Edith Deborah Holmes, wife of the Vicar of Bampton, peacefully passed away, and the news was received by the parishioners with greatest regret and with many signs of sympathy for the Vicar and the members of his family. The deceased was the daughter of the late Mr Edmund Ford Radcliffe of the Bengal Civil Service, and came to Bampton Vicarage just 25 years ago. Deceased had been ailing in health for some considerable time, but her illness had only assumed a more serious aspect during the last five weeks, culminating in her death, at the age of 72. Mrs Holmes leaves a husband, one son (Mr. Clement Holmes of Nottingham), and three daughters (Miss Lilian Holmes, Mrs Francis Thelwell and Mrs E.V. Cox, wife of the Re. E.V. Cox)."

Henry Forrester Holmes was Vicar from 1892 until 1917 and over that period his family life and his involvement in the parish featured much in the local press. He lived in interesting times and had a significant impact on the church and community.

The restoration of the church

The 1890s were an important period in the history of The Church of St Michael and All Angels, Bampton, and much of the interior of the existing church owes its appearance to the late Victorian “restoration”. A newspaper article for April 1897 reports that:

“Messrs. John Bryant and Son, of Barnstaple have signed the contract for the restoration of Bampton Church, the work to be commenced on the 17th inst. An interesting coincidence is that the oak vestry chest at Bampton bears the inscription, “John Bryant, Churchwarden, 1684.”

The work was to last for a year as another report for June 1898 states:

“The ceremony of re-opening the parish church of St. Michael and All Angels took place yesterday, and was marked by unqualified success, the various functions – festival services, public luncheon, and tea – all being largely attended by parishioners, as well as friends from the neighbouring parishes. The work done includes the reseating of the nave and aisle; concreting the floors and laying of wooden blocks, renewal of plaster and pointing of walls; and the setting up of the arcade. A new high-pressure heating apparatus has also been provided. The oak roofs have been restored, while the screen has been replaced in its original position by the rood loft, and lengthened with temporary extensions.”

Anyone visiting the church or attending a service there will notice how much of the interior owes itself to the late 19th century restoration. The walls are no longer plastered, making the interior darker than it would have been. The floor is made up of wooden blocks, whereas in some parish churches the floor consists of flagstone with brasses and engraved stones marking the burial of distinguished patrons from the past. However, engraved stone can be found on the tower floor. At the time of writing the High Pressure Hot Water System has finally, after over 100 years, ceased to work. It was developed by an American, A M Perkins, in the middle of the nineteenth century and the Bampton one was the only one that was still working. Further details about it can be found on the Bampton 1901 states that:

“Bampton's ancient church has just been enriched by the addition of two stained-glass windows descriptive of New and Old Testament subjects, contributed respectively by the Vicar and Mrs. Forrester-Holmes, and Mrs. Hollond of Wonham House. The window at the South of the chancel represents Our Lord stilling the tempest, and the dedicatory inscription runs as follows: “To the Glory of God, and in loving memory of Charles William Forrester-Holmes, who died September 4, 1894, aged 22. This window is erected by his parents. Mrs. Hollond's window commemorates the recovery of her son, Captain Hollond, from enteric fever, contracted in South Africa.”

Another window was added in 1905 dedicated to his parents, John and Mary Ann Holmes, and a further report adds:

“A new stained-glass window in Bampton Church has this week been dedicated by the Vicar, the Rev. H. Forrester Holmes, to the memory of his father and mother. The subject of the window, which is in the south wall of the chancel, is that of the presentation in the Temple. At the base is the memorial inscription. The window is from the studios of Messrs. L. Drake and Sons, of Exeter.”

A new oak door to the vestry had been added the year before.

The Rev. Holmes' generosity also extended to his parishioners, one example being the annual New Year's supper for the bell ringers. The one in January 1909 is recorded:

"A New Year's supper, which the Vicar of Bampton generously gives to the ringers of the parish church and public officials, took place at the Swan Inn, Bampton, where an excellent supper was served by Mrs. W. Venn. The Rev. H. Forrester Holmes, in giving the toast of the evening, "Health and prosperity to the Ringers of Bampton Parish Church", said he did so with sincerity. They all pulled together with unanimity and concord, and during the sixteen years he had been Vicar he always found them working with goodwill and fellowship."

The use of the Swan Inn is interesting as other inns in the town were not popular with the vicar. In February 1907:

"At the annual Licensing Sessions of the Tiverton Division the Rev. H. Forrester Holmes, Vicar, presented a petition to the magistrates from the inhabitants of Bampton, drawing attention to the superabundance of public-houses in that parish. There were seven fully-licensed houses and two beer houses in the town. They hoped the Bench would see their way clear to accede to the request, that the number might be considerably reduced. The petitioner pointed out that there were roughly speaking, 300 adult males in Bampton, giving one public to every 33 men. The Chairman said they had considered the application for renewals, which would all be granted with the exception of four houses in Bampton, which would be reserved for further consideration. These were the Red Lion, Angel Inn, Wheelwright's Arms, and the Great House Inn."

Reference to the newspaper articles for the preceding months would show how justified this request was as a number of local residents were up before the Bench for their drunken and disorderly behaviour.

The coronation of Edward VII

There is no reference to the church being involved in Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1897, probably because the church was being renovated. There is no mention of her death in 1901, either. However, the coronation of Edward VII was covered. In April 1902:

"A meeting was held at the National School, Bampton, yesterday to consider the best way of celebrating Coronation Day. Mr. J. R. Hollond J.P., chairman of the Urban District Council, was voted to the chair, and among those present were the Rev. H. Forrester Holmes (vicar) . . ."

This was followed later in the year by the celebrations, with the church and the Rev. Holmes involved.

"Coronation Day at Bampton will be long remembered. The church bells announced the gladsome day with a merry peal. Later, headed by the band, a procession of Friendly Societies and local bodies marched from Brook Street through the town to the parish church. At 4 p.m. the scholars of the National School and other elder children had a capital tea. The aged poor had an excellent meat tea at the White Horse Assembly Room. Athletic sports took place on that part of the Hills which overlook Brook Street. The town was gay with flags and charmingly illuminated during the evening. Dancing

took place on the Hill Green until dusk, and afterwards in the streets. Everything passed off orderly and happily."

Things were very different eight years later when news of the King's death reached Bampton, in May 1910, and his funeral was commemorated, as reported:

"The day of the late King Edward's burial was duly observed at Bampton on Friday. Many of the shops were not opened for the whole day. Others were closed at midday, when all business was suspended. Blinds were drawn in all private houses, and almost everybody wore the deepest mourning. At 1 o'clock, the Town Band played the Dead March in "Saul" in different parts of the town. At 2 p.m. a largely attended memorial service was held at the United Methodist Church. The Parish Church was filled to overflowing at 3 p.m. when the memorial service was held there. Muffled peals were rung upon the bells at intervals throughout the afternoon."

Over a century later we have experienced both a Jubilee and a death of our much loved monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, and it is interesting to compare and contrast the celebrations.

The church during the Great War

The Rev. Henry Forrester Holmes was to remain Vicar at Bampton until he retired owing to ill health in 1917. At the beginning of August 1914 he preached a sermon warning of the dangers that lay ahead. The local paper reported that:

"On Sunday evening (Aug. 2nd) at the Bampton Parish Church, the Vicar (Rev. H. Forrester Holmes) made an allusion to the grave crisis in Europe, and the hymns "God moves in a mysterious way." O God of love. O King of peace," and "God our help in ages past" and "God that madest Earth and Heaven" were feelingly sung - the latter as a Vesper, by the congregation."

He had previously questioned whether we were ready as a nation for the events that were to unfold. As early as November 1901 he raised the issue of preparedness for war in his role as a member of the School Board. The local newspaper reported that:

"At Tiverton School Board meeting, the Rev. Forrester Holmes of Bampton wrote asking whether the Board employed an instructor in military drill for the school children. The Clerk said he had replied stating they had no regular instructor. The Clerk was instructed to make enquiries as to the engagement of an instructor and report at the next Board meeting."

It is not known what the outcome was.

During the Great War the church continued the usual round of services, probably in an attempt to boost moral with so many of the young men returning injured or not coming back at all. In September 1914:

"The dedication and harvest festival was held at the Parish Church of St. Michael and All Angels, Bampton, on Tuesday (Sept. 29th). The Rev. M.H. Hayman, of Woodbury, conducted all the services. The church was decorated with flowers, fruit, vegetables, and sheaves of corn. The bells rang merrily, under Captain C. Broomfield."

It is possible that the Rev. Holmes did not take the service because of failing health as he was well into his sixties by then.

Easter 1915 was celebrated in much the same fashion with the Rev. Holmes officiating but assisted by his curate and a visiting vicar from Torquay. The press reported that:

"On Easter Sunday (Apr. 4th.), at the Parish Church, Bampton, good congregations attended the services, which were of a bright and hearty character. The music was especially bright. The processional hymn, "Christ the Lord is risen today," and recessional hymn, "Alleluia! Alleluia! hearts to heaven and voices raise," were heartily sung by the congregation. Mr. Gilbert Todd, a chorister, was the cross-bearer. The officiating clergymen were the Rev. H. Forrester Holmes (vicar), Rev. D. Clunn (curate), and Rev. A. Fuller of Torquay. The church was beautifully decorated. The decorators were Chancel, Mrs. F.T. Seward and Mr. W.H. Stacey; pulpit, Miss L. Davey; font, Mrs. E.P. Row; windows Misses G. Holmes, M. Wensley and F. Wensley, M. Chaplin, and G. Brock, and Mrs. S.J. Hoare. Miss G. Vicary ably presided at the organ, and played appropriate music. The bells rang out merrily in the early morn, under the direction of Captain C. Broomfield."

However merrily the bells rang out it could not hide the fact that the inhabitants of Bampton were heavily involved in the war effort. A telling report in the local press indicated how much that involvement was:

"A visitor to Bampton would, if he were a careful observer, notice in the windows of many of the houses a little card, on which is painted a silver medal, with accompanying ribbon, while underneath is written a name or names. The card indicates that from the house exhibiting it there has gone forth to serve his country one or more members of the household. There are many such houses."

The vicar's failing health was recognised later in the year with the appointment of the Rev. Cox who would not only succeed him but be his son-in-law, as well:

"The Vicar (the Rev. H. Forrester Holmes) asks the parishioners to extend a hearty welcome to the Rev. Ernest Victor Cox, who is coming to Bampton as assistant curate, owing to the Vicar's continued indisposition."

About the same time the family would have received the sad news that their youngest son, Lionel Patrick, had been killed on the first day of the Gallipoli landing. He had emigrated to Australia and volunteered to serve in one of the ANZAC regiments.

Christmas was celebrated in the usual manner:

"The usual services were held at the Parish Church of St. Michael's and All Angels, Bampton, on Christmas Day. The early morn was ushered in by a peal rung on the bells, which also rang out during the day, under Capt. C. Broomfield. The church was beautifully decorated with holly, evergreens, etc., by many willing helpers. Rev. H. Forrester Holmes (vicar) and Rev. E.V. Cox officiated at the services, which were well attended. The singing of the carols at the afternoon service was heartily indulged in by the congregation."

With failing health, the loss of his wife in April 1917 and son, Lionel, two years before, Rev. Holmes resigned as vicar of Bampton in June 1917. In recognition of his service to the church and Bampton:

“A presentation has been made to the Rev. H. Forrester Holmes, who has just resigned the living of Bampton, which he had held for 25 years. A cheque was accompanied by an address recognising his valuable labours and the legacy he left in the form of a restored church, a new organ, and other improvements.”

In September his son-in-law, the Rev. Earnest Vyvyan Cox, took over as vicar of Bampton. The Rev. Holmes was to die two years later in September 1919. The report in the local paper emphasises how full his contribution was to the life of the church and community:

“The Rev. Henry Forrester Holmes, late Vicar of Bampton, died at his residence, Beechwood, St. David’s, Exeter, about 11 o’clock on Monday evening. Deceased was the son of Mr. and Mrs. J. Holmes of Eaton Bishop, Hereford, and before accepting the living of Bampton was curate of Snitterfield, Warwickshire, under the late Rev. John Radcliffe, and had held various curacies in Canada. Mr. Holmes was Vicar of Bampton from 1892 to 30th June, 1917, when, owing to ill-health, he resigned in favour of his son-in-law, the Rev. E.V. Cox. He was also perpetual curate of Petton Chapel. His chief work at Bampton was the restoration of the parish church of St. Michael, at a cost of more than 2,000 pounds. The reopening of the restored church took place with great ceremony on June 23rd 1893, when the present Bishop of Crediton said in the course of a sermon that “the work was the outcome of courage and devotion.” The deceased was also the means, with the assistance of a Carnegie grant, of obtaining a new organ (built by Messrs. Hele and Co., of Exeter) which was dedicated on July 28th 1913, when an organ recital was given by the late Dr. D.J. Wood of Exeter Cathedral. Mr. Holmes was Rural Dean for the Tiverton Deanery from 1911 to 1913. He was Chairman and corresponding trustee of the Bampton National School. He took the deepest interest in all parochial matters, and annually gave a dinner to the ringers and invited friends, and presided in his well-known genial style. Mrs. Holmes predeceased her husband on April 6, 1917. Deceased leaves one son, and three daughters, to whom the sympathy of the parish and neighbourhood is extended.”

Colin Wellard.