

VCH Nottinghamshire
On-line Texts in Progress
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VICTORIA
COUNTY
HISTORY 

Nottinghamshire

WEST LEAKE

RELIGIOUS HISTORY

Advowson and property

There was a priest and a church at Leake in 1086.¹ At that time there was no distinction between West or Little Leake and East or Great Leake. By c.1200 there were two churches. The one at West Leake was dedicated to St Helena and the one at East Leake to St Leonard. The latter was later changed to St Mary.²

During the 14th century West Leake, a closed village, became less important while East Leake, an open village, grew. However, the two churches belonged to the same benefice and were not divided until 1876. Henry Balfour Hamilton became the first rector of West Leake in 1882 after the death of the previous incumbent.³

In 1227 a pension of 40s. a year was granted to the prior and convent of Repton from St Helena's church at Leake. The prior and convent were also given the advowson and presented from 1229 until 1517 with only two exceptions. After the dissolution Sir John Port purchased the Repton lands and the advowson of Leake. It passed to the Hastings family (later earls of Huntingdon) when

¹ *VCH Notts.*, i. 255, 265, 283, 284.

² J. Johnstone, 'West Leake, the Mother Church', *Leake Historian No. 3* (1994-5), 10-11.

³ Godfrey, *Rushcliffe*, 135-7.

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Sir John's daughter married George Hastings.⁴ The Revd John Bateman purchased the advowson in 1830 and presented himself in 1836.⁵

When the benefice was separated into two in 1876,⁶ Lord Belper purchased the advowson of West Leake.⁷ In 1933 West Leake was united with Kingston on Soar and Ratcliffe on Soar. For some time the rector of Gotham was also priest-in-charge of the combined benefice. In 1992 West Leake became part of the East Leake benefice, which consists of East Leake, West Leake, Stanford on Soar, Costock and Rempstone. The patronage of the united benefice, at the time of writing, is held jointly by the bishop, the Southwell & Nottingham Diocesan Board of Patronage, Lord Belper and Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge.⁸

In 1291 the church at Leake was worth £33 6s. 8d. with the portion of the chapel of Tutbury (Staffs.) being £5.⁹ In 1535 the rectory at Leake was valued at £25 3s. 6d. a year. An annual pension of £2 was paid to the prior of Repton and another of 17s. 4d. to the prioress of the Minories without Aldgate, London.¹⁰ In 1650 the Parliamentary Commissioners reported that East Leake and West Leake were worth £185 a year and that 'there are two churches belonging to the said parsonage, that is to say, in the town of West Leake one church and in the town of East Leake another church, they being one entire parsonage and donative'.¹¹ In 1881 the living was valued at £170¹² but in 1912 it was only £154.¹³ In 1928 the joint benefice of West Leake with Kingston and Ratcliffe was worth £315 with residence.¹⁴

⁴ Johnstone, *West Leake, the Mother Church*, 12.

⁵ *White's Dir. Notts.* (1864), 549.

⁶ *London Gazette*, 4 April 1876.

⁷ S & N Ch. Hist. Proj..

⁸ Diocese of Southwell & Nottingham, *Directory 2011*, 140.

⁹ *Tax. Eccl.*, 311; Godfrey, *Rushcliffe*, 135.

¹⁰ *Val. Eccl.*, v. 166.

¹¹ Godfrey, *Rushcliffe*, 135-6.

¹² *Kelly's Dir. Notts.* (1881), 72.

¹³ Austin, *'Under the Heavy Clouds'*, 217.

¹⁴ *Kelly's Dir. Notts.* (1928), 115.

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The Rectory stood next to the church on the west side. In 1589 the churchwardens reported that the parsonage house was in decay.¹⁵ In 1596 the churchwardens reported that the rector, Thomas Bodon (or Baldwyn) had two benefices, 12 miles apart, and that he lived at Kirby.¹⁶ In 1601 the parsonage was still 'something in decay in the fault of our parson who has promised to amend it before Pentecost'.¹⁷ In 1674 the Rectory was assessed on five hearths.¹⁸ In 1725 the parsonage house was described as having 10 bays.¹⁹ After a settlement by Parliament in 1743 one annuity or rent charge of £130 a year, clear of all deductions and taxes issuing out of the manor, land and tenements of West Leake, was made in lieu of glebe and tithes.²⁰ In 1743 the rector reported that he lived in the parsonage house in West Leake and his curate lived at East Leake.²¹ The Rectory was rebuilt in 1723, of red brick and render with a plain tile roof. It was of two storeys with garrets.²² In 1759 the parsonage had four rooms and a back building, a courtyard, two gardens, barn, stackyard, three stables and large barn. Opposite the house on the other side of Town Street were two enclosures of about ten acres which provided the annuity.²³ In 1853 the Rectory was described as 'a pleasant mansion'.²⁴ After the living was combined in 1933 the rector lived at Kingston. The Rectory at West Leake was sold and is now two private houses.²⁵

Church life

The first recorded rector of Leake was Henry de Gray who was instituted in 1229. In 1308 Raymond William de Fergis, Cardinal of Sancta Maria Nova, became rector. He was appointed

¹⁵ NUL, AN/PB 292/2/f. 5r./8.

¹⁶ NUL, AN/PB 292/5/67.

¹⁷ NUL, AN/PB 293/3/29.

¹⁸ *Hearth Tax*, 84.

¹⁹ Notts. Archives, DR 1/3/2/1/201/3.

²⁰ Notts. Archives, DR 1/3/2/1/201/5.

²¹ *Visitation Returns*, 85.

²² EH List.

²³ Notts. Archives DR 1/3/2/1/201/6.

²⁴ *White's Dir. Notts.* (1853), 410.

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archdeacon of the West Riding of Yorkshire in 1307 and in the same year was also appointed to the prebend of Wetwang in York for three years. However he remained rector of Leake until 1347.

Robert Smyth, who was rector from 1462 to 1472, asked to be buried before the altar of St Helena's. Other rectors who were buried at West Leake were John Davys (rector 1667-1717), Robert Hemington (1772-5), Theophilus Henry Hastings (1795-1803), George Holcombe (1804-36) and John Bateman (1836-82).

John Davenant, rector from 1612 to 1620, became president of Queens' College, Cambridge, and was later consecrated as bishop of Salisbury. Edward Bigland was instituted in 1620. At the time of the Commonwealth his personal estate was confiscated. He was taken prisoner but on the journey to Nottingham was forced to lie in a wagon in fields overnight and contracted a palsy from which he died. He was buried at West Leake. He was succeeded by John Moore who conformed after the Restoration and kept the living. He too was buried at St Helena's.²⁶

The longest serving incumbent of Leake was John Davys, who was rector from 1667 to 1717. His sister was married to the 6th earl of Huntingdon and he later married Parnel Horton whose mother was of the Ferrers family, so he was very well connected. Several of his children also were prominent locally and his great-grandson, George Davys, became rector of Willoughby on the Wolds, (1811-31) tutor to Princess (later Queen) Victoria and bishop of Peterborough (1838-64).²⁷

Michael Stanhope, who was rector from 1717 to 1737, was a noted preacher. In 1708 he preached a sermon at Whitehall for the Thanksgiving for the defeat of the Pretender. Later he preached at the House of Commons and again in 1722 when the archdeacon of Nottingham made his visitation. The archdeacon protested strongly against the doctrines Stanhope had set forth.²⁸ In

²⁵ EH List.

²⁶ Godfrey, *Rushcliffe*, 136-7.

²⁷ M. & H. Meadcroft, 'John Davys, rector of East & West Leake 1667-1717', *Leake Historian* No. 5 (2001), 9-14; Godfrey, *Rushcliffe*, 312.

²⁸ Southwell & Nottingham Church History Project,

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1733, 1736 and 1737 the churchwardens presented the rector, Michael Stanhope, for not residing in his benefice, neglecting his ministerial office and not supplying a resident curate.²⁹

In 1743 the rector reported that the sacrament was administered on Christmas Day, Easter Day and Whitsunday and every other first Sunday in the month, alternately at West Leake and East Leake. No-one had been refused the sacrament.³⁰

Theophilus Henry Hastings was educated for the Church by the Revd Granville Wheeler, rector of Leake from 1736 to 1770.³¹ Hastings, who was related to the earl of Huntingdon, as was Wheeler's wife, was curate of Leake from 1755 to 1763. As Wheeler was often away at his family home in Kent, Hastings, as his curate, had plenty to do. He had very strong High Church ideas and was strongly opposed to Evangelical and Methodist views. When East Leake Baptist chapel was built in 1756 he was very outspoken against it. This caused problems within the family as the wife of Theophilus's godfather, the 9th earl of Huntingdon, was Selina, countess of Huntingdon, who worked with evangelical groups and began to set up a network of chapels known as the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion. However, in 1795, by which time the countess had died, Hastings was appointed rector of Leake. When a Methodist church was built at East Leake in 1798 he spoke equally strongly against it in both West Leake and East Leake churches and later published his sermons. He died in 1804.³²

In 1851, when the population was 190, the church had 150 seats, of which 90 were free. The living was endowed with land worth £20, tithe worth £130 and glebe house worth £20. The rector remarked that 'The Tithe was commuted by Special Act of Parliament – the Land is 10 acres – and a glebe house and garden'. On Census Sunday the morning congregation was 30 and the afternoon

²⁹ NUL, AN/PB 323/148, 160, 499, 548.

³⁰ *Visitation Returns*, 85.

³¹ NUL, AN/IM 211/1/43.

³² R. O. Wood (ed), 'The Reverend Theophilus Henry Hastings', *Leake Historian No. 3* (1995) 19-21.

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65. There was no evening service. In both the morning and afternoon there were 40 children in the Sunday school.³³

The first rector of West Leake was Henry Balfour Hamilton who was instituted in 1882.³⁴ He was succeeded by Richard Owen Jones who was rector of West Leake from 1902 to 1931 and then moved to West Stockwith and Scrooby in north Nottinghamshire. However, at his death in 1945 he was buried at West Leake.³⁵

When the bishop visited West Leake in 1913 he reported that the church held 120 while the population was 139. There were 30 in the Sunday school. In the previous year there had been 12 baptisms and three confirmations.³⁶

Charles Herbert Vincent Brown became rector of West Leake in 1932. The following year the united benefice of West Leake with Ratcliffe on Soar and Kingston on Soar (the two latter had been united in 1916) was created and he became rector. For some years afterwards the rector of Gotham was priest-in-charge of the three parishes. In 1992 West Leake became part of the East Leake united benefice (East Leake, West Leake, Stanford on Soar, Rempstone and Costock), with the rector living in East Leake.³⁷

Fabric and furnishings

St Helena's church has a nave, chancel, south aisle and porch.³⁸ There is a small north transept for the vestry and organ. There is a bell-cote at the west end. Most of the stonework is

³³ *Religious Census*, 5.

³⁴ NUL, AN/IM 214/1/137.

³⁵ *Clergy Lists*, II, 169.

³⁶ Austin, *'Under the Heavy Clouds'*, 141, 217.

³⁷ S & N Ch. Hist. Proj.

³⁸ Except where indicated the information for this section is from the S & N Ch. Hist. Proj. and Godfrey, *Rushcliffe*, 138-147.

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local lias limestone with some sandstone, probably from the Castle Donington (Leics.) area. Some of the windows where the sandstone was badly eroded have been replaced with dressed Carboniferous sandstone, probably from Derbyshire.

The earliest part of the building is the north wall which has a Norman window and a blocked-up Norman doorway at the west end. In the 14th century the chancel was enlarged. It has a three-light east window with reticulated tracery. At the same time the south aisle, with five arches supported by octagonal columns, was added. In the 15th century a clerestory was built above the nave to give more light. The nave is supported by three buttresses on the exterior north wall and two on the west wall. The roof was originally very low.

In 1589 the churchwardens reported that 'our chancel is in decay'.³⁹ In 1602 they again reported that the church and churchyard were in some decay 'which we will mend before Whitsunday'.⁴⁰ However, in 1614 the church was again reported as being greatly out of repair and the porch likewise.⁴¹

In 1718 after the archdeacon's visitation it was ordered that the walls be repaired and whitewashed inside and the roof and pavement to be repaired.⁴² However in 1721 the churchwardens reported that 'our church is out of repair' and in 1722 'The archdeacon's orders are not performed'.⁴³

In 1878, two years after he became patron, Lord Belper began a programme of restoration and rebuilding. The work was carried out by Henry Hall. It involved taking down and repairing the south aisle and porch and rebuilding the clerestory. The north transept and vestry were rebuilt. The windows were re-glazed and a new floor was laid. As far as possible the rebuilt sections were in the

³⁹ NUL, AN/PB 292/2/folio 5r/8.

⁴⁰ NUL, AN/PB 293/5/21.

⁴¹ NUL, AN/PB 295/5/91.

⁴² NUL, AN/PB 321/833.

⁴³ NUL, AN/PB 322/ 195, 313.

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Perpendicular style. The height of the west wall was increased and a new bell-cote for two bells was added. The nave roof was remade as a high pitched one, covered in tiles. In addition to the exterior structural work the interior was improved. There was a new altar, oak pulpit and reading desk, rector's stall and choir stalls. The whole church was also re-seated. The cost of £1,850 was met mainly by Lord Belper.

The east window was given in memory of Arthur Strutt and represents the Resurrection. Below it is a modern marble reredos. The east window of the south aisle shows the Last Supper, Our Lord and St John and is in memory of the Revd John Bateman, rector 1836-82. On the south wall is a window in memory of Amelia Harriet, Lady Belper, who died in 1890. Also on the south wall is a window showing four country scenes, given in memory of members of the Blake family. On the north wall of the chancel is a window in memory of Mary, wife of John Carrell, a curate at St Helena's in the 19th century. There is also a small window with fragments of ancient glass in the shape of a shield.

On the south wall of the sanctuary and of the south aisle there is a piscina. In the chancel is a bishop's chair. At the west end of the nave, near the porch, is the font. At the time of the restoration in 1878 the rector, John Bateman, gave an organ, made by J. M. Greenwell.

The two bells which hang in the exterior bell-cote were both originally cast by Thomas Hedderley of Nottingham, one in 1758 and the other in 1762. The bells were rehung in 1858 by Taylors of Loughborough. The 1762 bell was recast in 1920 as the gift of Sir Arthur Blake and his wife Florence.⁴⁴

There are several monuments and memorials within the church, including three very old effigies. On the north wall of the chancel is a canopied recess with the figure of a lady wearing a wimple and with one hand holding a fold of her gown. On the north wall of the organ chamber in

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the north transept is an arched tomb-recess with the figure of a man with curly hair, with a heart in his hands and a dog at his feet. He is wearing a gown with a pattern of crosses and annulets (circles) and may be Alan of Leake or a member of his family. On the south wall of the south aisle is an arched tomb-recess of a figure with a gown of many folds, belted at the waist.

The more recent monuments include those of the Mansfield family who were lords of the manor from 1594 to 1741. Most of their monuments are on the north wall of the nave. There are also wall monuments on the south wall of the chancel to two Thomas Mansfields who died in 1706 and 1741.

The other monuments commemorate the rectors and their families. On the west wall of the nave are floor stones to the Revd Edward Bigland and his wife, to the children of the Revd John Davys and to rectors Edward Ellis and Robert Hemington. On the north wall of the nave is a monument to the Revd George Holcombe. On the north wall of the chancel are monuments to rectors Robert Hemington, Edward Ellis and John Bateman and his family. On the east wall of the chancel is a monument to Theophilus Henry Hastings.

On the north wall of the nave there is also a roll of honour in the form of a brass plate recording 17 men of the parish who served in the First World War and a memorial to the four who died. The lych-gate in the churchyard is also a memorial to those who died in the First World War.

The churchyard contains several slate headstones, including one on the north side of the church dated 2010. On the south side of the church, near the east end, are the remains of a pillar sun-dial. On the church wall above it is another sun-dial. On the south side of the churchyard are two large tomb memorials to Sir Arthur and Lady Blake. A large yew tree grows on the south side of the church. The churchyard surrounds the church on the north east and south sides, with just a path across the west end.

Protestant Nonconformity

In 1603 no nonconformists were reported to be in West or East Leake,⁴⁵ but in 1676 there was one Dissenter in West Leake.⁴⁶ Between 1689 and 1698 Samuel Wilkinson's house was licensed for occasional nonconformist meetings at Leake where John Whitlock, Richard Bateson and John Hardy were preachers. The number of hearers was claimed to be 113, with four gentlemen and most of the rest yeomen and farmers.⁴⁷

In 1851 it was reported that a group of 19 General Baptists met for evening worship in a house and a group of 55 Wesleyan Methodists met for evening worship, also in a house.⁴⁸

There has never been a purpose-built nonconformist meeting house in West Leake although many of the surrounding parishes had both Baptist and Methodist chapels.

Roman Catholicism

In 1603 no Catholics were reported in West or East Leake.⁴⁹ In 1693 the churchwardens presented Mr John Wyld for being a recusant. He was presented again in 1694 when he was described as schoolmaster.⁵⁰ There has never been a Roman Catholic place of worship in West Leake: the nearest church is at East Leake.

⁴⁵ *Diocesan Census*, 510.

⁴⁶ *Compton Census*, 611.

⁴⁷ A. C. Wood (ed), 'A note on nonconformity in Nottinghamshire in 1717', *TTS*, xlii (1943), 14-19.

⁴⁸ *Religious Census*, 5.

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⁴⁹

NUL, AN/PB 294/1/225.

⁵⁰

NUL, AN/PB 319/265, 346.