

Gowin Knight (approx. 1636-1691)

Vicar 1671-2

Gowin¹ Knight was vicar of St Helen's for a very short time. He is mentioned in correspondence by his predecessor, Alexander Jones: "*The parish of Ashby, as soon as the Gentleman Mr Knight sent to supply his roome, came ... did then with so general a Concurrence and earnest importunity desire my stay that at length I did give them fair hope.*"² Either Knight was a very unpopular arrival or the parish was reluctant to part with Jones, who had ministered in Ashby for eleven years. It could have been a bit of both.

Knight graduated from Christ Church, Oxford in 1661 and became a Fellow of Merton College in 1663. He was ordained priest by Robert, Bishop of Lincoln, on 23rd December 1660. His whereabouts until 27th February 1672, when he was appointed to Ashby, are unclear, though he may have remained at Merton. In 1675 he was appointed to Ponteland in Northumberland and from 1679-83 he was at Thrumpton in the Diocese of Southwell. On 12th September 1690, he was instituted Rector of Longford, near Ashbourne, Derbyshire, in the Diocese of Coventry & Lichfield. His successor at Longford, Charles Byrch, was instituted some 17 months later, on 4th February 1692.

Oddly, despite his appointment to Ashby, Theophilus, 7th Earl of Huntingdon, was in correspondence with Knight in his role as Bursar at Merton College in September and October 1672 regarding a grant by his ancestors of the site and buildings of a dissolved college in Oxford, in trust for the foundation of a hospital and for other charitable purposes.³ Perhaps Knight didn't move to Ashby at all. Other than the note of Gowin Knight's unpopular appointment in the records at Ashby, there is little more to be said about him, other than to record the details of his family.

When, on 13th February 1676/7⁴, Knight married Anne Malin at St Mary's⁵, Nottingham his address was given as Merton College, Oxford. Robert Knight, their son, was baptised at St Mary's on 10th January 1677/8. By March 1679 the family was in Thrumpton as their daughter Christiana was baptised there on 18th March. Christiana must have died, as a second Christiana was baptised at Thrumpton on 27th February 1680 and Anna was baptised there on 3rd December 1682.

By 1684 the family was in Kegworth, Leicestershire, where daughter Elizabeth was baptised on February 3rd. On 8th November 1689, a son, Gowin, was baptised at St Mary's in Nottingham, though he didn't live for long, as he was also buried there on 5th March 1690. Gowin Knight senior, having been appointed to Longford in September 1690, was buried at St Mary's, Nottingham on 10th September 1691.

We know that Gowin's elder son, Robert, survived to adulthood, as he entered Christ Church, Oxford, aged 15, in April 1693. He gained his BA in 1698 and his MA in 1701 and became vicar of Corringham, Lincolnshire and later of Harewood, Leeds. Robert's son, Gowin like his grandfather, graduated from Magdalen Hall, Oxford in 1736 and became a physician. In 1745, he discovered a process for forming strongly magnetised steel, which he used to develop a compass needle able to function with greater precision. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society and, in 1756, Gowin Knight became the first principal librarian of the British Museum.

¹ Various spelt as Gowin, Gawen, Gowyn, Goawyn.

² Ashby de la Zouch. Seventeenth Century Life in a small market town. Christopher Moxon. 2013. P137. From research conducted by Moxon in the Huntington Library, California.

³ National Archives – Reference: MS Carte 79, fol 292 & National Archives – Reference: MS Carte 79, fol 362

⁴ Until 1752, the new year began on 25th March.

⁵ St Mary's in the Lacemarket.

Another Gowin Knight?

In my hunt for information about Gowin Knight, I came across another Gowin Knight, who might have been his father or a close relative, though I cannot quite make the connection. This Gowin Knight married Martha Nash (or Welsh) of West Retford, Notts, in Mansfield on 7th October 1633. His residence at the time of marriage was given as Derby. On July 10th 1649, probate was given to Martha Knight, widow of Gowin Knight of Newhall, Derbyshire, by the Staffordshire Probate Office.

Gowin and Martha Knight had a son called Gilbert, who matriculated at Christ Church, Oxford (our own Gowin Knight's undergraduate college) on 29th October 1669, aged 20. He graduated with a BA in 1675 and an MA in 1676. On 3rd April 1682 he was licensed to marry Rebecca Layton of St Mary, Aldermanbury, London, by which time he was vicar of Fordingbridge in Hampshire.

Between January 1683 and August 1687, four daughters were born to Gilbert and Rebecca in Fordingbridge. By December 1688, the family were in Kegworth, where their next two daughters were baptised in 1688 and 1689. In November 1691, the Parish register for Kegworth reads, "*Gilbert Knight Cur buried Nov 20 1691.*" Does this indicate that he was Curate there? In his will, dated 14th September 1691, he leaves some £500 to his daughters and everything else to his wife Rebecca.

Though Gowin & Ann Knight's daughter, Elizabeth, was baptised in Kegworth in 1684, the two families don't appear to have been there at the same time, though 'our' Gowin and Gilbert, son of Gowin of Newhall, died within two months and eleven miles of each other in 1691. Could they have been brothers or cousins?

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