

Alexander Jones (1633-1672)

Vicar 1662-1671

Alexander Jones was baptised on 9th February 1634 at St Mary's Church, Eccles in Lancashire. The register reads, "Allexander, son of John Jones vicar."¹ He entered Jesus College, Cambridge in 1653 and his entry in the Cambridge University Alumni list records that he was educated in Manchester, took his BA from Cambridge in 1656 and his MA in 1660. He was a college Fellow until 1663 and became vicar of Ashby de la Zouch in 1662, appointed by Lucy Countess of Huntingdon, acting on behalf of her young son, Theophilus.

Alexander Jones was the son and brother of puritan ministers. His father, John, vicar of Eccles in Lancashire between 1611-1659, was a dissenting minister, who gave communion to those who sat rather than knelt and in whose church nobody stood for the Creed.

Between 1664 and 1667, three baptisms are recorded at St Helen's for children of Mr Jones, minister and his wife Ann. They are Christian, Mary and Theophilus. Theophilus could well have been named for his patroness's son. On 16th June 1668 Ann Jones was buried at Castle Donington. On 23rd March 1669, Alexander Jones married his second wife, Mary Rugety/Rugely in Coleshill, Warwickshire. Their son, Alexander, was baptised at St Helen's on 21st October 1671.

Early the following year, on 27th February 1672, Alexander Jones reluctantly resigned his living at Ashby to become vicar of Piddletown (now Puddletown) in Dorset. The parish was one of the vicarages settled on Emmanuel College², Cambridge by Henry, the 'Puritan Earl' of Huntingdon in 1587. (Henry had settled on Emmanuel College the rectories of Loughborough and Thurstaston in Leicestershire, Aller and North Cadbury, Somerset, and the vicarage of Piddleton, Dorset.)

The move to Puddletown appears to have been much against Jones' will. When Lucy, Countess of Huntingdon decided to transfer him, 97 parishioners petitioned the Earl to persuade the countess to change her mind and Jones himself asked to stay.³ The Countess was unmoved.

Jones didn't minister at Puddletown for long. He died there in 1672 and was buried in the churchyard on 26th November.

During his time in Ashby, Jones appears to have been an active vicar. He was appointed in 1662 and re-appointed in 1664 to give the weekly 'Ashe Lecture' in St Helen's Church, which was funded by a £20 bequest in the will of Francis Ashe in 1650. He also made serious attempts to settle a 90 year long dispute between the parishes of Ashby and Blackfordby. He appeared to have succeeded when an agreement was signed in 1663 to settle the dispute over Blackfordby people paying levies for Ashby Parish Church, but other disputes between the parishes continued, ending only when Blackfordby became a separate parish some 200 years later.

Alexander Jones was just 38 years old when he died. His will survives.⁴ In it, he left money to care for the poor of both Puddletown and Ashby parishes, the money for the Ashby poor coming from his

¹ Ancestry

² Emmanuel College had been founded in 1584 by Walter Mildmay, Elizabeth I's Chancellor of the Exchequer as a training centre for Anglican preachers, on puritan lines.

³ Records in the Huntington Library, California, studied by Christopher Moxon in 1968. See: Ashby de la Zouch, Seventeenth century life in a small market town, 2013, p 137.

⁴ Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills, 1384-1858 for Alexandri Jones. Prob 11: Will registers – 1674-1687 – Piece 345: Quire numbers 54-103 (1674) (Ancestry)

dues for giving the Ashe Lecture. He gave his wife Mary her £100 dowry and the guardianship of his daughter Mary from his first marriage. No other children are mentioned in his will, though no burial records for them prior to November 1672, the date of Alexander's will, have yet come to light. To Samuel Shaw, Ashby's schoolmaster, he left a choice between his best cloak and his best book. His second best cloak was left to his brother, Edmund.

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