

## Percy Rawson Preston

### Vicar 1903-1906

Percy Preston was born in Tulse Hill, in the Parish of Lambeth, in January 1870 and was baptised at Holy Trinity church in that parish on 16<sup>th</sup> May. His parents were James Bickerton Preston, a hop merchant, who described himself as 'gentleman' in the baptism register, and Josephine (neé Penfold).

Josephine was James' second wife. They had married in July 1862 in Kennington, London. His first wife and the mother of his first four children was Amy (neé Arland), who had died in 1858. Percy was the youngest in a family of 9 children, five of them born to Josephine. Percy's father, James, was doing well in business. By the time Percy married in 1899, James and Josephine were living at 21 Wilton Place, a substantial town house in Knightsbridge.

The 1881 Census listed Percy as a boarder at Ascham House in Bournemouth, Dorset. At that time, it was the lower house of a school, taking boys between the ages of 9 and 13. It is now part of Bournemouth and Poole College. He later went on to Harrow School. From there, he entered Exeter College, Oxford, where he studied theology, graduating in 1892 and going on to Leeds Clergy School, which had been founded in 1876 by Dr John Gott, the Vicar of Leeds, to provide a practical training for graduates destined to be ordained to town curacies.<sup>1</sup>

Percy was ordained Deacon at St Nicholas Parish Church in Witham, Essex, in September 1893 and priest at Bishop Stortford in December 1894. Kelly's Directory of 1895 listed him as a Curate, living at 24 Broomfield Road, Chelmsford.

On 12<sup>th</sup> September 1899, Percy married Lily Catherine Finch at St Mary Magdalen, St Leonard's on Sea, Sussex. She was the younger daughter of Major General A U Finch of Hove. The 1901 Census listed Percy and Lily at 13 Pittville Villas, Cheltenham. He was curate at All Saints Church in the town. Whilst there, he worked with the vicar, George Gardner, to write "Beauty and the Beast. An Operetta." Whether or not he wrote any more musical pieces is not known.

The Gloucestershire Echo of 8<sup>th</sup> October 1903 recorded his appointment as Vicar of Ashby de la Zouch, but his time here was to be brief. A new vicar, Rev Herbert Sawyer, was appointed in January 1907, when "***the Rev P R Preston, who, after being abroad for some months for the benefit of his health, resigned.***"<sup>2</sup>

Percy Preston's health did not improve; he died in Switzerland on 19<sup>th</sup> April 1911, aged 41 years. His widow, Lily, inherited just over £11,000, which provided her with an income for the rest of her life. They had no children and Lily did not re-marry. She lived for many years with her unmarried sister, Mary Finch, in their home town of Hove, until her death there in 1944.

There is little to be found about Percy's life, but one sad detail is the story of Percy's brother, Herbert, who died of typhoid, aged 28, in 1891. He had only been married for 2 years and his wife Cecilia had recently given birth to their first child. Her family home was at Bredfield near Woodbridge in Suffolk and a stained glass window in Herbert's memory was installed in her parish church by their mother, Josephine.

Julie Starkey  
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<sup>1</sup> Information from an article by Roy Yates, published by the University of Leeds, 2013. (Online)

<sup>2</sup> Melton Mowbray mercury and Oakham and Uppingham News, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1907 (FMP)