

Joseph Smith 1684-1721

Vicar 1716-1721

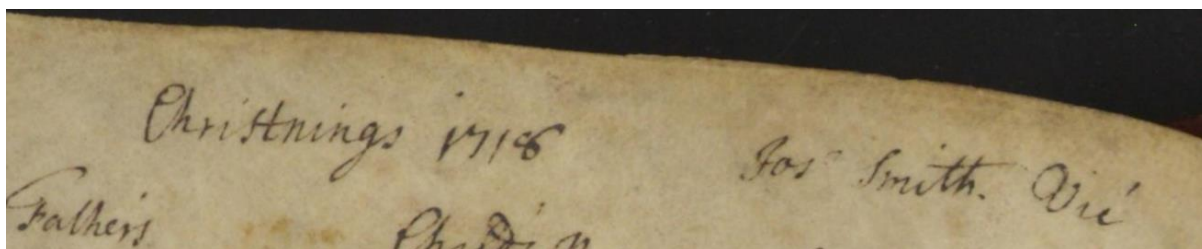
Very little information has yet come to light about Joseph Smith, who was vicar of St Helen's between 1715 and 1721. He was the son of another Joseph Smith, vicar of All Saints Church, Lullington in Derbyshire between 1673 and his death in 1714. It is recorded in the Lullington parish registers that Joseph Smith junior inducted his father's successor, William Parry, into the church at Lullington on 19th March 1715.¹

Joseph Smith junior was born in 1684 and baptised at Lullington on 8th September. He was one of at least 13 children, born to Joseph and Ann Smith between 1671 and 1689. When his father died he left Joseph five shillings and most of his books, though he left his notes and sermons to his daughter Elizabeth.²

He was admitted to Lincoln College, Oxford, in March 1701, aged 17 years. He gained his BA in 1705 and his MA in 1713. He was ordained Deacon at Eccleshall, Staffs in 1706 and priest in 1708. In 1708 he was appointed Curate at Morton in Derbyshire.³

He became vicar of Ashby de la Zouch in 1716. His patron was Theophilus, Earl of Huntingdon.

There are few records of his time in Ashby apart from a document in the Lincoln archives – Queries in advance of the Bishop's visitation in May 1718 – which he completed but did not sign. His signature appears often in the Ashby parish registers.



Joseph Smith's signature in Ashby parish registers, 1718⁴

The bishop's 'Articles of Enquiry' document asks the number of families in the Parish and how many of them are dissenters; whether there are any 'licensed meeting houses' in the parish; whether there is a school in the parish where the Christian religion is taught '*according to the Doctrine of the church of England*;' whether there are alms houses or charitable endowments in the parish. It asks where the vicar lives and whether he has a curate. Smith is clearly concerned that '*the poorer sort, for want of means, are miserably ignorant in their duty*' (to send their children to be instructed and catechised in church) and reports to the bishop that the church is '*endeavouring to raise a Charity School*' to remedy this. He reports 40-50 communicants in church each month.⁵

There is a second 'Articles of Enquiry' document from the Bishop of Lincoln, dated August 1721, which is completed by Smith's successor, Samuel Holbrooke, who mostly '*refer(s) to my predecessor's*

¹ Lullington Parish registers. Ancestry

² Will of Joseph Smith, 1645-1713. Find My Past

³ Clergy of the Church of England Database

⁴ Ashby parish register. Find My Past

⁵ Articles of Enquiry. Ashby de la Zouch, Akely Deanery. May 1718. Lincoln Records Office.

answer' except in his report that he is not able to move into the vicarage because his predecessor's widow is still there.⁶

Three baptisms of children born to Joseph Smith and his wife are recorded in the Ashby parish register. John is baptised in June 1717, Richard in July 1719 and Joseph in November 1720. Richard dies at about ten months old and Joseph survives for just a few days.

Joseph Smith's final entries in the Ashby parish registers are made early in March 1721. He is buried on 21st March 1721. This suggests a sudden and swift illness and he may have fallen victim to the smallpox epidemic which was sweeping the country between 1721 and 1723. He appears to have left no will.

Julie Starkey
December 2023

⁶ Articles of Enquiry. Ashby de la Zouch, Akely Deanery. August 1721. Lincoln Records Office.