

The Old Rectory of St James – *The Rectors' Rooms*

During the time that the Old Rectory was a guest house, the visitors' room were named after some of the rectors:

John de Besselow Rector of Stirchley 1382-1400 – *A Rector on the move*

John de Besselow was presented by the Crown as the Rector of Stirchley on 23 October 1382 during the turbulent reign of King Richard II. He belonged to a family who were the lords of the manor of Beslow near Shrewsbury from the time of the Domesday Book. John lived in a Rectory almost certainly on the present site, although that building is now long gone.

In 1400 John left Stirchley for the Rectory of St Margaret's at Wolstanton near Newcastle-under-Lyme, only to move on one year later to St Michael's at Woolstaston in Shropshire. That same year he was appointed by the canons of Shrewsbury as vicar of the Church of the Holy Cross, which was at that time the Abbey church. However, his tenure lasted just 18 months; he died in 1402.

Roger Clayton Rector of Stirchley 1792-1827 – *An educated man*

A graduate of Emmanuel College Cambridge, Roger Clayton was ordained in 1776 by the Bishop of Hereford during the reign of King George III. He took up the curacy at Stirchley under Rev John Rogers in 1779 and was himself appointed Rector 13 years later on the death of his predecessor. Written in quill on the vellum pages of the parish register is the record of his institution:

The Revd. Roger Clayton, Clerk, A.M of Wroxeter, was instituted to the Rectory of Stirchley upon Thursday the 17th day of May on the presentation of John Oakeley, of Fir Grove, in the County of Salop. Esq.. and Samuel Sneade, of Ludlow, Clerk in the said County. the true and undoubted Patrons thereof for this turn in London by James Cornwallis Ld. Bishop of Lich: and Cov: and inducted thereto upon Monday, the 28th day of May, 1792.

Although substantial building work had been carried out on the Rectory in 1783, by 1817 the condition of the main 3-storey block had deteriorated to the extent that Roger was given leave to live elsewhere while repairs took place.

As perpetual curate at neighbouring Dawley, with two churches and two parishes to run Roger was assisted by a number of curates in succession. Roger Clayton resigned his post in 1827 after 48 years as Rector, by which time he must have been well into his seventies.

Edward Fosbrooke Rector of Stirchley 1758-1775 – *A cleric from a clerical family*

Edward Fosbrooke was born into a clerical family during the reign of King George II. His grandfather had been a priest, his father was the vicar of Diddlebury and the Rector of Acton Scott, his elder brother was the vicar of Cold Weston, and his son John was later to become the vicar of Childerditch in Essex.

The marriage of Edward Fosbrooke to Ann Baldwyn, spinster, appears in the Stirchley Parish Register on 20 January 1766. As Edward Fosbrooke Junior was one of the witnesses, it seems likely that this was Edward's second marriage. One Lydia Fosbrooke was a witness with Edward to a marriage in 1760. It could well be that this was Edward's first wife, although there is no record of her death in the Parish Register.

Although small parish Stirchley was a well-endowed one. In 1772 the Rector's living was valued at over £68,000 in modern equivalence. In addition to this the Rector received all tithes in kind, that is one tenth of all agricultural produce in the parish. For tithes of calves and milk a monetary sum was paid. In addition the Rectory owned glebe lands of 45½ acres which, for the most part of his tenure, Edward rented out to the tenant of Stirchley Hall. It is likely that Edward's Rectory was the predecessor of the current building and is likely to have been of timber-framed construction. Edward died in post and was buried somewhere in the churchyard on 29 February 1775.

William Hunt Painter Rector of Stirchley 1894-1909 – *Victorian Rector and botanist*

William Hunt Painter was born the son of an ironmonger in 1835 in Duddeston, a poor working-class area of Birmingham. Giving up his job as a bank clerk, he trained at Islington Missionary College. However, he took a curacy in Westmoreland and it was here that he became interested in botany.

William was appointed to Stirchley in 1894 and is recorded in the 1901 Census aged 65 living at the Rectory with his wife Jane and two domestic servants, Agnes Timmins and Emma Evans. He remained as Rector until 1909 when failing health forced his retirement to Shrewsbury where he died the following year. On his death, the *English Churchman* described him as 'a *faithful and devoted minister*.' A tablet in the church erected by the parishioners describes him as '*faithful and untiring*' and notes his instrumental role in restoring both church and Rectory. William is buried with his wife in the churchyard close to the Rectory garden wall.

William was a keen amateur botanist and a specialist in the study of mosses whose specimens may be found in a number of herbarium repositories, notably at University College Aberystwyth. He discovered *one* of the rarest plants in the world, named plant *Painter's Fumitory* after him, one of the very few plants considered endemic to Britain. That is to say it exists nowhere else in the world and in only a single location in this country. It has only ever been found twice: at Bishops Castle in 1905, and at Ironbridge in 1907, on both occasions by William Painter himself, and is now believed to be extinct. (*The plant may have been rediscovered at Broadoak near Shrewsbury in 2005 – see the photograph below – but this has yet to be confirmed.*)

Jane Hunt Painter – *The Rector's wife 1894-1909*

Jane Stamps of Birmingham was the wife of William Hunt Painter whom she married at Kings Norton in 1871. Her father was a self-made iron merchant who had moved to Calthorpe Road Edgbaston, which is still one of the city's desirable addresses.

After the death of Jane's father, her mother Louisa Stamps came to live with the couple and was energetic in Sunday School activities. A tablet in the church commemorates her life 1814-1897. When William retired with ill-health in 1909, the couple moved to Shrewsbury. William died the following year and Jane survived him by 20 years, dying at the age of 88 in 1930. She was laid to rest with her husband and alongside her mother in the churchyard close to the Rectory wall.



Painter's Fumitory *Fumaria painteri*