

This is the Thirty-fifth of an occasional series of articles by David Stone about incidents in the history of Swanton Morley and its church

The Collett Family

Part 2: William Collett Snr as a Country Gentleman, and the Collett Tombs in the Graveyard

The commutation of tithes

From about 1800 onwards, the voluntary commutation of tithes (the substitution of a money payment for the old payment in kind) was a central feature of many enclosure awards, and this payment could be either in the form of a rent-charge, or as an allocation of land. Either way the country parson did well out of the arrangement, for the tithe owner (usually the clergy) had the power to prevent the enclosure by refusing to accept commutation, so many tithing agreements erred on the side of generosity towards the clergymen. Take the question of the allocation of land; because the original tithe was designed to present the owner with one tenth of the parish yield, the grant of land had to match this. The result was that substantial blocks of glebe land were consolidated in the area adjoining the church and the rectory. With this significant ownership of land, came increased social status; effectively country parsons became gentlemen farmers; and with this came the traditional functions of social leadership, notably the function of being a magistrate.

Now, by the time that William was appointed rector of Swanton Morley in 1808, this process was well under way. As a demonstration of William's role as country gentleman, Bryant, in his *Norfolk Churches (1901)*, when writing about some of the earlier rectors of Swanton Morley, said, "The Rev. Wm. Collett, also vicar of Holkham, was a keen sportsman and a crack shot, and on one occasion killed a pheasant and a woodcock with one shot, to which feat he owed his appointment."

The rectory (the benefice not the building), was consolidated with Worthing, and the joint rectories were valued in 1831, at £922 per annum, so William had a very comfortable income.

The Collett tombs

There are two Collett tombs in the graveyard of All Saints' Church, Swanton Morley, and you can find these tombs by using either of the location maps which are held in the church. The first tomb is that of William Snr's daughters Charlotte and Anna, who died in 1805 and 1806 respectively. The second is that of William himself, who died on 20 Sept 1825, and of his wife Anna who died on 12 Dec 1850. Unfortunately, the inscriptions proved quite hard to photograph well enough to reproduce here, so I include transcripts below. (I shall return to William Collett Jnr in a later article.)

SACRED

To the memory of
CHARLOTTE COLLETT
Who died Feb 27th
1805
Aged 18 years

Also of
ANNA COLLETT
Who died Nov 16th
1806
Aged 21 years

SACRED

To the memory of
The Rev William Collett
The Rector of this Parish
Who died Sept 20th
1825
In the 70th year of his Age
Also of ANNA his widow
Who died Dec 12th 1850
Aged 70 years

Also of their son
The Rev WILLIAM COLLETT
Formerly of Thetford Norfolk
And afterwards Chaplain of
Morden College Blackheath
Who died Sept 11th 1866
In the 70th year of his Age
And was laid to rest in Charlton Cemetery
Kent

When William Snr's funeral was announced in the *Christian Remembrancer* of Jan – Dec 1825, he was said to be Rector of Swanton Morley with Worthing, and of Holkham with Egmere. He was no longer vicar of Surlingham. Remember that his son, William Jnr. had been appointed vicar there in June 1821.

The officiating minister at his funeral was John Maul, rector of Brisley. The new rector of Swanton Morley, Henry Tacy, had not yet arrived in the parish and the next few burials were taken by William Frost, who was the stipendiary curate at Beetley and East Bilney. It is interesting to note that the funeral on 12 August, which was the one immediately preceding that of William Snr, was taken by William Collett Jnr. who designated himself rector of Surlingham. The first burial at which Henry Tacy officiated was on 18 Mar 1826. Note that the rectory house has changed since William's time because Henry Tacy re-built it.

The younger three daughters of William Snr

We shall be looking at his son, William Collett Jnr next time but, for now, let us look briefly at what happened to his three younger daughters. I shall cover them in decreasing order of age.

- Sophia Collett married a wealthy widower called John Deacon in Swanton Morley on 12 October 1816. Her siblings Frances and William Jnr were the witnesses. John was fifteen years older than her, and was a successful London banker, being a partner in Williams, Deacon and Co. He was described as being of Mabledon Park Tonbridge and of Portman Square. If you look on the internet you will see that Mabledon Park is a very impressive mansion, built in 1804 and extended in 1829 by John Deacon. She may have made John's acquaintance through William Collett Snr's brother, Cornelius, who was himself a founding partner in the Woodbridge Bank. John Deacon died in 1851, aged 79 years, leaving a widow, two sons and up to nine daughters. He left Mabledon to his elder son, who was also called John. It may have been he who further extended Mabledon in 1870.

- Mary Collett married Thomas Leventhorpe, of St Pancras, London, in Swanton Morley on 29 July 1811. Mary was buried in Woodbridge, Suffolk, 'in her 30th year' where she was described as 'relict of Thomas Leventhorpe'.

However, it is not Mary and Thomas themselves, but their third child, who is mainly of interest to us. His name was Collett Leventhorpe, and he is pictured here. He was baptised in St George's, Bloomsbury, on 29 Feb 1816. He was a soldier, a physician and an adventurer who went out to North Carolina in 1843, fell in love and decided to stay. A book on his life has recently (2007) been published: *Collett Leventhorpe, the English Confederate: the life of a Civil War General*, by Timothy Cole and Bradley R. Foley.



- Frances Elizabeth Collett married John Preston Reynolds in Swanton Morley on 6 Oct 1818; they were married by the Rev Morden Carthew, vicar of Mattishall, and her sister Mary Leventhorpe was one of the witnesses. Incidentally, John's sister, Phyllis Preston Reynolds, would a little later (24 Oct 1820) marry William Collett Jnr. John Preston Reynolds was the son of a brewer from Great Yarmouth and he was a graduate of Caius College. He was rector of Little Munden, Herts, from 1819 to 1831, and of Beeston St Andrew in Norfolk from 1831 to 1844. They had a son, called John Collett Preston, who was born in Little Munden in 1819.

So that is the end of my story of William Collett Snr. Next time I shall talk about William Collett Jnr and the way in which he managed to make the ruined church of St Saviour's, Surlingham, continue to pay him a handsome rent-charge, without him having to do any work for it.