

ART. XIII. – *Bishop Richard Watson and His Lakeland Friends: A Study in Patronage.*
BY THE REV. J. R. GUY.

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THE *Extraordinary Black Book* of 1831 claimed that “the patronage of the bishops [is bestowed] on their connections and relations to the hundredth degree”.¹ The exaggeration of the statement is pardonable, but it spotlights an abuse all too prevalent in the Church of England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, in the case of Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff from 1782-1816, the claim is not too far from the truth.

At Llandaff Cathedral, all twelve of the prebendal stalls, with their concomitant estates and advowsons, were in the gift of the diocesan bishop. During his long episcopate, it fell to Watson to make a large number of appointments to these prebends, and the purpose of this paper is to isolate and detail the predominant group of clergy so nominated, the extent of which has perhaps not hitherto been realised, the eight “lakeland” clergymen whom he preferred during the period of his almost permanent residence at Calgarth Park, Windermere, from about 1790 until his death in 1816. Richard Watson was himself a native of Westmorland. His father, the Reverend Thomas Watson, was from 1698-1737 Master of the Grammar School at Heversham – “a long and distinguished rule” wrote Robert Humber² – and Richard, who was baptised in Heversham Church on 25 September 1736,³ lived as a boy in the family home at Plumtree Bank⁴ just below the school itself, which he attended until the age of eighteen. The family originated at Hardendale in Shap. A Hugh Watsonne was a pensioner of Shap Abbey at its dissolution,⁵ and the family Christian names of Anthony, Thomas and Agnes recur in the Shap Parish Registers during the sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.⁶ Richard’s elder brother was an Anthony, who died in 1767 as curate of St George’s Chapel, Kendal,⁷ and his sister Agnes was baptised at Heversham on 22 April 1731.⁸ The long connection with Shap had been severed by this time. Later, Watson was to write in his *Anecdotes*⁹ “My grandfather’s little patrimony at Hardendale near Shap was inherited by my father’s elder brother, who died, leaving only daughters: and it is, I believe, without having suffered alienation, still in the possession of their descendants”.

Despite his long residence at Cambridge, Watson maintained a close connection with his native county, even after the deaths of his father in 1753¹⁰ and brother in 1767. In 1773, when Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, he made a prestigious marriage with Dorothy, the daughter of Edward Wilson, Esq., of Dallam Tower near Heversham¹¹ but it was not until the 1780s that he was in a position to contemplate settling once more in Westmorland. The death of his great friend Mr John Luther, M.P. for Essex, in 1786 made Watson sole executor of his Essex estate, and inheritor of his considerable property in Sussex.¹² This last he sold to Lord Egremont for £23,000, enabling him to purchase the Windermere property which was to be his home until death.

The acquisition of Calgarth from the heirs of Myles Sandys of Graythwaite¹³ can be dated to 1787-1788. Dr Thomas Kipling was appointed his deputy in the Cambridge Divinity Chair on 26 May 1787¹⁴ and Watson then removed to Dallam Tower. In 1788, with his friend William Preston, Bishop of Ferns and Leighlin, he restored the Heversham School House (quite close to Dallam) and on 28 October of that year he can be found adding to his lakeside estate, by the purchase of "Grove Estates in Ambleside".¹⁵ Clearly, the Calgarth period of his life dates from this time.

The new house to grace the estate came a little later. In 1791, Adam Walker described it as "large but unfinished"¹⁶ but by 1796, West was able to say that the bishop "*has built an elegant mansion*".¹⁷ Thereafter followed some twenty years in which Watson and his family were to be prominent members of Lakeside Society, and the recipients of his ecclesiastical patronage provide a fascinating insight into the circles in which he moved.

All but one of his appointments of "lakesmen" date from the time of his residence at Calgarth. The exception is the Reverend John Cookson, collated to the prebend of Caerau in Llandaff Cathedral on 2 June 1783¹⁸ and Watson's first appointment after his consecration as bishop the previous year.

Cookson is a common Westmorland name. William Wordsworth's mother Ann was a Cookson of Penrith before her marriage to the poet's father, John. The Reverend John Cookson can be identified with the son of John Cookson, maltster, of Clappersgate, Ambleside, who matriculated at St John's College, Cambridge on 25 June 1746.¹⁹ At the time of his appointment he was rector of Kelvedon Hatch and curate of North Mandeville, both in Essex. Thus it is likely that he was more a protégé of the bishop's great friend, John Luther, then still alive, than of the bishop himself, and therefore he stands apart from the rest of the group. However, Watson may well have been personally acquainted with him, for he is probably the same John Cookson who was acting in his home town in the early 1780s as Usher of Ambleside School under the Reverend Isaac Knipe.²⁰

From 1790, the flow of patronage is sustained. On 25 June of that year, the Reverend John Wilson was collated to the Llandaff prebend of St Cross.²¹ Wilson was a lifelong friend of his patron. Both were educated at Heversham School, where their names are listed in succession among the scholars on a board in the school Hall. Both matriculated at Trinity College, Cambridge; Watson in 1755, Wilson in 1757. Both became members of the Trinity Senior Common Room; Watson being elected Fellow in 1760, Wilson in 1764.²² Both retained their connection with Westmorland. In 1770²³ Dr Thomas Symonds as vicar of Kendal presented Wilson to the perpetual curacy of Helsington, to which church in 1779 he gave a pewter cup and cover.²⁴ He continued to live at Kendal even after Trinity College presented him to their Yorkshire livings of Aysgarth (1781) and Gainford (1782), acting in the commission of the Peace for Westmorland. His premature death at the age of fifty-two on 12 January 1791 prevented almost certain further favours from his episcopal friend. A mural monument to his memory can still be seen in the south aisle of Kendal Church, where he lies buried.

To succeed him in the vacant stall of St Cross at Llandaff, Watson appointed another near neighbour and friend, the Reverend Reginald Brathwaite, who was collated on 2 May 1791.²⁵ Brathwaite was a descendant of the family of Ambleside Hall, and the son of Gawen Brathwaite of Brathay.²⁶ After schooling under the Reverend Isaac Knipe at

Ambleside, he matriculated at Michaelmas, 1755 at St John's College, Cambridge (shortly after Watson at the neighbouring college of Trinity). Both graduated in 1759, Watson as 2nd Wrangler, and Brathwaite as 13th, and both became Fellows of their respective colleges, Brathwaite of St John's in 1761.²⁷ At the beginning of 1762, the Crown nominated him as "Stipendiary Minister" of Hawkshead, which parish he retained until his death. From 1764 to 1788 he was also rector of Astwick and vicar of Arlesey in Bedfordshire, and in 1770 his college presented him to the rectory of Brinkley, Cambridgeshire, on the occasion of his marriage and the consequent relinquishing of his fellowship.²⁸ He, however, resided at Hawkshead, serving the church there, and acting in the Commission of the Peace for Lancashire. In 1774, the vicarage house proving too small, Brathwaite built Belmont²⁹ – presumably with the money of his wife Frances, the daughter and sole heiress of Robert Tubman, mercer, of Cocker-mouth.³⁰ Belmont was within easy riding (or boating) distance of Calgarth.

In 1796, the bishop turned his attention to his own family. On 23 April of that year, he collated his nephew Richard Watson Moor to the vicarage of Newland in the Forest of Dean. Though in the diocese of Gloucester, the advowson then belonged to the bishops of Llandaff.³¹ Moor at this date was only in deacon's orders, but on 10 July he was priested by his uncle, and the same day presented by him to the perpetual curacy of St Brides Wentloog and Coedkernew.³² The day after, he was collated to the prebend of St Andrew in Llandaff Cathedral.³³ Comfortable preferment indeed for a young man with no known university education! Moor was to relinquish Newland the following year to another of his uncle's northern protégés, the Reverend Robert Gibson,³⁴ but on 21 December 1799 he was compensated by promotion to the more valuable Llandaff prebend of Fairwater.³⁵ He does not seem to have resided upon either of his parochial benefices – in 1798 St Brides Wentloog was in the care of a non-resident, part-time curate, the Reverend John Jones³⁶ – and the *Durham Chronicle* of 1 February 1823 recorded the place of his death as London.³⁷

The turn of the century saw a younger generation as the recipients of the bishop of Llandaff's patronage. The first, on 1 January 1800, was the Reverend John Fleming, collated to the prebend vacant by the promotion of Watson's nephew, that of St Andrew.³⁸

Fleming was in some ways the most notable of Watson's lakeside circle. The eldest son of the Reverend William Raincock and Agnes Fleming,³⁹ he was born at Penrith, and educated at Hawkshead School, where he may have known Wordsworth.⁴⁰ In 1785, he matriculated at St John's College, Cambridge, of which Hawkshead's vicar was an alumnus. The Fleming family home at this time, and until the early twentieth century, was Rayrigg, Windermere, with its elegant Tudor and Queen Anne fronts, and gardens falling away to the lakeside, and it was to this house that he returned after marriage in 1794 to his cousin Jane, the daughter of Peter Taylor of Whitehaven and Isabella Fleming.⁴¹ From 1799 to 1826 he served as curate of Jesus Church, Troutbeck,⁴² and from then until his death as curate of Windermere for his kinsman, Sir Richard le Fleming, Bart., Rector of Grasmere and Windermere 1823-1857.⁴³ Here his children were baptised⁴⁴ and here he and his family lie buried.⁴⁵ Bowness-in-Windermere was Bishop Watson's parish church, Troutbeck on the border of his estate, and Rayrigg close to Calgarth. It cannot have been a surprise when, on the promotion of his nephew, the bishop's great friend Dr John Strachey, Archdeacon of Suffolk (and prebendary of

Llandaff) wrote on 28 September 1799 to another of the Llandaff Chapter: "his Lordship means that a Mr Fleming, a neighbour of his, a man of Fortune, and one of his chaplains, should be the new prebendary".⁴⁶

John Fleming retained his Llandaff stall until his death, but received also the vicarage of Brigham (1813) from the Earl of Lonsdale, and then (1814) the rectory of Bootle, where he died on 11 January 1835.⁴⁷ Among the "remarkable men" whom De Quincey found in the Lakes, along with Wordsworth, Southey and Coleridge, he lists "the Revd Mr Fleming of Rayrig".⁴⁸

John Fleming was only thirty-two at the time of his collation to St Andrew. Bishop Watson's next promotion was still younger. In 1802, his friend the Reverend Reginald Brathwaite resigned his stall of St Cross, and the bishop collated his son, the Reverend Gawen Brathwaite, in his place.⁴⁹ Brathwaite junior was then twenty-eight, and Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge. Apart from a brief period (1808-1809) as curate of Coniston, it was at the university that he resided until his life was cut suddenly short by a stagecoach accident on 15 February 1815. There survives a memorial to him in St John's College Chapel.

In his last years, the bishop turned his attention back to his own family. On 28 June 1809, he collated the Reverend John Fleming Parker to the prebend of Llangwm.⁵⁰ Parker was a distant relative of the bishop's wife,⁵¹ and his appointment rather vindicates the "hundredth degree" of the *Extraordinary Black Book*. He was still a young bachelor at this time, and his Llandaff prebend was his first real preferment. In 1813, the bishop promoted him to the more valuable stall of Warthacwm⁵² which he was to hold for nearly fifty years, and in 1818 he was presented to the Parker family living of Waddington. To this he added (1825) the rectory of Bentham, and, as husband of Catherine, daughter of Thomas Lord Ribblesdale, was sufficiently well connected to be (until 1830) Chaplain to William, Duke of Clarence, later King William IV.⁵³

Finally, Dr Watson secured the future of his second son and namesake, the Reverend Richard Watson. At the time of his graduation as LL.B. from Trinity, Cambridge, the bishop collated him to the prebend of Llangwm, just vacated by his distant cousin,⁵⁴ and the Chapter of Llandaff, then including two of his relatives, with two close neighbours and other friends of his father, presented him to their vicarage of Pentyrch, Glamorgan. In 1819, the same corporation (of which, of course, he was now himself a member) added the vicarage of Undy, Monmouthshire, and (1821) that of Dingestow, in the same county. Shortly before his death, his father had also (1815) acquired for him a prebend at Wells.⁵⁵ The bishop's death left his second son well provided for from the revenues of the church. It is to this Watson that we owe the edition of the bishop's autobiography,⁵⁶ but he seems to have been spoiled by so much indulgence. During his lifetime, George Atkinson wrote of him: "the man who can absent himself for twenty years together at the expense of the Church to live a life of frivolity at Boulogne, deserves the condemnation of every well-regulated mind".⁵⁷ The Reverend Richard seems to have been unrepentant, for he was still living in Boulogne at the time of his death in 1858,⁵⁸ when the *Gentleman's Magazine* was no less acid in its comment on him than Atkinson had been.⁵⁹

Bishop Richard Watson himself died at Calgarth on 4 July 1816, aged 79. His tomb can still be seen in the churchyard of Bowness-in-Windermere, at the east end of the south aisle. His record of sustained favouritism of a group of clergy who had no other connection with their cathedral than that with which he himself provided them is unique

in the history of Llandaff. Few of his “lakesmen” can have regarded their preferment as anything other than a source of income⁶⁰ and some, unlike the bishop himself – despite what has been written of him – probably never visited the then ruinous and roofless Welsh cathedral from which they took their titles. Watson did appoint clergy resident in his diocese to prebends, but by far the greatest number, detailed in this paper, were his family and lakeland friends. Few bishops can have been in the position of being able to hold a Chapter Meeting with a majority of the prebendaries present in the comfort of their own spacious libraries, but so far from the cathedral. At the dawn of the nineteenth century, Richard Watson, on the shores of Windermere, was one such.

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Notes and References

- ¹ D. McClatchey, *Oxfordshire Clergy 1777-1869* (Oxford, 1960), 10.
- ² Robert D. Humber, *Heversham* (Kendal 1968), 9.
- ³ Heversham Parish Registers 1691-1810, in the Church Safe.
- ⁴ Now two cottages.
- ⁵ Joseph Nicolson & Richard Burn; *History & Antiquities of Westmorland & Cumberland* (London, 1777), Vol. I, 476.
- ⁶ Mary E. Noble (ed), *Registers of Shap 1559-1830* (Kendal, 1912).
- ⁷ John F. Curwen, *Kirkbie Kendal* (Kendal, 1900), 297, for the story of St George’s. Heversham Burial Register under 19 July 1767.
- ⁸ Heversham Church Registers.
- ⁹ Richard Watson (ed), *Anecdotes of the life of Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff*. (2nd. edit. 2 vols. 1818).
- ¹⁰ His memorial can be seen in the north-west corner of the north aisle of Heversham Church.
- ¹¹ *The Lonsdale Magazine*, Vol. I, No.1, January 1820, 10. I am grateful to Brigadier C. E. Tryon-Wilson for the extended loan of his bound copies of this magazine.
- ¹² Watson, *Anecdotes*.
- ¹³ George Aitchison, “Calgarth Hall”. CW2 xxxv 208.
- ¹⁴ *Dictionary of National Biography*, sub nom. Richard Watson.
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- ¹⁶ Adam Walker, *Remarks made in a tour from London to the Lakes in the summer of 1791* (London, 1792), Letter XII, 14 August, 65.
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- ¹⁸ J. Le Neve and T. Duffus Hardy: *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae* (3 vols. Oxford, 1854), II, 265.

- ¹⁹ J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, *sub nom.*
- ²⁰ M. L. Armitt, "Ambleside Town and Chapel," CW2 vi 58.
- ²¹ Le Neve, II, 266.
- ²² Venn, *sub nom.*
- ²³ J. Whiteside says 1779. "Notes on the Chapel of Helsington," CW2 viii 58.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ Le Neve, II, 266.
- ²⁶ T. W. Thompson, *Wordsworth's Hawkshead*. (OUP, 1970), 51.
- ²⁷ Venn, *sub nom.*
- ²⁸ Thompson, *op. cit.*
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.
- ³¹ Gloucester City Library MS. D1/196. Newland Presentations 1602-1832.
- ³² Cardiff Library "Rayer" MS. p.188.
- ³³ Le Neve, II, 264.
- ³⁴ Subsequently Rector of Fyfield, Essex, 1803-1840, and Perpetual Curate of Holy Trinity, Preston, Lancs. 1820-1824.
- ³⁵ Le Neve, II, 268.
- ³⁶ National Library of Wales MS. LL/VC/23.
- ³⁷ I am grateful to Mr C. R. Hudleston for this reference.
- ³⁸ Le Neve, II, 264.
- ³⁹ Agnes was a descendant of Fletcher Fleming, brother of Sir George Fleming, Bishop of Carlisle, and son of Sir Daniel Fleming. I am grateful to Mr C. R. Hudleston for the genealogy.
- ⁴⁰ His brother, Fletcher Raincock, was a schoolfellow of William Wordsworth's. T. W. Thompson, *Hawkshead Church, Chapelry and Parish* (3rd ed. Ambleside, 1970), 43.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴² Troutbeck Parish Registers, in the Church Safe.
- ⁴³ George Browne, "The advowson and some of the rectors of Windermere", CW2 ix 61.
- ⁴⁴ Windermere Parish Registers, in the Church Safe.
- ⁴⁵ The family tomb survives north of the chancel of Windermere church, and there is a memorial brass to some of the Flemings in the north aisle there.
- ⁴⁶ N.L.W. MS. Llandaff Misc. Correspondence, No. 9.
- ⁴⁷ Venn, *sub nom.*
- ⁴⁸ Christopher North, *A memoir of John Wilson*. (2 vols. Edinburgh, 1862), Vol. I 125.
- ⁴⁹ Le Neve, II, 266.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 268.
- ⁵¹ John Fleming Parker's father, John, M.P., of Browsholme, was the son of Barbara, daughter of Sir William Fleming, Bart. of Rydal. Her sister, Dorothy, had married the bishop's father-in-law, Edward Wilson of Dallam. I am grateful to Mr C. R. Hudleston for the genealogy.
- ⁵² Le Neve, II, 269.
- ⁵³ J. Foster; *Alumni Oxonienses*, *sub nom.*
- ⁵⁴ Le Neve, II, 268.
- ⁵⁵ Venn, *sub nom.*
- ⁵⁶ The "Anecdotes" see n. 9 above.
- ⁵⁷ George Atkinson; *The Worthies of Westmorland* (London, 1849), Vol. I 227.
- ⁵⁸ Venn, *sub nom.*
- ⁵⁹ *Gentleman's Magazine*, July 1858, 88.
- ⁶⁰ None of the Llandaff prebends was particularly valuable, and St Cross and St Andrew among the poorest. However, leases, renewal fines, etc. on the corps of the prebends provided their holders with an income for nominal duties. With the cathedral in ruins, they were virtually sinecures.