

WHERE DID THE VICAR OF WINCHCOMBE LIVE BEFORE THE OLD VICARAGE WAS BUILT

By Rob White

INTRODUCTION

Winchcombe's longest serving incumbent during the last two centuries was Rev. John James Lates, who was vicar from 1793 until his death in 1831. When he died he and his wife Mary had been living for many years in the vicarage (more recently known as the Old Vicarage), mid-way along the south side of Gloucester Street. Some sources indicate that before the construction of the Old Vicarage the Lates lived in Church Cottage, the eastern-most property on the south side of the street and opposite the church. But other information suggests that although Rev. Lates may have owned Church Cottage he never actually lived there. So where *did* the Vicar of Winchcombe live before the old Vicarage was built? And why did his widow, Mary Lates, bequeath Church Cottage to her niece Elizabeth Maggs - just one of her many nephews and nieces.

REV. JOHN JAMES LATES

John James Lates was born in 1769, the son of James Lates (an Oxford musician) and grandson of David Francesco Lates (a teacher of modern history at Oxford University). He attended All Souls College Oxford, gaining his Masters degree in December 1793 when he was ordained as a priest². By then he had been the curate at Winchcombe for several months³, and shortly afterwards he became the vicar - the previous incumbent (Rev. Richard Roberts) having died a few months before. In May 1794, six months after his ordination, he married Mary Banbury at Tredington, Warwickshire, who at 32 was seven years his senior. And so, at the age of 25 the pattern of his life was set, as vicar of a quiet rural parish, and thus it continued for the rest of his life.

In addition to his post in Winchcombe it is believed that Rev. Lates was responsible for seeing that pupils were taught at the local grammar school, although the actual teaching was usually undertaken by a paid assistant. He later added the curacy of nearby Charlton Abbots to his responsibilities, and for several years at the turn of the century he was chaplain to the Winchcombe & Sudeley Volunteers, one of several local militias in Gloucestershire that



1831 miniature¹ of Rev. John James Lates (1769-1831)

had been formed to combat the threat to maritime counties from Napoleon. In 1817, he also became Rector of Sudeley on the death of the previous incumbent, and in the same year he and Edmund Thomas Browne located the leaden coffin of Queen Katherine Parr. This had originally been buried at Sudeley in 1548 but was disturbed several times in the late 18th century, so the two men had it placed in the Chandos vault, beneath St Marys Chapel at Sudeley, for safe-keeping⁴.

Little more is known about Rev Lates, although he kept a lancet to bleed his parishioners with, blood-letting then being a favourite remedy for many ailments, and he would make no charge, unlike the local surgeons⁵. His portrait, by a local artist, suggests that he was small in stature, although since it is dated 1831, the year of his death, and he was well known to the artist, it may have been painted from memory.

The annual Land Tax Assessments⁶ show that in the summer of 1794 Rev. Lates and his new bride had taken up residence in the same premises where Rev. Roberts, the previous incumbent, had been living twelve months before. They continued to live there until 1811 when they moved to a property (later known as the Old Vicarage) midway along the south side of Gloucester Street.

CHURCH COTTAGE

On 3 October 1831 after a “lingering and painful illness, borne with meek and exemplary resignation”⁷, Rev. John James Lates died at the age of 62 and was interred in St Peters church the following Sunday. His widow, Mary Lates, relocated into Church Cottage⁸, still in Gloucester Street but opposite the Church, and there she lived, with her niece Elizabeth Maggs, until her death in 1854. She then bequeathed the property to Elizabeth, who continued to live there for the rest of her life. But who had previously owned Church Cottage and what connection – if any – did the property have with the Church?

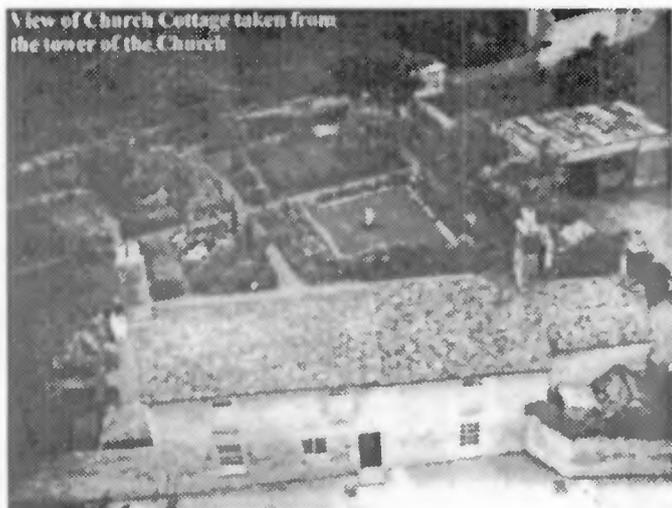


Photo of Church Cottage (from the Church Tower)

A small extension was built on the west side of the property probably after the widowed Mary Lates moved there in the early 1830s. This is thought to have been the servants' quarters, with a scullery downstairs and access to a small bedroom on the first floor via a ladder and trap door through the ceiling. In 1914 it was occupied by Rev. Evans.

In 1914 a retired vicar of Winchcombe (Rev. Noble Jackson) wrote⁹ that “on [the] site of Church Cottage once were two cottages formerly the Vicarage but sadly in decay in 1819”. This echoed an extract from an article in the parish magazine¹⁰ nine years before which stated “on the death of Mr. Lates his widow bought the two cottages opposite the church and threw them together, thus forming

the dear little ‘Church Cottage’ with which many of us are so familiar”.

The 1819 deeds¹¹ to Church Cottage confirm that it was: - “part and parcel of the ancient possessions of the Vicarage of Winchcombe..... heretofore used and occupied as the Vicarage house.....[now] being unfit for the residence of the vicar of Winchcombe....”. It would therefore seem logical that before the Old Vicarage was built the previous vicarage must have been Church Cottage. So presumably the Lates would have lived there prior to their move to the “Old Vicarage” in 1811.

BEECH COTTAGE

However, a set of early 19th century title deeds¹² for Beech Cottage (a property adjacent to the church on the north side of Gloucester Street), makes several references to one of its former occupiers being the Rev. John James Lates. Other occupiers, according to one of these deeds, were: - “afterwards of Samuel Farmer Sadler and since of Priscilla Dixon as tenants thereof and are now in the occupation of Mr. Giles Carter solicitor”.



1826 line drawing showing part of Beech Cottage (to the left of the church)²³

In 1850 the property (described as “a villa with a garden in front”²⁴) was occupied by another member of the clergy (Rev. Martin, curate), but in the 1860s it was demolished to make way for the building of Dents school.

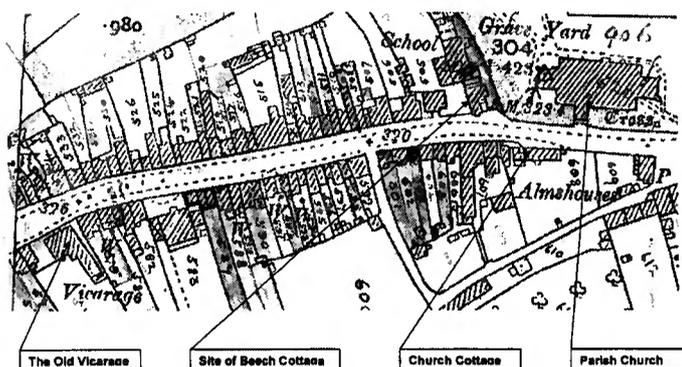
By referring to the series of late 18th and early 19th century Land Tax Assessments for Winchcombe (1776 – 1831), which lists those properties on which the tax was chargeable, it can be deduced from the named occupiers that Beech Cottage was the first property in the list each year. By comparing the LTAs for each year, from 1794 to 1831 its clear that Rev. Lates lived there from 1794 to 1811, then Samuel Farmer Sadler from 1812 to 1823, and then Priscilla Dixon in 1825. [And corroboration of Rev

Lates occupation of Beech Cottage can be deduced from an 1806 Valuation¹³ of Winchcombe.]

Furthermore, the LTAs show that Rev. Roberts (the previous vicar) lived at Beech Cottage from 1789 to 1793. And other documents in the extensive bundle of deeds indicate that the property was formerly owned and occupied by a previous vicar of Winchcombe, Rev Thos Skeeler, from 1737 until his death in 1757. It was eventually inherited by his nephew, Mr. James Skeeler Taylor, who sold the property in 1777 and it then continued to have no connection with the local clergy until it was occupied by Rev. Roberts in 1789.

So, the documentary evidence clearly shows that Beech Cottage was the property where several vicars of Winchcombe lived during much of the 18th and early 19th century, including Rev. Lates – until he moved into the “Old Vicarage”.

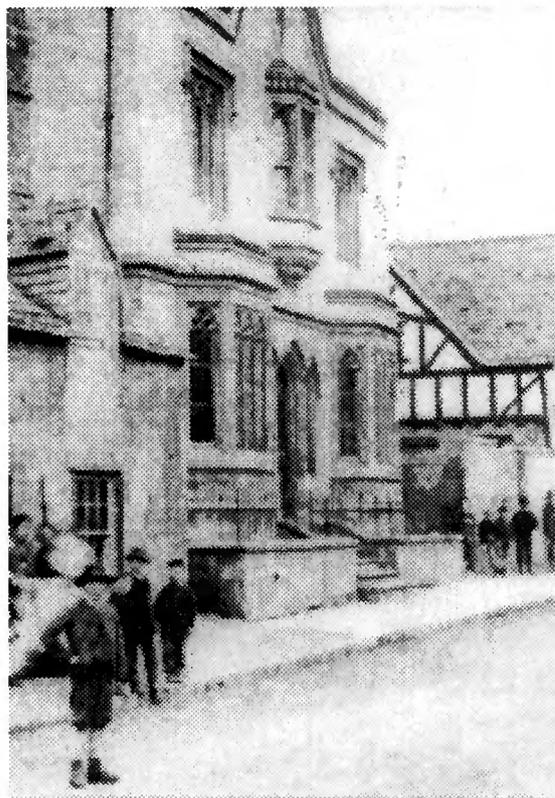
THE LOCATION OF WINCHCOMBE'S VICARAGES IN 19TH CENTURY GLOUCESTER STREET



THE OLD VICARAGE

While it's difficult to say precisely when the “Old Vicarage” was occupied by Rev. Lates, the surviving deeds plus Land Tax Assessments provide an indication. In October 1809 he purchased two adjacent houses on the south side of Gloucester Street (then occupied by three families) for £300. This was the site of the Old Vicarage, and Rev. Lates paid land tax on it every summer from 1810 until his death in 1831. But he was still paying land tax for Beech Cottage in 1810 and 1811. This suggests that he was still living at Beech Cottage by the summer of 1811, and vacated the property at some point in the following twelve months. The presumption therefore is that the Old Vicarage was constructed at some point between late 1809 and the summer of 1812 and during that time Rev. Lates continued to live at Beech Cottage. Furthermore, because the 1819 deeds to the property make no mention of demolition or rebuilding but

simply describe the property as a “*messuage tenement or dwelling house heretofore occupied as three dwelling houses with outbuildings offices stables garden and shrubbery*”, its possible that there was no demolition but simply a conversion of the three premises into one property. [This may be difficult to imagine nowadays because the magnificent gothic frontage of the Vicarage, with its large doorway flanked by twin bay windows, was not added until the mid 19th century.]



Late 19th century photo of the Old Vicarage²⁵

The original property was extended towards Gloucester Street in the mid 19th century, giving it a gothic-like appearance. Prior to that it had a garden at the front and no closed-in yard²⁶. In the 1950s a new property for the Vicar was built elsewhere in the town and the Old Vicarage was sold by the Church of England.

CHURCH COTTAGE - A FORMER VICARAGE?

So what can be the reason for the deeds of Church Cottage describing the property as “*part and parcel of the ancient possessions of the Vicarage of Winchcombe..... heretofore used and occupied as the Vicarage house.....[now] being unfit for the residence of the Vicar of Winchcombe...*”.

The most likely explanation is that in the 18th century Church Cottage was presumably the property of the Church - being named accordingly - and sometimes occupied by clergy, whether vicars or curates. In 1819 it was exchanged for the two properties on the Old Vicarage site (purchased ten

years before by Rev. Lates). Because the latter had a greater value than Church Cottage Rev. Lates received £400 (funded by Queen Anne's Bounty), and as vicar he was allowed to live in the Old Vicarage on the understanding that when he relinquished this role he would move to Church Cottage.

So, after 1819 Rev. Lates was presumably "*owner in his own right*" of Church Cottage, and he was also the nominal owner (on behalf of the Church) of the Old Vicarage, which he occupied.

MARY LATES

Consequently, when the newly widowed Mary Lates relocated to Church Cottage after the death of her



1837 miniature¹⁴ of Mrs. Mary Lates (1762-1854)

husband in 1831, she was not returning to a property she had lived in before. The transaction entered into by Rev. Lates several years beforehand was no doubt designed to ensure that she had somewhere to live after his death, although it must have been much smaller than she had been used to at the Old Vicarage and may have been somewhat dilapidated. Originally built and occupied as two small cottages and it's quite possible that Mary Lates may well

have "threw them together". But why did Mary choose to bequeath Church Cottage to only one of her several nephews and nieces when she died in 1854 aged 92.

The Lates had no children of their own so the bequest was not so unusual, since Elizabeth Maggs had lived at Church Cottage as her aunt's companion for many years. But two old documents indicate that their relationship was in fact rather different. After Elizabeth died in Winchcombe in 1895 at the age of 84 she was described in an obituary¹⁵ as having "lived in the town nearly all her life" But how could that be since her parents lived in Cheltenham (where Elizabeth was born) and there is no evidence that they had ever lived in Winchcombe.

The clue to what had happened lies in a second obituary for Elizabeth¹⁶ which began "when Elizabeth Maggs was nine months old she came to this Vicarage to die. But Winchcombe agreed with her so well that she had reached her 85th year when we buried her in 1895" - which sounds as if Elizabeth was a sickly infant when she arrived in Winchcombe¹⁷. At that time her mother had six other young children to look after plus another on the way, so her sister (Mary Lates) may have offered to take care of the sick child for a while. By the time baby Elizabeth was better her mother may have borne her next child or been close to doing so¹⁸, so Mary may have offered to keep her for a while longer. With Elizabeth's mother giving birth to a further three children in the next three years (she had a total of 11 in all) she would have been glad of her sister Mary's help in looking after one of her brood. Mary Lates (nee Banbury) had been 48 when her niece Elizabeth Maggs was born in 1810. After 16 years of a childless marriage she no doubt realised that she was unlikely to have any children of her own, and during the previous ten years she had seen her two younger sisters producing babies regularly. If Mary had not liked children she would surely not have kept Elizabeth with her longer than she needed to. And whilst it's difficult to imagine that she would have refused to return the baby, it's quite possible for Mary to have found reasons to justify keeping her a little longer - plus she may also have felt that it was her duty to help her overburdened sister. And having a child to bring up may have transformed Mary's life, especially if Elizabeth was a Banbury in appearance or temperament. But any doubt about their relationship is dispelled by a letter (written by Elizabeth's great niece) which described her as Mary's "adopted niece"¹⁹.

ELIZABETH MAGGS

So, it would appear that Elizabeth Maggs (sometimes known as Bess²⁰) did not return to her family in Cheltenham but continued to live at the Old Vicarage in Winchcombe. In 1831 when she



Photograph of Miss Elizabeth Maggs (1810-1895)

was 21 her adoptive father (Rev. Lates) died. Mary Lates was then 69 and Elizabeth was her companion in the way that some single or younger daughters were expected to sacrifice their own future and look after their elderly parents. When Mary died in 1854 at the age of 92 Elizabeth was 44, which may explain why she never married.

During the next forty years she continued to live at Church Cottage with her cousin, Sarah Francis, plus her sister Sarah²¹ some years later. And in 1905, ten years after Elizabeth's death, an eagle lectern for Winchcombe's parish church was bought as a memorial to the Maggs sisters.

For most of Elizabeth Maggs first 21 years she had lived in the Old Vicarage, and enjoyed the status that went with being the daughter of the vicar. For the second quarter of her life she was her adoptive

mother's companion, and as such she inherited Church Cottage – but as a daughter rather than as a niece. During the last half of her 85 years she continued to live there, with close relatives - a lady of independent means, still able to afford to employ a servant, which she had probably been accustomed to for the whole of her life.

In 1905, ten years after her death, Elizabeth Maggs was described²² in the following manner:-

“It will always be a pleasure to recall her memory, her grave, happy, simple manner, her quaint little sayings, her old-fashioned courtesy. She was a true gentlewoman, of a type which, unhappily, has almost disappeared. Girls of the present day would not care to reproduce it.”

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Sally Malyon (a descendant of the Maggs family) for help, encouragement and photographs.

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References:-

¹ The miniature portrait of Rev. Lates was painted by Miss Maria Wood (joint owner – with her sister, Mrs. Charlotte Sadler – of Beech Cottage in the early 19th century).

² *Alumni Oxonienses 1715-1886*, and GRO P368/1 MI 3/5

³ Rev Lates, as curate, first officiated at a Winchcombe wedding on 20 June 1793.

⁴ Emma Dent, *Annals of Winchcombe & Sudeley* (1872).

⁵ Winchcombe Parish magazine May 1905 (written by the then vicar, Rev John Taylor).

⁶ In one of the microfiche carousels at Gloucester Record Office.

⁷ *Cheltenham Journal*, Monday 10 October 1831

⁸ On (or close to) the site of Ivy Castle, referred to in John Leland's 'Itinerary' (page 74) but more fully explored in Donaldson DN, *Winchcombe: A history of the Cotswold Borough*, (2001) The Wychwood Press, page 69.

⁹ Gloucester Record Office P368 / 1 M3/5

¹⁰ Winchcombe Parish magazine May 1905 (written by the then vicar, Rev. John Taylor).

¹¹ In private ownership.

¹² GRO / D1594

¹³ GRO / P368 VE1/1

¹⁴ The miniature portrait of Mary Lates was painted by Mr. W. Patten, an artist from London.

¹⁵ In a scrapbook of [undated] newspaper cuttings in Winchcombe museum.

¹⁶ Winchcombe Parish magazine May 1905 (written by the then vicar, Rev John Taylor).

¹⁷ An old family birthday book indicates that Elizabeth Maggs was born on 16 April 1810, so she would have arrived in Winchcombe in January 1811 approx.

¹⁸ Elizabeth's younger sister, Sarah Maggs, was baptised in August 1811.

¹⁹ In Mrs. N.A. Malyon's letter of 14 May 1955 to Rev Bray (GRO P368 MI 3/5)

²⁰ Slaters Directory for Winchcombe 1858-59

²¹ Slaters Directory for Winchcombe 1868

²² Winchcombe Parish magazine May 1905 (written by the then vicar, Rev John Taylor).

²³ GRO

²⁴ John A. Oakey Reminiscences of Winchcombe (1936-7) page 8.

²⁵ In the Harold Greening donation (WIXFP 1998 879.5) in Winchcombe museum.

²⁶ John A. Oakey, Reminiscences of Winchcombe (1936-7) page 9