

# Clophill through the years

While researching the history of his home, Taylor's Cottage on the High Street, **Peter Sharp** visited the archives of **Balliol College** at Oxford as the college owned the living at Clophill and chose the rector. There he found a set of letters about the appointment of a new rector. Many of the letters in the archive are between the chairman of Balliol's appointments committee Cyril Bailey (all signed Cyril) and the Bishop of St Albans, Michael Furse (signed Michael). Here is the story that the letters revealed.

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## *The Sad Case of the Lonely Rector*

In late 1932 the living became vacant and various candidates applied, probably as a result of an advertisement in the Church Times. Some are replied to; some have recommendations attached to them. Some are ignored altogether and not replied to. One such example is from the vicar of Walker, a depressed working class district in Newcastle on the banks of the Tyne. You can almost hear the accent in his short succinct request for an interview;

*'I would like very much an opportunity to practise my vocation in a rural parish'.*

His letter was not replied to.

Among the candidates who were replied to and considered was the **Rev. George H. Pattison**, a vicar in Croydon. He visited Clophill in January 1933 and was obviously pleased with the parish and keen to come and work here. He wrote to Balliol's appointments committee:

*'I have today been down to Clophill and may say at once that in spite of the large Rectory and ugly church the prospect of going there appeals to me greatly.*

*The parishioners that I met especially Mr and Mrs Tanqueray were so kindly and so obviously disposed to work harmoniously with their Rector.*

*It is the helpful attitude of the people more than anything else which emboldens me to say, in the event of your Committee formally offering me the living, that I should be pleased to accept it.'*

(The 'large Rectory' is of course now the 'Old Rectory' opposite St Mary's church. Mr. Tanqueray was a solicitor with a practice in Woburn. Vice-Chairman of Clophill Parish Church Council, he lived in Ivy House.)

The village however had different ideas; Andrew Tanqueray wrote to Balliol on

the same day about the visit.



*Clophill Rectory about 1920. (Bedford & Luton Records & Archive Service)*

*'We arranged with the Rev. G.H. Pattison to come to Clophill today to view the Church and Rectory, where I met him about noon with our Churchwardens.*

*He subsequently lunched here and we had some conversation together.*

*As a result of our interview I came to the conclusion (with which I find my colleagues in agreement) that the applicant is hardly suitable for Clophill by reason of –*

*(1) His deafness- which, at his apparent age is unlikely to decrease, but rather the reverse.*

*(2) A certain lack of animation and responsiveness probably due to his defect in hearing.*

*(3) The fact that he is a bachelor is also in our opinion, against him as there are so few women in the village in a position to undertake Parochial work.*

*I am asked to communicate the above to you and to express the hope that you may have other more suitable & younger applicants for the Incumbency and, as I intimate above, we should prefer a married man whose wife would assist him*

*in the Parish.*

Despite these objections, Balliol appointed George Pattison as rector of Clophill. The Bishop of St. Albans could not officiate, as was usual, at his institution; in fact he never met him. The Reverend Pattison lived entirely alone in the Rectory, visited only a few days a week by his charlady.

It's sad to imagine this ageing, hard-of-hearing man with no family and limited social skills living a lonely life in a large cold rectory. We can only hope that he was unaware of the fact that no one wanted him there in the first place.

As if this wasn't sad enough, on Thursday 25th October 1934 the police were called to the Rectory because he had not been seen for some days and had not answered any knocks on the door. A constable forced entry through a window to find him lying in the hall against the front door, dead.

At the subsequent inquest the coroner ascertained that he had died of natural causes '...such as a seizure followed by a fall and severe blow to the head.'

He had no living relatives 'except a cousin which he referred to once in conversation' who could not be found. His possessions were 'disposed of'. To add further poignancy, new furniture that he had ordered to brighten up the house was delivered while the police were in the Rectory investigating his death.

Michael wrote to Cyril;

*'You no doubt have seen of the sudden death of Mr. Pattison, Incumbent of Clophill. He seemed to be a lonely and primitive soul, and lived all alone in the Vicarage. I gather he was never happy there. It has been rather a sad business altogether.'*

A sad, sad business indeed.

Peter Sharp

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