

THE MASTERSHIP OF THE HOSPITAL OF ST CROSS, WINCHESTER, IN THE EARLY SIXTEENTH CENTURY: THE CASE OF THOMAS LAWNE

By NICHOLAS RIALI

ABSTRACT

The long list of the masters of the Hospital of St Cross, Winchester, beginning in c.1132 and running to the present day is largely complete and generally accepted as accurate. Except that is for the early years of the sixteenth century. This essay explores the problem by asking whether bishop Richard Fox formally installed John Claymond as master in 1517, rather than in 1508 as is generally believed. Instead, it is here suggested that Fox retained the mastership in his own hands during these years, with the work of the master being undertaken by a 'custodian', this being Thomas Lawne.

"All pains have been taken with the list of Masters. It is the fullest yet published". So wrote the Reverend J C Cox as a footnote to his list of Masters of St Cross (Cox 1903, 197). The list of masters, and its accuracy, is a minor problem that has attracted the attention of local historians from the eighteenth century onwards, with the latest list being provided by John Crook (Crook 2011). However, no list is altogether satisfactory owing in no small measure to the erratic quality of the documentary evidence. This is especially the case for the period from c.1490 through to 1524 (Table 1). Whilst the main "players" can readily be identified, their periods of office and the names of their successors remain equivocal. However, one name that is wholly missing from the debate is that of Thomas Lawne (or Laune, Laund) who died in 1518 and was buried in the chancel of the Hospital's church. A fine brass marks his grave, which is to be found in the chancel of the church of the Hospital of St Cross, Winchester (Fig 1). Burials in locations such as these are often indicative of the high status or regard in which the individual was held. This

essay explores what is known about Thomas Lawne, and suggests he may have acted as *quasi* master of St Cross on behalf of the then bishop, Richard Fox.

The long series of episcopal registers of the bishops of Winchester provide considerable detail relating to the appointments of priests and officials to posts across the diocese. Amongst them are appointments to the mastership of the Hospital of St Cross, which lay in the bishops' gift. However there are a number of *lacunae*, especially so for the period under consideration here. Thus, on 12 December 1489 John Lychefeld (Lichfield) was appointed in succession to Richard Herward by bishop Peter Courtenay (Lipkin 1979). His mastership lasted only a short while; his successor was Robert Sherborne (Sherborne's name is occasionally spelt without the e, i.e. Sherborn). There is no record in the episcopal registers for this change but it is possible it took place between the death of Courtenay in 1492 and the installation of Thomas Langton as bishop in 1493. It has been observed that, "Between 1490 and 1492 Sherborn administered for the archbishop during vacancies in the sees of Lichfield, Hereford, Wells, Exeter, and Winchester" (Harper-Bill 2004). This indicates a possibility that the mastership was 'gifted' by the archbishop, perhaps with some persuasion from the king, to establish a source of income for an increasingly important royal official. Sherborne went on to lead a distinguished ecclesiastical career that led to his becoming bishop of St Davids in 1505 and his subsequent translation to Chichester in 1508 (Woolfson 2004). As admirably demonstrated by John Crook, Sherborne added much to the fabric of St Cross, especially so in the remodeling of the lodgings that are now the Porter's



Fig. 1 The church of the Hospital of St Cross, Winchester: brass and plaque in the chancel marking the burial of Thomas Lawne (d. 1518)

Lodge and the ambulatory with its gallery linking this block to the north transept of the church.

Whilst it is clear that Sherborne was fully established as Master, and contributed much to the Hospital, what is less certain is when he relinquished the mastership and who succeeded him. That he retained the mastership in plurality with his occupancy as bishop of St Davids is well-enough established to require no further comment here, but it was certainly not accepted without quibble (Harper-Bill 2004). Sherborne was one of many clerics whose role in government or as an officer of the Crown over-shadowed his role in the church. Indeed, he was only ordained a priest in 1501, despite having held a large number of benefices since the 1490s. It is generally accepted that Sherborne relinquished the mastership in 1508 on becoming bishop of Chichester, but there is no documentary evidence to support this. There does however appear to have been an uncomfortable relationship between Sherborne and Richard Fox, who had become bishop of Winchester in 1501. The precise nature of this has not been established, but it may be that with his translation to Chichester that Sherborne was required or induced to surrender the mastership. On that basis, 1508 would seem an appropriate date to mark the end of his mastership and the start of that of the next master, but who was his successor?

There is nothing in Richard Fox's episcopal registers that informs us as to what he did about the mastership of St Cross in 1508, or indeed in the first decade of the sixteenth century. Various possibilities have been advanced: that Fox retained the mastership in his own hands or alternatively that he appointed John Claymond master. L M Humbert, who was Master in 1855–68, suggested Claymond (Humbert 1868, 60–1); Rev. J C Cox, who authored the article on St Cross in the *Victoria County History of Hampshire* rejected Claymond and suggested Fox (Cox 1903, 197). However, Cox went further by suggesting that Sherborne resigned sometime around 1500, but this seems improbable. In John Crook's list we find Claymond named as master from 1508 (Crook 2011, 113); however in the body of his

text Crook suggests that Fox may have acted as master 'during a long interregnum between Sherborne and Claymond' (ibid., 73). The documentary record for Claymond's mastership rests on the entry in Fox's episcopal register for 1524. It was in this year that John Incent was appointed, on 13 June, as master in succession to John Claymond who is recorded as having resigned (Lipkin 1979; Fox episcopal Register, II, f.68v). We do not know for certain when Claymond was appointed master, but a likely date and occasion was 20 June 1517, he was formally installed as President of bishop Fox's Oxford college, Corpus Christi, and the college was itself formally inaugurated during a major ceremony held at St Cross that was attended by a notable congregation. Whilst the appointment would have been an appropriate moment to reward Claymond, from a practical point of view his duties in Oxford would have prevented his being present at St Cross for most of his time.

Before dismissing entirely the possibility that Claymond was master from 1508 or thereabouts, a more demanding question is to consider why Fox might have considered appointing Claymond as early as 1508. The two men knew one another well from at least the 1490s, and in the early part of the sixteenth century Fox identified in Claymond the man he would select to carry forward his hopes of establishing a college in Oxford. The plans for Corpus Christi came into shape in a formal manner in 1511–12, but Fox had been making these for some years previously. The actual process of building and equipping the college, and selecting the personnel who would teach, lecture and administer Corpus Christi appear to have been placed substantially in John Claymond's hands, albeit with the considerable personal support of Fox himself. There seemed to be no pressing reason to appoint Claymond master of St Cross in 1508, the income stream from the Hospital's properties could quite satisfactorily be managed by the bishop himself, or by one of the officers in his household, leaving Claymond free to concentrate on his academic life in Oxford and establishing Corpus Christi as a physical entity.

Whether or not Claymond was appointed in

1508, there remains this question: why is there no mention of him in a particularly significant episode of Richard Fox' life? This relates to the arrangements Fox made for the disposal of his personal property and wealth prior to his embarkation in the summer of 1513, to take ship across the English Channel to northern France, there to join Henry VIII's army that was set to make war with the French. Henry VIII had decided he wished to emulate his famous forebear, Henry V, by taking the country to war to press the claims of the English crown to the throne of France. The expedition was a spectacularly extravagant undertaking that achieved very little other than to annoy the French. At the same time as Henry was attacking the French, the Scots decided this was as good a time as any to invade northern England. The result was a catastrophic disaster for Scotland. The English victory at Flodden in 1513 was utterly comprehensive, and not only was the king of Scotland slain in battle, but so too were many of his nobility.

Richard Fox in his long career as a leading advisor to Henry VII had sought to bring peace between the nations, and he disapproved entirely of the campaign in France by Henry VIII. Nevertheless, it was made clear to him that he was to participate, and fearing that he would not return alive he made his preparations to that end. His main wishes were to ensure that his Oxford college was built and endowed, and second, that a chantry chapel would be erected in the presbytery of Winchester cathedral, within which his remains were to be buried. Much of the documentation for the establishment of these two foundations has been lost, but an important indenture survives in the archives of Corpus Christi college. This was drawn up between the Prior and Convent of the Benedictine monastery of St Swithun's (as Winchester cathedral then was) on the one hand, and bishop Fox on the other (Corpus Christi College, Oxford, *Indenture of 1513*; Smith 1989). In order to achieve his main aims, Fox gathered together into three locations his portable wealth and possessions, which were to stand as surety for the sums needed to pay for these works. These were his lodgings at St Mary Ovary in Southwark, which lay on the south bank of the River Thames and adjacent to the

very extensive episcopal palace – Winchester House; at Esher, where there was another very large episcopal palace held by the Winchester bishops; and in the lodgings at St Cross. It is notable that in all three instances Fox chose to place his worldly wealth in a situation away from one of his episcopal palaces, Winchester House and the palaces at Esher and Wolvesey. It is likely that this decision reflected a need to separate those things that belonged personally to Fox and those that belonged to the estate of the bishops of Winchester. The goods and chattels were inventoried and indentured, in writing, to named persons who were to be responsible for them at each location. Whilst these documents have not survived they are mentioned obliquely in the main Indenture. At St Mary Ovary this was the prior, who at that date was Bartholomew Linstead; at Esher, the nominated person was Thomas Nix, who was the parish priest of Esher and Long Ditton. At St Cross, the person named was Thomas Laund – but there is no mention of John Claymond who would surely have been nominated were he then Master of St Cross.

Remarkably little is known about Thomas Laund (or Lawne/ Laune). Today he is best known for the presence of his memorial brass in the Hospital's church, which records his passing in 1518 (Fig. 1). It lies in the eastern part of the chancel, just beyond the modern communion rails, up against the south wall. The effigy of Thomas Lawne is just under a metre long (37¼"), whilst the inscription in black letter script, measures 546 × 130mm (21½" × 5¼"). The inscription reads *Orate pro aia dni Thomas lawne Rectoris do mottysfont qui obiit nono die mensis Maij A° dni M° quingentesimo xvij^o cuius aie propicietur deus*. (Pray for the soul of Sir Thomas Lawne, Rector of Mottisfont, who died the 9th day of the month of May in the year of our Lord 1518, on whose soul God have mercy). The brass shows Thomas Lawne standing on a fictive grassy mound, with a tonsured head and long hair that reaches to his neck. He is dressed in his mass vestments including maniple, alb and chasuble.

This was a prestigious setting for the burial for a man who appears otherwise to be completely anonymous. If he left a will this has vanished without trace. He does however

appear in bishop Fox's episcopal register. He is recorded as having been collated to become rector of Mottisfont, Hampshire, in 1508 (Fox episcopal Register, II, f.15); and to the living of Ash, Surrey, in 1510 (Fox episcopal Register, II, f.21; and see Smith 1989, 411, n.13). He appears again in June 1517, when he was listed amongst the members of Fox's household who were present at the inauguration of Corpus Christi. This is the full extent of our knowledge of this man. If he attended either Oxford or Cambridge university then his presence has so far eluded detection, for his name cannot be found in any printed list of alumni of these universities. It may be that he was trained as a lawyer in London, but if so nothing has emerged to substantiate this.

The presence of Thomas Lawne's name in the 1513 indenture drawn up between bishop Fox and St Swithun's indicates that Lawne was regarded as both trustworthy and reliable. He was a man to whom Fox could entrust a substantial proportion of his personal wealth safe in the knowledge that his wishes would be followed. Thomas Nix must have been equally dependable. It must also surely follow that both men had been known to Fox for some length of time, and both may even have been members of his household in the years before Fox was translated to become bishop of Winchester. That Lawne was appointed to Mottisfont in 1508 may simply be co-incidental but it seems more than this, almost as if Fox wanted one of his household officials to have the gravitas conferred by clerical appointments, but without handing over the mastership of St Cross. Fox quite probably had indentified some of the revenues from the Hospital's estate as one of the income streams that would fund his building works in Oxford and Winchester; therefore he kept the mastership in his own hands. We can therefore see in Thomas Lawne a man who was an important member of Fox's household, someone who was also the *de facto* master of St Cross but without being formally installed as such. He was also the man who stood guarantor for a substantial portion of Fox's wealth should it have come about that Fox perished whilst participating in a futile war with France.

In the later years of the 1510s Fox is known

to have regarded the Hospital of St Cross as a quiet retreat, escaping his both duties as bishop and royal official, and also the demands of his large entourage. Even today in the midst of the busy world of the twenty-first century St Cross retains that sense of peace and tranquillity that must have so attracted Richard Fox. Perhaps in this there is a further clue as to why there was no formal master at St Cross in the years between 1508 and 1517; Fox wanted to retain the Master's lodgings for his own use. Even in 1517, with Claymond formally installed, Fox could continue to enjoy St Cross for Claymond can hardly have been much there. Besides, the two men enjoyed each other's company, as Fox spells out succinctly in his surviving correspondence (Allen & Allen 1929). Thus there is a deal of sense to seen in appointing as custodian someone such as Thomas Lawne to undertake the master's duties and supervise the changes in the church that Fox appears to have called for. These include the installation of the stone screens in the eastern bays of the chancel. It is often suggested that these were brought to St Cross from the redundant church of St Faith. The church and its parish seems to have been diminished from the time of the Black Death, and in the first decade of the sixteenth century Fox was given permission to finally demolish the church and bring its font and other furnishings to St Cross, amongst them the two stone screens. The north screen can only have come from a major building and is of a quality that is both astonishing for its design as also for the lack of recognition it has received. It would have fallen to Lawne to supervise the installation of the screens. A second major feature of Lawne's 'tenure' would have been the introduction of the Renaissance stalls in the chancel. Brought from France in c.1513–15, along with screens for the side chapels and probably also the chancel too, these completed the refurbishment and reorganisation of the chancel (Riall 2008; Riall 2014). The successful conclusion of these works, and perhaps also the practical management of the events surrounding the inauguration of Corpus Christi may well go some way to explain how Thomas Lawne came to be buried at St Cross.

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Author: Dr Nicholas JE Riall, BA (Hons), Dip Archaeol, PhD, Tethers End Cottage, 9 Elley Green, Neston, Corsham, Wilts, SN13 9TX

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