

## **Kirkwell House**

**David McLean (2026)**



### **Introduction**

Kirkwell House sits in Teindhillgreen on the north-eastern outskirts of Duns, the last house on the north side of the road. Built in 1880, it only took its current name around 1990 when it was sold to private buyers by the Scottish Episcopalian Church. Previously, it was long known as The Rectory, being the dwelling for a succession of ministers (or rectors) of Christ Church which is located a short distance to the west. Today, the property is Category B listed. Some internal changes have been made over the years such as combining rooms and blocking up doors but the house's character is still very much intact. Since its current name is relatively recent, this paper will generally use its traditional name of The Rectory for consistency.

### **Before The Rectory**

Christ Church was built in 1854. Until then, there had not been an Episcopal place of worship in Duns for over 150 years. The town was occasionally visited by clergy who travelled down from Edinburgh; otherwise, the nearest such churches were in Berwick and Norham. In 1852, a number of local Episcopalianians began to meet for worship in a large room in the militia store in Teindhillgreen (now the property known as Hillside), having appointed the Reverend Augustus Edward Crowder, curate of Shadforth near Durham, as their first rector. But it was

not long before a meeting was held in Dunse Town Hall by those who desired to have a proper Episcopalian church in the town. Many of those attending were from local landowning families and £360 (with a purchasing power today of around £45,000) was pledged towards the construction of a new building. It was largely designed by Colonel William Hay of Dunse Castle who had been charmed by a church he had seen in the German Rhineland; town architect David Duns drew up detailed plans on Hay's design. Hay himself laid the foundation stone in September 1853 and local Dunse builders took just over a year to complete the new church at a cost of £600. Originally, the proposed name was the 'Church of the Holy Trinity' but it was consecrated as 'Christ Church' in October 1854.

Clearly, a dwelling was needed for the rector but The Rectory in Teindhillgreen was not built until over 25 years later. Evidence shows that, in the intervening period, Christ Church incumbents lived in a house at Cheeklaw on the southern edge of the town. The 1865 valuation roll shows 'Cheeklaw Nursery House and Garden' occupied by first rector Augustus Edward Crowder; he died at Cheeklaw at the age of 46 in 1873, leaving a wife and four children. The 1875 valuation roll is more specific, showing a 'House and Garden, Cheeklaw' owned by Colonel Hay of Dunse Castle and leased for 29 years to the Trustees of the Dunse Episcopal Congregation. It was now the residence of John Brunson Fletcher, second rector from 1874 to 1878; he had been curate at Berwick before coming to Dunse.

It is not easy to accurately identify this house but the 1881 census provides clues. The order of properties listed on the southern edge of town reads as follows : *Station Cottage; Nursery House; Gas Works House; Parsonage; Cheeklaw Farmhouse; Cheeklaw Cottages*. With no mention of 'Cheeklaw House' (Cheeklaw House and Cheeklaw Farmhouse are separate properties although very close together), it seems likely that the Episcopalian parsonage was Cheeklaw House, still today the most southerly property in Duns. It would have been considered somewhat undignified for a minister to be housed in other than a substantial property.

## **Building The Rectory**

Given the town's layout at the time, it would be difficult to imagine two properties any further apart than Christ Church and Cheeklaw House. But perhaps financial considerations delayed the Episcopal congregation from getting round to constructing a house for their rector in a more convenient location. The Rectory was eventually built in 1880. British Listed Buildings attributes the house to architects Hay and Henderson and this is confirmed by the Dictionary of Scottish Architects. William Hay was a Scottish architect who is best known for his work on churches and cathedrals (including the Cathedral in Hamilton, Bermuda); he practised in Canada for a number of years and designed some of Toronto's most important buildings before returning to Edinburgh. George Henderson, another Scot, emigrated to Australia to practise as an architect in 1867. He returned to Edinburgh ten years later to form a partnership with William Hay in 1877.

The architecture of today's Kirkwell House is striking. Built in baronial style, the front entrance is set in a 'drum' tower topped by a tall spire which incorporates two bands of fish-scale slates. Corbels (stone brackets to support the weight of extended masonry above) are much in

evidence – below the small balcony above the front door; under the decorative ledge at the first-floor window immediately above; and supporting the tower spire. Crow-stepped gables and fired clay ridge tiles on the main roof confirm the building's traditional roots.



*Corbelling at three levels on the drum tower*

James Beale was the third rector of Christ Church and the first to occupy The Rectory. His predecessor, John Fletcher, moved to St Paul's Church in Edinburgh in 1878, causing a vacancy in Dunse. According to the Berwickshire News, there were 97 applications for the Christ Church post and this was before the new rectory had been built! James Beale, senior curate of St John's Church in Edinburgh, was appointed and he took up residence at Cheeklaw. While the date stone in the east elevation of The Rectory is carved '12th Oct 1880', it was apparently not completed that year since James Beale and his family were still at the parsonage at Cheeklaw for the April 1881 census. However, they had soon moved to their new home at the top of the town – at the close of a Sunday morning service in May 1881, the Bishop of the Diocese of Edinburgh accompanied the Reverend Beale and members of the congregation along Teindhillgreen to the new rectory. There, the Bishop was reported as having pronounced a 'brief benediction' although, since he gave separate invocations on each floor, it seems to have been a fairly thorough blessing!

### **Occupants of The Rectory**

**James Beale**, first inhabitant of The Rectory, remained rector of Christ Church for 20 years. The 1891 census for the 'Episcopal Parsonage' shows him at the age of 47 as 'Episcopal

Clergyman, Rector' with his wife Mary, age 48. They had two sons – James junior, age 19, who was listed as an 'engine and machine maker' and Charles, age 18, who was still a scholar. Their daughter, Mary junior, is not listed in the census; she would have been around 20 years of age and may already have left home. There were also two servants in the house, a cook and a housemaid, a common combination. Although James Beale junior was apprenticed as an engineer in Glasgow, he soon felt called to the ministry like his father and obtained his divinity degree at Durham University in 1897. His brother Charles also became a minister – he will reappear in this story later. Reverend James Beale senior resigned his rectorship at Christ Church in 1899 due to ill health. Before he left Duns, his congregation and other friends presented him with a silver card case and a cheque for £100. He moved to the spa town of Buxton in Derbyshire where he died in 1902 at the age of 58. He was author of 'The Story of the Scottish Church'.

The next rectorship was very short and little evidence survives. **John Edmund Sedgwick**, a graduate of the universities of Oxford and the Cape of Good Hope, came to Duns from a parish near St Albans in 1899. He appears in a couple of Berwick newspapers in cricket match reports, being a member of the local club at Manderston. He resigned from Christ Church in 1900 to take up a post in Southend, Essex.



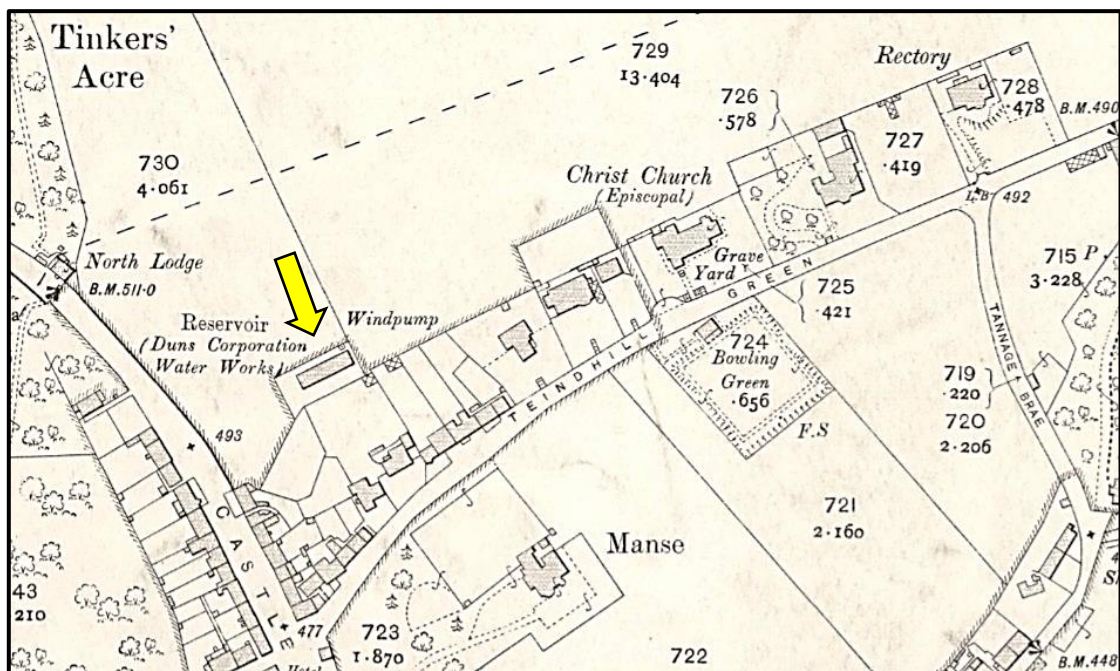
*Carved cross on one corner-stone and date inscription (12<sup>th</sup> Oct 1880) on another*

The third occupant of The Rectory was **Walter Robert Macray**, a graduate of Oxford University. He was headmaster of the Abbey School in North Berwick when it was announced, in January 1901, that he had been appointed rector of Christ Church. However, it was some time before he arrived in Duns since the 1901 census, taken at the end of March, shows him still in North Berwick at the private boys' boarding school in Dirleton Avenue. At the age of 37, the census (which misspelled his name as 'Macrae') lists him as 'Clerk in Holy Orders (Episcopal Church of Scotland) and Schoolmaster' together with his wife Agnes, age 33, two other teachers, a matron, three domestic servants and nine boarding scholars; one presumes that there were also day pupils. It surely cannot have been long before he moved to Duns.

In January 1903, the Berwickshire News reported the Macrays as among some fifty couples attending a 'subscription ball' in the Volunteer Hall. Dancing began at 10pm and went on until 3am to the music of Herr Iff's band from Glasgow; an Edinburgh company provided the supper

and other refreshments. In those days, newspapers delighted in filling entire columns describing the dresses of virtually every lady in attendance at such events. Agnes Macray, we are told, was wearing a white satin dress with lace flounce and eau-de-nil ('water of the Nile', pale yellow-green) velvet trimmings.

Walter and Agnes Macray doubtless appreciated life in a relatively modern rectory but there was one aspect which caused periodic dissatisfaction – the water supply. Since 1859, Duns had been supplied from the Hardens reservoir to the west of the town and, while this transformed the lives of local residents, there was always a challenge in maintaining a sufficient pressure to the houses at the higher points in the town, especially at the top of Bridgend and in Teindhillgreen. In an effort to improve the situation at the latter, a water supply tank was built in the field known as Tinker's Acre, behind the houses at the junction of Castle Street and Teindhillgreen. But the pressure problems returned from time to time. In December 1903, the Macrays joined the Crawfords of Mountview and the Laidlaws of Hillside in complaining to Duns Town Council about the poor supply of water and, indeed, its absence altogether on occasions. The council notified the local water company to address the matter but it was pointed out that the problem was not helped by the fact that, in frosty weather, many Duns citizens left their taps running slowly overnight to prevent their pipes from freezing!



*Teindhillgreen reservoir tank in map of 1908 (National Library of Scotland)*

In December 1904, in The Rectory, Agnes Macray gave birth to a son – he was named Walter Kenneth Douglas Macray. The 1911 census lists Walter Macray, 'Clerk in Holy Orders, Episcopalian', age 47, his wife Agnes, age 43, and son Walter junior, age 6. They employed Mary Jane Gault as cook and Agnes Muir as housemaid as well as 26-year-old Ethel Katharine Lee who was governess to young Walter – he went on to become a civil servant in Nigeria.

As well as carrying out his many clerical duties, Walter Macray (like other town ministers) supported a whole range of local organisations and good causes but he still found time for other interests. He was a playing member of Manderston Cricket Club as well as Duns Curling Club which carried out its sport on the lake at Duns Castle.

Reverend Walter Macray stayed in Duns for 17 years before deciding the time was right to serve elsewhere. He preached his final sermon in Christ Church in October 1918 before moving south to the parish of Brome and Oakley in Suffolk. 85 members of his congregation (and perhaps other local friends) donated money to the sum of almost £160 as a gift to their departing minister.

In early December 1918, just weeks after the end of the Great War, it was announced that **Anselm Ashley**, a graduate of Cambridge University and at that time chaplain and precentor of St Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh since 1905, would take up his duties as the next rector of Christ Church in February 1919. In a quiet ceremony in April 1919, in Gullane, he married Ethel Durie Nelson Thatcher. The 1921 census lists Anselm Ashley, 'Clerk in Holy Orders, Scottish Episcopalian Church', age 46, with his wife Ethel, age 38, and housekeeper Elsie Brotherston, age 43. Curiously, the census also lists George Brotherston, age 48, as a 'boarder' and employed as a roadman with Berwickshire County Council. He must surely have been the husband of Elsie the housekeeper but it was an unusual living arrangement. Anselm Ashley left Duns in 1927 to take up an appointment at St Mark's Church in Portobello from which post he resigned through ill health in 1936.



*Reverend Anselm Ashley, fourth occupant of The Rectory*

The next incumbency at Christ Church had a particular significance. **Charles Tindall Beale**, who came to Duns from the Holy Trinity Church in Dunoon in January 1928, was the son of the Reverend James Beale who served the Duns Episcopalian congregation between 1878 and 1898 and had been the first occupant of The Rectory. Charles Beale had been about three years

old when he first came to Duns with his parents in 1878, their home at that time, of course, being the parsonage at Cheeklaw. One presumes that he had carried some fond memories of Duns since he returned as rector of Christ Church fifty years after his family had first come to the town. He had married Rachel Christina Sarah Phillips in 1912.

Charles Beale was a dedicated scoutmaster who gave a great deal of his time and energies in support of the Boy Scouts movement. A particular highlight came in the summer of 1929 with the international Boy Scouts jamboree near Birkenhead which marked the twenty-first anniversary of scouting. Beale was asked to lead a troop of 50 scouts from Berwick and Berwickshire who would take part in the jamboree with representatives from 42 nations in a vast camp of around 30,000 boy scouts and girl guides. He wrote an article for the Berwickshire News in advance of the trip explaining that, while he was naturally happy to take on the considerable responsibility for the local scouts, he hoped that county residents might see fit to help with the costs of the event. During his time in Duns, he was elected as a member of the Berwickshire Naturalists.

Health problems determined that Charles Beale would be rector at Christ Church for only six years. Illness forced him to give up his scouting involvement in 1933 and he died of cancer in The Rectory at the age of 60 in March 1934.

In the autumn of that same year, his successor at Christ Church was appointed in the person of **Richard Augustus Forde** who had previously served the Church in both Canada and New Zealand. His rectorship in Duns from 1934 to 1946 spanned the years of the Second World War. Given that the Great War had been proclaimed as ‘the war to end all wars’, many questioned life and faith when another international conflict broke out only twenty years later. In early 1941, the various clergy in Duns organised a series of meetings to which both members of the public and the armed forces were invited. In February, Reverend Forde spoke to one such well-attended meeting in the South Church Hall in Currie Street during which he addressed the question ‘*What is wrong with the world?*’

The war was also reflected in an announcement in the Berwickshire News in April 1942 that Ruth Victoria Forde, daughter of the Reverend and Mrs Forde, had become engaged to John Barnet Urwin of Dunfermline. Ruth Forde was in the WRNS and John Urwin was in the RAF. All seems to have gone well for the couple since, two years later in April 1944, their son John Richard Urwin was born at the Knoll Hospital in Duns.

The Reverend Forde was enrolled as a Duns Town Councillor in autumn 1944 but he remained in the town for only two more years when he left for a parish near Spalding in Lincolnshire in October 1946.

In November 1946, the Vestry of Christ Church appointed **Robert Duggan** as their next rector and he took up his duties in 1947. An Irishman, he had studied divinity at Dublin’s Trinity College, was ordained in 1910, served the first twenty years of his ministry in Ireland and came to Duns from the parish of Charlbury in Oxfordshire. Like his immediate predecessor, Robert Duggan became a member of Duns Town Council. His tenure in Duns was another relatively short one. He had seemed to be recovering from illness but, while staying with his daughter, Mrs Esme Fielding, at Mordington near Berwick, he died of heart failure on 31 October 1951 at the age of 66. He had taken the service at Christ Church on the previous Sunday and so it was all very sudden; the Bishop of Edinburgh conducted Robert Duggan’s funeral service.

In early 1952, in his memory, his wife and daughter made a handsome gift of books from Robert Duggan's library to the Berwickshire High School which was still in Newtown Street. They included a 20-volume set of Charles Dickens novels and a 48-volume set of novels by Sir Walter Scott. It seems that the Reverend Duggan's widow, Mabel Frances Duggan, continued to live at The Rectory for some months after her husband's death since she died there very suddenly of a stroke on 05 March 1952. Perhaps she had been allowed a period of grace to make other arrangements before the arrival of the next rector.

For her daughter, Esme Fielding, it turned out to be a triple loss – as we have seen, her father had died the previous October; her husband, Reginald John Fielding, died at the age of 52 in the Peel Hospital near Galashiels on 29 February 1952 after suffering a stroke; and now her mother was dead less than a week later. All the 'antique and modern household furniture' of The Rectory was auctioned in the Berwick Corn Exchange in early April 1952.

Researching rectors beyond this point becomes more difficult. Public records are increasingly time-barred. And newspapers, including the Berwickshire News, fell into a different style as the twentieth century progressed, gradually (if unconsciously) abandoning that catch-all, gossipy manner which left us so much more information about previous generations. **Charles Francis Crichton**, a native of Edinburgh, was a chaplain in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve during the Great War. After serving congregations in Perth, Dundee and York, he was rector at Christ Church from 1952 to 1960; he then went to Edinburgh to be one of two Episcopalian hospital chaplains in the city where he died at the age of 74 in 1965.

**Albert John Baynham** was rector at Christ Church between 1960 and 1974 when he went to St James' Church in Cupar. He was retired by 1979 and living in Dysart, Fife. He died suddenly in the Victoria Hospital in Kirkcaldy in the summer of 1980.



*Memorial stones of Rectors Baynham, Duggan and Crichton, side by side in 'God's Acre' at Christ Church*

From 1974 to 1990, the rector was **Bruce Harold Clark Gordon** who, even today, is still fondly remembered by many former staff and pupils of the Berwickshire High School. One day in March 1979, a fearsome snow storm blew up such that by mid-afternoon even snow ploughs were struggling in the blizzard. There was no chance of buses getting anywhere near Duns and hundreds of pupils were stranded in the school. Reverend Bruce Gordon walked through the snow to the BHS and spent some hours at a telephone, calling around his congregation and others who might be able to give some pupils a bed for the night. It was very late before the task was accomplished by the Reverend Gordon and others but every last pupil was eventually found a refuge. It was sterling work.



*Reverend Bruce Gordon, last clerical occupant of The Rectory, and his wife Sue in Lanark*

### **After The Rectory**

Bruce Gordon was the tenth and last rector of Christ Church to live in The Rectory. When he left the town in 1990 to become rector at the namesake Christ Church in Lanark, the Scottish Episcopalian Church decided to sell their rectory in Duns. Being over a hundred years old, it was an expensive building to maintain and especially costly to heat. It is extremely likely that The Rectory's first private owners were responsible for changing its name to Kirkwell House. The Church purchased a property for a new rectory just across the road in what had originally been the grounds of Wellfield House and the next rector (Christopher John Martin) went to live there; it remains the Christ Church rectory today.



*Original plaster cornice and timber fireplace detail at Kirkwell House*

### **Clergy at Christ Church Rectory**

1881-1898	James Beale (at Cheeklaw from 1878 to 1881)
1899-1900	John Edmund Sedgwick
1901-1918	Walter Robert Macray
1919-1927	Anselm Ashley
1928-1934	Charles Tindall Beale
1934-1946	Richard Augustus Forde
1947-1951	Robert Duggan
1952-1960	Charles Francis Crichton
1960-1974	Albert John Baynham
1974-1990	Bruce Harold Clark Gordon

*The information in this paper has been researched from various newspapers of the time (especially the Berwickshire News) and from public records – census; valuation rolls; and birth, marriage and death records.*

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