

THOMAS DOVE - from St Mary's Parish News June 2012 by John Read

Just inside the west door on the left as you walk towards the coffee area, there is a wooden board giving a list of all the incumbents of St Mary's Saffron Walden going back to the 12th century. The board notes that two of the vicars became suffragan bishops, but omits to include a similar note about a much more distinguished cleric, Thomas Dove, vicar from 1580 to 1607, who became Bishop of Peterborough. The following account is based on an article in the Dictionary of National Biography, and Dawes and Loder's History of Framlingham.

Dove was born in London in 1555, and studied at Pembroke Hall (later Pembroke College), Cambridge from 1571, before becoming vicar of St Mary's in 1580, probably as a result of the close association of the entire Howard family, including the Earls of Suffolk (of Audley End) with Pembroke Hall. The Howards were also Lords of the Manor of Framlingham in Suffolk, and Dove was presented by the Howards to the Rectory of Framlingham in 1584. He then was appointed Dean of Norwich in 1589 and Bishop of Peterborough in 1601. He remained Bishop of Peterborough as well as Rector of Framlingham until his death in 1630.

He was also a chaplain to Queen Elizabeth, who, according to the Dictionary of National Biography article, "admired his excellence in preaching so much that she said this Dove was a dove with silver wings, who must have been inspired by the grace of Him who once assumed the form of a dove".

In the sixteenth century and later, pluralism (that is the practice of clergy holding several church offices at the same time) was common in the Church of England, particularly with well connected individuals like Dove. It can be seen from the above dates that he was simultaneously Vicar of Walden and Rector of Framlingham for 23 years, remaining Vicar of Walden for six years even after he became Bishop of Peterborough, as well as holding on to the rectory of Framlingham for 29 years of his time at Peterborough. Added to this, he also held the living of Heydon from 1586 to 1588, and as a chaplain to the Queen would have had to travel to London. How did he manage all this in days when travel was much more laborious than it is now? It is likely that he would have appointed curates to take charge of his churches in his absence, and would have paid their stipends out of his own pocket, which was no doubt well lined with the income from his various posts. There is some evidence that he was in Walden in 1598, because his signature can be seen at the foot of each page of the parish registers from 1558 (beginning of Elizabeth's reign) to 1598, when as a result of an edict issued in that year, incumbents were required to have the previous paper registers copied on to parchment for their better preservation. Dove and his two 1598 churchwardens certified the correctness of these entries to comply with this edict.

John Read