

The Rev William Henry Dixon 1783-1854



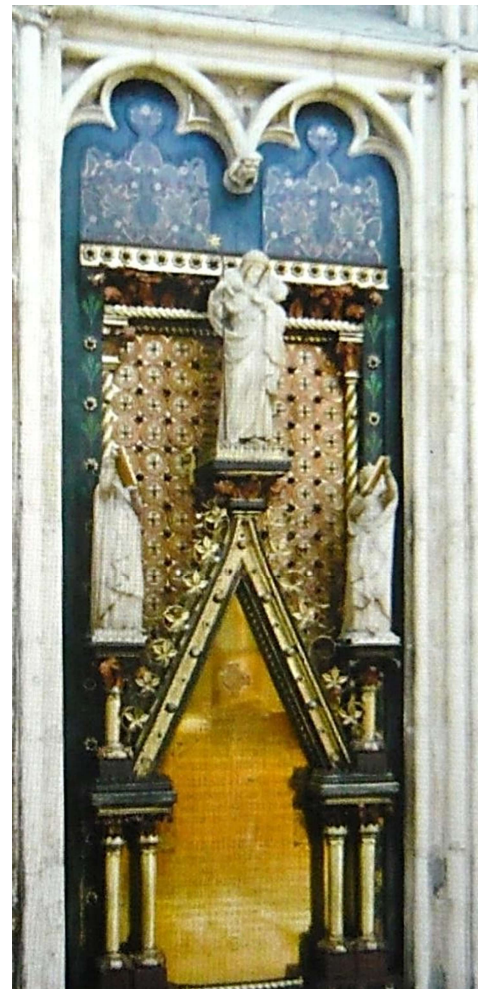
Having seen in the last Newsletter the thwarted ambition of the Rev Paul Parnell whose career did not progress from being a curate at Tickhill and domestic chaplain to the Earl of Scarborough, this focus on the Rev William Henry Dixon shows a different career progression after his first appointment as curate at Tickhill. No doubt William Henry was helped by his family connections. He was the son of the Vicar of Wadworth, the Rev Henry Dixon (also employed by F F Foljambe as a gamekeeper) and his wife Anne, the grandson of two other vicars, nephew of three of his father's brothers, all ordained, and the nephew of his mother's half-brother, the Rev William Mason (shown left), a canon at York Minster, chaplain to the King, poet and garden designer.

William Henry was born at Wadworth vicarage on 2 November 1783 and baptised on 5 December. He had a younger brother, James, baptised on 9 February 1785. After spending his early years at Wadworth, William Henry aged eight was sent to school at Worsbrough Grammar School where his grandfather, the Rev Jeremiah Dixon, once taught. He went eventually to Pembroke College, Cambridge, where he took a degree in music, becoming a skilled cellist. Like so many members of his family he then studied for the priesthood and was ordained in 1807, his first post as curate being at St Mary's Church, Tickhill, when the Rev Twigge was vicar. William Henry's time in Tickhill lasted only from February 1807 until November 1808. There followed a succession of curacies, for example at Carlton, Kirklington and Mappleton before he was installed as a canon at Ripon in 1815, a post he held until 1852. William was fortunate in being made vicar at Bishopthorpe, a short distance from the Archbishop's palace there, in 1824, a post he held for the rest of his life. Within four years he became domestic chaplain to Archbishop Harcourt and continued in that role for Archbishop Musgrave. Further promotion included becoming prebendary at Weighton in 1825, canon residentiary at York Minster in 1831 and rural dean of the Archdeaconry in 1842, all these posts being held concurrently.

William Henry and his younger brother were the main beneficiaries of the Rev William Mason's will. (Mason had inherited estates in East Yorkshire. He died in 1797.) To this financially secure background he accrued livings which brought in many hundreds of pounds a year. For example, in 1851 according to Parliamentary Papers Vol. 42, he received £466/19/6 as prebendary of Weighton, £600 as canon residentiary of York and £130 as vicar at Bishopthorpe. He also had a house provided in Minster Yard and a vicarage at Bishopthorpe.

However, William Henry was generous with his money and his time. At his own expense he much improved several vicarages. His enthusiasm for music was continued in York where he twice chaired committees responsible for music festivals held in York Minster in 1825 and 1829. The money raised went to help York Dispensary which provided medical care for York's poor. William Henry was a director of the Dispensary. One of his interests was in researching the past, especially ecclesiastical history. In 1821 he successfully applied to be elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. Over the years he collected information about previous Archbishops of York which formed the basis of a publication after his death.

He first married Mary Ann, daughter of James and Thomasina Fenton of Loversall Hall at St Katharine's Church, Loversall in 1809. Mary Ann died in York in 1829. William Henry then married



Mary Anne daughter of Rear Admiral Hugh Robinson of York in 1832. She was responsible for the installation of a memorial in York Minster in 1862 dedicated not only to her husband but also to his uncle the Rev William Mason (who in addition has a memorial in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey). A second memorial to William Henry was placed in St Andrew's Church Bishopthorpe where he had served as vicar for 30 years.

The monument, pictured above, in the South Choir Aisle at York Minster to Canon Mason and his nephew Canon Dixon includes three alabaster figures: the Good Shepherd and two wingless angels. The brass is inscribed with the chorus from two hymns which Mason wrote for morning and evening service. The firm of Skidmore in Coventry designed and erected the monument. This was the first memorial to be restored by the Friends of York Minster - in 1992.

For information on this and other monuments in the Minster see: Pattison, I. R., & Murray, H., *Monuments in York Minster*, The Friends of York Minster, 2001.

See also: Norcliffe, The Rev. C. B., *A Memoir of the Rev. W. H. Dixon*, British Library, Historical Print Editions, 1860.

Photograph of the memorial © David Nicholls