

The Founders of Compton Dando Church Estate Trust

Throughout the Middle Ages the land at Compton Dando was divided between the Benedictine abbey of Bath and the Augustinian abbey of Keynsham. A long list of those to be prayed for by the monks of Bath in 1316 includes 'Fulco de Anno [Dando] who gave us Compton and the land at Stortis and land at Kokeredeshulle, and the mill of Compton'.¹ The canons of Keynsham possessed the manor house [capital messuage] and land in the common arable fields of Compton Dando.² In the decades before the final dissolution of all the monastic houses during 1536-39, it was obvious to abbots and priors that major change was inevitable. There was increasing interference in monastic affairs by the Crown and local landowners. In an attempt to secure for themselves influential friends the monasteries granted long leases of land to local dignitaries and appointed laymen as stewards, receivers of rents, auditors and agents. On the estates of Bath and Keynsham many of those who were to be the chief beneficiaries of the dissolution were already firmly installed in monastic administration for several years before the collapse came.³ It was during the years leading up to the dissolution that the prior and monks of Bath agreed to the unusual arrangement at Compton Dando whereby land and property was set aside for the maintenance of the parish church.

The responsibility for this provision was chiefly due to Sir David Brook or Broke (c1498-1559). He was a member of a family which had long been established at Ashton Phillips in the parish of Long Ashton. He trained as a lawyer at the Middle Temple and rose rapidly in his profession, finally becoming a judge and chief baron at the Court of the Exchequer. He took a prominent part in legal affairs in Bristol and Bath, and was M.P. for Bristol from 1529 and recorder from 1540. He was on good terms with Thomas Cromwell and was active in the affairs of various monastic houses, notably at Bath. Like so many of those involved with the dissolution and the disposal of monastic lands, he remained conservative in his religious views and was in favour with Queen Mary, being knighted at her coronation in 1553. The Queen granted him the manor of Horton in Gloucestershire. After Queen Mary's death in 1558 he was out of sympathy with the religious changes brought about by Queen Elizabeth, and in his will made shortly before his death in 1559 he asked in vain that his funeral service should be conducted with catholic ceremonial 'yf it maye be suffered'.⁴

David Brook was legal advisor to William Holway, the last prior of Bath (1525-39) and was highly respected by the elderly prior. In a legal dispute over the income from St John's Hospital in Bath which was tried before the Court of Star Chamber in 1533 the prior stated that he had sought the advice of David Brook who he described as his close friend ('my nigh frende').⁵ It was Brook's influence with the prior that enabled him to secure the presentation of his relative Edward Brook to the lucrative benefice of Compton Dando in 1529. This must have been a considerable promotion for Edward Brook who was a young priest, only just above the statutory age of 24.⁶ He was to remain at Compton Dando through all the religious upheavals of the next three decades. During the reign of Edward VI when clerical marriage was permitted, Edward Brook married Agnes Hunte. He managed to conceal the marriage during the restoration of Catholicism after 1553, but was finally discovered and forced to resign in 1557 at the age of 53.⁷

In addition to securing the benefice of Compton Dando for Edward Brook in 1529, David Brook used his influence with the prior of Bath to establish the trust for the maintenance of