

the parish church. To ensure the survival of this arrangement, Brook took great pains to appoint a group of remarkably eminent local men as feoffees to administer the estate. The most distinguished were Edmund St Loe and Sir William St Loe of Sutton Court in the parish of Chew Magna, a younger branch of the St Loe family of Newton St Loe. They were major landowners and Sir William was a prominent courtier, later chief butler and captain of the guard to Queen Elizabeth. He is remembered today as the third husband of Bess of Hardwick, leaving her the wealth to build Hardwick Hall.⁸ Brook also persuaded two of his nephews to serve as feoffees. Hugh Brook, who was a landowner from Long Ashton and John Walsh of Stowey, who was a leading local lawyer, judge and M.P. for Somerset. David Brook thought highly of John Walsh, making him administrator of his affairs and leaving him part of his extensive library of legal books.⁹ Such eminent men can have devoted little time to the affairs of Compton Dando, but their influence made sure that the new trust survived the storm which was to sweep away so much else during the 1530s.

For the day-to-day conduct of the trust local feoffees were appointed, although in the absence of detailed records from the early years, only a few of their names survive. Among them were members of the Young family who possessed the freehold estates of Sewardswick (Wick Farm) and Grubbeswick (Knowle Farm). The Youngs had been prominent in Bristol as merchants, lawyers, town councillors and mayors throughout the later Middle Ages. During the 16th century Sir John Young was a leading Bristol merchant and landowner. He built the 'Great House' on the site of the former Carmelite friary in Bristol where the Colston Hall now stands, with the Red Lodge at the end of his formal garden. Here he entertained Queen Elizabeth during her week-long visit to Bristol in 1574. In Compton Dando George Young, who lived at Sewardswick, took a leading part in the establishment of the Church Estate.¹⁰ Members of the Bysse (or Bisse) family of Publow were also appointed as feoffees by Sir David Brook. They were wealthy clothiers who possessed tucking or fulling mills at Pensford and Publow, exporting their cloth to the Netherlands, France, Spain and Portugal. This was a prosperous trade and the Bysse family was able to use the profits to purchase a large amount of the Church land which became available after 1539. John Bysse bought land in the parishes of Wellow and Camerton, and chantry land at Bridgwater. By 1553 he was being described as 'gentleman', and he became a J.P. in 1559. James Bysse acquired former Bath abbey lands at Stoke St Michael, Englishcombe and Chelwood. John and Richard Bysse were among the earliest recorded feoffees, to be followed later in the 16th century by Thomas Bysse.¹¹

From Compton Dando itself early feoffees include John Sutton, who leased the mill by the church. In a survey of 1568 this was described as two mills:

One of the said mylles is a griste myll, and th'other is a tucking or fullinge mill with two stockes, In winter the said mylles will go contynuallye, yf they may have worke for them, and in the summer they do goo by poundes and the tenante maye well make three goode poundes every daye and night.¹²

This was a profitable undertaking and John Sutton was one of the most important tenants, first of the Hungerfords and later, after 1567, of the Smyths of Ashton Court. In the subsidy or tax assessment of 1581 Joanna Sutton, the widow of John Sutton was shown as managing the mill and her liability for tax was £5 8s 4d, the highest figure in Compton Dando.¹³ Two