

Compton Dando's connection with a famous writer by Brian Vowles

It is possibly a little-known fact that there is a connection between the village and a famous author.

Close to the porch of St Mary's Church in Compton Dando lies the grave of its one-time vicar, the Rev. Campbell Manning Christie, who died in the nearby vicarage on 5 June 1887 aged 76.

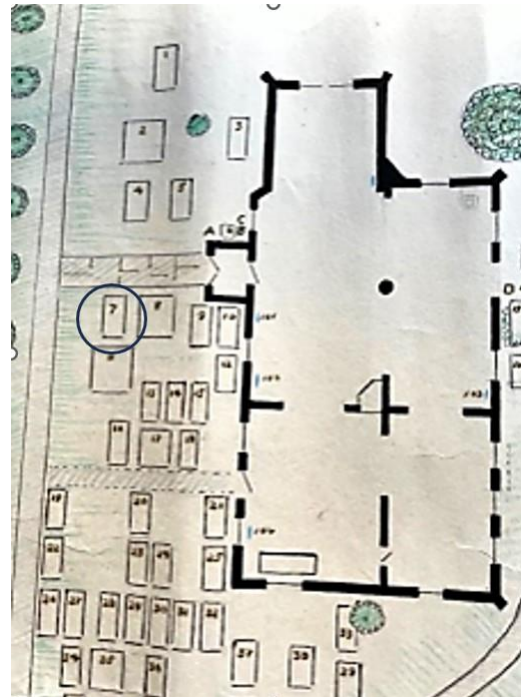
The vicarage was a handsome building, the foundation stone had been laid on the site of an earlier house on 19th April 1849 and the vicar at the time took up residence the following year.

However, the Rev C.M. Christie was only appointed to the living on 10 August 1877. Whilst there he married his second wife Ann on 26 September 1878 at Trinity Church Stepney. She was the only daughter of Jonathan Taylor formerly of Compton Dando.

One of his sons by a previous marriage was Archibald who became a barrister in the Indian Civil Service. During Archibald's time in India a son Archie was born in Peshawar and it was he who met Agatha Miller on October 12 1912 at a ball given by Lady Clifford at Ugbrooke House, Chudleigh in Devon. Agatha later described her first impressions of her husband to be. *"He was a tall, fair young man, with crisp, curly hair, a rather interesting nose, turned up not down, and a great air of careless confidence about him"*.

On the afternoon of Christmas Eve 1914, 24-year-old Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller married the dashing 25-year-old Captain Archie Christie, of the Royal Flying Corps at Emmanuel Church, Guthrie Road, Clifton in Bristol, and so acquired the name that was destined to

make her world famous as the "Queen of Crime" and one of the most successful crime writers of all time.



Rev C.M. Christie's grave in St Mary's Churchyard



Colonel Archibald Christie, officer of the Royal Flying Corps, 1915

After the ceremony the bride and groom travelled to Agatha's family home, Ashfield, Torquay to spend Christmas Day after which Archie returned to France. Promoted to Colonel, Archie was mentioned in despatches five times and was awarded the DSO and CMG. Agatha joined the V.A.D (Voluntary Aid Detachment) and became a qualified

dispenser where she learnt about poisons, knowledge that she would later use to in many of her novels The couple had an only daughter, Rosalind born in 1919 In 1924 Archie became financial advisor to the British Empire Wembley Exhibition Tour and although he and Agatha toured the world for ten months the marriage was not to last. In 1926 Archie asked his wife for a divorce and in December Agatha disappeared from the family home “Styles” in Sunningdale, Berkshire and was discovered ten days later in a hotel in Harrogate, having apparently had some sort of breakdown. The couple separated and were divorced in 1927.

Archie married Nancy Neele the following year and they had a son, also Archibald in 1930. Archie became a successful businessman and later served on several boards including Rank films. He died in 1962 aged 73.

In 1930 Agatha Christie married archaeologist Max Mallowan who was 13 years her junior but kept the surname of her first husband. She died in 1976 aged 85.

Emmanuel Church, Bristol where she became Mrs Christie, was made redundant in 1974 and was demolished for flats in 1977 but the tower still stands.

2020 was the centenary of the publication of Agatha Christie’s first novel “The Mysterious Affair at Styles” in which she introduced one of her most famous fictional detectives, the fastidious Belgian Hercule Poirot, and also invented the classic “country house murder” detective novel.

Agatha’s grandfather-in-law passed away in 1887 and his grave stone carries the following inscription *“In loving memory of the Rev C M Christie vicar of this parish who died June 5th 1887 aged*

76 years Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.

Also. Ann Francis widow of the above the dearly beloved and only child of the late Jonathan Taylor Esq formerly of this parish who died April 27th 1895 aged 53 years. If ye follow me keep my commandments”



Compton Dando Church from an old post card.

The Wells Advertiser, published on 22 January 1891, announced the marriage - “On the 14th inst., at Beverley Minster, Yorkshire, by the Rev. H.E.Nolleth, vicar, Henry Francis, of Compton Dando, to Ann, widow of the Rev. C.M.Christie, late vicar of Compton Dando, Somerset.”

Post script – On 17 June 1887. The Bishop of Bath & Wells offered the Rev. R.J. Jeffreys, the curate-in-charge of Shepton Mallet and chaplain of the Shepton Mallet Union, the living of Compton Dando near Bristol, vacant by the death of the Rev CM Christie. Its value was nearly £300 a year with a capital Vicarage house.

The last vicar to live in the vicarage was the Rev. John Coe and it was sold by the church authorities in 1997 to become a private residence.

Note - I am very grateful to Jonathan Rowe who has provided me with much of the information used in this article and who has given me permission to quote from his research.