

## Sacrilege in Warmington Church

*(Information reproduced with thanks from Deddington On-Line)*

**9th January 1840**

**John VINCENT** (30) from London and **William DAVIS** (30) from Faringdon broke and entered into Deddington Parish Church and stole various items. The Rev Cotton Risley's diary contains nine separate entries (see below) relating to this sacrilegious offence and the events thereafter. As the first entry shows, he immediately went into a whirlwind of activity but, nonetheless, still had time to write up his diary extensively at the end of what was obviously a very busy day.

**9th January** - About 8 o'clock I was informed that the Church had been broken into and robbed by two men who presented pistols at the Sexton's head on his going to the Vestry Room previous to ringing the curfew a few minutes before 8 o'clock, they were secreted and had succeeded in breaking open the Parish Chest and ransacking it of the pulpit hangings, communion cloth and cushions. They broke the lock of the [unreadable] Register Chest but could not open it. They took away from the Vestry 13/-d. in silver belonging to me as fees taken by the Sexton for divers offices performed by me as Vicar. They cut one of the Altar cushions to pieces, but being disturbed left all things in confusion, together with 4 keys, one a skeleton, a screw driver, a cobbler's or plumber's and glazier's knife much worn and an old silk handkerchief.

The Sexton was knocked down and stunned by a blow from the butt end of a pistol as he says and on recovering himself was compelled by their threats to let them escape by opening the Church Door for them. They had effected an entry by cutting away and breaking a portion of one of the Chancel windows, having forced out one of the iron bars which was found in the Vestry Room in the morning. I immediately drew up a Handbill offering a reward of £30 to be paid by the Parish and myself on conviction of parties, stating the facts of the case as well as I could collect them. I despatched the policeman in the direction they were supposed to have taken towards Oxford, and sent him afterwards to Bicester to inform the police there of the problem. I also sent Edmund my servant to Brackley on a similar errand.

Two men, one short. one tall, were seen running away from the Churchyard gate about 5 minutes after 8 o'clock dressed in dark clothes; they had been seen between Adderbury and Deddington in the morning by a lad named Callow who was breaking stones on the road between the hours of 10 and 12 o'clock and particularly observed them. Another lad named Sessions saw them near the Barber's shop opposite the Churchyard wall and running fast from the direction of the Churchyard gate.

**10th January** - The two men supposed to have been the parties concerned in the Church affair last night were apprehended late this afternoon, a woman with them, on their road to Oxford, by my order and brought to the cage by the policeman and Farndon the constable. I fixed to examine them in the morning. The woman had 15 Pawnbrokers tickets in her possession.

**11th January** – Examined the two men taken up yesterday on suspicion of having broken into and robbed the Church, who gave their names as Mr Davis, Plumber and Glazier, and John Vincent, Tailor. After an investigation and examination of two hours and a half, by which a chain of strong suspicious circumstantial evidence was obtained against the men, I fully committed them to take their trial for the sacrilege at the ensuing Assizes.

**12th January** – A hymn book and prayer book were found by John Parish in the Castle Ground, being a part of the property stolen from Banbury Church.

**13th January** – Thompson, the Banbury policeman, came to say he had succeeded in recovering the Communion Cloth stolen from Warmington Church near Banbury at a Pawnbroker's shop thereat; and that it was pawned at Saul's shop by the shortest of the two men I committed to Oxford on Saturday – for breaking into our Church.

**15th January** – The policeman came three or four times to see me with fresh intelligence relative to the men committed for robbing our Church.

(Note: 27th February Davis and Vincent were charged at Oxford Assizes with... feloniously breaking and entering the parish church of Deddington on the 9th day of January inst. and stealing therein a pulpit cloth and cushion, two altar cushions and cloth, thirteen shillings and other articles, the property of the parishioners of the said parish. Sacrilege.)

**28th February** – Attended the Courts in Oxford Town Hall, dined with the High Sheriff and Grand Jury at The Star, 35 magistrates being present.

**1st March** – Our Deddington Church breakers, Davis and Vincent, were tried for breaking into Warmington Church and stealing the communion cloth, the pulpit cushion, etc. a night or two before they effected their entrance into ours – they were found guilty before Mr. Baron Gurney and told that they would be tried on two other indictments for sacrilege on the morrow – for breaking into Banbury Church and ours at Deddington on Thursday evening, the 9th January.

**3rd March** – Davis and Vincent again tried by Mr. Gurney for the Banbury Church robbery and found guilty. He did not deem it necessary to try them for breaking and robbing ours – but at once sentenced them to transportation for life.

**Vincent** arrived in Hobart in 1841 but does not seem to have settled down to earn his pardon because Banished! lists a series of offences over the next 21 years. Davis also went to Hobart but in a separate transport. Davis was quickly into trouble with the authorities and two years after his arrival was sentenced to hard labour in chains at Port Arthur. Port Arthur was a punishment station for the worst offenders and hence had a fearsome reputation for the lash. He escaped by trying to swim across the bay but was never seen again and was presumed to have drowned.