



News and events

- Our exhibition "**Wheathampstead during the Second World War**" was a huge success, with many visitors on both days. We did not keep a headcount but an estimate of 800 cannot be far out. Many people came more than once as there was so much to read, to see, to remember, and to talk about. Many thanks to the organising committee.
- Our **next meeting** will be on **Wednesday 18 June** when Kate Harwood will give a talk "**Allotments: a history**".

Lambert Osbaldeston

It is well-documented that John of Wheathampstead was twice elected abbot of St Albans in the 15th century, but it is less well-known that Lambert Osbaldeston had two spells as rector at St Helen's in Wheathampstead, under less creditable circumstances.

Born in London in 1594, he attended Westminster School and Oxford University and was appointed joint headmaster of Westminster School at the early age of 27. In 1629 he became prebendary (a type of canon) at Westminster Abbey and also at Biggleswade (diocese of Lincoln) and at Wells Cathedral.

His first appearance in Wheathampstead was in 1637 when he was appointed rector at St Helen's



on the death of the previous incumbent Mark Stubbing. Given his many positions, it is unlikely that he spent much time in Wheathampstead but, if he did, he would probably have stayed in the Old Rectory, now in King Edward Place.

Trouble started in the following year when letters written by him to the Bishop of Lincoln were found in the house of Bishop Williams, the Dean of Westminster. In them, an unnamed person was described as "the little urchin" and "the little meddling hocus pocus". It was obvious that the person so described was the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, close adviser to King Charles the First. At a trial in the Star Chamber in February 1639, Osbaldeston was stripped of all his ecclesiastical positions (including Wheathampstead) and ordered to pay fines of £5,000 to the King and to Archbishop Laud (the total of £10,000 is roughly equivalent to two million

pounds today; other sources say that the £5,000 was split between the King and Laud, which seems more likely). He was also condemned to have his ears nailed to the pillory in the presence



of the scholars of Westminster School. Clearly a smart mover, Osbaldeston left the court while the judgment was being given, burnt some documents in his study at the School, and left a note "*If the Archbishop enquire after me, tell him I am beyond Canterbury*".

Archbishop Laud

He hid in a private house until November 1640. The Long Parliament first met in that year and in January 1641 he petitioned "to be relieved against a heavy sentence, obtained against him by the unjust proceedings of Walter Walker and Cadwalader Powell, two servants of the Bishop of Lincoln". The unlucky Lewis Wemyss, who had been appointed rector in 1640, petitioned "that he may not be deprived of the rectory of Wheathampstead, conferred upon him by His Majesty, which rectory was, before the sentence of the Star Chamber, in the possession of Osbaldeston" but was unsuccessful. Osbaldeston resumed the rectorship at Wheathampstead in 1642.

He had not learned to keep his mouth (or rather his pen) shut in the tumultuous years of the Civil War, the execution of Charles I, the Republic (Interregnum) and the Long Parliament (1640 to 1660). Having publicly criticised the lengthy proceedings of the Long Parliament, he was again relieved of many of his benefices, including Wheathampstead, in 1659. He died in October of that year and is buried in Westminster Abbey with no memorial.