

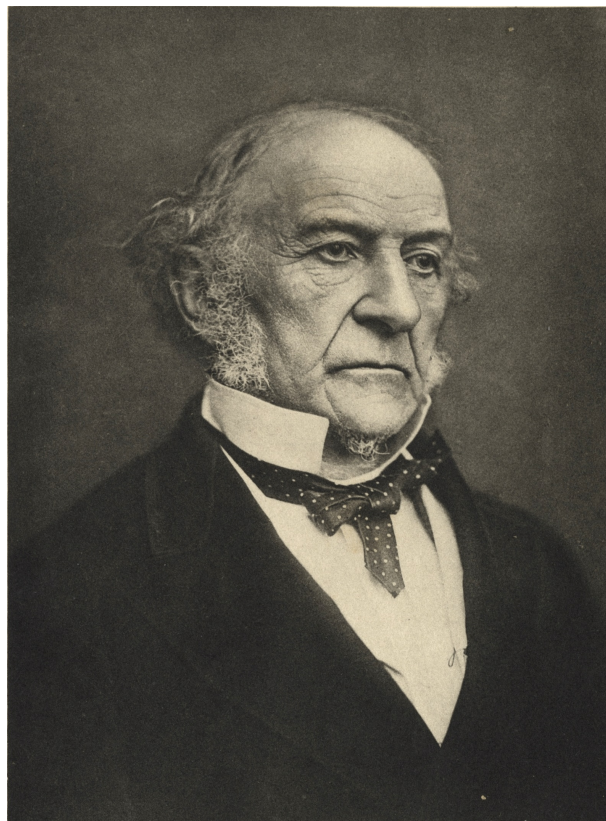
## The Ewelme Scandal – Mr Gladstone and Rev. Harvey

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The name William Ewart Gladstone may conjure up the caricature of the elderly Liberal Prime Minister, clutching his famous capacious bag, venturing into the Victorian night to rescue ‘fallen women’. As charitable as Mr Gladstone undoubtedly was, in 1871 his personal interference in Ewelme church matters caused such a furore, it became nationally known as ‘The Ewelme Scandal’ and was considered one of the reasons that he was not re-elected in 1874.

The origins of the Scandal went back to 1605 when King James 1 attached the annual stipend for the Rectory of Ewelme to the Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, an arrangement which took effect in 1629 and confirmed by Act of Parliament in 1712. The first appointment was John Prideaux future Bishop of Worcester, (Rector from 1629-1642), and over the years future Bishops of Lincoln, Oxford, Bangor, London, Llandaff, Durham, Hereford and Chester were Rectors of Ewelme. Two became Archbishops of Canterbury. The roll call of Oxford’s eminent high churchmen who were honoured by the Crown Appointment of Ewelme Rectory was all very well, but the position became largely a sinecure, and many visited rarely, leaving the overall running of the parish to Almshouse clergymen and later to Curates. A few though, took a great interest in Ewelme. Bishop Randolph (1783-1807) added considerably to the Rectory. Bishop Hampden (Rector 1836-1848) bought Cottesmore Mansion [The Old Mansion] as a home for his Curate, who was also his son in law, but then vandalised the Rood Screen by sawing off 2 feet of the central section panels and painting over the purple, scarlet and gold decoration with brown paint! An assault not rectified until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century!

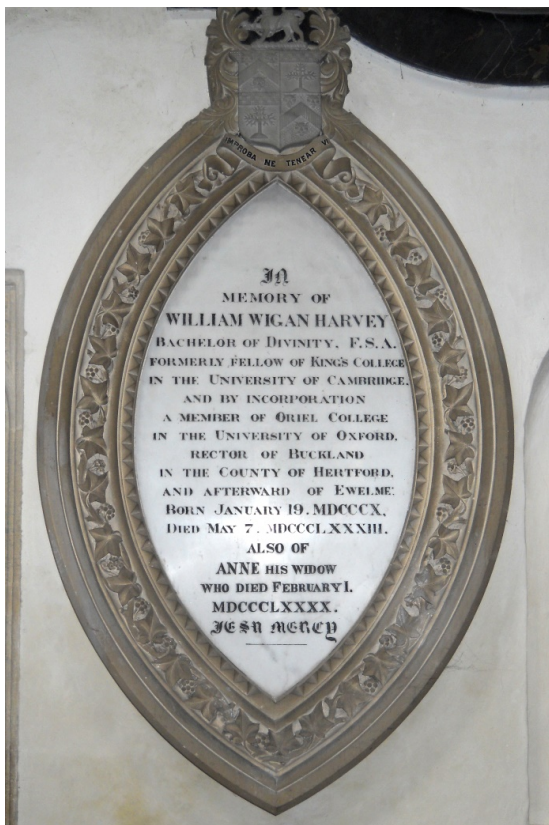
In 1870 the last Regius Professor, Robert Payne Smith resigned to become the Dean of Canterbury and, after more than 250 years, Mr Gladstone personally decided to sever the Rectory from the Regius Professorship.



William Ewart Gladstone

As an Oxford man he wished to continue honouring the University, with the stipulation that the Rectory should always be given to a member of Convocation of the University of Oxford. (Convocation - originally the main governing body of the University, consisting of ecclesiastical and academic Doctors and Masters). Mr Gladstone's government accordingly passed an Act of Parliament to this effect in 1871. He offered the patronage to the Canon of Christ Church Rev Jelf, who declined it, so he approached a boyhood friend from his days at Eton, Dr William Wigan Harvey. Unfortunately, Dr Harvey was a Kings College Cambridge man. This impediment posed no problem for Mr Gladstone. To qualify for the Rectory of Ewelme Dr Harvey was incorporated into Oriel College Oxford, and become by residence, a member of Oxford Convocation and was presented with the Rectory on 15<sup>th</sup> December 1871. In Oxford great indignation was expressed at the apparent slight to this august body and the University.

In the House the Tories pounced. The Prime Minister was accused of playing fast and loose with his own Act in preferring his own candidate. Awkward questions were asked in the Commons on the 13<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> February 1872 by Sir John Mowbray, Conservative MP for Oxford University. The MP alleged that Dr Harvey had voted in the House of Convocation after only 42 days of residence instead of the necessary 180 days. As the Queen made the appointment, was she acquainted with Dr Harvey's seemingly 'unqualified' condition at the time? Gladstone defended himself eloquently, stating an Oxford University clergyman had refused the Living, and anyway, Dr Harvey was a very able man. He did, however, admit he had placed himself in an unfortunate position and could have acted more wisely. (It was unfortunate that, at about the same time, Mr Gladstone had also appeared to violate the spirit of an Act of Parliament to appoint another technically ineligible man he felt deserving of a post. He made Sir Robert Collier a judge for 2 days in order to qualify for an appointment to the Judiciary Committee of the Privy Council. This scandal became known as The Colliery Explosion!) Both preferment's laid him open to the charge of evading Parliamentary Acts for personal purposes. He came in for harsh criticism, and although not accused directly of acting corruptly, opinion was that he did '*peculiarly interpret*' an Act of Parliament, and the scandals are cited as the cause for his failure to be re-elected in 1874.



Mr Gladstone probably believed he was acting for the best as his 'Ewelme Rectory Bill' allowed the village a resident Rector. Over the centuries too many had been absentees. In any event his assessment of Dr Harvey proved accurate as he was able and zealous. His interest in the village was such that he undertook to produce a document which has been most useful to the Archive. In the early 1880's he drew up a plan of all the village properties - with a key showing the owners and occupiers at the time. Consequently, for example, we are able to see that 'Thatchings' and 'East Cottage', (opposite 'The Greyhound'), were buildings containing three small dwellings, and the names of those living therein. We can also identify the sites of buildings subsequently demolished. Additionally, his daughter Elinor Bidwell had died in childbirth, and in 1882 he donated to her memory the magnificent Clayton and Bell stained glass east window above the main altar - the best Victorian craftsmanship available.

William Wigan Harvey died in Ewelme in May 1883 and is buried in the southwestern part of the old churchyard. His memorial plaque is affixed to the north wall near the altar which surprisingly details his controversial incorporation into Oriel College, an action greatly discomfiting to his friend Mr Gladstone and instigating 'The Ewelme Scandal'.