

MEMORIALS

Beneath Your Feet – *The Gumble Affair*

At the eastern end of the Cathedral's nave seating, just before the modern communion rail is a ledger stone for the grave of a forgotten but, in his time, very argumentative and difficult canon named Thomas Gumble. You have probably stood on it many times. The text reads:

HERE RESTETH THE BODY
OF THOMAS GVMBLE
DD CHAPLAIN TO HIS
MAJESTIES LIFE GWARD
& PREBEND OF THIS
CATHEDRALL
WHO DEPARTED THIS
LIFE SEPTEMBER Y 9
1676
AGED 50 YEARS

There is little indication on the ledger stone of the problems that Gumble's very self-centred attitudes caused in the Cathedral's Chapter in the 1660s and 1670s. One element related to his notional home at No. 2 The Close, which was part of the Deanery complex and possibly part of the former St Swithun's Priory. It would have vicarious fame when his successor Thomas Ken refused to allow the house to be given to Mrs Eleanor Gwyn, better known as Nell Gwyn, who was the official mistress of Charles II at that time. The 'low and rather simple' house was demolished in 1846.¹

Thomas Gumble was born in 1626, educated at Magdalen College, Oxford, and appears to have served as vicar of Chipping Wycombe, Buckinghamshire (circa 1650–1657) during the Interregnum period. This appointment is not recorded in the Clergy of the Church of England Database (CCED) but is mentioned in his Dictionary of National Biography entry in the late 1890.² Gumble's breakthrough career move came in late 1655 when he was appointed

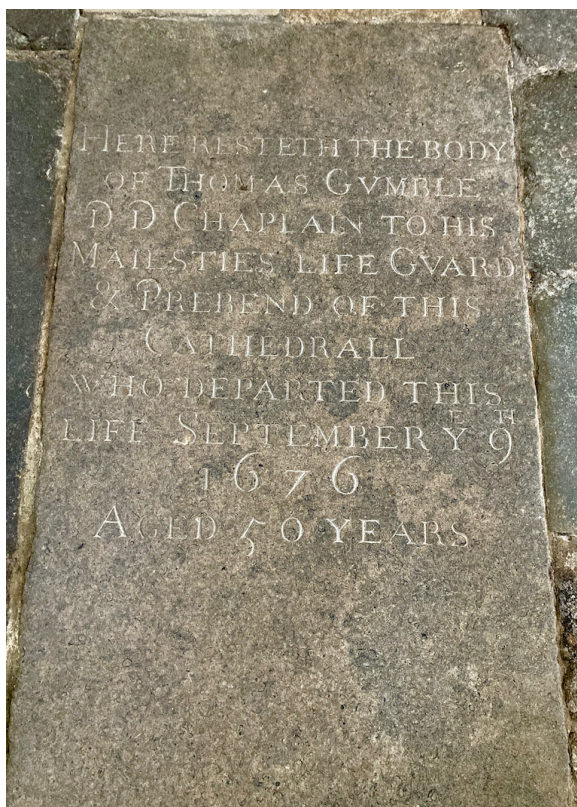
¹ W. R. W. Stephens and F. T. Madge, *Documents Relating to the History of the Cathedral Church of Winchester in the Seventeenth Century*. Winchester: Warren and Son (1897), p. xlvii.

² Gordon Goodwin, "Gumble, Thomas", *Dictionary of National Biography 1885-1900*, Vol. 23, p. 338.

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chaplain to the Parliamentarian, General George Monck, in Scotland. In 1660 Monck, an astute politician as well as a successful army leader, paved the way for the return of Charles II to England. From 1656 to 1660, Thomas Gumble was one of Monck's most trusted agents and undertook several missions for him. On 4 January 1660, he played a crucial role in the restoration of Charles II to the English throne when he carried Monck's letters from Newcastle to Parliament and the City of London.³

By late 1659, the country appeared to be drifting into anarchy, with widespread demands for new elections and an end to military rule. Monck made clear his support for moderate Parliamentarians who sought the return of the authority of Parliament. At the start of 1660, he marched his Scottish army to the English border, supported by a force raised by former New Model Army commander, Sir Thomas Fairfax. It was at this time that he wrote to Parliament of his intentions to come south and restore its powers.⁴ Military opposition melted away and, on February 2nd, 1660 Monck entered London. In April, elections were held for a Convention Parliament which restored the Stuarts.



Thomas Gumble's ledger stone

Gumble was rewarded with £100 from Parliament and gained rapid preferment within the Church. CCED noted that he was ordained as deacon and priest in the Diocese of Lincoln on 19 December 1660.⁵ In 1661 he was made a Doctor of Divinity of Cambridge University by royal mandate and, on July 6th that year, was collated to the fifth prebendal stall in Winchester Cathedral.⁶ Gumble was also that year commissioned as Chaplain to the Duke of Albemarle's Troop of the King's Life Guards. (Monck had been made Duke of Albemarle by Charles II in July 1660). On May 21st, 1663, he received

³ Thomas Gumble, *The Life of General Monck*. London, 1671, p. 168.

⁴ Peter Ackroyd, *The History of England, Vol. III, Civil War*. London: Pan (2014), pp. 360-1.

⁵ <https://theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/search/index.jsp>, reference No. 63621 (Gumble, Thomas).

⁶ Goodwin, "Gumble", p. 338.

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the rectory of East Lavant, Sussex.⁷ Another appointment was chaplain to the warship, 'Royal Charles'. In 1671, Gumble published *The Life of General Monck, Duke of Albemarle, &c., with Remarks upon his Actions*. It was more than a biography, almost a hagiography: a political defence and tribute to Monck's loyalty, moderation and statesmanship. The book painted Monck as the hero of the Restoration, emphasising his careful handling of the army and Parliament.

Gumble arrived in Winchester when he was installed as a canon on July 6th, 1661. He remained, however, closely attached to Monck as "Domestick Chaplaine" and thus spent much of his time in London.⁸ From 1663 onwards, reports from Dean and Chapter indicated that he was seldom in residence in the Close or participating in Cathedral life. From 1661 to 1667, he only attended one of the two General Chapter meetings held each year. From 1667 to 1671, he just came to the opening of the November Chapter meeting so that he was eligible for his "dividend" or share of Chapter income. After Albemarle's death in 1670, his local appearances rose, and it was at this time he completed *The Life of General Monck*.

After nearly a decade of little engagement with the Cathedral, his colleagues became restive. In 1670, he was warned of a financial penalty if he continued to use a deputy to deliver his sermons. Two years later, £4 was taken from his prebendal stipend for failing to read his share of prayers. It was around this time that the "Gumble Affair" gained its reputation. Essentially, Gumble had neglected his accommodation at 2 The Close since 1661 and it became a "ruinous & standing spectacle", according to fellow canons.⁹ Gumble, however, blamed the Chapter for its dilapidated state. After extensive negotiations, the Chapter rebuilt No. 2 The Close.¹⁰

At first, Gumble was pleased with the house but the truce with Chapter was short-lived. In 1674, he demolished much of the renovations and proceeded to rebuild it 'in another fashion'.¹¹ This led to extensive conflict and litigation that concluded with a decision by Bishop George Morley that Gumble had to repay £170 to Chapter.¹²

⁷ CCED, ref. 63621.

⁸ Stephens & Madge, *Cathedral Documents*, p. 113.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 166-7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-9.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 169.

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Then, suddenly, the “Gumble Affair” was over with his unexpected death on September 9th, 1676, at the age of 50. His *DNB* biographer, Gordon Goodwin, says he had the reputation of being an ‘amiable and kindly man’,¹³ but Chapter’s experience was of a seldom-seen, irascible and argumentative colleague who made little contribution over his fifteen years as a prebendal canon. The rebuilt No. 2 The Close was soon occupied by Thomas Ken, who would famously refuse its use by Nell Gwyn in 1683. She later lived in an annex at the south end of the Deanery.

Finally, did Thomas Gumble and Bishop Peter Mews (1684-1707) know each other? There are no records that they did but Thomas Gumble and Peter Mews possibly knew of each other as they were closely connected through mutual contacts with General George Monck during the 1650s and early 1660s. It can only be speculation but factors to consider are that both were part of a trusted royalist network in the period leading up to the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 and both were Oxford-educated royalist clergymen. Mews was, however, a soldier (See *Record Extra*, March 2025) and joined Charles II’s court in its exile in the Netherlands.¹⁴ He travelled several times to Scotland carrying messages to Monck and other Stuart supporters and gathering intelligence. It was in Scotland that he may have been in contact with Gumble, who was part of Monck’s inner circle as his chaplain and agent.

Both received preferments after the Restoration, thanks to the king and Monck: Gumble was made a canon of Winchester Cathedral and rector of East Lavant. Mews had a more rapid ascent in the church hierarchy, becoming Dean of Rochester (1670), Bishop of Bath and Wells (1672) and Bishop of Winchester (1684). They moved in the same clerical and political circles during the Restoration church settlement and reconstruction of the episcopacy. While no direct correspondence between Gumble and Mews survives, the overlap in roles, Monck’s patronage, and ecclesiastical appointments make it highly likely they were acquainted and possibly cooperated during their time in Scotland and later in church affairs.

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Photograph

Thomas Gumble’s ledger stone in Winchester Cathedral (Author, July 2025).

¹³ Goodwin, “Gumble”, p. 338.

¹⁴ Tom Watson, “Editors’ Note – In Search of Bishop Peter Mews”, *Record Extra*, March 2025.