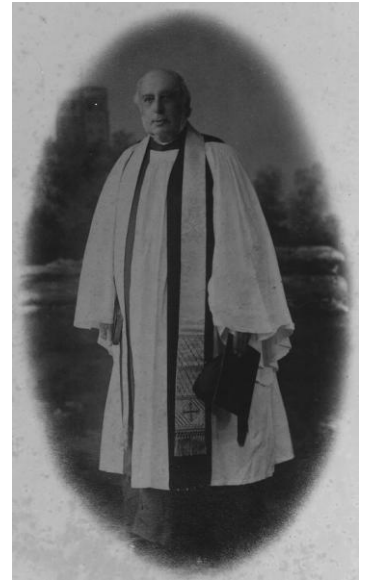


Canon Owen Davys (Rector from 1859 to 1914), like so many of his predecessors at St Helen's, owed his living to his father, the Bishop of Peterborough, who had gained responsibility for the living at Wheathampstead following a general ecclesiastical reorganisation of dioceses when Wheathampstead was transferred from the care of the Bishop of Lincoln. This was the year that the parish of Harpenden was separated from that of Wheathampstead. Canon Davys remained in the living for 55 years and did many good works, including building a new school for the children of the village (still to be seen in Church Street), and embarking on a vast scheme of restoration of the dilapidated church building he found when he arrived, putting up £500 of his own money for the work. He also established St Helen's as a centre of fine church music.



Canon Davys

He was an energetic local historian. He joined St Albans & Hertfordshire Architectural & Archaeological Society as an Associate Member in 1863, progressed to become an Honorary Secretary by 1898, and was elected Vice-President in 1900. During this time, he published some 24 articles in the Society's Transactions, most of which were studies of Hertfordshire churches.

Canon Davys knew how to enjoy life and lived in grand style at the rectory, employing a retinue of servants to cater for the family's needs. There were a cook, numerous maids to look after the parlour, house, kitchens, scullery and children as well as valet, butler, coachman, grooms and gardeners. The family nicknamed them as 'grandfather's little weaknesses'. Canon Davys maintained a fernery, which he stocked from his travels, outside the western crinkle-crankle wall that surrounded the garden of the earlier rectory. To complete the picture of mid-Victorian gracious ease and elegant living, peacocks strutted on the lawn.

He died in 1914 and is buried in the churchyard at St Helen's.



Source: *St Helen's Church, Wheathampstead* by Ruth Jeavons  
(copies are available in the church)  
with additions

See also Canon Davys' autobiography:

Davys, Rev. Canon Owen (1913) *A Long Life's Journey, With Some I Met by the Way*, Gibbs and Bamforth, St Albans.