

## Of prebends and prebendaries

People say "Manors and Lords we understand but *prebends* and *prebendaries*, what are they?"

Prebend comes from the Latin verb *praebere*, 'to grant'. Over the years, it came to mean that part of a Cathedral's revenue granted to a Canon (a member of the Chapter) as a stipend.

Prebend also means the property that funded the stipend. Our Binegar Prebend was Whitchurch Manor.

A Prebendary was the Cathedral Canon who received the stipend. A stipend was less a salary, more a payment made so you did *not* have to work. It meant you could take on a role that was normally unpaid.

Bishop Robert created the Dean and Chapter of Wells and its Prebends in 1140. Back then, the Bishop alone had the right to appoint a Canon to the living of a Prebend.

Some prebendaries had to be resident; others could pursue interests like the law. Being absent, they had to pay for a Vicar Choral at the Cathedral and a priest in a prebendal church like Holy Trinity.

Within a century, Popes and Kings assaulted the rights of Bishops. In 1265, Pope Clement IV declared that he owned all church benefices. His successors went further, "reserving" prebends for their appointees and demanding the first year's income from every new prebendary.

The King too grabbed all he could. Like the Pope, he needed to reward the services of a growing body of officials. In 1279, Edward I declared, "The Court of the Kingdom of England has always been governed principally and for the greater part by clerks, spaciouly endowed with ecclesiastical benefices and honours".

And so battle raged. The Papal bureaucrats tried to keep up with who owed how much for what. The King meanwhile, by fair means and (generally) foul gradually gained the upper hand.

A Prebendary was nice work if you could get it! Money for old rope, one might even say! Take a look at how Thomas de Tormeton fought tooth and nail to keep hold of his prebends from 1348-61.