

Robert Jones: Rector of Souldern (1787–1835)

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SUMMARY

Robert Jones is both an interesting and a puzzling person. He was an intimate friend of William Wordsworth from their University days at St John's College, Cambridge. Jones was athletic, friendly, affable and good company; he was the companion of Wordsworth on his three thousand mile walking tour through Europe in 1791. During his adult life he and the Wordsworths repeatedly visited one another and he accompanied them on several tours through Wales, but, as the years went by he became overweight, out of condition, withdrawn, but constant in his friendship and love for William as was William in his regard for Jones. From the onset of his appointment to the church of St Mary, Souldern, Jones did his best to delay actually settling there, offering one reason after another to the Bishop of Oxford as to why he should have leave of absence, managing to spend almost half of his tenure away from his parish. During the thirteen years he actually spent in Souldern he ran up a massive debt and the Bishop in 1822 was obliged to allow Robert to retire to Wales leaving the cure of Souldern in a curate's hands. Eventually the Bishop had to involve the civil authorities to deal with monetary issues while Robert, still in name Rector of St Mary's, continued to live comfortably at his family home in Wales.

In 1622 Dr John Williams, Bishop of Lincoln, bestowed a substantial endowment upon St John's College, Cambridge. He had already founded four scholarships and two fellowships in Westminster school, two of which were for persons born in Wales; he now founded four scholarships and two fellowships in St John's College, Cambridge for the further advancement of these scholars. He then purchased lands and the perpetual donation and patronage of four benefices, one of which was the cure of Souldern.¹ To these benefices the holders of his fellowships were in due course to be presented. And so it came about that in 1806 Robert Jones, Fellow of St John's, was presented to the Church of Souldern.

Robert Jones' claim to fame today is that he was a close friend of William Wordsworth. They both entered St John's College, Cambridge, Robert in June and William in October 1787. Jones was, like William, a second son and destined for the church. They both shared a passion for poetry, mountains and walking. William took only the subjects which interested him while Robert had dropped to the third class by the end of his first year.² Instead of studying during the summer vacation of 1790, William and Robert decided on a walking tour of Europe with the objective of reaching the Swiss Alps.³

Many years later Wordsworth wrote 'In the month of August 1790 I set off for the continent, in companionship with Robert Jones, a Welshman, a fellow-collegian. We went staff in hand, without knapsacks, and carrying each his needments tied up in a pocket handkerchief, with about twenty pounds a piece in our pockets...For what seemed best to me worth recording in this tour, see the Poem of my own Life [The Prelude Book 6]'.⁴

¹ W. Blomfield, *History of the Deanery of Bicester*, part VII, *History of Fritwell and Souldern* (London, 1882) (henceforth DB), 71.

² Juliet Barker, *Wordsworth. A Life* (henceforth WL), 68.

³ Juliet Barker, *Wordsworth. A Life in Letters* (henceforth WLL), 9–12.

⁴ WLL 10.

Not even Wordsworth's sister Dorothy was told and later she wrote 'had he acquainted me with his scheme before its execution I should have looked upon it as mad and impracticable.'⁵

Despite Wordsworth's recollection of leaving for the continent in August, records, and indeed a letter of his own written in 1790, show that they spent the night of 12 July at Dover and the next day crossed to France arriving at Calais on the eve of the celebrations of the 14 July;⁶ this eventful day made little impression on the two young men as all their thoughts were of poetry, nature and their walking tour.⁷ Between July and late September 1790 the two undergraduates travelled nearly three thousand miles, walking at least two thousand of them at a rate of more than thirty a day. From Calais they walked almost due south to Chalon-sur-Saône, 'a march it was of military speed'⁸ where they hired a boat to travel down the Rhine to a little below Lyon. Then they trekked across country visiting the Grande Chartreuse, Geneva and the Lakes, passing through the Simplon Pass and reaching Lake Maggiore, Lake Como and on through North Italy, then to Basel where they bought a boat and sold it again on reaching Cologne. From there they went on foot through Belgium and finally home.⁹

From Kesswil, Switzerland, Wordsworth tells Dorothy 'we have several times performed a journey of thirteen leagues (40 miles) over the most mountainous parts of Switzerland.'¹⁰

They lived frugally and travelled light, and thirty years later Robert recalls 'We were early risers in 1790 and generally walked 12 or 15 miles before breakfast and after feasting on the morning Landscape how we afterwards feasted on our Dejeuner of whatever the house might afford'.¹¹ The whole escapade was a remarkable achievement showing great courage and stamina, both physical and mental and it made a very strong bond between the pair.

Twenty-five years later Jones declared to Wordsworth 'I can assure you that a Day seldom passes that I do not think of you with feelings of inexpressible affection'.¹² Wordsworth, who had, with great feeling dedicated his work, *Descriptive Sketches* (which recounted their memorable tour), to Robert,¹³ was equally fond of him; their friendship was to endure until Robert's death in 1835.

By the middle of October they were both back at Cambridge, with only a few short months left to prepare for their degree examination.

In January 1791 one hundred and forty undergraduates were examined; William and Robert being among those unplaced in order of merit.¹⁴ William did not want to go into the church; Jones secured one of the Welsh fellowships offered by St John's and was able to return to his wealthy home in Denbighshire. He obtained his M.A. in the same year and his B.D. in 1794 and was ordained at the age of twenty-three.¹⁵

By the middle of May 1791 William, wearying of London and short of money, decided to visit his friend Robert at Robert's family home, Plas-yn-Llan, at Llangynhafal,

⁵ WLL 73-4.

⁶ WL 75; WLL 10.

⁷ WL 75.

⁸ K.R. Johnson, *The Hidden Wordsworth*, 192.

⁹ Ibid., 192 ff.

¹⁰ WLL 12.

¹¹ WL 80.

¹² Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth, A Life* (1989), 44.

¹³ *Descriptive Sketches* in W. Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, ed. T. Hutchinson (Oxford, 1981), 469 (henceforth PW).

¹⁴ WL 83-4.

¹⁵ 'Deceased Clergy', *Gentleman's Magazine*, June 1835.

Denbighshire.¹⁶ The Jones' lived in the 'house by the church' in a glorious situation high on the Clwydian range of mountains.¹⁷ According to one description Jones' home was 'a rambling Tudor house with a courtyard. The most impressive house in the neighbourhood beautifully situated,'¹⁸ although Wordsworth, according to Dorothy, called it 'quite a cottage just such a one as would suit us' and she adds 'and oh! how sweetly situated in the most delicious of all Vales, the Vale of Clwyd!'¹⁹

On 26 June 1791 Dorothy Wordsworth wrote to her close friend Jane Pollard:

'I often hear from my brother William who is now in Wales where I think he seems so happy that it is probable he will remain there all summer, or a great part of it; who would not be happy enjoying the company of three young ladies in the Vale of Clewyd and without rival? His friend Jones is a charming young man and has FIVE SISTERS, three of whom are at home at present, then there are mountains, rivers, woods and rocks, whose charms without any other inducement would be sufficient to tempt William to continue amongst as long as possible'.²⁰

While enjoying the summer the two young men explored North Wales, met the noted travel writer Thomas Pennant and stirred by Pennant's description of an ascent of Snowdon decided to climb it at night in order to see the sun rise from its peak.²¹ Wordsworth gives a vivid description of this climb in Book 14 of the *Prelude* balancing it with the 'Crossing of the Alps' in Book 6.²²

In 1792 William was once again in France walking extensively along the banks of the Loire and he invited Robert to join him at Blois. Robert, however, decided to take up a teaching post at Bangor which would keep him in Wales until Christmas.²³

In 1793 an old school friend of William wanted to make a tour of the west of England and Wales and invited William to accompany him offering to pay his travelling expenses. Wordsworth was delighted to do so. Unfortunately when they were approaching Salisbury they had an accident in which their light gig was smashed beyond repair. His friend Calvert decided to ride back home but William continued on foot alone. On reaching Wales he travelled north and by the 30 August arrived at Jones' home where, Dorothy notes in a letter to her friend Jane 'he is now quietly sitting down in the Vale of Clwyd ... and passes his time as happily as he could desire with his Friend Jones the companion of his continental Tour'.²⁴

Robert frequently visited the Wordsworths both at Grasmere and later at Rydal Mount; in both places Robert would have met many of the Wordsworth's illustrious friends, among them Sir Walter Scott and William Coleridge. In September of 1800 Jones visited Grasmere on the 13th and then again a few days later. Jones returned again on the Friday 19th September. Jones stayed with us until Friday 26th September. Coleridge came on Tuesday 23rd and went home with Jones'.²⁵

¹⁶ WL 90.

¹⁷ WL 91.

¹⁸ Kenneth R. Johnson, *The Hidden Wordsworth*, 264.

¹⁹ WLL 25.

²⁰ WLL 14. See *Letters of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. A. G. Hill (Oxford, 1985), 168 for the complete letter.

²¹ WL 91-2.

²² *The Prelude* 14 in PW, 583f; Ibid. 6 in PW, 536.

²³ WL 112.

²⁴ WLL 24-5; WL 130-1.

²⁵ Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Grasmere Journal* (1987), 42, 43.

Blomfield mistakenly suggests that Robert went abroad again with Wordsworth in 1802.²⁶ But Blomfield had based his supposition on the sonnet Wordsworth wrote on that occasion which, though addressed to Jones, was referring not to Wordsworth's current journey from Calais to Ardres but to that other one in 1790.

Jones, as from Calais southwards you and I
Went pacing side by side this public way,
Streamed with the pomp of a too credulous day,
When faith was pledged to new-born liberty.²⁷

Wordsworth is referring of course to Bastille Day, July, 1790.

Such was the young man, athletic, intelligent and charming who was appointed to St Mary's Souldern in December 1806. He continued however to live at his home, Plas-yn-Llan but set things in motion to improve the money payment in lieu of tithes which, based in the 17th century on the then prevailing price of corn, was now worth very little. In a letter to St John's, Cambridge he writes:

'at the beginning of my Incumbency I set aside an old composition which was paid and acquiesced in by my more immediate predecessor Mr. Horseman and all his predecessors for the last 130 years. The old composition for tithes amounted to £122 and their present value is considerably more than £300 per annum besides the Glebe which consists of about 135 acres'.²⁸

A paper of c. 1800 compiled by Mr. Bond, St John's Bursar, states 'In Soulderne Parish there are 5 acres of enclosed glebe arable and about 4 acres pasture, with orchard, two kitchen gardens and Churchyard. In all about 11 acres contiguous to the House.'²⁹

In March 1807 Robert Jones wrote to Bishop Charles Moss 'this living has for a long time laboured under the disadvantage of a fixed money payment by no means adequate to the present value of the Tithes which hath been quietly acquiesced in by former Rectors.'³⁰

In fact Mr. Horseman's son had stated that 'My Father always supposed that the decree in Chancery might be set aside, but was deterred from making the attempt by the fear of the expense and consequent ill will of the parishioners. For his forbearance he never received any compliment or compensation. His notion was that the living might be doubled'.³¹

This 'notion' was correct; Mr. Bond reported that the value of the living in c.1800 was £195 and with Taxes and Tenths deducted was £170, but that in his opinion 'if the 1,270 acres of land divided between arable and grass were properly tithed, at say 6s. an acre for arable and 4s. an acre for grass, then the net value would be £385 15s. 0d.'

William Wing wrote of Horseman, 'This noted and quaint character, while he fought successfully the battles of his clerical brethren against the rapacity of lay landowners and improprators, so neglected his own privileges as Rector of Souldern, that his immediate successor raised the value of his incumbency at least £200 per annum by simply looking after his just revenues.'³²

²⁶ DB 83.

²⁷ *Sonnets Dedicated to National Independence & Liberty* III in PW, 241.

²⁸ DB 92.

²⁹ DB 93.

³⁰ Oxfordshire Record Office, MS Oxf. Dioc. (henceforth OD) c. 658 1a.

³¹ DB 94.

³² DB 93-4.

³³ W.Wing, Appendix to *Antiquities of Steeple Aston*, N. Oxf. Arch. Soc. Trans. xxii (1887).

In the letter of March 1807 already mentioned Robert asks for a certificate of non-residence on the grounds that the buildings were dilapidated and because of incipient fears of hostility from his parishioners over his attempt to improve the rate of payment in lieu of tithes.

He wrote again on 17 March from Wales stating that his curate Sir William Clerke was looking after the Parish, and that he had not yet signed the Bill for the enclosing of the Parish of Fritwell 'but that the enclosure should be highly advantageous to the Living of Souldern'.³⁴

By April he had gone to Cambridge to consult with the Master and Senior Fellows about selling some property in Fritwell in order to redeem the land tax on the Rectory of Souldern.³⁵

It is not clear whether Robert received a certificate of non-residence or not but he continued to live in Wales occasionally visiting Cambridge. Writing again from Cambridge in May 1807 he stated that his glebe consisted of 11 acres in Souldern and about 60 statute acres in the open fields of Fritwell, of which he proposed selling about 8 acres near the village of Fritwell along with the cottage and garden in the same parish. He reckoned on getting £30 per acre, sufficient to redeem the land tax in both parishes:

'my allotment in Fritwell if the Enclosure Bill has passed will be within a quarter of a mile of the house and home stall at Souldern and only separated from the Souldern part of the Glebe by the Turnpike road from Bicester to Aynho; nor will any new Building be necessary in consequence of the Enclosure'.³⁶

Between March 1807 and January of the following year there was a constant exchange of letters between the Bishop and Robert, the latter continuing his plea for a certificate of non-residence, chiefly on the grounds that the house was not fit for habitation. There had been in the early 19th century an increase of legislative activity concerning clerical residence³⁷ so it was not surprising that by October 1807 Bishop Charles' patience was wearing very thin. He asked Robert to explain his continued non-residency. The rough draft of his letter begins, 'Sir, I am not a little surprised at the tenor of your letter and particularly after the Indulgence I have shown you' and went on to point out that the house had been inhabited by his predecessor until the day of his death. He went on to ask that if repairs were needed why had they not been done that summer. He continues 'I might have deferred summoning you to residence for a few weeks until you had been a twelvemonth in possession of your preferment had it not been for an injunction which I had lately received from the Privy Council.' He ends by saying that he would have to bring the provisions of the Residence Act against him if he did not immediately take up residence in Souldern, and in a postscript to his secretary lets his annoyance towards Robert show by adding '(I would omit the mention of authority because, if he does not know it already, he will soon find out)'.³⁸

Robert's reply was curt. He was engaged in a Curacy in the neighbourhood of his home. Sir William Clerke took very good care of the church at Souldern; the house was no fit habitation for a clergy man and that he 'meant to do something about it the following summer and would set out for Souldern the following day'.³⁹

³⁴ OD c. 658 2.

³⁵ OD c. 658 3.

³⁶ OD c. 658 4.

³⁷ Diana McClatchey, *Oxfordshire Clergy 1777-1869* (Oxford, 1960), 30-8.

³⁸ OD c. 658 56.

³⁹ OD c. 658 55.

Mr. Bond in his report to Cambridge had said nothing about the house being uninhabitable, just that 'The house is of stone, rough as to workmanship, old and rather large, the ground rooms awkwardly disposed'.⁴⁰

Robert's letter in November (from Souldern) ends on an arrogant note: 'it is perhaps unnecessary for me to add that by quitting my usual Place of Residence for this place immediately after the Receipt of your Lordship's letter of the 24th of last month and complying with your wishes which I am not more [~~'less'~~ crossed out] in duty bound than by Inclination disposed to do I am so far from laying the Residence Act in force against me that I am saving you that trouble.'⁴¹

According to a terrier of 1638 the dwelling house at that time was 'new built, with two Barnes and a stable in good repair'.

Blomfield fills in the details saying that the Pre-Reformation house consisted of 'a hall in the centre with a solar at one end, and a buttery, cellar and kitchen at the other. A small staircase with a small projecting gable in the centre of the house, led out of the hall into the upper apartments [and that] Mr. Harding, rector (1642-48) had added to it on the south side the parsonage house referred to as "new-built."⁴²

The Churchwardens in their yearly returns from the late 18th century and during Robert's tenancy always stated that the 'Church and Parsonage House and outhouses thereto belonging are in good repair'. It was not until 1828 that they noted 'all well excepting the Rectory House now under repair but nearly finished'.⁴³

In January 1808 Robert invokes the Gilbert Act which allowed money to be advanced or borrowed for the repair or rebuilding of premises for the benefit of the clergy and once again asks for a Licence of absence.⁴⁴ The Bishop cautiously replies that he would be delighted to enable him to raise the necessary money but that he must first receive the proper papers and proof that the work had actually begun. He makes the further proviso that Robert is to stay in the neighbourhood either in Souldern itself or in a neighbouring parish, adding as a parting shot, 'I see no reason for your removing to a distance, and it certainly will be in your interest that the workmen should be under your constant and immediate view and attendance.'⁴⁵

This reply in no way suited Robert who now wrote at length to ask for a licence for non-residency until May 1809. He explained that he could not properly fulfil his duties at Souldern while the repairs were going on, that he really had to go to Wales to live with his mother (one of the best of mothers who is far advanced in years) and with his sisters, that he would be usefully employed as curate as before. He repeats that no one could serve the parish of Souldern better than his curate, Sir William Clerke, who was resident at Fritwell and that since anyway the farmers were so incensed at the recent enforcement of his rights regarding tithes that it would be better if he stayed away until 'a little time and absence would effectually heal' their irritation. (He had forgotten that he had said in an earlier letter that 'All the occupiers and proprietors of land in the Parish have at last agreed not to resist my claims'.⁴⁶) He ends by laying out the value of the living; the composition for tithes came to £435; his gross income would then be £631 and after deductions for various taxes and

⁴⁰ DB 94.

⁴¹ OD c. 658 57.

⁴² DB 95.

⁴³ Oxfordshire Record Office, M.S.Oxon. Archd. Papers c.102 Churchwardens' Presentments.

⁴⁴ OD c. 658 59.

⁴⁵ OD c. 658 60.

⁴⁶ OD c. 658.59.



Fig. 1. Souldern Parsonage. DB, plate after p. 98.

interest and part of the Principal of £500 raised for repairs, he would have a net income of £500 a year.⁴⁷ The Bishop gave in and issued a licence of absence until March 1809.⁴⁸

It would seem that the Bishop and Jones were at cross purposes; the Parsonage (Fig. 1) was evidently adequate for living in but Jones was perhaps thinking on the lines of Wordsworth's (and Coleridge's) view that 'among the benefits from a Church establishment of endowments corresponding with the wealth of the county to which it belongs, may be reckoned as eminently important, the examples of civility and refinement which the clergy ... afford to the whole people.' Wordsworth adds that 'the established clergy [were] the principal bulwark against barbarism.'

He continues with a description of his ideal, 'a parsonage house generally stands not far from the church: this proximity imposes favourable restraints, and sometimes suggests an affecting union of the accommodations and elegancies of life with outward signs of piety and mortality'.

He added: 'The precincts of an old residence must be treated by ecclesiastics with respect, both from prudence and necessity'.⁴⁹ Possibly influenced by this view Robert proceeded to spend the money raised by improving the south front rather than making interior changes.⁵⁰ The terrier of 1811 describes the house as slated, with a dairy adjoining and two thatched stables and a pleasure ground in front of the house. A barn of two bays and a

⁴⁷ OD c. 658.61.

⁴⁸ Oxfordshire Record Office MS. d.d. Par. Souldern b.13 item d.

⁴⁹ PW 723.

⁵⁰ DB 98.

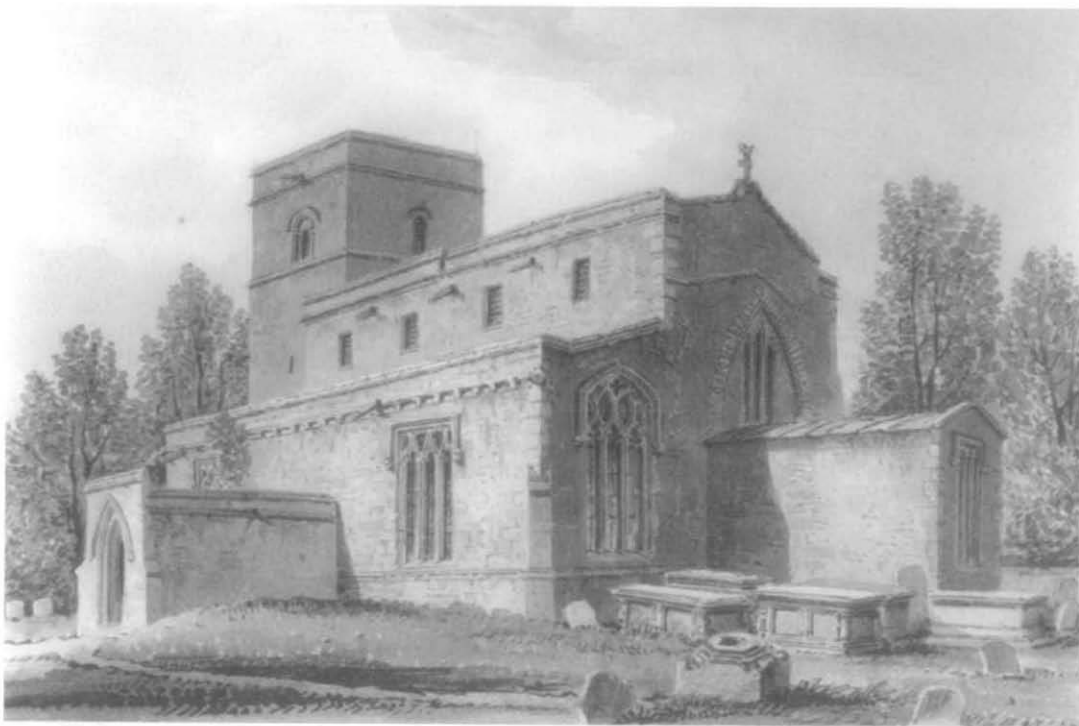


Fig. 2. South-east view of the church in 1823, by J. Buckler. Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. a 68, f. 484.

Cowhouse, both thatched, were built by Jones in 1810 as were two slated necessities and a stone walled garden for fruit trees on the north, extending from the north-east to the north-west, which with an already existing orchard and nursery for trees comprised two acres of land; furthermore there also existed the dairy ground a paddock a spinney and an established pond all together extending over more than three acres.

Earlier in 1808 in Fritwell Jones had built a slated Barn of five Bays with a slated stable adjoining it; between 1808 and 1809 he had had extensive quickset hedges set up in the glebe at Fritwell. In 1810 he built two thatched hovels and walled with stone both the farmyard and the Stackyard.⁵¹

How much all this cost is not known; the original amount borrowed was £662 6s. 10d.,⁵² a strangely precise amount; later Jones was to explain his mounting debts on these improvements.

Presumably Jones took up residence in March 1809 when his licence for absence expired, but the first sign that he was actually living in Souldern was in 1810 when he attended a Vestry meeting for the first time;⁵³ for the next thirteen years according to his own statement he remained in Souldern.⁵⁴

⁵¹ DB 95 (Terrier of 1811).

⁵² OD c.435, 32–6.

⁵³ DB 82.

⁵⁴ OD c. 429 f.130.

In July 1820 Wordsworth and a group of friends decided to re-trace the steps of his earlier tour across France and Switzerland. On their journey to Dover they visited Souldern where they found their once athletic friend grown soft and very fat, no longer fit for a walking tour even if he had been free to go; while they were in Souldern news that Robert's mother had died reached them and leaving his friends Robert hastened to Plas-yn-Llan.⁵⁵

Wordsworth was impressed by Robert's dwelling which so closely exemplified his own views on how a parsonage should look, and while there composed a sonnet entitled *A Parsonage in Oxfordshire* in which he comments in a philosophical manner on the absence of a dividing wall or boundary between the churchyard (Fig. 2) and his friend's garden.⁵⁶ In later years he recalled the visit: 'With pleasure I recall ... the residence of an old and much-valued friend in Oxfordshire. The house and church stand parallel to each other, at a small distance; a circular lawn or rather grass-plot, spreads between them; shrubs and trees curve from each side of the dwelling, veiling, but not hiding, the church. From the front of this dwelling, no part of the burial-ground is seen; but as you wind by the side of the shrubs towards the steeple-end of the church, the eye catches a single, small, low, monumental headstone, moss-grown, sinking into, and gently inclining towards the earth. Advance, and the churchyard, populous and gay with glittering tombstones, opens upon the view.'⁵⁷ This visit in 1820 was the only time that Wordsworth came to Souldern; all other meetings between the two friends took place elsewhere.

In 1816 Edmund Legge succeeded Bishop Charles as Bishop of Oxford; in June 1822 Robert wrote a rather frantic letter to him concerning his fears of his own imminent arrest for debt.⁵⁸ It is clear from this letter that Robert had been living well beyond his means. He put down his money difficulties to debts incurred in repairing the rectory which he had estimated at £500.⁵⁹ He had however also erected several buildings and walls of stone in Fritwell in spite of his assertion in his letter of May 1807, 'nor will any new Buildings be necessary in consequence of the Inclosure'.⁶⁰

When in 1808 he had been granted permission to raise the necessary money he had considered a little over £600 to be sufficient. An indenture had been drawn up between him and Henry Churchill of Deddington for a loan to Robert of £662 6s. 10d. to be repaid at a rate of £5 10s. 0d. per centum if Robert continued to reside in Souldern or £10 0s. 0d. per centum if he did not.⁶¹ He had had 13 years to repay and according to him a gross income of £500,⁶² (though in an earlier letter he had put his income at £613 gross and £500 net⁶³). His debts now amounted to over £3,000,⁶⁴ an enormous sum even if he had under-estimated the cost of all his rebuilding.

His letter to Bishop Legge written in the third person mentions that 'some of his creditors have had recourse to legal measures and your Petitioner hath just cause to fear that his Person will very shortly be arrested and lodged in one of his Majesty's Prisons whereby the Parishioners will be deprived of their Minister.' The Bishop realised that he had to accept Robert Jones' suggestion that the Reverend Francis Clerke, fellow of All Souls, should act as

⁵⁵ WL 534.

⁵⁶ *Miscellaneous Sonnets* VII in PW, 215.

⁵⁷ PW 723.

⁵⁸ OD c. 429 130.

⁵⁹ OD c. 658 57.

⁶⁰ OD c. 658 4.

⁶¹ OD c. 435 32-6.

⁶² OD c. 429 130.

⁶³ OD c. 658 61. For the full text of the mortgage see OD c. 2092 137-9.

⁶⁴ OD c. 2261 item j.

curate in Souldern for a stipend of £55 0s. 0d. with the surplice fees and use of the Rectory house, garden and office, with a further allowance of £6 10s. 0d. towards payment of taxes, and allowed Robert leave of absence until December 1823.⁶⁵ In fact Robert never returned to Souldern and Francis Clerke continued to look after the parish until 1826 when he was succeeded by another fellow of All Soul's College, J.A. Walpole, followed by W. Cotton Risley, fellow of New College, whose stipend was raised to £70 0s. 0d.⁶⁶

There are two documents extant for February 1825: the first is a writ of *fieri facias de bonis ecclesiasticis* by which the creditor of a Church of England incumbent could obtain payment out of the profits of the incumbent's benefice when he had no assets of his own. One of Jones' creditors must have been Lambert Molony of Boulogne-sur-Mer, France, because it seems that he obtained a judgement in court against Robert Jones. Having obtained judgement, a writ to the Sheriff of Oxford against Jones' goods would have followed. The Sheriff would then have made the return that Jones had no goods or chattels out of which the debt could be satisfied, but that Jones was the incumbent of the benefice of Souldern.⁶⁷

Next a writ was issued against the Bishop of Oxford for Jones' debt to be paid from the benefice of Souldern. The Bishop then issued a warrant of sequestration to a named sequestrator, in this case Lambert Molony. Next this warrant was affixed on or near the church door in Souldern. The Bishop remained personally responsible for the execution of the writ and the warrant of sequestration was merely his direction to his agent (Molony) to do what the court had ordered him to do. The second document extant is a bond given by Molony to the Bishop as security for the obligations he will have assumed as sequestrator. Lambert Molony was bound to provide out of the profits of the benefice for all outgoings of the Rectory as well as for the performance of divine service. Once all debts were discharged Molony would have been released from his bond.⁶⁸

By June 1822 Robert had become an absentee Rector and had settled comfortably in Wales. Evidently his 'inconsiderable landed property' being entailed⁶⁹ was safe from the creditors he had left behind.

Robert had long been pressing the Wordsworths to visit him in Wales and now in the summer of 1824 they were at last free to do so. On 24 August they set out from Rydal Mount and eventually reached Llanrwst in the Vale of Conway where they had arranged to meet Robert. They were delighted to see him again, and as he had brought his carriage and a servant it not only made travelling more comfortable but they moved at a leisurely pace which suited everybody. Jones came into his own with his knowledge of Welsh, and his good temper soothed William's irritability which surfaced when travelling; altogether he was 'the best tempered Creature imaginable.'⁷⁰ Jones introduced them to his friends in the Vale of Clwyd and to the famous 'Ladies of Llangollen', Lady Eleanor Butler and the Hon. Sarah Ponsonby. They retraced William and Robert's earlier steps across Snowdonia, revisited Beddgelert, from whence the two had made their midnight ascent of Snowdon thirty-three years earlier, finally parting after thirteen days journeying at Devil's Bridge.⁷¹

Robert still managed to get into financial difficulties; in 1825 Dorothy Wordsworth had the unpleasant duty of writing to Robert about a sum of money owed to her brother, though she softened the request, by implicitly inviting him to Rydal Mount again.

⁶⁵ OD c. 429 131.

⁶⁶ DB 82.

⁶⁷ OD c. 2261 item j; *Halsbury's Laws of England, Ecclesiastical Law*.

⁶⁸ OD c. 2261 item j; *Halsbury's Laws of England, Ecclesiastical Law*.

⁶⁹ OD c. 658 61

⁷⁰ WL 567-8.

⁷¹ WL 568.

'Did you or did you not remit to Masterman and Co. the little sum (I believe about £8 0s. 0d.) which you owed my brother? ... I tell him,' she wrote diplomatically, 'that you have intended coming this summer, and settling all in such a much pleasanter and more convenient way than through the medium of Bankers – yourself by the fireside at Rydal Mount....Will you trust yourself again to my guidance to the Top of one of our Mountains? Or did I give you too much of it last time?'⁷²

A letter from Dorothy in October 1825 speaks of Robert's liking for 'quiet enjoyment' rather than 'bustling pleasures' and calls Glyn Marvin where he had a curacy the 'Valley of Meditation'.⁷³ Already in 1824 Wordsworth had noted his friend's 'plumpness, ruddy cheeks and smiling countenance' and that he seemed to those who met him 'little suited to a hermit living in the Vale of Meditation'.⁷⁴

In May 1826 Wordsworth regretted that he had no hope of visiting Wales that year as they had had notice to quit Rydal Mount (which did not in the event happen) but he begs his friend 'Do come and see us, we are growing old and ought to make the best of our time to keep up long tried affection.'⁷⁵ Sara Hutchinson wrote in September of that year from Rydal Mount 'we are threatened with a visit from Mr. Coleridge, and have had a letter proposing a visit from William's Welsh friend Mr. Jones.'⁷⁶

By 1832 when Jones once again visited the Wordsworths at Rydal Mount Dorothy paints a picture of him 'fat and roundabout and rosy, and puffing and panting while he climbs the little hill from the road to our house'.⁷⁷ This along with a letter of Dorothy's written to him in October 1825 where she says 'we really were not sorry that you did not arrive in the course of last summer; for you would have had no quiet enjoyment, and you are not made for bustling pleasures' gives a picture of a person grown indolent, out of condition and inclined to introspection, far different from the vigorous athletic person always ready for a walking tour in the company of his close friend.⁷⁸

Robert was still in name Rector of Souldern; licences for non-residence subsequent to the one issued for June 1822 to December 1823 are either not extant or were never issued; however licences do exist spanning the years from March 1831 to 1836, the last issued in March 1835 just a month before Robert's death.⁷⁹ It would seem that he lived more or less permanently in Wales leaving the care of the parish to others.

Robert Jones died in April 1835 at Plas-yn-Llan; a notice appeared in the June issue of the *Gentleman's Magazine* to that effect.⁸⁰ Memorials to some of the Rectors of Souldern are to be found in the church but no sign of affection or memorial followed Robert's death. Wordsworth wrote of their friendship 'Much of the latter part of his life he passed in comparative solitude, which I know was often cheered by remembrance of our youthful adventures, and of the beautiful regions which at home and abroad we had visited together. Our long friendship was never subject to a moment's interruption, and while revising these volumes for the last time, I have been so often reminded of my loss with a not unpleasing sadness that I trust the reader will excuse mention of a man, who well deserves from me something more than so brief a notice.'⁸¹

⁷² *Letters of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. A. G. Hill (Oxford, 1985), 168.

⁷³ WLL 177; *Letters of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. A. G. Hill (Oxford, 1985), 168n.

⁷⁴ W. Wordsworth, *The Prelude: The 1805 Text*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford), 275n.

⁷⁵ Stephen Gill, *W. Wordsworth, a Life* (1989), 351; WL 587.

⁷⁶ WLL 182.

⁷⁷ W. Wordsworth, *The Prelude: The 1805 Text*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford), 275n.

⁷⁸ WLL 177.

⁷⁹ OD d. 174; Oxfordshire Record Office MS Oxf. Archd. Papers b.26 f. 394; Ibid, b51 f.44; OD d.17.

⁸⁰ 'Deceased Clergy', *Gentleman's Magazine*, June 1835.

⁸¹ DB 83.

Wordsworth, who felt things deeply, was still moved to tears two years later while at Lake Como in 1837. 'At Lake Como memories of Robert Jones' (and of Mary and Dorothy on the 1820 tour) 'came upon him as fresh as if they had happened the day before' wrote Dora and that William had confessed to her 'I kept to myself and very often could for my heart's relief have burst into tears'.⁸²

As early as 1820 Wordsworth had summed up this complex friend in his poem

*A Character*⁸³

I marvel how Nature could ever find space
For so many strange contrasts in one human face
There's thought, and no thought, there's paleness and bloom
And bustle and sluggishness, pleasure and gloom.

There's weakness and strength both redundant and vain,
Such strength as, if ever affliction and pain
Could pierce through a temper that's soft to disease,
Would be rational peace – a philosopher's ease.

There's indifference, alike when he fails or succeeds,
And attention full ten times as much as there needs;
Pride where there's no envy, there's so much of joy;
And mildness, and spirit both forward and coy.

There's freedom, and sometimes a diffident stare
Of shame scarcely seeming to know that she's there,
There's virtue, the title it surely can claim,
Yet wants heaven knows what to be worthy the name.

This picture from Nature may seem to depart,
Yet the man would at once run away from your heart;
And I for five centuries right gladly would be
Such an odd, such a kind happy creature, as he.

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⁸² WL 688–9.

⁸³ *Poems of Sentiment and Reflection IV* in PW, 378.