

THOMAS KEN 1637 - 1711

Sometime Rector of St Mary's Church at Brighstone

[Return to contents](#)

The birth of Thomas Ken was during July 1637 in Little Berkhamstead, Herts. His father also Thomas was of the Ken family of Ken Place in Somerset. His mother was the daughter of the poet John Chalkhill. She died when he was four and his father at fourteen. His step sister Anne, and her husband Izaak Walton author of the *Complete Angler*, brought him up in what was a very disturbed period English religious history.

He attended Winchester College from 1651 until 1656. On a stone buttress in the south east corner of the Cloister is carved the name *Tho Ken 1856!* As a student at Hart Hall, Oxford he gained a fellowship at New College in 1657, BA in 1661 and MA in 1664 having been ordained in 1662. After curacy in Oxford he held the living of Little Easton in Essex before moving to St. Mary's at Brighstone in July 1667 staying only until May 1669 before moving on to East Woodhay in Hampshire and Prebendary of Winchester Cathedral.



St Mary's Church, Brighstone

In the shadow of the trees in his rectory garden at Brighstone he wrote

*Awake my Soul, and with the sun
Glory to Thee, my God, this night*

perhaps the two of the best known today his morning and evening hymns.

Awake my soul and with the sun

The full original 11 verses are now seldom printed

1. Awake, my soul, and with the sun
Thy daily stage of duty run
Shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise
To pay thy morning sacrifice
2. Redeem thy mis-spent time that's past,
Live this day as it 'twere thy last:
Improve thy talent with due care;
For the great Day thyself prepare
3. Let all thy converse be sincere,
Thy conscience as the noon-day clear;
Think how all-seeing God thy ways
4. By influence of the light Divine
Let all thy own light in good works shine;
Reflect all heaven's propitious ways

And all thy secret thoughts surveys.

In ardent love and cheerful praise.

5. Wake, and lift up thyself, my heart
And with the angles bear thy part,
Who all night long unwearied sing
High praise to the eternal King.

6. Awake, awake, ye heavenly choir,
May your devotion me inspire,
That I like you my age may spend,
Like you may of my God attend.

7. Glory to thee, who safe hast kept
And hast refreshed me whilst I slept;
Grant Lord, when I from death shall wake
I may of endless light partake.

8. Heaven is dear Lord, where'er thou art,
O never then from me depart;
For to my soul 'tis hell to be
But for one moment void of thee.

9. Lord, I may vows to thee renew;
Scattered my sins as morning dew;
Guard my first springs of thought and will,
And with thyself my spirit fill.

10. Direct, control, suggest, this day
All I design, or do, or say
That all my powers, with all their might,
In thy sole glory may unite.

11. Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
Praise him, all creatures here below,
Praise him above, ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Glory to Thee my God this night

1. Glory to thee, my God, this night.
For all the blessings of the light;
Keep me, O keep me, King of kings,
Beneath thy own almighty wings.

2. Forgive me, Lord for thy dear Son,
The ill that I this day have done,
That with the world, thee, and myself
I, ere I sleep, at peace may be.

3. Teach me to live, that I may dread
The grave as little as my bed;
Teach me to die, that I may
Rise glorious at the awful day.

4. O may my soul of thee repose,
And with sweet sleep my eye-lids close,
Sleep that may me more vigorous make
To serve my God when I awake.

5. When in the night I sleepless lie
My soul with heavenly thoughts supply
Let no ill dreams disturb my rest,
No powers of darkness me molest.

6. You, my blest guardian, whilst I sleep
Close to my bed your vigils keep
Divine love into me install
Stop all the avenues of ill.

7. Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
Praise him, all creatures here below,
Praise him above, ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

William Alexander, Bishop of Derry and Raphoe, said of the hymns; “None are so suitable to the honest pathos and majesty of the English Liturgy; none are so adapted to the character which the English Church has aimed at forming, the sweet reserve, the quiet thoroughness, the penitence which is continuous without being unhopeful.. They are the utterances of a heart which has no contempt for earth, but which is at home among the angels”

Ken had an organ in his room at Winchester but it was his daily practice to sing his morning and evening Hymns, even when alone, to his accompaniment on the lute. He remained in the city for several years, acting as a curate in one of the lowest districts, preparing his *Manual of Prayers for the use of the Scholars of Winchester College* (first published in 1674), and composing hymns. It is a book of sixty-nine pages and Ken advised the boys “Be sure to sing the morning and evening Hymn in your chamber devoutly, remembering that the Psalmist upon happy experience,

assure you that it is a good thing to tell of loving-kindness of the Lord early in the morning and His truth in the night season” The hymns were not printed in the Manual until they were added as an Appendix to the edition in 1695, when the title reads “A Manual... College and all other Devout Christians” To which is added three hymns for Morning, Evening, and Midnight; not in the former editions”.



His “*Hymns for all the Festivals of the Year*” was much praised by Keeble, who was probably indebted to them for the idea of the “Christian Year”. Here is part of Ken's hymn of St Paul:

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| <p>1. Firm his Faith, and lively hope,
Yet Charity has greater Scope;
The last, though lovely all appear'd
Was most endear'd</p> <p>3. To the Great God of Love he pray'd
And never fail'd of gracious Aid;
He sweetly felt that love constrain
To love again.</p> | <p>2. No other, Knowledge he desir'd
But what the love of Jesus fir'd
All worldly Things he counted loss
For Jesus Cross</p> <p>4. He liv'd by Faith, but more by Love,
Had foretasted of the Bliss Above,
Now to be thought by human Mind.
For Love design'd.</p> <p>5. The boundless Length, Breadth, Depth and Height
Of Jesus Love, was his Delight;
In ev'ry Trace he strove to tread,
Where Jesus led.</p> |
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Ken was noted throughout his life for strength of conviction and fidelity to conscience. Appointed in 1679 chaplain to Princess Mary at The Hague, he incurred her husband's displeasure through his out-spokenness, and returned to England. Holding a similar post at the Court of Charles II, his firm hand refused to give the use of his house to Nell Gwynne the king's mistress, is said to have moved the lax but good-natured Monarch to appoint him Bishop of Bath and Wells. In the following reign, true to his colours, he was one of the seven bishops sent to the Tower for refusing to read *The Declaration*, while at the Revolution he was deprived of his See for failure to take the oath of allegiance to the new Sovereign. If it be asked how such a gentle nature could be so firm, the answer lies in Ken's sincerity and prayerfulness. Both points find illustration in his verse. For the former we select:

*Great God of Men requires the heart,
With which but Few will freely part;
When they an Heart acceptable present,
It must be broken, soft, contrite, and rent.*

And for the latter:

*I live, my God to Errors prone,
Thy truth oft tempted to disown;
But I in thee confide,
Thou only art my Guide;
O keep me in the narrow Way,
Which leads to everlasting Day.*

He was given a home by his friend Lord Weymouth at Longleat, where he spent the remainder of his days. He died there on March 19, 1711, and was buried at Frome Selwood two days later. His will states: "As for my religion, I die in the holy, catholick and apostolick faith, professed by the whole Church before the disunion of east and west: more particularly I die in the communion of the Church of England, as it stands distinguished from all Papall and Puritan Innovations, and as it adheres to the doctrines of the Cross." This last phrase is a tacit reference to the doctrines of passive obedience and non-resistance, which he held. The good bishop's modest ambition had been richly fulfilled:

*And should the well-meant songs I leave behind
With Jesus' lovers and acceptance find
'Twill heighten e'en the joys of heaven to know
That in my verse the saints hymn God below.*

Most can name two of the three Bishops, Ken and Wilberforce from the pub name but get stuck on the third. He was George Moberly (1803–1885), the Headmaster of Winchester College from 1835 until 1866 when he resigned to become Rector of St Mary's. He was the incumbent of Brighstone until 1869 when he was appointed Bishop of Salisbury by the Gladstone government.



[Return to contents](#)

[Biography and Further Information](#)