

# SAMUEL WILBERFORCE 1805 - 1873

Sometime Rector of Brighstone

[Return to contents](#)



*Brighstone Church*

Samuel Wilberforce was born at Clapham Common London, the third and favourite son of William Wilberforce a leader in the anti-slave trade. He was educated privately and later at Oriel College, Oxford. He married Emily Sargent, the eldest daughter of the Vicar of Lavington in Sussex during July 1828. The same year he was ordained deacon in Christ Church Cathedral and a year later priested. His curacy was at Cheffendon near Henley. Two years later in 1830 his cousin, Richard Summer, appoints him Rector of Brighstone.

At Brighstone he spent over ten happy years, bringing up his large family and publishing his father's biography. During this period he began to emerge into prominence as a public speaker, both on behalf of the missionary societies, and also as his father's natural successor in the campaign against slavery. This attracted the attention of the Prince Consort and Queen Victoria. Before he had been a year and a half in his parish he had compiled a hymn-book for its use; and as soon as February 28, 1832, there occurs this entry in his diary:

*“Finished hymns and wrote to the Bishop with them”.*

It was published in August 1832 during which month the Bishop of Winchester was again paying a few days visit to the young Rector of Brighstone. A third edition of 2,000 copies was called for by October 1833. In August 1800 Samuel Wilberforce was collated as Canon of Winchester, and two months later he became Rector of Alverstoke.

His wife died in March 1841. Four years after this he was preferred to the Deanery of Westminster, but he remained only a matter of months, for on 30 November 1845 he was consecrated Bishop of Oxford, a position which he was to hold for twenty-four Years.

In 1869 the aged Bishop of Winchester resigned; and Mr Gladstone called Samuel Wilberforce to succeed him. On 16 December, Samuel Wilberforce was enthroned in his Cathedral church of Winchester. But four years later he died at Holmbury, Surrey through a fall from a horse on 19 July 1873. Mr Gladstone wrote to the Queen:

*“.. there can be no doubt that there does not live the man in any of the three kingdoms of your Majesty, who has, by his labours, given such a powerful impulse as the Bishop of Winchester gave to the religious life of the country.”*

Samuel Wilberforce enjoyed exercising influence, dispensing patronage, initiating policies, and effecting reforms; he was blessed with a robust and self-confident temperament that would neither decline advancement nor shrink from responsibility. A large and ornate canopied monument to the Bishop occupies a prominent position in the south transept of the Cathedral at Winchester. Did he deserved the nickname ‘Soapy Sam’ ?

His hymn book which he published while at Brighthstone and was dedicated to his cousin the then Bishop of Winchester contained over 200 hymns. How many he was the author of, added extra verses or edited is not now known.



*Bishop Samuel Wilberforce*

[Return to contents](#)

[Biography and Further Information](#)

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 Brighthstone until 1869 when he was appointed Bishop of Salisbury by the Gladstone government.

