

# A Christmas Connection to Oglethorpe's Parish Church

Here in the United States, James Edward Oglethorpe is known to us as the founder of the colony of Georgia, but most of his life was spent in England where he had deep family roots and significant political involvement. This month's article features a Christmas card from 1975 that makes a connection to Oglethorpe in Surrey, England.

In 1688, Oglethorpe's father acquired an estate (or manor) in Surrey, known as Westbrook. As the only suitable male heir, James Oglethorpe became the squire of Westbrook in 1718. His older brother Theophilus had been exiled for political reasons. In 1722, Oglethorpe was elected as a Member of Parliament and during his campaign to raise awareness of conditions in English prisons, he used the manor house as a venue for political gatherings. He also mortgaged the estate to help finance the establishment of the colony of Georgia as a refuge for the disadvantaged. In 1744, he and his heiress wife, Elizabeth Wright, honeymooned at Westbrook, but the couple never again resided there.

Near Westbrook was Godalming, home to the Oglethorpe's parish church, known as St. Peter and St. Paul. The church is depicted on the front of the Christmas card, which was among records donated by one of the first Coastal Georgia Historical Society presidents, Weyman Huckabee.

The Christmas card was sent to Huckabee as part of an effort to raise funds urgently needed to repair the framework supporting the 400-year-old bells in the church. His contact with Godalming dated from October 1971, when he met Stanley Dedman, the Borough Librarian and Curator of Godalming. Dedman was in Georgia to speak at the biennial conference of the Georgia Library Association on Jekyll Island.



James Edward Oglethorpe



*A View of Godalming Church, in SURRY.*

The Society took this opportunity to invite Dedman to give a lecture on Oglethorpe to its membership. Attracting an audience of over 300, the program was held at Brunswick Junior College, now College of Coastal Georgia.

Accompanied by his wife, Dedman spent three weeks in Georgia, visiting Atlanta, Savannah, and Athens. At the end of their visit, the Dedmans were made honorary citizens of Georgia by Secretary of State Ben Fortson in recognition of the links they had forged between Georgia and Oglethorpe's home in England. A few

years later, when a campaign to repair the framework supporting the bells fell short of its goal, Dedman suggested an appeal to his Georgia friends to close the gap. The parish sold Christmas cards like the one shown here in aid of their project. Ultimately, the campaign was successful. The bells, which were recast in 2017, continue to be rung every Sunday.