

High Stewards of Abingdon Abbey before and after Dissolution.

The high stewardship started as a purely artificial device by which the king could reward his servants, courtiers and ministers at the abbey's expense. Such people amassed large portfolios of minor offices which could be bought and sold and, taken together, could make them very rich. There were no fixed duties, but the post did allow oversight and influence. Nominally conferred by 'the abbot and convent' but they had no choice. The salary was about £10 per year - perhaps £50,000 today. Several of the high stewards had been fellow-members of the king's privy chamber and were linked by marriage and financial dealings.

Year	Name	Comment	Reference
1522	Sir Thomas Fettiplace	Of Compton Beauchamp. Courtier and diplomat. D. 1523 and buried in the Abbey.	Margaret Yates, <i>Town and Countryside in Western Berkshire, 1327-1600</i> (2007) pp. 55, 58; http://www.berkshirehistory.com/bios/tfettiplacejr.html
To 1528	Sir William Compton	Of king's privy chamber. Main interests were in the Midlands, D. 1528	G. W. Bernard, 'The Rise of Sir William Compton, Early Tudor Courtier', <i>The English Historical Review</i> , 96 (1981), pp. 754-777
To 1534?	Sir William Essex	Of king's household. Of Lambourn. Requested the office, but not certain it was ever granted. Lawsuits against the abbot in 1534, which he won. This may have prompted his ceasing to be high steward, if he ever was. Died 1548	I.S. Leadam (ed), <i>Select Cases in Star Chamber</i> , Selden Society Vol 16 (1902) pp. 172-4; <i>The Commons 1509-1558</i> (History of Parliament) ii 106-7; <i>Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 4: 1524-1530</i> (1875), 2 July 1528 No 4454
To 1536	Henry Norris	Of privy chamber; diplomat and administrator. Received £10 per year as high steward. Executed 1636 allegedly for adultery with Anne Boleyn, actually for opposition to Thomas Cromwell. Ancestor of future Earls of Abingdon.	<i>Letters and Papers, Vol 10: January-June 1536</i> (1887), pp. 349-371; Dictionary of National Biography.

To 1637	Thomas Duke of Norfolk	Seems to have held the position jointly with Norris before his death. Attainted 1546 at which time it was wrongly assumed he still held the high stewardship.	<i>Letters and Papers, Vol 8: 1535 No 401, 17 March 1535; Vol 12 Part 1: January-May 1537, 26 Jan 1537; Vol 21 Part 2 1546 No 556 p. 289.</i>
To 1551 or 2	Viscount Beauchamp, later Duke of Somerset and regent for Edward VI	Obtained, presumably bought, the position from Norfolk 1537. Executed 1552.	<i>Letters and Papers Vol 12 Part 1: January-May 1537, 26 Jan 1537; Decree of Court of Augmentations, 12 February 1537, E 315/105/54b, 56.</i>
1538-1540	Thomas Cromwell	Minister in charge of dissolutions. Seems to have eclipsed Beauchamp. Executed 1540. His local representative was John Wellesbourne, who d. 1547.	<i>Letters and Papers, Vol 14 Part 1: January-July 1539, Augm. Book 252, II. ff. 32; Vol 15 1540, Augm. Book 1032 I.</i>
1551?-1566	Sir John Mason	Abingdon-born, and held local property (though resident in Hampshire). Diplomat and administrator. The high stewardship may have been assumed rather than granted, and he expressly extended it to cover the town. D. 1566	Patrick Fraser Tytler, <i>England under the reigns of Edward VI and Mary</i> (1839), pp. 361-2

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