Biography of William Gibbs, Benefactor of St Michael's, Mount Dinham.

William Gibbs (1790-1875) made a fortune in business, in particular by importing guano from islands on the Pacific coast of South America. The Agricultural Revolution of the 18th century had shown how farming could feed a growing population, but modern artificial fertilizers were still in the future. Gibbs took a business risk when in 1842 he began the long-distance importing of bird manure, but it was a risk which benefited many farmers and those who ate their produce.

Gibbs's father had been in the cloth business; among a number of other interests was a cloth mill at Exwick. After his own success in business, William Gibbs bought the estate at Tyntesfield near Bristol, and from 1863 onwards began to rebuild the house, which he also provided with a fine Gothic chapel rather in the style of Sainte-Chapelle in Paris. The house is now owned by the National Trust and open to the public.

In the chapel at Tyntesfield, and in other churches founded by the Gibbs family, worship was offered in the Anglo-Catholic tradition renewed in the 1830s and following decades by the Oxford Movement, a school of thought which continues to emphasize the continuity of the modern Church of England faith and practice with that of the earliest Christians.

The Gibbs family was philanthropic and devout, and founded churches in many parts of the country. William Gibbs personally paid for the grand polychrome brick chapel at Keble College in Oxford, a college founded both to commemorate the priest-poet John Keble, who in 1833 had started the Oxford Movement, and also to help provide university education to those unable to bear the cost of attending one of the University's older colleges.

William Gibbs died in 1875 and is buried at Wraxall, the parish church of the Tyntesfield estate, but a life-size monument here at St Michael's church was part of the scheme of decoration devised by his family and set up to commemorate a man who was genuinely loved by those who knew him.