

An Anglican Glossary

Ornamental Hermit

Hermits (Anchorites and Anchoresses) were a respected part of the religious expression of the early Church in England. However, during the 18th and early 19th centuries, such practices waned.

Wealthy landowners who liked to decorate their vast estates with small Greek temples and other artificial features, added the Ornamental Hermit, a man hired to live in a hut or cave and pretends to be a religious recluse. He was provided with food and a robe. His contract required him to remain for a specific length of time after which he would be paid a sum of money. His sole purpose was to look and act the part for visitors to the estate as a sort of theme park attraction.

What this tells us about the English aristocracy at the time was that an ancient religious tradition was turned into an artificial exhibit. Too often religion was relegated to public ceremonies.



Hermitages were huts, caves or spaces built into mounds.



Edith Sitwell, one of the famous family of British writers, has several anecdotes about "hermits" in her delightful book *"English Eccentrics."*