

North Luffenham

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Church Affairs in North Luffenham, 1574 to 1625.

Robert Johnson became Rector of North Luffenham on 16 April 1574, and continued to hold the living until his decease which may in all probability be fixed for 21 July 1625. The glimpse which is here given of the state of the parish during this long incumbency has been derived mainly from the Diocesan Archives at Peterborough and specially from the records of the Archdeaconry of Northampton, but there are still a great many MSS of this period which have not yet been searched for this purpose.

If it be objected to this method of dealing with the history of a parish that only the misdeeds of the villagers are recorded whereas their good characteristics are left unmentioned the answer is a simple one: - The age commonly misnamed the Reformation was a destructive one, it was more occupied in pulling down the work of preceding centuries than in ~~building up a new~~ ^{reposing an ancient} structure: There is indeed nothing to record at this time but the decay of the material as well as of the spiritual elements of Church life: the building and its services were alike neglected with the consequent effect upon the life of the community, that the religious fervour of mediæval times albeit accompanied with a modicum of superstition had its place taken by the fanaticism of puritanism whose constructive efforts must be sought elsewhere than in the religious ecclesiastical sphere. It may be safely said of Robert Johnson that the good he did lives after him and that the evil was interred with his bones.

declared excommunicate in the year, 1612, following that when the offence was committed. On 12 March 1623 Daniel Gibson, brother to Ann Gibson who had married Jonathan Todge the Curate, was seen drunk in Stamford St Martin's by three witnesses who accordingly reported him. In those days excommunication was not a sentence to be trifled with, the mere fact of a person remaining excommunicate as exemplified by the case of Anthony King in 1604 was an offence as was also having dealings with any such person: John Odan, the keeper of the village alehouse, is cited for knowingly entertaining John Shredd, when excommunicate, in his house in 1610: and a third instance is in 1618 when Ffaustius Sculthorpe an excommunicate has dealings with several others, one of whom pleads that it was upon necessity, for he only sold his ewes unto Sculthorpe to the intent to be kept of him. Four cases of refusing to pay tithes for the repair of the Church; and one charge of breach of trust occurs.

The Gretua Green of Rutland in those days was Stowe in Lincolnshire, probably the chapelry in the parish of Barholme; there are numerous instances of irregular marriages taking place there from other parts of the county but that of William Charter and Sibyl Blackburke in 1588 at which John Bollard was present is the only one on record from North Luffenham. Couples were not always married at their own church for John Parkies of North Luffenham and Mary Sharman of Eppingham daughter of Robert Shereman of Grestham were granted a license in 1608 to get married at Pillou. In 1611 William Tomson of Langham and Ann daughter of Clement Colson and Margery his wife of North Luffenham had entered into a marriage contract which the parents of Ann Colson for some season hindered after the Canon had been asked although they had previously given their consent: a suit was therefore brought against them to overcome their obduracy but apparently this effort was unsuccessful as Ann Colson was wedded to Thomas Coole in 1616.

A fight in the churchyard between Anthony whose master was named Ward and Nicholas Walgrave, in which the said Walgrave seriously damaged the said Anthony's head in 1581 is the last item of the ancient news of this kind to be noticed.

few sticks on the Saboth day." Thomas Freeman did not come to church as he ought in 1617 but frequented Feast towns upon Saboth days, and was guilty of drunkenness. In 1624 Abel Hainworth and George Andrew committed the indiscretion of running a race upon the Lords Day in the morning, for which they might have quoted apostolic precedent, had they been wary enough. All this savours of the Puritan scrupulosity which caused the Presbyterian Barber to hang his cat for Sabbath mouse-catching:-

'Poor puss must suffer on the Monday
For catching mice upon the Sunday'

The next serious charge recorded is that of slander. In 1581 Thomas Reddall, a North Luffenham man, was guilty of open railing at Uppingham: in 1583 William Andrews is presented for blaspheming the name of God and for being a scold or curser. Andrew Tyler and Isabel Griffin are each accused of defaming John Lyon in 1589: but the Parson seems to have come in for the greatest share of abuse, three instances of this may be given (1) in 1576 Elizabeth Lion, (possibly the future wife of ~~John Bassett the lord of the town whom he married in 1585 and was the daughter of~~ John Lyon, a family connected by marriage with the Bassetts, lords of the town of North Luffenham) uttered slanderous words against M^r Johnson the parson there, as in cursing of him, saying 'The devil gnaw thy bones' and 'The devil take thee' with such like: she had to beg pardon in the form 'I aske M^r Johnsons forgiveness and I pray God to forgive me for speaking of such rude words against him. (2) In 1592 Mary Bradfield, Dorothy Hunt, and Elizabeth Hunt spread a slanderous libell tending to the defamiation of M^r Johnson, for neglecting to make amends for this offence they were excommunicated and found it hard to regain favour (3) Clement Colson and Keneleu Earle abused the minister M^r Johnson in slanderous speeches in 1611. and it cost them much both in pocket and vexation before they were received back. Besides these three instances, the details of the Tithe Suit which

(Rull. Mag. I. 2, 4, 5)

have already been set forth in a separate paper, shew what friction existed between the Rector and his influential parishioners about the year 1588. In 1612 John Shred whose name has already been mentioned was charged with blaspheming of the Name of God and for not coming to the divine service orderly. Another character of the same kind was Christopher Bickardye, a great-swearer and blasphemer of the Name of God when he is in his ale or full of drink, he too was

declared

Evening Service for in 1612 Brian Norden was presented for his abuse in the church on the sabbath day after the Second Lesson was read in praying and threatening speeches when there was a penance in doing. In 1624 Abel Hainsworth behaved disorderly in the church in the tyme of divine service.

By 1586 the services on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays had been stopped. In 1620 Thomas Munton was ~~to~~ drunk at Midsummer tyme last past and came so to church in evening prayer tyme and in the middle of prayers he spewed in the church, and then Rowland his father, being churchwarden, did take him out of the church and lead him home, he not being able to go alone: for this offence Thomas Munton had to perform penance. The same year we find Robert Ffalkner brawling and railing against the Wardens and Sidesmen in the church. Offenders of a different type were Thomas Litchly in 1611 sleeping in the church in the tyme of divine service and John Andrews in 1624 for unseemly sleeping in the church. The Rector, in 1586, doth not in tyme of baptism use the signe of crossing the children: in 1583 for some reason unexplained he refused to church Margaret Wyuge, and in 1593 Elizabeth wife of Faustin Sculthorpe refused to give God Thanks after her child burth. We find John Luffe and Wit-crowe Odam getting married without the banns being thrice asked, in 1586. At a Court held in the church on 9 July 1611 the Rector of Wakerley was accused before the Archdeacon of not being resident there as he ought to have done but hath been at Glenfield in the county of Leicester (where it would appear he was also Rector): as a result he is ordered to preach every Sunday in his parish according to the Canons.

There 38 presentments regarding immorality of various kinds during this incumbency and there must have been but a small proportion of the whole number of cases as the records are far from being complete. The next charge to which most importance is attached is that of profaning the Sabbath or the Lords Day as it is called indifferently. In 1585 five men are presented for amusing themselves at some pastime before Evening Prayer on the Sabbath Day: in 1593 three men mowed grass on this day: in 1614 William Ireland set his servant to hack upon Michaelmas Day at Lyndon in Evening Prayer tyme: ~~re~~ John Munton is accused of going hedging in 1616, but explains that "he did but cut a

few

