

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 Sibill Blackburke in 1588 at which John Bollaud 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.