North Luffenham

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Church Affairs in North Luffenhams, 1574 to 1625.

Robert Johnson became Rector of North Luffenhams 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 structure: there is indeed nothing to record at this time but the decay of the material as well as the spiritual element 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, 1622, following that when the offence was committed. On 12 March 1623 Daniel Gilson, brother to Ann Gilson who had married Jonathan Tooke, 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 Odlin, the keeper of the village alehouse, is cited for knowingly entertaining John Shread when excommunicate, in his house in 1610: and a third instance is in 1618 when Francis Sculthorpe an excommunicate had dealings with several others, one of whom pleaded that it was upon necessity for he only sold his eggs 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 occurred.

The Gravel Green of Rilstone in those days was stone in Lincolnshire, probably the chapel of the parish of Barkshill; there are numerous instances of irregular marriages taking place there from other parts of the country but that of William Chater and Sibyl Blackmore 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 Parkeius of North Luffenham and Mary Sharman of Eypeingham daughter of Robert Sherman of Grisward were granted a license in 1608 to get married at Pillon. 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 reason hindered after the banns had been asked although they had previously given their consent: a suit was therefore brought against them to overcome their decision but apparently the effort was unsuccessful as Ann Colson was wedded to Thomas Cole in 1616.

A fight in the churchyard between Anthony whose marker 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 Sabbath day." Thomas Freeman does not come to church as he ought in 1617 but frequented Feast houses upon Sabbath days, and was guilty of drunkenness. In 1624 Abel Hainworth and George Andrew committed the indignation of running a race upon the Lord's Day in the morning, for which they might have quoted apostolic precedent, had they been wary enough. All this savours of the Puritan smallness which caused the Presbyterian barber to hang his cat for Sabbath mouse-catchers:

"Poor men 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 Luffenhaw man, was guilty of open railing at Uppingham: in 1583 William Andrews is prevented for blasphemying the name of God and for being a scold or curarr. 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 Lyon, (formerly the future wife of John Barrett, the lord of the town) he accused in 1585 and his daughter, a family connected by marriage with the Barretts, lords of the town of North Luffenhaw) uttered slanderous words against Mr. Johnson the Parson there, as in accusing of him, saying "the devil grace thy bones" and "the devil take thee with such like: she had to beg pardon in the form "I ask Mr. Johnson forgive me and I pray God to forgive me for speaking of such rude words against him. (2) In 1592 Mary Brasfield, Dorothy Hunt, and Elizabeth Hunt spread a slanderous libel leading to the defamation of Mr. Johnson, for neglecting to make amends for the offence they were excommunicated and found it hard to regain favour. (3) Clement Colson and Kerelius Earle abused the minister Mr. Johnson in slanderous speeches in 1611, and I cost them much both in pocket and vexation before they were received back. Besides these three instances, the details of the Tithe Suit which have already been set forth in a separate paper show what friction existed between the Reclav and his influential patronisers about the year 1588. In 1617 John Shred whose name has already been mentioned was charged with blasphemying of the Name of God and for not coming to the divine service orderly. Another character of the same kind was Christopher Bickendyne, a great-swearer and blasphemer of the Name of God when he is in his ale or full of drink, he too was

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Evening Service for in 1612 Brian Norden was prosecuted for his
abuse in the church on the Sabbath day after the Second Lesson was
read in prayers and threatening speeches when there was a penance
in doing. In 1624 Abel Hainesworth was suspected for disorderly in the
church in the time of divine service.

By 1586 the services on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays
had been stopped. In 1590 Thomas Munson was drunk at Mid
summer time last past and came to church in evening prayer
time 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 Munson had to perform penance. The same year we
find Robert Fulkner brawling and railing against the warden
and sidesmen in the church. Offenders of a different type were
Thomas littleby in 1611 sleeping in the church in the time of
divine service and John Andrews in 1624 for unlawfully sleeping
in the church. The Rector in 1586, both not in time of baptism
use the sign of crossing the children: in 1583 for some reason
unexplained he refused to church Margaret Wyunge, and in 1593
Elizabeth wife of Francis Sclapeore refused to give God thanks after
her child birth. We find John Luffe and William Odum getting
married without the banns being thrice asked, in 1586. At a Court
held in the church on 9 July 1611 the Rector of Walkerley was
accused before the Archdeacons of not being resident there as he ought
to have done but hath been at Elandfield 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 Canon.

These 38 presentations regarding immorality of various kinds
during this incumbency are those much have been by 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 pro-
faning the Sabbath or the Lord's Day as it is called indifferently. In 1585
five men are prosecuted for amusing themselves at some pastime before
Evening Prayer on the Sabbath Day: in 1593 three men moved grass on
this day: in 1614 William Ireland set his servant to stack upon Michael
was Day at Lyndon in Evening Prayer time: to John Munson
accused of going hedges in 1616, but explains that he did but cut a
few.
his household who from 1586 onwards ceased to attend the church services and gradually drifted into membership with the English Romanists that becoming organized as a separate religious body. His property in North Luffenham, assessed worth about £90 a year, was confiscated by the Elizabethan Government in 1601 and he was allowed to keep £30 a year only for his own needs. This action can only have embittered his feelings towards the authorities for in 1605 we are told that James Bigby had daily resort of paupers and kept 'warrant holes' and had urinated his hom in the church yard during service time. — Attention is drawn in 1586 to the carelessness of the Rector in ministering the Communion with both hands together, and to the fact that Mr Rushbrooke, Schoolmaster at Oakham; with his wife used to leave his own parish church oftentimes to communicate with Mr Johnson at North Luffenham, as he did at other times with Mr Gibson (another Puritan rector) at Riddlington; Evidently North Luffenham had become a center of Puritan influence. Mr Johnson was also reported in 1588 for absconding himself from the saying of Morning Prayer — it was a favourite device with Puritan clergy to disfigure the Church Service by causing it to be taken in their absence so that greater importance might be given to the Sermon when they came in to preach. In 1586 the Warden's report that their Rector 'is thought unmeet to preach for that the bishop would not make him minister: a canard which although it was untrue (for Robert Johnson was ordained priest by both of Edmund Seaver in 24 June 1568 and had also been licensed to preach) yet was formally pleaded in the Archers Court in the suit of Johnson v. Hunt which caused so much strife in the parish in 1588. All this commotion shows that Robert Johnson's minstary was not acceptable to his parishioners.

As regards Evening Prayer we find Simon Gooden and Thomas Hunt absconding themselves on the Sabbath and Holy Days of 1587. It appears that it was the custom during this period for penance (when it was adjured) to be performed after the Second Lesson at Evening
The Diocesan Authorities, the Parson, and the lay parochial officials. The Wardens of North Luffenham were called to order in 1578 for making no presentment, that is, they reported none of the misdoers of the parish to the Bishop through the Archdeacon: the same occurred in the years 1592 and 1606. In 1582 the Wardens lacked a Register Book where John Hunt it appeared was keeping away. Having presented their Rector in 1583 for a dereliction of duty, they are ordered finally to support the charges they have made against him. In 1586 the parish tries to evade these disagreeables by neglecting to appoint churchwarden and sworn men; but on no presentations being made the Archdeacon sends for four leading villagers (John Barsett, Thomas Hunt, and John Odam) and orders them to see that these officials are duly elected. The following year the Rector presents these Wardens saying that the Communion is not ministered so often as it ought to be by reason they would not make provision for it.

And what used to happen when people were gathered together in church for public worship? — Simon Goodman set a bad example in 1576, he used to go first of the church commonly after the pastor in read and very often would go away before service is done and especially at the expounding of the catechism and as it seemeth unto the churchwardens in contempt in the expounding of the said catechism. Next year the same man is presented for not having received the Communion this two or three times notwithstanding that they hath been three Communions at North Luffenham in that space: but he gives as a reason that there is matter of controversy between him and the churchwardens; yet we still hear of him as a non communicant in 1582. Other instances of parishioners who seldom or never communicate occur in later years, five in 1582, one in 1593, one in 1595, two in 1614, two in 1615, one in 1617 and one in 1621: this leaves out of consideration Mr. James Digby and...
of the Rector, as the Parish Register tells us, never set down his name in the Register according to order.

Robert Farrington, A.M., ordained deacon 9 September 1604 by Richard (Vaughan) bishop of Chester, and priest 4 April 1605 by George (Lloyd) the next bishop, of Chester, occurs as Curate from 1608 to 1612, during which period he was also Master of the North Luffenham School. He had been instituted to the Rectory of Pillon in 1607, and severed his connection with North Luffenham soon after being instituted to the Rectory of Lyndon in 1611. In 1610 John Shread is presented for being a common swearer, he has to produce a certificate signed by Mr. Johnson and Mr. Farrington to the effect that he is a no "common swearer" - a somewhat ambiguous requirement. Robert Farrington died in 1617 in possession of both Pillon and Lyndon Rectories. It is also recorded of Mr. Farrington that he never set down his name in the North Luffenham Register.

Jonathan Toque was the last and last Curate who served during Robert Johnson's time: he graduated in M.A. from Emmanuel College Cambridge and was ordained deacon 11 June and priest 24 September 1609, by Thomas (Dove) Bishop of Peterborough. He received a general license to preach from the Bishop on 16 March 1612. The Warden complained in 1613 that Jonathan Toque did not wear the surplice every day as he should do, and that he did wear a wrong cap of his head in prayer time, contrary to the Canons. He remained Curate until the death of Robert Johnson in 1625, and succeeded him as Rector. He died in 1640.

The Churchwarden, Overseer, and Side-man had a very uneasy time of it in those days: these officials in ancient times reported occasional delinquents on the part of their neighbours, and in this were supported by the public opinion of the village, but in the later Tudor and earlier Stuart times these reports came to be used for police purposes as a cheap and effective way of keeping the parishioners well in hand and their action naturally came to be much resented. So a certain want of harmony may be observed between...
and in 1619 there lies a small hill in the south side of the chancel.

Robert Johnson always had so many projects in hand as well to further the Puritan cause as to increase his own private fortune, besides the duties of several offices whose performance even in a limited degree must have needed his presence in various parts of the country, that it became absolutely necessary for him to have regular clerical assistance at North Luffenham: it will therefore be interesting to put on record the names of such of his colleagues as have come down to us. The first one of whom mention exists is

**William Ireland**, who came from Grantham near Uppingham: he was ordained deacon 27 July and priest 4 October, 1577. In 1580 he was cited before the Archdeacon for officiating without a license, but on producing his letters of orders was dismissed.

Thomas Tooke, another cleric, was in 1578 accused of serving the cure without a license and taking up him to be "official for church deacon": he admitted that occasionally he helped Mr. Johnson at divine service.

William Laiocke, A.B., of Clare Hall, Cambridge, the third on this list was ordained deacon on 10 October 1585 and priest 27 March 1586 by Richard (Howard) Bishop of Peterborough. The Churchwardens complained in 1587 that William Laiocke preached without a lawful license so far as they knew, and further stated that he had no need of any license therefor, that he was made Minister by his Ordinary in giving of the Bible unto him he bid him write and preach: to meet this complaint William Laiocke received a license from the Bishop of Peterborough on 7 February 1587 to preach the word of God in the church of North Luffenham. He was still Curate in 1589.

Mr. Durrin, the next Curate, was unlicensed in 1590 and remained so for at least two years. In 1593 complained it made that he provided no services on work days.

Mr. Eyrey, the fifth Curate seems as showing his letters of orders at the Bishop's Visitations in 1597.

Mr. Turner acted as Curate from 1598 to 1600.

William Larrel, a Minister from Lincolnshire, acted as Assistant in 1602.

Mr. Baker then acted as Reader and following the example
windows on its north side were daubed up with water and stone,
the South chancel door being somewhat in decay. The chancel
still remains unpaved at the east end in 1619, a window on
its north side is daubed up the top of the roof needs some
pointing. In 1624 the chancel is uneven and not paved in parts
the walls not being parapelled (that is plastered) the walls and
buttresses are broken and mouldered away in the foundation,
two of the windows being closed up, the great east end window
was chipped and full of holes and the Reector is declared to blame
for not having warded the chancel windows and floor.

The Church furniture was in no better condition: in 1581
defects in the pew box and in the locks for the chest wherein the
sermon book and other documents were kept are recorded, also that
chair seat in the church are decayed. In 1605 they want
Jewell's Apology and have not the two tombs of the howlades, the
Communion cup is kept with the almswardens and the carpet
of the Communion Table is of coarse buckram very unfit, and
there is no greater sheep pot for the Communion. In 1619 their
pewer Flagon is like an aleuagard: the book of Common Prayer
pieced and patched very much; the Register book not subscribed
and a book for His Majesty (James I) coming and one for his
deliverance from Gowry standing: the chest wherein the Register
Book lies had but one lock and the Clerk keeps the key; besides
which certain seat at the middle end of the church in the north
alley are very indecent. In 1624 a cushion for the pulpit is wanted
as well as a carpet for the Communion Table which is stated not
to be decent, the partition between the church and the chancel
is out of repair and the seats in the chancel are unhindered
and in need of repair at the charge of the Reector.

As regards the churchyard it appears that in 1583 the
churchyard walls is unfenced and in decay in the default of Mr
Johnson, and the church gates are broken: in 1584 the parson is
prevented for amusing our churchyard with stoves lying unde
sarily: in 1605 part of the south churchyard wall is in great decay:
and
In what condition was the fabric of the church and chancel during this long incumbency? The accounts which have come down to us are not very reassuring. In 1581 we learn that "if of the church windows are decayed and the south church porch to ready to fall." In 1586 the church is in decay and in 1587 the church walls also. The next year the church is reported as "out of repair"; in 1592 the church porch (which one is not stated but probably that on the south side) is out of repair as is also the church itself in 1593. Some effort seems to have been made to remedy this carelessmen, for two surveys of the building were made, one in 1605 and the other in 1619: these show that the fabric was in a very unsatisfactory condition. In 1605 the windows in the west end of the church is almost daubed up with mortar, all the scale in the church are unpaved in the bottom, the west end of the church and the belfrey all unpaved and lyeth very unseemly. But little seems to have been done to improve matters for it is again recorded in 1624 that the church is out of repair and the walls in the church are not whitened.

The chancel which was more particularly under the Rector's care does not appear to have been better looked after than the church: in 1581 its windows are in decay through the default of Mr Johnson, parson there; the same complaint is repeated two years later with the addition that the chancel itself is in decay: the parson is presented in 1584 regarding two of the chancel windows on the north side, which from another presentment in 1586 it appears were not all glazed. From the survey of 1605 it seems that the chancel was unpaved towards the east end (this was no doubt due to the ancient altar having been removed and its site left in desolation) and that one of the windows
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Personal

see. Alth. 86 (10)
Ref. pub. 74 (7) 88 (10)
Sum. 88 (7)
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91 (5)
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20 (8) Red Tailor
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