



Local and Landscape History Research Group

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Contents

- | | | |
|----|---|-----|
| 1. | The Manorial Court and Regulation | 1. |
| | William Franklin | |
| 2. | Who ruled Cambridge in the 16th century?
Evidence from the Corporation's Common Day Book 1544 – 1584 | 4. |
| | Honor Ridout | |
| 3. | Piety or Personalities? Parish Politics in a small Cambridgeshire village. | 8. |
| | Shirley Wittering | |
| 4. | Loosing Huntingdonshire | 18. |
| | Evelyn Lord | |

The Manorial Court and Regulation

The manorial courts were the principal body that regulated the system of agriculture and the customary rights in a township. Quite when the manorial court system was introduced has been the subject of much debate since the nineteenth century. Manorial courts met regularly and regulated almost every aspect of the open fields including the time of harvest, choice of crops, the rotation of crops through the fields, and the commoning of animals on the fields in wintertime. They regulated the commons and the wastes: the stint, or how many acres of land were required to common a cow or a horse, how much turf or furze could be collected per household, the numbers of fish and fowl that could be taken, and they ensured as much as possible that the community acted as one in tasks such as draining the land,¹ or maintaining the common droves. For Histon, there is the unusual survival of a Field Keepers (Reeves) Book, which was used by the Reeves to keep note of the letting of pastures as well as the communal carting of gravel for road maintenance.²

A typical manor held three different manorial courts in a year, each serving slightly different functions. The **Court Leet** was a criminal court, meeting twice a year, which made presentments for violation of the law. This was a form of "communal accusation" against wrongdoers. In Burwell as in the records of many manorial courts we find cases of trespass by animals and overstocking of pasture in the court rolls from the 13th century onwards, for example in 1312 Adam Idayne was in mercy to the court of the Ramsey Abbey manor for overstocking a pasture by 50 sheep. The court fined him six pence.³ In Stretham on 29th April 1614 the Court Leet heard presentments against nine persons all of who were fined. The presentments at this court were not only for issues such as trespass and overstocking, but included a faulty chimney, "*Item, wee finde that the chimney where widow Salmon dwells is in default, and wee doe payne hir to amend it by the 15th of May next, in payne of 20s*", and "*Item, wee finde Richard Sheirbrooke dwelleth upon a ground encroached upon the common and therefore wee payne him to amend it within 14 dayes in 40s*." Clearly the court was also concerned about issues such as fire risks from faulty chimneys and unregulated development on the town's commons.⁴

The court leet enforced the regulation of the meadows, commons, and other areas of pasture, such as balks, and those who overstocked the common were liable to fines levied by its jury against them. The regulations issued by the manorial court, sometimes referred to as 'Field Orders' and byelaws have survived for a few parishes in Cambridgeshire such as Stretham, Cottenham, Impington, Burwell and Caxton to name but a few (see figure 1. Impington Field Orders below).

The **Court Baron** regulated the relationship between the lord and the land. Originally this was a court of the free tenants of a manor. The court baron was responsible for the positive regulation of the land. It had the power to decide custom.

The third form of manorial court was the **Halmote**, which was the customary court for non-free tenants. As the distinction between free and unfree tenants waned, the two courts merged and became in many townships a single manorial court, retaining the title of court baron. In Waterbeach all three courts met together in 1748, the jury sitting for "Court Leet, General Court Baron and Customary Court," simultaneously.⁵ In Burwell, the Court Leet and Court Baron of the Manor of Burwell Ramseys were meeting simultaneously by 1729, when they re-issued the village by-laws.⁶

The jurors of the manorial court were not employed by the manor but elected by their peers and overseen by the manorial steward. If a juror did not perform well, they were not re-elected, and as local farmers it was in their interest to ensure the smooth operation of husbandry. Where control by the manorial court was lacking, trespass, damage to crops, encroachment and divers other problems could arise, examples of such misdemeanours can be seen both in surviving records and in plain sight in villages today, for example, in Upwood, we are told, divers tenants of Ramsey went into Upwood Turf Fen and dug turf for fuel, making several ditches, so that the tenants of Upwood, "are unable to go or to drive their animals beyond the said marsh as they ought to", for which the manorial tenant was fined.⁷ In Soham, a Duchy of Lancaster manor, manorial control was so lax in the 16th and early 17th centuries that people were able to construct houses and fence off gardens around them on the town's commons without challenge or reprisal from the manorial court (figure 1).⁸

Well run courts required the jurors to attend and in some fines were issued for non-attendance.⁹ As well as attendance at the courts, the jurors would also be required at times to form sub-courts, such as a court of survey. Courts of survey occurred when the township field book needed updating or when the lord died and in the latter case, they, with their local knowledge, worked with the official sent by the crown to undertake that part of the inquisition post-mortem. Similarly, one or more of the jurors might be required to represent the township at the Hundred Court.

The number of jurors varied from place to place. At Cottenham for example there were twenty in 1596 when as a result of a court case against Sir William Hynde, 'Articles of Agreement' were drawn up and witnessed by all of them. As Cottenham had more than one manor this was probably the jurors representing the various manors rather than the total. In Caxton the court rolls show fourteen jurors usually present, while in Soham, the manor of Nether Wigorne, one of the smaller manors was always presided over by the manorial steward and three jurors, with the lord of the manor sometimes in attendance.

Figure 1. Transcript of the Field orders of Impington 1479/80 (CUL Add.Ms.3957)

Orders made by the assent & agreement of the Lorde of both the manners of Impington:-

- 1 First it is agreed the every inhabitant or land holder within the towne of Impington shall sufficiently make all his walles, ditches, hedges & other fences betwixt him & any of his neighbours in said towne or felde there before the first day of May next comyng, and shall keepe them from tyme to tyme in payment of forfeiting for every pole or any of the said fences unmade by the [] pane of six dayes next after warnyng given to him by evry of his neighbours to make the same 12d & if it be less than a pole 6d.
- 2 Itm yet no p'ons shall suffer any oxen or other cattell to be kept or yet in any of the corne felds ther, but shall stocke them upon his owne groundes from the first day of Aprill yearly untill hervyst be doone, nor shall they be loose any oxen or other cattell into or enter the said felde, nor make any [storye] to fead by the way: upon payment of forfaiting for every beast that shalbe used contrary to this order – xijd.
- 3 Itm yet no p'son shall suffer any fole, coult, horse or other beast to go lose in any other mans corne in the tyme of harvest or at any other tyme of the yere: upon payment of forfaiting for every beast for every tyme – iijs. iiijd.
- 4 Itm yet no p'son shall suffere to go, keepe or stacke any mare in the felde of impington at any tyme of the year: upon payn of forfeiting for every mare kepte or staked contrary to the order, for every day – vjs viijd.
- 5 Itm yet no p'son shall keepe or suffer any sheepe or other cattell to go in the moore of Impington at any tyme hereafter (except milch kin & hearcows and steers above the age of one year & under the age of two yeres, from the xvjth day of March untill the feast of St Bartholomew the apostell, and yet no p'son shall kepe for his dwelling house above ij ki[n]e, nor for xvj acres of land in the felde there above one bullocke & so rate like: upon payne of forfeiting for every sheepe that shalbe kept contrary to this order, for every day ob: and for every other beast xijd for every day.
- 6 Itm yet every land houlder within the felde of Impington shall sufficiently scowre all the comon draynes & watercourses going through or by any bof their lande ther before the feast of Saint Luke yearly and shall likewise sufficiently grype the waterforough all their lande in every of the said felde before the said feast & so shall keepe them until the first day of May, upon payment of forfeiting for every pole which shall not be done xijd & if it be less than a pole vjd.
- 7 Itm yet no p'son shall suffer any of his hogges to go unworied in any of the felde of Impington, nor in any of the comons belonging to the said towne at ant tyme of the yere, neuither to go in the corne of any man: upon payne of forfeiting for every hogge – xijd.
- 8 Itm yet no p'son shall kepe any byheards of any cattell in any of the comons belongyng to the towne of Impington: upon payne to loose for every beast so kepte – xijd.
- 9 Itm yet no p'sons shall ployghe ij selions into one selion: nor one selion in to two, neither shall ploughe any balke nor any parkethereof any of the felde of Impington. Whereby the Lord tarary booke shalbe satisfied, upon payne of forfeiting for every selion so ploughed xxs and for every balke ploughed up – iijs iiijd.
- 10 Itm yet no p'son breake any headges or cutt or brake downe any woode but his owne or els by the licence of the owner of such headges or woods, neither shall suffer any of his houslondwe to be the like, upon payne of forfeiting for every tyme that the order shall be broken – vjs viiid.
- 11 Itm yet neither the Lords of the Mannor ^{place} of Impington place nor the the fermor, nor the assignes of any of them, neither the Lord of the Manor of Impington Fermhold, nor the fermor, nor their assigns, or any of them for their parte shall keepe within the said felde or comons of Impington above iiijd sheepe from the feast of the annuciacon of our Blessed Lady the Virgyn to the feast of All Seyntes, and the said feast of All Saintes, untill the said feast of the annuciacon next above iijd sheepe: but by the consent of both parties upon payn for every sheepe for every weeke – iiijd.
- 12 Itm yet no p'son shall reape any bentes russhes, or grasse in any of the felde of Impington at such tyme as they shalbe in severaltie and only upon his own lande, or he otherwise licenced by the owners of such landes upon payne of forfeiting for every tyme that this order shalbe broken – iijs iiijd.
- 13 Itm yet mp p'son shall suffere any of his cattell (hogges only accepted) to go & feede in the felde of impington which the yere following shalbe fallowed felde: from the ende of harvest to the feast of Saint Luke, upon payne of forfeiting for every beast viij d.
- 14 Itm yet no p'son shall drive any cart upon any mans corne growinge in any of the felde of Impington, neither to carry any grasse or corne from any stroudes or furrowes, with horses any other [causbe] other than [moorfatir] shall require upon payne to forfeit for every tyme that this order shall e broken – iijs iiijd.
- 15 Itm yet no p'son shall gather any pease or peastoble growing in brok felde: but only upon his own lande or els up by the license the enter & that be the Wednysday & Friday only, upon payne of forfeiting for every tyme that the order shalbe broken xijd.

Note: The Impington field orders contained in a Field Book are a sixteenth century transcript of the field orders of 19 Edward IV, which were still in use during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, and used in evidence to the courts during a dispute.

Before considering how the manorial ensured the bye-laws were adhered to and the commons regulated, it is worth noting that in most large townships there was usually more than one manor, and that each manors had its own courts. In such cases it was usual for the court of the largest manor to set the bye-laws, the regulation of the commons and the ordering of husbandry for any year. The courts of the smaller manors dealt with admissions and surrenders of property and issues of justice pertaining to their tenants. Without such an arrangement chaos might have ensued. A good example of such an arrangement in practice was that of the five medieval manors in Burwell, known as, Ramsey's, Tiptofts, Dullingham's St Omers, and Rectory. The largest of these was Ramsey's, the manor of the Abbot of Ramsey, and it was this manor's court that set the bye-laws and regulated the commons.

Compliance

To ensure compliance with the bye-laws and field orders every township had at least one Reeve,¹⁰ and sometimes a deputy or assistant known as a Beadle. In upland parishes the reeves were concerned with the adherence to the open field regulations as well as overseeing the stocking of the permanent meadows and commons. However, in parishes where there was fen it was usual to have Fen Reeves as well, whose role solely related to the stocking of the fens and the produce taken from the fen. These were however not the only officials in a township. A typical medieval township might also have: Affeeror(s), Ale-taster(s), Collectors, Constable(s), Hayward(s), Pounder(s), and Woodward(s). All of whom ensured the rules and regulations were adhered to. We will not consider this list further but focus on those whose role was to ensure the rules and regulation of the fields, commons and fen were adhered to. Detailed information regarding the role of Reeves and Fen Reeves is very scarce. Most often we only see instances in the court rolls of the jurors ordering the reeves to carry out an inspection, or we find them presenting misdemeanours to the court.

In Caxton the field Reeves were responsible with the Constable for ensuring the village turned out to scour the town gutters or common drains, while in Stretham they were to give notice to those inhabitants to clear their individual sections of ditches on the east side of Bar Lake. In both cases the reeves would report non-attendance or failure to comply to the court leet, and a fine would duly be given. It is also clear from surviving records that regular inspections were carried out by the reeves, although there is scant evidence to inform on the frequency of such. Articles of Agreement drawn up at Lolworth on 1st July 1691 ordered that any person letting out their portion of the common pasture to others was required to notify the field reeves. The same articles also state that the field reeves were to deal with any person not paying their due tithes of ewes and lambs to the minister, fining them for every occurrence, and they were to "*search, see and cause all gaps and breaches [in hedges] in all public places on all sides of the New Pasture to be made strong and secure before any couples be put in & likewise that the fence be so kept & secured all the year.*" The Lolworth Agreement also informs us in that parish two Field Reeves and a Hayward were appointed by their peers in the township at Easter, their term of office being until the next election at Easter the following year.¹¹

Conclusions

It is clear that the manorial court system was often very good at both ensuring the effective regulation of husbandry and dealing with minor infringements of local regulations. Its operation was a very communal affair involving the leading townfolk and all those who worked the land. Communal rotation of crops, communal organisation of drainage and policing were the key benefits in the earlier medieval period.

Significant changes in tenure and landholding after the Black Death resulted in fewer farmers holding larger amounts of land. Subsequent population rise increased the numbers of those with little or no land, and by the seventeenth century the split between a smaller number of land holders and cottagers was widening. Added to this was the increase in nuevo rich landlords who were not interested in tradition but in profit. These new landowners, often from emerging professions, such the legal profession, were keen to take whatever land they could and legal challenges by the populace of townships often resulted. Yet despite their attempts at changing the longstanding order, for the majority of townships across the country, the manorial court with its field orders and bye-laws remained until formal enclosure by Act of Parliament in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

William Franklin

References

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- 2 CAR51/17/46. covers the period 1759-1803.
- 3 TNA SC2/179/16.
- 4 CUL EDC14/15/6
- 5 Ravensdale, J.R. *Liable to Floods: Village Landscape on the edge of the fens A.D. 450-1850*. Cambridge University Press. (1974) pp.82-83.
- 6 CUL Ms.Doc.625 (1)
- 7 Olson, S. *A Chronicle of all that happens: voices from the village court in medieval England*. Studies and Texts 124. Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Canada. (1996) pp.20
- 8 CA 107/P10
- 9 Olson, p.155.
- 10 Reeve and Bailiff are the same. The term 'Bailiff' appears to imply a permanent position as opposed to that of an elected official.
- 11 CAL65/4

Who ruled Cambridge in the 16th century? Evidence from the Corporation's Common Day Book 1544 – 1584¹

The Corporation's Common Day Book records the decisions and actions taken at its formal meetings and courts. It is a tome of over 400 sheets, currently kept in the County Archives at Ely. It may have had a predecessor and almost certainly had a successor, but neither survive.

Besides recording decisions and action to be taken, it stores the transcripts of some wills and indentures where property was being transferred.

My interest here is more in the identification of the individuals appointed to act for the Corporation, but more specifically in the admissions to the Freedom of the Borough – the Burgesses. After that, there are the detailed descriptions of the processes by which, each year, the Borough officers were chosen or elected. There are no figures for the population of Cambridge at this time – the end of the century has an estimated 5,000. As all agreed the population was rising by 1600 (as was the case nationally) we may be very, very roughly right in saying 4,000 in mid-century. Half that number at least were women and ineligible for any public office. Probably about half were children and young people. Servants and labourers would also have been ineligible for the status of freeman on social and financial grounds, which leaves us with considerably fewer than a thousand adult males of suitable social standing and fortune to be considered for the freedom and some active role in the town's governance. There was no great incentive to become a freeman, it seems, unless you were ambitious for the status and potential power, so many more men were probably too busy or simply not interested.

Those who did take up the freedom, the Burgesses, or the communalty as sometimes named (with various spellings) were the men then entitled to vote in Corporation affairs and to hold office. There is no complete list, and we do not know how many there were at the point when the Common Day Book (hereafter CDB) was begun. Admission to the freedom could take place at any of the Corporation's regular meetings and might involve a single man or several at a time. The eligibility was the same as in most boroughs in England (?) at this period. The (eldest) sons of freemen were automatically eligible, as were the (first?) apprentices of freemen. Given that some men would have no adult son, and some apprentices would leave the town for work elsewhere, these conditions do not provide a reliable replacement rate. The system relied on other men buying the freedom. The price varied, but in Cambridge at this time it was usually 3s 8d plus court fees. (Cambridge labourers were being paid about 6d – 8d a day.)

In some cases, the applicant had 2 sponsors or 'godfathers' named against the record and/or as pledges if the applicant was not paying the fee immediately. The number of Cambridge-born men taking up the freedom was not high.

As noted before, a feature of the Cambridge record (is this found in other towns?) was the naming of the applicant's birthplace, if he was not son of a freeman. This immediately reveals that over half the new freemen came from outside Cambridgeshire. The record gives a place – maybe village or town – and a county. Unsurprisingly, a few places are in doubt, as the clerk was recording places he'd never heard of, but the county is generally clear, accepting that Richmondshire is in Yorkshire and Appleby in Cumberland. And there is the surprise: why were men born in such distant parts seeking the Freedom in Cambridge?

An analysis of the origins of the 420 with named birthplaces in this period 1544 - 1582 (a few have not – we'll come to them later) gives the following figures:

From Cambridge itself, counting the sons of freemen as born in Cambridge ²	120
(including sons of freemen 81, apprentices 9, neither 30)	
From villages in Cambridgeshire	93
Total Cambridgeshire	213

Which leaves us with about half the Freemen coming from further afield.

Adjacent counties – Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Hunts, Beds and Herts – supply nearly 100, with the greatest numbers from Essex (32) and Suffolk (22).

Very few came from south of a line London – Bristol, (10), thus leaving about 100 travelling longer distances from their birthplaces to Cambridge.

Yorkshire provided about a third of these (35), Cumbria 15 Lancashire 12 and the Midlands counties smaller numbers each. Four came from Wales.

There were also eight from overseas, from 'the land of the Emperor'. The Emperor, Charles V and his successors, ruled a vast swathe of Europe from the North Sea to Austria, but these men probably came from the area now Belgium and northern France, and may well have had trading or other links with England.

The CDB gives no indications why men from over let's say 50 miles (2 days journey), should have wanted to associate with Cambridge and presumably settle here. For some, there may have been a link through Stourbridge Fair, to which traders came from across eastern and northern England (though we have few details at this period of individual traders).

The CDB has further information about men involved in the Corporation affairs in the details it provides of the election of officers. Every August the new Mayor, four Bailiffs, four counsellors, 2 Coroners and the searchers of hides (leather) were elected, to take office at Michaelmas (29 September). The two Treasurers had already been elected, at Hock Tuesday (in the second week after Easter). Presumably they needed more time to work with the current Treasurers and learn the duties before also assuming office at Michaelmas.

The election process was modified a little during this period, and I'll discuss that later.

As noted before, the process named 20 men. To begin, the Mayor and his assistants (who?) chose a man. The Commonalty chose another man. These two men chose 12 others from the burgesses gathered in the Guildhall (early in the period they were specified as 3 from each of the 4 wards of the town). The 12 then chose 6 more. The 18 then elected all the officers.

It might be supposed that there would be some lapse of time before new freemen were chosen in this process, but this was not necessarily the case.

The election held in August 1545 included in the 18, five men whose admission to the freedom had occurred in the previous year. Of these, one was an Essex man, one from Norfolk, two were from Yorkshire and the fifth from Cumberland. The other 13 men had presumably obtained the freedom before the CDB opened.

Of the 18 electors in 1553, nine can be identified from the freedom entries, one from as far back as 1544, but the most recent was in the spring of that same year. Their geographical origins were similarly spread. Three had been born in Cambridgeshire, but there were also individuals from Suffolk, Essex, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Northamptonshire, Derby and Yorkshire.

By the 1579 election all but four of the 18 can be identified from the freedoms list. They include three Lancashire men and one from Westmoreland, beside the less-travelled. (We might wonder if the northerners and the one man from Sussex were mutually intelligible, so different must have been their accent and dialects.)

Cambridge was welcoming to men from other parts of England who had chosen to settle in the borough. They were able to take part in the most important of the Corporation's procedures. This is further confirmed by the choice of mayors which included, during this period, at least three Yorkshiremen as well as one from Derbyshire and one from Cumberland.

There was no consistency in the 20 men chosen each year to carry out the elections. In the 5 years 1545 – 1549, a total of 59 men took part in this process. Of these, half did so only once. The others took part two or three times, with the exception of John Longmead who was picked for the Preachers' ward men every year. (Was this ward, on the southern and eastern fringe of the town, lacking in men of suitable standing? It had a notable number of labourers listed in the earlier tax records, probably those men working in the Barnwell field.)

The few admitted to the freedom whose birthplaces were not recorded included some of the lawyers licensed to act in the Borough courts, several county gentlemen and one or two minor officers.

Next to the Mayor, the most important officers were the bailiffs, who had responsibility for considerable sums of money. They collected the tolls and fees from the market and fairs – Stourbridge fair provided the most significant sums – and paid to the royal Exchequer the annual £70, the Borough's fee farm. Only one fragmentary record of their accounts survives, and the CDB has only occasional references to their responsibilities. Was there a process for checking their accounts? The outgoing Treasurers' accounts were audited every January, by a named body of eight men, four aldermen and four others (common councilmen?).

As noted before, while the corporation was ready to accept men from other parts of the country, it was also insistent that men elected to office should be resident in the town. This requirement came to the fore in 1556 when Thomas Smith was chosen mayor. He had, it was noted, moved out of the town. His election was allowed to stand, on condition that he moved back into town as soon as possible (and before Michaelmas when he should take office), with his family and household, into a house that fitted the dignity of the mayor 'so that the same may be openly known to all persons repairing to the same town to be the mayor's house by the honest dressing and trimming of the same as well inwardly as outwardly'. Smith was required to live in the house throughout his mayoralty but if he had to be absent on the town's business, to appoint a competent deputy. Finally *'that he shall well and getly [sic] use and exercise the*

said room and office of Mayoralty in all things as other mayors have done as well to the worship praise and commendation of himself as of the town and borough of Cambridge according to his ability and substance putting thereto his goodwill and diligence to the best of his power.'

A key word here is probably 'substance'. While mayors could claim expenses for particular events, and were given usually 20s for a fine gown, there were doubtless many lesser expenses that could not be reclaimed. A general level of hospitality was expected, and the mayor's household needed to have sufficient servants to maintain his and the town's dignity. Only the well-to-do burgesses were likely to meet these requirements.

The election process would seem to lend itself to government by a small group – an oligarchy in fact. However, as we have seen, some individuals took part over a number of years, but others participated only once. In the case of Mr Smith's election above, none of the 18 electors had taken part in the previous year, though the 'commonalty' had chosen the same man in both years, to share the choice of the 12.

The fact that the process began with just 2 men choosing two thirds of the electors immediately suggests that the result could be easily fixed. This problem either did occur or was seen to be possible. In 1549 the Corporation agreed in a memorandum that the electors must take an oath that they had not been persuaded to make particular choices: to swear that they were 'in no case laboured by Mr Mayor or any other person to choose any special person to be of the election' and if they refused to be sworn, others were to be chosen in their stead.

Later this was seen to be inadequate. An elaborate procedure to reduce this danger was instituted in the 1560s – transcribed in Annals vol2 p226. The general result was to limit the choice of mayor by the votes of the Aldermen to two names, which the commonalty could then vote on.

This idea, an experiment, did not last. In subsequent years it was enough to anonymise the choice of the first 2 men, by picking out hidden names. The names of each of the Common Councilmen (the 24) were written on slips of paper, and each name was concealed in a ball of wax. The balls were put in a box, and thence the two were drawn out by the Mayor and the Commonalty. On one occasion at least, those two men each drew out another, to make the choice of the 12. A further requirement was added, that their choices should be made within an hour. If we imagine a crowd of men gathered in the not-to-large Guildhall, this might have been an entirely practical clause for men who had other businesses to attend to and did not want to spend all day waiting on decisions.

The 'new ordinances' as they were called were used through the subsequent years.

The High Steward

The Corporation had an ambivalent attitude to the support of outsiders. While they insisted that their officers lived in the town, they could obviously not ask that noblemen or gentlemen whose patronage they sought do the same. For some years the 3rd Duke of Norfolk was the Borough's High Steward, and the Corporation must have reckoned that to have the country's premier duke on their side was an asset. By the end of Henry VIII's reign, the Duke had been accused of treason. Neither town or University could anticipate the dynamics of Tudor politics.

At the accession of Edward VI, with the Duke of Norfolk in the Tower of London, the new Lord Protector, the Duke of Somerset, was made the Borough's High Steward. He was overthrown in 1552 with an accusation of treason and executed on 22 January.

On 6 February 1552 a memorandum recorded that it was

*'Agreed the honourable lord the Duke of Northumberland to be high steward of this town if it shall please his grace to accept it.'*³

Only 17 months later that same Duke stood on the steps of the market cross in Cambridge, realising that his coup (to put Lady Jane Grey on the throne) had failed and that he must give cheers for Queen Mary '*and among other he threw up his own cap.*' '*And so laughed that the tears ran down his cheeks for grief...*' months later he ended on the scaffold. In the meantime, the Duke of Norfolk had resumed the position of High Steward to the town. He did not enjoy it long, dying the following year, 1554.

After his death, the new young Duke (aged 16) was invited to take on the role of High Steward to the Corporation. (The University had declined the young man's request to be their High Steward.)

The Duke was active in Parliament⁴ and was patron of eighteen borough seats in the Commons for the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk. He asked the Cambridge Corporation to elect a servant of his as one of their members, but they stuck to their rules, and told him they could not do it.

The Duke otherwise had little to do with Cambridge (except during the visit of the Queen to the University in 1564, when he lodged with Alderman Alexander Ray next to the market).

The Duke was apparently quite a popular man, but got himself embroiled in the affairs of Mary Queen of Scots, and was executed for treason on 2 June 1572. Within three weeks the Corporation had elected Lord North of Kirtling the new High Steward.

The Norths

This turned out to be the happiest relationship of Borough and High Steward, as Lord North had already proved himself to be on the side of the town in a Town-Gown disagreement. Lord Roger North was granted the freedom at no charge in August 1568, after he and several local county gentlemen had been consulted. Later in the day Mr Thomas North gentleman was also admitted free without charge. Four years later, in 1572, Lord Roger's son John was admitted, as the son of a freeman. As detailed in the previous article, Lord North seems to have been of great help in confirming to the Borough the right to run Stourbridge Fair. The experiment of choosing his sons as MPs failed, and the old course was re-adopted.

Honor Ridout

References

1 CA City PB .57 Cambridge Common Day Book V61. 1

2 2 were identified as born elsewhere

3 CA City PB.57

4 In 1563 he attended the Lords on forty-nine of the fifty-seven recorded business sittings and was appointed to three bill committees. He was present in 1566-7 on only two-thirds of business sessions, but he was chairman of a committee to scrutinize a mining patents bill and he was named to three others. Furthermore in 1566-7 he became actively involved in the parliamentary agitation concerning the marriage and succession.

Piety or Personalities? Parish Politics in a small Cambridgeshire village.

Fig.1 Drawing of Vicar counting his Tithes:



These days religion is a matter of choice, it was not always so in the past. But first we must go back to the origins of this dissention, to the the history behind this argument.

The stone that Henry VIII flung into the pool of religious practice when he broke with Rome and declared himself head of the English church, sent ripples down the centuries, leaving no-one untouched. The Reformation was a violent disruption to the religious life of lord and commoner alike. No longer was the comfort of the saints, the '*holie companie of heaven*' to be relied upon for support and protection; man had to find his own salvation by faith alone. As the years passed and the ripples grew wider, the struggle to find salvation and meaning in life also grew wider and more diverse. What the villager thought of these changes is difficult to discover; only by studying their actions can any idea be gained of the spiritual opinions of most of the inhabitants of a community.

PRE-REFORMATION CHURCH:

The pre-reformation church laid great stress on the '*Holy Communion of Saints*' and derived much comfort from the belief that the Christians' way through this life and the time spent in purgatory in the next, was being eased by the prayers of the dead. Bede Rolls, kept in churches included the names of those who had died; these were read out and prayed for every Sunday after Mass. Their painted churches bright with stained glass, alive with statues of saints and glowing with candles all helped the congregation (many of whom could not read) learn the Bible stories and pictures of the Last Judgment reminded them to behave themselves.

Fig. 2 Wall Painting in Ickleton Church

The Protestants on the other hand, held that redemption was by Faith alone. They believed that painted walls and carved images were un-scriptural and distracted from the Word of God and that the emphasis of the liturgy should be auditorial rather than visual.



THE REFORMATION:

The reformation of the church begun by Henry VIII and continued by Edward VI and Elizabeth I, stamped out much that was corrupt and greedy within it. The selling of Indulgences, the principle of Purgatory, the cult of the Virgin Mary and the worshipping of images of saints were all forbidden. In 1559 Queen Elizabeth introduced an *Act of Supremacy and Uniformity* which endeavoured to tread the *via media* through the principal doctrines of the time. Whilst outlawing the Catholic faith this act retained some catholic ritual. To many the act was unacceptable, and large numbers of clergy abandoned their livings rather than subscribe to the new articles. East Anglia had some 36% of its parishes without clergy.¹ Many of these puritan clergy known as *Independents* held the view that people should be free to go outside their parish (which was against the law) for their spiritual nourishment. Congregations became 'Gathered' from many parishes.

During the next hundred year's religious opinion swung between Puritan and high Anglican. During the Commonwealth (under Cromwell) the puritans abolished anything remotely papist such as Bishops, High Altars and the use of church music, or pagan such as the celebration of May Day, Easter and Christmas.

The translation of the Bible into English allowed men to see for themselves the path to Salvation. The puritan's emphasis on studying the Bible and preaching the Word gave greater impetus than ever before on the ability to read.

Fig. 3 Iconoclasts destroying holy relics.



Any signs of 'popish idolatry' found in parish churches were ruthlessly destroyed by the army

Margaret Spufford in her study of rural communities in Cambridgeshire states that yeomen, at least, could write and approximately 30% of villagers could read. ¹ In Thriplow the percentage was 31%.

In 1660 the Monarchy was restored, and the full panoply of state religion was reinstated, including the authority of Bishops, the Book of Common Prayer and Ecclesiastical Courts. Over the years the established church felt so secure in its position as a state religion that it became spiritually lethargic. By the eighteenth century the rise in the value of tithes and the plurality of many livings raised the social status of the clergy and they became more closely identified with the squirearchy than ever before or since, and for a time the English clergy became the least clerical of priesthoods, often employing a poor curate to carry out their spiritual duties, as Anthony Trollope in his 'Barchester' novels and Parson Woodforde in 'Diary of a Country Parson' both depict so well.

As a result of this lethargy, the external appearance of the churches at the beginning of the nineteenth century was one of 'unparalleled slovenness and neglect'. Gladstone, looking back to the early days of the century, recalls that 'our services were probably without a parallel in the world for their debasement, the faculty of taste, and the perception of the seemly or unseemly, was as dead as the spirit of devotion'. ²

Practice and service were still rooted in puritan thinking, and anything hinting of popery such as processions, images, candles, embroidered vestments and singing choirs was looked upon with deep suspicion. Furnishings such as stone altars were seen as a focus for sacrifices and therefore pagan, leading to their abandonment and desecration, for instance at Lenton, Nottinghamshire there was a 'W.C.(water closet) contiguous to the holy Altar itself, nay occupying the place where the Altar ought to stand'. The presence of W.C.s close

Fig. 4 - Chancel with Hats on Altar



to the altar was mentioned again and again. In one church there were two - one for the clergy and one for the congregation, on either side of the chancel.³

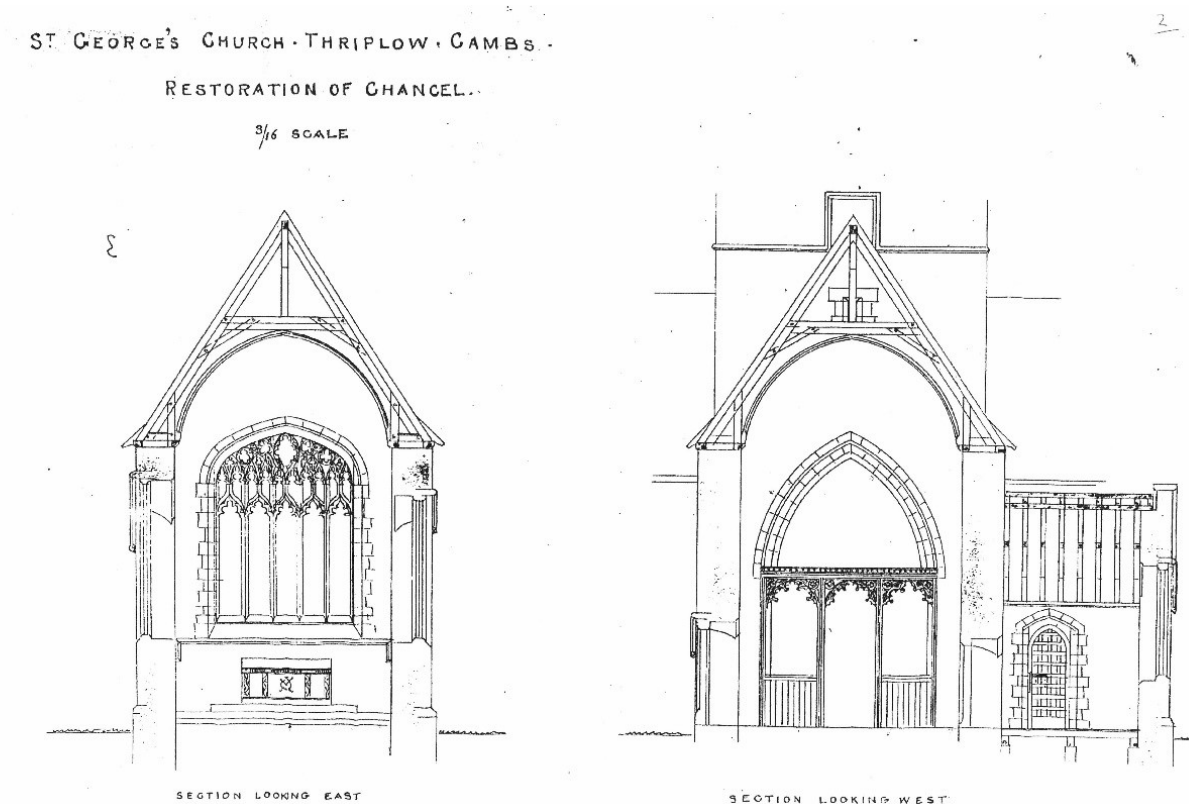
With the protestant emphasis on preaching, the pulpit became the centre of the service with large three-decker pulpits being introduced and placed usually on the side of the nave and even at the west-end as at Great St. Mary's in Cambridge, surrounded by box pews with the result that congregations turned their backs on the altar and the Chancel was seen as serving little religious purpose. Instead, they were used as Vestry offices, school rooms or general lumber rooms for garden tools, flower vases, and coats and hats piled upon the altar during services. Parson Woodforde recalls visiting Bath in 1769 and visiting the Octagon Church; *'It is a handsome building, but not like a place of worship, there being fire-places in it, especially on each side of the Altar, which I cannot think at all decent, it is not liked'*.⁴

THE ANGLO-CATHOLIC REVIVAL IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY:

In the 1820s a group of University clerics in Oxford wrote a series of tracts urging reform of the church. They believed the Church of England to be the natural descendant of the early church and called for a return of the liturgy and practices of the fourteenth century. This revival, destined to revolutionise not only religion but to inspire a new wave of architecture was known as the 'Oxford Movement'. It was part of a general desire among many people to return to a more traditional ordered life that they felt was being destroyed by the growing industrialism and commercialism of the times. The writings of William Morris, John Ruskin and Augustus Pugin, the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites, and the poetry of William Wordsworth and Walter Scott, reflected this desire to return to a time of proper social hierarchy and political stability that they imagined the medieval era epitomized.

Their attempt to return to the holy simplicity of the medieval church was taken up with enthusiasm by a similar group of university clerics in Cambridge, in 1839 they founded a group called The Cambridge Camden Society and imbued the gentle influence of Oxford with the energetic vitality of East Anglia. They formulated a code of practice, a set of rules regarding church furnishings, church liturgy, and church architecture that was to fundamentally change the face of Victorian England and give the name 'Victorian Gothic' to a style of architecture that is now widespread and familiar in most parishes in the country.

Fig. 5 Design by Giles Gilbert Scott for Chancel of Thriplow



Their attempt to influence religious practice and religious architecture was given voice by their vigorous and strongly worded journal, 'The Ecclesiologist', which encouraged both clergy and laity to study church buildings and to restore old churches and build new ones in the 'Gothic' style.

It is difficult in the late twentieth century to envisage the fury and disapproval that the proposals and practices of the Cambridge Camden Movement engendered amongst both clergy and laity, in the mid-nineteenth century. The wearing of surplices during the sermon, lay-choirs in the chancel and the singing of hymns all scandalised the parish-

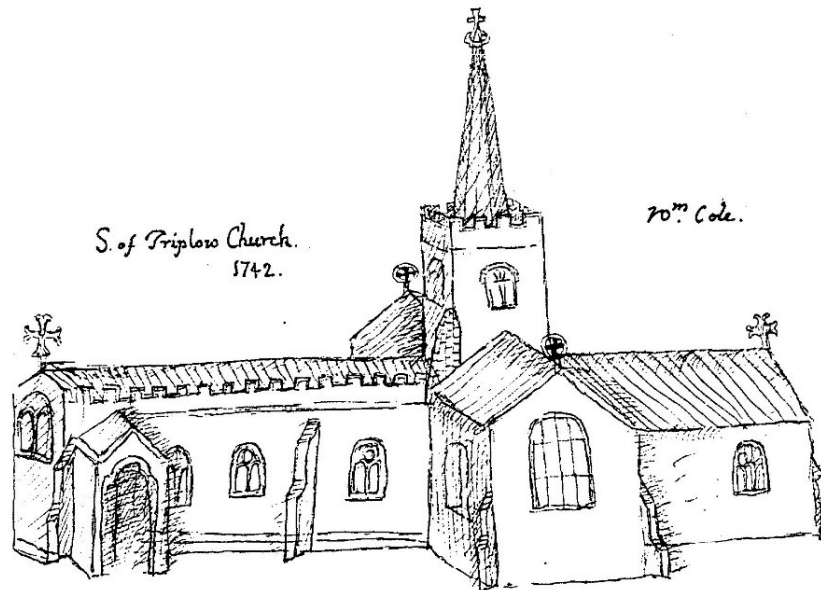
ioners of those churches in which they occurred and led to law suits in the ecclesiastical courts and even to riots.⁵ It seems strange to us that these seemingly acceptable and normal Church of England practices should have seemed so shocking and alien.

What was the church in Thriplow like before 1875?

Down the years generations of Thriplow's inhabitants have spent what they could in time and money glorifying God by repairing and beautifying His Church. The majority of the pre-reformation wills for Thriplow leave money or goods for the upkeep of the Church, and the churchwardens' accounts bear witness to the constant struggle to keep the fabric of the church in good repair.

The earliest illustration of the church, so far discovered, is one drawn by William Cole in 1742 showing the building complete with a south porch very much as it is today.⁶

Fig. 6. Wm Cole's drawing of Thriplow Church 1742



In 1783 there were complaints that the chancel was in a decayed and dirty state. A drawing made by Nathan Maynard, the Whittlesford Diarist, in 1835, shows the Nave roof much higher than pictured by Cole, and the North Transept very much lower than it is today, so that it would seem that although repairs were regularly carried out they were very much in the nature of patching-up rather than substantial restoration.

In June 1866 the eminent Cambridge architect R.Reynold Rowe was requested by the Archdeacon of Ely to survey the church and his findings make disconcerting reading as his sketch showing the south Transept with a tarpaulin covering the roof and the windows boarded up reveals.

Despite continuing repairs recorded in the Churchwarden's Accounts the Bishop's Visitation return for 1873 completed by the Vicar Thos. Andrew, was most vehement in its condemnation of the state of the chancel (the responsibility of Peterhouse), describing it as *'the most delapidated in the Diocese, it is in a most disgraceful state'*. The Rev.Andrew stated that £1,000 had been spent within the last seven years (from 1866) repairing the tower and transepts.⁷ Unfortunately, the churchwardens' accounts which would have given details of these repairs, are missing.

Fig. 7 Thriplow Church drawn by Nathan Maynard in 1835



Drawing of Thriplow Church 1835 by N Maynard showing North-East of Church. R. 58/5/5 CRO. Maynard Papers.

THE RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH:

In 1874 an energetic new vicar, the Rev.John Watkins arrived in Thriplow, he had only been in the village a year before he announced in the *'Parish Magazine'* for March 1875 *'We are glad to announce the beginning of the Church Restoration'*. The Vicar wrote in each month's edition a detailed account of the restoration during the years 1875-1876.

John Watkins shows his excitement in his very first entry in *'The Parish Magazine'* in March 1875, at the uncovering of an *'ancient double piscena probably Early English that had been plastered up in the South Wall of the Chancel'* and further, on removing a thick layer of plaster covering the Font, it was discovered to be constructed of Purbeck Marble of Norman workmanship. (It is now thought to be Saxon).

Fig. 8 Drawing of South Transept drawn by R R Rowe 1866



Watkins does not mention the glass but it would seem that the stained glass was removed and replaced with plain glass. This may seem contrary to 'Gothic' principles but a builder's account in 1827 'to 80 foot sq. of New Glass in Triplowe Church' may have meant that by 1875 there was very little stained glass to replace; further, as stained glass was expensive there were probably insufficient funds to acquire new stained glass for the windows.⁹

The last entry dated December 1876 stated, 'At last, the Chancel is to be restored! We have information from the Architect's office that the contract for the work has been taken, and that it will be commenced next Spring'. The Chancel restorations were the responsibility of the lay rector, the College of St.Peter in Cambridge and they commissioned Sir G.Gilbert Scott, R.A. one of the foremost Victorian architects, to undertake the work. In November 1875, eleven years after R.R.Rowe's report, he made specifications and drawings for the proposed restoration of the Chancel of Thriplow Church.¹⁰ The Chancel had been partitioned off during the restoration of the Nave owing to its ruinous condition, but in the edition of the 'Cambridge Chronicle' dated October 20th 1877, a report appeared of the services that took place to celebrate the restoration of the chancel and the near completion of the repairs to the nave, so it would seem that the Chancel was practically rebuilt in a matter of months!

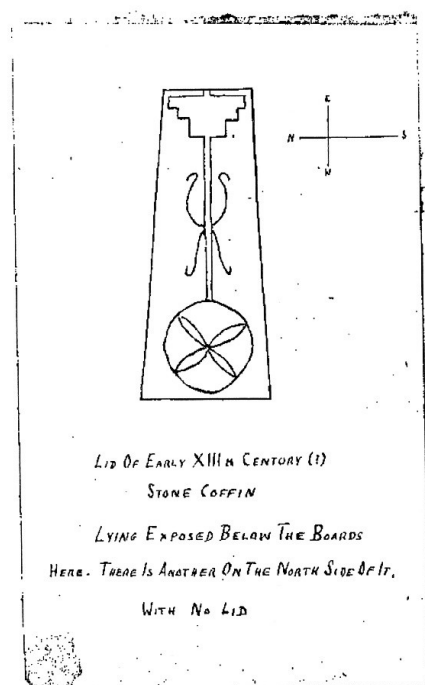
Fig. 10. Church painting designs



The windows in the Nave were the first to be restored and while this work was carried out all services except Communion were held in the National School room which the Vicar describes as 'no means agreeable during the hot weather'. Other discoveries include remains of fourteenth century windows under more plaster in the chancel and in October 1875 whilst taking up the old uneven floor in the Nave prior to laying a new floor of encaustic tiles, a very exciting discovery was made of two stone coffins dating from the thirteenth century.

The roof was repaired and the Nave ceiling was painted according to old patterns found at the eastern end of the building. Fred Perrin, born in 1852, recounted to Mr Vinter how, before the Church was restored in 1877: 'they used to come in by the West Door'; he also recalled there being 'stained glass in the windows and box pews for the farmers and open pews for the rest'.⁸

Fig. 9. Early English Coffin



The restraining influence of G.G.Scott's restoration of the chancel is very evident. There is no 'High Victorian Gothic' here; the ceiling is plain, dark wood with no vestige of the painting that is such a feature of the nave and transepts, the windows are pure restorations of what had existed before, and 'glazed with transparent glass of a suitable tint' though Scott does specify that any 'fragments of painted glass to be reused in the new glazing'. The floor is covered with red and buff encaustic tiles to match the nave, the only extravagance are the tiles within the altar rails which feature birds and animals and cost 27/6 per yard as opposed to the oth-

ers which cost 20/- per yard. The only decorative features are the small corbels on either side of the south door and the beautiful scrolled hinges on the door itself.

Fig. 11 Encaustic tile in Chancel.



In October 1877 a long account appeared in the *Cambridge Chronicle* of the completion of the restoration of Thriplow Church between the years 1865 and 1870. £1,000 was said to have been spent on restoring the two transepts and the tower. The cost to Peterhouse of rebuilding the Chancel was £2,000.

The effect on the parishioners as they filed into the Church through the rebuilt South Porch and newly opened South Door for the celebratory service would have been very different from what it was before restoration. Instead of dark paneling on the walls, brick floors, old poppyhead pews, the old three decker pulpit standing before the south east pillar under the tower, hatchments and royal coat of arms hanging from the walls and the font in the middle of the nave aisle, there were white walls, clear windows, a simple reading desk and the pulpit standing by the north west pillar.¹¹ The font now stood in front of the West door, the floor was covered with tiles decorated in red and buff and the ceiling was painted in bright designs of maroon, green, blue and silver. The villagers sitting on borrowed wooden chairs must have gazed in wonder at the altar covered with an embroidered cloth and ablaze with candles in brass candlesticks and everywhere flowers and greenery: such a glow of colour and clarity after the dark, dank interior they had known.

NON-CONFORMITY IN THRIPLLOW

In 1638 Bishop Matthew Wren of Ely, a staunch supporter of the 'high church' Archbishop Laud, accused Thomas Carter, Vicar of Thriplow, of 'Scandalous and Immoral behavior'. His list of 'crimes' included '*communion table not railed in, no book of preacher's names, no terrier, no poore men's box, parishioners have not received the communion at the Holy Table, by reason they had no rayle so it is administered in the chancell as usually they had done*'.¹² In 1640 Bishop Wren, was imprisoned for eighteen years; Archbishop Laud was beheaded.

It was now the turn of the Puritans to influence the religious lives of the people. In 1640, Ecclesiastical Courts, Bishops, and the Book of Common Prayer were all abolished. In 1643 an ordinance called for the removal of all idolatrous icons and William Dowling was made Parliamentary Visitor for Cambridgeshire. His orders were to remove all superstitious relics from Churches, anything that distracted the eye, and represented the host of heaven. He visited Thriplow in March 1643 and "*brake about 100 Cherubims and superstitious pictures and gave Order to take down 18 Cherubims and a cross on the steeple and to level the steps*".

At the restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, opinion swung strongly away from the puritans and another round of ejections began. Two popular preachers, Francis Holcroft (1632-1692) and Joseph Oddy (1628-1687) were ejected from their livings in Bassingbourn and Meldreth, and from their Cambridge Colleges. They were both imprisoned in Cambridge gaol for their beliefs, but were occasionally allowed out by a lenient gaoler to preach in the surrounding villages, including Thriplow. They formed a 'gathered' church and drew many hundreds throughout the counties of Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire to them by their doctrine of pre-destination, a belief that only the chosen 'elect' would be 'saved' from eternal damnation. Francis Holcroft is generally considered to '*have been the chief promoter of independency in that county*' (Cambridge).¹³ He died in Thriplow in 1691.¹⁴

On Thursday 19 July 1759 John Wesley wrote in his Journal:

*"I walked from Stapleford to hear Mr Berridge at Triplow, and saw many other companies, some before, some behind, some on either side, going the same way, fifteen hundred or two thousand were assembled in the close at Triplow. The only unpolished part of the audience were the few gentlemen on horseback. They were much offended at the cries of those in conviction, but much more at the rejoicing of others, even to laughter; but they were not able to look them in the face for half a minute together".*¹⁵

Wesley stayed over-night with Berridge and was persuaded to preach to the crowds the next day. John Berridge (1716-1793) was vicar of Everton, Bedfordshire from 1755-93. In 1756 he left his living and spent the rest of his days travelling and preaching in Cambridgeshire and surrounding counties. He lived until 1793 and was obviously a most influential preacher. A baulk (a path between cultivated strips in the open field system of farming) in Thriplow

Fig. 12 – Wesley preaching in a village

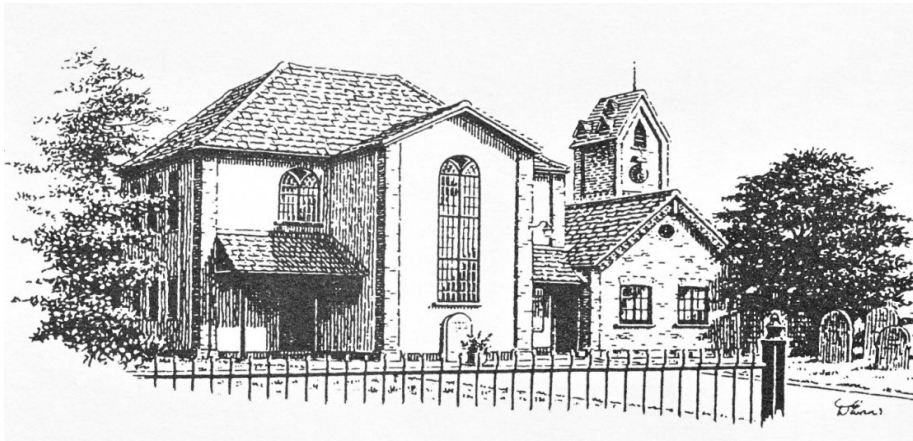


where he used to preach was named Berridge's Baulk in his honour. The Return made by the Rural Dean in 1783 states that '*The Schoolmaster is a Follower of Mr Berridge's Disciples*' and that '*The greatest Part of the Parish are Dissenters*'.¹⁶ Thus two opposing factions within the Established Church, Evangelists and Anglicans, both started out with the same desire to restore what they perceived as its lost links with an earlier more devout form of Christianity. Yet, by concentrating on differing aspects of the pre-reformation church, the results were so very different that the more extreme of both movements eventually broke away from the Church of England: some of the Evangelists forming the Dissenting Churches and some of the Anglo-Catholics leaving to join the Church of Rome.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY DISSENTERS OF THRIPLow:

The story of non-conformity in Thriplow in the eighteenth and nineteenth century is mainly the story of three men, father, son and grandson, each with the name of Joseph Ellis, who between them spanned the best part of a century. By hard work, good management, and the aid of the Act of Enclosure in 1840, the family rose within three generations from tenant farmer to become of Lord of the Manor, J.P. and owner of most of the land in the village, employing 80 men and boys.

Fig. 13 Fowlmere Chapel



Joseph Ellis I is described as a follower of John Berridge, walking over 20 miles to Everton to hear him preach. When his father Thomas, died in 1769 Joseph, then aged 24, took over the running of the farm. He became one of the first deacons of the Independent Chapel in Fowlmere built in 1780, whilst continuing to be churchwarden of Thriplow Parish Church until his death in 1829.¹⁷

His name first appears as churchwarden in 1790, and he kept the churchwarden's accounts continually until his

Fig. 14 Gowards, home of first dissenting chapel in Thriplow



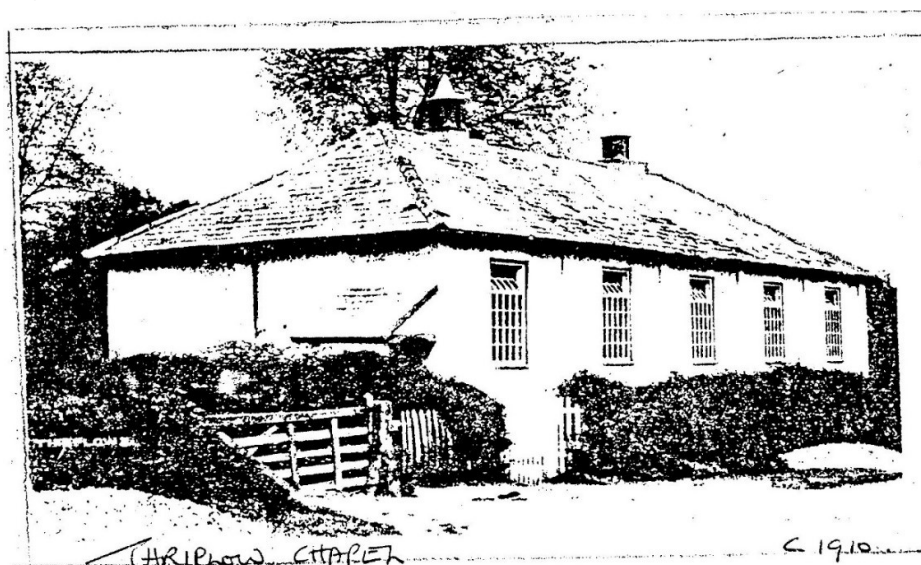
'meeting place' was made in 1800, in a room in a house in Middle Street owned by Thomas Prime, known as 'Wig' Prime.²⁰

In 1835 it was reported that the congregation had grown so large that the barn put aside for non-conformist services could not hold all the people and Joseph Ellis II built a small Independent chapel in Middle Street at a cost of £30

In the 1851 Religious Census, 100 people attended the evening service there, the morning service being held at Fowlmere. This census shocked the nation by revealing that well over half the population of England and Wales did not attend church, and that of those that did, over half attended a non-conformist chapel. These figures are borne out in Thriplow - out of a population in 1851 of 521, 196 people attended the parish Church and 100 attended the dissenting chapel, excluding the children at Sunday School, a total of 296 or 56%, the proportion of non-conformist to Anglicans was 33%

In 1844 the Non-Conformist Chapel built in 1832 by Joseph Ellis was being used as a school, but the classroom in the old chapel was 11 ft square and with approximately 50 children was obviously too small, so in 1846 the new school was built in Fowlmere Road, Thriplow, by Joseph Ellis II. This was much larger, 42 ft by 21 ft,

Fig. 16. British School in Fowlmere Road built 1846



DEMOLISHED - 1976

death in 1829, a period of 28 years. When Joseph Ellis I died in 1829 his son Joseph Ellis II took over from him until 1832. Between them, Joseph I and Joseph II were churchwardens for 42 years.¹⁸

The surviving parish records for 1764-1832, show both Anglicans and Dissenters holding parish offices. Churchwardens, overseers, surveyors and constables rotated between the same few names year after year. indeed, at the back of one of the Account Books is a list of 'Overseers by turn - Of these seven names, five were signatories to the first applications from Thriplow in 1800 for a 'licence to hold Meetings for religious Worship by a Congregation of Protestant Dissenters from the Church of England'. And three - all farmers, were Churchwardens at various times.¹⁹

The first applications to set up a Dissenting

Fig. 15 Independent Chapel in Middle Street



by Joseph Ellis II. This was much larger, 42 ft by 21 ft,

In 1853 the building began to be used on Sundays as a chapel and was used as such until 1972 when it was demolished and the present house was built. In his reply to the Bishop's Visitation Returns in 1873, the Rev Thos Andrew stated that 'there is an Independent Chapel and a Primitive Methodist', so it would seem that the Primitive Methodists took over the Middle Street Chapel for Sunday evening services sometime after 1853.

PIETY OR POLITICS?

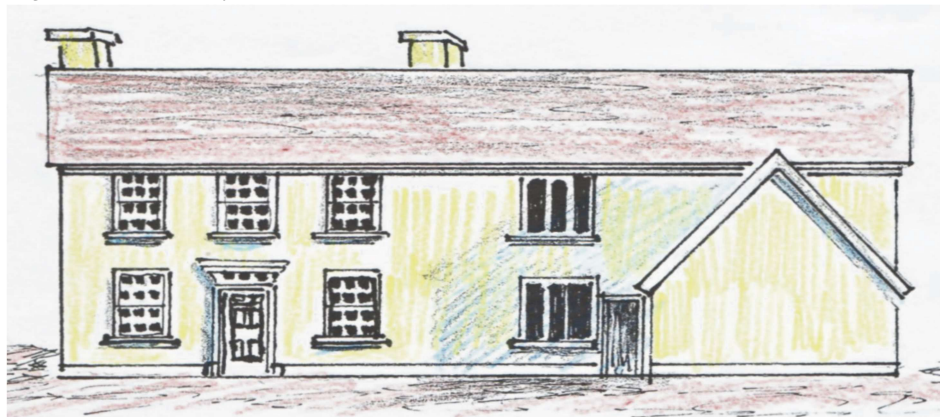
In 1832 the Rev John Jenks became vicar of Thriplow and significantly Joseph Ellis II ceased to be churchwarden. Joseph had been churchwarden since 1829 when his father died, but the year that John Jenks took up his office his name is missing and the churchwarden is named as Thomas Prime.

The churchwardens' accounts consist of amounts spent on the upkeep of the fabric, communion wine, bread, and journeys connected with church affairs. The income came from a church rate set each year and charity bequests: the difference was either owed to the churchwarden or owed by him to the parish. In 1833 Ellis claimed the amount due to him from the accounts, a sum he had never bothered to claim before. At the end of that year he signed the Church accounts at the annual Easter meeting as Overseer, and continued to do so until 1838 when there was a gap of three years before he resumed signing the accounts until 1856 two years before he died.

That gap of three years is significant as it was on July 25 1838 that the Rev John Jenks wrote a letter to the newspaper, *The Cambridge Chronicle*, accusing Joseph Ellis of dismissing a lad in his employ for taking time off to be Confirmed. He accuses Ellis of not only dismissing the lad, but of not paying his church rates and of ridiculing the church in front of his men.

Ellis refuted the accusation in the *Cambridge Chronicle* of August 4 1838. We are fortunate to have the draft of Ellis's letter in which he mentions several things he leaves out of the final letter.

Fig. 17. The Rectory, Middle Street



Since 1794 the Ellis family had leased the 'Parsonage House' or 'Rectory', the property of Peterhouse (the lay rectors) and with it the right to the great tithes which were worth £634 13s a year. In comparison, the vicar's income was a mere £137 15s. Jenks seems to have had no other livings and between 1846 and 1850 even had to pay Joseph Ellis rent for land on Bacon's Manor which Ellis owned. The vast difference in incomes coupled with the fact

that the recipient of the Church Tithes was a leading dissenter must have been galling indeed to John Jenks. Thus it seems clear that the conflict between the Vicar and the leader of the Dissenters was not ideological but envy of his affluent and influential position.

The Rev John Jenks died in 1849. It would seem that Ellis's accusation of him neglecting his Daughter was not quite right as in his will he left her all his estate except for a small legacy of £20 to a nephew and another of £40 to his housekeeper as long as she was still living with him at the time of his decease. To his wife he leaves the sum of one shilling. As (Quote) '*she has enjoyed an annuity agreeably to a deed of separation in my possession, I leave to her no other part or portion of my property whatsoever.*'

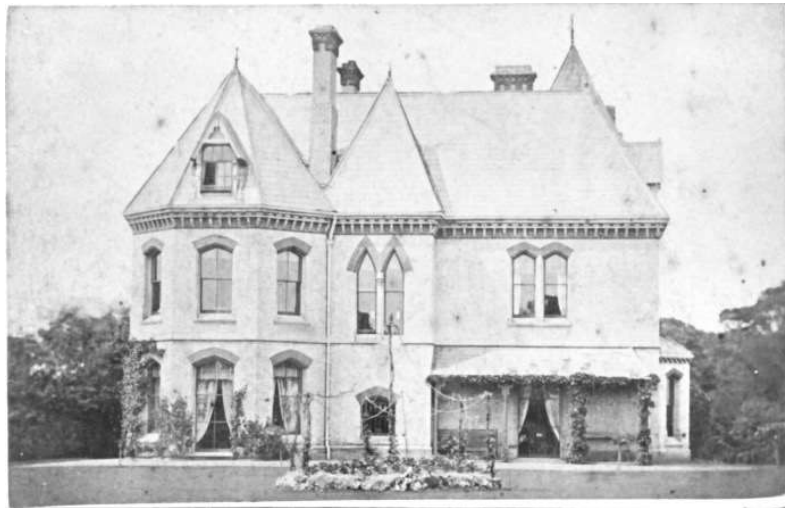
IN CONCLUSION

The vicar of Thriplow, Thomas Carter, being made to put up altar rails in 1639 at the behest of Bishop Wren; William Dowsing knocking it all down again in 1643; Francis Holcroft arguing with Samuel Cater, a Quaker, in front of a great crowd in 1676 on the subject of predestination; John Berridge drawing vast crowds including John Wesley, to hear him preach in the 1750s; the apathy of the Anglican parson in the early 1800s leading to the licensing of a dissenting meeting house; and the enmity of a subsequent vicar causing Joseph Ellis to build the first chapel, all show Thriplow as a centre for Independence.

The result of the 'gothic' restoration of the parish church and its rather 'High' form of worship with candles, embroidered vestments and sung services in contrast to the simple, plain services at the chapel, led to an even greater divide between it and the church.

Yet Joseph Ingle Ellis III, built himself a new house in 1862, thirteen years before the restoration of the church, of so 'Gothic' a design as to rival St Pancras Station in all but size.

Fig.18 Thriplow House built by Joseph Ellis III in 1862



So it would seem that the reason behind the acrimonious letters to the press by the Rev. Jenks and Joseph Ellis are not as obvious as they seem, once the income from tithes question is resolved.

Figure 18. Thriplow Church from Whittlesford border by Nathan Maynard 1875



Shirley Wittering

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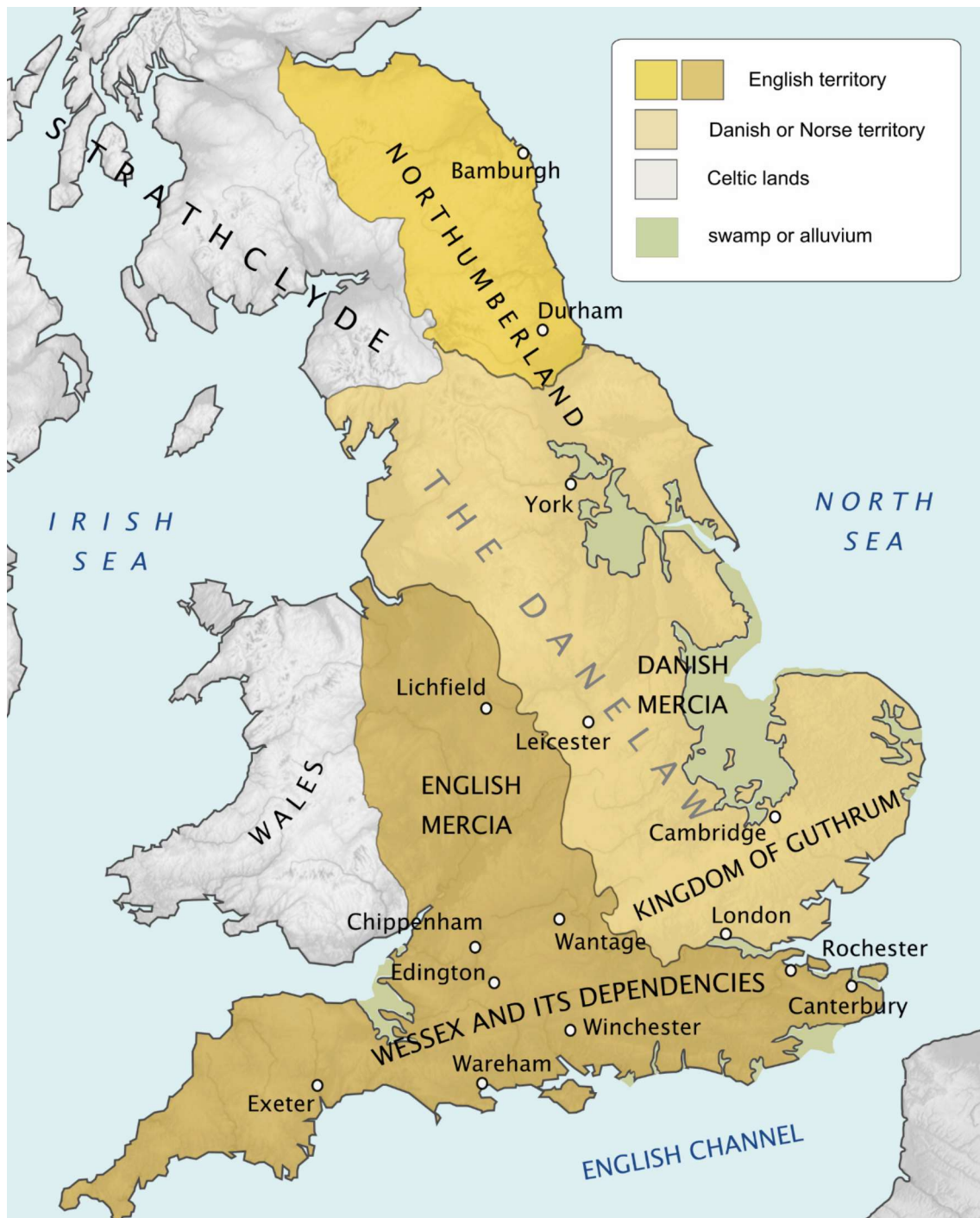
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Loosing Huntingdonshire

This article on the politics that lost Huntingdonshire is in two parts. It starts with an account of the origins of the shire, and part two is on how the shire was lost. It shows how local politics are at the mercy of higher authorities, and how political party triumphs over local politics.

Part 1 Making Huntingdonshire

The word shire means something that has been shorn off, and it appears at the end of the 7th century referring to territory administered by an ealdorman. In the case of Huntingdonshire, Christopher Taylor suggests that this was an area shorn off from the Kingdom of Mercia, that took its name from the town of Huntingdon which preceded the shire by at least one hundred years.¹ The shearing happened when Mercia broke up its large and unwieldy districts and mapped out the Midland shires for military purposes. However, an alternative theory about the founding of Huntingdonshire is that it was part of the Danelaw re-taken by Edward, King of Wessex in 915 (Edward the Elder). By 918 he had re-conquered all of England south of the Humber, and as he went he reconstructed the boroughs that the Danes had taken over. These included Bedford in 915 and Huntingdon in 917.² The shires came into existence after this so that by the second half of the tenth century at the latest England had been divided into shires.³



The earliest documentary evidence of Huntingdon is in 657, where it appears in the description of the bounds of Peterborough Abbey's possessions given to it by Wulfhere. It is next mentioned in c 917-921 when 'the host (the Danish army) went from Huntingdon.' They went to Tempsford 'leaving the fortress of Huntingdon to be repaired by King Edward and the English, and all the original inhabitants of the district submitted to King Edward and sought his peace and protection.'⁴ This is when the three shires of Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire could have been formed, under King Edward's peace and protection. Pauline Stafford agrees with this, but Cyril Hart disagrees. Controversially, he suggests that Huntingdonshire with Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire was part of an 'outer Danelaw' settled by Guthrum's Danish army, and that each area which later became a shire was governed by its own earl but with common administrative elements, and that the shire pre-dated the town. The shire boundaries were fixed by Guthrum's army but did not coincide exactly with the subsequent shire boundaries.⁵

Harold Finberg reiterates that shires were formed when King Edward re-modelled the boroughs, which became a central focus with a garrison, mint and a trading population with a hinterland formed out of a number of hides of land which supplied resources to the town.⁶

The town next appears in 963 when King Edgar confirmed Wulfhere's grant to Peterborough Abbey, and this entry shows the four hundreds so the shire was in existence by then.⁷ By the 10th century Huntingdonshire was a cohesive administrative territory. The boundaries between Huntingdonshire, and Northamptonshire were recorded in 1244.

The jury says on oath that the River Nene divides Huntingdonshire and Northamptonshire at Aylington (Ellington) to the bridge at Walamersford (Wansford) except for the fee of Henry Engaine, and thereafter to Medewell below the burgh. (Peterborough)⁸

The Boundary Between Huntingdonshire and Northamptonshire at Wansford Bridge Photo author.



The same year the boundaries between Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire were also recorded.

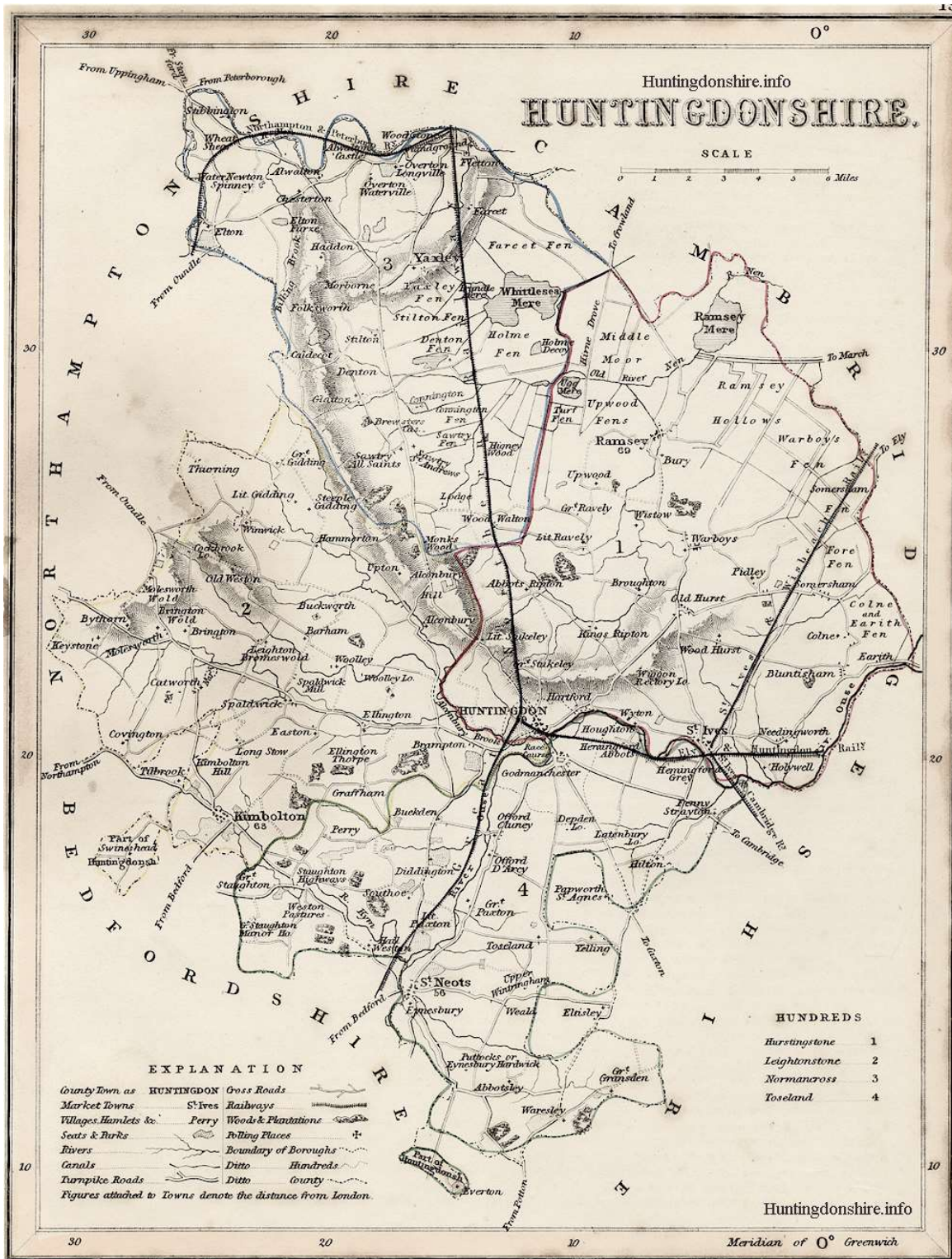
The jurors say past Medwater to Chiselowe, and to Woodhead and to Sunthmustemuth and to Holdenhead at Frikallade and to Saddlebow and to Deben and Wishammoth and there falls the Nene at Huse, and to the middle of Benwick, to the bridge at Herhweth (Earith) and to Holywell and to the Priory of St Ives and to Papworth St Agnes and to Fenstanton and the land of Gilbert of Ghent and including Hilton and to Toseland and to Great Gransden and to Wareseley, Abbotsley and Tetworth to Everton, Barford, and St Neots, Hale Weston, and to Great Stockton (Staughton) to Kimbolton and to Connington, Lullingstone, Luddington and Aylsworth.⁹

In 1284 a perambulation of the bounds between Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire was made as the result of a dispute between Thorney, Peterborough, Ely and Ramsey Abbeys over rights in Whittlesey Mere.

By the 13th century Huntingdonshire was a fully fledged economic and administrative unit distinct from its neighbours with defined boundaries.¹⁰

Loosing Huntingdonshire

On 26th October 1972 the Local Government Act received royal assent. It amalgamated Cambridgeshire, the Isle of Ely, Soke of Peterborough and Huntingdonshire into one large local authority to be known as Cambridgeshire. The ancient county of Huntingdonshire, in existence for 1000 years, was to be no more. Its name and identity were subsumed into Cambridgeshire and as far as the outside world, the media, local and national government



were concerned it was forgotten. Its towns and villages, rivers, fens and farms became recognised as Cambridgeshire, and are referred to as such in the press, on television and radio.

Of course the process has started seven years earlier when Huntingdonshire County Council, founded in 1888 was amalgamated with the Soke of Peterborough to become Huntingdon and Peterborough County Council, which after a shaky start bedded in and worked well. It was this authority that received the White Paper on Local Government Reorganisation in February 1970. In May 1970 the council wrote to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government opposing any amalgamation with Cambridgeshire, but proceedings were halted by the Dissolution of Parliament and a general election.¹¹

The Conservative manifesto for the election 'A Better Tomorrow' stated 'We are committed to the need for reform of the present structure of local government.' It promised a full and frank consultation on the pattern of boundary changes and the effect of these on existing resources. Meanwhile the Labour manifesto 'The Britain We Want' also included local government reform. 'We shall carry through in the next Parliament a major reorganisation of local government.'¹²

The Tories were returned under Edward Heath, who gave Peter Walker the environment minister *carte blanche* to arrange a fundamental reorganisation of local government, the result of which was the 1972 Act. On the face of it this act seems to hit at the heart of Conservative attitudes in destroying tradition, disbanding ancient units, and threatening county elites, but these over-whelming changes were sanctioned by Heath, who liked 'tidy administrative solutions.'¹³

Walker's Command Paper detailing the changes he would make appeared on 12th March 1971.¹⁴ The paper proposed that Huntingdonshire should be part of a new county with the Soke of Peterborough, Isle of Ely, Cambridgeshire, and parts of West Suffolk including Haverhill, Newmarket, Clare RDC, and Moulton; the section on West Suffolk being an addition not in the white paper. Cambridge and Peterborough would remain as unitary authorities.¹⁵

A memorandum from the Huntingdon and Peterborough County Council suggested that 'Local government reform is not a topic in which the average citizen seems particularly interested, but it is undoubtedly one of the most controversial of subjects to those who it concerns'. The memorandum also stated that the sparseness of population and difficulties of communication in Huntingdonshire would cause remoteness of administration and lack of interest on the part of the electorate, and the consequent decline of democracy. But it could also be argued that a single county would mean less disturbance and less wastage and more community interest.¹⁶ The act singled out the smaller counties as being less cost effective than large conglomerations, suggesting that centralisation would work towards better and more efficient services, while ignoring the geographical distances which would add to cost and inconvenience.

A conference held in Cambridge asked 'local people' (it does not state which and from where) what they thought about the proposals, and all, except for those in Peterborough and Cambridge which would keep their identities, were hostile to it. A spokesman from Huntingdonshire pointed out that a large county would be inefficient and inconvenient, and there was widespread dislike of the proposals expressed at the conference. A decision was taken to inform the Department of the Environment that Huntingdon and Peterborough wanted to stay as one county, and but the county councils of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely were willing to merge, but without the add on-s from Suffolk, and that the wording of the Bill to be presented to Parliament should be amended to take this into account.¹⁷

Other suggestions were made at the time. It was suggested that any new county should be called Mid-Anglia. This was dismissed by the county councils involved, as was the Rev. G. Whitlock's suggestion that the word Huntingdonshire be substituted for Cambridgeshire throughout the Bill. However, the Isle of Ely voted to accept the proposals in the white paper, Cambridgeshire County Council and Huntingdonshire and Peterborough opposed it, and Huntingdonshire instructed its MP Sir David Renton to vote against the merger.¹⁸

On 27th October 1971, the *Cambridge Evening News* asked 'What's in a name' and gave the answer which was part of a reason for accepting the plan, 'More cash and better borrowing at a cheaper rate.'¹⁹ On 18th December 1971, Cambridgeshire County Council changed its mind and voted for the planned reform. This was seen as treachery in Huntingdonshire, but it was felt that there was a slim chance that Huntingdon could become the HQ of the new super-county, which would make a difference to the town.²⁰ It was hoped that the Hinchingsbrooke site would make a good location for a new county hall but as the *Hunts Post* pointed out, everything was tipped in favour of Cambridge. William Midwood, clerk of Huntingdon RDC, summed up the feeling at the time when he wrote that 'None of the counties liked the idea six weeks ago – so I don't know what happened to change their minds.'²¹ The answer was, of course, as the *Cambridge Evening News* had suggested – government cash and future investments.

The first debate in Parliament on the Local Government Bill took place on 19th May 1971. Sir David Renton MP for Huntingdonshire said that there were some reservations about the bill, and that Huntingdon and

Peterborough County Council had passed a resolution that there should be no further amalgamation affecting them, as they had already undergone considerable upheaval in the last six years, and the proposed county, which included part of West Suffolk was too large and outside the road and rail links of the area.²² In saying this Renton was fulfilling part of his brief from the shire. The second reading of the Bill took place on 16th November 1971, and despite being briefed to oppose the merger of Huntingdonshire with Cambridgeshire, Sir David Renton voted with the government.

In October 1971 the *Hunts Post* published a headline 'Disappearing Huntingdonshire' pointing out what would happen if the bill was passed. The only response to this appears to have been a letter from Major B. Cruz of Kimbolton, 'Huntingdonshire Disappear. Under-water or bricks and mortar?'²³ Apart from this there appears to have been no resistance to the merger and the loss of the shire's name, and no campaigns as organised elsewhere.²⁴

Once royal assent had been given, the Act became legal; Huntingdonshire became part of a larger conglomeration called Cambridgeshire. Existing local authorities were given time to discharge their functions, re-organise their resources, and arrange for local elections. This was to be done 'in the spirit of co-operation rather than harsh rivalry.'²⁵

'The Big Switch' took place on 1st April 1974.²⁶ Huntingdonshire was a lost shire. Changes would be felt in almost every area of life, transport, roads, traffic control, education, police, provision for the young and the elderly, parks, museums and libraries would all be under the control of a large central authority.

What was lost apart from a name? Ironically the order to remove and sell the old 'Huntingdonshire' name boards had been made in June 1972 by the Roads and Bridges Committee of the Huntingdon and Peterborough County Council²⁷, so the boundary markers had already disappeared. But was it just the name and local government which defined the shire? Criteria that can define a shire or county includes space, physical characteristics, social groupings, administration and politics, and local narratives.

Until the twentieth-century a shires occupied a defined space, demarcated by known boundaries, marked by name boards, or earlier by posts or stones. The boundaries were known and could be recorded on maps, appear in boundary charters, and cartularies such as that of Ramsey Abbey which describes Huntingdonshire's northern boundary. Shire boundaries could be marked physically, as 'In a village on the boundary of Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire, vicars were still held upside down in a hole [to show where the county boundary lay] even in the decorous nineteenth-century'.²⁸

The political and legal framework of the county has been in place for over a1000 years. The county or shire acted as a measure of control and acted as a unit for collecting levies and taxes, and raising an army, and continued to operate these functions into the nineteenth century. The commission of Peace was a key-factor in the context of the county. Although responsible to the crown, it was the organ through which national legislation was disseminated at a local level. The county as a whole was expected to supply an army in times of national stress, to pay taxes and subsidies, maintain roads, bridges and gaols, and provide a venue for the assizes. Failure in any of these areas resulted in the whole county being fined. The county was one of the earliest corporate bodies.

The social element of the county is grounded on the people who live in it, and the society they have created. In the early modern period, (mid-16th century-mid 18th century) this has led to historians identifying a group of the elite as a 'county community', who identified with their county and took this identity into court and national government. The equivalent of this in the later eighteenth centuries and the nineteenth centuries was the county clubs and societies which flourished in London and brought together exiles from their homeland. There must have been informal gatherings in the medieval period and sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who took market produce from Huntingdonshire to Cheapside and their allotted places to sell in London, and the carriers who used the same inn in London. The serf or peasant farmer would have been aware of the county when tax collectors arrived, or the sheriff's men came to round up them up for military service. Shire officials had to be aware of their shire's territory as 'hue and cry' had to stop at the county boundary for the next county to take it over. While the 1839 County Police Act placed the onus of law and order onto each county.

The shire or county were prominent in the early historiography of local history. The earliest atlases were drawn for the county elite, and the earliest histories were written by them.²⁹ While one of the largest and most complicated historical research projects was based on the county – the Victoria History of the Counties of England started in 1899 and still in process today, and the first place any local historian looks for information about a place.

In the 1920s, F.W. Hackwood could write 'The tendency for centuries was for each shire to exploit its own vitality, to cherish its own traditions. Everywhere local patriotism and civic independence has gone hand in hand with the operation of the shire system tending towards variation and individuality'.³⁰ In 2012, William Evans wrote 'The importance of the county as a unit of political identity is now on a downward slope.'³¹ This is mostly due to the 1972 Local Government Act.

Evelyn Lord

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- 24 One of the amendments to the Bill was a proposal to take villages on the Surrey/Sussex border out of Surrey and place them in Sussex. One of the protestors was my aunt. 'I am Surrey born and bred, and Surrey I will die' (and she did) Hansard notes that 'People care passionately about this'. There was a march on Westminster and the amendment was dropped. Parliamentary Debates, Hansard 935, 941 1107-1112. The amendment was defeated by 18 votes. Efforts were made to find similar resistance in Huntingdonshire, but none have been traced. However, a householder in St Ives still defiantly displays the Huntingdonshire border sign.
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Local and Landscape History Research Group

The Local and Landscape History Research Group (LLHRG) is a group for those interested in, or wishing to research their local history or aspects of the landscape around them. Membership is free and open to all. We hold regular meetings via Zoom and produce this our quarterly bulletin, copies of which are sent out via email to members of the LLHRG and are deposited in Cambridgeshire Archives, Huntingdonshire Archives and the Cambridgeshire Collection.

We welcome articles on landscape and local history research and as a group we are a great resource for anyone setting out to research their local or landscape history.

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