



History of the Parish of Beenham.

By Mary Sharp.

CHAPTER II.

VICARS AND PATRONS.

THE great Revolution which goes by the name of the Reformation, of which the date may be fixed in 1539, the year of the suppression of the Monasteries, caused a shock which must have been felt through the length and breadth of the land. The vast possessions, granted during preceding centuries to religious houses, everywhere changed owners, and from the easy-going monks, to whose rule their tenants had become accustomed, the land with its tenantry, as well as the advowsons of countless livings, became the property of laymen, often *nouveux riches*, in whose eyes they were in many cases merely looked upon as objects of barter wherewith to increase their wealth. So, at all events, as will be seen by the following narrative, it happened at Beenham, and henceforth the manors, the advowson of the living and also the Rectorial tithes (these last passing into the hands of lay impropiators) suffered from frequent changes of ownership, which could not have been otherwise than detrimental to the best interests of the population.

The advowson of the Living, together with the Abbey Manor and the Rectorial Tithes were granted to Sir Henry, afterwards Lord Norreys of Rycote. Of the Manor and the Tithes more will be said in a later chapter.

The new patron had to wait some time before he could avail himself of his privilege, for Henry Olyver, the last nominee of the Abbot and monks, retained the incumbency till his death in 1555. He lived on through the reign of Edward VI. into that of Mary Tudor. We do not know how he managed to steer his way in peace; that he succeeded in doing so seems clear from existing evidence.

The following is the list of the Post-Reformation Vicars of Beenham and their patrons. Where these last are not mentioned, the month date being also omitted, it must be understood that the names have been taken from the Parish Registers or elsewhere,

there being no corresponding entry of the institution in the Diocesan Records.

DATE.	PATRON.	VICAR.
13th March, 1555	Henry Norreys, Esq.	John Horwood, on the death of Henry Olyver.
	" "	Robert Bembrick.
22nd November, 1564	" "	Richard Parker, on resignation of Robert Bembrick.
1611	<i>Thos. Earl of Kelly</i>	William Elton, by death of Richard Parker.
1634	<i>Sir Peter Vanlore</i>	Samuel Bofford.
1645	" "	Philip Goddard.
30th April, 1686	Nathan Knight (? Wright)	Richard Simeon, by death of Philip Goddard.
2nd February, 1686-7	" "	John Willcox, by cession of Richard Simeon.
1687		Robert Humphreys.
1690	Mr. Blagrove (Lysons' History)	Philip Goddard.
12th July, 1731	Thomas Goddard (Apothecary, London)	Thomas Horton, by death of Philip Goddard.
22nd June, 1733	Mary Forrester, widow (So entered in the Sarum Dio. Reg., but in a note attached to a Copy of Dr. Stevens' Will it is stated that Mr. Horton, Mrs. Mary Stevens' father, presented Thos. Stackhouse see below.)	Thos. Stackhouse, M.A., by cession of Thos. Horton.
20th February, 1753	Thomas Horton, of Hampton, Middlesex, Clerk	Francis Ayscough, by death of Thomas Stackhouse.
12th January, 1757	Thomas Horton, Clerk, Rector, Hascomb, Surrey	Thomas Stevens, M.A., by death of Francis Ayscough.
14th March, 1788	Mary Stevens, of Beenham, widow	John Douglas, D.D., by death of Thos. Stevens.
22nd June, 1808	Mary Stevens, of Midgham. Berks, widow	Robert Barkers, M.A., by death of John Douglas.
1st February, 1810	" "	John Bushnell, B.A., by resignation of Robert Barker.
1839	Mrs. Sarah Bushnell, widow	Henry Cherry, by death of John Bushnell.
1842	" "	William Bushnell, M.A., by death of Henry Cherry.
May, 1855	" "	Thomas Hext Bushnell, M.A., by death of William Bushnell.
October, 1900	Thos. Hext Bushnell	Robert Dunn, B.A., by resignation of Thos. H. Bushnell.
October, 1907	" "	Gilbert Duffus Sutherland Bushnell, B.A., by resignation of Robert Dunn.

Lord Norreys of Rycote, as he then was, may have presented to the Vicarage three times, though his name and the presentation of Robert Bembricke are not recorded in the Diocesan Register. It is, however, there stated that he did present Richard Parker on the resignation of Robert Bembricke, November 22, 1564; such irregularities in the entries are found in almost every case during that troubled time of change and uncertainty.

Lord Norreys died in 1601, and neither the names of the three next vicars nor of the patrons are given in the Sarum Register, but we learn from the Parish Registers that William Elton succeeded on the death of Richard Parker in 1611, and was followed in 1634 by Samuel Bofford, and in 1645 by Philip Goddard. In 1622 the Earl of Kelly, who had married Elizabeth grand-daughter of Lord Norreys of Rycote, received a grant of the manor and advowson of Beenham; and later the Inquisition Post Mortem, after the death of Sir Peter Vanlore of Tilehurst (1627), informs us that he owned, among other possessions in Beenham, the advowson of the living, and it seems probable that these are the names lacking from the list of Patrons between 1611 and 1634-45 (entered above in *Italics*).

Of the early vicars of Beenham whose appointments have been mentioned, very little is known except what can be gleaned from the Parish Registers. These dating from 1561 tell us something of Richard Parker. He, at any rate, had accepted the new order of things for he was a married man with a large family. Four sons and three daughters succeeded each other till in 1586, in the month of October, "The Vicar's wife was buried." Perhaps this was the first time that such an incident had occurred in Beenham. Richard Parker himself followed her in 1610. His successors William Elton and Samuel Bofford were also family men. A long list of children follows their names among the baptisms and also burials, for infant mortality was almost the rule and not the exception in those days.

The next appointment was that of Philip Goddard, in whose time (1676) a return was required of the number of "Popish recusants, obstinate separatists and nonconformists" in the various parishes of the Diocese of Sarum. In Beenham at the time were a hundred and twenty inhabitants, seven Papists and no nonconformists. The Papists were doubtless of the household of Richard Perkins, a relative of the Ufton family. Philip Goddard suffered from discontent amongst his parishioners, though he and they were wise enough to submit their differences to arbitration. It is recorded on some pages at the end of the old Register book that in the year

1677 a "Publique" meeting was held between Mr. Philip Goddard, Vicar, and John Webb and divers others "in the presence of Mr. Samuel Brightwell, Esq^{re}. one of His Mag^{ties} Justices of the Peace and John Curtise, gentleman, arbitriater indifferently chosen to decide and conclude about the number and proportion of his common on Towneymead."

And then and there an agreement was made and signed that "the said Vicar should have 3 commons at half stint and 6 proportionately at whole stint and th^t there must be no after differences arise between the parties aforesaid, . and for confirmation of the sd. Agreement the sd. Philip Goddard the Vicar was to give unto the Parish Church of Beenham Two Books then wanting, which were the book of Homilies and the book of Cannons and Constitutions of the Church of England, which Books the said Vicar brought and delivered up and this was ordered to be set down in the Parish Book of Accounts and Registers for a perpetual memorial."

A few words of explanation seem necessary as to the nature of this dispute and its settlement.

The system of agriculture, known as the Common or Open Field system, had prevailed in England from Saxon times or even earlier. Customs varied in different parts of the country, but in this part of Berkshire certain lands bordering on the river Kennet were cultivated in common by Freehold landowners and their tenants. There were both arable, meadow, and pasture lands. The arable lands were divided by grass strips called "mere ridges" into parallel spaces about a furlong in length and a rood in width, four of which went to an acre. These pieces of land were allotted in rotation to the "commoners" as they were called; in no case would any man's lands, to however many he was entitled, be all held contiguously, but would be scattered over the entire field. A roll was kept of the order of rotation of the allotted strips, and, as it is expressed in an old Berkshire Parish Book preserved at Sulhamstead by the late Major Thoyts, "at the end, each lot returns and is the same as at the beginning, and so continues the same for ever."

Besides the arable land there was the meadow ground, on which the commoners grazed their cattle and horses and which was used also for hay (pigs were forbidden). Sheep were generally fed on the fallow. The number of cattle, sheep and horses which each man was allowed to turn out depended on the size of his holding in the arable ground. A large number was allowed before the meadows

were turned down for hay and before the fallow was ploughed up. The full number was termed "full stint" and the smaller would be "half stint." In some places the hay was made in common and afterwards divided, and in others the meadow was divided into strips and allotted before being mown.

The names of the open fields, as known in earlier times, are still preserved in the old Parish maps. In Beenham they were the following—beginning at the west and north of the Bath Road :—Bar field, Lye Furlong and Beenham field ; and south of the road : Ingle field, Wharf field and Paradise, part of East Mead and Towney Mead.

The next presentation, Richard Simeon, is said in the Bishop's Register to have been made by one Nathan Knight. Nathan is an unusual name, and it happened that at that time Nathan Wright, afterwards Keeper of the Great Seal under William and Mary, had some interest in Englefield, where his son eventually married the only daughter and heiress of Sir Francis Powlet, owner of the Englefield estates. It seems possible that it is his name that is here intended, but misspelt.

Another difficulty presents itself in connection with this presentation. Two presentations were made, according to the Register, in the same year 1686. The first to Richard Simeon on the death of Philip Goddard on the 30th April, and the second to John Willcox on the 2nd February, also 1686, by cession of Richard Simeon. The difficulty is more apparent than real, for by the old style of reckoning the year did not begin till the 25th of March, the first month of the new year was therefore April and the last of the same year would be February. The dates of the three first months after January 1st are generally written thus :—1686^e.

From the Parish Register we learn that yet another appointment was made later in 1687—that of a certain Robert Humphreys. Then the advowson changed ownership again and, according to Ashmole, Mr. Blagrove, presumably of Calcott, appointed another Philip Goddard to the vicarage. Of him we know that he was a contemporary and friend of George Goodall, Rector of Padworth (1683-1707), who made him his executor and residuary legatee. It is to this second Philip Goddard that we owe some most valuable notes copied by his successor Thomas Horton into a book of the tithe accounts of the Vicarage.

Thomas Horton or, as the name is sometimes written, Haughton,



April y^e 12th 1748th
 Chosen for the Church
 -warden of the said Parish for the year
 Ensuing W^m Elze Carter by me
 Tho Stackhouse vic^r

resigned the living in 1733 and in the same year Thomas Stackhouse, M.A., was presented by a Mrs. Mary Forester.

Of this man and his writings there is no lack of information, and, as typical of the more learned clergy of his day, his career is undoubtedly interesting. How different the standards then were from those of the present time the reader may judge for himself. The following account is taken from the Dictionary of National Biography.

Thomas Stackhouse was ordained priest in London in 1704 and was a curate at Shepperton, and afterwards, about 1713, he was minister to the English Church in Amsterdam. He was not therefore without various experiences, but these did not fill his pocket. On his return to London he found himself in great poverty; so much so that he was induced to write and print an appeal to the then Bishop of London, John Robinson, in which he dwelt on the "Miseries and great hardships" suffered by the "inferiour clergy in and about London." He was just then beginning his great work, "The History of the Bible." The booksellers would advance him no money, and he made matters worse with them by his "irrepressible pen" in publishing a pamphlet called "The Bookbinder, Bookprinter and Bookseller confuted, or an Author's Vindication of Himself."

It was from a condition of extreme poverty and distress that he was rescued in the summer of 1733 by the influence of Edward Gibson, Bishop of London (John Robinson's successor), who obtained for him his appointment to the Vicarage of Beenham. He died and is buried there. The tradition of the place relates that he wrote some part of his famous History of the Bible not, as it is said, at the Beenham Vicarage, nor even within the confines of the village, but at a public-house hard by on the Bath Road, still existing, known as "The Three Kings or Jack's Booth," and it is further averred that, tired with his literary labours during the week, on Saturday nights he would sometimes stay late and drink deep, that after such occasions he was wont to choose the sin of drunkenness for his Sunday morning's sermon, and—"Didn't he give it himself!" Who are we to cast a stone at him, whose grandfathers and their fathers mostly did the like?

His great work, in two ponderous folio volumes, profusely illustrated, has, of course, long since been superannuated. It was written in defence of the inspiration of the Bible against the free-thinkers of the day. Only the curious book-lover is ever likely to

look at it now ; but so far as the illustrations are concerned his curiosity is certainly likely to be repaid in amusement. Each illustration is dedicated to a different bishop. It is nowhere stated who was the artist, but he has a vivid imagination. The Ark, for instance, is represented as an enormous floating stable with windows, and out of each window there looks a different beast, while, to give an idea of the interior arrangement, a separate small square picture in the margin shows us a sample stall, very spacious and very clean, as it well may be since a man, presumably one of Noah's sons, is sweeping it out.

A white marble tablet, now placed on the north wall of the tower of Beenham Church, records Mr. Stackhouse's death and also his claims to the respect and admiration of Posterity. It is surmounted by a representation of an open Bible. The inscription is as follows :

Juxta reconditum est quod mortale fuit Thomæ
Stackhouse. A.M. Hujus Ecclesiæ per annos XIX
Vicarii. Qui pro Christiana fide strenuus admodum
propugnator non sine gloria militavit
Qui plus scire volunt scripta ejus consulant
Ex hac vita grata alterus vice corpore suo
solutus emigravit Octobris idibus A S
MDCCLII Ætat sua LXXII.

(Translation.)

Near this spot is hidden what was mortal of
Thomas Stackhouse, A.M. Vicar of this church for
XIX years. Who, a most valiant champion, fought
not without glory for the Christian faith.
Whoever wishes to know more, let them consult
his Writings His body being dissolved,
he emigrated from this life to another better
one on the Ides of October Old Style
1752, aged 72 years.

Thomas Horton next presented Francis Ayscough as his successor, and he, dying within three years was followed by Thomas Stevens, M.A. Mr. Horton, on this second presentation, describes himself as Rector of Hascombe in Surrey.

(To be continued.)