

ART. VI.—*Financial problems of St Bees Churchwardens.* By JOHN ADDY, M.A., Ph.D.

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ONE continuous problem that has faced churchwardens during their period of office has been that of finance. Raising money to pay for repairs to the fabric and to cover the running costs of the parish church has taxed their ingenuity, for opposition to their demands for money was often vocal, and sometimes led to litigation. The churches in Copeland deanery were often in a state of disrepair due to lack of finance and there is evidence to show that the area was one of extreme poverty down to the latter part of the eighteenth century. Hence a variety of devices had to be adopted to raise money and these methods are recorded in the terriers. St Bees was no different from the other parishes in the deanery, all of which were large and included a number of chapelries, some of which were seven or eight miles distant from the parish church. The custom at St Bees has a bearing on the problems which arose in the seventeenth century, when urgent repairs were needed:

"Our way of assessing to the necessary repairs of our church is by couples and half couples, which is done the Tuesday in Whitsun week by the churchwardens, foremen of the four and twenty, and of as many of that number as appear, which assessment is mitigated on St John's Day according to equity, and with respect to the abilities of every parishioner. This is the custom, the ancient and immemorial custom, of the parish of St Bees. The assessments laid for the repairs of the parish church are collected by the four churchwardens and paid on St Mark's Day to the churchwardens and foreman of the four and twenty at which time the parish accounts are stated, and afterwards registered in a fair hand."

Then follows some details of a custom which appertained to the parochial chapelries and the reason for this rather odd practice:

“twelve pence is paid for the head of every fox and for the head of every brock or badger; four pence for the head of every raven and as much for the head of every eagle; whereby the assessments to the repairs of the parish church are very much lessen'd in the mountainous parts of the parish.”<sup>1</sup>

The select vestry of St Bees, even with this method of providing some relief for poor chapelries, had to face opposition. From time to time the chapelries tried to exercise a pretended right to independence from the parish church, especially where distance and the the problem of travel made regular visits to church a serious matter. In the seventeenth century it was Ennerdale chapel that tried to claim complete independence of the vestry of St Bees and to further this commenced a suit in the Chancery Court at York in 1684.

The trouble began when the churchwardens of St Bees assessed Ennerdale for contributions towards urgent repairs to the parish church. Ennerdale inhabitants rejected this out of hand and claimed to be an independent rectory and not a dependent chapelry. The churchwardens then took the case to the Consistory Court of the Archdeacon of Richmond, where sentence was pronounced in favour of St Bees. An appeal was registered subsequently in the Archbishop's Chancery Court at York in the hope that the decision might be reversed. Legal processes in the seventeenth century operated no faster than they do today, so it is not surprising that the appeal hearing extended over two years.

In order to establish certain basic facts, the witnesses from St Bees were asked if the townships of Ennerdale and Kinniside were an independent rectory since the dissolution of the priory of St Bees in 1539 and whether

the impropriator of the rectory of St Bees appointed the curate at Ennerdale. A further question was put to them to certify how long Ennerdale chapel had exercised full parochial rights in the matter of baptism, solemnisation of matrimony, burial of the dead and celebrations of Holy Communion without paying compensation to the vicar of St Bees for loss of fees. They were asked also how many parishes there were between St Bees and Ennerdale and if these were also subordinate to St Bees. Then followed a set of questions to the chapelwardens of Ennerdale. One important point appears to have been the extent to which the civil authority regarded the chapelry as an independent authority. Hence questions were asked concerning the appointment of overseers of the poor, sidesmen and chapelwardens and the extent to which the chapel supported its own poor. The chapelwardens were required to state if they received orders from Quarter Sessions directly, in addition to orders from the Archdeacon of Richmond's court, or if such orders came through St Bees. The payment of synodals and procurations direct to the court at Richmond or otherwise had an important bearing on the case. Normally these fees were the direct responsibility of the parish and not of the chapelry. The final matter concerned pew rights in St Bees and the extent to which Ennerdale contributed to the support of the poor of St Bees and the repair of the roads in that town.

The chapelwardens of Ennerdale, Thomas Lambe of Croasdale and Thomas Lambe of Lowray (?Lowcra), gave evidence. So far as they were aware the townships of Ennerdale and Kinniside had been a rectory since the dissolution of the priory in 1539. They based their assertion on the fact that the impropriator of the tithes had appointed the curate and paid his stipend. Since Ennerdale was seven miles from St Bees, Ennerdale people had been allowed to receive communion, bury

their dead, solemnise matrimony and baptise without reference to the vicar of St Bees, even to the extent of paying no fees. Furthermore, the two townships elected their own overseers of the poor, the chapelwardens, and sidesmen. Any orders from the Richmond court were always addressed to Ennerdale wardens. Finally, they said, no inhabitants of Ennerdale had any right to a pew or burial rights at St Bees, neither did any contribute towards the relief of the poor or repair of the roads in that place. Moreover, the chapelwardens had not been asked to collect any assessments for the repair of St Bees church for at least three years.

Richard Skelton and Richard Smith, two of the St Bees churchwardens, challenged the evidence from Ennerdale witnesses. In the first place, they argued, Ennerdale with Kinniside had never been a separate rectory but had from time immemorial been regarded as part of St Bees parish. The impropiators of the tithes had always appointed the incumbents of St Bees and the curates of Ennerdale until the tithes of the latter were alienated to "different and several persons", when the new tithe owners nominated the curate and paid his stipend. There was an argument about distance. Ennerdale was not in the estimation of St Bees churchwardens seven miles distant but only four, and between the two lay the chapelry of Cleator. Calculation of distance was a problem that was not solved until much later. The practice in Copeland deanery and elsewhere in the north of using the computed mile and the old northern mile of 2,240 yards led to many disputes, of which the above is an example. The churchwardens agreed, however, that Ennerdale had some parochial rights, for no one "can recall a time when Ennerdale people had come to St Bees for the sacraments or to be married, buried or baptised". These rights did not constitute a rectory and therefore

Ennerdale township was part of St Bees parish in the same way as Eskdale, Wasdale, Netherwasdale and Loweswater, the latter being much farther from St Bees than Ennerdale. "There were and are diverse parishes which devide and lye between them and St Bees aforesaid and . . . the chappell of Lowswater lyes directly beyond Ennerdale yet all the Inhabitants within the said several Chapelrys doe Contribute to the repair of their mother Church of St Bees and own themselves parishioners thereof."<sup>2</sup> There was no dispute concerning the appointment of the officials of the chapel nor was it denied that the chapel supported its own poor. It was strongly denied that orders from Quarter Sessions and the Archdeacon of Richmond's court were sent directly to Ennerdale chapelwardens, but maintained that they were frequently sent through the churchwarden of St Bees.

It would appear that the decision to assert independence of St Bees was decided upon at the primary visitation of the Archbishop of York in 1684, when Ennerdale chapelwardens decided that they "desired so to pay their fees and could, would and did do it" as a parish and not as a chapelry. Although the inhabitants of Ennerdale had no pews or burial places in St Bees church, nevertheless they had the "free liberty and privilege of sitting in any seat, stall or pew in the parish church of St Bees . . . and of burying their dead there if they so pleased".<sup>3</sup> It became clear from further evidence that Ennerdale chapel made no contribution in any way to the maintenance of either poor or highways in St Bees since the two townships were entirely separate constabularies. It had been the custom, at least until 1684, for representatives from Ennerdale to accept office at St Bees, and one member of the select vestry of twenty-four was always an Ennerdale man.

The vicar of St Bees, aged 32, was called to give

evidence. It is of interest to note how many incumbents in the deanery were local men, educated at one of the grammar schools and returning after ordination to serve local livings for the rest of their lives. Richard Stainton, the then vicar, was no exception. He had lived all his life in the area and received his education at St Bees grammar school. Confirming the evidence of the churchwardens, he added that as a schoolboy he had seen "and observed the Chapelwardens of Ennerdale on St Mark's Day [the usual account day for the parish of St Bees] attend upon the churchwardens of St Bees to give in their accounts for the said Chapelry . . .".<sup>4</sup> Stainton also added that he remembered hearing one of the chapelwardens say to his father that, "if he, the chapelwarden, had had as much Scholarship as his son . . . he could have cheated all the twenty-four & the churchwardens in his said accounts".<sup>5</sup> Stainton was convinced that until recently Ennerdale had contributed towards the repair of the parish church and that he as vicar had received such payment, including arrears, on St Mark's day.

A dyer from Egremont, Thomas Pearson, was called to give evidence. He had been born in the town and had lived there all his life. He knew the two Lambes and confirmed that they held extensive lands in the chapelry. Pearson was convinced that Ennerdale was a chapel of St Bees and until 1684 the chapelwardens had brought contributions towards repairs at the parish church. He said he had heard "Thomas Lambe the younger's grandfather, about 27 years ago or thereabouts, say that he had been accounting and paying to the churchwardens of St Bees the assessments . . . due from the inhabitants of the chapelry of Ennerdale. . . ."<sup>6</sup> The tithes of St Bees and Ennerdale had been paid to the impropriator of the rectory until recently, when the Ennerdale tithes were alienated. The blacksmith of St John's, Anthony Patrickson,

then an old man of 75, educated in St Bees school, remembered seeing the Ennerdale wardens bring their accounts and contributions to St Bees on St Mark's day. Having lived all his life within two miles of St Bees, he never knew the custom contradicted until six years before, and continued: "he hath known the guardians of the said chapelry of Ennerdale bring in their accounts the number of the foxes, badgers, and wild cats that have been killed within the said chapelry . . . and that the churchwardens have allowed twelve pence a head for them out of their assessments. . . ."

When John Frear, a former chapelwarden of Ennerdale who had held office in 1671, was called he said that in the same year he received an assessment from St Bees and went round the chapelry collecting from each their due proportion and noting those who did not pay. He then took this list with the money to St Bees. William Viccars acted as chapelwarden in 1678 and he too collected assessments and gave an account of all the foxes and vermin killed during the past year. The churchwardens then allowed him twelve pence a head for the foxes and other vermin as part of their assessment. William Nicholson had been churchwarden at St Bees in 1639 and he had always received money due from Ennerdale chapel for repairs to the church. Another churchwarden, Thomas Benn, who had held office in 1664 also received payment from Ennerdale, amounting in that year to 16s. 5d. He had also seen Francis Sheppard, another churchwarden, receive as much as 108s. 8d. from the same chapelry. Thomas Patrickson, from Scalegill, had been foreman of the vestry for seven years and on no single occasion during that period had Ennerdale chapel omitted to pay its due. It was Patrickson who produced additional evidence to show that a rent of £140 was paid annually to the Bishop of Chester out of the dissolved priory of St Bees, towards which

the impropiators of the tithes contributed £20 as their proportion for Ennerdale.

In an attempt to strengthen their position, the churchwardens of St Bees produced a second set of articles which traced matters back to the reign of Edward VI. On 26 June 1553, Edward VI had alienated the tithes of St Bees to Sir Thomas Chaloner in whose family they remained until they were alienated to Henry Jenkinson. The latter then alienated Ennerdale tithes, but Jenkinson and Chaloner before him always paid the stipend of £12 per annum to the incumbent of St Bees and £4. 13s. 4d. to the curate of Ennerdale. Relationships between the parish of St Bees and Ennerdale were traced from 1622 to 1642. In the former year the church of St Bees was in a very decayed state, and so heavy were the demands for money from the parochial chapels that Eskdale, Netherwasdale, Upperwasdale, Loweswater, and Ennerdale refused to pay their assessments. The select vestry wasted no time and took the case to the Bishop of Chester's consistory court and the chapels were ordered to pay their dues to St Bees. There the matter rested until 1635, when the church had become so ruinous that the steeple fell down and destroyed a large portion of the fabric. The report states that it would cost £100 to rebuild. Ennerdale did pay its share of the sum to rebuild the steeple but complained about the cost. The following year Ennerdale refused to pay any contribution whatever, on the grounds that it had already been heavily rated the previous year. However, William Lickbarrow, schoolmaster at Ennerdale from 1618 to 1636, said that the chapel had always paid assessments.

Dissatisfied with the decision of the Richmond court, the parishioners of Ennerdale appealed to York, hence the survival of this case. William Easdale, chancellor of York in 1636, upheld the decision of the Bishop



of Chester made in 1622. A search was ordered for records stored in "the tower of St Mary without the walls of York", which was used as a store. These records were later destroyed when the tower was blown up in 1644 during the siege of York. On this occasion the search revealed that Ennerdale had been appropriated to the cell of St Bees by a certain Ranulph. To confirm that Ennerdale paid assessments, the original churchwardens' accounts for 1625, 1631 and 1632 were produced and are now in the file of papers concerning this case at the Borthwick Institute, York.

Ennerdale continued to be classed as a chapel of St Bees until the reforms of the nineteenth century. St Bees evidently continued to be a poor parish until the close of the eighteenth century, for the visitation return of Bishop Porteus in 1783 states: "The church is neither decent nor clean and the seating accomodation is bad while the interior needs great repair. Old people say this is the reason they do not attend church in winter. We have no parsonage house and our vicar is non resident being 25 miles away for what reason we cannot tell."<sup>8</sup>

The following churchwardens' accounts reveal the extent to which destruction of vermin was allowed in the assessments and the method of giving approval to the accounts.

### St Bees Churchwardens' Accounts.

#### 1651 *Disbursement of John Steele*

Imprimis: to John Simpson for his worke	£3	13s	4d
Item; to William Bigrigg for worke	1	1	6d
Item; to William Hodgson for worke		4	6d
Item; for nayles to Henry Harper		1	6d
Item; to Anthony Hind for 3 ravens heads		1	0d
Item; to Thomas Richardson for 2 ravens heads			8d
Item; to Nicholas Mireas for 3 ravens heads		1	0d
Item; to Nicholas Gibson for one raven head			4d

Item; to Gaven Scafe for one raven head	4d
Item; for 2 load of sand	4d
Item; for 3 days work at the Church	1 od
Item; to Mr Wibridge for one fox head	1 od
for passing his accounts	1 od
for Collecting up Ennerdale assessments	10 od
Total	£5 17 od

Paid all to Anthony Nicholson by me John Steel 1651

This account past with approval of Percival Radcliffe minister of St Bees.

1653 *Disbursement of Robert Makinson*

Imprimis; to the plumber	£0 17 od
Item; to Henry Walker for making the bell roopes	2 6d
Item; for bread for a communion	1 od
Item; for a brock head	1 od
Item; to the Clarke for lying flaggs over 3 graves	1 6d
Item; for writing the Catechism	4d
Item; for my self attending the plumber 3 days	1 od
Item; for one day at Egremont when the bell roopes were made	6d
Item; for writing a Kalendar of the names of the inhabitants	2d
Item; to the Clarke for writing the accounts	1 od
Item; to the minister for approving the accounts	1 od
Item; in charges of the sute at Carliell	3 0 6d
Thomas Shepard to pay his disbursements	10 od
For abell for the Dog whipper	3d
Item; to John Whinwray for one day bearing of sand for leads	6d
Item; to John Hutchinson	2 6d

The sum of the disbursements amounts to £5. 10s 8d.

There remaineth in his hands to be paid to the next Churchwarden

1 2 11d

Examined per me Patrickson, Foreman 1653.

1666 *Disbursements of Robert Hutchinson*

Imprimis; to John Simpson and his son Georg	7s 4d
Item; to Thomas Leach	1 od
Item; for 3 loads of coals	1 od
Item; for a tending the plumber 10 days	3 4d
Item; for laying down the flaggs on John Thompson wife grave	6d
Item; to Francis Bigrigg for a pick shaft	3d

Item; to Anthony Marshall	3	3d
Item; the fifth of November for candles and drink	2	od
Item; for 3 days to Egremont & one day tending Anthony Marshall	2	od
Item; to Matthew Cragg wife for drink		3d
Item; for a tending one day		4d
Item; for soope for the bells		6d
Item; to Anthony Nicholson wife for drink		7d
Item; for bread for the communion	1	od
Item; to Ellin Benn for mending the scripcloaths		6d
Item; to Henry Bigrigg wife	1	od
Item; to Henry Bigrigg for a collar to the midell bell		8d
For writing the list		2d
For writing of this account	1	od
To William Gaitskell old churchwarden	3	11d
To the Minister for a lowing this account	1	od

### Netherwasdale.

For two foxheads	2	od
Easkdale for 5 ravens and one fox cubbe	2	od
To Robert Thompson	7	6d
To Matthew Cragg wife	3	4d
To William Hodgson dog whipper	1	od
To Anthony Marshall	4	od
For foxheads kild in Ennerdale	7	od
For 12 young ravens	2	od
For one wild catte		4d

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£3 2 4d

Allowed by me Francis Radcliffe minister.

### References.

- <sup>1</sup> St Bees Terriers, DRC. Lancs. Record Office.
- <sup>2</sup> Responsions. CP. H. 4081A. Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>4</sup> Depositions of Richard Stainton. CP. H. 4081A.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> Depositions of Thomas Pearson. CP. H. 4081A.
- <sup>7</sup> Depositions of Anthony Patrickson. CP. H. 4081A.
- <sup>8</sup> Visitation Returns to Bishop Porteus, 1783, D.R. Ch. 4, Lancs. Record Office.