

THE PARISH CHURCH OF HIGH WYCOMBE  
(FOURTH NOTICE).

THE PARISH REGISTER.—INTRODUCTORY.

IN taking a historical survey of the subject generally it may be noted that the introduction of Parish Registers into England was consequent upon the Injunctions issued in September, 1538, (30 Henry VIII). By this order it was enjoined that in every parish a register-book should be kept in a coffer with two locks by the parson, vicar, or curate, and churchwardens, and that on every Sunday, in the presence of one of the churchwardens, the parson, etc., should enter into the register-book a written record of the dates and names of the weddings, christenings, and burials of the preceding week; by neglect of which duty he incurred a fine of three shillings and fourpence to be employed in the repair of the Church. In 1547 an Injunction was issued by Edward VI. similar to that of 1538, excepting only that the penalty was directed to be appropriated to the poor box of the parish. Inquiries were directed at the instance of Cardinal Pole, under Philip and Mary, in 1555 and 1557, whether the clergy had complied with these directions: and in the first year of Queen Elizabeth (1559) a further Injunction was issued, which differed from that of 1547 only in directing that the penalty should be divided between the poor-box and the repair of the Church. These Injunctions, however, were not strictly observed, and fresh directions were issued in 7 and 39 of Elizabeth, and the High Wycombe register commenced, if Langley's account of it be correct, on Sept. 10, 1598, the year following the date of the last-mentioned Injunctions.

During the confusion which existed in the reign of Charles I., parish registers were much neglected, and were for the first time regulated by Act of Parliament. In 1644 an Ordinance was made to the effect that "a fair register-book of velim" should be provided in every parish, and that the names of all children

baptized, and the time of their birth, and also the names of all persons married and buried should be set down therein by the minister. During the Commonwealth the system of parochial registration was generally neglected by the men who were intruded into the Church livings, and Parliament again interfered, and Registrars were appointed. At the Restoration the charge of keeping the registers again devolved upon the parochial clergy, and still continues a part of their duty. Nothing appears to have been done with regard to parish registers in the reign of James II. ; but in that of William III., in consequence of a duty being imposed upon the various entries, the negligent and careless clergy were, for the first time, exposed to the terror of the common informer. Many of the Registers, therefore, from this time seem to have been better kept; but, as many of the clergy were not fully aware of the penalties to which they were subject through a non-compliance with the law, in 4 Anne an Act of Indemnity was found necessary.

In the year 1753 was passed the famous Marriage Act, called Lord Hardwicke's Act, which is still in force. By this Act any person convicted of tampering with or destroying any register of marriage was to be deemed guilty of felony without benefit of clergy. In 1783 the Stamp Act was passed, which levied a tax upon every entry in the Parish Register; but it met with such opposition that it was repealed in 1794. By it the rich and the poor were taxed alike, and the clergyman had been placed, practically, in the invidious position of a tax-gatherer. As the poor were often either unable or unwilling to pay the tax imposed upon them, the clergyman paid it out of his own pocket rather than incur the ill-will of his parishioners. In 1812 an Act, commonly known as Rose's Act, was passed for "the better regulating and preserving parish and other registers," and lastly, in 1836, an important change was made, when it was required that henceforth all future registers should be kept in books specially provided for that purpose, and according to one uniform scheme set out in the schedule annexed to the Act. Since the passing, therefore, of the Registration Act of 1836, the Parish Registers have been kept with

greater exactitude and care. The registration of births and deaths has superseded, as far as legal purposes are concerned, that of baptism and burial.

#### THE WYCOMBE REGISTER.

The Parish Register of High Wycombe is said by Langley to commence on September 10, 1598,\* and in this matter he has been followed by subsequent writers, none of whom, however, appear to have made a personal examination of the original documents for the purpose of verifying or correcting his statement. We must not, therefore, regard their reiteration of Langley's words as confirmatory of his assertion in reference to the time when he wrote.

Langley probably prosecuted his researches concerning the churches in Desborough Hundred a little over a century ago, and, if he is correct in his statement, as quoted above, the earlier portion of the Register, extending over a period of about fourteen years, must have been lost since his time. As parish registers came into use about 1538, or soon after, and the existing Wycombe Register does not commence until some seventy-four years subsequent to that date, it appears extremely probable that the earliest volumes are indeed lost.

For the purpose of comparison, it may be useful to add the date at which the registers in the other parishes of the Hundred commence:—

16th century:—Hughenden, 1559; Little Marlow, 1559; Wooburn, 1564; Hambleton, 1566; Fawley, 1573; Radnage, 1574; West Wycombe, 1581; Turville, 1582.

17th century:—Fingest, 1608; Great Marlow, 1611; Bradenham, 1627; Medmenham, 1643 (an earlier one of 1539 now lost); Hedsor, 1678.

18th century:—Saunderton, 1728.

From a study of these figures it appears highly probable that the Wycombe Register of 1598 was not the earliest of the series.

“No person will be surprised,” says Mr. Rickman, “that one-half of the registers anterior to A.D. 1600

---

\* “Hundred of Desborough,” p. 53.

should have disappeared. If any other nation possesses similar registers of that date (a proof of uninterrupted civilization), a comparison might be instituted, and a preservation of such records through 300 years would not prove to have been of frequent occurrence; but in point of fact, examination shows that 812 English Parish Registers commence in the year 1538, about forty of which contain entries (copied, probably, from Family Bibles and tombstones) anterior to the date of Cromwell's injunction; 1822 Parish Registers commence from A.D. 1558 to 1603, when the Canons, authorised by King James, directed a copy of all Parish Registers to be made and preserved; and nearly one-half of them, 5,082, have been preserved accordingly, and are now extant. Parish Registers to the number of 969 commence between that time to the year 1650—2,757 from 1650 to 1700—1,476 Parish Registers from A.D. 1700 to 1750, the rest since that time."

The oldest Wycombe Registers now in existence consist of three long, narrow volumes bound in skin, of which two—those for burials and marriages—commence at Lady-day, 1612, the other, for baptisms, in June, 1613. The writing is small, and the entries are closely written. There are instances of negligence in the keeping of the Registers; but they are in a far better state of preservation, and the items are more regularly recorded than is the case in some parishes. Some portions are entirely in Latin, some in a mixture of Latin and English; but the latter portion is, of course, all in English. In some parts the entries have evidently been made by the incumbent himself, in others by ignorant parish clerks, whose writing is bad, and their spelling worse.

It was formerly the custom in many places to record in the Registers any extraordinary event which occurred in the neighbourhood. This was the means of preserving much interesting matter that would otherwise have been forgotten. The Wycombe Registers, however, do not contain many references to extraneous events, and what few there are will be found at a subsequent page under the heading of "Miscellaneous Extracts."

The earliest volumes have suffered from damp to a considerable extent, rendering some of the leaves so

rotten that they can only be turned over with the utmost care, and in several instances only a portion of the entries remain; but those that are intact are easily decipherable. These registers are thus endorsed:—

“Chepinge Wiccombe in Comit—  
Buck. The Register of Burials  
Ao Dni 1612 and so forward.”

On the other cover we find the following:—

“Chepinge Wiccomb in Comi—  
tatu Buck. The Register for  
burials. An. Dni. 1622 and so  
forward.”

On the first page the following is inscribed:—

“Chepinge Wickcombe in Com.  
Buck. This Booke was boughte  
ano. dini. 1612. Phillippe  
Chamberlaine \* beinge min. . . †  
John lamkin, George Bates,  
Edwarde. . . † and Edwarde  
Sparkes beinge Church wardens  
of Chepinge Wickcombe aforesaide  
per me Edm. Randall. . . †

The entries are prefixed by the following note:—

“A sure Register of the names  
and number of those that  
shalbe buriede at Chepinge  
Wickombe in the Conty of  
Buck, ffrom and after the  
five and twentithe day of  
Marche ano dini 1612.”

A similar introductory note is prefixed to the other two volumes. The entries of interments are carried down to September, 1653, and recommence at the other end of the book in 1656, where they are continued to February, 1681, the year in which Thomas Cordell became vicar.

---

\* Vicar from 1594 to 1629.

† Edges of the leaves torn off.

The oldest marriage register opens thus:—

“ A sure register of the names and number of suche cupples as shalbe mariede at chepinge wickombe in the Conty of Buck from and after the five and twentithe of marche ano dmi 1612.”

The Baptismal Register commences June 13, 1613, and is continued down to June 12, 1653, and recommences Dec. 7, 1672, so that there are nearly twenty years missing. There can be no doubt that this Register began, like those for marriages and burials, at Lady-day, 1612; but, as the first leaf of the book is now missing, the entries for the opening thirteen months are lost.

The break in the registration which occurs in 1653 was consequent upon the Act passed by Cromwell's so-called Little Parliament in that year, which enacted that the birth, not the baptism, of children should be entered, and that marriages should take place before a Justice of the Peace after the banns had been published in the market-place, or some other public place, on three several occasions. The entries were to be made by a “register” sworn in for the purpose, and we accordingly find the following notification to the point:

“ Sunday ye 18 September 1653.  
 . . . Wooster was elected & sworne  
 to be register for this parish.

JAMES BIGG, MAYOR.”

The first entry was made on Nov. 7, 1653. The leaf containing the only mention of the said Marriage Act is dated May, 1654; but it is so mutilated that any attempt to make an accurate copy of it is impossible. The entries are signed by four successive Mayors—James Biggs, Nicholas Bradshaw, John Gybbons, and Henry Elliott, and in a few instances by Edmund Petty, the Recorder. After March, 1656, the entries are not signed at all. The volume ends Jan., 1680.

The following entry is the only instance of the mention of banns of marriage during this wretched

period, and, unfortunately, it is undated:—

“The Bans of Matrimony betwne  
Thomas Banes  
And ffancis Greenwood both  
of this Towne.”

This entry occurs twice. I also found the following certificate:—

“These are to certify whom it doth  
concerne that William Hoather  
of the pish of Littlemarlowe and  
Joan Shrimpton of the par of high  
Wicombe weare asked three sever-  
all Sundayes by a lawfull minis-  
ter.

WILLM. BRICKWELL CLERKE.”

The second portion of the Register consists of three volumes, fastened each by two clasps. They are thus endorsed—“A Booke of the Persons Baptized [married or buried] within the Burrough and Parish of Chepinge Wicombe als Wicombe in the County of Buck since the yeare of our Lorde God 1675. Annoq Carol ij 27” —reckoning from 1649, thus including the interregnum occupied by Cromwell’s usurpation. The register for baptisms comes down to April 23, 1727: that for marriages to March 25, 1754; burials to March 25, 1732.

EXTRACTS—BURIALS.

1612. John Hutchinson Cowehearde 20 Mar.  
1615. In marche a<sup>no</sup> p<sup>di</sup>ct. nullus.  
1641. John Shrimpton son of Guye Aug. 2.  
Anne Littlebov da. of John bu. Ap. 3.  
1643. Elizabeth Goodwin da. of John bu. 3 Oct.  
ffrancis Shrimpton sonne of fra. bu. 16 Aug.  
1646. frances lucas da. to Rich. 12 Aug.  
1659. Will Harman pappermaker 1 May.  
1660. Richard Hyrett pappermaker 7 April.

These are the earliest instances of the mention of paper-makers.

1661. Mr. Edmond Petty Recorder 19 Dec.\*

\* *Vide* “Records of Buckinghamshire,” Vol. VII., p. 445.

† The out-borough or parish of Wycombe as distinguished from the Municipal borough.

He was M.P. for Wycombe in 12 Charles II. "Katherine Mary," the first instance of a double name, occurs this year, Dec. 10; and also the following note: "A True Register of all Burialls from the 11 October 1661. By me John Brickwell Clerke." His name is also found scribbled at the beginning of the book thus: "John Brickwell 1666 clark of this parish, mark and beholde." But he went the way of all flesh the next year, and "William Brickwell his sonn came into be clark." The following is a somewhat curious entry:—

Mris Archdall wiffe to Mr. Thomas Archdall died the 14th October 1663 and buried the 14th of October 1664.

1665. May. The old widowe Giles of the Forins.†

1666. Joseph Shrimpton Glover 6 Aug.

John Hitchcock clothworker 2 Sept.

1667. John Carter pettie chapman May 1.

1670. Jonathan Bowdery 3 Oct.

He, doubtless, belonged to the family from whom was derived the name of the Lane running out of Oxford-street on the south side towards the river. Ten years later—1680—we meet with Richard Bibby, from whom the Alley, running by Trinity Chapel, from the London-road to Saffron Platt, probably derives its appellation.

1672. Nicholas Bradshaw Mayore buried the 28 day Sep.

Bradshaw died suddenly at the old inn called the Antelope adjoining the Red Lion on the east in the High-street. A meeting of the Town Council had been held as usual for the election of Mayor, and the choice had fallen upon the above-mentioned Nicholas Bradshaw, who had filled the office previously on three several occasions, viz., in 1649, 1654, and 1662. As customary, the members of the municipal body, after the election of the Mayor, had adjourned to the Antelope for the usual complimentary dinner, which the out-going Mayor—Martin Lluelyn—gave at the expiration of his term of office. Before, however, the repast commenced, the Mayor-Elect was seized with a sudden illness, and died before he could be removed to his own home. That year seems to have been an unfor-



tunate one for the Wycombe Mayors, no less than three elections taking place within the twelvemonth.\*

1674. Michael Field ye elder felt maker Jan. 9.

Mr. Richard Lucas Alderman 27 Feb.

Richard Lucas was Mayor of Wycombe in 13 and 20 Charles II. Tokens bearing his name have been found dated 1653, 1655, and 1670. They show a lion rampant and the name on the obverse, and on the reverse the date and the words "In Wickham. R.D.L."

1675. The wife of John Shrimpton 26 June.

Sarah ye daughter of Hugh Shrimpton 3 Nov.

A stranger being a Welchman 19 Nov.

The name of Shrimpton occurs among the Mayors of Wycombe more frequently than any other. Members of this family filled the office of Chief Magistrate of the Borough on twenty-two occasions, ranging over a period of nearly two centuries, extending from the last year of Elizabeth to the 25th George III.

1676. Mr. Thomas Archdale the eldest son of Thomas Archdale Esq of a feavour in ye — yeare of his age and was buried 5 Aug.

Thomas Archdale Esquire aged about 72 yeares 5 Sept.

1677. Edward Stubble died suddenly in the field while he was mowing corne. 21 Aug.

Mr. Thomas Davis Alderman died suddenly and was buried 26 January.

1678. James Tombs a souldier. 14 Sept.

1680. Mr. Alexander Parnham, Alderman, 23 Decemb.

He was Mayor in 26 Charles II. Two of his tokens dated 1666 and 1668 have been found.

Jonas &

Richard. Twinns, the sons of George Shrimpton of flackwell Heath were buried in one coffin 2 febr.

1681. John Hancock came by his death by a fall of a cartt and buried Sep. 11.

Martin Lluellin Doctour of Physick and Alderman of the Burrough of Chepinge-

---

\* "Records of Buckinghamshire," Vol. VII, 459.

Wicombe was buried in the north chauncell of the church of the Burrough aforesayd 20 March 1681.

He was Mayor in 24 Charles II. He resided in Easton-street, and was the author of "Wickham Awakened." He was one of the physicians to Charles II.

The latter part of the 17th century appears to have been particularly fatal to the older inhabitants of Wycombe, and in this part of the register frequent mention is made of "aged," "ancient," and "olde," people being buried.

1681. Mrs Penelope Winch wife of Mr. Edward Winch Apothecary 1 Sept.

One of Winch's tokens has been found, dated 1666, and bearing—on a fess, 3 crosses patouce, on a canton 5 fleurs de lis.

1682. Anne Archdale of Great Missenden in the County of Bucks was buried in the upper part of the north chauncell. 25 March.

In 1683, and again in 1687, Tylers Green appears as "Tiler in Green."

1685. Matthew Archdale of the parish of Cheping Wycombe, gentleman, was buried in the upper part of the north chauncell of the church of Cheping Wycombe 12 Jan. Matthew Pettifer,\* Inne-holder.

He was Mayor 9 Charles I.

1686. Edward Mercer a soldier of the Earl of Oxford's Troop was buried 4 Sept.

1687. Samson Price a soldier of the Earl of Oxfords Regiment was buried 13 May.

This was the famous regiment known as the Royal Horse Guards. They obtained the nickname of "Oxford Blues" from Aubrey de Vere, Earl of Oxford, who commanded the troop on its formation in 1661. They are still known as "The Blues."

---

\* Members of this family filled the office of Mayor of Wycombe ten times between 18 Henry VIII. and 35 Charles II. Some of them were also Churchwardens.

1690. Sarah wife of Richard Shrimpton, tallow-chandler, July 2.

John son of Thomas Hayley of Beaconsfield accidentally drowned was buried 29 Decem.

1692. Anne Grove widow of Alderman Thomas Grove of the Redd Lyon 11 Feb.

Thomas Grove was Mayor 1 William and Mary. Elizabeth Barrat of Horsendon Lane 11 May.

This part of Wycombe has entirely disappeared since the completion of the modern Reading and Hatfield Road in 1783. Horsendon Lane was a thoroughfare which ran in a line with Crendon-street, passing down where the brewery yard of Messrs. Wheeler and Co., Ltd., now is, and thence southward towards the old Marlow-road, which then passed Loakes House, now Wycombe Abbey, on the east side, and took its way up to the corner of Daws Hill Lane, its course across the Park being still easily discernible.

Kongheil Moskath a Dutch widow from the Wier Mill 15 June.

In several instances already given the occupation of the deceased person is mentioned. Paper-makers are named as early as 1659, and the names of persons of that calling are of frequent occurrence in subsequent years. Thomas Cordell, who was appointed vicar in 1681, was very particular in noting the trade of the persons buried, and it may not be devoid of interest, before passing on to the next century, to give a list of trades compiled from the register for the decade 1681 to 1690, which will indicate the principal occupations of the inhabitants of the town in the middle of the 17th century. They include the following:—Labourer, blacksmith, victualler, pappermaker, scholemaster, taylor, baker, laceman, sawyer, fellmonger, musician, inne-holder, lace-buyer, butcher, bargeman (Flackwell Heath), miller, hemp-dresser, glover, tallow-chandler, sive-maker, maulster, bell-man of the Burrough, pastery-cooke, brickmaker (Flackwell Heath), apothecary, haberdasher of hatts, wheelwright, scrivener, lath-render, tanner, bodysmaker, cloathworker, iron-monger, grocer, turner, collarmaker, brewer, brazier, chirurgeon, ffishmonger, gardiner, danceing-master, serjeant of the correction-hous, joiner, cooper, etc., etc.

Judging from their frequent occurrence, the chief trades carried on in Wycombe two-and-a-half centuries ago were connected with the making of paper, lace, and gloves, only the first of which has continued to be a local industry of importance down to our own day, although the decline of the second has occurred within living memory. One of the earliest names connected with the lace trade in Wycombe is that of Noy, the Quaker, who probably gave its name to Noy's Lane, a narrow passage running out of Church-square into Church-street opposite the old Chequers Inn, now Mr. Dring's drapery establishment.

1701. Mr. George Clewer Alderman \* March 11.  
 1719. Mrs. Ann Archdale Oct 25.  
 1740. The Right Honble. Arabella wife of Henry Earl of Shelburne Nov. 10.  
 1742. Elizabeth wife of ye Rt. honble. Lord Dunkerron Aug. 19.  
 Master James, son of ye Rt. Honble. Lord Dunkerron April 27.  
 1750. James, Lord Duncarron Sept. 25.  
 1751. Henry Petty † Earl of Shelburne April 27.  
 1770. The Rev. Richard Lluelyn Rector of Sanderton 29 Dec.

He was the grandson of Martin Lluelyn, of High Wycombe, and son of Monk's Adjutant General, who rode by the King's side at the restoration of Charles II., when he entered London, May 29, 1660.

1778. The Honble. William Granville Petty son of the Earl of Shelburne Feb. 5. ‡  
 Joseph Dean who was drown'd in Ld. Shelburne's Canal § 21 June.  
 1783. A stranger, found dead in the road near the King of Prussia Aug. 31.  
 1787. John Shrimpton Esqre Major of the Tower, London, and an Alderman. 4 April.

---

\* *Vide* "Records," Vol. VII., p. 453.

† There is a fine monument to his memory in the North Chancel aisle of Wycombe Church, *vide* Vol. VII. of the "Records," pp. 448 *et seq.*

‡ "Records," Vol. VII., pp. 452-3.

§ The Dyke.

The most Noble & Puissant Prince William Petty,  
Marquiss of Lansdown Earl Wycombe, Viscount  
Calne & Calstone and Baron Wycombe

also

Earl of Shelburn, Viscount Fitz Maurice and  
Baron Dunkerron.

in Ireland

Knight of the most Noble order of the Garter  
& one of his Majesty's Honorable Privy  
Council

Died 7<sup>th</sup> May 1805

In the 68<sup>th</sup> year of his Age.

And was buried in the Family Vault  
in the Chancel of this Church May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1805

1788. The Rev. James Price A.M. 24 yrs. Vicar of this parish died Jany. 6th: buried 11th. Ætat 63.
1789. Louisa Marchioness of Lousdown Aug. 17.
1793. Robert Williams, aged 102, Feb. 24.  
The Honble. Thomas Fitzmaurice second son of John late Earl of Shelburne. Nov. 4.
1794. George Clavering, Esq., of Lanchester, Durham, 28 May.

The most elaborate entry found in the Register—a fac-simile of which accompanies this paper—relates to the Prime Minister Shelburne, who was called upon to form an administration in 1782. His tenure of office lasted only seven months; but during that brief period the siege of Gibraltar terminated gloriously, and Howe and Rodney won their naval victories. In 1783 he resigned the leadership of his party to William Pitt, and took but little share in public business afterwards. He was a good speaker, and Camden rates his oratorical powers above those of any other Peer of his time, with the exception of Lord Chatham. Dr. Johnson frequently visited him at Wycombe Abbey. There is neither monument nor inscription to his memory in the church.

1811. Thomas Weller 32 years Bailiff of this Borough 18 March.

Mary, wife of Major General John Gaspard Le Marchante. Aug. 27.

Major-General Le Marchant was chiefly instrumental in establishing a Military College at Wycombe, of which he became Lieutenant-Governor. He vacated his office, and was sent in command of a Brigade of Cavalry to the Peninsula. He was slain at the Battle of Salamanca, July 24, 1812.

#### BAPTISMS.

1801. John Gaspard Son of John Gaspard & Mary le Marchant. Dec. 13.
1804. Anna Maria dr. of John Gaspard Le Marchant and Mary his wife. July 16.
1806. Ann dr. of Howard Douglas Major and Superintendent of the Royal Military College and Ann his wife. Jan. 8.

1808. Christina Helena Emma daughter of Howard and Ann Douglas. 16 June.
1809. Charles Stuart son of William and Cornelia Robison Captn. in the 24th Regiment of Foot: born 16th May: Bap. 11 June.
1811. Sarah Mary dr. of Sir Howard Douglas Bart. Major and Superintendent of the Royal Military College, and Ann his wife. Feb. 7.\*  
Lionel Charles Henry William son of Edward Thomas and Emma Fitzgerald. Oct. 31.

This Baptismal Register ends abruptly in 1812, and this explanatory note is added:—"This book was oblig'd to be laid aside as a new form of entry was ordered by Parliament and a Book printed accordingly. Quod vide.

"JAS. PRICE, A.M., Vicar."

This was in consequence of the passing of "Rose's Act."

#### THE PLAGUE.

Wycombe, in common with other places in the lower part of the county—for example the neighbouring parishes of Hampden <sup>(1)</sup>, Great Marlow <sup>(2)</sup>, Little Marlow, etc.—suffered severely in those years when the

---

\* General Sir Howard Douglas succeeded Lieut.-General Le Marchant as Superintendent-General of the Royal Military College established at High Wycombe in 1799. The family resided in the house in Church Street next to the present Free Library. It was pulled down in 1899 to make way for the business premises of Mr. W. McIlroy.

(1) The following extract is taken from the Great Hampden Parish Register for 1647:—"N.B. My daughter Sarah Lenthall was buried ye eleventh day of August An: supra, she came fro London to Wickham & on ye Saturday only to see vs & so to returne ye morrow in ye afternoone to Wickham againe, but then fell sick & on Wednesday morning following being ye 11th of Aug. about an houre before Sun rise dyed of ye sicknes & so in ye Evening we buried her in ye meade called ye kitchen-meade by ye hedgeside as you go downe into it on yor left hand, a little below ye pond at ye enterance into ye meade: She was aged 14 yeares eleven moneths & seaventeene dayes—had she lived to Bartholemew day she had bin full 15 yeares of age.

Susanna Lenthall my wife dep'td this life Thursday evening about eight a clock ye 26 of August, she died of ye sicknes

country was visited by that terrible scourge known as the Pestilence or Plague. The entries in the Burial Register show a great increase in the rate of mortality during those years.

The low situation of Wycombe, the water-courses which ran along the margin of some of the streets and were nothing better than open sewers, the narrow streets and alleys, the "yards" at the rear of other buildings which existed—and may still be seen in some of the older parts of the town—together with the absence of proper sanitary arrangements, rendered it easily susceptible to an outbreak of epidemic diseases such as small-pox and the plague; and we find that the old Overseers' accounts, as well as the Parish Register, contain ample evidence of the virulent character of these visitations, and the more than usual frequency with which they recurred. In order to illustrate this point, I will give some statistics drawn from the Parish Register for the half century extending from 1617 to 1666, during which period the town was subject to no less than seven attacks of the plague, besides intermittent outbreaks of the small-pox.

1665 is generally known as the year of the Great Plague, but it is a mistake to suppose that the scourge was confined to that year. There were, in fact, several plague years during the 17th century, in which the pestilence raged as fiercely in some parts of the country as it did in 1665. The entries in the Register prove that the sickness occasioned great ravages among the inhabitants of Wycombe in the years 1617, 1624, 1625,

comfortably & in peace & was buried ye 27 by hir daughter Sara.

John Gardiner a childe yt lived in my house died of ye sicknes & was buried August ye 29th.

Adrian Lenthall my sonne a hopefull yong man & neere one & twenty yeares dep'ted this life of ye sicknes, Thursday morning a little before day breake & was buried at ye head of his sister Sara's grave ye same day, being ye 2nd of Septe'b :

My cosen John Pickering a lad about 13 yeares of age, dying of ye sicknes, was buried the 25 of Septeb: 1647.

ROBERT LENTHALL, RECTOR."

(2) "Buried this year 1665 of that disease called the plague the some of fifty persons of young and ould." (Gt. Marlow par. reg.)



1631, 1632, as well as in 1665 and 1666. During these last two years the percentage of deaths recorded as being attributable to the effects of the Plague was no less than 64·4 and 70·1 respectively, and, as most of these deaths occurred during the autumn months, the town must have then presented a spectacle of desolation and mourning such as can be better imagined than described. It will be noticed, from the dates quoted above, that in three instances the pestilence prevailed two years together—1624-5, 1631-2, 1665-6. In each case the second visitation was worse than the first.

In 1617 the number buried according to the Register was 112, whereas the average number of burials for the preceding five years had been only 67. The average for the next six years—1618 to 1623—was slightly under 70; but in 1624 the number of interments rose to 109, and in the following year<sup>(3)</sup> it reached 131. The average of the next five years—1626 to 1630—was under 59, but in 1631 the number buried again reached 109, and in the next year rose to 146, which is the highest number but one recorded in this portion of the Register. In every instance it was during the autumn that the Plague raged so fearfully, and those who died from the scourge have the syllable "pest" attached to their names.

At the end of the year 1664 we find this entry:—"Buried this yeare in all 51," and during the early part of 1665 there is no indication of the approaching epidemic, for in June we find this entry:—"Num. sepult. non." The plague, however, broke out the very next month, and spread with great rapidity, so that in the remaining months of the year there is a large number of burials entered, especially during August and September, which appear to have been the worst months. The total of the whole year was three above that of 1632. The following remark occurs at the end of the list of interments:—

"This yeare buried, 1665, 149:  
the pest 96."

---

(3) "Mary, the wife of Sir William Borlase Sen: July 18, 1625, a gracious ladye she was, dyed of the plague as did 18 more." (Lit. Marlow Par. Reg.)

In 1666 a large number of burials also occurs, and a note at the end of the entries of burials reads thus:—

“Numbers buried this yere, 1666, 144:  
Whereof the plauge 101.”

In 1667 the number of interments declined to 63, and a low rate continues down to 1679-80, when small-pox was prevalent in the town.

#### QUAKER BURIALS.

About the period of the Restoration, and for some years afterwards, Wycombe was a stronghold of the Society of Friends. Their first meetings here appear to have been held in 1659, at the residence of John Rance, in White Hart Street, when the well-known young Quaker, Thomas Ellwood, the son of an Oxfordshire magistrate, was present.

The following extract from the Borough Records shows that they had to suffer for their opinions:—

“1664. That on the 8th day of January, Anno Domini, 1664, being Sabbath Day, Samuel Trone, Jeremiah Steevens, Nicholas Noy, John Littleboy, John Cock, George Ball, and Joseph Steevens, all of this Borough, labourers, and being professed and known Quakers, having this day assembled themselves together, with divers women, at the house of John Rance, in this Borough, under pretence of religious worship, contrary to a late Act of Parliament, and being brought before us, two of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the Borough aforesaid, had acknowledged and confessed the same, and thereupon the said several persons were this present day, by warrant under our hands and seals, committed to the House of Correction, in the Borough, there to remain for the term of three months, according to the late Act of Parliament; it being the first time that they, or either of them, have been convicted of the same offence.

“HENRY ELLIOT, Mayor.

“ROBERT WHISTON.”

In 1698 Thomas Archdale was elected one of the Members of Parliament for Wycombe, and he was the first member of the Society of Friends who ever sat in the House of Commons. He was chosen in the place of John Archdale, who, being also a Quaker, had refused to take the oaths.

The following note is the earliest mention of them which occurs in the Parish Register:—

Agust.

Ther was buried in the yeare 1666 of the plage 4 quakurs.

In subsequent years we meet with the following references:—

1678. Febr. 4. Mary Rogers, widow, of Great Missenden, put into the ground in the Quakers Burial place within this parish for whose being buried in woollen I Received no affidavit to this present day being february 14, 1678.

1679. April 9. Ann Steele, widow, put into ground.  
April 26. Phillice Noy, wife of Nich: Noy putt in ground.

May 28. Richard Antony of Hugendon affirmed to be putt into the ground in the Quakers burial place here.

May 28. Samuel Wilson affirmed to be putt into the ground in the Quakers burial place.

June 29. Phillice Quill putt into the ground in the Quakers burial place here.

Aug. 24. Martha the wife of John Boone putt into the ground.

1680. June 6. Mary Bolton wife of George Bolton inhumed.

Ann Treacher of the parish of Great Missenden, widow, said to be putt into the ground in the Quakers burial place here on ye 28 July.

Richard, an infant, the son of Richard Web said to be putt into the ground in the Quakers burial-place 10 September.

A child of John Gadsden was putt into ground (as is said) 2 Octob.

Joane wife of Robert Burroughs putt into ground in the Quakers burial-place (as is said) 14 Octob.

William son of William Cogland of Hughenden in this County of Bucks said to be putt into the ground in the Quakers burial-place here in this towne 28 Novemb.

1681. A child of John Whiting said to be putt in the ground 28 March.

Mary wife of Daniel Afers late of Alys-bury and daughter of Nicholas Noy was buried in the Quakers burieing place 23 Sept.

The above Quaker interments are found intermixed with others; but in the following year they are entered separately in the middle of the Register. The entries are prefixed by the following note:—

“A register of persons sayd to be buried in the Quakers burying place and of affidavits brought for their burying in woollen. Anno Dni. 1682.”

June 15. Nicholas Cony of the parish of Cheping Wiccombe was buried.

June 19. Affidavit was sworn for his burying in woollen.

Aug. 7 Elizabeth wife of Richard Dorrell of the Burrough of Cheping Wiccombe hosier was buried.

Aug. 13. Affidavit was sworn for her burying in woollen.

Aug. 18. John son of Benjamin Hawes of the Burrough of Cheping Wiccombe shoe maker was buried.

Aug. 24. Affidavit was sworne for his burying in woollen.

Sept. 29. An infant daughter of John Whiteing of the Burrough of Cheping Wiccombe Taylor was buried and

Oct. 5. Elizabeth wife of the sayd John Whiteing was buried.

Oct. 6. Affidavit was sworne for both their burring in woollen.

- Oct. 29. Joane Chitch of the Burrough of Cheping  
Wiccombe widow was buried.
- Nov. 2. Affidavit sworn for her being buried in  
woollen.
- Oct. 28. Elizabeth Gadligh of the parish of West  
Wycombe in the County of Bucks was buried.
- Nov. 3. Affidavit was sworne for her being buried  
in woollen.
- Nov. 20. Henry Wheeler of the Burrough of Cheping  
—Wiccombe husbandman was buried.
- Nov. 21. Affidavit was sworn for his being buried in  
woollen.
- Nov. 26. Elizabeth Littleboy of the Burrough of  
Cheping Wiccombe spinster was buried.
- Nov. 26. An affidavit was sworne for her being  
buried in woollen.

#### BURIAL IN WOOLLEN.

With the ostensible twofold purpose of encouraging the woollen industry at home, and preventing the importation of linen from abroad, an Act was passed in 1666 to enforce burial in woollen. The Act was to come into operation on New Year's Day, i.e., March 25th, 1667, and according to its provisions no person was to be buried "in any shirt, shifte, or sheete other than should be made of wooll onely." So strict were the terms of the Act that even the quilling round the inside of the coffin and the ligature which bound the feet of the corpse were required to be of woollen stuff.

The law, however, was so universally disregarded, and the penalty for its breach was so seldom enforced, that it became, practically, a dead letter. Accordingly, a more stringent Act was passed in 1648 (30 Car. II., Cap. 3). By section 2 of this Act it is enjoined that "noe Corpse of any person or persons shall be buried in any Shirt, Shift, Sheete, or Shroud, or anything whatsoever made or mingled with Flax, Hemne, Silke, Haire, Gold or Silver, or any stufte or thing other than what is made of Sheep's Wooll onely, or be put in any coffin lined or faced with any sort of Cloath or Stufte or anything whatsoever that is made of any Materiall but Sheep's Wooll onely, upon paine of the forfeiture of five pounds of lawfull money of England," etc.

The other principal provisions of this statute were:—

1. The minister of the parish was to register all burials.
2. That some relation or other credible person should make affidavit within eight days before some Justice of the Peace that no manner of stuff whatsoever but of sheep's wool had been used in the coffin, or about the body of the deceased person. The affidavit was to be brought to the minister, who was to register the same.
3. If no affidavit was brought to the minister within the specified time he was forthwith to notify the omission to the churchwardens or overseers of the poor, who were within eight days thereafter to apply to the Justices to grant warrant for the forfeiture of the penalty, whereof one half went to the poor, the other half to the informer.
4. If the Ministers, Churchwardens, Overseers, and Justices neglected their duty they were under a penalty of five pounds.
5. Persons dying of the plague might be buried without a penalty being incurred even if linen were used.
6. By section IX it was directed that the Act should be publicly read upon the first Sunday after the Feast of St. Bartholomew (Aug. 24), every year for seven years after its enactment, immediately after Divine Service.

This law was not formally repealed until 1814 (54 Geo. III. Cap. 108), but it had fallen into desuetude some years previous to that date.

Although the Act was very unpopular it was pretty generally observed, and we find the entries respecting persons buried in woollen commence in the Wycombe Parish Register in the year when the above-named Act was passed, viz., 1678. The churchwardens' accounts contain frequent mention of payments "for writeinge out ye register of such p'sons as have been buryed in woollen," and "fileing ye paper of the buryalls in

woollen;" and in the Overseers' accounts payments are made for wool for shrouds for the poor.

M. Misson, a French author, who visited this country some few years after the passing of the Act of 1678, gives a very interesting account of the manner in which burial in woollen was carried out at that time. He says:—"There is an Act of Parliament which ordains that the dead shall be buried in a woollen stuff, which is a kind of thin bays, which they call flannel; nor is it lawful to use the least needleful of thread or silk. (The intention of the Act is for the encouragement of the woollen manufacture.) The Shift is always white; but there are different sorts of it as to fineness, and consequently different prices. To make these dresses is a particular trade, and there are many that sell nothing else. A man's shirt has commonly a sleeve purfled about the wrists, and the slit of the shirt done in the same manner. This should be at least half-a-foot longer than the body, that the feet of the deceased may be wrapped in it as in a bag. Upon the head they put a cap, which they fasten with a very broad chin-cloth, with gloves on the hands, and a cravat round the neck, all of woollen. The women have a kind of head-dress, with a forehead cloth. That the body may lie the softer, some put a layer of bran about four inches thick at the bottom of the coffin. The coffin is sometimes very magnificent. The body is visited to see that it is buried in flannel, and that nothing is sewed with thread."\*

Notwithstanding the pains and penalties attached to the non-observance of this sumptuary enactment, we occasionally meet with instances of its provisions being ignored. The case of Mrs. Ann Oldfield, a celebrated actress, who was buried in Westminster Abbey in 1730, is well-known. By her express desire she had her body laid out in a fine Brussels lace head-dress, a holland shift with a tucker and double ruffles of the same lace, and a pair of new kid gloves, and wrapped in a winding

---

\* Memoirs and observations in his Travels over England by M. Misson, written originally in French, and translated by Mr. Ozell. The work was published at The Hague in 1698, and in London in 1719.

sheet of fine linen. Pope has immortalized the posthumous vanity of this lady in the following lines:—

“Odious! in woollen! ’twould a saint provoke,  
 Were the last words that poor Narcissa spoke.  
 No, let the charming chintz and Brussels lace  
 Wrap my cold limbs, and shade my lifeless face;  
 One would not, sure, be frightful when one’s dead:  
 And, Betty, give this cheek a little red.”\*

So, too, in Wycombe the edict was not always obeyed, as the following instance will be sufficient to show:—

1678. Lawrence the son of William Butler buried 4 August for whose being buried in Woollen there was no affidavit brought me of which I† certified the overseers by writing under my hand on the 21 of August.‡

When an affidavit was brought it was entered thus:—

Sarah the infant daughter of Robert Welch was buried 4 September for whom there was an affidavit broght to me on the 10th of September 1678 under the hands and seals of Eliz: James and Susan Haley sworne before Dr. Martin Lluelyn Justice of the Peace for the County of Bucks.

These affidavits are constantly repeated down to 1695, the last one being dated Aug. 7th of that year; after which only the word “affidavit” is added to the entry of burial till Jan. 20th following. They recommence Jan. 26th, and are continued to the end of the volume, March 24, 1731, and in the next register to March 17, 1750.

Sometimes the relatives of the deceased person, who could afford to do so, would rather pay the penalty than have the body buried in woollen. I met with only one instance, however, in the Wycombe Register, and in

---

\* “Moral Essays” (Epis. I., 245-251). The “Betty” referred to in the last line was her maid, Mrs. Elizabeth Saunders, another actress.

† Isaac Mills, Vicar.

‡ This was more than four months after the Act came into force.



that case the amount paid is not mentioned. It occurred in 1771, and is entered thus:—

The Rt. Honble. Sophia Countess of Shelburne  
Buryd in Linnen 15 Jan. Penty. pd.\*

#### MISCELLANEOUS.

Under this heading are included a few extracts from various parts of the Register which do not fall under the titles of either Baptisms, Marriages, or Burials.

At the beginning of the Register of Marriages for 1674 there is the following memorandum:—

Collected in the Borough towards the redemption of Captives at Algiers,\* Sally, etc. from the 27th of September to the 5th of October 1680, fifteen pounds & seventeen shillings & sevenpence; and in the Parish within the forementioned time nine pounds, two shillings & five pence, in all twenty five pounds, which was paid in at the Visitation at Beconsfield the fift of October 1680 by me

ISAAC MILES, MINISTER.

In the presence of

JOHN FREEMAN	}	CHURCHWARDENS.
THO. SHRIMPTON.		
ROBERT CHALFONT		
JOHN RATCLIFFE.		

At the end of the Register of Marriages for 1754 there is the following entry:—

That Mr. Cordell late Vicar of Chipping Wicumbe in the County of Bucks put me in Clark of the same place is certified by me,  
EDWARD STEVENS

Dated August 6, 1725.

Witnesses to this Certificate—JOHN CURTIS.  
JOHN STEVENS.

\* She was the daughter of John, Earl Granville, and the first wife of Prime Minister Shelburne. Her monument by Carlini is in the Bower Chapel.

\* Collected for poor English Captives Redemption on ye coasts of Africa, ye sum of £3:7 (Whitchurch Par. Reg.).

If this date be correct, Stevens must have held his office nearly, if not quite, sixty years; he must, therefore have seen the town baptised, married, and buried for two generations.

The following extract from the Registers respecting the population of Wycombe is taken from Langley's "Desborough Hundred," p. 34:—

Annual average for 20 years inclusive:—

	Baptisms.	Marriages.	Burials.
1688 to 1707 .....	59	... 17	... 63
1730 to 1749 .....	86	... 17	... 92
1770 to 1789 .....	110	... 30	... 99
Greatest No. in			
any one year...	132 (1762)	41 (1671)	159 (1775)
Least No. ....	39 (1695)	8 (1691)	50 (1688)

#### BRIEFS.

Briefs were licenses, issued under the authority of Parliament by the Court of Chancery, for making collections for charitable purposes, chiefly in regard to losses by fire. The mention of them is met with in most registers and churchwardens' accounts, and during the last century they became very frequent, so it was ordered that they should henceforth only be granted on the application of the Quarter Sessions, and in 1828 they were finally abolished. It was customary to endorse the brief with the amount collected, and enter it in the parish books.

The only reference to briefs I found in the Wycombe Register are at the beginning of the list of burials for 1674, where three are noted as follow: —

Sunday, May 25, 1678, I read the Briefe for Rickmansworth, in the County of Hartford.

Sunday, June 9, 1678, I read the Briefe for Wem in the County of Salop. The Losse £23,677:13:1.

Sunday, June 16, I read the Briefe for Harlington in the County of Middlesex, the whole losse £1,046:13:3.

No signature is appended to them; but they were evidently entered by the Rev. Isaac Miles.

## LOUDWATER CHAPEL.

Inside the cover of the Register of Burials 1731-1812, in reference to the district church of Loudwater, are these entries:—

Memento May 1st 1794.

Received of Mr. James Davis (who erected and endowed the Chapel at Loudwater, which was consecrated on the 25th of June 1791) the sum of five guineas for a vault to bury his wife in the said Chapel.

JAS. PRICE, A.M., Vicar.

Mr. Davis died at Loudwater Oct. 17, 1818, aged 72.  
1812.

Received of Mr. Plaistow Ten Guineas for a vault dug in the Chapel at Loudwater for the Burial of his wife.

JAS. PRICE, A.M., Vicar.

May, 1812.

The ground adjoining the said chapel was consecrated for burial by the Rt. Revd. George Prettyman Tomlins Ld. Bishop of Lincoln; when it was agreed & stated in the Deed of Consecration that the same fees were due to the Vicar of Wycombe for burials at Loudwater as would be paid if buried in the parish church or churchyard. N.B. A copy of the fees was then given to the Rev. William Pryce, Chaplain at Loudwater, and another copy deposited with the Register Books at the Vicarage.

JAS. PRICE, A.M., Vicar.

## AN INDUCTION.

The following is the only instance of a record of an Induction that I met with in going through the Registers:—

James Price, A.B., was inducted Vicar of Wycombe, March 27th, 1788, by the Rev. Thomas Jones, of Dinton, Bucks.

## FUNERALS BY TORCHLIGHT.

The custom of using torches at funerals is a very ancient one, and was in vogue among the Romans. Their public funerals—*funera indictiva*—were celebrated by day; private burials—*tacita*—by night; but both were accompanied by torches. William Montacute, Earl of Salisbury, who was executed April 29, 1397, and was buried in Bisham Abbey, directed by his will that twenty-four poor people, clothed in black gowns and red hoods, should attend the funeral, each carrying a lighted torch of 8lbs. weight.

It appears that at one time funeral torches were provided by the churchwardens, who charged the friends of the deceased a certain price for their use, according to the weight of wax consumed. At Sir John Gresham's funeral in London, in 1556, they had "four dozen of great staff torches and a dozen of great long torches."

Two instances of torchlight funerals have occurred in Wycombe during the present century. The following extract relates to the former of these occasions:—

March 5, 1811. Louisa dr. of Charles and Susanna Douglas.

She was niece to Sir Howard Douglas, of the Royal Military College.

The second instance was of

Elizabeth Gellett, Oct. 25, 1823.

This lady was the wife of the proprietor of the Red Lion Hotel. The procession was formed in the gateway leading up to the stable yard of the hotel, and when all was in readiness the torches were lighted, and the whole party then set forth towards the Church. First came a man by himself bearing a torch in his right hand, followed by two others in similar fashion; next was borne the corpse in the procession, accompanied by four persons, two on each side, holding the corners of the pall with one hand, and in the other carrying a torch. Behind the corpse walked the nearest relatives and friends, some bearing torches and some being without. Arrived at the entrance to the churchyard, the one who had walked by himself stepped forward, and accompanied the clergyman, who had come thus far to meet them. The torches were kept burning until the conclusion of the service, when they were all extinguished. Since then no such ceremony has taken place at a funeral at Wycombe.

R. S. DOWNS.