

## The Northchurch Registers

**E**XCLUDING the years of the Civil War and Commonwealth, the parish registers of Berkhamsted St. Peter are complete from 1538 to the present day. Berkhamsted St. Mary (Northchurch) has not been so fortunate in keeping its earliest records, though lists of baptisms, marriages and burials are complete from the year 1655, thereby including the last five years of the Commonwealth.

In addition, a few isolated transcripts from earlier Northchurch registers have been preserved, and in the list of burials we find this interesting entry of 1610: Mother Clifford born in the time of King Henry the Seventh being an hundred and five years ould and more.

No other centenarian has been found in the pre-1840 registers of either Berkhamsted or Northchurch.

### FARMERS AND LABOURERS

Especially interesting is the contrast between the registers of a busy little market town and those of a large but scattered rural parish. Berkhamsted has always had professional men and tradesmen, and their occupations, when stated, add interest to the entries. But until modern times Northchurch was a parish of farmers and labourers, and if the parish clerk had a comment to make it was usually 'Poor'. This description appears so often that one wonders why the clerk did not use ditto marks.

Some of the 19th century entries, however, are a little more informative. Of the fourteen couples married at Northchurch in 1845, ten bridegrooms were labourers and twelve brides were straw-plaiters. In the following year (twelve marriages) we find six labourers, one gentleman, one turner, one farmer, one ironfounder, one ironmonger and one gardener. Among the brides were five straw-plaiters, one lady's maid, one housekeeper, two servants, and three with no occupation stated.

### THE CURATE'S DISPLEASURE

Turning to the list of baptisms, we find a particularly interesting entry dated 1663: Judith, ye daughter of Robert Toefeild borne at Barkhamsted and baptised att Northchurch Nov. 23rd.

Judith became an orphan at a very early age and in very tragic circumstances. Two years after her baptism, according to the Berkhamsted register,

her father was poisoned by his wife, who was burnt alive at Hertford. It is now believed that many of these so-called poisoning cases were due to appendicitis.

Among entries made by a rather illiterate Northchurch curate named Lancelot Smith are the following:

1702. Eunice daughter of Tho. Putnham baptised by Mr. Bays ye dissenting minister as all his other children were excepting the first.

1705. Lois daughter of Tho. Putname baptised as I suppose by the Presbyterian Minister at Box Lane (Boxmoor).

The curate evidently had strong views about Dissenters in general and the Puttenham's in particular. The baptisms of other children of this family are entered in another hand without comment. Later on, several adult Puttenham's were baptised at the parish church, including Henry, aged 70, who lived at Dudswell.

In the 18th century we find a number of women of other families being baptised at the same time as their children.

### UNUSUAL NAMES

Here are some further entries:

1719. John and Timothy, ye sons of John Norris and Elizabeth his reputed wife.

1746. Mary the posthumous daughter of William Hill and Anne Hill.

1792. (In this year four children named Wood, described as 'poor', were baptised together, followed by five Davis children and four Rolle children, also 'poor'.)

1804. Williama, daughter of William and Keturah Shepherd Murray.

Many other unusual names appear in the burials list. Dammaras Harding (1656), Dammaras How (1673) and Damaris Birch (1721) were probably grandmother, mother and daughter.

John Sweetsir was the name of a boy baptised in 1673; later on we find Zipporah White (1696), Cassen King from Fields End (1771), Vallua Langham (1779) and Valua Morecraft (1808).

The following entries are rare in that they give addresses:

1706. William Tomerlin of the Wood.

1707. Anne How of Magdalen's, widow. (Magdalen's = Marlin).

1714. William Rose of St. James's, Westminster.

1719. John How late of St. Mary Magdalen's.

1723. William Thomlins of ye Cross in ye Oak (Cross Oak).

1745. William Hill of Lagley.

1747. Jane Coley, widow of Woodcock Hill. (There are several entries with this address).

1748. James the son of Henry Norris of New House.

1773. Richard Wood formerly owner of Maudlins (Marlin).

1776. Richard Keene of Norcourt Hill, Yeoman.

Among the more unusual entries are the following:

1722. An unbaptised person commonly called William Cock was put into ye ground.

1732. An unbaptised female child of James and Mary Dod was put into ye ground in ye church yard. (There seems to have been an idea at this time that it was not necessary to enter unbaptised persons in the register proper; whether infants or adults, their names appear only in the affidavits list and they are said to be 'interred' or 'put into the ground,' never 'buried'.)

### AGAINST THE LAW

Some parishioners did not like the idea of burial in woollen, as prescribed by law, and were willing to pay a penalty to be buried in linen. Some tried to do this unobserved, as witness this entry:

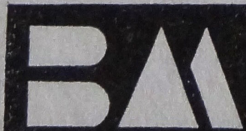
1719. Judith ye wife of John Puttenham of ye Parish of Rickmansworth was buried. Mem.: That Mr. William ffen (Fenn) made information as soon as ye Burial was over that ye said Judith was buried in Linnen and John Puttenham paid ye 50 Shillings for ye use of ye poor, Mr. ffen as informer having his Title to ye other fifty shillings.

In another case it was noted that £2 10s. was paid to Samuel Johnson and William Hill Churchwardens and overseers of ye poor of ye parish and by them distributed in public to ye poor.' In 1756 Anne Ayscough, widow of the Rev. Francis Ayscough, late rector of Northchurch and Dean of Bristol, 'paid the penalty for not burying in Wollen.'

Then there is this sad entry of 1729: John Dicks, a stranger found in ye snow and dying at ye Cow Roast was buried. Ye said John was neither buried in Linnen nor Woollen but Straw only and so not contrary to ye Act of Parliament.

'BEORCHAM'

(To be continued)



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