

1646 Tithes and the Village of Ecton

Looking at the February Village magazine made me look a little closer at that era and what turbulent times it was for the people of Ecton and the country as a whole. The previous year King Charles 1st was defeated at the Battle of Naseby (not many miles from Ecton) by Oliver Cromwell and his Ironside Troops. Charles headed north in the hope of forming a new army in Scotland but he was captured and by 1647 he was being held prisoner at Holdenby House, (again not far from Ecton) for several months before going to London.

At the same time on the opposite side of the political spectrum were bands of Levellers wandering around the countryside causing unrest amongst ordinary people. The Levellers were soldiers who fought on the side of Cromwell and who wanted more political rights for ordinary people. In 1649 William Thompson one such Levellers was shot by pursuing Parliamentary troops in Wellingborough Woods, he then went on to Northampton, occupying the town in May of that year. He was killed and subsequently buried in an unmarked grave in All Saints Churchyard.

With Parliament in control instead of the King the church became more puritanical; the common prayer book was banned as was the celebrating of Christmas and Easter. One of the few pleasures ordinary people could participate in was also banned, when all the Maypoles were taken down. At the same time the harvests of the 1640's were the worst of the century caused by wet weather, this resulted in higher food prices. Parliament was short of funds due to the cost of the Civil War so excise duty was placed on beer (the staple drink at the time as the water was impure and not fit for drinking) and on salt which was necessary in preserving food, so paying tithes would have been very hard for the people.

What exactly was a Tithe? There were two kinds of tithes, the greater and the lesser tithes. Each household had to give one tenth or tithe of their goods to the church. The Rector received the great tithes (one cow in every ten, or one bundle of corn in every ten). The lesser tithes went to the village priest who saw to the everyday running of the parish. The rector was a well educated man having been to either Oxford or Cambridge universities, but the parish priest had only the minimum education, his share of the tithes was made up of hens, ducks or garden produce. In 1646 people paid their tithes in kind but later in the century it gradually changed to people giving one tenth of their wealth in money, so it would be the value of the cow rather than the actual cow. We have no record of who the priest may be who received the small tithes but we do know a little about the rector who received the great tithes.

In 1646 the first John Palmer was the Rector of Ecton. He was the eldest son of Joseph Palmer, Gentleman of Cropedy in Oxfordshire and his first wife Ann. Ann's father was John Dod, the 'Decalogist' at one time of Canons Ashby. A Decalogist is someone who has connections with the Ten Commandments. John was born in 1612 and after attending Emmanuel College Cambridge was incorporated at Oxford on the 6th November 1651. He was Rector of Ecton from 18th November until his death in 1679. As well as being Rector of Ecton from 1665 he was also Archdeacon of Northampton and is buried in Ecton.

John Palmers wife was Bridget Catesby, eldest daughter of the Lord of the Manor of Ecton, Clifton Catesby. She was born in 1626 and died a year after her husband. The couple had 3 sons and 5 daughters, the two oldest sons followed their father and in due time became Rectors of Ecton. The third son is buried in St. Giles in Northampton. The third daughter married Nathaniel Whalley, Rector of Broughton, whilst the fourth daughter married Samuel Freeman, Dean of Peterborough.

Looking at the will of John Palmer you will see that he was a wealthy man, he gave his Manor of Deanshanger to his eldest son John, and to his second son Thomas he left lands in Hollowell and Guilsborough. He also left lands to his third son George plus £20 each to numerous relatives. 'To the Church of Ecton' for the service of the Lord's table one round plate of patten of silver which I have already provided. For the poor of Ecton 40 shillings. Bridget Palmer his wife left a substantial amount of money in her will, £100 to each of her children and various gifts of £20 to her grandchildren. To her brother Thomas Catesby of Ecton she bequeathed two of 'my Jacobus peeces as an acknowledgement of my thankfulness to him for all his favors at all times' (a Jacobus is an English gold coin struck in the reign of James 1st and worth about 20 - 24 shillings). To the poor of Ecton she left 50 shillings.

John Palmer was a witness to the wills of several people in Ecton, most people were so poor they did not make a will so the following must have been the more wealthy of the parish.

T Welford	1648
W. Fox	1663
Eliz. Marshal	1664
Alice Thompson	1668
E. Peacock	1670
J. Mot	1673
Fr. Child	1675
Joseph Wells	1676
J. Smith	1677

In 1679 Eliz. Maydwell of Northampton gave John Palmer and his wife 20 shillings for rings.

1646 was a time of great upheaval in England and one wonders how much these changes affected the people of Ecton living through those momentous times.

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