

Early 17th Century Social History of Stoke Gabriel

The 17th century is a rich period for the survival of documentary records relating to the parish of Stoke Gabriel. These include baptismal, wedding and burial registers, wills, poor relief, litigation and episcopal records. In particular and of greatest value are the churchwarden accounts (CWA) that cover the years from 1611 to 1622. [1] These are the earliest accounts that exist for the parish and indeed no accounts exist for subsequent years until the 20th century.

The accounts are not merely those of the church but also of the parish. The division between ecclesiastical and secular affairs and the resultant establishment of modern-day Parish Councils did not occur until 1894 with the Local Government Act. Often in some detail, the accounts reflect the protestant religion of the period and the lay responsibilities that had been imposed on parishes by the Tudors. [2] The decade-long period thus provides the basis for an early 17th century insight into the parish and its social history.

Fitting within the reign of James I (1603-25), the first of the House of Stuart, the accounts offer a Jacobean perspective on how the great affairs of state and the accompanying social and religious change played out at the level of the parish. Using the documentary records available, this paper focuses on ecclesiastical affairs, law and order, charity and poor relief, the local economy and infrastructure, and the social culture within the parish of Stoke Gabriel, but first of all sets the national and local context for the period.

National & Manorial Context

The Jacobean period was a period in which the country was essentially protestant but remained under pressure from the Puritans – the so-called Godly and austere fundamentalists – to reform itself further. The bible was available in English and there was growing literacy among the population. At the same time, the Catholic recusants were a significant minority, covertly continuing with their ceremonies and rituals and maintaining their allegiance to the Pope. The King attempted to suppress both Catholics and Puritans and in 1605 survived the Gunpowder Plot, an unsuccessful attempt by the Catholics, Guido Fawkes, Robert Catesby and others, to blow up Parliament. He had ended the war with Spain and the country was largely at peace, experiencing population growth and material prosperity. The king however was often in conflict with Parliament, not least because of his supreme authority and his divine right to rule which he repeatedly exercised. Other key events in this period include the publication of the King James' Bible (1611), the death of William Shakespeare (1616), the execution of Walter

Raleigh (1618), and the setting sail of the Puritan pilgrim fathers in the Mayflower from Plymouth to America (1620).

Two hundred miles from London, the parish of Stoke Gabriel was within the hundred of Haytor, comprising some 24 parishes between the Rivers Teign and Dart including those of Torbay but not Totnes. As divisions of the shire, the hundreds were the administrative unit for military and judicial purposes under the common law and had been in existence since Saxon times. The parish itself had become an administrative unit under the Tudors with responsibility for both ecclesiastical and secular affairs, but the parish was also part of the Manor of Paignton, which comprised Paignton, Marldon and Ashburton in addition to Stoke Gabriel, and would also be subject to its courts and customs. [3] An established manor before the conquest, it passed to the Bishop of Exeter in 1050. It was a valuable ecclesiastical estate having a palace in lieu of a manor house.

At the Reformation, the King forced the Bishop to sell all his estates outside Exeter including the Manor of Paignton. In 1545 it was transferred, together with the advowson – the valuable right of patronage – for the church of Stoke Gabriel, into lay ownership, specifically to Sir Thomas Speke. [4] In 1557, Sir Thomas' son transferred it to Sir William Herbert, the first Earl of Pembroke. [5] His successor, Sir Henry Herbert, inherited the title and estate. He married the well-educated Mary Sidney who became the Countess of Pembroke, a member of Elizabeth Tudor's court and an acclaimed author of literary works. [6] At the turn of the 16th century, she acquired responsibility for the management of several of her husband's estates including the Manor of Paignton and became the lay rector and patron of the parish church, probably the most famous of all the church's patrons.

By the time that the title to the estate had passed to the 3rd and 4th Earls of Pembroke, the manor was in serious decline with bridges, walls and wells in a ruinous state. In the 17th century, for the first time since the establishment of the manor in Saxon times, the estate was being broken up and sold to the local gentry and yeomanry of the parish.

Ecclesiastical Affairs

In spite of the doctrinal assaults on parishes occasioned by the vicissitudes of the Tudor Reformation, the church remained synonymous with society. The officers of the church were officers of the parish and among its key constituent members. The primary officer was the vicar and incumbent of the living, who was the leader of both the church and the parish.

A native of Stoke Gabriel and son of the preceding parish vicar, Adrianus Cowte was ordained in 1601. [7] Following the death of his father later that year, he was presented

to the parish by his patron, the Countess of Pembroke, and was installed by Bishop Cotton into the vicarage. [8] He died in office in 1636 and was the incumbent throughout the Jacobean period. As the vicar, he was the leader of the body of householders that became the collective expression of the parish. The body became known as the vestry (because that is where they met) and its annual meeting occurred in Easter week when the accounts were received, the church and poor rates were set, and the new churchwardens were elected. [9] All householders were expected to attend, of which there were about sixty in the parish according to the 1608 church rate book. [10]

The two churchwardens of Stoke Gabriel were annually elected at the vestry meeting and, during the period for which the accounts are available, no-one served more than once. [11] Four sidesmen were elected at the same time, some of whom served for more than one year and some, but not all, went on to serve as churchwardens. The wardens were generally people of the “middling” class, some of whose families, such as the Churchwards and Adams, have monuments in the church.

Over the Jacobean period, income was primarily sourced from church rates, a variable tax separate from tithes and introduced by the Tudors to replace income from church ales. It was levied by the churchwardens on householders and those who failed to pay their church rate were named in the accounts. No distinction was made between those who simply couldn't afford to pay or were simply late in paying. The non-conformists opposed payment in principle although the parish had few, if any, non-conformists at this time. Additional income was obtained from the occasional provision of graves within the church, the rental of church property (from people identified as “cotters”), knells and, in spite of the introduction of the church rate, the continuing sale of church ales at Whitsun. The income fluctuated from year to year but the churchwardens were seemingly not without sufficient funds to stand credit for such cash flow challenges.

One particular churchwarden was the grandson of Sir Thomas Pomeroy who had held the barony of Berry Pomeroy with its castle, manor and lands. Sir Thomas had sold the barony and its estates to Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, and then fell from grace following his unsuccessful involvement in the Prayer Book Rebellion of 1549. His grandson, Valentine Pomeroy, came to live at Sandridge in the parish of Stoke Gabriel and was elected as one of the churchwardens in 1622. The Pomeroy never did recover their status as one of the leading baronial families in the south west of the country but Valentine Pomeroy and his son, Roger, were great benefactors to the church. [12]

There was no office of treasurer, vergers or secretary at this time but there were the following offices, each of which typically attracted a quarterly fee:

- Parish clerk, an assistant to the parish priest who was the vicar's son, Andrew;

- Scrivener, someone who could write (but whose words were not always spelt consistently) and would typically complete the church registers and compile the accounts at the end of the year using the expense receipts that had been retained by the churchwardens; [13]
- Sexton, the grave digger; and
- Dog whipper, who was responsible for keeping the church free of the dogs that freely roamed the parish at that time.

In the Jacobean period, changes to the fabric of the church and to the protestant form of worship continued to be made, gradually, if belatedly, conforming to the doctrinal requirements of the Elizabethan Religious Settlement some 50 years earlier. [14] The accounts reveal that bread and wine were frequently purchased in sufficient quantities to allow all confirmed persons to take the sacrament (rather than just the clergy) and that in 1612 “a newe cussion for the pulpit” was purchased from Exeter, indicating the increasing importance of preaching. A vestment abhorred by Puritans, surplices were used and were washed every year. The accounts also reveal that in 1614 a “newe comunion book” was obtained and that in 1618 “washing and whiting the church” were carried out probably to cover up iconographic images that still remained.

The parish had no other clergy although occasionally, as in 1615, they paid for a preacher, an increasingly important talent as Puritanism began to exert greater influence across the country. In 1612, there was a visitation by the Archbishop of Canterbury to Totnes. Whether he came to Stoke Gabriel is not recorded but the parish had to pay towards his significant costs over a period of several years.

Throughout the decade, regular maintenance and repair works were undertaken to the church, the churchyard walls, and the Church House, which at this time was divided into the Little and Great Church Houses. The construction materials and labour were paid for out of the accounts. One of the teams of general labourers is frequently identified as “Loye his man & his boye”.

Of note also are the payments:

“...to the Glasier the xij day of August for glasing the church windows” (CWA 1615)

and associated extra payments for wood and for a boy to help the glazier. Similar payments were made regularly throughout the decade. Any original mediaeval windows would probably have been destroyed by the iconoclasts during the reign of Edward VI. The production of glass in this period used Elizabethan methods and was expensive. It would take until the second half of the century before a cheaper method of production became available.

The accounts were also used to record agreements between contractors and church officers relating to the cost of proposed works, as illustrated by:

“...a bargaine made by the same glaser in the presence of Robart Elloyt Robart butland & Thomas lane for the menden of the churche wyndowes betwyxt that & Ester for xvijjd vjd payd in hande the other xijd at the Caivent day” (CWA 1622)

Most, if not all, of the existing glass is however of Victorian origin, and it is not known whether any of this Jacobean glazing has survived. A similar agreement of this kind was struck with the bell founders and recorded in the accounts.

Church bells were important for the parish but the accounts reveal that they often required repair and sometimes needed to be re-cast. Unlike today when the bell would be transported to the nearest bell foundry, bell founders were itinerant craftsmen, travelling from church to church to re-cast bells on site. In 1613, the parish church tenor bell needed to be re-cast and the bell founders had arrived in Stoke Gabriel. The accounts for the year contain multiple entries relating to their work, more in the nature of a narrative than an itemised listing of expenses, as follows:

“...exspencis of the bell founder & for earnest money when the bargaen was made for the castinge of the great bell”

“...4 dayes worke to make the pitt to cast the bell in & to help the bell founder”

“...one day to fetch clay & earth for the bell with a horse”

“...one dayes worke for to drawe stones to byld the ffurnes in the chappell”

“...a horse labor & a man to fetch stones at Weggadon to make the furnes”

“...fetching of the blocks & tackling from Ditsham the first tyme”

“...expensis when the bell was halled uppe & downe”

“...fetchinge upp & downe of the tackling from Ditsham the second tyme”

Changes to the church fabric were also made for social reasons. To provide a measure of comfort for the congregation, a purchase was made of:

“...slatt stones to cover the churchfloor” (CWA 1614)

In 1622, however, a cost was also incurred for rushes that were typically used to cover church floors, suggesting that the stone floor covering was not yet complete.

Law and Order

Like other rural parishes, the people of Stoke Gabriel would have had a general understanding of neighbourliness and the need to live in peace and harmony. They would have had their own customs, probably the same as, or derived from, those of the manor, and would have adopted standards of conduct and behaviour, resulting in a more malleable social framework than one under the rule of law. [15] Sufficiently integrated in this way, they would police themselves, as colourfully illustrated when payments were made for:

“...watchinge & kepinge of Thomas Vinsent & for his diett before he went to prison” (CWA 1614); and

“...a man to watch Wm Hodge when he was sett in the Stookes” (CWA 1617).

Indicative of the extent to which they were used, the village stocks and pillars were repaired regularly throughout the period, as indicated by the payment to:

“...the tything man of paynton to wardes the reparing of the stockes and pillyareie” (CWA 1621)

The parish also paid for the:

“...mendinge of the stookes of Paington” (CWA 1612)

But many parish customs were being superseded by law and the parish would have had to adjust to this change.

The parish constable was not a police officer but was the principal officer of state responsible for administration of law and order and for the organisation and training of the King's armies. [16] He was accountable to the magistrate, an officer of a hundred's court responsible largely for petty crime, but his expenses came out of parish funds. The Protestation Return of 1641 shows that there were two constables for the parish, both of whom were local men, William Adam and Christopher Full.[17] The role extended beyond the parish boundary into the Haytor hundred. The constable regularly appeared before the magistrate's court in Newton and Paington but his main interaction with the parish was through his contact with the fit and able men who would be called up in the event of war.

The accounts indicate that an annual mustering of men from Stoke Gabriel and other parishes took place at various towns including Newton, Ashburton, Paington, Exeter, Chudleigh and Ugborough, where they underwent military training. The distances from

Stoke Gabriel to these places varies from about 5 miles for Paignton to about 20 miles for Exeter. Pack horses and men were hired to carry the armour and weaponry to the muster but the trainee soldiers themselves walked, as exemplified by the payments to/for:

“...Thomas Cretchet for caryeng of the armor to Chudley” (CWA 1618)

“...grasse for Three Horsses that caried the armor to Chudley for one night” (CWA 1618)

Prior to each muster, the parish purchased any required new weaponry usually from a supplier in Dartmouth, as exemplified by the payments for:

“...six poundes of gunpouder” (CWA 1620)

“...barell to putt gonn puder in” (CWA 1620)

“...20 lbs of lede to make bulletes” (CWA 1618)

At the same time, the armour had to be repaired and blacked and any new military hardware had to be purchased. The parish dutifully paid for/to:

“...3 newe chappes 12d 2 newe 16d scabbards & makinge cleane of 4 sowrds” (CWA 1611)

“...the old Trimmer of Dartmoth for mending and blacking the armor” (CWA 1618)

“...making of a new coslott and new pare of tearsses of the new fashion which weare commanded to dowe” (CWA 1620)

“...for making cleane of our arrmmor and for mending of the tersses of the same and for making cleane of fower swordes and the mending of fower scabidges” (CWA 1620)

Owned by the parish, the armoury and weaponry were stored in one of the two Church Houses since payments were made:

“...to carpinter one day to make hangeings for the armore in the churchhowse” (CWA 1617)

“...unto Hennerie Downing for the making of the cruckes for to hange the pyckes in the church howse” (CWA 1620)

The cost of purchasing new armour was significant and some items were recycled, for example payments were made for:

“...an old sword” (CWA 1619)

“...armor being in the hands of Josias full” (CWA 1619).

The soldiers would have been the fit and able men of the parish, the very sort on whom the rest of the family depended for the household economy. The timing of the musters may have conflicted with the seasonal demands of their industry, creating difficulty and the need for increased dependence on the old and young, the womenfolk and their neighbours.

Ecclesiastical law also required enforcement. The Articles of Enquiry for the Archdeaconry of Totnes were designed to ensure compliance with the reformed doctrine of the 39 Articles of Religion and the Book of Common Prayer (the Elizabethan Settlement) and with the requisite standards of office. They were also designed to ensure that parishioners met with the prescribed social and moral standards. Any breach of these standards required citation of the individual. None of the returns for the relevant period has survived but the personal dilemmas faced by the churchwardens are self-evident. Many of the parishioners were their neighbours and their citation could become the cause of tension and ill-feeling. Similarly, the citation of the parish vicar by the wardens for a breach of his duty could similarly cause friction and become divisive and it was almost impossible to evict him from his living anyway. Archdeacons' visitations were now occurring twice a year, and the Articles of Enquiry had become searching investigations into the moral and social rectitude of the parish, resulting in large numbers of ex parte actions by the church courts against cited individuals. [18]

By way of illustration, a libel was filed with the Exeter consistory courts against the parish vicar by members of the prominent Churchward family. [19] The case was that he had refused to administer communion to them on Christmas Day, 1607. The priest had declared from the pulpit to the congregation that his refusal was “because there were but two or three malicious persons redde to receive the same”. A second libel was filed by the Churchward family against the vicar and his wife, Mary, who was alleged to have been ex-communicated for the past two years for failure to attend the church court as required, yet her husband allowed her to continue to attend Sunday services to receive holy communion. The Churchward family were not prepared to see their reputation damaged nor was the priest reluctant to take a principled stand against them. Both parties appear to have shown some obstinacy and the case dragged on for years without an apparent outcome.

Tithes were a constant source of tension between vicar and parishioner, resulting frequently in litigation before the courts. [20] The parish of Stoke Gabriel was probably no different to other rural parishes but one dispute is different. The rector was the

Chancellor, one of the canons of Exeter Cathedral, and the more valuable tithes went to him. The less valuable tithes remained within the benefice to provide support to the vicar. The litigation was initiated by the parish clerk, Andrew Cowte, (probably on behalf of his father) against the Dean and Canons of Exeter Cathedral. [21] It was alleged that the cathedral was in receipt of tithes that should have gone to the vicar. [22] It came before the Chancery Court and endured for at least twenty years. The outcome is unknown but its mere existence throughout the period of the vicar's incumbency would have delivered a salutary warning to any parishioner thinking about withholding their tithes.

By and large, everything in the accounts and other records suggest that the parish was law-abiding. There were exceptions:

1. Church ales were still being produced in 1622 in contrast to the many other Devon parishes where the practise had ceased as required by late 16th century legislation.
2. The administrator's account dated 25th October 1614 relating to the deceased Agnes Slee required a sum of money to be distributed "amongst the poore at her burial", rather than transferring the sum to the Overseers of the Poor for distribution. [23] This was a Catholic practice in which the recipients of the money would in return pray for the soul of the deceased to speed its passage through purgatory.
3. A payment was made:

"to the tythingeman of Paington towards the Kepeyninge of of the Stoupe there"
(CWA 1613)

If the catholic stoup had been a fixture of the church, it should have been removed early in the Reformation and it is odd that the parish still possessed one some 100 years later and, moreover, chose this moment not to dispose of it altogether but to put it into safe keeping with the tythingman. [24]

The County of Devon was slow to embrace Protestantism and it wasn't until the 1570's that it made significant advances. The parish however was even slower in its conversion but perhaps, with the increasing influence of the Puritans, the parish had a sense of what was to come and conformed.

Low level penalties, involving the parish stocks and withholding communion, for breaching ecclesiastical laws were levied by the priest and the churchwardens. High level penalties including fines and ex-communication were levied by the church courts.

Charity & Poor Relief

The Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601 put the responsibility for the administration of poor relief on to the parishes, requiring the collection of a poor rate from householders and the appointment of two Overseers of the Poor. [25] The office was co-extensive with the parish, unlike that of the constables. The implementation of the law caused a distinction to be made between the deserving and undeserving poor, the latter being viewed as idle and associated with petty crime and sinfulness. [26] Parishioners viewed the deserving poor as coming from within their own parish, people with whom they had some background familiarity, and paid them weekly pensions or funded apprenticeships for them. By definition, vagrants could not meet these requirements and were viewed with suspicion and removed from the parish. The impact of these changes caused parishes to become inwardly-focused in their administration of poor relief and xenophobic in their treatment of non-parishioners.

A separate rate and account book was kept by the Overseers of the Poor and that for Stoke Gabriel from 1638 still survives. [27] The book contains a list of householders in their hierarchical social order, firstly for "Waton" and then "Stoke Towne", their assessed rate, and a brief description as to how the funds were used. It confirms that the funds were used to provide relief only within the parish, either through the payment of a pension or through funding apprenticeships. At the time, it was the custom among middling class testators to leave sums of money to the poor people of the parish and the book identifies such bequests as another source of income for poor relief. The wills of the yeomen, Richard Adam (1596), Peter Nicholls (1619) and Edward Sweteland (1620), the gentleman, Josias Full (1647), and the widow, Elizabeth Bonkerd (1627), all contain bequests to the parish poor. [28] The will of Peter Nicholls also refers to his and his deceased brother's wish that an:

"...almeshouse should be built of procured for twoe poore people of the parishe of Stokegabriell".

While the accounts have no entries relating to the parish poor, they contain numerous charitable donations to the poor and needy beyond the parish. For example, payments were made to help alleviate human suffering from illness or loss of life:

"...one fisher of foye who had great lose at see by pirates" (CWA 1611)

"...towards Releffe of the peopell of torr in the tyme of the plauge for 2 weeks" (CWA 1611)

"...a poor man of lime Nicholas hont who had great lose at sea 2 tymes" (CWA 1612)

"...Mary temple of Stepney towards hir great lose at sea" (CWA 1617)

“...a poore man of Ratcleffe who had his shipp & goodes lose at sea” (CWA 1617)

The parish constable was paid (xs) to deliver the charity to Torre to prevent the spread of plague to Stoke Gabriel (CWA 1611)!

Charitable payments were also made to people whose houses had burnt down in “Cornewall”, “Glostershe”, “Wylshere” and “Barkshere” and to the rebuilding of the “church of Saint albones” and the “buildinge of the Tower” at Northampton. Nearer to home, a payment was made to:

“...the inhabytunce of collumpton towards the Byldinge of the towne thatwas bourned” (CWA 1611)

Payments made to more distant places were generally in response to the receipt of a brief, a practice that had recently developed and would extend across the country by the mid-17th century. [29] The practice is identified in the second half of the decade of the accounts by specific reference to a brief, as exemplified by the payment to:

“...William Cllarke of Cllovellie for a breef” (CWA 1620)

Larger sums were made to people directly affected by illness or loss of life rather than loss of property. The accounts also reveal regular payments to “maymed” and “pore” soldiers and prisoners. All these extra-parochial charitable payments complement the intra-parochial relief of the parish poor administered by the Overseers of the Poor.

An insidious and increasingly worrying practice that developed in the 17th century related to the capture and ransom of mariners and fishermen at sea by corsairs from the Maghrib (present day countries of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia) of North Africa. Commonly referred to as Turks because of their association with the Ottoman Empire, they were the cause of much anxiety in the coastal towns of Devon and Cornwall including Dartmouth. [30] The accounts reveal the following payments towards such ransom demands:

“...2 pore marchauntes of Jerusalem Robbed & kept in prison by the tourkes” (CWA 1617)

“...John ollyver of london being in the Turkes gallyes towards his Ransome” (CWA 1617)

“...mary fford of ffoy towards the Redemyng of hir Husband from argeer” (CWA 1618)

“...towe pore wimen there husbands beinge in tvrkey” (CWA 1618)

In 1619, the Mayor of Dartmouth recorded that over fifty Dartmouth men had been taken captive that year by Turkish pirates. [31] By 1642, so many people from Dartmouth and the surrounding area had been affected that a petition was made to Devonshire JP's and was signed by many Stoke Gabriel parishioners. [32] In 1680 a fund was established specifically for the redemption of captives and raised in excess of £5 from parish householders. [33]

This sustained level of extra-parochial charitable giving, which in 1611 was in excess of 10% of the total expenditure, is remarkable given the generally inward-looking nature of parochial charity at this time. The parish income was intended to cover expenditure associated with ecclesiastical purposes or certain specified lay purposes prescribed by the Tudors. Charity in the form of poor relief was funded separately and used only for the poor of the parish. The vestry had taken a decision with decade-long consequences to help those beyond the parish. The instigator(s) could not have been the wardens since they changed each year. In all likelihood, it was the parish vicar. By virtue of his office, he was the leading person within the parish, he was the only parochial officer to hold the same position throughout the relevant period, and he had the patronage of the Countess of Pembroke. A man of principle, it would seem that his view of charitable giving was not constrained by territorial boundaries. Seemingly, he may have been used to getting his own way but would still have had to convince the vestry.

Local Economy and Infrastructure

Across the country, the population was simultaneously growing and experiencing foodstuff inflation, creating opportunities for some but impoverishment for many. [34] The manorial system was in decay and was about to break up and, at the same time, a transition was taking place from a self-sufficient, subsistence-based farming model to one increasingly based on trade.

At this time, the parish of Stoke Gabriel had a population in the mid-hundreds and the beneficiaries of this change were the so-called middling classes. Few in number, they were the farmers – the lower gentry, yeomen and husbandmen – who had leased the lands forming part of the Pembroke estate and purchased them when the opportunity arose. This led to the increasing fragmentation of the estate within the parish. Illustrative of such, the will dated 6th December 1647 of the gentleman, Josias Full, of Aish, provided for the disposal of itemised parcels of land and property across the parish that were acknowledged to have previously been purchased from Philip Herbert, the 4th Earl of Pembroke. [35]

The aim of a subsistence-based economy would be to provide such food and other resources as the parish required. Arable farming was still based on the open field

system in which fields were divided into strips, an inefficient method of operation with no economies of scale. Land enclosures did not typically occur until later in the 17th century. During the Jacobean period, however, the economy became much more dependent on trade with people within and outside the parish. [36] The nearby town of Paignton had an ancient weekly market, for which the accounts show that the parish made an annual payment to its clerk. [37] Clearly, there was a need for the produce to be sold somewhere and it is likely that this payment was made to secure that right at the market.

Most agricultural labourers of the period would earn a wage of about 1s for a day's work, with a higher wage for some specialised tasks, and possibly one or more additional benefits, such as housing, the right to gather fuel, the right to catch rabbits, and the right to keep an animal on the land. [38] The manor of Paignton however had its own customs and these benefits and rights may or may not have been available to tenants.

Fishing was also an important industry. In the past the village was the centre of the River Dart for salmon fishing although today this has largely ceased. Given the difficulties with its transportation, salmon would have been traded or sold locally at Paignton market.

Some parishioners were also involved in the sea fishing industry of Dartmouth.

[39] While the fisheries were largely in the North Atlantic, the main market, especially for pilchards, was in Iberia, which meant that they had to run the gauntlet of the Turkish corsairs. There were mariners who came from the parish, as indicated by the payment to:

“...James bickford to the louth of his bott to cary the mariners to Dartmoth” (CWA 1613)

On the east side of the River Dart, the village is roughly equidistant from the towns of Dartmouth, Totnes and Paignton. In the 17th century, both Dartmouth and Totnes were on the other side of the river and access to them would have been by boat and indeed the accounts contain multiple entries relating to the hire of a boat to get to Dartmouth, even on one occasion in 1615 to transport the pulpit there for repair. Access to the town of Paignton, on the other hand, would have been by foot or on horseback, as it was to the other towns to which the menfolk travelled for musters and military training. Based on the decade for which the accounts exist, much of the economic interaction was with Paignton and Dartmouth and, to a lesser extent, Newton. Surprisingly, there is little interaction with Totnes, which is mentioned once in the context of the Archbishop of Canterbury's visitation and on one other occasion in 1619 for some unspecified purpose.

As the country became a trading nation, there was a need for improved infrastructure. In the West Country, rivers were more of an obstacle to travel than fields and woodland. The office of Surveyor of the Highways was responsible for the maintenance of roads and bridges. [40] In Stoke Gabriel, his role extended throughout the Haytor hundred and

he oversaw the repair of the following bridges during the decade, obtaining the assistance of local men as needed: “Tengbridge” (1611, 1617 & 1620), “Western Bridges” (1611); “Ockinton bridge” (1615); “Plunton Marie bridge” (1617); “Lea bridge betwixt Kingsbridge & Mathmont” (1617); “newe bridg in Kings Teynton” (1617); “Credy bridge” (1619); “Bickham bridge”; “Newe bridge” (1619); “Calvery bridge” (1619); and “Hoowle bridge” (1622).

On one occasion, the parish paid a fine imposed upon:

“...Robt. Elliott for that he was charged to paye in the 100 cowrt for not mendinge the wayes.” (CWA 1612)

The fine was significant (xjs ixd) and seems to reinforce the view that bridge repairs were given a higher priority than the highways.

Social Culture

Believed to have been ordained by God, the 17th century social hierarchy was class-based with the King at the top, then the Nobility, the Gentry (Baronets, Knights & Esquires), the Yeomen (also the Merchant and Professional classes), the Husbandmen and, at the bottom, the Serfs. It was a fundamentally patriarchal society in which the husband was the head of the household and provided security in the form of income and accommodation. The vocation of Protestant Englishwomen was to be a “good wife” who managed the household economy, educated the children and any servants, and cared for the sick who generally quickly recovered or quickly died. She was expected to be submissive, patient and obedient. [41] In Stoke Gabriel church, the priest held services of Holy Communion which celebrated “goodwife sundaye” (CWA 1618, 1619 and 1620), suggesting that the wives of the parish fitted the stereotype of the day.

In spite of the social order, the parish remained a neighbourhood with a high degree of mutual dependence. Neighbours required assistance with planting and harvesting, not least when the men went off for military training or to fight in wars. A close-knit community which policed itself, there had to be a strong level of trust and cooperation.

The festival culture that was associated with Pre-Reformation Merry England was no longer so evident in the Jacobean period. [42] Across the country, many festivals, such as Plough Monday, Candlemas, Shrovetide, Hocktide, Rogationtide, May Day and especially Corpus Christi, and their associated processions and activities had been banned or had simply disappeared. In 1618, King James attempted to arrest the decline and declared that certain sports and activities could take place on Sunday and holy days but it caused deep offence to the Puritans.

In Stoke Gabriel, the festival culture had not died out completely. The annual production and sale of Whitsun ales and the associated festival of Rushbearing, in which fresh rushes are laid as a fresh church floor covering, continued right up to the final year of the surviving accounts, as indicated by the payment for:

“...the cutting of a hundred and haffe of force facketes” (CWA 1622),

which are a form of rushes, and the receipt from the previous year of:

“...the profit of the church alle the some of viij li xijs” (CWA 1621).

How much longer the festival continued is unknown, but it already outlasted all the other pre-Reformation festivals within the parish. [43] Suppression orders had been issued on several occasions against church ales by Puritanical sympathisers and Stoke Gabriel was one of the last Devonshire parishes to cease their sale. [44]

The failure of the Gunpowder Plot in 1605 was annually celebrated in the parish on the 5th November not with a bonfire and fireworks but with bell ringing and the lighting of candles, followed by refreshments for the ringers, as indicated by the payments:

“...for the Ringers & candeills the vth ofnovember” (CWA 1618)

“...for bere for the ringers the 5th November” (CWA 1618)

The apparent dearth of festivals in the parish at this time is offset by the numerous social occasions when refreshments were provided to the bell ringers or those repairing church fabric. When new bell ropes and a tower beam had been fitted, provision had been made for:

“...bread and drincke in the owd” and

“...for thear Dyner when the came hom” (CWA 1620)

In contrast to the mediaeval period, the parish would have been a culturally different place in the Jacobean era but there is a sense that opportunities were exploited for social gatherings and fellowship even if they were not on the scale of those of Merry England.

Conclusions

The picture of the parish that emerges from this analysis of contemporary records is of a parish in transition at many levels.

The parish had slowly but dutifully complied with the doctrinal changes of the Tudor Reformation and with the need for it to take on lay responsibilities. It would have been comforted by the reign of Elizabeth I and the relatively prolonged period of peace and stability. It would not of course know what was to come once the Puritans gained power in less than twenty years, but the parish would have been aware of the movement and their desire for greater reform. The parish might seem isolated and the infrastructure of the day was not great, but there is ample evidence to show that people travelled widely within South Devon, even to Exeter. These occasions presented ample opportunity to meet with others and exchange news and views.

The parish was generally law-abiding and followed its leaders. The accounts refer to the purchase of items that they were “commanded to do”. In a period in which custom-based practice was giving way to the rule of law, the parish recognised its importance in keeping order and actively participated in its enforcement, difficult though that may have been at times. And, together with the parish constable, it played its full part in providing the men of the parish with the requisite training and equipment for soldiering.

The leader of the parish, the vicar, Adrianus Cowte, had authority and influence. Probably more preoccupied with the relationship with his patron than with parishioners, he was part of the elite priestly culture that distinguished itself from the popular culture of the day. His father may have given him cause to expect that he would follow in his footsteps (which of course he did) and would have prepared him for his eventual succession. His introduction to and association with his patron may have given him cause for his high-minded, if not authoritative, manner. He was prepared to stand up to the established families of the parish and, through his son, to take issue with the cathedral hierarchy. A principled man who may not have been popular, he must have been persuasive to get his way with the vestry’s commitment to extra-parochial charity. In a period of transition, he represented stability and his leadership likely had far-reaching consequences on the social and religious culture of the parish in this period.

Mike Stott, January 2018

Endnotes

[1] Devon Heritage Centre (South West Heritage Trust), 1981 A-99/PW1

[2] N. J. G. Pounds, *A History of the Parish*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), 181-199

[3] Rev George Oliver, *Ecclesiastical Antiquities in Devon* (Exeter, W. C. Featherstone, New London Inn Square, 1840), Vol 1, 173; Harold Fox, Dartmoor’s Alluring Uplands:

Transhumance and Pastoral Management in the Middle Ages, (University of Exeter Press, 2012), 120-121; and <http://www.torbay.gov.uk/media/7582/old-paignton-caa.pdf>

[4] Nicholas Orme, *The Church in Devon*, (Exeter, Impress Books, 2013), 32-33 & 176; and <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/speke-sir-thomas-1508-51> Accessed on 2nd December 2015

[5] Exeter Cathedral Archives, D&C Minute Book, 116;
<http://www.torbay.gov.uk/media/7582/old-paignton-caa.pdf>

[6] http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/sidney/pembroke_biography.htm Accessed on 2nd December 2015

[7] <http://db.theclergydatabase.org.uk/> Accessed 30th November 2015

[8] Devon Heritage Centre (South West Heritage Trust), Chanter XXI (Episcopal Register of William Cotton), 1582-1626,

[9] W. E. Tate, *The Parish Chest*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011), 13-25

[10] Devon Heritage Centre (South West Heritage Trust), 1981 A/PW 2

[11] Devon Heritage Centre (South West Heritage Trust), 1981 A-99/PW1

[12] <https://sites.google.com/site/pomeroytwig/home/the-devon-family> Accessed 30th November 2015

[13] For the period under consideration, the scrivener and clerk were one and the same person.

[14] Claire Cross, *Church and People, England 1450-1660*, (Oxford, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999), 107-132

[15] Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680*, (Abingdon, Routledge, 2003), 163-167

[16] Pounds, *ibid*, 193-195

[17] <http://www.devonheritage.org/Places/Stoke%20Gabriel/StokeGabrielProtestaionReturn.htm> Accessed on 3rd December 2015

[18] Devon Heritage Centre (South West Heritage Trust), DEX/2/b/11-23

[19] Devon Heritage Centre (South West Heritage Trust), 1981 A/178

[20] Anne Tarver, *Church Court Records*, (Chichester, Phillimore & Co Ltd, 1995), 100-112

[21] The National Archives, C 2jasl/C29/42

[22] Other records suggest that the bishop did not intend that the advowson should have been included in the sale of the manor of Paignton.

[23] Devon Heritage Centre (South West Heritage Trust), 1981

[24] A tithing is a group of ten families who were jointly responsible for maintaining order and who were responsible for enforcing the laws of murder and theft. A tithingman was the person from the group who was the contact with the authorities. A group of ten tithings is an hundred and they elected a constable.

[25] Pounds, *ibid*, 195-198; and Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain, 1470-1750*, (London, Penguin Books, 2001), 215-221; The poor rate was in addition to tithes and the church rate.

[26] J. A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England, 1550-1750*, (London, Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1999), 128-129

[27] Devon Heritage Centre (South West Heritage Trust), 1981 A/PO 1

[28] The National Archives – The Prerogative Court of Canterbury, PROB 11/90/35, PROB 11/133/805, PROB 11/135/753, PROB 11/202/529 and PROB 11/152/396

[29] Pounds, *ibid*, 269-273

[30] *Tudor and Stuart Devon*, Edited by Todd Gray, Margery Rowe and Audrey Erskine, *Fishing and the Commercial World of Early Stuart Dartmouth*, Todd Gray, (Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 1992), 173-199

[31] Devon Heritage Centre (South West Heritage Trust), DD61947, fol. 12

[32] Petition of 1642 to the Devonshire JPs, <http://ngb.chebucto.org/Cole-Documents/dartmouth-harbour-gathering-1642.shtml> (Accessed 7 June 2016)

[33] Devon Heritage Centre (South West Heritage Trust), 1981 A/PF45

[34] Wrightson, *English Society*, 133-138

[35] The National Archives – The Prerogative Court of Canterbury, PROB 11/202/529

[36] Robert Whiting, *The Blind Devotion of the People*, (Cambridge, C.U.P., 1989), 7-14

[37] <http://www.torbay.gov.uk/media/7582/old-paignton-cao.pdf>

[38] Wrightson, *English Society*, 42

[39] *Tudor and Stuart Devon*, Edited by Todd Gray, Margery Rowe and Audrey Erskine, *Fishing and the Commercial World of Early Stuart Dartmouth*, Todd Gray, *ibid*

[40] Pounds, *ibid*, 198-199

[41] Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680*, 98-100

[42] Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England, The Ritual Year 1400-1700*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994), 154-185

[43] Cox, John Charles, *Churchwardens' Accounts from the Fourteenth Century to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, (Miami, Hardpress Publishing, 1913), 243-245

[44] Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680*, 220