

LECTURE TEXT

I have been asked to supply a copy of my recent talk to be posted on the Trust's website. I am very happy to do so, simply warning readers to remember that what you read was prepared as a talk and not as a polished article for publication. In that spirit, I hope you find this piece interesting and informative.

The 32nd Emil Godfrey Memorial Lecture – Lewes – 14 June 2013

The Archdeacons of Lewes and the Reformation

Thank you for the invitation to give this 32nd Emil Godfrey Memorial Lecture – I see from the list of my predecessors that I have a lot to live up to... I want to talk with you this evening about the Archdeacons of Lewes and the Reformation, a topic that on first glance you might find rather obscure for such an occasion as this. Yet it is one that I hope would have gladdened the hearts of Emil Godfrey (1913-1982) and his illustrious father Walter (1881-1961).

Both father and son were – as you probably all know well – distinguished local architects with a particular interest in restoring and adapting ancient buildings. Walter Godfrey was one of the founders of the National Buildings (now Monuments) Record; he helped to restore Herstmonceux Castle in the 1930s and worked on numerous churches including Boxgrove Priory (1931) and Yapton (1939-41) from my neck of the woods. He was also the author of numerous books on the history of architecture, and a keen gardener who put his views into practice when working on the house and gardens of Charleston Manor, Sussex in the early 1930s.

Of special interest to me, Walter Godfrey was Literary Director of the Sussex Record Society alongside the famous Louis Salzman between 1940 and 1957, a fact sadly missing from his life that may be found in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* - another tribute in itself to his fame. And I think this is a doubly sad omission, for he also served as Chairman of the Council between 1931 and 1957 – which you must admit counts as distinguished service. He served on the Council for a total of 33 years. Literary Director for a total of 17 of those years, he personally edited several SRS volumes including, 'The Book of

John Rowe' and 4 volumes of transcripts of Sussex wills – a real service to local historians and genealogists. Although you have had many illustrious members of our society speak to you over the years, including of course Christopher Whittick and John Bleach, I think I am the first Literary Director of the SRS to give you a talk, and as we are always on the look-out for editors and topics, please see me afterward if you have any ideas for future volumes...

Emil Godfrey was also interested in history and ancient churches, working with his father on the restoration of the Temple Church in London after the war. He worked on numerous churches in this area, including St Michael's here in Lewes, Bishopstone, Brightling, Poynings and Southease. And he too worked in my part of West Sussex for he was involved in the presentation of Fishbourne Roman Palace and work on the Bishop's Palace at Chichester. It must have been difficult having such a famous father, but he too seems to have left his mark, hence of course this series of lectures.

You may still be forgiven for thinking, however, how does all this connect with archdeacons, and why might the Godfreys' have been interested? Well, one of the key duties of archdeacons - across the land - was to enquire routinely each year about the care of churches by the clergy and churchwardens. And we have evidence of this in surviving visitation material going back as far as the sixteenth century, hence one volume in our series edited by the late Wyn K Ford on Church Surveys, based largely on the fairly comprehensive one conducted for Bishop Bowers in 1724. And this will soon be followed – we hope - by another volume covering the early seventeenth century, for Chichester diocese is fortunate in being probably the best in the country for survival of material relating to Archbishop Whitgift's survey of 1603, material surviving for Bishop Harsnett's time in the 1610s, and the more famous Laudian surveys of the 1630s. So here is a blatant plug for a forthcoming volume...

Moving to my talk proper: I shall say a little more about archdeaconries in general and Lewes in particular, move to consider six archdeacons who spanned the period 1527 to 1578, and surface to draw some conclusions on what we might learn from their stories about the church and society at that time. The

archdeacons in question were Edward More, John Shery, Richard Brisley and Robert Taylor – all Roman Catholics - the last of whom was deprived as such under Elizabeth in 1559; and two Protestants: Edmund Weston and Thomas Drant.

I hope you will find this interesting and relatively fresh, for it all stems from research I am doing currently in connection with a wider project on the Church of England between 1540 and 1700. This project is about the diocesan structure of the church and has drawn me into asking idiot questions about archdeacons and what they did, a relatively neglected layer of the Church of England hierarchy. And sadly a layer not too well documented in that many record offices around the country seem to have forgotten that they have material relating to archdeacons – not here in Lewes of course - although the key records are now kept at Chichester and sadly much has been lost for this archdeaconry. This is something you may have noticed in one of our recent volumes on the probate inventories of Sussex clergy, edited by Annabelle Hughes, where the balance is heavily skewed towards the west.

The Church of England (and Wales) was divided into 27 dioceses during the early modern period, and further sub-divided into 62 archdeaconries. Archdeacons traditionally held two visitations (or inspections) a year, one at Easter where the main concern was establishing how many people took communion as required by law; the other at Michaelmas, when as I have already said, they were particularly interested in the fabric and furnishings of churches and the work of churchwardens. Archdeacons were appointed by their bishops and often referred to as the ‘eyes of the bishop’ in their dioceses, given their concerns for discipline. There were huge variations in their wealth and power. The Archdeacon of Canterbury earned at least £163 per annum, worth almost as much as some of the poorer bishops, but the Archdeacons of Chichester and Lewes earned around £38 and £39 respectively, and you will note that Lewes was worth one pound more! It has to be said, however, that both were at the lower end of the income scale for archdeacons...

Lewes and Chichester were probably fairly typical of how archdeacons ran at this juncture, for they, along with 16 other dioceses, were very much under the thumb of their bishops in what we might call the smaller dioceses with only one or two archdeacons to their name. They conducted their own courts, largely dealing with social, religious 'crimes' detected at their visitations, and most important of all, probate and matrimonial business. I would be interested to know where they lived when in Lewes and in which church they largely conducted their courts? In larger dioceses like York, Lincoln, Exeter, London and Norwich, archdeacons were much more powerful and independent. And that has been reflected to some extent in the survival of records, hence a good collection for the Archdeaconry of Nottingham at the southernmost tip of York diocese.

When we look at the Archdeacons of Lewes in turn for my chosen period, they seem a pretty illustrious bunch. Edward More who served between 1527 and his death in 1541, thus entirely in the reign of Henry VIII, was a relatively local man from Havant in Hampshire. He attended Winchester College, then New College Oxford where he took a BA and an MA, before returning to become Headmaster of Winchester College between 1508 and 1517. He returned to a career in the church, supplicating for a Bachelor's degree in Theology in 1518. He then held a succession of livings in the gift of the college before his friendship with Bishop Sherbourne of Chichester, a fellow Wykehamist, gained him a prebend at Chichester in 1521, and the post of archdeacon in 1527. Our problem with More is that although he was relatively distinguished, (sufficiently so to gain an entry in ODNB), it is unclear how much he ever came to Lewes or took his duties seriously, for he was a notable pluralist, having been elected Warden of Winchester College in 1526, where he was buried on his death in 1541.

More was succeeded as archdeacon by a man named John Shery, who was obviously well connected for he was a chaplain to the Duke of Norfolk, and it was the latter who presented him to be Precentor at St Paul's Cathedral in London, a post he took up a year after he became Archdeacon of Lewes in 1542 – so another pluralist with split loyalties. He held a variety of livings extending from

Thakeham in Sussex to Hayling Island in Hampshire, and was clearly an educated man for he left books to three fellow clergymen in his will, but we sadly know little about him or his education. He died in 1551.

We move smartly to two tough Roman Catholic disciplinarians: Richard Briseley and Robert Taylor, both of whom also served as diocesan Chancellors, an interesting development that I shall come back to later. Briseley was a Doctor of Canon Law from Cambridge, a Cistercian from here in Lewes, a prior to their cell in Horton, Kent. On surrendering the priory in 1538 he received a pension of £15 per annum, but this was soon bettered by a succession of livings in Essex and Surrey, before he was given a Chichester prebend by Bishop George Day in 1547. He was clearly quite active in Chichester for he gained a better prebend in 1555, having already been made a Canon Residentiary in 1554. Briseley features in the work of the famous historian Eamon Duffy, for he was active in the church of Queen Mary in disciplining Protestants in the area. He served as Diocesan Chancellor for the whole diocese between 1554 and his death in 1558 working under Bishops Day and Christopherson, both known for their tough approach to Protestant heresy. It is not clear how he got on with Bishop Scory, the Edwardian appointment here briefly between 1552-3.

Robert Taylor, who succeeded Briseley very briefly in 1558 before he was deprived in November 1559, was also an highly educated lawyer, holding his qualifications from Merton College, Oxford where he also became a Fellow. He served as Registrar of the University of Oxford between 1529 and 1532, during which period he was also Principal of St Alban Hall, Oxford, to the east of Merton. There are several mysteries to his life for there is a gap of nearly ten years before he surfaces again in our records as Rector of Maresfield in 1541. And mysteries abound again as to his whereabouts after his deprivation under Queen Elizabeth in 1559. According to the redoubtable Tim McCann, he was spotted in the homes of several Catholic gentry, captured briefly at the Scott family home in Iden, and found again with the Gage family at Framfield in 1592. Although he only served briefly as Archdeacon of Lewes - if he ever really got his feet under the table in those turbulent times - he may have worked closely with Briseley when the

latter was Diocesan Chancellor and he held a Chichester prebend between 1551 and 1559.

This brings us to the two Protestants who served under Bishops Barlow and Curteys in the early years of Queen Elizabeth. The first of whom was Edmund Weston, educated at both Cambridge and Oxford, another high class civil lawyer, and another who doubled up as Diocesan Chancellor between 1561 and his death in 1570, virtually the same period as he served as Archdeacon of Lewes. He is another who presents us with mysterious gaps in his career, in this case perhaps because he may have gone abroad following his deprivation as a prebendary of Westminster in 1554. Having checked on the great book on Marian exiles by Christina Garrett, however, it seems more likely that he just laid low for he was ejected on account of being married. He crops up in Chichester diocese with a stall in the cathedral, swift appointment as a Canon Residentiary in 1561, and eventually dies as Warden of St Mary's Hospital, Chichester in 1570. Numerous references to him in the Dean and Chapter Act Book of the time suggest that he too was more resident in Chichester than in Lewes.

The last of my chosen archdeacons was Thomas Drant cited by one contemporary as that 'fat-bellied archdeacon', and better known as a poet and translator rather than as a clergyman and theologian. He was a Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge where he probably first met Richard Curteys who later became Bishop of Chichester. Drant became Archdeacon of Lewes in 1570 and his request to become a Canon Residentiary at Chichester Cathedral was accepted 'on account both of the worth and learning of a distinguished man, and of the lack of preachers in the Church'. He took over the house in the Close previously occupied by Edmund Weston. Drant published translations of the work of Horace, and epigrams and spiritual verse, usually with an anti-Catholic satirical twist. He was very well connected, not only with Bishop Curteys, but also with Bishop Grindal of London where Drant served as a divinity reader at St Paul's Cathedral in the 1560s and held a prebend. He preached at court and seems to have spent the latter years of his life in London at his vicarage of St Giles, Cripplegate. Drant was in a circle of intellectuals that included Edmund Spenser, Gabriel Harvey, Philip Sydney and Fulke Greville; he was undoubtedly

the most intellectual and best connected of all the early modern archdeacons of Lewes. Yet as with so many others, a huge question mark hangs over how much he ever came here... But he too has merited an entry in ODNB.

So what can we learn from the stories of these archdeacons? First, that they were all very well educated - apart from Shery - very much in the upper echelons of clergy for that time. And this continued throughout the period. They were all well networked as a result, at court, with Oxbridge colleges, and throughout their dioceses. Highly educated though they were, however, these archdeacons conform to a pattern that I have detected elsewhere, namely that the career path of a typical archdeacon usually ended in death rather than promotion! You will note that of my six, all bar Taylor, who was deprived, died in post. I need to do more work on establishing just why this might be the case, but I think it is still true to this day!

Three of my archdeacons held degrees in civil law, and it was no accident, for again it was common at this period that they also doubled up as Diocesan Chancellors. These were the 'Sir Humphrey' figures that really ran the Church of England... By the end of the sixteenth century civil lawyers were divesting themselves of their clerical careers and concentrating on simply being the efficient bureaucrats that most of them were. Diocesan Chancellors emerged in the seventeenth century as MPs, JPs and even gained knighthoods; they were often better socially connected than their bishops.

One big lesson that I would draw to your attention, however, relates to what these people reveal about the continuity that existed in this and lower levels of the Church through the turbulent times of the early English Reformation in the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI and the Counter-Reformation led by Mary. Above them Bishops and Deans of Chichester were deprived, George Day in 1551 under Edward; John Scory in 1553 under Mary, from whence he went abroad; and restored, as with Day in 1553. Batholomew Treheron, appointed Dean under Edward, resigned in 1553, while his successor Thomas Sampson was soon deprived, if ever really installed, that same year.

But real turbulence for the lower ranks of the clergy, including our archdeacons, only really occurred in the years 1558 to 1560 when deaths from influenza, deprivations and also lots of resignations finally marked the coming of the Protestant Reformation in England. As Eamon Duffy has pointed out in his important book, *Fires of Faith*, many clergy finally gave up on playing Vicars of Bray, seeing which way the wind was blowing, and the accession of Elizabeth I marked a real watershed in the Church of England.

And the results were truly staggering for the diocese of Chichester, something that has not been fully appreciated even though Tim McCann wrote about it in a pioneering article many years ago (1983). Approximately two thirds of all Sussex livings changed hands around 1558-1560. Of 38 cathedral posts, 30 changed hands at or soon after this period owing to religious reasons or death. Bishop Barlow had to rebuild the diocese aided by largely new and inexperienced clergy at all levels. He needed two new Archdeacons. And we are slowly coming to terms with the fact that this degree of turnover was something that occurred in many other parts of the country. Owing to death, resignation or deprivation some 38 out of 62 (61%) archdeaconries needed new archdeacons at this juncture, and only 3 were restored with any previous experience.

One problem that has bedevilled this talk throughout, however, is how often these Archdeacons ever visited and resided in Lewes. The fact that they were all rank pluralists is awkward. Another tricky indicator is that all bar Shery held Chichester Cathedral prebends, giving them opportunities and responsibilities there. And with Briseley, Taylor and Weston also holding the substantial office of Diocesan Chancellor, this also points to lack of direct involvement with Lewes. So having identified that archdeacons merit further study, I am now faced with the search for their surrogates in the shadows, those who actually did the work on the ground!

But let us come full circle and return to what all this might tell us about our churches, and to some of the problems it might have set Walter and Emil Godfrey when considering how to restore churches. Well the duties for the archdeacons would have changed considerably during this period, more perhaps than at any

other similar short period of time. The impact of the Reformation upon the physical state of our churches was considerable and has been well documented. Gone would have been rood screens, altars, chantry chapels, incense, and possibly organs – although our views on the losses regarding music are being heavily modified. In would have come the royal coat of arms, sentences of scripture, a chest of three locks for a clergyman and churchwardens to keep new documents like parish registers (required after 1538) and later churchwardens' accounts.

Historians turning to psychology to explain some of these momentous events have always been drawn to the anxiety expressed by Protestants as to how they might be saved, and the ditching of purgatory and hence those chantry chapels. Others more recently, notably Eamon Duffy of course, have plucked at our heartstrings on matters of loss; the loss of comfortable services, the certainty of what occurs at Holy Communion, the confessional, the music and ceremony. We are all familiar with the fact that the Anglican Church was built physically on the medieval churches of Roman Catholic England - in other words - English Catholics were robbed of their churches. Only comparatively recently, however, have I come to appreciate that for the thousands of people who remained Catholic in this land after the Reformation - the huge majority of people in West Sussex for example - they were also robbed of their church structure. This entailed their dioceses, cathedrals, and ironically, that also included archdeacons. And not all was restored with the new Catholic hierarchy in 1850.

Our first two archdeacons, More and Sherry, served a relatively united church; Brisley and Taylor a much troubled church, while Weston and Drant served a church with new disciplinary functions that included keeping a watch on those who had refused to go along with the Reformation, and were thus seen as potential traitors. Much modern research is now looking at communities like those in West Sussex where people wisely adapted to the problems of multi-faith occupation and coped in a more civilised fashion than has often been thought in the past. But that is another talk...

Andrew Foster – June 2013

Suggestions for further reading:

E. Duffy *Fires of Faith, 2009*

E. Duffy *Voices of Morebath, 2001*

E. Duffy *The Stripping of the Altars, 1992*

M. Hobbs (ed.) *Chichester Cathedral An Historical Survey, 1994*

M. Kitch (ed.) *Studies in Sussex Church History, 1983*

R. Manning *Religion and Society in Elizabethan Sussex, 1969*

K. Leslie & B. Short (eds.) *An Historical Atlas of Sussex, 1999*

D. Dyas (ed.) *The English Parish Church through the centuries* (interactive CD-ROM) University of York, 2010

R. Peters *Oculus Episcopi Administration in the Archdeaconry of St Albans 1580-1625, 1963*

J. R. Armstrong *A History of Sussex, 3rd ed. 1974*