

## 4 Reformation to Restoration

---

### The Background

It had been John Wyclif and his like who had begun the process which led to the Reformation. The traditional date for this in England is 1533 when Henry VIII finally broke with Rome; but in parish churches there had already been many changes and these would have had an impact on Purley as everywhere else. In 1538 Thomas Cromwell acting for the King, ordered every parson to provide an English Bible in his church with free access to readers. At the time any book was so valuable that this could usually be complied with only if the Bible were chained in place.

The next year in June 1539 Parliament passed the Act of Six Articles. This set out six points of doctrine as a statement of traditional beliefs. The King saw it as a reaffirmation that it was only political control of the church which had changed, but many of the clergy saw it as a step backwards. Purley promptly lost its Bishop as Nicholas Shaxton, Bishop of Salisbury, interpreted it as a major set back for the protestant cause and resigned his see in protest, to be replaced soon afterwards by John Capon. It was a requirement of the Act that each parish priest read it publicly and periodically in their churches. The set-back was however only temporary and from Whitsun 1549 the first English Prayer Book was established as the only legal form of worship. The following year all the old service books were called in to be destroyed.

Also in 1549 an Act was passed to take away all positive laws against the marriage of priests. During the four years that followed many priests took advantage of the opportunity and married. It seems likely that Purley's John Leke followed the fashion and converted his concubine into a wife.

As of All Saints day 1552 (1st November) all and every persons in the King's realms were ordered to attend church every Sunday and Holy day unless they had a very good reason not to. The penalty was very severe, for a first offence six months in prison, for a second conviction one year and for a third it was life.

### Richard Gatskyll 1554-1563

When Queen Mary came to the throne in 1553 she tried to reverse many of the trends which had started during the reign of Henry VIII and accelerated during that of Edward VI. Her first Act was to deprive all married clergy of their livings. This she did by Royal Proclamation in December 1553 and over the next two years officials toured the country carrying out the Queen's wishes. In the diocese of Salisbury 37 of the parish clergy were deprived. John Leke was one of the first to go and his successor Richard Gatskyll was inducted on the 27th April 1554, the first time the Royal patronage was exercised in Purley. Perhaps surprisingly, John Capon, Bishop of Salisbury, survived in office and eventually died in 1557 shortly before Queen Mary herself.

Richard had been noted as John Leke's curate in 1553 so he was probably asked to keep the parish going after John's ejection and was soon after confirmed as rector.

On Queen Mary's death in 1558, her sister Elizabeth began the work that culminated in what has become to be known as the 'Elizabethan Settlement of Religion'. She restored the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity and sent her Commissioners to obtain the assent of the clergy in writing. The best known of the Commissioners who visited the Diocese of Salisbury in 1561 was John Jewel, who had spent most of Mary's reign as an exile in Geneva. Soon after his tour he reported back to friends in Zurich of *'The wilderness of superstition which has sprung up*

*from the darkness of Marian times. We found in all places votive relics of saints, nails which the infatuated people dreamed that Christ had been pierced with and I know not what small fragments of the sacred cross. The number of witches and sorceresses had everywhere become enormous'*

Five of the clergy in Berkshire refused to sign the assent, among them Richard Gatskyll, who was as a consequence deprived of the living of Purley. It may well be that Richard had already left soon after the death of Queen Mary and that he was not around to answer the Commissioner's questions as he had leased the parsonage in 1560 to William Stoning, whose son was to become rector in 1577.

### **Thomas Handcock 1563 and Thomas Mountayne 1563-1566**

Thomas Handcock had signed the assent in the diocese of Lincoln and was appointed to be rector of Purley in 1563. John Jewel who had been mainly responsible for the ejection of Richard Gatskyll was made Bishop of Salisbury soon after he had completed his tours of the southern dioceses. He was an ultra-protestant who had almost resigned his see soon after his appointment when the Queen had proposed the restoration of crucifixes to parish churches. The Queen had bowed to his pressure and Jewel stayed on to indulge in a literary battle to force catholic minded academics to flee to the continent.

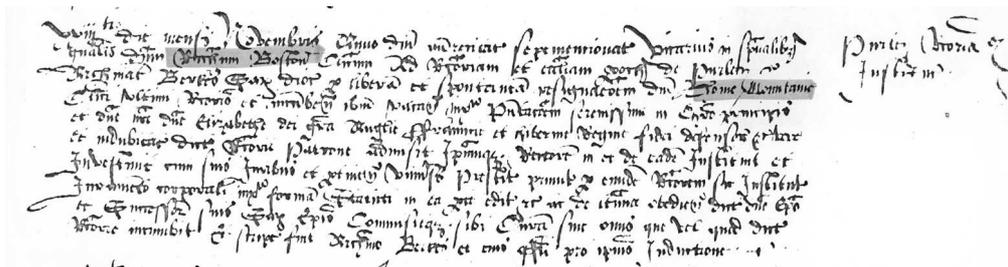
Apparently Thomas Handcock did not fully satisfy his bishop as he too was deprived and replaced by Thomas Mountayne who was instituted on 29th August 1563.

### **Richard Boston 1566-1577**

Richard Boston was instituted on 11th January 1566 and remained at Purley until he died in 1577.. In 1572 he wrote the will of Thomas Holloway of Purley which is still preserved. It was during his rectorship that the papal excommunication came in 1570 and thereafter Roman Catholics were regarded as potential traitors. Previously they had continued to practice their own forms of worship at home and put in sufficient token attendances at the parish church to satisfy the authorities, but now this token attendance was now forbidden by the Pope.

### **Thomas Stoning 1577-1585**

On 25th September 1577 Thomas Stoning became rector. He was the son of William Stoning who had leased the parsonage in 1560. A year later he witnessed the probate of the will of Christopher Staynton who was recorded as a tailor of Purley.



The item in the Register of John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury, recording the institution of Richard Boston as Rector of Purley in 1566 - Now in the Wiltshire Record Office (M20133)

The image shows a handwritten document in Latin, likely a churchwarden's presentment from 1584. The text is written in a cursive script and mentions names like John Newberry, John Pikman, Edward Comber, and John Justis. The document is somewhat faded and has some ink bleed-through from the reverse side.

*The Churchwarden's presentment 1584. This records John Newberry and John Pikman as the old churchwardens being replaced by Edward Comber and John Justis (m20134)*

An Act of 1581 had tightened the persecution of Catholic recusants who were to be fined £20 for each month of absence from church as well as having to put up a bond of £200 for good behaviour. Also during this period the great debate within the Church of England was being conducted. This revolved around two issues, first the form of government, ie whether episcopal or presbyterian, and second the role of preaching. The Presbyterian party were pressing strongly for each local church to be governed by a council of elders who could appoint or dismiss ministers without interference from bishops or the holders of endowments. They were also intent on reducing worship to little more than a prolonged sermon. In the outcome the power of the established church prevailed and preachers were obliged to recite the complete service from the Prayer Book before they were allowed to indulge their preaching. The bishops were generally appalled by the low standards of education of the clergy, most of whom were quite incapable of preaching anyway. A number of set sermons or homilies were prepared which most clergy merely read week after week until they attained a sufficient standard of education to be able to obtain a preaching licence. Thomas himself was noted as not having such a licence.

Thomas Stoning died on 26th January 1585 and all his goods and chattels came to Elizabeth his widow after she had sought Letters of Administration from the Archdeacon as Thomas had not left a will. An inventory of his effects was conducted on 26th January by Edward Comber, a former churchwarden, John North and a third man unnamed. Among his goods, valued at £35/18/8 were a little Bible, a book of psalms, an old gown and a cassock.

He left three children under age, William, Anne and Elizabeth and a condition of his wife Elizabeth inheriting was that she would bring up and educate his children.

The inventory taken after his death throws considerable light onto the lifestyle of a typical Elizabethan cleric. His furniture consisted of a table and frame, a form, a square table and a cupboard worth £1-6s. A chair and two stools were valued at 2s. In the cupboard were three candlesticks, a basin and a ewer, two salts, a platter, six saucers, four pewter dishes, three pottengers and a dozen spoons valued at 16s. There was a heavy table cloth for a round table, a cupboard cloth and a painted cloth to hang on the wall together valued at 6s 8d. The fireplace had a broche, a fire shovel, two pothangers with a pair of pothooks, a pair of tongs and a gridiron at 8s. To prepare food there was a cleaver and a chopping knife and for cooking a chaffing dish at 1s 4d, a brass pot, three old kettles and two sellers worth 12s. The inventory went on to list the contents of the bedrooms, the food stores and barns and finally noted that he had a horse and a little cart, a cow valued at £1 4s, eleven sheep, six pigs plus a goose a gander and assorted poultry.

### **Randall Wright 1585-1623**

After Thomas Stoning died, Randall Wright became rector on 25th February 1585. He also held the living of Burnham in Buckinghamshire from 1584. He had been a student at Christchurch College, Oxford where he obtained his BA in 1577 and MA in 1580.

Presumably at first he did not live in Purley as the Stoning's had rented out the parsonage house which was said in 1595 to be occupied by a number of poor men who paid their rent to the parson. Randal Wright was obviously attempting to regain possession of the parsonage and an enquiry was held into the matter. Presumably he succeeded in regaining possession.

The earliest entries in the Bishop's Transcripts for Purley are dated 1607 when it was reported that there had been four christenings, five weddings and three burials during the year. The curate was James Clarke and Matthew Justice was churchwarden. On 27th March 1608 James Clarke wrote and witnessed the will of Alice Ponde, widow of Purley.

John North, a yeoman of Purley, died in 1608 leaving 2s to the parish church and a cow for the use of the poor in the parish. When it died a sum of £6 was obtained as compensation and held by the overseers, who distributed interest of 6s each year to poor widows. This charity was reported on in 1786, 1837 and 1905 in Parliamentary enquiries.

Randall Wright died in 1623.

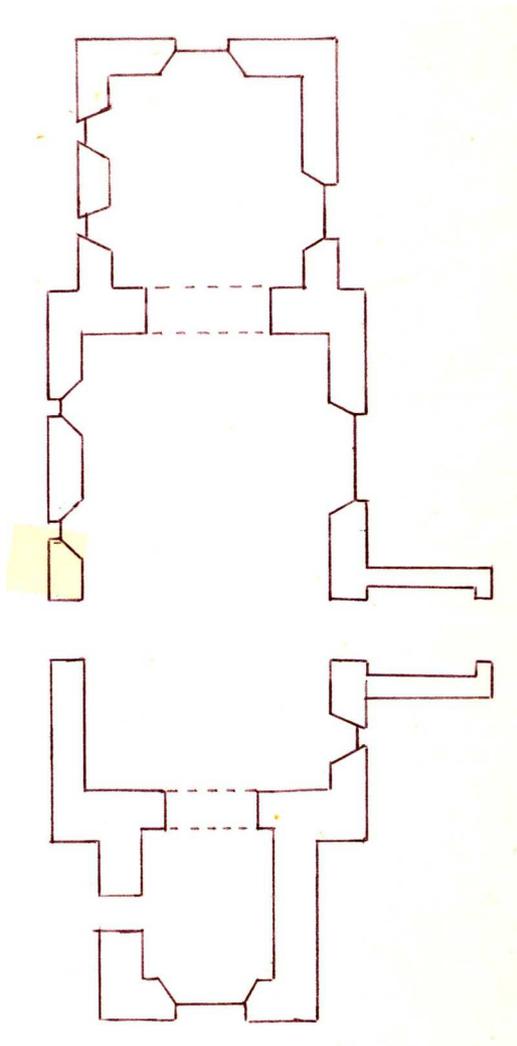
### **The 17th Century Warring Parties**

The seventeenth century Church in England was fought over furiously by men of strong opinions who could roughly be grouped into five 'parties'. First there were the Recusants, the Catholics who had remained loyal to Rome. Then there were the Arminians or High Anglicans. Next came the Low Anglicans who favoured Calvinistic ideas but within an episcopal context. Then came the Presbyterians who were bitterly opposed to bishops, deans, archdeacons or any other form of hierarchy. Finally came the Independents or free thinkers who saw little or no need for priests or ministers at all.

James I was a firm believer in the episcopacy and was prepared to tolerate the Recusants provided they kept a low profile. The Low Anglicans were in firm control although the strength of the Arminians was growing. The Puritans (Presbyterians and Independents) complained bitterly, not because they were persecuted as they often claimed but because they were not allowed to impose their views on the rest of the population. It was in this period in 1620 that the Pilgrim Fathers sailed to America where they felt they could have laws to suit themselves.



*The 1626 church shortly before rebuilding in 1870 - note the early English window in the south wall (M30457)*



Plan of the 1626 church (M30625)

William Noble of Queenborough in Leicestershire. The later died at Purley in 1644 and is commemorated in a memorial plaque.

For many years the Arminian party lead by William Laud had been advocating more spiritual forms of worship and had been campaigning against the way in which holders of ecclesiastical endowments had grown rich on the tithes and other benefits of livings while appointing clergy at pitifully low stipends. They had been buying up endowments and shaming the holders and other Lords of Manors into doing something more to support their local churches. In particular they were advocating the removal of the Holy table from the nave, where it had been moved in most churches during the early years of Elizabeth's

Charles I came to the throne in 1625 and with his accession came the ascendancy of the Arminian Party and the eventual promotion of William Laud as Archbishop of Canterbury. Laud had been born in 1573 in Reading, the son of a clothier, and in his early days had been chaplain to Charles Blount, Earl of Devonshire. The Low Anglicans were very uneasy at developments and the Puritans became more and more bitter at what they saw as neo-popery and abuse of civil liberties.

### Richard Watts 1623-1659

After Randall Wright's death Richard Watts was appointed to Purley. He became rector on 9th July 1623 and John Reynolds and Alexander Wimisse stood surety for him. He was an MA of Trinity College Cambridge and saw Purley through a period of violent religious and political activity culminating in the Civil War and the Commonwealth period. He is recorded as witnessing two wills, those of John Goodboy in 1628 and Joan Justice in 1658.

He seems to have had two daughters, Alice who married Henry Peacock of Keysho in Bedfordshire on 30th October 1634 and Dorothy who married the Reverend



The arms of Lord Grandison on the south face of the tower (M30459)

reign, to a more secluded position in the sanctuary. This prompted a spate of rebuilding and this movement probably explains why Purley Church was rebuilt with a new chancel around this time.

The Norman church probably had a simple apse leading from the chancel arch and this was replaced by a new square chancel with two new large windows in the east and south walls. The east window depicted St John the Evangelist and St John the Baptist and was given by Viscount Grandison of Lydiard Tregoze in Wiltshire. Two lancets from the early church were reset in the north wall of the new chancel. It also seems likely that a new tower was built at the west end with a similar window to the two new ones in the chancel set in the west wall. This window survives today and is of typical Stuart/Tudor design.

The present tower bears the crest of Viscount Grandison, uncle of the then Lord of the Manor of Purley Magna and bears the date 1626. The oldest bell in the tower is dated 1627 and adds further credence to the date 1626 being the actual date of rebuilding.

In 1627 Charles I seized the lands of Francis Hyde who, as a Roman Catholic, was accused of having persistently refused to attend the services of the English Church. The land seized included most of the land around Purley Hall.

In 1641 it was required that everyone should subscribe to the protestant cause, as a consequence of the Protestation Act of May 3rd approved by a reluctant Charles I. This required that every man had to declare on oath that he supported the maintenance of the '*True reformed Protestant Religion expressed in the doctrine of the Church of England against all popery and popish innovations within the realm contrary to the same doctrine*' On 21st February 1642 Richard Watts certified that all men of Purley had taken the oath except for Edward Bagley who was *scarce compos mentis*. Edward's father of the same name was churchwarden at the time.

Richard died in 1659 aged 78.



*A painting of the church from the south-west in the mid 1700s (M20135)*

## **The Civil War and its Aftermath**

When Civil War broke out in 1642 it was essentially between the King and the Arminians supported by the Recusants against Parliament which was dominated by the Presbyterians and supported by the Independents. The Low Anglicans by and large remained neutral or got swept up into the camp of whichever group happened to control their area.

In 1643 the Solemn League and Covenant was formally accepted by the Church of England and the following year saw the Directory of Public Worship introduced. This was a distinctly Calvinistic Book which was never popularly accepted although it was ordered to replace the Book of Common Prayer in 1645.

Following the Puritan victory, the Arminians fled abroad or laid very low. The Presbyterians who controlled parliament set about imposing their views on the rest of the population. One of their first Acts was to dissolve the Cathedral Corporations and freed most of their assets to augment the livings of parish clergy. The living of Purley had been reported as worth £12/3/7 in 1534 and by 1707 its value had risen to £100 so presumably the clergy of Purley benefited from these measures. In 1646 Parliament established Presbyterianism as the only authorised religion in England.

These measures succeeded in alienating the Anglicans, who had largely supported the Puritan cause by the end of the war, but more importantly Parliament tried to make the Independents conform. This resulted in the second Civil War which erupted briefly in 1648 and the Independents who formed the bulk of the army under Cromwell triumphed.

When the new victors executed the King in 1649 any support from the Anglicans vanished and England faced ten years of authoritarian rule under the Commonwealth. During this period the Independents, because of their own belief in the every man's right to his own religious opinion were prepared to allow almost any form of worship to continue, provided it was not used as the basis of opposition to the State. The Presbyterian ordinances were either ignored or enforced only to a farcical level.

The former bishops who had been deprived by the Exclusion Act of 1642 continued to live quietly and ordain Anglican priests occasionally. In most of the churches the former incumbents carried on, but bowing to the various official winds and pressures. In about a third of the parishes in England a new minister had to be appointed either through death or resignation and these were generally of a Presbyterian persuasion although a small proportion of Congregationalists were appointed.

### **Daniel Reynor 1659-1662**

Following the death of Richard Watts, Daniel Reynor became the Minister of Purley in 1659. He studied at Queen's College Cambridge from 1647 and became a scholar at New College Oxford in 1649 taking his BA in 1650 when he was also made a Fellow of his College.

He was rector of Buttermere from 1656 to 1657 and vicar of Clyffe Pypard in Wiltshire from 1657 to 1658. This latter benefice was in the patronage of the Goddard family, near neighbours of the St John's of Lydiard Tregoze who were Lords of the Manor of Purley. It is likely therefore that there was some behind the scenes negotiations.

A Commission had been established in March 1654 to examine all appointments to benefices and to prevent men ordained by bishops from being installed. They asked many searching and irrelevant questions which were almost impossible to answer. Daniel Reynor was almost certainly a Congregationalist and had not been ordained in Anglican Orders. However in the climate of the times the St John's, who were well known as Royalists, would have seen him as the candidate acceptable to them who would most likely be able to pass the tests of the Commission and gain the approval of Oliver Cromwell who had now assumed the patronage from the Crown, although generally he seems to have left what would formerly have been Crown appointments to the Commission of State.

