

Breaking News ... **TUDOR PRIEST PUT TO DEATH IN PILTON**

HOW THE WESTERN RISING CAME ABOUT

Most Devon parishes, especially the rural ones which made up the majority, were conservative, diligent, loyal to the monarchy and passionately attached to their experience of church and parish life. From cradle to grave, parish community and Church were so interwoven, financially, emotionally and intellectually, that changes in the Church could literally dismantle the recognisable physical and social fabric of their lives.

In just 18 months, between 1547 and the Summer of 1549, the young King Edward VI's 'advisors' rolled out – or rather, steam-rolled out - their idea of Protestantism. Too much radical change took place too fast within the physical and experiential world of the parishes' religious and social life. Many found this intolerable.



Parishes were expected to bear the costs of these material changes to their church and services *and* destroy, obliterate or sell many beautiful and decorative - and costly - objects familiar and dear to them. At the same time they were still contributing heavily to various royal war efforts, and their fund-raising church ales had been banned. Two new, hard-hitting taxes on sheep and cloth were imposed in quick succession. Then, use of Archbishop Cranmer's Booke of Common Prayer (left), in English instead of the

'familiar' Latin, became obligatory from the 9th of June, 1549, Whit Sunday. The familiar and much-loved Mass, along with most of its traditional liturgical practices, was no more. People began to protest.

In the mid-Devon village of Sampford Courtenay things rapidly reached flash-point. A man was murdered. The Western Rising, also known as the Prayer Book Rebellion, had begun. Musters and battles followed. Exeter was put under siege for five weeks and people were reduced to starvation.

Thousands later met their deaths at the hands of the royal armies in Devon. Of those people captured or arrested later, some faced imprisonment, but the aftermath of the battles may have involved many more executions than previously thought, both summary and official, both lay people and clergy. Many punishments – and executions – were extreme and bloody. Some – maybe many – deaths may never have made the official records as the 'powers-that-were' sent in what amounted to a 'cleaner', the gratuitously vicious Sir Anthony Kingston. But those considered the very worst offenders received a capital sentence calculated to serve as a grisly warning to others. *This was the price paid by Sir Richard X, then curate of Pilton. The sentence? **Hanging in chains.***

Further Reading For anyone interested in finding out more about this bloody episode in Devon's history, there is a good account online. Search for: *Devon Perspectives, Prayer Book Rebellion.*

HOW DID THE FACTS ABOUT PILTON COME TO LIGHT?

The execution of Pilton's curate was mentioned in a 2014 article [1] by Prof. Mark Stoye, Professor of Early Modern History at the University of Southampton. Prof. Stoye is currently



working on a major new study of the Western Rising. In recent correspondence he kindly furnished the remainder of the facts to date [2].

Two manuscript lines in one document are all that we have: a tantalisingly brief glimpse of what must have been a shocking and traumatic event for Pilton. Absence of evidence is, as they say, not necessarily evidence of absence. With almost 470

years separating us, two lines speak volumes and often, as here, such gems of knowledge are stumbled upon by pure chance.

It turns out that the information concerning Pilton is simply background detail, local colour in a completely separate case dated several years later...

References[1] Stoye, M., (2014) '*Fullye Bente to Fighte Oute the Matter*': Reconsidering Cornwall's Role in the Western Rebellion of 1549, *English Historical Review*, *129* (538), pp549-577[2] TNA, C1/1369/11-20

With thanks to Professor Stoye for contributing the photograph.

Case : Seizure of Complainant's Goods while in hiding as a Papist

Date: between 1553-1555

Complainant



John Marten, parson
of Bittadon

Vs.

Defendants



Edmund Burnet,
John Stampe/Skampe?
& James Gosland

THE DETAIL FROM JOHN MARTEN'S CASE

In John Stampe's/Skampe's deposition he states that after the rebellion he was commanded to arrest John Marten of Bittadon, clerk, and "*one Sir Richard ---- then curate of the parishe of Pilton.*" Stampe/Skampe had been informed "*that they bothe were notoryos rebels & treators in the late Comocyon.*"

He alleges that he and others went to John Marten's home and "*there the foresaid Sir Richard was apprehendyd, and after by Commandement of the late honourable Erle of Bedford then being the ... Kynges majesties lewtennant of the West ... the said Sir Rychard ----- by the martiall lawes was hanged at Pylton aforesaid for his traytoris & Rebellious factes yn cheynes, to the example of all others.*"

In a later document, the complainant denies that Sir Richard was arrested at his house (Bittadon is about 6 miles north of Barnstaple). Marten does not, however, deny that Sir Richard was hanged.

Skampe / Scampe was a name very common in this area from the 1500s onward. In fact, Scamp's Court (at the lower end of Pilton Street) echoes their presence still. Gosland may just be an original transcription error for – or derivation of – Goddysland / Goddisland, another name featuring in old documents of this area. In fact, both a John and James Goddisland were Mayors of Barnstaple between 1545 and 1549. It is therefore not unreasonable to conjecture that at least 2 of the 3 men sent after Marten (and Sir Richard) may have hailed from the Barnstaple locality.

WHO WAS SIR RICHARD?

The earliest Ministers' Accounts after the suppression of Pilton Priory in 1536 (TNA, SC6/HENVIII/7298) mention a Sir Richard Calwey, clerk, parish priest. It is possible that this is the Sir Richard who was executed 13 years later: contemporary bishop's records show a Richard Cailwey, deacon of Bath & Wells diocese, being ordained priest in Devon in 1524. There are no further Pilton institutions recorded between 1536 and 1549. If he decided upon a church 'career' from the outset, he could have been around 37 by 1536, and about 50 at the time of his execution. There is no recorded replacement for him either; it may be that Pilton was served from elsewhere, possibly Ashford, at least for some while after this terrible event.

WHAT WAS SIR RICHARD'S CRIME?

Unless new information surfaces, we may simply never know.

John Marten of Bittadon tells how he had been 'enforced to hide himself for a season' in order to avoid the sentence of imprisonment inflicted on other priests.

The Vicar, Robert Welshe, of St. Thomas in Exeter was executed for:

- preaching against the Reformed religion
- continuing the usage of Catholic rites and ornaments
- being in some manner implicated in the murder of one of the Earl of Bedford's messengers (this despite dissuading the rebels from torching the city of Exeter...)

In his '*Antient History and Description of the City of Exeter*' *, contemporary chronicler, John Hooker, describes priests as 'principal Stirrers, and Governors in the camps (and afterwards executed)' p48. Hooker names eight priests, (though not Richard Calwey), 'besides a Multitude of other Priests who joined them.' Later he refers to 'divers Priests, and other Busie-bodies...' p66 No bias, of course! * [Accessible online, a fascinating though not impartial account.](#)

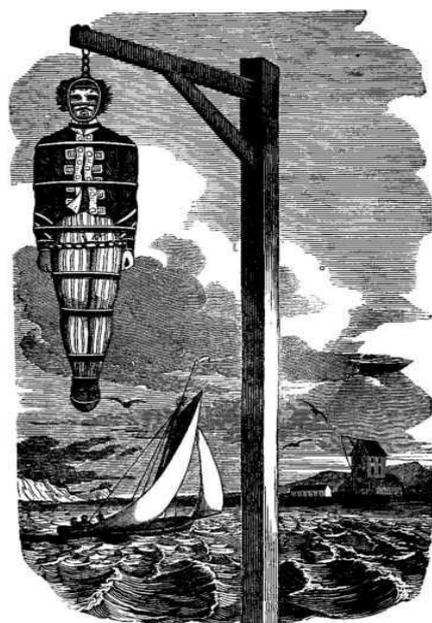
If our Richard was an unlikely accessory to murder, then: * *adhering to the religious rites in use for centuries* * *daring to question reforms being pushed through by the boy King Edward VI's advisors* * *attending and helping to run a rebel camp and/or* * *there being a 'stirrer' and/or a 'busie-body'* may well have sufficed to seal his fate.

WHAT WAS 'HANGING IN CHAINS'?

This was a sentence in its own right; worse than hanging (if that is possible), this was the punishment reserved for arch criminals, rebels and traitors. Another name for hanging in chains was 'gibbeting'.

Hanging someone in chains was intended as a deterrent to others. The execution was public, and the condemned would usually be dragged to the place of execution on a hurdle. Sermons would also be pronounced, so the scene would be a crowd-puller.

After the death by hanging, a gruesome humiliation would begin, albeit post-mortem. This could last for months or even years.



Either prior to execution or just afterwards, the person – or corpse – was wrapped about with iron chains designed to hold the body together. Sometimes iron bands were used instead to create separate 'cages' for the torso and four limbs. If done post mortem, the corpse may then have been re-hung on a tall, wooden gibbet. There it would swing eerily in the winds, stinking, yet maintaining its human shape as it became maggot-ridden and rotted in full view of passers-by, many of whom may have known the person in life. The decaying, but still human-shaped, body appeared to be both living and dead. Eventually, clothing disintegrated and only the skeleton remained. It could thus assault the senses of parishioners for a very long time after the event, and keep alive the memory of the crime long after the criminal had departed this life (image: *Captain William Kidd, 1700s*, Public Domain Image).

Technically, and rarely, people could be hanged in chains while still alive. An excruciating, lingering and very public death by dehydration and/or exposure awaited. Whilst we do not know how Sir Richard died, it is more likely that he was executed by hanging in the normal way first.

Robert Welshe, vicar of St. Thomas' in Exeter, was executed in August, 1549, for his part in the Western Rising. He was hauled up '**on the Top of the Steeple of St. Thomas Church on which the said Vicar was hung in Chains, having on his Priest's Vestments, with a holy Bucket, a**

sprinkling Brush, a small bell, a Paire of Beads, and other *Romish* Articles hung about him; where he remained for a long Time.’ (p101, Hooker, above)

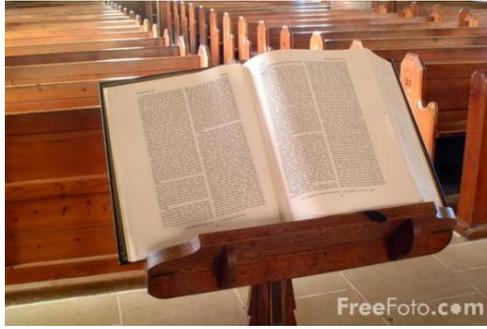
Henry Joyes, vicar of St. Mary’s, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire, was also hung in chains from his own steeple in 1549.

We do not know if Sir Richard was hung from the former spire of Pilton church. We do not know whether he was made to wear the same ‘Popish’ attire as Robert Welshe, or how long he was left hanging as a deterrent. It is nevertheless no surprise that the public practice of Catholicism in Pilton was stamped out. Ironically, by the late 1580s the religious thermometer was swinging in the far opposite direction: before long, both Pilton and Barnstaple were to become hot beds of the most radical Protestantism, threatening to tear apart the new Church of England...

HOW LIFE LOOKED BEFORE THE REFORMATION



HOW LIFE LOOKED AFTER THE REFORMATION



Church of England Burial Record, After 1812
(Family History Library film 994,229 Item 1, page 80)

BURIALS in the Parish of <i>Wingland</i> in the County of <i>Hampshire</i> Year <i>1841</i> in the Year 18 <i>41</i>						
Name of deceased	Name	Residence	Abode	When buried	Age	By whom the Ceremony was performed
No. 633	<i>William Budge</i>	<i>Colmash</i>	<i>Colmash</i>	<i>Sept 28</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>W.D. Evans</i> <i>Wctor</i>
No. 634	<i>Timothy Hughes</i>	<i>Jurpote</i>	<i>Jurpote</i>	<i>Nov 29</i>	<i>76</i>	<i>W.D. Evans</i> <i>Wctor</i>



Church of England Burial Record, Before 1812
(Family History Library film 994,229 Item 6)

Persons buried in the year of our Lord 1735	
<i>Apr 15 Anne the wife of Edward Barton</i>	<i>widow</i>
<i>June 3 Jane</i>	<i>widow</i>
<i>June 3 Thomas Freeman</i>	<i>widow</i>