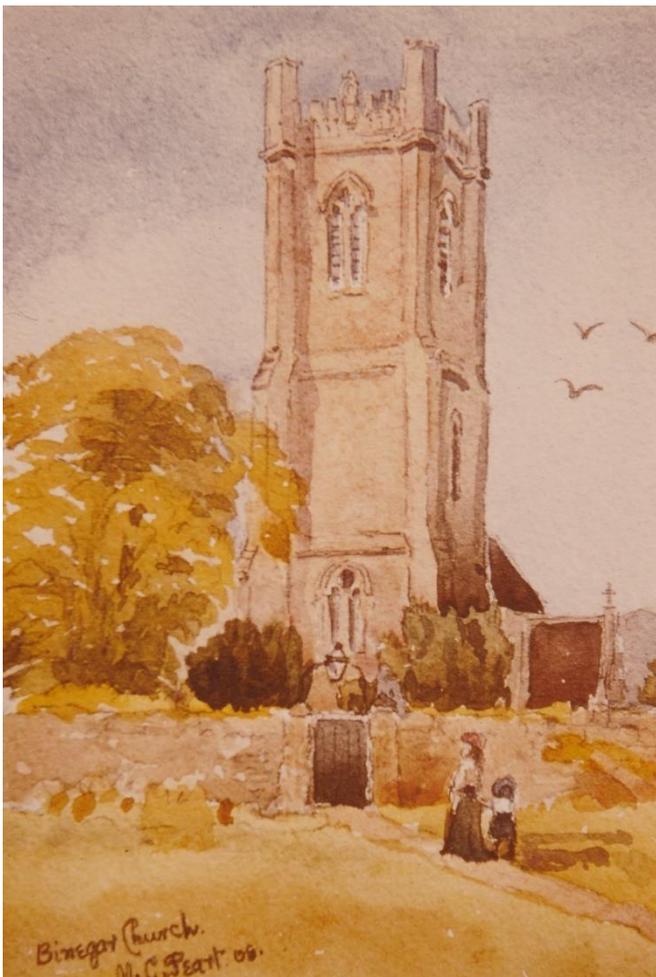


## A couple seek sanctuary in Holy Trinity Church

Before the time of King James I (1603-25), a fugitive from the law could find sanctuary in a parish church, and *could not be brought out*.

This had been English law from the time of King Alfred, (famous for burning the cakes at Athelney), and perhaps before. The idea was to shelter a man from sudden vengeance, to give him the chance of a fair trial, and (from Norman times) the choice of leaving the country. If he chose this last, he must swear an oath to leave directly and promptly, never to return to the kingdom unless by permission of the sovereign. This was to "abjure the realm".

The oath was, "I swear on the Holy Book that I will leave the realm of England and never return without the express permission of my Lord the King or his heirs. I will hasten by the direct road to the port allotted to me and not leave the King's highway under pain of arrest or execution. I will not stay at one place more than one night and will seek diligently for a passage across the sea as soon as I arrive, delaying only one tide if possible. If I cannot secure such passage, I will walk into the sea up to my knees every day as a token of my desire to cross. And if I fail in all this, then peril shall be my lot."



In James I reign, "Church Sanctuary" ended, but a relic still survives in English law – a writ or a summons cannot be delivered to a person in a church or churchyard.

Excitingly, there is a record of a man and woman seeking sanctuary in Holy Trinity Church. It was in the 41<sup>st</sup> year of the reign of Henry III, that is 1257, yes, over 750 years ago!

The record reads, "William and Cicely de Wynchalse fled to the church of Behenger, confessed themselves to be thieves and abjured the realm. They were strangers and had no chattels. The jurors concealed this. Therefore they are in mercy."

*Somerset Record Society, volume 2 page 244*

Isn't that tantalising? They were strangers to Binegar. Who were they? Do you think they were from Winchelsea in Kent? Where had they come from that day? What had they stolen? Where did they steal it? Why did the locals take pity on them? What happened in the end? Did they leave England in

sackcloth or are their descendants still among us? Answers on a post-card.