

A lost Rector – Thomas Waryn

The Black Death of 1348 devastated the population. In the next 50 years, we know all five Whitchurch Prebendaries: Richard de Thormerton, Thomas Edlington, Robert Corfe, Nicholas Ford and Richard Courtenay but the list of Holy Trinity Rectors lapses entirely.

The plague took its toll on the clergy.

Then, by chance, I found Thomas Waryn. There were a good few noble Thomas Waryns but our Rector does not seem to be one of them.

We know of him only from the *Hungerford Cartulary*. A cartulary is a medieval manuscript containing copies of original documents relating to the foundation, privileges and legal rights of the church.



Sir Thomas de Hungerford (d. 1397) and his second wife Joan Hussey (d. 1412), in the Chapel of St Anne, Farleigh Hungerford Castle

Here, “Hungerford” means the family of Farleigh Hungerford Castle.

On Thursday 27 August 1377 at Wells, Nicholas Carscombe, Rector of Timsbury and Thomas Waryn, Rector of Binegar quit their claim to “all their rights in the lands and tenements etc. in Farleigh Montfort which they had by the grant of Agnes Hubard, and also in the rent of a rose from the lands.” The beneficiary was one John Buttesford.

What was going on? In 1377, there was clearly a Rector –Thomas Waryn - attending to the spiritual needs of his Binegar flock. His benefice included land a day away on horseback that brought income. Then he entered a *quitclaim* and gave it all up.

The answer seems to lie with the Castle and Thomas Hungerford, the founder of that family’s fortunes. Thomas was steward in Wiltshire of the lands of John of Gaunt and of the Bishop of Salisbury. He was “citizen, merchant and mayor” of Salisbury. He was Sherriff and *escheator* of Wiltshire. On the death of a landholder with no heir, the *escheator* seized lands for the lord or the crown. Hungerford seemed to do well from this. On 15 occasions, he represented Wiltshire or Somerset as MP. In 1377, he was the first person who MPs called *Mr Speaker*.

Meanwhile, King Richard II knighted him and, in 1377, Sir Thomas set about building himself a castle at his manor of Farleigh Montford (to give it its proper name then). Its design was

already old fashioned and its location vulnerable to attack. It was then, perhaps, more a vanity project than a piece of military construction and engineering.

The castle needed land, of course. Step forward Thomas Waryn who held the land by the grant of Agnes Hubard. Was this the Agnes who prospered in the medieval *golden age of women* ushered in by the Black Death? Widowed, she ran the family's architectural business and designed and built the tomb in Christ Church, Greyfriars of Queen Isabella, Edward II's widow. She was paid £100 – that is hundreds of thousands today. Some tomb!

Some Queen! They called Isabella the *She-Wolf of France*. With her lover and loyal barons, she overthrew her husband, King Edward II.

Edward, they say, came to a grisly end with a hot poker in Berkeley Castle.

Isabella, in retirement, took the habit of a Poor Clare and was buried with the preserved heart of her late husband. Some say she can still be seen walking through Christ Church clutching that heart.

Who was the John Buttesford to whom Waryn surrendered his land? Buttesford was a chaplain, probably to Sir Thomas Hungerford, who started building his castle in 1377. He cleared a village (well, wouldn't you?), built a chapel and a new parish church. All of this needed income – what better than church income.

Seven men witnessed *Waryn's Quitclaim*. One was Nicholas Cristesham, a prominent citizen, freeman, churchwarden of St Cuthbert's, tax collector and 13 times MP for Wells.

Another was Thomas Tannere, a man who had fallen from grace with Bishop Ralph in 1350. The Earl of Devon and five judges heard the case. The Bishop complained that, on visiting Yevele to exercise his rights as a lord, he was set-upon by 32 men he could name (and others). They "by force prevented him from making such a visitation, assaulted him there, compelled him to fly to the church of that town for fear of death, besieged him therein for two days and two nights and assaulted his men and servants, whereby he lost their service for a great time". The verdict: guilty, fine 20 shillings each. How did relationships get that bad? I thought Bishop Ralph was a good man.



15thC image of Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer

Another witness was William Churchstighele. I mention him only because of his marvellous name that means *dweller at the church gate*.

That, then, is all of our knowledge of our lost Rector, Thomas Waryn. There was a Canon John Waryn at Wells Cathedral around the end of the century. Could Thomas and John be related?

You ask how I chanced upon our lost Rector. I have no idea. You know how it is, you just google something and there he is, willingly, or so it seems, giving up his land!