

The Tiverton Anabaptists.

A recent visit to Tiverton gave me an opportunity of consulting for a second time (by the courtesy of the Rector), the fine folio volume of Church Warden's Accounts of the seventeenth century preserved in the vestry of St. Peter's Church. On the occasion of my first visit I was only able to take a cursory glance through these accounts and though I came upon some general entries relating to the Tiverton Anabaptists I did not come across the particular entries specifying the names of those who were fined in 1628. Consequently in my paper on "James Toppe and the Tiverton Anabaptists" in the last number of the "Transactions" I had to rely on the list given by the Rev. Edwin S. Chalk in his history of St. Peter's Church and adopted from him by subsequent writers.

My second visit has enabled me to verify and correct the list. A word of explanation will save the time of subsequent researchers and enable them to put their finger upon the entries at once.

The Warden's Accounts were entered up each year in fair form in the large Account Book from the loose papers and bills of the Wardens. The church year ran from Easter to Easter and so covered part of the term served by two Mayors of the town. When the clerk was entering the Accounts of the wardens William Bray and John Mogridge "whose yere began the xiiith daye of Aprill 1628 and ended the ffiveth day of Aprill, 1629" he reached the foot of the page [folio 51] and then by some inadvertence nearly forty pages were turned over and he resumed his account for that year far on in the book without discovering the mistake till he had nearly completed his entries. He then appended this note at the bottom of folio 51:

"The residue of this acct followes in the 89th leafe of this booke." The intervening blank leaves were gradually filled up by the entry of yearly accounts in orderly succession.

Turning forward then to folios 89 and 90 we find the entries of which we are in search. At the foot of folio 90 comes the note: "The acc^o for moneys levied on the Anabaptists is on the next side." and there we find it set out in full with the headings:

"An Accompte of moneys levied on the Anabaptists for their Absence from Church in the yeere 1628."

The manuscript confirms my conjecture that "John Skibbon" was a misreading for John Skibbowe and not only so but shows that where Mr. Chalk read "Of John Gibbons the ixth day of February 4^s" the true reading is "Of John Skibbowe the ixth of february iiij^s." We see then that John Skibbowe was twice fined for his anabaptist principles in 1628 and that we must strike out the name Gibbons from the list of early Tiverton anabaptists. The rest of the list as given in these "Transactions" May 1912 p. 3, and September 1913, p. 196, is substantially correct though I notice the spelling "Israell Cockeram" is given, which exactly tallies with that which I found in the will of her husband William Cockeram. The earlier warden's accounts show sundry payments to John Skibbowe for communion wine e.g. in the accounts for 1614-15:

"Item paide unto m^r John Skibbowe for wine for the Communion. xxv^s"

In 1619-20 he lost his wife:

"Item recd of John Skybbowe for his wyves Buryall oo - o6 - oo." He was evidently a tradesman of some standing in the town.

Following the account of the fines on the Anabaptists comes an account of "Moneys received of M^r Culme and m^r Ham being Maiors in our yeere" from which it is clear that at this period severe disciplinary measures were taken to govern the morals of the town. There were fines "for keeping unlawfull game" i.e. gambling and for swearing "one that swore in his [i.e. Mr. Ham's] presence. 1/-" There was a fine "levied upon one that travelled on the Sabboth daye x^s" and "on one that sold Ale unbound [i.e. without license] ili". These Mayors were zealous. At the end comes a note:

"The whole Sum rec^d from M^r Culme and M^r ham and the Anabaptists is viii ii^s x^d"

The following entry points to the Mayor's zeal and explains the outburst of persecution against the anabaptists "To John Hollings and John Stooke by m^r Maiors order for taking notice of the Anabaptists absence from Church—vs."

Plymouth, March 1914.

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