History of Bedfordshire by Joyce Godber

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P. 230 – “Though not all in the county were agreed, the parliamentarians gained control; thus clergy who were strong Laudians or who actively threw their weight into the struggle on the royalist side would be target. About 30 were deprived of their livings or even imprisoned….John Gwin, vicar of Cople, who said in church that ‘The scripture bid him obey the king, but there were no scripture commanding him to obey the parliament”, was fined 100 pds and committed to Newgate for his ‘debauched, lewd and contentious disposition’,; later he went to Virginia. Giles Thorne, rector of St. Mary’s Bedford and Timothy Archer of Meppershal, were confined for years in the Fleet prison.’

Some rectors went to join the royalist army. The wives and families of those who were ejected were sometimes in distress – they were often allowed on-fifth of the income from the benefice. Civil war in the parishes!

P. 232 –New churches created in 1640s in shire, simpler form of worship, known as Independents and formally set up congregations. In Bedford in 1644 and 1645, detachments of Cromwell’s troops were quartered in the town, and they seem to have met from 1645 onwards. In 1653, the Bedford town council invited Independents to take over St. John’s church. The same year young John Bunyan, not a tinker, was in Bedford and joined the Independent congregation.

Bedford became an Independent centre. Some came to believe baptism should be an adult matter and thus to be call Baptists.

A new separate group appeared, the Quakers. Quakerism brought to the county by William Dewsbury, the ‘apostle of Bedfordshire’ in 1654. The Shire in 1650s was in confused situation – beleaguered Anglicanism, slender Presbyterianism, flourishing Independency, family numerous Quakers and scarcely any Roman Catholics. Large mass of ‘don’t’ knows’.

1660 restoration of Church of England and uneasy peace with some limited tolerance for Independents – Quakers often imprisoned. Giles Thorne to Bedford St. Mary. Thorne’s will became a confession of faith: “I , having lived, by the grace of God will die in the true religion established by law, and in the true, ancient, catholic and apostolic faith professed in the Church of England.”

No letters or diaries survive of the period illuminating details. “It is perhaps worth noting that at Bedford St. Paul through all the changes the office of parish clerk was held 1628-88 by three generations of one family, that of Marks. The Independents at St. John’s were ejected. 1676, John Bunyan, tinker, was excommunicated for refusing to come to his parish church in Bedford and take the sacrament.1676, Bunyan was back in prison. While in prison from 1656 to 1665, he wrote and made long tagged laces to support this family. The Pilgrim’s Progress was published in 1678.

P. 247 – Confused struggle 1642-46; leading royalists were almost at once obliged to leave the county. Main fighting was not in Bedfordshire.. In Oct 1643, Sir Lewis Dyve with 400 h9rse surprised, went to Bedford where the local parliamentary commander was in an alehouse and had to escape by the back door, and there was a skirmish on the bridge. Aug 1645, king passed through the county; 300 royalist horse mustered on the meadows at Gt. Barford; moved on to Bedford where again there was fighting on the bridge. Newport Pagnell became a parliamentary garrison town, under Sir Samuel Luke. Mustermaster was Capt. Henry Whitbread. Fought off attack in June 1644.

Great majority simply wanted to lead quiet lives.

P. 251- Normal life disrupted, more financial levies, parliamentary troops quartered and hostile troops raiding. King beheaded in 1649, and war ended.