

Account of Purley on Thames

Thomas Stoning

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An article by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 84 published in PPN November and December 1988

84. Thomas Stoning, Clerk of Purley (Part 1)

Nearly five years after helping Christopher Stenton to write his will, Rev. Thomas Stoning, "Parson" of Purley died. His death seems to have been unexpected as he had no time to write a will and his widow, Elizabeth, obtained Letter of Administration for his estate from the Archdeacon of Berkshire on 3rd March 1585. The official papers include a "Duration Bond" that she would "well and honestlie norishe, instructe and bring uppe" his three children, William, Anne and Elizabeth. Since no baptismal registers exist for Purley from the 16th century, this is the only source of information about his family.

Thomas Stoning probably died a few days before the inventory of his goods and chattels was made on 26th January 1585. Edward Comber, John North and a third man listed his possessions which had a total value of £35 18s 8d. Although the house was sparsely furnished by today's standards, he was much wealthier than his former neighbour, Christopher Stenton, whose goods were worth just over £9.

In the religious upheavals following the death of Henry VIII, several Purley clergy were deprived of their livings but things had settled down a little when, in September 1577 during the reign of Elizabeth I, Thomas Stoning succeeded Richard Boston, who had served the parish for ten years.

Even so, the Puritans reported in 1586 that although resident in his parish, Stoning was a "non-preacher". After only seven years Stoning died and was succeeded by Rev. Randall Wright who was at Purley for nearly forty years.

The parsonage was described in 1634, half a century after Rev. Stoning's death, as a building of "six bays having thirteen rooms". The three-acre site lay on the hill on the south side of "The Streete", now Lister Close leading off Purley Village. On the west was a small field or "close", on the east was an orchard and near the house were the farm buildings: two barns and a stable.

There is a curious reference in the entry for Purley in the Victoria County History of Berkshire which says that "the Parsonage was also said to have been leased to William Stoning about 1569, which lease he afterwards surrendered on the grant of a new one to him and his sisters Elizabeth and Ann". This ties up with the names of Thomas Stoning's three children mentioned above, but since they were still under 21 in 1585 and the family did not come to Purley until 1577, this information appears to be incorrect.

A seventeenth century country parson had to be many things to many people. In addition to leading the church services, administering Holy Communion to his parishioners at Christmas and Easter, conducting baptisms, marriages and burials as required, he would often be involved in village administration. He might have to write legal documents, such as wills, measure the strips in the open fields and, since both the church and the agricultural calendar were governed by feast days, advise the villagers when to plant their crops, turn the cattle onto the stubble etc. Some of the items mentioned in the probate inventory reflect these activities.

(To be continued)

Jean Debney

87. Thomas Stoning, Clerk of Purley (Part 2)

Amongst Thomas Stoning's possessions found in the parsonage in January 1585 were a "littell" Bible, a Book of Psalms, an "olde" gown and a cassock worth £1. Because the individual rooms in the "parsonage" are not named in the probate inventory, one cannot recreate the contents of any particular one, but other sources suggest that he used at least the hall as a living room and a couple of chambers for sleeping and storage.

The furniture consisted of a table and frame, a form, a square table and a cupboard worth £1 6s, a chair and two stools at 2s. In the cupboard were three candlesticks, a bason and ewer, two salts, a platter, six saucers, four pewter dishes, three pottengers, and a dozen spoons valued at 16s. There was also a "carpet for a round table" (carpets were much too precious to walk on although the value of this one is very low), a cupboard cloth and a painted cloth (to hang on the wall as decoration and cheaper than tapestry) together worth 6s 8d.

The fireplace had a broche, a fire shovel, two pothangers with a pair of pothooks, a pair of tongs and a gridiron at 8s. To prepare food there was a cleaver and a chopping knife and for cooking a chaffing dish at 1s 4d, a brass pot, three old kettles and two "sellers"

For sleeping there were two bedsteads appraised at £1 3s 4d, each having a flock bed, bolster and pillow worth £1 4s 4d, a covering and a blanket at £1 1s. In addition were two other "old" bedsteads with just a single cover between them worth only 6s 8d. Probably stored in this room were more painted cloths at 3s 8d, a press (? for cheese) and boards at 3s, and two storage vessels at 1s.

The linen consisted of three pairs of fine sheets worth £2 3s and four pairs of course ones at 13s 4d, three fine pillow beres (cases) worth 14s and two course ones at 2s, three table cloths and two towels at 10s, with a counter pane and 15 table napkins valued at 6s.

Since Rev. Stoning died in the middle of winter, it is not unexpected to find food stored in the house and Thomas had £1 6s 4d worth of butter, cheese, honey, lard and "grese" in addition to 11 bacon flitches (half pigs) and a breast of beef at £1 6s 8d.

Miscellaneous items included a butter churn, two firkins (small storage casks) and three tubs at 6s, a cever (? wooden trough for mixing bread), three bowls, dishes, trenchers, four baucetts(?) and a tankard together worth 4s, a (?spinning) wheel, three bottles and a grate at 2s 4d, also an axe and a bill. Appraised with a powdering trough for preserving meat in salt and spices were an old tub, ten short planks, a shovel and a spade at 5s 4d.

Probably stored in one of the barns were 3 quarters of wheat worth £2 8s, 6 quarters rye at £4 and 8 quarters barley at £4. These would have been used to produce bread and beer etc. for the family. There was also £1 worth of hay and vetch for animal fodder. In addition there was a quarter of malt (for beer) and six bushels of peas worth £1 2s.

For travelling to Reading etc., Rev. Stoning had a horse with a "littell" cart and harness valued at £2 15s 8d. His farm animals consisted of a cow

and two sacks worth 3s 4d, a horse cloak, a land staff (for measuring the strips in the fields?), a pair of bellows, three baskets, a "flascat"? and two sieves at 2s 4d.

Clothing was rarely valued at this period of the 16th century and, apart from his clerical vestments, no items of everyday wear are mentioned. However, it is possible from the list above to imagine something of Rev. Thomas Stoning's life as a parson-farmer ekeing out his living in Elizabethan Purley.

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