



Saturday 17 September 2016

SPECIAL ISSUE No 1 - HORRIBLE HISTORIES!

THE HEAD OF SIR THOMAS MORE VISITS LYNSTED!

Our Parish Magazine in 1978 carried a story from the late Anthony Vaughan, an expert historian. He tells of the head of Thomas More that was carried by his daughter Margaret to the Roper ancestral home of Lynsted Lodge (Lynsted Park) where her brother-in-law, Christopher Roper lived. It is also possible that "the Head" visited Lynsted Church. Margaret's visit was celebrated by Christopher Roper when he redecorated Bumpit in her memory. Tony Vaughan explains that the decoration of Bumpit includes the family crest with its rampant Black Lion – the origin of the village pub's name. The head was eventually buried in St Dunstan's Church, Canterbury in a lead-lined box – opposite the home of Margaret and William Roper.

Why Behead Sir Thomas More?

Sir Thomas More's story begins with King Henry the Eighth and his decision to separate the English Church from the church in Rome. King Henry wanted this change so he could divorce his wife, Catherine of Aragon and marry Ann Boleyn.

Powerful Roman Catholics like the Lord Chancellor, Sir Thomas More, didn't like the King's plans, so the King cut off his head on 6th July 1535!

After execution, the King ordered "the Head" to be put on a stake on London Bridge, where it was left

for nearly a month, until it had to be taken down to make room for other heads. Margaret knew that old heads were usually thrown into the river, but she and her friends kept careful watch and bribed the executioner, who took heads down and put new ones up, to let her keep the 'sacred relic'. Even after a month, his head was more or less recognisable.

On her journey to her husband's home in Canterbury, Margaret stopped off in Lynsted. It may be she did this because her husband was there or simply out of courtesy – plus head.

At home, Margaret kept her father's head until she died (1544) when it was given to her own daughter, Elizabeth Roper (Lady Bray). Margaret had asked that her father's head be placed in her arms when she died...

Buried but not forgotten

When Elizabeth died in 1553, the head was put in the Roper vault under the Chapel of St. Nicholas in St. Dunstan's, Canterbury. The Roper home sat opposite St. Dunstan's but is no longer standing.

"The Head" was next seen in 1715 when other remains were being put in the vault. It was also seen in the summer of 1835 when, by

accident, the roof of the vault was broken. The churchmen saw the head in a lead-lined case with one side open - "something of the shape of a beehive" - behind an iron grille. The vault was later sealed and a tablet placed in the floor reading:

"Beneath this floor is the vault of the Roper family in which is interred the head of Sir Thomas More of illustrious memory, sometime Lord Chancellor of England, beheaded on Tower hill 6th July 1535. Ecclesia Anglicana libera sit."



Can you find the tomb for Christopher Roper in this Church? The carvings show two sons, John and William, and five daughters, Bridget, Mary, Catherine, Elizabeth and Margaret.

Can you see who carved the monument?

"RIOT!" – BLUDGEONS, DEATH AND EXECUTIONS

200 Bludgeons March Through Lynsted

1835: "EAST KENT QUARTER SESSIONS. Canterbury. Before WILLIAM DEEDES, Esq., Chairman, and a full Bench of magistrates). Richard Cox, labourer, aged 20, and William Butler, labourer, aged 22, were indicted for riotously assembling with other persons, and committing assaults at Throwley, Doddington, Lynsted, and Rodmersham.

They pleaded Guilty to the whole of the charges alleged against them.

Each of the indictments against the prisoners contained six counts Sir John Maxwell Tylden, and several of the officers of the Milton and Faversham unions, briefly stated the nature of the offences which the prisoners had committed, for the guidance of the Court in determining the punishment to be passed upon them.

It appeared that about 200 country labourers and others, armed with bludgeons, proceeded in a body on the 4th May to the parish of Throwley, and from thence to Rodmersham, Lynsted, and Doddington, and prevented

the relieving officers appointed under the Poor Law Act from discharging their duties, and in several instances put them in bodily fear, and committed violent assaults upon the guardians and officers of the Milton and Faversham unions. Butler was particularly active on one occasion, and exhibited a large placard in his hat with the words, "We want no tickets - we will have money or blood." Cox was also very violent, and was identified as having been present at every place where the riots took place, and also with having committed several assaults upon the officers.

The bench withdrew to consider who punishment should be awarded, and after the lapse of about 20 minutes the CHAIRMAN returned into court and addressed the prisoners, sentencing Richard Cox to be imprisoned and kept to hard labour in the common gaol at Maidstone for two years, and at the expiration of that term to enter into recognizances for twelve months; and William Butler to be imprisoned and kept to hard labour in the common gaol at St. Augustine's for nine calendar months."

24th October 1835: The Times

The Courtenay Riots – Swords, Muskets and Murder

Account of the murder of Lieutenant Bennett

1838: "To the Editor of the Kentish Gazette. Sir— Mr. Church, of Greenstreet, surgeon, having stated the recent inquests held before me at Boughton (arising out of the late calamitous events in that neighbourhood), that **Lieut. Bennett** had, previous to being shot, run one of the rioters through the body with his sword, which statement Mr. Church being now convinced was made under an erroneous impression, has addressed the following letter to me, which, in justice to the character of **Lieutenant Bennett**, and to those parties whose testimony was at variance with Mr. Church's assertion, have to request you will make public through the medium of your paper. I am, Sir, your obedient servant, Thomas Thorpe DeLasaux, Coroner.

Greenstreet, Sittingbourne, 7th June, 1838. Sir, I hasten to inform you it was certainly in error in stating at the late inquest held at Boughton that I saw Lieut. Bennett wound a man before he (Lieutenant B.) fell; the facts of the case are these:- at the beginning of the affair on the right the soldiers, near Dr. Poore, when Major Armstrong called



aloud to him, the conflict almost immediately began; attention at that moment was attracted to an officer in advance the soldiers, opposed to whom were three or four of the rioters with raised sticks. I saw the officer make thrust at one of them, which, from my position, I verily believed at the time went through the man; the officer was soon lost to my view. The firing over, I went to look at the killed and wounded, and observed an officer dead on the ground. His sword, which I picked up, was by his right leg, covered with blood and alimentary matter. Perceiving from the direction of the wound he must have died instantly on receiving it, I concluded he was the individual who made the thrust at the man, it being impossible for him to have used his sword after the shot had been fired. From particular inquiries I have now every reason to believe Lieutenant Bennett was never seen by me alive; the officer supposed to be him must have been Lieut. Prendergast, who was about the same time knocked down.

The above explanation was given by me to Dr. Poore and Mr. Knatchbull this morning, the former of those gentlemen suggested my writing, leaving it to you to make what use you pleased of the letter. I am, Sir, your obedient servant, JAMES CHURCH.

To T. T. DeLasaux, Esq., Coroner, Canterbury. "

12th June 1838: Kentish Gazette

**Look out for
Issue No 2
Coming Soon**

The "Knight of Malta": Courtenay Riots and Murders

The Battle of Bossenden Wood, Boughton. John Nichols Thom led a gang of disaffected men, claiming he was sent by Heaven to restore God's dominion on earth. His followers came from Canterbury, and many local villages Boughton under Blean, Sittingbourne and Greenstreet He was a clever but mischievous and arrogant child who came to idolise historical "Messianic" figures.

In particular, Thom admired William FitzOsbert, sometimes called William Longbeard, who disturbed Kent and London in the reign of Richard the First. In homage, Thom dressed like William Longbeard to complete the picture.

John Thom's father was a Cornish inn-keeper. His eccentric mother was known as "the cracked cherry" who, after a fire in the pub, fell apart, ending her days in a lunatic asylum.

John Thom left Cornwall and bowled up in Canterbury where he claimed to be a gentleman, "Sir William Courtenay, Knight of Malta", so he could seek election to the Canterbury Council as their M.P. As one observer put it - "His only asset was a sense of the dramatic - galloping up and down their streets, dressed in superb and splendid robes of velvet and gold, and ornamented with an enormous black beard and a sabre, accompanied by a servant dressed in the same fashion, although with less costly materials." Soon after election, Thoms was 'found out' and jailed for perjury in 1833. In custody, his wandering mental state led him to the Kent Lunatic Asylum, Barming Heath (near

Maidstone). Four years later he was mysteriously released and he started along his path to Greenstreet.

On leaving the Lunatic Asylum, John Nichols Thoms returned to his claim to lead the oppressed and dispossessed - his base at the time that interests us was Boughton under Blean as a guest of Mr. Francis of "Fairbrook".



Murder of Nicholas Mears. The day things got nasty The Charge of Murder:

Lord Denman took his seat at nine o'clock precisely on Thursday morning (9th August 1838), and the prisoners **Thomas Price and William Mears otherwise Tyler**, were immediately placed at the bar, and the indictment read over to them, in which they were charged, on the Coroner's inquisition (together with one John Thom, alias John Nichols Thom, alias Sir William

Courtenay, *now deceased*), with the **wilful murder of Nicholas Mears**, at the Ville of Dunkirk (next to Boughton Under Blean), on Thursday, the 31st of May last.

Pen pictures of the two accused

The prisoner Tyler, who is described in the calendar as 20 years of age, appeared rather younger. He was dressed in a sailor's jacket, black waistcoat, and dark trousers. He is a man with a fair complexion, auburn hair, light whiskers, blue eyes, a slight and graceful figure, and features which, though irregular, are not unprepossessing. His countenance is expressive of decision and of susceptibility of feeling which one may readily associate with enthusiasm and religious fanaticism; but there is nothing in his face that indicates a cruel or sanguinary disposition. **The other prisoner, Price**, was habited in a working dress. His age was stated in the calendar at 30. He is a hard-featured person, but though coarser and more common-place looking than his fellow-prisoner, there was nothing in his appearance or demeanour that would lead a bystander to ascribe to him any particularly ferocity of character. The Hon. Mr. Law, Mr. Sergeant Andrews, Mr. Bodkin, and Mr. Channell, conducted the case for the prosecution, and Mr. Shee and Mr. Deedes appeared for the prisoners.

Breakfast at The Wheatsheaf, then marched on Greenstreet

Hawkinge (*one of the followers*) examined by Mr. Lucas explained: On Tuesday the 29th of May he saw Courtenay at Bosenden, with about thirty persons. Both prisoners were there. That day the accused had supper at Bosenden House, composed of milk, bread, cheese, and pork. Sarah Culver, Courtenay, and Mears served. Some had tobacco

afterwards. After supper Courtenay said they were to sleep in the cottage (*Fairfield*). They went there. He said he should call them in the morning. They had straw at the cottage to lie on; witness was one of the party.

The next day, they went to Sittingbourne, and breakfasted at *the Wheat Sheaf*, and returned, after going through several places, to Bosenden. At **Greenstreet** they had twenty or thirty with them. Seven or eight joined them that day. They rested in the cottage at night. They had a flag and carried bludgeons and sticks.

Mears' death revealed – Shot, run through with a sword and dumped in a ditch

About half an hour after he was called up on Thursday, Hawkrige saw Nicholas Mears. He heard the report of fire arms. Saw Mears leaning against the hedge. Courtenay ran after another man. Courtenay seemed to make a slip, and the man got away. Courtenay afterwards stopped the fallen man with his sword, and fired a pistol at him. The body was carried to a ditch. He did not see who carried the body, or know the number of persons who carried it. Did not see the body laid down. The prisoners and the rest breakfasted afterwards.

Have heard persons in his presence say that he had been crucified. Courtenay has cited passages from the Testament. Heard him say that he was the resurrection of the body of Jesus; that Sampson was a great man, but a greater one than Sampson was among them. Heard him say, "I am the blessed Lord and Saviour; I can call fire from heaven, and burn every one of you in your beds. You are safer with me than at home in your beds." Was present when one man fell down at his feet, and asked him whether he should follow him with his heart or with his feet. This was in the wood. Heard him speak of **Nicholas Mears**, and say, "Though I have killed the body, I have saved the soul." Thinks this was before breakfast. He said if any man attempted to run away, he should be a dead man. This was after killing Mears. Bosenden-house is about three quarter of a mile from the London road. Thomas Harris went to work on Thursday, the last day of May, in a field at Bosenden-house. Heard a voice; looked up, and saw Tyler at a window. Courtenay was standing near. Understood him to say the constables were coming; and after moving away a few moments, he returned, and said again "The constables are here." Courtenay went out and met them. When he chopped Mears, there were several round him. He cut him six or seven times.

*Kentish Gazette, 14th August 1838
lat Canterbury Assizes!*

Want to know more? Published in 1848. *"The life and extraordinary adventures of Sir W i l l i a m Courtenay, Knight*

of Malta alias John Nichols Tom, formerly spirit merchant and maltster of Truro in Cornwall." Free on-line.



Cross-examined.- Had heard Courtenay say he was the Christ nailed on the cross. Never heard him say his was the white horse mentioned in the Apocalypse.