

Changes.

Towards the end of the fifteenth century most religious foundations had become landlords whereas previously they had worked the farms themselves. As rents flowed in the monasteries became excessively wealthy, huge incomes often supporting a few monks or nuns whose life-style became ever more worldly, although there was still some commitment to the poor, sick, travellers etc. Headley was no exception to this trend. In 1377 it was leased for thirty-nine years to John de Berden, a citizen of York, at a rent of forty shillings per annum. The Bramham poll-tax of the same year recorded "Willelmus de Hedlay et uxor Mid, William and his wife presumably being the resident farmers. The four pence that they were taxed was the lowest ratp. But although it no longer farmed the land, Holy Trinity continued to maintain a small religious establishment at Headley.

Just as de Burden's lease was coming to an end politics intervened and all alien priories, i.e. those owned by foreign abbeys, were closed. And so Headley's monastic days ended in 1414 when the place was said to be very poor and with only two monks living there. But it still remained in the possession of Holy Trinity, which managed to evade closure at this time, and it was not until the reign of Henry VIII that the monastic link was finally broken,

But it seems that although it was no longer officially a religious place, Headley continued to be considered 'special' by the local people.

After the Dissolution Sir William Gascoigne was told that a merchant named Thomas Spicer and his wife had been arrested and imprisoned in Tadcaster tolbooth on their way back from a pilgrimage to Headley.

In 1534 Thomas Westyll of Headley Hall died and asked to be buried in Bramham churchyard. He bequeathed ten shillings to the vicar and Sir John, the chantry priest, three shillings to the priest to pray for his soul and five shillings for the poor of Branham.

By now, the religious changes instigated by Henry VIII were starting to take effect, one of the most important being the closure of monasteries and the disposal of all their goods and lands, sometimes of even the very material of which they were built. A commission visited every abbey and priory, throw out the monks, take temporary possession and decide upon the disposal. This was a golden opportunity for those with money, as opposed to titles, high birth or royal patronage, to acquire land, At least one York man was ready to take his chance, He was Richard Bowyer (sometimes called Bowyers or Bowler), variously described. as 'a burgess of York ' and 'the king's sworn servant', Obviously thinking that it was best to deal directly with the top man, in 1535 Bowyer wrote to Thomas Cromwell, the most powerful man in the kingdom after the monarch: "I beg you will write to the Prior of Holy Trinity, York, for a lease to be made to me of the manor of Headley, at the rent assessed in the King's books, also that you will write to your commissary to see the same lease sealed at your visitation."

One of the major architects of the policy of dissolving the monasteries, Thomas Cromwell was immune to the importuning of one as comparatively poor as Bowyer. Although of modest background himself, he had benefitted from Tudor mistrust of the aristocracy and achieved great wealth, influence and the close friendship of the king: all of which were guaranteed to create enough enemies to ensure his eventual downfall and execution. Shortly after the dissolution of Holy Trinity and the consequent disposal of Headley, Bowyer seemed to have abandoned his chances of a monastic grant by involving himself in a daring venture which ended in betrayal and death for many. This was the Pilgrimage of Grace, an unusual combination of 'the commons' and the gentry against the King for a mish-mash of reasons ranging from enclosures; various perceived social injustices and the closure of the monasteries to the oath of supremacy and deep theological principles.

Bowyer was closely allied in some way to Lord Darcy, then keeper of Pontefract castle despite being in appalling health. and about eighty years old. When it seemed in the autumn of 1536 that something was afoot in Lincolnshire, it was Richard Bowyer who carried messages between Lord Darcy and 'the Lords' who. assembled at Nottingham to discuss the situation.

An even t5 moved on and it became clear that there would be an armed rebellion in Yorkshire, Henry- VIII sent urgent instructions to William Harrington the Lord Mayor of York and .Sir George Lawson who was treasurer of Berwick but lived in the city as he was also the

sheriff, Bowyer had the task of delivering the king's letter and so keen was he to get it rapidly from Pontefract to York on the 13th October that he killed a horse on the way. The king wanted the city to be put into a state of defence, so Harrington and Lawson "determined to send for the gentlemen of the Ainsty to come and help keep the city after the old custom. Captains were appointed in every ward and bar", As Bowyer was the captain of Bootham Bar he eagerly put on his white coat with the red cross of St. George on both back and front, but when the 'pilgrims' appeared in force a few days later the city immediately capitulated,

After meetings, letters to the king and shows of strength on all sides, a truce was declared and a pardon granted so that the pilgrims could prepare detailed statements of their position for the king to pretend to consider. To this end a huge and unusually democratic council took place over the weekend of December 2nd to 4th at Pontefract, where Lord Darcy had pretended to the king that lack of weapons had forced him to surrender the castle to the pilgrims, who had then forced him to take their oath, Richard Bowyer was not amongst the six burgesses chosen to represent York, although he would doubtless have liked the new coats for himself and his servants, together with the tent, all other necessaries and all expenses which were provided by the city. But he went anyway.

When the leaders were trying to define heresy, it was Bowyer who laid before them several books "which he articulated to be heresy".. A set of religious articles having been drawn up, it was Bowyer who

that evening took a copy of them to Archbishop Lee who had come somewhat unwillingly from his palace at Cawood to Pontefract abbey. When Sir George Lawson wondered what the "assembly of divines was resolved upon", it was Bowyer who offered to try to find out, He went into their room whilst they were away at dinner and when they returned he offered to act as secretary for them but they quickly threw him out.

"About this time quarrelling broke out among the commons and tumults arose, Aske's servants cut the red crosses of the coat of Richard Bowyer, who was in the coat at the time, It does not appear what he had done to annoy them but he seems to have been a meddlesome fellow".

The Pilgrimage ended in total disaster with many of all classes imprisoned or executed. Towards the end of March 1537 the Duke of Norfolk was in York on business 'about execution' and decided to find out exactly who had drawn up the pilgrims's religious articles. One whom he considered to know most and to be "as naughty a knave as any" ('naughty' then meaning wicked or evil) was Bowyer, who was accordingly despatched to prison in London, He was interrogated but managed to avoid further incrimination, probably by turning King's Evidence, and less than a year later was free and again petitioning for monastic lands. Headley, however, was not to be his, In May 1538 it went instead to Sir Arthur Darcy, who had never supported his father's involvement in the Pilgrimage but was nevertheless deeply saddened by his execution.

The Bowyer family maintained their connection with the Darcys and apparently resided at Headley. They were entrusted with important business: in a letter-of-attorney dated 28th August 1545 Sir Arthur Darcy instructed 'George Bowre of Headlay to accept seisin from Ralph Greenacre and Ralph Hodgeson of manor of Potter Newton'.

Sir Arthur Darcy is a well-known figure, partly because of his activities against the 'rebels' at the time of the Pilgrimage of Grace whilst his father was executed for his part on the opposing side but mainly because of his unscrupulous acquisition of monastic lands, especially in Craven. From being the farmer of Sawley Abbey he became the owner of its estates, which gave him most of Tadcaster in addition to many other former religious lands and properties and from their rapid sale he soon built up a large fortune. However, he held on to Headley although it is unlikely that he actually lived there; his final tenant was George Goore. Sir Arthur died in 1560,

