

A LITTLE HISTORY OF SOUTHCHURCH

By Mike Penry

Episode 11: THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Southchurch in the Seventeenth Century was still a delightful rural backwater of manors and farms. Southchurch manor continued in the Rich family, as Earls of Warwick, until the estate was divided in 1678 with the failure of male heirs. The present Thorpe Hall building (the golf club) dates from about this time, and the date 1668 is carved on the side of the house. The century also provided several notable firsts for Holy Trinity:

- Our oldest surviving memorial (no thanks to the Victorians!) is the stone in the floor of the nave of the Old Church inscribed "Here lyeth interred the body of Henry Moore of Thorpe, Senr. Gent, who departed this life ye 20th day of January in the year of Our Lord 1678".
- Our oldest surviving church goods are a chalice and paten of 1682.
- Our oldest surviving graffiti is the inscription in the wooden pillars which support the belfry giving the date 1666 and the two initials: "I. A ".

The parish records also date back to the seventeenth century, beginning in the year 1682. Parish affairs were administered by officers such as the overseers of the poor, who were chosen by the Justices of the Peace and had to report to the church's vestry meetings how much they would need for looking after the poor and putting out poor children as apprentices. These overseers first appeared in 1536 following the suppression of the monasteries by Henry VIII and the consequent ending of the charitable, healing and educational work of the monks. At first the churchwardens had to raise funds by voluntary contributions, but later a rate was levied. In 1682 the rate at Southchurch was threepence in the pound.



Memorial stone to Henry Moore



The initials "I.A. 1666" carved into a wooden pillar. They're hard to see in this photo, so visit the real thing at Holy Trinity. You'll find it to the left of the font at about head height.

The first signature in the church's historic records is that of Revd Thomas Case, the rector, who from 1682 until his death nearly fifty years later never seemed to have missed a meeting. On 17 April 1682, a special monthly rate of a farthing per pound was made by the rector and his colleagues to provide relief for the poor of the parish. Rates were paid by, amongst others, the manors, the White Horse Inn (since, in an act of historical vandalism, it's name has been changed to The Old Walnut Tree), plus Samuels, Buttery's and Bournes farms. The Earl of Devon paid rates on The Wick.

Christopher Parsons, whose family was linked with the church for many generations and to whom we will return in a later episode, was chosen as overseer in 1682. He recorded that a woman named Nevel had been provided with a new pair of shoes and stockings costing three shillings and two new shifts costing 2/6d each. Another expensive parishioner was Widow Bagstick - the parish paid her rent of £1 per annum and gave her 1/- a week. "Goody Britt" was at first paid 1/6d a week for

nursing her when she was ill, but the amount increased to 3/6d for the last ten weeks of her life. When "Goody" died, the nurse was paid 12/-. Other expenses were 2/- to "lay her forth", 8/- for the coffin and 2/- for four bearers to carry her body to Prittlewell - a long walk for little pay! The overseer was more fortunate and received 3/- for two days' attendance at the funeral and selling her goods, but the parish received 12/- credit for the goods sold.

Two officials in each parish were also named to see that the highways were kept in repair. They were empowered to claim from every parishioner a certain amount of work on the roads or money in lieu of such work. In 1661 Thomas Bincks of Prittlewell, who held a farm in Southchurch of £100 or more and had been "presented divers times for the like", is reported to have said at the sessions that "he cared not a *** (in very truth) for any surveyor for this presentation, for he could get off for 7 shillings or a noble [6s. 8d.] charge - to the ill example of others".

Southchurch had other sinners too. In 1635, twenty-six people in the parish were assessed for the Ship Money Tax. One was William Archer of Southchurch, who five years previously appeared before the dreaded Star Chamber, charged with storing, instead of selling, his corn in a year of famine, consequently enhancing its value. Archer was ordered to pay fines of 100 marks to the king and £10 to benefit the poor. He was also sentenced to stand in the pillory in Newgate market for an hour with a paper on his hat setting out his crime, and afterwards was put in the pillories of Leadenhall market and at Chelmsford. Laud, one of the Star Chamber examiners and later Archbishop of Canterbury, said, "This Archer was guilty of a most foul offence which the Prophet has termed... grinding the faces of the poor. This last year's famine was made by man and not by God".

We also had poachers. The Calendar of Essex Quarter Session Records for September 1606 tells how two local men went with a net to Southchurch Hall to Mr Edward Rawlyn's ground and took a couple of conies. Some other men went to Mr Rawlyn's ground "all weaponed with staves, some beinge spiked". Four conies were caught there. They then went to Porters where they pitched their net "in a pasture grownd near the clyff" but caught nothing. They tried the next field, but a fox broke the net and they returned home.

Come back in a couple of weeks' time for Episode 12: "Oysters and Lords".

- The first dwellings are built in Southend.
- The oyster trade thrives.
- Raiders from Kent.

See all Episodes of 'A Little History of Southchurch' [here](#)