

THE MOST LEARNED AND REVEREND DOCTOR PETER HEYLYN - PART I

By

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The Reverend Doctor Peter Heylyn was appointed rector of Old Alresford in 1633, and remained in that post until his death in 1663, although the years 1643-1660 he spent in virtual exile in Oxford, Abingdon and Winchester. During these years the Parliamentary forces were hard on his heels on many occasions, but were unsuccessful in flushing him out. Dr. Heylyn was a very brave man with an unshakeable faith in God, and his experiences whilst under cover read like an adventure story.

He was born in Burford on the 29th November 1600, the second son of Henry Heylyn gentleman, and a descendant of the ancient family of Heylyns who were hereditary cup bearers to the Princes of Montgomeryshire, Wales. At the age of six he was instructed by Mr. North the schoolmaster of Burford and did so well that in a short time he had learnt Latin, could write verses and was proficient in history. At the age of 13 he was sent to school in Oxford and placed under the tuition of Mr. Joseph Hill, an Ancient Bachelor of Divinity. A Mr. Walter Newbery (afterwards a zealous Puritan) was appointed to instruct him in logic and other academic studies where he again made good progress. In 1615 he was admitted to Magdalen College, Oxford having endeared himself to the President Dr. Langton and Fellows of that college, by the presentation of a Latin poem about a journey he had made to Woodstock. Within the space of a twelve month he was made Impositor of the Hall, and again acquitted himself so well that he continued in the post longer than any previous incumbent and earned himself the soubriquet 'Perpetual Dictator'.

In July 1617, Heylyn obtained the Degree of Bachelor of Arts. The College statutes required some exercise to be performed by a B.A. during the long vacation, so he began his "Cosmographical Lectures" and finished them in August. This performance earned a profound admiration of his great learning, and abilities, and to show his gratitude to his admirers, he wrote a Latin comedy called "Theomacia", which he finished in a fortnight. He was made Moderator of the Senior Form and during his two years in office he began to write his 'Geography'. In 1620 he was made Master of Arts. After 'Geography' was approved by some learned friends, his father gave consent for it to be printed and the first copy was presented to King Charles I then Prince of Wales, to whom it was dedicated and by whom, together with its author it was graciously received. His Geography was enlarged and reprinted in less than three years and was again presented by him to the Prince of Wales, who received it with most affectionate commendations of the author. But it met with the disapproval of King James. The book was given to His Majesty by Dr. Young, Dean of Windsor who professed nothing but kindness towards Heylyn. The King at first expressed the great regard he had for the author, but unfortunately he fell upon a passage, where precedence was given to the French King, and France was called the more famous kingdom. James was much offended and ordered the Lord Keeper to call the book in. The Dean gave notice to the author of His Majesty's displeasure and advised him to go to court and make use of the Princes' patronage in order to prevent the rankling of this wound. He chose to stay in Oxford, and sent an apology and explanation of his meaning, that the burden under which he suffered, was rather a mistake than a crime and that mistake was not his own but the printers. It was later corrected and amended.

During 1625-1628 the Reverend Doctor visited France, Jersey and Guernsey, and produced a book describing his travels, which had King James lived to peruse, would have restored him to his favour and protection, because he described the vanity and levity of the Monsieurs, and the sluttishness of their Madames fully, both in verse and prose.

Prior to this journey in September 1622, he was confirmed by Bishop Lake in the parish church of Wells, and shortly afterwards obtained a dispensation that he should not be compelled to take Holy Orders until he was 24 years of age (he was then not quite 22). He wished to be absolutely certain of wanting to undertake the profession, but after being persuaded to do so by a right reverend and learned person, Dr.

Buckner, he applied himself to being ordained priest. His ordination sermon was based on the words of Jesus to St. Peter "and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren".

Upon being made chaplain to His Majesty King Charles I, Peter Heylyn went to London to receive instruction from Archbishop Laud, then Bishop of Bath and Wells, who cautioned him to behave in all circumstances with the dignity of his calling, and intimated that the King did not "love silk nor satin chaplains". Heylyn young and old ever observed this, never rustling in silks like some of his brotherhood, but "went always in a plain, grave and decent habit".

By now he was a man of active spirit, though studious and contemplative, and would not be perpetually devoted to a reclusive life, so he resolved to marry and try his fortune in the world. Accordingly a fair fortune was offered to him viz, a wife with a thousand pounds portion, a gentlewoman of a very ancient family and of excellent education, one Leticia Highgate, third daughter of Thomas Highgate J.P. of Hayes in Middlesex.

Preferment did not come easily to Heylyn, for after preaching at Court, His Majesty expressed a high opinion of him to many noble lords around him, and within a few months offered him the Rectory of Hemingford in the County of Huntingdon. The Bishop of Lincoln, to whom he made application with his presentation, would not allow the King to have any title to the living, so he had to return to London. The Bishop was much offended that a young divine should have so great a knowledge of law. (This was the beginning of many differences between them). His Majesty said he was sorry to put him to so much trouble, but it would not be long before he would be out of his debt, and within a week bestowed upon him a Prebendship of Winchester, to the extreme vexation of his Lordship of Lincoln, who was then Dean of the same church!

Heylyn was asked to pronounce upon one Capt. Nelson, who pretended to have found a way for the discovery of longitude at sea. No one else could approve or subscribe to his demonstrations, so the King had referred him to his chaplain, who said that His Majesty was mistaken in him, his skill and knowledge lying more in the historical than the philosophical part of geography, notwithstanding he gave a full account thereof in writing according to the best of his judgment.

His mind being intent on useful rather than notional learning at this time, he began to read over the Statute Laws of the Nation, and to compare them with the time and circumstances that occurred in story. This was to enable him to better serve His Majesty. The King was recovering from smallpox and Heylyn turned poet, making a copy of English Verses, which one of his friends presented to the King.

For good services prudently and diligently performed, His Majesty bestowed on him the Parsonage of Houghton in the Bishopric of Durham, and worth about £400 per annum, afterwards exchanged with Dr. Marshall for the Parsonage of Alresford in Hampshire, which was of about the same value. This exchange was approved by the King in order that he might live nearer the court, in readiness for service to His Majesty. No sooner inducted into this living than he took care that the service of God was constantly performed by reading the Common Prayers in his church every morning, and that gave great satisfaction to the parish. He ordered that the communion table (which Puritan minded parishioners had placed table-wise in the centre of the church) should be placed in accordance with custom, at the east end of the chancel and railed about decently to prevent base and profane uses, and where the church or chancel needed repairs they should be carried out. This table dated 1620, is still to be seen in the church of St. Mary the Virgin, Old Alresford. However, not all parishioners were pleased with these changes, and amongst the most notable and influential, was Richard Norton, a wealthy landowner who resided at the Manor House, and was a friend of Oliver Cromwell.

Next followed work to make his own house a fit and convenient habitation. He added a new building to the old one, which was far more graceful, made a chapel next to the dining room that was beautiful with silk hangings about the altar, and here Heylyn or his curate read morning and evening prayers to the family, calling in his labourers and workfolk (for he was seldom without them) and thought it a deed of charity as

well as to please his fancy by often building and repairing to give poor people work, and to encourage tradesmen in their honest callings. He kept their loyalty by paying them regularly.

In July 1630 he took his degree of Bachelor in Divinity, and in 1633 his degree of Doctor in Divinity, an honour not usually conferred in those days on men of such youth.(30 years). The feud with the Bishop of Lincoln was still going on, and in 1634 grievances against him (the Bishop) were investigated by Heylyn and others, so that in 1637 the Bishop was censured by the Star Chamber for tampering with witnesses in the King's Cause, suspended from his benefice and sent to the Tower for three years, during which time he heard no sermon or public prayers.

About now Heylyn was given the parsonage of South Warnborough, as well as Old Alresford. He also set about writing the History of the Church of England since the Reformation. To assist in this work, by the commendation of Archbishop Laud, he was allowed to carry home some of the books from the library of Sir Robert Cotton, leaving a deposit of £200. Archbishop Laud also required him to translate the Scottish Liturgy into Latin, which raised howls of protest in Scotland, so the book did not proceed very far, in fact, no further than the hands of Archbishop Laud.

In November 1640 began the session of the Long Parliament, at the opening of which a rumour was spread that Dr. Heylyn had run away to escape an approaching storm that was likely to fall upon his head, as well as that of his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury. But he who was always an undaunted spirit would not desert the cause of King and Church then in question, and departed speedily for London from Alresford to confront the false report raised about him by the Puritan faction. He appeared in his gown and tippet at Westminster Hall in the Church with the accustomed formalities of his cap, hood and surplice, and employed his pen boldly in defence of the Bishops Rights, after the Lords began to shake the hierarchy by passing a vote "That no Bishop should be on the Committee for the examination of the Earl of Strafford". Heylyn asserted that rights maintained by Law or ancient custom belonged to them, a rare commendation at this juncture of time.

About now the Bishop of Lincoln returned from the Tower to church to say his prayers and hear his brother Peter Heylyn preach in Westminster Abbey, where notwithstanding the holiness of the peace he resolved to revenge himself for past deeds by disturbing the Doctor in his sermon before all the congregation, against all good manners and the common rules of civility. The Bishop preached a sermon before the King asking that greater care should be taken in observing the Sabbath although it was well known that he himself played bowls on Sunday after evening service, and indulged in shooting with bows and arrows and other recreations.

No sooner was the Doctor out of the pulpit than he was being questioned about a sermon he had preached years before and many gave evidence against him expecting him to come bloodily off, but he won the day, and told his friends he would now go to Alresford with a purpose never more to come to Westminster whilst the Bishop of Lincoln was there.

His parishioners always loved him both in prosperity and adversity because of his affable and courteous behaviour, and his readiness to do any kindness. He was resolved to spend his days among them, but the unhappy wars now following put everything into disorder and confusion and caused him to fly for his own preservation. In 1643 a party of horsemen under the command of Sir William Waller, was sent to bring him prisoner to Portsmouth. Heylyn escaped but was continually disturbed by alarms of drums and trumpets sounding around him, and decided that the only safety lay in going to Oxford, to take sanctuary. The news of his being in Oxford resulted in his being declared a delinquent, and sequestration of his goods and chattels recommended. His library was taken away, (as he was thought to be too great a scholar) the plunder of which he declared the greatest of his losses. The books were taken to Portsmouth where they were valued at £1,000., put into a public library from which place they could not be redeemed.

His goods and chattels were driven away, corn and hay seized upon, as well as all his household goods, so that he was left naked, for immediately by order of the committee the tithes of both his livings were sequestered as well as the profits from his Westminster prebendary, and what temporal estate he had

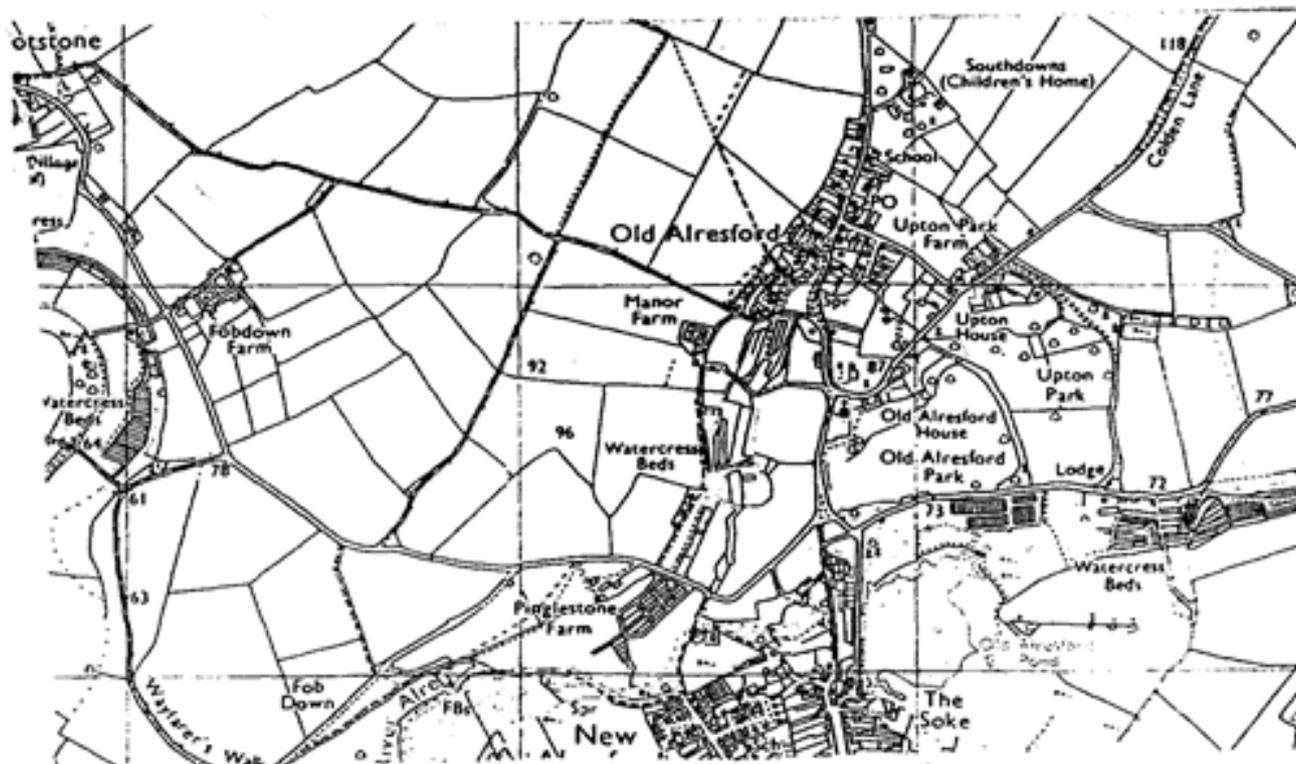
.within their reach was taken from him. Being asked by one of his acquaintances how he lived he replied, "By horseflesh and old leather", explaining that he saved only his coach and horses which conveyed him to Oxford, and which he had been forced to sell in order to live, but that being done he must think of some other way to live, first upon credit which did not last long without an estate to support it and afterwards upon the "charity of friends which is shorter lived for the heat of that love soon grows cold".

To be continued.

Peggy McKerracher, November 1995.

Sources: The Biography of Rev. Dr. Peter Heylyn, by his son-in-law and loaned by Laurence Oxley.

Private papers.



SITE OF DR. HEYLYN'S RECTORY - SU588337 (NOW THE DIOCESAN RETREAT).

ORDNANCE SURVEY PATHFINDER 1243 SCALE 2 1/2" TO 1 MILE.