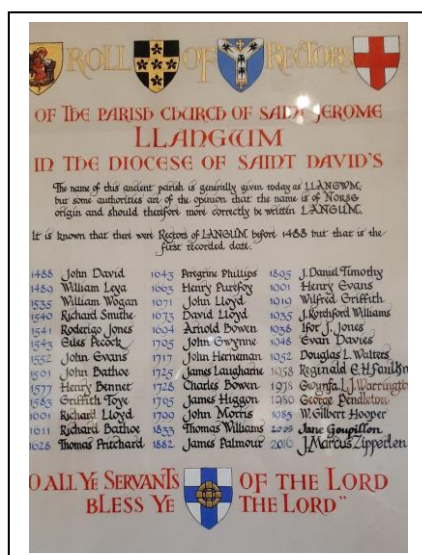


The Curious Case of Richard Bathoe of Llangwm

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The list of rectors who served St Jerome's parish in Llangwm includes two Reverends Bathoe – John from 1561 until 1577, and Richard, from 1611 to 1628. The story of the two Bathoes, father and son, illustrates a turbulent period of British history, from which Llangwm, despite its reputation for isolation, was not immune.

The Bathoe family and Llangwm

The Rev John Bathoe had been the prior of the Augustinian priory in Haverfordwest (1536-37), following on from

William Barlow, who had been appointed Bishop of St Davids in 1536. In 1535 Barlow had surveyed the priory for the *Valor ecclesiasticus*, in preparation for Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries to expropriate their riches and incomes. In this role, John Bathoe presided over the priory's suppression on 19th February, 1537. Having lost his home and position, ex-prior Bathoe was compensated with a pension of £14 annually (very roughly equivalent to about £9000 in 2023).

Since John Bathoe was rector of Llangwm by 1561, and had a son, it seems that he used the opportunity of the dissolution of the priory to marry and father children, as did as many as 20% of previously at-least-nominally celibate clergy. We know that one of those children was Richard Bathoe, who was to become Rector in Llangwm in 1611.

At the time that John Bathoe was Rector in Llangwm, the rector in neighbouring Burton was a young man named Richard Meredith (Meredyth). Richard Meredith (1550-1597) married a Sarah Batho around 1584. The name Batho (or its various spellings Bathow, Bathoe) is unusual, so it seems reasonable to guess that Sarah was related to, perhaps the daughter of John Bathoe, and therefore sister to Richard. Richard Meredith soon left Burton, first to be rector in Angle, and then chaplain to the Lord Deputy of Ireland (essentially the Viceroy), Sir John Perrot of Haroldston Manor, outside Haverfordwest.

In Tudor times, Pembrokeshire was surprisingly important in maintaining English rule over Ireland. Two of the major figures used by the Tudor Crown to suppress the Irish had strong

Pembrokeshire connections. Sir John Perrot, born at Haroldston Manor was reputedly the illegitimate son of Henry VIII. He was made President of Munster by Queen Elizabeth I in 1571, and later, in 1584, he became the Lord Deputy of Ireland. In both roles, his task was to suppress Catholic Irish rebels under the lords of Desmond (themselves descendants of the FitzGeralds of Carew who had spearheaded the Strongbow invasion of Ireland in 1169).



Sir John Perrot of Haroldston

Patronage from Sir John Perrot allowed Richard Meredith to rise rapidly in the Irish church, first as dean of St Patrick's (protestant) cathedral in Dublin (1584), and then as Bishop of Leighlin (1589). As bishop, he appointed his brother-in-law Richard Bathoe as his steward.

Irish Refugees

Perrot was unsuccessful in suppressing the Irish rebellion, and some years later, Elizabeth sent another courtier with Pembrokeshire connections, Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, to finish the job. The Devereux family originated in West Wales and Robert Devereux, the 2nd Earl of Essex, had grown up in Lamphey with his uncle, George Devereux. The Essex adventure was a failure, and he soon returned to England where he was charged with desertion of duty and subjected to house arrest. Following an attempt to break out of his custody with a group of armed collaborators, he was charged with treason and executed.



Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex

Both the Perrot period in Ireland, and subsequently that of the Earl of Essex, were characterised by the use of a “scorched earth” policy against the Irish rebels. Edmund Spenser who fought in the Desmond rebellion wrote in 1596 “The open enemy having all his country wasted, what by him, and what by the soldiers, findeth succour in no places. Towns there are none of which he may get spoil, they are all burnt; Country houses and farmers there are none, they be all fled; bread he hath none, he ploughed not in summer; flesh [livestock] he hath, but if he kill it in winter, he shall want milk in summer, and shortly want life. Therefore if they be well followed but one winter, ye shall have little work to do with them the next summer. ... All those subjects which border upon those parts, are whither to be removed and drawn away, or likewise to be spoiled, that the enemy may find no succour thereby: for what the soldier spares the rebel will surely spoil”.

A consequence was two periods of major famine in 1582-3 in Munster, and 1602-3 in Ulster. Both were caused by the deliberate destruction of crops and food reserves by English troops. The Irish historian, Michilene Kearney Walsh, estimated that as many as 60,000 people died in the Ulster famine of 1602-3. Although this may be an overestimate, the death toll was certainly very large as a proportion of the pre-war population. The repeated references to cannibalism, both in the 1580s and 1600s is a clear indication that these were very serious crises, where starvation had reached such a pitch that neighbourly and even family bonds of human solidarity had broken down. Disease, a natural consequence of famine, was rife, and epidemics broke out in Cork city where the country people fled. By early 1582 27-70 people were dying in Cork (which had a population of about 2,000) every day. People continued to

die in the province long after the war had ended, so that by 1589 Munster had lost one third of its population. An inevitable consequence was another flight of refugees, so that by 1601, Pembrokeshire was said to have been “inundated with people who had fled the ‘late wars’ in Ireland”. The number of Irish refugees pouring into Pembrokeshire must have resembled the flight of today’s boat people from Syria into Greece, and North Africa into Italy. While an estimate of 20,000 may have been an exaggeration, the impact must have been enormous bearing in mind that the total population of Pembrokeshire at the time was fewer than that number.

Pembrokeshire historian George Owen, who served as the Deputy Lieutenant of Pembrokeshire, from 1587 until 1590 and 1595 until 1601 and as High Sheriff of Pembrokeshire in 1587 and 1602, wrote in 1603 that in Roose and Castlemartin, “you shall find the third, fourth or fifth householder an Irishman...” and remarks that some parishes became entirely Irish, apart from the pastor.

The Curious case of Richard Bathoe

Unsurprisingly, the arrival of overwhelming numbers of Irish refugees caused consternation in Pembrokeshire. The large numbers of desperate people, who were different in their speech and their Catholic religion, led to an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust. It was under this context that Richard Bathoe arrived back in Pembrokeshire from Ireland. Landing in Milford Haven, he made his way to Pembroke, where he described himself as a preacher, resident in Ireland. In Pembroke, in a private conversation, he made some remarks regarding the 1601 treason of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex against Queen Elizabeth I.

Whether his conversation was intended to be provocative we cannot know, but it seems foolhardy to have criticised Essex in Pembroke, just down the road from Lamphey where Essex had grown up as a boy. Essex still had strong ties with the area, and from his uncle’s household he had recruited his chaplain, Rhys Pritchard, and his steward and representative in West Wales, Gelly Meyrick. Gelly Meyrick had served on many of the earl’s military ventures and was knighted by him in Cadiz. One of Gelly Meyrick’s responsibilities had been to organise a following of Devereux tenants, connections and neighbours in West Wales, as well as Meyrick’s own adherents. A consequence was the recruitment of many Welsh captains for the last campaign for the Essex in Ireland, where Meyrick became the marshal of the earl’s Ulster army. In this capacity, he was named by Essex as his collaborator, and Meyrick himself stood trial for high treason on 5 March 1601, was found guilty and executed, a week after Essex.

Bathoe’s conversation criticising the Earl of Essex was overheard, and he was set upon by an armed gang led by Sir Gelly Meyrick’s brother, John Meyrick of *The Fleet*, Monkton, in Pembroke. Among Bathoe’s assailants were Thomas Adams, Hugh Powell, John Cheere, John Shakerlyne, John Lynch, and others. A number of women supported them, including John

Meyrick's mother in law, Maud Wogan, Gelly Merick's widow, Lucy, her sister Elizabeth, and Jane Webb.

When Bathoe took his complaint to the Star Chamber in 1602, the women denied knowledge of the affair. Nevertheless, they accused Bathoe of being a "common haunter of alhouses, and wintaverns", "a card and dice player and an all-night dancer". Over the past year he had ridden "armed with his sword target and pistoll or horsemans peece up and downe in the County of Pembroke, and into the townes of Pembrok and Haverfordwest"; he was unlearned, and incapable of reading even English well, and incapable of performing the function he claimed (presumably as a preacher).

Mathias argues that this denunciation of Bathoe is an example of the attitude of Pembrokeshire Puritans to immigrants from Ireland (of which they took Bathoe to be an archetype), whose free movement created both political and military risk. However, as we have seen, Bathoe can hardly be characterised as an Irish immigrant. Although it is clear he arrived from Ireland, his background is clearly Pembrokeshire. How, then, could he have been thought to be an Irish immigrant? Is the truth behind the story that Bathoe perhaps contrasted Essex's "New England" ultra-protestant approach to the Gaelic Catholics to his old benefactor, Perrot's reputedly more tolerant attitude to the Catholic religion? Was Bathoe the victim of the long-running antipathy between the Perrot and Devereux families? This antipathy had recently become more intense: Sir John Perrot's son, Thomas, had eloped with Dorothy Devereux, Essex's sister. Thomas had inherited the Perrot estates, but when Thomas himself died, his inheritance went to his illegitimate half-brother, James, rather than to his Devereux wife, resulting in a decade-long legal dispute between the Devereux and Perrots. Whatever the reason, it was surely at least indiscreet to raise a criticism of two recently executed local favourites.

The outcome of the Richard Bathoe case in the Court of the Star Chamber is not known. It is worth noting, however, that not all Star Chamber cases were held in London, as had been the original intention of the court. By Elizabethan times, cases could be delegated to local tribunals. Thus, in half the cases submitted to Star Chamber by Pembrokeshire plaintiffs, the court appointed a local commission to act on its behalf. The commissioners chosen to undertake the task were, almost without exception, selected from a list of the shire's justices of the peace. Given the influence of the Perrot family in determining justice in Pembrokeshire, and their roles both as sheriff, and as custodian of Haverfordwest prison (where those found guilty by the local Star Chambers were imprisoned), justice may not always have been unbiased. Whether Bathoe's case was held in London or locally is unclear, but it seems likely that it was decided locally. Although the outcome is not known, since Richard Bathoe subsequently became a rector in Llangwm, it is likely that he won his case.

A longer version of this article will be available in the 2023 issue of Pembrokeshire: The Journal of the Pembrokeshire Historical Society