

Saints & Malignants

Rothley and its Neighbours

In the 17th Century's

Times of Turmoil



Susan Joyce

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Chronicle 6

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Terry Sheppard

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Charles I, surrounded by his enemies.
From the ESPC microfilm, 17th century State Papers Domestic

Scheme of Illustrations

Front cover. Memorial Tablet to Matthew and Anne Babington. Rothley Parish Church. Note: Matthew in armour.

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Introduction

An explanation of the title of this chronicle is necessary. In the mid 17th century religion was an intrinsic part of the lives of the great majority of people; what happened in the parish church and what was said in the pulpit had a huge effect, and it is true to say that one of the major causes of the English Civil War, (1642-1649), was a dispute over religion.

Saints in the eyes of the parliament and its forces, meant the “Godly” puritans who wished to “purify” the Church of England, especially after King Charles I and his Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud (pictured below) set about enforcing “the beauty of holiness” – ceremony, ritual and the insistence on the correct vestments for the clergy in the 1630’s.

Malignants were those who, during the Civil War, whether laymen or clergy, supported the king and opposed parliament, its forces and its regulations. Clergymen who were for the king were not averse to preaching anti-parliament sermons to their flock. Such men had to be removed.

This short Chronicle is based on part of a dissertation for an M.A. Degree at York University studying religious changes during the Civil War and Commonwealth in Derbyshire and Leicestershire.

Manuscript sources consulted included the Walker MSS at the Bodleian, Oxford, deposits at Lambeth Palace Library, the Record Offices of Lichfield, Derby and Leicestershire, the libraries of Derby City and at the Universities of York & Nottingham.

Books consulted includes J Besse, *The Sufferings of the People called Quakers*; A G Matthews *Walker Revised, a Revision of J Walker’s Sufferings of the Clergy in the Ground Rebellion*; and Samuel Palmer *The Nonconformist’s Memorial*.

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William Laud
Archbishop of Canterbury

A Timeline

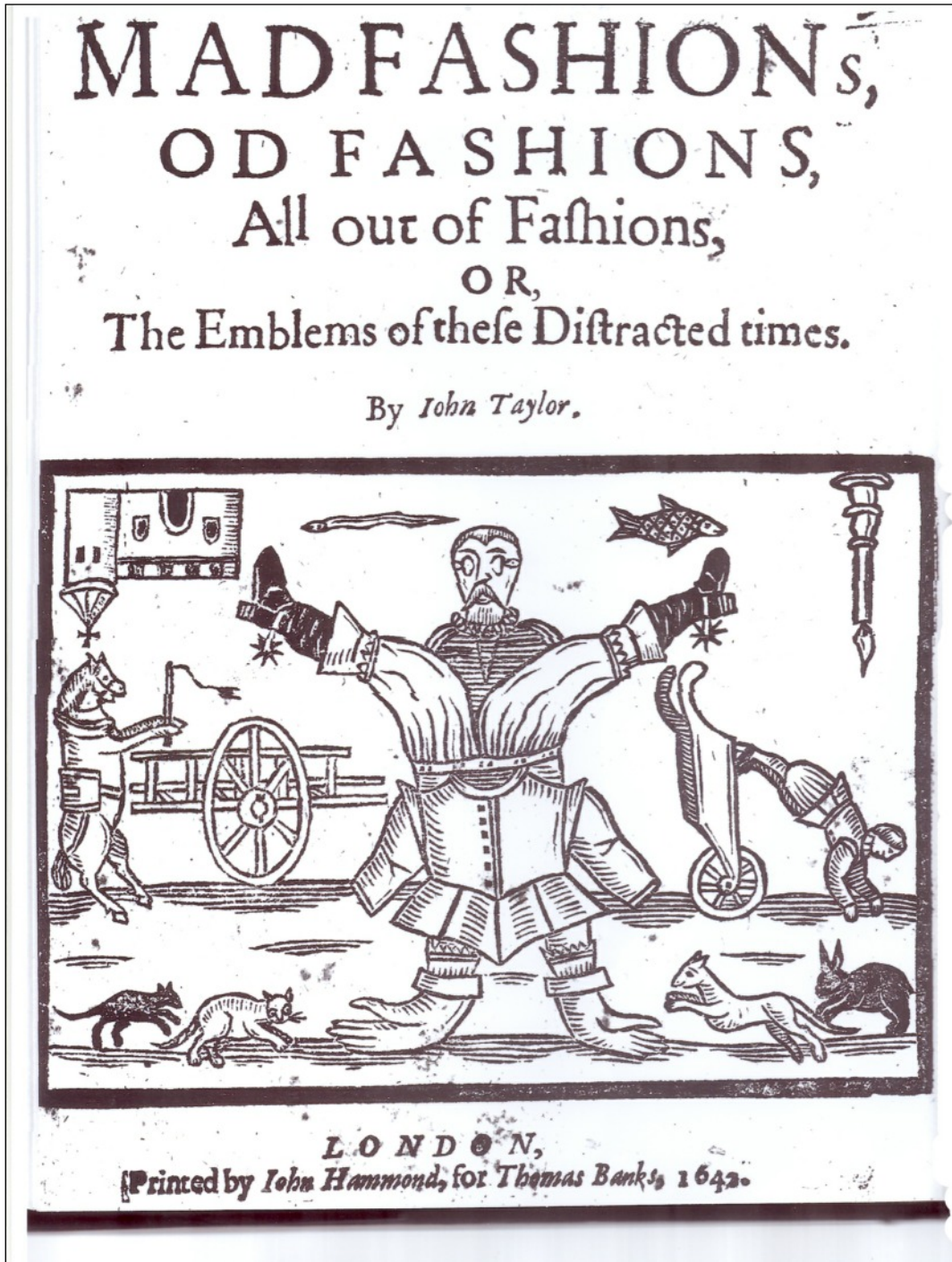
- 1633** Charles I appointed William Laud as Archbishop of Canterbury. A clothier's son from Reading, he was described as "a little low red-faced man of mean parentage". Sets about enforcing the "beauty of holiness" in the church of England – vestments, ceremonial, ritual, alters railed at the east end of the church, with penalties for disobedience or criticism. Puritans outraged.
- 1640** Charles I forced to recall Parliament after 11 years' personal rule. Needs money to fight an invading Scots army. Scotland resentful at attempts to force Laud's policy on the Scottish church.
- January 1642** Charles and Parliament so mutually hostile King leaves London fearing for his safety.
- August 1642** Civil war begins between forces of King and Parliament. Charles raises the royal standard near Nottingham Castle. It blows down in the night. Taken as a bad omen.
- August 1643** A parliamentary ordinance dismantles existing Anglican church, abolishing bishops, and the use of fonts, organs, candles, crosses, a railed alter and the liturgy of the church. 15 out of 26 cathedrals damaged or vandalised. Book of Common Prayer replaced by Directory of Public Worship. Parish clergy regulated by local county committees.
- September 1643** Scots enter the war on parliament's promise to set up Scottish style church – Presbyterianism, no bishops.
- January 1645** Parliament orders execution of Archbishop Laud.
- June 1645** Battle of Naseby in Northamptonshire means King's last real hope of victory lost.

- May 1646** King surrenders to the Scots at Newark. Eventually imprisoned on the Isle of Wight where he plots with the Scots to return, prompting a second civil war.
- January 1649** King executed by order of Oliver Cromwell.
- 1650** Parliament orders a survey of church livings and the suitability of their occupants. Attempts made during the 1650's, to secure "a godly preaching ministry".
- 1653** Cromwell becomes Lord Protector. Toleration is allowed for nonconformists to practice their own form of religion. None for Catholics.
- 1655** After a failed rebellion country is divided among 11 major generals. Military rule.
- 1658** Cromwell dies.
- 1660** Charles II restored to the throne. During the 1660's, Acts of Parliament to restore Church of England, any surviving ejected ministers to be returned, any refusing to accept Acts of Uniformity, ordination by bishops and the 1662 Prayer Book to be removed, and not come within 5 miles of their old parish. Persecution of Quakers.
- 1673** Final Toleration Act for all nonconformists except Catholics.

In 1642 John Taylor produced “Mad Fashions...or the emblems of these distracted times”. This showed “the world turned upside down” – a man wearing his boots on his hands, his gloves on his feet, his clothing upside down and various extraordinary scenes like a mouse pursuing a cat, a rabbit chasing a dog, a fish in the air and, most relevant to this chronicle, a church with its tower pointing downwards and its door and windows up to heaven.

The years of the 1640’s and 1650’s indeed saw the world turned upside down, culminating in the dismantling of the hierarchy of the Church of England and the execution in January 1649, of the king.

Charles, once the war with his parliament had broken out in the summer of 1642, abandoned London, making Oxford his headquarters, leaving parliament free to pass measures which included abolishing the



office of bishop, executing the Archbishop of Canterbury, and replacing the Prayer Book used in all churches by a “Directory of Public Worship”, in 1645. The puritans in parliament had won the day, and failure to adopt this brought the wrath of the county committee of local parliamentary supporters, down on the heads of unfortunate clergymen.

The end of censorship, which had kept protest and nonconformity underground, And which had brought severe punishments on several puritan pamphlet writers, led to an enormous upsurge in “nonconformist” sects – Baptists, Quakers, Independents (later Congregationalists) and obscure, radical groups like the Ranters (of whom more later), the fifth monarchy men, and the diggers. The diggers under their founder, Gerard Winstanley, set up a socialist agrarian commune, on St George’s Hill, Weybridge, in Surrey, at the end of the 1640’s until local property owners forced them off. Ironically today St George’s Hill is a gated estate of enormously expensive houses, with not a Digger in sight. Ordinary people “the common sort” were preaching, teaching and organising their own religious communities, among them women, especially in the Quaker movement, as preachers, prophets and missionaries.

Leicestershire during the civil war was held for parliament, with the exception of Ashby, which was Royalist garrison; Rothley, both village and church, was firmly under the control of the Babingtons, lords of the manor since the latter part of the 16th century, and patrons of the living of the church.

Thus, the vicar of Rothley was appointed by the Babingtons; at the time of the Civil War, the patron was Thomas Babington and the vicar, William Staveley M.A, had been in his post since 1625. He was clearly a learned and well educated man, but was described in a survey of 1650 as “no preacher”, unlike Oliver Bromskill of All Saints, Loughborough, a “judicious and solid divine, an excellent preacher and a holy liver”, or William Grace of Rearsby whose sermons were described as “edifying”.

The Babingtons supported parliament, and, in fact, Thomas Babington and his troops were involved in a skirmish with Royalist forces at Rothley Lodge in 1644. Thomas died in 1645, and was succeeded by his son, Matthew (1612-1669).

Facsimile of the Death Warrant of Charles I



So, William Staveley stayed in his post – not so roughly one third of Leicestershire clergymen, who were ejected from their livings, whether for open Royalist sympathies, being “too ceremonious” in their services, failing to set an example to their flock and sometimes through unpopularity with their parishioners; who – sometimes maliciously, one feels, informed against them.

Thus Robert Palmer of Wymeswold was said to be “so drunk he hath not known the water from the bridge”, Joseph Smith of Swithland (also in charge of Hathern and Sileby) “kept scandalous curates at forty shillings a year and was more interested in “fisque” than divinity. Robert Bayley of Oadby, truly a victim of village gossip, let his children play on Sundays, persecuted “Godley men”, fought and quarrelled in the alehouse and his wife was “seldom at church”.

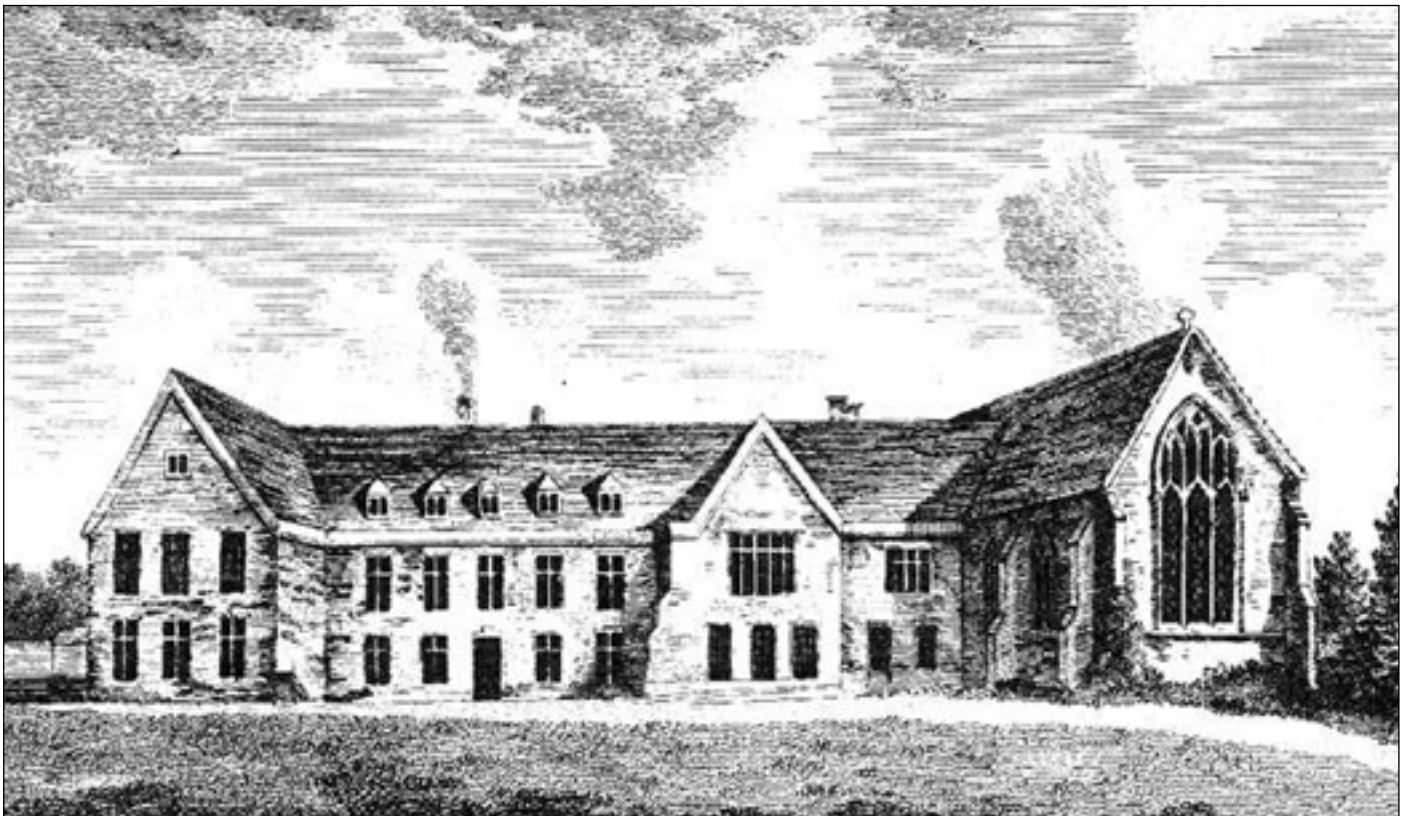
Thomas Bird of Somerby; one of 23 Leicestershire clergy accused of “scandalous behaviour”. 16 of them being “frequenter of alehouses”, was alleged to have had a piper play him home from the alehouse at midnight. “scaring the townsmen out of their sleep”. His reply included a note of sadness – “having no

company at home to recreate himself but three small children where the eldest is not above fourteen, hee indeed sometimes doth goe to the alehouse, hee having not wherewithal to entertain at home”.

In the days when there were no benefits for families or those out of work, the family of an ejected clergyman were hard hit. A tragic case occurred at Hoby. Thomas Rawson was ejected from his living by parliamentary troopers, with his pregnant wife, Lydia, and their nine children. He was forced to house them in the church porch and belfry for several days before seeking sanctuary at Rotherby where, using blankets as a screen between the family and the congregation, they existed on the charity of friends and neighbours until they were able to return to a normal cottage in Hoby, seven of the now ten children being farmed out as apprentices, to avoid starvation.

Closer to home, Richard Benskin, rector of Wanlip and vicar of Humberstone, refused to accept parliament’s orders, declaring he would “undergo any hardship, even death, rather than take the oath”. His words were prophetic, for when colonel Poyntz captured Shelford House in Nottinghamshire, Benskin who was present

The Babington seat at Rothley Temple. The 1790s engraving in *Nichols*



there, was refused quarter and “died at the foot of the stairs”, despite his clerical status.

His son stated that his parishioners had been forced “against their will to carry and drive all his cattle, corn and goods to Leicester”, when his belongings were seized by the county committee.

William Staveley was fortunate he kept his living during the war years. However, according to a story printed in Nichols’ “History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester”, his church was disturbed in 1644 by a moment of high drama. According to the story, Royalist troops from the Ashby garrison entered Rothley church during a service, and took away three men from the congregation, to Ashby.

One can imagine the consternation of the parishioners on hearing the clatter of hooves outside, the doors being flung open and armed men entering the church. Unless these men – whose names are not recorded – were chosen at random to frighten the natives, it would seem that they were known to their abductors as troublemakers, or had been pointed out as such. We shall never know.

At least Rothley did not suffer the indignities visited on All Saints, Loughborough, when, in 1644, the churchwardens had to “dress” and sweeten the church” with frankincense, after soldiers had used it as their living quarters.

William Staveley’s successor, Richard Naden, was appointed in 1652, Matthew Babington being described as the “lawful patron of the same” i.e. Rothley Church. He remained as vicar until 1661, when Edward Ward was presented to the living by Babington. Naden is not listed as having a degree, but it does not mean that did have one; certainly, however, during the 1650’s a number of ministers taking over parishes did not – like John Smith at Wanlip, who had been a hatter in London.

In 1648, Babington had suffered his own personal tragedy, the death of his wife, Anne. Her memorial in Rothley church, which incidentally shows Babington in armour, indicates that she was greatly loved.

“Her soul, without flattery, was adorned with a trinity of divine excellencies as rare companions. A sound knowledge, a prudent profession, a sincere and constant practise of ye best religion of ye Church of England in all her relations. Her body being for beauty a fit cabinet for such a jewel, in memory of whom her said husband erected this monument”. Anne was clearly no puritan, she is shown wearing a fashionable dress and necklace.

The poor woman died “in the 33rd year of her age”, after four sons and seven daughters, in single births “before ye eldest was twelve years and three quarters old”. The twelfth pregnancy proved fatal to both

Nichols 1790s engraving of Rothley Church, spared the indignities of the crisis



mother and her still born baby daughter. Matthew was to spend the last twenty years of his life as a widower.

The wording on the tablet indicates that both husband and wife were loyal supporters of the Church of England, most likely leaning towards moderation, rather than the High Anglicanism practised by the king. It is not surprising that, during the 1660's, in his position as Justice of the Peace, and with the restoration of the monarchy and the hierarchy of the Church of England, Matthew pursued local nonconformists with great vigour.

During the 1650's, whatever his personal opinions, there was little that Matthew could do, as England was under the rule of "the saints", chief of whom was Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of England after 1653, and himself an independent.

Later known as Congregationalists, the Independents favoured a "gathered" congregation, one which ran its own spiritual affairs and organised itself. This was the time when theatres and the celebrations associated with Christmas, were banned, and from 1655 England was actually under military rule, the country being divided into eleven districts, each under a major general.

During this time, Babington must have had his eye on Mountsorrel. The southern part of the village was included in Rothley Parish, witness the number of

gravestones of Mountsorrel people either side of Rothley church path. During the later middle ages Mountsorrel had been a target for nonconformists, when, in 1389 an itinerant preacher, John Edward, preached in taverns there. He was a Lollard, a follower of John Wyclif of Lutterworth, who was highly critical of the state of the church, at that time. This tradition was continued with the arrival of Richard Adams, a Baptist minister, who established a meeting house in his home when he moved to Mountsorrel. He remained there for a number of years, building up a congregation of eighty members by 1669. During the 1640's Samuel Oates, a former weaver and father of Titus Oates (the man responsible for manufacturing the "Popish Plot" implicating Catholics, in the reign of Charles II) was sent out from Bell Alley Baptist meeting house in London to evangelise Leicestershire and the east midlands.

His efforts may well have met with success considering the popularity of Richard Adams in the 1650's. In 1656 messengers were sent to "stir up" the enthusiasm of local Baptists, sometimes known as "Dippers" from their practice of adult baptism. There were similar congregations in Leicester, Loughborough and the Soar valley villages. Babington "very zealous against the Dissenters according to Samuel Palmer in the Nonconformist's memorial, finally took action against Adams, once the official, political and religious climate had changed, fining him a shilling a day for preaching.

The charming inscription on the memorial tablet to the *greatly loved* Anne Babington, who died in 1648



On occasion, Babington resorted to force. John Shuttlewood, a minister at Hose in the vale of Belvoir, encountered a group of “30 or 40 horsemen with swords drawn and pistols cocked”, led by Babington who fell upon him and his friends while singing psalms. Shuttlewood was described by Samuel Palmer as a “great sufferer for nonconformity not only by the loss of a very comfortable subsistence but by the seizure of his goods and the imprisonment of his person”.

Far more dangerous to the established order than the Baptists and the 50 or so Independents in Mountsorrel were the Quakers, the movement founded by George Fox born in Fenny Drayton, near Lutterworth in 1624, was regarded by the establishment as dangerously subversive.

George was the son of “righteous Christer”, so called by his neighbours, a weaver and his wife Mary Lago “an upright woman of the stock of the martyrs”. Braithwaite in his “the Early History of Quakerism” suggests this could mean descent from one of the two Protestant martyrs in the next parish, Mancetter, Robert Glover and Joyce Lewis, burnt at the stake in the reign of Mary I (1552-1558), Lutterworth, the nearest town, had been the home of John Wyclif and his supporters the Lollards (it was in Derby in 1650 that the Quakers were first so called, by Justice Gervase Bennet, either because Fox had bid his hearers “tremble at the name of the Lord”, or from the trembling and shaking which characterised Quaker religious activity in the early days.

Far removed from its peaceful image today, early Quakerism was marked by the refusal of its adherents to acknowledge the civil power, to doff their hats in church to those in authority, to swear oaths or to pay tithes to the established church. It was a movement in which women played a substantial part, preaching, teaching and even acting as missionaries overseas; Quakers often ended up in prison for their intransigence.

With the passing of the Blasphemy Act in 1650 Fox and his fellow evangelists faced the prospect of gaol; he was imprisoned in Leicester in 1651, having already suffered the same fate in Derby – six months imprisonment for returning to join the army – “a lousy stinking low place without any bed among the thirty

felons, there being several friends (Quakers) in prison with hardly any room to lie down”. Swannington near Coalville was to become a major Quaker centre, with visiting preachers from Bristol and London. It was at Swannington that Fox encountered local Ranters (of whom more later) who “whistled, danced and sang” but according to Fox were subdued by his words, several turning to Quakerism.

During the 1660’s there were 40 Quakers in Mountsorrel, 60 in Sileby and small groups in Wymeswold and Syston, “of the mean (i.e. lowly) sort”. Mountsorrel may well have been the lynch pin of this grouping because of its nonconformist tradition. The comment was made that “they were silent led by a woman whose name I know not”. This could have been Elizabeth Hooton, who, with her son when living in Syston, was singled out for attention by Babington. Elizabeth, a well to do farmer’s wife from Scrooby, north Nottinghamshire, mother of five children and leader of a local Baptist congregation, met George Fox and became a Quaker. When widowed, she sold up and went as a missionary to America, Jamaica and Barbados. During the 1660’s she was with her son Samuel in Syston. Babington’s treatment of the family was described as “unjust usage – five mares and their furniture taken from a cart laden with corn at harvest time”.

Babington took Samuel “from the plow”(sic)...so they kept him in prison both at seed time and harvest” (presumably for refusing to pay tithes to the church). He may have been the “Mr Horton”, who in 1667, was dragged by an officer and soldiers “and many rude people” from a Quaker meeting in Syston, put in the stocks, thrown in a wheelbarrow, thrown in the mill pond, some crying “stick a knife in him”. The name is so similar and this was clearly an individual prominent among Syston Quakers. It illustrates the indignities many Quakers had to suffer, for their faith.

Another group of which Babington must have heard was the Ranters, a disorganised but dangerous number of radicals whose founder, Abiezer Coppe, is afforded (perhaps apocryphally) the dubious distinction of taking a Ranter trait to new heights, swearing in a pulpit for an hour on end. His book “The Fiery Flying Roll” would have horrified gentry like Babington. “Thou who hast bags of money behold I the Lord come as a thief in the night, deliver thy purse or I’ll cut

thy throat”...”have all things in common or else the plague of God will rot and consume all that you have”.

His followers Jacob Bauthumley and Robert Wilkinson in Leicester made equally inflammatory statements, Wilkinson claiming he was both God and the Devil and there was no God but him. The Bible was a “pack of lyes”, there was no heaven, no hell “but here”, which must have horrified the pious burghers of Leicester and men like Matthew Babington. Their activities were an example of what dangers such sects could present to the established order. Incidentally, “Ranters Row” on Mountsorrel Lane in Rothley does

not refer to Coppe and his cronies, but to the much later Primitive Methodist chapel which still stands today as a private house.

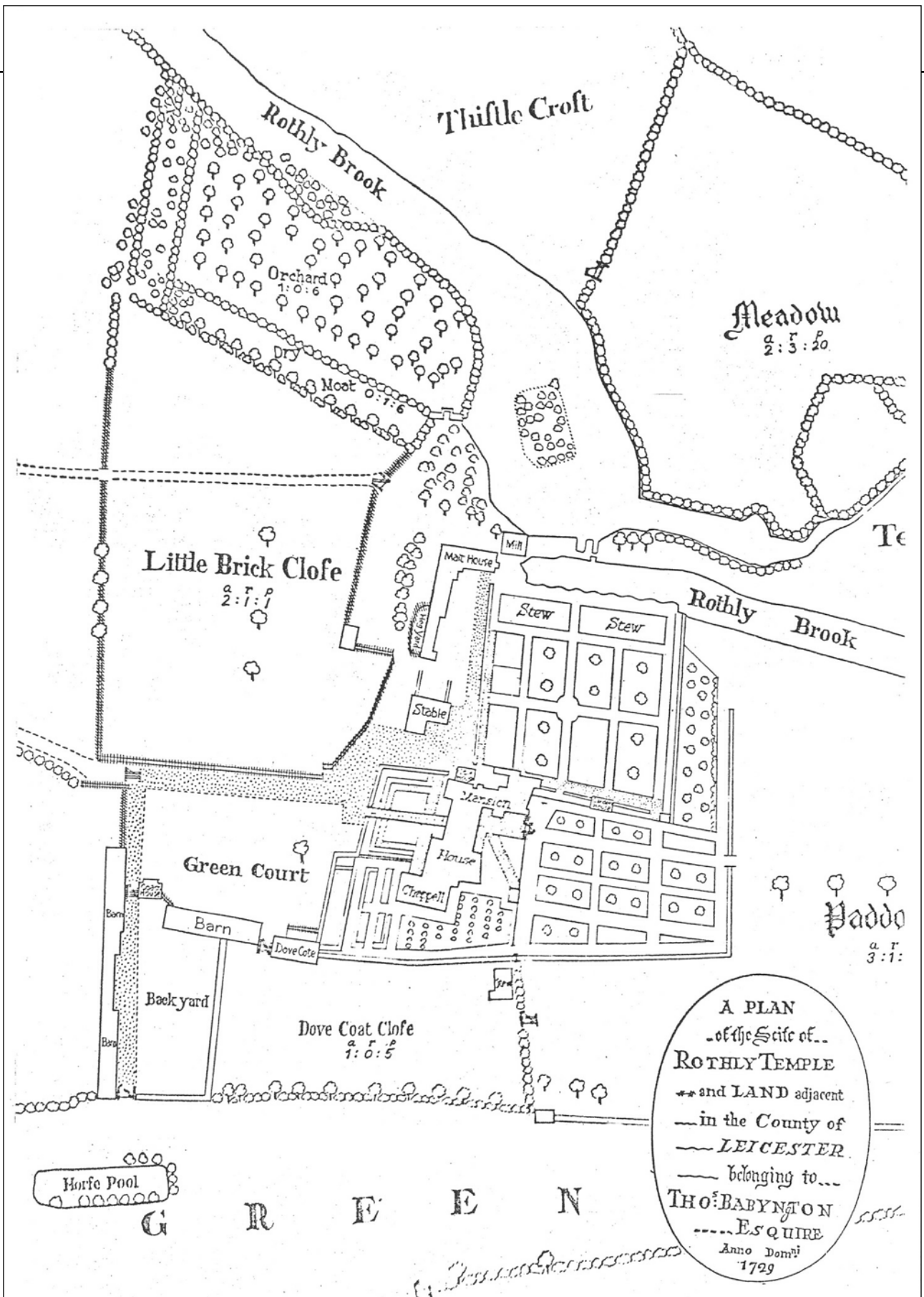
So while there was twenty years of change and turmoil in the country at large, dispossession of clergymen of all persuasions in the 1640’s and 1660’s, the rise of religious groups considered dangerous to the very fabric of ordered, hierarchical 17th century society, Rothley under the Babingtons remained relatively calm, no doubt to the relief of its inhabitants. Other parts of the county and the country in general were not so fortunate.

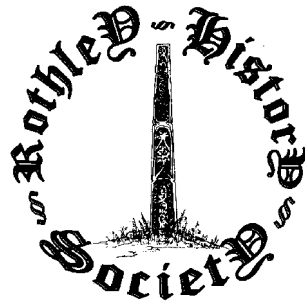


The Babington Arms above the memorial to the beloved Anne

Facing Page, Inside Cover: A reproduction of a map of 1729 showing the layout of Rothley Temple how it would have looked emerging after the 17th century.

Map arranged with south at the top





The Rothley History Society was formed in 1999 to provide a focal point for those sharing a general interest in history as well as those with a specific interest in the long and varied history of the village.

The Rothley Chronicles Series are designed to allow short-run publication of brief well-researched topics based on Rothley, and of Rothley material transcribed from local and other archives.

Number Six in the Chronicles Series of Short Works published by the Rothley History Society

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