

Village Echoes

Irish Lay Subsidy

Irish politics has been very much in the news of late because of the Prime Minister's problems over the 'Irish Backstop'. That reminded the Local History Society of the small part that Goudhurst once played in Ireland's history.

The English had established "plantations" through large areas of Ireland by the confiscation of lands, which were then granted to "planters" from England. This process accelerated under James I, when the Plantation of Ulster took place. The early plantations in the 16th century tended to be based on small colonies. The later plantations were based on mass confiscations of land from Irish landowners and the subsequent importation of numerous settlers and labourers from England and Wales and, later, Scotland.

In 1641 rebellion broke out in Ireland. Many of the "planters" were dispossessed by the Irish rebels and fled to Dublin and elsewhere for safety. These survivors of the rebellion caused both a logistical and economic problem for the English Council in Dublin, which then harassed Westminster for funds. MPs debated how best to raise money for the beleaguered Irish protestants. The result was the Act *"for a speedie contribution and loan towards the releife of His Majesty's Subjects of the Kingdom of Ireland"*. The task of collecting contributions was given to parish churchwardens and overseers. The intention was to print and publish the names of those who contributed, although this never occurred.

We are fortunate in having a list of the inhabitants of Goudhurst who contributed towards the appeal for funds and some of the names will be familiar to readers. The largest contribution, of £5, was made by Edward Bright, who is described as a "Clerk". This was a very large sum of money for those times but is perhaps not surprising when we learn that he had very

strong protestant views. He had been appointed vicar of Goudhurst in 1639 but replaced in 1640 by James Wilcock. He then became vicar again in 1646 until Wilcock reclaimed the living at the restoration. Following the Act of Uniformity 1662, Edward was one of more than 2,000 clergy ejected from the Church of England for refusing to conform to the Book of Common Prayer. We are told that he had the *“character of a very good man and was endowed with a great deal of patience, which he indeed much needed, having the affliction of a very forward and clamorous wife. On this account many thought it a happiness to him to be dull of hearing.”*!

Other notable donors were Henry and William Campion, each giving £3; Edward Bathurst £2; John Horsmonden 30/-; William Culpeper £1; James Wilcock (Edward Bright’s successor) £1; Stephen Stringer 10/-; and Robert Fuller (he of the ‘Pirate’s Grave’) 5/-. The smallest donations were of 2d each, which were made by some 14 parishioners. In total Goudhurst contributed £50.2s.10d. Although Parliament had hoped that the Act would raise £400,000, the actual amount collected was estimated to have been about £45,000.

Of course, the above did not solve any problems in Ireland. The final Government-planned plantations were established under the English Commonwealth, and Cromwell's Protectorate, during the 1650s, when thousands of Parliamentary soldiers were settled in Ireland. The consequences remain with us today.