

# THE REVEREND JAMES POINTER

**Rector of Blakeney (1584-1621) and Wiveton (1591-1621)**

*By Jean George*

*The sixteenth century was a time of great religious change. Henry VIII defied the authority of the Pope and persuaded Parliament to declare him Supreme Head of the Church in England. In the reign of Mary Tudor there were bloody attempts to return to the Church of Rome, but Queen Elizabeth re-affirmed the Anglican Church and established a compromise with Catholics, though quarrelling and dissent continued in many parts of the country. In this part of Norfolk, far away from London, most people were not greatly bothered by these changes. The passing years brought the cycle of seedtime and harvest – sometimes good, sometimes bad – and the toil of fishing, farming and trading continued. Life went on: no doubt some people objected to the new forms of service, but others accepted them or did not much care either way. It was towards the end of this turbulent century, in 1584, that James Pointer became Rector of Blakeney under the patronage of James Calthorpe.*

## **His House**

Pointer lived in the Old Rectory, or Blakeney Parsonage as it was then known, and from the inventory of his goods,<sup>1</sup> made on 19 April 1621, we can form some impression of the furnishing of his house and his style of living. By then the Parsonage was quite old and not necessarily the largest house in the village. It had a parlour, a buttery where beer was brewed, a chamber for outside equipment, three bedrooms and at least one other room.

The parlour was well furnished. It had a long ‘framed’ table, an improvement on the trestle table of earlier years, covered with a carpet – only later were carpets used to cover the floor. There were six joined stools, a settle, a short form, seven chairs and eight ‘owld cushens’. One cupboard with a press for keeping clothes was a fine piece of furniture, valued at thirty shillings.<sup>2</sup> The inventory records fire irons, a toasting iron, a glass box, a birdcage (no mention of contents!) and a pair of snuffers, as well as other cupboards. The most valuable group of items were a gilt tankard, a cup, trencher and salt, and six silver spoons, weight 42 ounces, together valued at £10.15s. The walls were hung with no less than 16 pictures and two ‘skutchins’ (coats of arms), and there was also a ‘great mappé’. One cannot but wonder if any of these still exist. And what did the great map show? Could it have been the map of Blakeney haven and adjacent villages prepared in 1586? The parlour also contained glasses and a bottle and, as the very last item, ‘lombardy’ – a term which seems to mean other stuff not worth describing (ie lumber). There is enough detail here, though, to enable us to picture this panelled, candle-lit room with dark wooden furniture throwing shadows in the firelight.

The hall contained another framed table, with six joined stools and a clothes cupboard. More interesting items were ‘a musket full furnished’ ready for use and valued at £1.6s.8d, two halberds and a ‘powle axe’, and the back of a corselet – a reminder that the men of the parish were supposed to be ready for military action if and when needed. One other interesting item in the hall was a saffron kiln, probably made of wood and plaster, which would have been

used for drying saffron, a valuable crop grown as a spice and for medicinal purposes. The kiln would have been used in autumn when the crop was harvested.

The buttery, next to the parlour, was a very important part of the house: it was used almost entirely for making beer. Tea had not yet reached this country and beer was the standard drink for the general population. The buttery contained seven hogsheads, large wooden casks with a capacity of 50 gallons each. At the time of the inventory three were full and four were empty. Other pieces of equipment included a barrel, three hanging shelves, a keeler (wooden tub), a flaskett, small stools, a handbasket, two bottles and a stone jug. Next to the buttery another chamber held handrakes, two pitchforks, a side saddle, a 'pylyone', a tub, baskets, vinegar keg, cheesevats, earthenware pots, eight saffron dishes and one 'spanishe staff'.

Probably the most prized possession in the whole house was the bed in the main bedroom: a fine four-poster, with a canopy or 'tester of wainskott', probably oak, and with a fine cloth 'vallens' and curtains. It was fitted with a featherbed, a bolster, two pillows, a green rug and an old tapestry coverlet, total value £5. A small leaf table, six joined stools and a clothes cupboard completed the furnishing of this room. A pair of andirons suggests that a fire was lit in cold weather. Two other bedrooms were more simply furnished.

Unfortunately, the last part of the inventory is not legible, which may account for the lack of any reference to a kitchen or kitchen utensils. The total value is also unknown, although the items which can be read total just over £42, of which his 'apparrell', not itemised, accounted for £20.

## His Living

Though some Elizabethan livings were very poor, this did not apply to Blakeney and Wiveton combined. There do not seem to be any accounts dating from Pointer's time but a later incumbent clearly had access to some and made some notes<sup>3</sup> relating to the year 1614. First, he set down the sum total of Mr Pointer's corn:

|           |                       |           |        |           |
|-----------|-----------------------|-----------|--------|-----------|
| Wheat     | 14 coomb <sup>4</sup> | 3 bushels | 1 peck | £10. 0. 0 |
| Rye       | 49                    | 3         |        | £24. 0. 0 |
| 'Myllyng' | 3                     | ½         |        | 1.18.0    |
| Peas      | 17                    | 1         | ½      | 7. 0. 6   |
| Oats      | 25                    | 1         |        | 6.12.0    |
| Buck      | 4                     | 3         |        | 1. 4. 0   |
| Barley    | 304                   |           |        | 145. 0. 0 |

'So this accompt is for both his livings' £195.14.6

The note then runs as follows:

Thus I reckon but at the bottom of ye accompt Mr Poynter setts downe ye suma totalis for all his corn 199.0.0.

This yere the prices of corne were but ordinary. All that sume was for his corne only, none of his other profits were reckoned.

Query whether he lets his glebe or not this yere. The next yere I find he let much of his glebe at Wiveton and he took 7.0.0. for it.

Though the note refers to 'profits' it is more likely that the sums set against the crop totals represent the income received. The costs of producing that quantity of corn would have been of the order of £50. The note does not refer to the income from tithes – nor to any saffron crop – so it can be guessed that Mr Pointer's total 'profit' would have approached £200 for the year. In 1614 a country parson could have lived very comfortably on that.

## **His Church**

In contrast to the comfortable parsonage house and the profitable living, the church buildings of Blakeney and Wiveton seem to have been in very bad repair. Reports from the Archdeacon's Visitations from 1597 onwards<sup>5</sup> tell of such faults as 'the pavement is much broken' ... 'the walls are in decaie' ... 'east window is much broken' ... 'the chancel needs paving' and, of Wiveton, 'the bell is riven'. No-one seems to have been enthusiastic in effecting any repairs. The same faults are reported time and time again, and as late as 1677 the leads and roof of Wiveton church were still decayed.

Inside the churches many things were 'wanting': 'a table of tenne commandementes' ... 'a comlie cloth for the communion table' ... 'a comely surplesse' and so on. It was also alleged that graves were left uncovered.

The Visitations also found fault with the conduct of the clergy and churchwardens. The latter were charged with not collecting fines from those who missed church on Sundays or with not walking the parish boundaries. Of James Pointer it was said in 1597 that 'he doth not were the surples in reading devine service'.<sup>6</sup> He was one of only 18 clergymen in Norfolk who did not wear a surplice, although there were others who wore one only occasionally. This is usually taken to be an indication that the incumbent was trying to promote a stricter form of Protestantism in place of the established church, but can this be said of James Pointer? The Visitation records that the charge was dismissed on acknowledgement of fault.

An important requirement introduced in 1538 was that registers should be kept in every church to record baptisms, marriages and burials. The Blakeney registers are very largely complete from this date and one<sup>7</sup> bears a comment in the hand of James Pointer. "The 24 March 1602 and in her 45th yere departed Queen Elizabeth and the same day succeeded King James whome God preserve long to reign over us". Queen Elizabeth, of course, died in 1603, but the entry is correct because at that time the new year was not considered to start until 25th March.

## **His Life**

It is, perhaps, unfortunate for James Pointer that Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey left a considerable volume of records relating to his role as Justice of the Peace. On 23rd April 1605 Ellen Reeve of Wiveton gave evidence before him:

She sayth that her daughter Elizabeth Reve, who lyveth in house with her, upon her being discovered to be with child, was examined by women of the towne of Wiveton, who was the father therof. And at the firste she did name one Sander Dove, a comber, and since upon another examination by the examinant and mother Thurlowe, she hath confessed that Mr Poynter the minister of Wiveton and Blakeney, is the father of her child.<sup>8</sup>

On the same day Elizabeth Reeve gave evidence:

She sayth that she is with childe by Mr Poynter, ye minister of Blakeney, but that she was firste defiled by him at Blakeney Parsonage before Mr Berrye, Curate, came thither to dwell, and she gesseth the tyme to be somewhat before hallowmass laste. And sayth all so that he hath defyled her sondry times since, and she reckoneth vi or vii tymes. And sayth that he gave her money at severall tymes. She also confesseth that the said Mr Poynter when he knew her with childe, did advise her to lye with some other man, and named Sander Dove, and accordingly she sayth the said Sander Dove did once lye with her in her mothers house and another time in the fielde. She further sayth the said Mr Poynter did bid her saie that the said Sander Dove was the father of her childe. She sayth that the places wher Mr Poynter did meete with her when he defyled her was some tymes at Blakeney parsonage, and some-tymes at Wiveton parsonage.

It has to be remembered that this was an examination before a magistrate, not a trial. No evidence was offered on behalf of the Revd James Pointer or Sander Dove. No-one was found guilty, but the inference seems to be clear. A few days later Nathaniel Bacon wrote to Lord Rich in the household of the Earl of Northumberland:

It maie please your honour to understande that one James Poynter, parson of Blakeney, Wiveton and Glamford thre several chardges, and Chaplin to the Erle of Northumberlande, being a man notoriously defamed for his vitious life continually led since he came into the chardge of the ministry, and now lately accused by a pore womans daughter of Wiveton to have gotten her with childe...

Nathaniel asks for Pointer's dismissal. At the same time, he wrote an even stronger letter to the Bishop of Norwich. In it he repeats Elizabeth Reeve's accusation against Pointer and goes on to say that:

... Poynter hath dwelt longe in this kinde of sinne, though he hath a wife of his owne, from whome he lyveth and yet is no woman of evill reporte ... in the late Bishops tyme [and in Scamlers tyme] he hath bene convicted for this kynd of Crime, and once was allso arraigned for a rape. Ther was one Alice Whitbie, a younge woman of Blakeney, for whome he was sondry tymes in question, and she had severall children,... and he suspected to be the father of them, and this woman is not longe since married and now he is fallne to this other...

Nathaniel asks for Mr Pointer to be dismissed. The Reverend Pointer, however, was not dismissed.

Elizabeth Reeve was then almost 29 and several efforts were made to find her a husband. She accused 15 year old Alexander Moye, but his employer. Henry Drury of Baconsthorpe, believed him to be 'not faultie'. William the cripple, who lived on the alms of the town, offered to marry Elizabeth, and to receive a cow and seven pence. William Sayers, who worked at Leeche's malthouse in Wiveton, was asked to marry her in exchange for summer meat, winter meat, two cows and a piece of money, and his dwelling so long as he lived. He

said he would not marry her without the consent of the town but he spoke to Elizabeth and was accepted. Nevertheless, nothing came of these various offers, for on the 8th September 1605 was baptised Margaret Reve, base born.<sup>9</sup>

The Revd James Pointer remained at Blakeney until his death in April 1621. By local standards he must have seemed an erudite man, even though no books are mentioned in his inventory. He was the first boy from Wymondham School to go to Corpus Christi College in Cambridge, where he graduated in 1575. Eight years later he gained an MA degree, and in 1590 became a Bachelor of Divinity.<sup>10</sup> He was about 70 when he died.

Perhaps it was his good fortune to live at a time when his 'tabloid' life style could not be spread abroad so easily as it would have been today.

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## Notes

- 1 Norfolk Record Office (NRO), Inventory 31/23 (BAHS document E.16).
- 2 If a reminder is needed: the pre-decimal system was 12 pence to 1 shilling, 20 shillings to 1 pound.
- 3 NRO, Blakeney Parish Deposit, PD/619/38.
- 4 Another reminder: in dry measure there are 4 pecks to 1 bushel, 4 bushels to 1 coomb.
- 5 Visitation records are available in the NRO.
- 6 Bishop Redman's Visitation 1597, *Norfolk Record Society*, Vol XVIII, 1946,p55.
- 7 NRO, PD/619/1.
- 8 *The Official Papers of Sir Nathaniel Bacon*, Camden Papers, 3rd series, Vol XXVI, 1915, pp 18-21.
- 9 NRO, PD/619/1.
- 10 John Venn & J.A.Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, 1924.