

CAERWENT HISTORIC TRUST

Acting Secretary

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“WOE UNTO ME IF I PREACH NOT THE GOSPEL” Part I

So proclaims the pulpit in Caerwent parish church, as it has done since it was first constructed there in 1632. The pulpit text is a result of the political and religious turmoil of the early seventeenth century that would subsequently see the foundation of the first nonconformist chapel in Wales at nearby Llanvaches, and split the nation during the English Civil War.

According to Bishop Godwin of Llandaff the state of the Church at the beginning of the seventeenth century was appalling:

Monmouthshire had 177 parishes and 15 chapels, but only 50 clergymen. The church was weak and impoverished. Sermons were rarely preached. The church buildings and the cathedral were in a severe state of disrepair. There were unlicensed ministers. Clandestine and unlawful marriages were “daily made”. Incumbents [clergy] “daily imbeziled church lands”. Charles Lewis, vicar of Llanllywel, was reported to have been put in the stocks in Chepstow, guilty of drunkenness.

The clergy were widely hated by their parishioners and the established church lacked the dynamic qualities that many at that time thought Puritanism and Roman Catholicism possessed. Bishop Godwin reported that outrages were daily committed against the preachers in the form of “verbal abuse and the laying of violent hands upon them”.

Not surprisingly, Monmouthshire had the highest recorded level of Roman Catholics in the country except for Chester, and the first organised dissenting non-conformist church in Wales met for the first time at Llanvaches in November 1639. Its founding minister, William Wroth had once been the rector of Llanvaches parish church. We will continue with his story in the next issue.



WROTH'S CHAPEL, LLANVACHES.

from the Secretary:

It looks like I shall be in-and-out of hospital for the next few months so Jennifer has kindly taken over my role for routine communications. Also I can't offer to lead walks etc. A couple of members are prepared to lead some walks but would like a supporter to guarantee to accompany them. My indisposition also highlights our shortfall in Trustees – we could do with at least two more.

If you could help with either the walks or by temporarily joining the Trustees, please contact Jennifer as above.

Thanks John Nettleship 01291 420745 john@rose-cottage.freemove.co.uk June 2007