

Priest Leverton

Much of the detail of this note is taken from 'The History of Cornwall' Hitchens & Drew (1824) Vol 1 pp 680 - 683

There have been many Rectors as Parish Priest at St Tudy Church, including a number before 1264, but they were not legally instituted then. There is a list in the church - the longest serving incumbent was Matthew Broke (1534-91), a remarkable 57 years throughout the unparalleled changes in our ecclesiastical history during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth I. The most unusually named Rector has to be Obadiah Ghossip, extruded from office in 1650 during the Commonwealth. His successor was Nicholas Leverton, described as "*so profligate while studying at Oxford that his contemporaries could not bear the cost of his prodigality*". Leverton left Oxford, and after a brief sojourn as a schoolmaster in Padstow, embarked for the West Indies spending time in Barbados, Tobago and Bermuda and experiencing many adventures¹ before becoming Rector of St Tudy in 1650 where, it is reported he assaulted a John Maby (Quaker) for '*asking of Priest Liverton (sic) parson of St Tudy how one might knowe ye true phrophettys from ye false*'².

In the life of Nicholas Leverton BA who was ejected from St Tudy there are remarkable incidents which will justify their insertion although they have only a remote connection with his ministerial character. He was educated at Oxford and while at that seminary was so very profligate that his friends, although in decent circumstances, were unable to bear the expense of his prodigality. He was therefore removed at an earlier period than was intended; on his return he established a small school at Padstow. Being of a restless disposition he embarked for Barbadoes (sic) shortly after his ordination; in which place he received with more respect than his conduct deserved. The profligacy of manners however, that prevailed among the inhabitants, so far exceeded his own that he grew disgusted with their morals and embarked as chaplain to a ship's crew that were designing to begin a plantation in the island of Tobago. On reaching the island part of the crew went on shore to make observations and discovering no Indians erected a booth as he commencement of their settlement. The captain resolving to walk round the island divided the company into two parties, directing them to take contrary ways so that walking on the margin of the sea they might meet on the opposite extremity of the island. The captain at the head of one party took one direction while the other, in which was Mr Leverton, took the opposite. The latter, after proceeding some distance and meeting with unexpected difficulties returned to their booth but the captain and his companions were never heard of more.

The surviving party, on returning to their booth were destined to encounter new calamities. They found that through carelessness their long boat had been driven on a rock and wrecked. In addition to this, through an excess of rain their powder had been so damaged as to be rendered useless. And to complete their misfortune very early next morning they were attacked by a party of Indians, when they were unable to make any effectual resistance, who killed the greater number and wounded the survivors. Mr Leverton was severely wounded in the head; in this condition he betook himself to flight and with his companions in adversity found shelter in the woods. But, having lost one of his shoes and being unable to keep pace with his associates he was left behind to provide for his own safety. On a narrow bay he stripped off his clothes in order to swim to the opposite side in the hopes of obtaining a sight of the ship but no vessels was to be discovered.

¹ 'The History of Cornwall' Hitchens & Drew Vol 2 pp 651-652 (1824)

² A Record of the Suffering of the Quakers in Cornwall', ed. Norman Penney (1928)

In this melancholy condition, hungry, solitary and naked he laid himself down on the grass as night approached expecting immediate death. His fatigue and the coldness of the air prevented him from sleeping and the night was spent in sorrowful reflections on his past life and in surveying the motives which had induced him to undertake this disastrous voyage. This survey of his motives was occasioned by the constant recurrence to his mind of the following Scripture passage "What doest thou here Elijah?" After having endured the coldness of the night, the heart of the following day became so intolerable that he fainted away but he was revived by one of his comrades who just then joined him and they began their feeble march towards the shore in quest of the ship, in which journey they were joined by another. Being unable to make the discovery they desired as night approached they perceived a smoke and, on approaching, found it to be the remains of a fire the Indians had lighted before they burned their booth. By this they continued all night and to its genial warmth they attributed the preservation of their lives. On the following day they fell in with another of their companions but he was severely wounded in the knee and was unable to bear them company, in consequence of which he was abandoned to his fate. At length after many painful efforts they discovered the ship, towards which they hastened with the utmost joy. Mr Leverton and another swam to the vessel but the third, being unable to swim remained in the water with nothing but his head above the surface for fear of the Indians, until he was delivered by his companions on board. Signal guns were now immediately fired by which means six or eight more were recovered but the adventure terminated with the loss of about one half their company.

Being compelled to abandon their enterprise they directed their course to one of the Bahamas which they reached in safety and experienced a hearty welcome from many of their countrymen who had found asylum from the troubles that had agitated England. Mr Leverton, on landing at New Providence found a pious non-conformist minister whose name was Sherwood. Hitherto Mr Leverton had connected himself with no party, neither was he acquainted with the principles of either. But finding many of the inhabitants desirous of establishing the ceremonies of the English Church and being solicited to become their minister he resolved, previous to undertaking so important a charge to know the grounds on which he acted. With this view he conversed with Mr Sherwood with much freedom on the subject. He was proselyted by his arguments and induced to become non-conformist.

The Governor of Barbadoes being about to leave the island nominated as his successor man to whom the inhabitants were not attached. These therefore, pleading their charter which permits them to choose their own Governor, they appointed Captain Lane to that high station. But his rival by arming his partizans (sic) to secure his authority seized Lane, Sherwood and Leverton and sent them prisoners to England with an information directed to Archbishop Laud that they were disaffected to the liturgy of the Church. Arriving in England, they found the face of affairs considerably changed. Laud had lost his power and was in custody if the Black Rod; so that instead of being punished they were respectfully received by the patentees or proprietors of the island and encouraged to return. Sherwood being rather timid, declined: but Lane and Leverton being plentifully furnished for their voyage returned with new commissions.

On reaching Barbadoes they found that during their absence the Spaniards had made themselves masters of the island. An engagement between the parties immediately ensued in which many Spaniards were killed and the English made good their landing. But the commotions which prevailed prevented tranquil re-establishment. Mr Leverton therefore continued to traverse these seas about two years, during which time he was exposed to various hardships, to famine, storms and shipwreck. At length being wearied with his sufferings he resolved to return to England. But on this voyage being detained by calms and contrary winds all on board were reduced to the utmost distress for want of provisions, their daily allowance being but eight spoonfuls of pease and a half pint of water for some time. Mr Leverton was now a serious man, his past afflictions having had

the happy tendency to drive him to God. Every morning and every evening he therefore called the ship's company together to join him in solemn prayer to the Almighty for their deliverance. They were at length taken up by an English merchant ship and landed at Bermuda. In this place he continued to preach with great acceptance about a year when a fit of sickness rendered it necessary for him to return to England for the recovery of his health.

Mr Leverton intended to repair to London. As he was taking his horse from the stable to begin the journey the hostler observed "Sir, you are somewhat like our minister, I believe you have lived in hot countries as well as he". On making further enquiries he found that the minister was no other than his old friend Mr Sherwood, with whom he had been intimate in Barbadoes. Their mutual joy at this unexpected meeting may be easily conceived. Arriving at London he was received with much honour and respect by the lords proprietors of the island of Providence and after some time was settled as a minister in Suffolk. After some years in Suffolk Mr Anthony Nicols, one of the eleven excluded members, who had formerly known him at university took him into Cornwall and settled him in St Tudy, the parish which Mr Nicols' home stood. In this place he continued about nine or ten years, until he was ejected, and was singularly useful in awakening the careless from a state of false security. In addition to the duties of the Lord's Day he established a lecture on Thursday in which some of his neighbouring brethren assisted. This was well attended by the gentry and others, by whom he was held in high esteem.

Upon the Restoration. Mr Leverton was not only ejected but was exposed to additional trouble. About two years before his appointment, the former incumbent (Mr Obadiah Ghossip) had been sequestered but before the change took place he was dead. As the patronage belonged to Lord Mohun he was solicited to let Mr Leverton remain as his successor but this application was made in vain. His Lordship presented his own chaplain with the living, who on pretence of dilapidations would have seized his goods had he not been prevented by the kindness of the people who befriended him in his distress. To complete this severity Lord Mohun prosecuted him for the main profits of the living ever since he had held it in his possession, nor would he accept any compromise. In consequence of these hardships he was obliged to withdraw and after some time found asylum in a foreign land. As Lord Willoughby was appointed governor of Surinam, a minister with whom Mr Leverton had been acquainted in Bermuda sent him an offer of going thither as a minister, which offer he accepted. He had not been in this island more than few weeks before he was suddenly launched from time into eternity.

Though profligate in early life, his piety was not doubted as he advanced in years. The calamities of eventful life he considered as an instrument by which he was led to know himself and God. He was a man of warm passions and these sometimes precipitated him into acts of indiscretion but they were only momentary. His reason quickly resumed its wonted dominion and all became clear and tranquil. His pen has added nothing to the general stock of literature as he never published any thing nor left any manuscripts for publication behind him.