

The will of the former friar John Bukkill 1555

Monks received pensions of £5 or £6 a year following the closure of their monasteries, payable by those who were the new owners, but friars were allowed nothing. Thus they must have sought livings in parish churches immediately they were homeless. Friar John Buckle was in this situation, and we know that when he died in 1555 he was Rector of Chillesford. He made his will during Queen Mary's reign, which began in 1553, when Catholicism was restored, although the monastic tradition was not revived. The queen reigned for only six years, before Elizabeth altered the religious landscape again, but John probably died believing the 'old religion' was back for good.

He asked to be buried in Orford Church, and left £4 for its repair '*for the discharge of my father's will*'. This is revealing to those who may believe that bequests were met faithfully and promptly by executors. Clearly Robert Buckle had been remiss in carrying out his brother's last wishes, only one pound of the five bequeathed having been paid 21 years later.

The ex-friar left money for repairs to Chillesford Church, his parsonage there, the Spittall (Hospital) house in Orford, the repair of Mill Lane between Chillesford and Butley, and to a large number of people, many of them named³. Most of the amounts were a pound or less, and the total was around £30. The poor of Orford, Chillesford, Butley and Capel benefited, and such bequests usually meant that the deceased had some connection with the parishes listed. In John Buckle's case he left Robert Pawling of Orford, '*my wages that is owing me for serving of the parish aforesaid*'. Perhaps he felt that Pawling, of all people, would be able to chase up the debt and secure its payment. Thus he served Orford Church, as well as Chillesford, and he may have fulfilled the same function at Butley. The people of Capel were probably attending Butley Church by this time, with Capel Church demolished or left to fall down. Butley Priory, its lands and the patronage of the church now belonged to William Forth, a staunch Protestant who may have declined to appoint a Catholic priest to the benefice.

The end of an era

David Elisha Davy, when he visited Orford Church in the early 19th century, noted at least seven Buckle brasses, '*sometimes a buckle in brass on the stone*'. It is unclear how he identified so many unless more buckles survived at that time, or he had access to the probate copies of the wills.

The earliest reference to the Buckles in Orford is to be found in a document in The National Archives dated 1402 when a William Bokell was among a group of Orford men who granted some land for religious purposes. The earliest locally proved Buckle will is dated 1405 (still earlier ones that were proved at Canterbury or Norwich have not been consulted). Three additional wills speak of burial in the church. Thomas and his widow, Joan, each left 6s 8d for '*breaking the ground*' for burial in the church itself, and after the Reformation, Richard also asked for burial in the church, leaving the same amount of money for disturbing the paving. Thus from those that have been studied we know the names of seven of the Buckles buried in Orford Church.

Vic Harrup

Glossary:

Stallboat – fishing boat, anchored in a tidal river, with its net suspended beneath.

Havyn cocke – used for heaving oysters from the river bed.

Splyng bote – sparling boat which used nets in deep water.

Salt – made by evaporation in saltpans on the marshes.

Thacke tiles – roofing tiles.

Syr – honorary title (Sir) given to non-graduate priests.

Mark – the value of 13s 4d (not a coin).

Chantry – foundation to fund a priest who would pray (or sing, as the name implies) for the souls of the founder, his family and friends and others who would pay him to do so. The chantry priest might (as he did at Orford) perform his duties in a chantry chapel within a parish church.