

This is the twenty-fifth of an occasional series of articles by David Stone about incidents in the history of Swanton Morley and its church

THE PRINTING OF THE LINCOLN BIBLE

I noted in my last article that the Lincoln Bible is an edition of the King James Bible (KJB) that was printed by John Hayes, Printer to the University of Cambridge in 1674. I thought that you might like to know a little more about the background to the production of this Bible and also to see how this fits in chronologically with the village's other figure of historical note, Henry Ainsworth and his Book of Psalms.

The evolution of Bibles in English leading to the Great Bible

When Henry VIII came to the throne in 1509, the Bible that was in use was the same Latin language Vulgate Bible that had been in use for over a thousand years, and it was widely acknowledged by those who had access to the original Greek and Hebrew texts that it had become significantly corrupted over the years. John Wycliffe had published an English translation of much of the Bible in manuscript form back in the 1380s, but it was not in widespread use. Printed Bibles in English had started to appear in the middle of Henry's reign: copies of Tyndale's New Testament began to arrive in England as early as 1526, Coverdale's Bible was published in 1535 and the 'Matthew' Bible in 1537. However, Henry was not really comfortable with the idea of Bibles in English. He deplored the Tyndale's Bible because of its copious annotations, which he referred to as "pestilent glosses", and he only just about tolerated the other two. It was Thomas Cranmer who was the driving force behind the production of the 'Great Bible' (also prepared by Coverdale). Starting in 1539, Cromwell directed the Clergy to place a copy of this in every church, and in such a place that all the parishioners could read it. But from about 1541, access by laymen to the Bible was increasingly curtailed by Henry.

Cranmer's ideas were adopted again during the brief reign of Edward VI (1547-1553) and the Great Bible came back into general use. Also, as part of a move to make the Bible accessible to all, the Psalms were set to music and the singing of Psalms by congregations was encouraged. The most widely used metrical Psalter was one by Sternhold and Hopkins which appeared in 1549. However, this was a re-working of the existing prose Psalter by men who knew no Hebrew; their main interest was to set the Psalms to music.

The Geneva Bible and the Bishops' Bible

Then, as soon as Mary came to the throne in 1553, the Great Bible was suppressed and many English scholars were driven abroad. They found refuge in Frankfurt and Geneva and the outcome of this was a new version of the Bible in English, the Geneva Bible. However, this was not published until 1560, by which time Elizabeth had come to the throne. This Bible was very fully annotated and was ideal for private study.

So, before long, there were two Bibles in common use in England, the Great Bible and the Geneva Bible, both of which were tolerated by Elizabeth. However, this presented the Church of England authorities with a problem. They were very well aware of the deficiencies of the Great Bible, which had been translated from the Latin Vulgate, rather than from the original Hebrew or Greek, but they also found the Calvinistic nature of the marginal notes in the Geneva Bible to be unacceptable. Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury, therefore ordered yet another translation, the Bishops' Bible, but the quality of this was somewhat variable. It was first published in 1568 and substantially revised in 1572. Thus this Bible was born at much the same time as Henry Ainsworth, who was baptised in Swanton Morley in 1570.

After he left Caius College, Cambridge, Ainsworth felt increasingly uncomfortable with the Church of England and he developed strong Reformist views. The upshot was that he went to Amsterdam in about 1595 and joined the small Reformist community there.

The King James Bible (KJB)

Shortly after James I came to the throne in 1603 he met representatives of the various religious factions for a conference at Hampton Court. Ainsworth did, in fact, return briefly to England with a small Reformist delegation hoping to present their views but he did not succeed in meeting the king. In the event, about the only thing that did emerge from the conference was an agreement to commission a new translation of the Bible. However, the Reformers wanted to replace the Bishops' Bible by a better translation, while James I wanted to reduce the influence of the Geneva Bible with its very Protestant marginal notes. The eventual result was the King James Bible, which was first published by the King's Printer, Robert Barker, in 1611. This was initially free of all marginal notes.

Henry Ainsworth's Book of Psalms

To make sure that we understand the chronological order of events, it should be noted that, at almost the same time as the first edition of the KJB was published in London (1611), Henry Ainsworth first published in Amsterdam (in 1612) his *Book of Psalmes, Englished both in Prose and Metre*. This was a much more scholarly publication than the Sternhold-Hopkins Psalter, but it was strongly annotated in a way that reflected Ainsworth's Reformist views and it was not found to be acceptable in England. It was, however, very much in tune with the views of the Pilgrim Fathers and the Plymouth Colony that they founded. Thus, whilst in England the Church used the KJB and the Sternold & Hopkins Psalter, the Pilgrim Fathers took with them to America copies of the Geneva Bible and of Ainsworth's Psalter.

Printing of Bibles by Cambridge University

In 1543 Henry VIII granted to the University both the right to appoint "Three Stationers and Printers or Sellers of Books", and the right to print "All manner of books approved by the Chancellor". This right included Bibles, but the right was not taken up until 1591 when a copy of the Geneva Bible was printed there. There then followed many complex and bitter disputes between the University, the Stationers' Company in London and the King's Printers. Excellent editions of the KJB were published in 1629 and 1638 which corrected many of the errors made by the King's Printers, but then came the Civil War (1642-51) which threw the printing trade into confusion.

The predecessor to John Hayes as Printer to the University was John Field who was appointed in October 1655, but he became notorious for the number of errors that his Bibles contained. However, he did go some way towards restoring his reputation with the production of a large Lectern Bible in 1659. It was a magnificent edition, although still not completely error free.

Hayes was appointed Printer in 1669, but he was in a very weak position. He had lost his press and other assets in the Great Fire of London, and he was effectively totally under the control of a wealthy, powerful and scheming London stationer called George Sawbridge. He did produce some small (quarto and octavo) Bibles in the early 1670s and his major contribution to these seems to have been in the addition of marginal notes and references. However, it was in 1674 that he published his large Lectern Bible (a copy of which was bought by Henry Lincoln) and this incorporated still more marginal notes. Unfortunately, however splendid this Bible may appear to us, it would seem that it suffers in comparison with Field's Lectern Bible. A recent book on the history of the Cambridge University Press said that it was:

"..... a production that offered much of the ostentation but little of the splendour of Field's. It too was made the vehicle for interleaved engravings, though Jean Drapentières crude reworking of the engraved title page made it but a poor relative."

Nonetheless, quite a few copies of Hayes' Bible were printed, including one thought to have been owned by Charles II, for it bears his arms on the front and back covers.