

Jerome Harvey of Houndstreet and Compton Dando

For those who had capital to invest, the dispersal of monastic land during the later 16th century provided invaluable opportunities. Many of the monastic estates were acquired by already well-established gentry families and royal servants, but others with available wealth were also able to share in what the Cornish historian Richard Carew called ‘the golden shower of the dissolved abbey lands’. In Dorset in 1630 Thomas Gerard noted how the ambitious yeomen ‘doe now beginne to encroach upon the Gentry’, and writing of Devon in c1600 John Hooker observed the rise of such men ‘clymyng up dayley to the degrees of a gentleman.’¹ One of those who seized the chances offered was Jerome Harvey who lived at Houndstreet (now known as Hunstrete) on the border of the parishes of Marksbury and Compton Dando in north Somerset. There were numerous members of the Harvey family living in the neighbourhood during the 16th century, and several of them were engaged in the profitable cloth manufacture and other industrial activities connected with the mills at Pensford and along the river Chew. Jerome Harvey was one of those who accumulated considerable wealth through the cloth trade, and the earliest reference so far found to him concerned legal proceedings over large-scale dealings in cloth with Walter English of Totnes in 1598.² His increasing affluence enabled him to buy property on the former Glastonbury abbey estate at Houndstreet during the early 17th century and to engage in other profitable activities. In 1635, for example, he acquired a lease of the tithes of Compton Dando, said to be worth £100 per annum.³ He was also able to lend money at interest to people from various parts of the district. There is a reference in 1636 to the sum of £218 plus six year’s interest owed to him by a cousin named Lutterell. Among other transactions was a loan of £40 to Hercules Stourton of Little Langford, Wiltshire.⁴ He also continued to deal in land, and during the early 1630s sold a farm in Marksbury to Richard Court of Compton Dando.⁵ This property which is still known as Court Farm was later acquired by the Popham family who gradually built up their large estate in the neighbourhood, centred upon their mansion and park at Houndsreet. Incidentally, this farm later became one of the sites of the 19th century experiments in cheese-making by Joseph Harding and his wife, Rachel, thereby establishing the methods for the standardized production of Cheddar cheese.

The surviving evidence suggests that Jerome Harvey was an ambitious, hard-working and careful man. He was a Puritan in his religious opinions, concerned with his spiritual welfare, as well as with profit. He supported the parliamentary cause in the dispute which increasingly divided English society, and this would have endeared him to his neighbours, the strongly parliamentarian Pophams who were later to fight so valiantly against the royalists in the Civil War. Jerome Harvey seems not to have married, and he had no children of his own, but treated his nephew, Richard Harvey, as his son. Richard was the son of Jerome’s elder brother William Harvey. The family involvement in the cloth trade led to Richard Harvey entering the service of Sir William Calley, a wealthy cloth merchant, who had made a fortune dealing in Spain and in 1619 had purchased a Wiltshire estate at Burderop, near Swindon. Later, in 1635 Richard Harvey became the confidential secretary to a prominent courtier, Endymion Porter, a close relative of the Popham family.⁶ When Jerome Harvey died in 1638

Richard Harvey was the executor and principal beneficiary of his will. The beautifully-written will and other documentary evidence relating to Jerome Harvey survives among the Calley papers which are now in the Wiltshire Record Office. This is because Richard Harvey maintained his connection with Sir William Calley and lived at Burderop later in his life.⁷

The clearest evidence for Jerome Harvey's wealth and for his religious views comes from his will which was made on 19 January 1633. In it he describes himself as 'of Houndstreet in the parish of Marksbury, Gent.'. In the usual Puritan fashion, he committed his soul to God 'in full assurance of the remission of all my synnes and of a full resurrection through his mercy and the merits, bitter death, and passion of my blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ'. He wished his body to be buried 'in the Channcell in Compton Dando nere the South Wall at the higher end of the sayd Channcell'. He also wished to have 'a fayre Tombe of choice stone of a reasonable highth, close to the wall of the said Channcell'. For the purpose of making 'a comely tombe' he bestowed £20. Sadly, his tomb was swept away during the Victorian restoration of the church, although a brass plaque continues to mark the spot. Sermons formed an important part of Puritan funerals, and Jerome Harvey evidently did not trust the incumbent of Compton Dando to give a suitably stirring or theologically acceptable address. He therefore requested that William Burton from Clutton or Roger Gray from Farmborough should be asked to preach, and ordered that 20 shillings should be given for the sermon. In order to ensure a good attendance at his funeral, he left £10 'to be divided among 200 poore people that shall accompanie my body to the Church, to each of them 12 pence'. It is remarkable that he expected so many paupers to assemble at Compton Dando. Apart from minor bequests to his servants and an endowment for the poor, the bulk of his substantial estate was left to his nephew Richard Harvey. He did, however, remember his friend and neighbour, Francis Popham of Houndstreet, 'whose love I confesse I have enjoyed to my great comfort in my lifetime. And I doe give him one Spurryall which I have in my purse as a Testament of my love, desiring Almighty God to bless him and his in this world and in the world to come'.⁸ This was Francis Popham (1573-1644), who had served in the Elizabethan army and was later a member of Parliament.

For the poor of Compton Dando, Jerome Harvey made a generous provision in his will. He left the large sum of £100 which was to be used to buy land, the rents from which were to be distributed to the poor at the fower most usual Feasts of the yeare' and were to be paid out on his tomb. The details of this bequest to the poor of Compton Dando and of the land at Saltford which was purchased are inscribed on a bequest board in the church, and the charity continues to provide assistance to the needy.

References

- ¹ Richard Carew, *Survey of Cornwall*, (1769 edition), 109; Thomas Gerard, *Survey of Dorset*, (1630), 6; John Hooker, *Synopsis Chorographical of Devonshire*, (1600), extracts in *Transactions of Devonshire Association*, 47, (1915), 334-8.
- ² *Acts of the Privy Council 1598-9*, 352, 11 December 1598.
- ³ Wiltshire Archives Service (WAS), 1178/572 Lease of Compton Dando Parsonage.
- ⁴ *Calendar of State Papers (Domestic)*, 1637-8, 394, 467; 1639, 103, 252; 1639-40, 285, 341-2.
- ⁵ WAS, 1178/574 Dealings over Court Farm, Marksbury.
- ⁶ G. Huxley, *Endymion Porter*, (1959), 218-9.
- ⁷ WAS, 1178/573 Will of Jerome Harvey 1633.
- ⁸ A 'Spurryall' or Spur Royal was a gold coin decorated with a star, like the rowel of a spur. It was worth 15s Od.

J.H. BETTEY