

Foreword



ROBERT KINGSTON has written a hugely interesting and most readable biography of Benjamin Culme, Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin from 1625 to his death in 1657.

The index at the beginning of the book gives an insight into the life and career of this most interesting seventeenth century Dean. His early life in Devonshire and his career up to his ordination are described.

Culme became Dean at a time when Ireland was relatively peaceful, and Dublin prosperous. However, this situation was not to last. Events at the beginning of the 17th century were settling down in the wake of the Reformation. The relative stability that followed was soon to be shattered by the Rebellion of 1641 when the native Irish rose up in bloody conflict with the Ulster Planters who had removed them from their lands.

The 1640s in general was a troubled period. The English Civil War between the Puritan Parliamentarians and Cromwell on the one hand, and the Royalists loyal to King Charles I on the other, were at war, which led to the beheading of the King in 1649. The Monarchy was abolished, and would not be restored until 1660 when Charles II gained access to his throne.

Throughout all this period, Culme was Dean of St Patrick's. His main achievements, so brilliantly documented by Mr Kingston, were in ecclesiastical reform and improvement in clergy salaries. This was also a period of Prayer Book revision, leading eventually to the Book of Common Prayer of 1662, just after Culme's lifetime. Throughout it all, Culme was a staunch adherent to the Anglican liturgy in the face of challenges from the Puritans. His contribution in that field is incalculable. The reader can discover for him/herself, what Culme achieved in general during his long incumbency.

Mr Kingston notes that Benjamin Culme was a contemporary of Prayer Book reformers such as Bishop Bramhall of Derry, and Archbishop Ussher of Armagh, both of whom were key figures in Irish Church liturgical and

administrative reform at this time.

It is clear that Benjamin Culme stands out alongside Dr Swift as one of the great deans of St Patrick's, and Robert Kingston, in this most appealing book, rightly draws our attention to his achievements. Culme can now be known to all as a dean who is no longer overlooked.

As his successor at the beginning of a new millennium, I can be thankful for Benjamin Culme's fine example, and I commend this book to all who have the best interests of our National Cathedral at heart. Mr Kingston has provided us with a book that will close a large gap in our knowledge of the long and distinguished history of St Patrick's and its many illustrious deans.

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Introduction



BENJAMIN CULME 1581¹–1657 was Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral and Prebendary of Clondalkin in Dublin, the second city of the Tudor and Stuart Kingdoms, between 1625 and his death. He occupied a prominent and exposed position at that time of major and dangerous flux leading up to the Cromwellian take over. The years from 1649 to his death in 1657 were spent 'in exile' near his wife's family in Wiltshire.

The point has been made that the Established Churches of Ireland and of England are best understood as the fruit of the Restoration, the period after 1660. They were not as much the fruit of the Reformation, or the Elizabethan settlement, or of the religious struggles that led to the Cromwellian Commonwealth, or even perhaps the strivings of those who sought the 'Via Media' a middle way through the turmoil of the times², though all these movements contributed significantly to what emerged.

The church of which Culme was a member was effectively swept away in the Cromwellian revolution and his ministry ended in failure, yet it was a time which a later generation sought to 'restore'. Of course, that could not happen, but certain aspects of the church he was part of did re-emerge and are still attractive to some people even today. The struggle and flux of his time honed a pragmatic system of episcopal authority, church structure, interaction with the civil authority and faith expression which re-emerged during the Restoration and can offer inspiration even in these early decades of the 21st century when we see not dissimilar tensions.

He occupied a key position but very little attention seems to have been paid to him and he is totally overshadowed by more able contemporaries like James Ussher and John Bramhall with whom he was involved and who displayed conflicting and more extreme views through that period. The basic conclusion suggested here is that Culme is an example of the more subdued 'middle' ground of the church, riding the storms whipped up by

1 Some sources give his date of birth as 1584

2 Spurr, John - *The Restoration of the Church of England, 1646-89*. 1991

Calvinists and Puritans on the one side and Laudians and Catholics on the other. He is interesting because of that but also because his time left not so much a legacy as a longing for a middle way of being a church. It also pointed to the need for a 'broad' church willing to live with a wide degree of diversity.

But equally interesting is that perennial question which besets members of the Church of Ireland in considering their clergy – why was he or she never made a bishop? As Dean of St Patrick's, regarded as a high office within the Church of Ireland (though the position is to some extent outside the mainstream), many of his Chapter were elevated ahead of him. His first father-in-law was on the bench and there were plenty of vacancies during his time. It's hard to avoid the question as to why he never was appointed to any of them.

My interest grew when I was rector of Virginia in County Cavan between 1985 and 1992 when I wrote a short popular history as a fund-raiser. Local opinion, on which I based my notes, was that a man named Benjamin Culme had been the first reformed minister. This view was backed up by the Revd George Hill in his *Plantation of Ulster* published in 1877. However, in his *Biographical Succession List of Kilmore* Canon J.B. Leslie notes the presence of a reformed minister from 1609 but does not name him and R.J. Hunter³ states bluntly that the first reformed incumbent was not Culme but 'in fact' the Revd. George Creighton.

Those who took an interest in such things in Virginia Parish basked somewhat in the past glory of its first minister having been 'elevated' to be dean to St Patrick's Cathedral (while it was pointed out none of us who followed him had ever risen to any such eminence). Later having learned something about the considerable estates and wealth that Culme had accumulated; his intriguing tenure in St Patrick's; his surviving the 1641 rebellion; his courage in standing up to the Cromwellians; his remarkably competent young second wife; and the fact that no one else seems to have written much about him, I always felt I would like to return to learning more about him when I had time, particularly if he could be connected directly with Virginia. My interest was further stimulated when I discovered that the Mageough Retirement Complex of which I am now the

Chaplain was built on the 'Bloody Fields' between Ranelagh and Rathmines, the location of the main slaughter of Ormond's retreating army on the 2nd August 1649.

Another matter is that there is a view, expressed for example in the list of Oxford Alumni, quoting Cotton's *Fasti* that Culme

going afterwards into Ireland, became at length D. of D. and dean of St. Patrick's church near Dublin, where he was accounted a learned and an excellent preacher and theologian. But he being forced thence by the rebellion that broke out in 1641, went into England, lived several years in a retired condition at Mudghill near to Lydiard St. John's in Wiltshire.

In fact, it was not the Irish in the 1641 Rebellion that caused him to leave but other Englishmen, Cromwellians, who banned the use of his beloved Book of Common Prayer and forced him from his deanery. Culme was damaged by the Rebellion though curiously he does not seem to have made a deposition of his losses as other members of his family did. He found himself in a tricky involvement with the Earl of Ormond, who ended up on the Confederate side, and then with Col. Michael Jones, one of the early Parliamentary leaders. Yet, he apparently saw no reason to leave until Oliver Cromwell was on the cusp of arriving in Ireland. His contacts with relations living on in his home areas of Molland and Canonsleigh would have left him in no doubt but that contemporary English clergy were having a far rougher time during the first English Civil War period than he would have had in Dublin. Being a reformed minister in Ireland, he probably realised, was not as dangerous as being one of 'Baal's Priests' in England. The Cotton view is something of a slur on this country and on its people who generally are fair minded and generous in their dealings, if fairly treated themselves.

The period of Culme's life did not directly produce the Established Church of the following century but it did cover the period of tension and struggle in which the extremes of Reformed and Western Latin influences came to be rejected in the working out, at the least, the bones of a middle way, and a broad and inclusive middle way at that. It evolved into an 18th century church which could live, maybe not comfortably but at least better than most other Christian churches, with the early development of the modern scientific method and the technologically driven society it spawned.

3 Hunter. R.J. 'An Ulster Plantation Town – Virginia', *Breifne Historical Journal* No. 4 (1970) pp. 43-51

Culme's life in Ireland involved being a land speculating and maybe property developing 'planter'; a parish incumbent most likely as a vicar⁴ and later as Dean of a Cathedral; as well as being a family man drawn into many of the dramatic changes taking place in the society of the time. It could be argued that as an ordained (whether in England or Ireland) minister of the reformed church he began as a free-lance Puritan preacher, became involved, perhaps somewhat reluctantly, in introducing the Bramhall/Laudian upgrading of the more sacramental side of worship and the regulating of church management structures, until finally slipping back into the less sacramental and informal ethos of the low-church prelude to the Cromwellian revolution.

Some might read Culme as a self-serving 'rascal' (the term Dean Jonathan Swift used of Dean Thomas Jones) who lined his pockets at the expense of the native Irish and the church he was supposed to be serving. Others will see him as a middle of the road 'reed' being blown about by the winds of change and yet standing more or less upright as he left the storm behind. Unfortunately, no one of his time in Ireland saw him as the 'Praenobilis Culmiorum Devonensium Familiae singulare ornamentum' or 'a very distinguished ornament of the most noble family of Culme of Devon' as his tomb inscription in Lydiard Tregoze described him.

This is an attempt to satisfy my curiosity and produce something coherent and perhaps interesting. I have tried to be as accurate and fair in the use of the many sources referenced or consulted but at the end of the day this is not an academic work, rather a personal view, and what I hope is a gentle but unapologetic polemic by someone trying to understand a little better the roots of the complex ecclesial community he has been part of all his life. There are inevitably misjudgements here but if there are any definite mistakes, particularly those which hurt anyone, I would wish to correct them. If anyone believes their copyright has been infringed I will remove the offending material in a future edition.

I was stimulated to take an interest in local history by the late Mr Tom Barron of Virginia, a marvellous teacher. I thank those who read the draft and those who encouraged me to share it, especially my wife Rosemary who became determined to see it published. I thank Ross Hinds who kindly took on the enormous amount of work involved in the task, Jasmine

Vity for the delightful graphics, Joanna Banks who, with great attention to detail, edited a middle stage draft, Brian Whelan in the RCB Library for his help, Albert Fenton and the Friends of St. Patrick's for their generous sponsorship at a crucial stage. They and many others helped this 'fun' project become this very pleasing and I hope interesting production.

Imported quotations have not been spell checked and names have in general not been standardised in case of unintentional misinterpretation (except where it seriously affected indexing). Dating at the time was somewhat chaotic so there are apparent conflicts between which I do not have the competence to adjudicate. In the first reference in the footnotes to a document I have tried to give full details and in subsequent references a short title as listed in the Bibliography.

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The Mageough
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4 A 'vicar' not having the rights or status of a 'rector'.