

Mathern Palace in 1563 (newsletter 4)

Madeleine Gray

In October 1563 the aged bishop of Llandaff, Anthony Kitchin, died at his episcopal palace in Mathern after a long and eventful life. A late entrant to the religious life, he had been prior of the Benedictine college at Oxford, abbot of Eynsham (where he was suspected of involvement in the Pilgrimage of Grace), a royal chaplain and finally bishop of Llandaff. He served the diocese under four monarchs and through all the religious turmoil of the sixteenth century, from 1545 until his death. This has been variously interpreted as greed, cowardice and a remarkable triumph of the ecumenical spirit.

He died in debt to the Crown for the clerical taxes of his diocese - either because he was too lazy to collect them or too greedy to hand them over, or because he was unwilling to coerce his clergy into paying money they could ill afford. But as a result the contents of his episcopal palace were inventoried on the orders of a Crown commission shortly after his death. Indeed, if the date given for the commission is correct, the inventory was ordered some time before his death but was not in fact taken until the week after he died. Local support for his actions, perhaps?

The inventory gives us a room-by-room description of Mathern Palace in the mid-sixteenth century, listing rooms like 'the high tower chamber', 'the utter tower chamber', 'the lower tower chamber over the parlour' and 'the chamber over the buttery'. It also gives us a poignant and rather pathetic insight into the life of the old man who had died there. Most of the furniture was old and shabby - old cloths and hangings, old beds, old chairs and chests. There was a hanging of arras and two silk cushions in his own chamber, but neither was worth much. His clothing was old, too: it looks very much as though he had bought most of it when he left the religious life on the dissolution of his abbey in 1538. He seems to have kept at least one relic from those days. The 'old cope of blue, red and green satin' found in his study may well have come from the vestments he would have used at Eynsham. His grey gelding horse still stood in the stable, and there were cattle and sheep with their fodder and two old carts.

There are disappointments in the inventory: what would we not give, for example, to know what the 'forty books great and small' were that the surveyors valued at 20s, or what was in the two great chests, the two little chests and the two caskets in the study? The inventory has also missed the six silver spoons which Kitchin's successor Hugh Jones claimed to have inherited from him. Kitchin's will has not survived and it is possible that he gave the spoons to Hugh Jones when he knew that he was dying.

Like all the clergy, Kitchin was required to provide weapons for the defence of the realm: in the parlour, of all places, there were an assortment of bows, arrows, bills and pikes and two 'almain rivets' (suits of light armour with overlapping plates) The only rooms which were elaborately equipped were the buttery and kitchen, with their great and lesser kettles, the cauldron and the mustard quern, suggesting that he was fulfilling his pastoral obligation of hospitality. Even here, though, there was little or no luxury. The best plates and candlesticks were of brass and pewter rather than silver, and the salt cellar was of 'tin, silver fashion'. He had over £40 in cash and over £40 was owed to him in rents and other dues, though some of the debts were of many years' standing.

What follows is a summary of the survey rather than an exact transcript.

Public Record Office E178/3451

Inventory of goods and chattels of Anthony Kitchin

Commission issued to William Bassett and John Carne, esqs., David Jeuans and Christopher Turbyll, gents., 27 May 2 [recte 5] Elizabeth [1563]

Inventory made by Robert Cooke, Richard Pratt, Philip Lawrence and Watkin Lawrence of Mathern, 2 November 1563

In the barn

Wheat, barley and oats £5

Hay 53s 4d

Wood £3 6s 8d

2 old wains with appurtenances 33s 4d

total £12 13s 4d

Cattle

A grey gelding with saddle and bridle 53s 4d

8 Welsh [?oxen] £10 13s 4d

45 sheep and lambs £4

total £17 6s 8d

In the parlour

2 tables with trestles and forms 2s

2 carpets and an old [cloth] of green say 6s 8d

A cupboard and an old cloth of dorney 12d

A pair of andirons 3s 4d

An old hanging of red, green and yellow say 2s

6 old cushions of dorney 2s

An old chair 4d

2 old stools 6d

2 pair of almain rivets, 3 bills, a long pike, 3 bows and

3 sheaves of arrows 20s

total 37s 10d

In the high tower chamber

A standing bed of wainscot with 2 curtains of red and
yellow silk 10s

A teston of yellow bridges satin, a featherbed, a bolster,
a pillow, a fustian blanket and a covering of tapestry to the same 30s

An old green say hanging with borders 2s

An old luxborne chair with an old cushion of silk,
another of dorney 2s

An old cupboard and a short table with a carpet 16d

total 45s 4d

In the utter tower chamber

An old feather bed, a bolster, a pillow, a covering, a teston
of dorney 10s

total 10s

In the middle tower chamber

A trussing bedstead with a teston and curtains of white

and blue buckram, an old feather bed and a bolster, a pillow and an old covering 20s

Old painted clothes and an old form 16d

total 21s 4d

In the inner tower chamber

An old feather bed with bolster and covering 10s

A flock bed with the appurtenances 2s

Old hangings of stained cloth 12d

total 13s

In the lower tower chamber over the parlour

A truckle bed, a feather bed, a bolster and a covering 10s

A teston and an old hanging of stained cloth 2s

A folding table and a trestle and an old carpet of dorney 12d

2 old chests covered with leather 10s

3 other old chests 2s 4d

A fire shovel and a fire fork 2s

total 27s 4d

In my lord's chamber

A truckle bed of wainscot, a feather bed, 2 bolsters and
an old coverlet of tapestry 40s

Another covering of arras work 20s

A round table and 2 old turned chairs and a cupboard 3s 4d

Old hangings of blue and yellow say with borders 12d

2 old chests 2s 4d

2 silk cushions 16d

A fire fork, a pair of tongs and a fire shovel 16d

total £3 9s 4d

In my lord's study

40 books great and small 20s

A table with a trestle and an old carpet 3d

2 great chests, 2 little chests and 2 little caskets 20s

Old hanging of blue and yellow say and a curtain

of blue and white buckram 12d

An old cope of blue, red and green satin 10s

total 51s 8d

In the chamber over the buttery

An old featherbed and a bolster, a blanket, a pillow and a

covering of dorney 10s

A table and trestles 4d

total 10s 4d

Plate

5 little ale cups, gilt, weighing 20 oz. £5

2 salt cellars, gilt, with a cover of silver, weighing

20 oz. £5

A stone cup with a cover of silver 6s 8d

total £10 6s 8d

Money

In one leather bag in silver £21 5s

Another bag of silver and gold containing £20

total £41 5s

My lord's apparel

An old long gown of black satin faced with caphew 40s

An old short gown of satin faced with caphew 20s

An old jacket of chamblet 3s 4d

An old jacket of worsted 3s 4d

2 chymmers of black chamblet 20s

An old chymmer of black worsted 5s

2 jackets of black damask 20s

2 old caps and an old silk hat 5s

total £5 16s 8d

In linen cloth

8 pairs of sheets 40s

total 40s

In the buttery

2 diaper table cloths 7s 8d

2 coarse table cloths 3s 4d

2 other table cloths 2s

One diaper towel 12d

2 plain towels 12d

13 diaper napkins 4s 4d

4 doz and a half of plain napkins 6s 8d

2 cupboard cloths 12d

6 spice plates of pewter 2s 6d

5 latten candlesticks 2s 6d

10 brasen candlesticks 6s

Salt cellar of tin silver fashion with a cover 12d

2 basins and 2 ewers of pewter 4s

3 quart pots of stone with covers and 7 other little cruses 2s

4 old barrels 16d

total 46s 4d

In the kitchen

12 platters valued at 6s

12 dishes 4s

4 other old dishes 12d

2 other old dishes 2d

12 saucers 4s

6 pottingers 4s

An egg dish 6d

A great kettle 4s 4d

2 other lesser kettles 3s 4d

A cauldron 10s

4 pots 20s

An old brass pan 12d

An old brazen chafing dish 12d

A posnet 12d

2 old skillets 12d

A flesh hook 2d

A trevett 4d

A brasen mortar with an iron pestell 12d

A cleaver and a chopping knife 12d

A fire pile and a butcher's axe 8d

A mustard quern and a grater for bread 4d

3 pair of pothangers 6d

3 pair of pothooks 6d

A pair of andirons 12d

3 spits 3s

A frying pan 12d

A gridiron 3d

A chafing dish 4d

A skimmer 2d

A long cobyarne 2s

A tray and 2 great bolls 6d

3 strainers 2d

A dressing cloth for the kitchen 4d

total £3 13s 11d

In the larder

4 old tubs and a trow for meat 12d

total 12d

In the bakehouse

4 boulders 4d

4 tubs and a barrel 2s 8d

total 3s

In the brewhouse

All the vessels appertaining to the brewhouse 10s

total 10s

Sum total £109 4s 9d

Debts

[all cancelled, presumably having been paid to the commissioners]

£25 17s 2³/₄d overdue rent from William Mathew

£6 13s 4d from William Morgan of Tredegar for ½ year's rent of rectory of Basaleg and appurtenances

Obligation of £20 on Lewis Rees, rector of Machen and vicar of Basaleg, dated 21 March 5 Eliz [1563] for payment of £11 17s 1d, whereof £3 7s 8d received and £8 9s 5d remains

Obligation of £20 on John Williams, rector of Mitchell Troy, dated 7 Sept 2 Eliz [1560] for payment of £8 4s 4d., whereof £5 9s 8d received and 54s 8d remains

Obligation of £20 on John Bassett, rector of Michaelston-super-Ely, and George ap Morgan of Llanhennock, gent., dated 15 Nov 3 & 4 Philip and Mary [1556] for payment of £4, still unpaid