

**GREAT MIGRATION TOUR TO ENGLAND
15 TO 25 AUGUST 2012
WINTHROP FLEET**

TOUR TALK

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THE DEDHAM CLASSIS

The *Oxford English Dictionary* does not provide a definition for the word “classis” that pertains directly to the Dedham Classis. The following is its first and main definition of the word:

In the Presbyterian system: an ecclesiastical court or assembly above the consistory and below the synod consisting of the elders or pastors from each parish or congregation within a given area.

The Dedham Classis was not so formal, nor was it part of any larger “system,” but was an informal and secret gathering of ministers of the Puritan persuasion in the latter days of Queen Elizabeth, mostly from Essex and Suffolk. The more formal definition implies a compact group of contiguous parishes, whereas the members of the Dedham Classis were from those scattered parishes which were at that time of a Puritan persuasion. (In the latter part of the sixteenth century, the critical division between the Independents [Congregationalists] and the Presbyterians has not yet arisen.)

The Dedham Classis operated from 1582 to 1589. Much of the time in the meetings was taken up with exposition of a Biblical text. Other business involved the placing of young ministers, just out of Cambridge or Oxford, in various parishes or lectureships. Although the ministers of the Dedham Classis were of an older generation than those who took part in the Winthrop Fleet, many connections can be traced.

Ezekiel Culverwell (1554-1631) was minister at Great Stambridge when John Winthrop married there his first wife, Mary Forth. Culverwell was influential in Winthrop’s spiritual development. (Culverwell was also distantly related by marriage to Roger Conant.)

John Knewstub (1544-1624) was a friend of John Winthrop’s father, Adam Winthrop, and dined often with the Winthrops as he travelled about East Anglia.

Richard Rogers (1551-1618) was lecturer at Wethersfield, Essex, from about 1578 until his death in 1618. He was uncle of John Rogers (1570-1636), who was lecturer at Dedham, Essex, at the time of the Great Migration and corresponded with Winthrop.

Henry Sandes (1549-1626) was lecturer at Boxford, Suffolk, from about 1582 to 1624. Boxford was immediately to the south of Groton, and the Winthrop family held land there. Adam Winthrop and Henry Sandes were very close friends, and Sandes was buried at Groton.

Thomas Stoughton, who died about 1622, was minister at a number of Essex and Suffolk parishes until he was silenced and deprived of his benefices in 1606. He was father of Thomas Stoughton and Israel Stoughton who came to Dorchester, Massachusetts, in the early 1630s.

The surviving records of the Dedham Classis have been published a number of times, most recently in 2003 as Volume Ten of the Church of England Record Society: Patrick Collinson, John Craig and Brett Usher, editors, *Conferences and Combination Lectures in the Elizabethan Church: Dedham and Bury St. Edmunds, 1582-1590*. (This volume is expensive and difficult to find, and is recommended only to the hardest of readers.)

SOME USEFUL WEBSITES

In the course of wandering about the World Wide Web in the planning and preparation of this tour, three interesting general websites have come to our attention which you as participants in the tour may also find of value.

<http://www.geograph.org.uk/>

On the home page, this website describes its mission as follows:

The Geograph Britain and Ireland project aims to collect geographically representative photographs and information for every square kilometre of Great Britain and Ireland.

11,338 contributors have submitted 2,897,398 images covering 265,092 grid squares, or 79.9% of the total.

The home page also includes a very small map of Great Britain and Ireland. Clicking on this map allows you to zoom in until you reach a page devoted to one of the grid squares. There you will find one or more images, almost always including the church if there is one in that grid square. Once you have had your fill of that particular grid square, there is also a little box which allows you to move to the next adjacent grid square in any direction. Or, you may return to the original map and set off in another direction.

<http://www.suffolkchurches.co.uk/>

The material gathered here for each of the Suffolk churches is extensive, including many photographs and descriptive text. Unfortunately, not all the parishes we will be visiting are represented here. The page for Lavenham, for instance, was taken down recently. For Bury St. Edmunds, be sure to look at "Bury Abbey." At the moment, the link for Bury St. Edmunds St. James, now the cathedral for the diocese, is broken.

<http://www.essexchurches.com/>

This website is simpler than the previous one for Suffolk, and includes only a few photos of each church. There are pictures here for all the parishes we will be visiting. Note especially Mistley, which has pictures for two churches. We will also be visiting the ruins of a third, older church, where a number of Great Migration immigrants were baptized.

MINISTERIAL ECONOMICS AND TITLES

Throughout the Winthrop Fleet Tour, as we visit one church after another, we will be discussing terms such as “rector,” “vicar,” “advowson” and “living.” In order to understand these terms, we must first understand the different ways in which ministers of the Church of England were compensated in the early seventeenth century.

Each ecclesiastical parish had attached to it two important property rights, the advowson and the benefice (or living). The advowson was “The ‘patronage’ of an ecclesiastical office or religious house; the right of presentation to a benefice or living” (this and other definitions given here are from the online version of the *Oxford English Dictionary*). In other words, upon the vacancy of a church office, some person or corporation had the right to name the successor to that office. The person holding the advowson (a word derived from the same root as “advocate”) might be a bishop or a college at Cambridge or Oxford or a lord of a manor or a borough, among many possibilities. The advowson could be devised and inherited and could be bought and sold.

The benefice or living comprised the various sources of revenue available to support a particular church office, including mainly the glebe lands and the tithes. The glebe lands were those lands controlled directly by the holder of a church office, while the tithes were payments in money or in kind owing to the church office by other landholders in the parish. Tithes came in several varieties, some of which will be referred to below.

We now come to a group of terms which are all entangled with one another. The “holder of an ecclesiastical benefice” was termed the incumbent. “A parson or incumbent of a parish whose tithes are not impropriate” is called a rector. If the tithes are impropriate, then the incumbent is the vicar. Impropriation is the “annexation of a benefice or its revenues to a corporation, office, or individual, especially ... to a lay corporation or a lay proprietor.”

Now, to attempt to untangle this knot of definitions. The person who controlled the entire benefice, including the glebe and all the tithes, was called the rector. If the rector was a lay person or a corporation, then the most common arrangement was that the rector took for himself the “great tithes,” which were the tithes from grain, hay, wood and fruit, and the remainder of the benefice would go to a vicar, who would actually have the “cure of souls,” that is, who would actually perform the ecclesiastical duties. The lay rector might be the lord of the manor, and so live locally, or might be an absentee landlord, such as a

college or bishop. In other cases, the rector might be the minister, that is might himself have the cure of souls. Whoever had the cure of souls would be the incumbent, whether vicar or rector. The lay rector was not an incumbent. (As an aside, the term “rectory” might refer only to the house occupied by the rector, as it does now, or it might refer to the whole financial package, including the rectory house, the glebe and the tithes.)

The impropriation of a benefice might take place in many ways, but for our purposes the most important was the redistribution of church wealth at the time of the English Reformation, when thousands of benefices formerly controlled by the religious houses fell into the hands of laymen.

Finally, there were two important classes of minister who fell further down the economic ladder. In general terms the curate was anyone entrusted with the cure of souls, and so might include the incumbent rector or vicar, but for our period the word had a more restricted meaning: “A clergyman engaged for a stipend or salary, and licensed ... to perform ministerial duties in the parish as a deputy or assistant of the incumbent.” A curate did not receive any portion of the tithes directly, although his stipend generally was paid from the tithes by the rector or vicar. A curate might be hired in a large parish where one man could not carry out all the ministerial duties. Also, if the incumbent was a pluralist, that is held more than one living, he might need to hire a curate for those parishes in which he did not reside.

A lecturer’s duties “consist[ed] mainly in delivering afternoon or evening lectures,” or sermons. This office became especially important to the Puritans, for whom sermonizing was far more important than the various ceremonies associated with the Catholic church. Hiring a preacher was a way for the Puritans to promote their own goals through an officer who, at least until the rise of Laud, could not be as easily controlled as the holder of an ecclesiastical benefice.

Don’t be concerned if all this is not immediately clear. We will be using and further exploring all of these terms throughout the course of the tour.

An excellent resource on this subject is Christopher Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church: From Archbishop Whitgift to the Long Parliament* (Oxford, 1956). Hill was, during the second half of the twentieth century, one of the most important investigators of the English Revolution and its origins. Unfortunately, the volume cited here is no longer easy to come by.

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