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THE RINGMORE ROYALIST

How well known is the dramatic story concerning the Reverend William Lane, Rector of Ringmore at the time of the Civil War of 1642-1646?

William Lane became Rector of Ringmore in 1637 and, a year later, of Aveton Gifford as well. He was a staunch Royalist and, although Plymouth declared against the King and for the Parliamentarians, he was not afraid to affirm his allegiance to the King from the pulpit. In a letter written by William Lane's youngest son, William, we are told that in 1642 parliamentary forces came by boat to Ringmore, plundered 'the valley of the Awmar', fired the Rectory (on the site of what is now Oldcastle) and carried off the Rector's two older sons to prison in Plymouth.

During much of this time William Lane, along with the Modbury Royalists, led by the Champernownes, strove to raise 'a fort on a hill (part of the glebe of Aveton) which commanded the bridge leading to Kingsbridge'.

Before the fort could be completed the Royalists were overcome by the Parliamentarians. In the words of the young Lane: '... then did the champions vaunt about the country and made diligent enquiry about Bishop Lane the traytor (for so the rabble stiled him)'. But they did not find him. He had slipped away and hidden himself in the tower of Ringmore church where he stayed for three or four months, fed and tended by his parishioners. Eventually he fled to France, returning only when he was able to buy his safety in England.

But the Rector's troubles had scarcely begun. In 1645 he was dispossessed not only of his two livings but also of land of his own at Aveton Gifford, so that he was left with only a few small watermills there from which to make a living for his wife and five children. It seems he was treated with much malice by Francis Barnard, who had replaced him in the Aveton Gifford living. After a time, he moved to 'Hope's Nose' in Torbay, where he quarried limestone to sell to the Topsham boats.

Even here William Lane suffered misfortune, for his home was raided and pillaged by marauders from the sea. He decided to return to Aveton Gifford, but only to find that Francis Barnard had blocked the water supply to his mills. He resolved then to plead his case at Cromwell's council board. At the age of sixty-three, with just a few pence in his pocket, he undertook the long walk to London to put in his petition.

The petition was successful. Orders were given for Barnard to be dispossessed and William Lane was permitted to name someone to

succeed Barnard at Aveton Gifford. He chose John Martin, 'in the hope to enjoy some comfort in the new possessor'.

Sadly, this hope was not realized, as the bleak words of his son's letter relate:

'... coming home on foot from Honiton to Exon [Exeter], being very dry and money scarce, finding water in the road, drank thereof; which chilled his blood and threw him into an ague (and he took up his lodging at the King's Head in High Street) and after into a feaver, which deprived him of his life. He lieth interred under the Chancel table in Alphington Church. This the exactest account I can give, I being the youngest of the family.'