

The Flookburgh Fire: 1664 not 1686!

According to Stockdale, "About the year 1686 a great fire took place in Flookburgh, destroying a considerable part of the town" ¹. This date has been accepted and repeated by several authors, including Sam. Taylor and J.C.Dickinson. ².

However, it appears there was only one fire, which occurred 17 May 1664. There are 2 relevant documents, one held in the Quarter Sessions records at Lancashire Archives, dated 1664 ³, and one recorded by Stockdale, in 1870.⁴ This latter is undated, hence Stockdale's phrase "about the year 1686....".

Both documents record a major fire in Flookburgh on the 17 May, with 22 houses destroyed and 146 bays of buildings destroyed, so it is almost certain they refer to the same fire.

Evidence from other locations also point to 1664. The following Parish Churches held collections after a "brief" ⁵ was issued, for Flookburgh, all collections dated 1665 ⁶.

Smarden Parish Church (Kent)

Thornhill Parish Church (Yorkshire)

Bridekirk Parish Church (near Cockermouth)

Aldenham Parish Church (Hertfordshire)

Farcet Parish Church (Cambridgeshire)

Grasmere Parish Church

Ribchester Parish Church

Stretford Parish Church

Wallasey Parish Church

Hagworthingham Parish Church (Lincolnshire)

Whittington Parish Church (Lancashire)

In the Bodleian collection is the following document, ⁷ written on parchment:-
Appointment by Thomas Preston, Robert Rawlinson, and Thomas Fletcher, of Cartmel, treasurers by the king's letters patents of the money's collected for the inhabitants of Flookburgh, miserably impoverished by a fire on 17 May 1664, of Daniel Hinson to be collector within the city of London; 10 June 1665; signed and sealed.

It may also be significant that Charles II renewed the market charter for Flookburgh in 1665, possibly as a further means of relieving the distress.

Finally, at least three contemporaries of Stockdale were aware that the 1686 date was suspect. Firstly, W.G. Collingwood made a note in his copy of the *Annales*, on page 126, that Bridekirk Parish Church collected for Flookburgh on August 20 1665 after being consumed by fire. (see Note ⁶). Secondly, Henry Fletcher Rigge, the High Sheriff of Lancashire, who wrote parts of the *Annales* wrote in his copy of the book that Grasmere Parish Church had collected for Flookburgh on 1 Jan 1665 following the fire. (see Note ⁶). Thirdly, and most tellingly, Edward M Hance and T.N. Marton wrote an article on the parish registers of Wallasey Church. After detailing the collection (see Note ⁶)

in 1665 for Flookburgh *“whose losese by fire mounted the value of two thousand pound, May 17;1664”*, the authors quote Stockdale’s date of about 1686(sic), and then say that *“..it seems clear that Mr. Stockdale has made an error with regard to the year of this fire...”*, quoting the Vicar of Flookburgh, the Rev. W.P.Rigge M.A.⁸

David Shore - version December 2015

Notes

¹ James Stockdale, Annals of Cartmel

First published under the title Annales Caermoelenses in 1872
Republished, Michael Moon, 1978

²

a) The Cumbria Village Book- Cumbria Federation of Women’s Institutes 1991.
Pub.Countryside books.

-1686 fire, destroyed 22 houses, other buildings, even burnt fruit trees in the orchards.

b) The Land of Cartmel, a History, J C Dickinson 1980 pub. Titus Wilson.

-Date of fire “in or about 1686”, according to Stockdale..... 22 houses etc.

c) Cartmel, People and Priory. Sam. Taylor, pub. Titus Wilson 1955

-1686 fire, 16 May, in that year, according to Stockdale, 22 houses destroyed.

d) Cumbrian Villages, Kenneth Smith, 1973, pub. Robert Hale

“a fire in 1686 destroyed much of the town, but houses still bearing the dates 1617,1625,1665 and1686 must have escaped the blaze.”

³ Lancashire record office QSP 257/12

To his Majesties Justices of Peace for the County of Lancaster

The humble Certificat of us whose Names are Subscribed
Shewing that at the Towne of Flookburgh beeing a Mannor and a Markett Towne whereof his Majestie is Lord upon Tuesday the 17th Day of May last there happened about two of the Clocke of the same day a most fearefull and lamentable fire begun in a Poore Widdow womans house who then was gone forth and had lockt the dore which by the meanes of a great and stronge Easterly winde burnt downe Twenty two dwelling howses of the Inhabitants besides Barnes Stables Beasthowses and other howses, wherein there were one hundred Forty & sixe Bayes of Buildinge and the rage of the said fire was soe very great by reason of the said winde that most parte

of the said howses beinge thatcht with straw thatch which then was soe exceeding drie that they all tooke fire within about a quarter of an howres space and thereby a great part of theire howsehold goods and all their Corne and provision of Meale and malt were also burnt insoemuch that two aged persons beinge sicke in their body was with very great difficulty preserved from the fire wherby the said poore Inhabitants have suffered losse in their said buildings & goods to the value of or thereabout as they are ready to prove & make appeare to yow upon the oathes of severall persons of good creditt who particulerly viewed the said howses and computed the said losse and thereby many of the said poore Inhabitants are wholly Ruined and impoverished in their Estates unlesse some Publicke and Charitable releefe bee afforded to them

Therefore tis our humble desire the sad and miserable Condicion of the said Inhabitants may be recommended to the Kings most gracious Majestee From the Generall Sessions of the Peace now held at Lancaster to the End the said Poore Inhabitants may the better obtain his Majesties Letters Patents for a speedy Collecion through the Nation for their present releefe in this their great Extremitie. Given under our hands this eleventh Day of July In the Sixteenth yeare of his Majesties Raigne 1664

John Simpson	An. Simpson wid:	Jo: Newby
Willm: Braithwaite	Elizebeth: Dixon wid:	Ed: Fell
Thomas Millers M(ar)kes	Jennett Gurnall wid:	Jane Eely
Rich: Bell	Eliz: Simpson wid:	
Christ: Baileman	Marg: Simpson wid:	
John Wilson	Francis Stones	The Court doth declare that they
Jane Burscough wid:	Will: Barrow	are satisfyed that and doe
Jennett Barrow wid:	Tho: Hiles	agree
Alice Barrow wid:	Michael Dauson	
Isabell Kilner wid:	Will: Simpson	
James Dauson		

(NB Abbreviated words, except Christian names, have been amplified; Writer's punctuation kept)

(Thanks to Dr. George Redmonds for help in transcription)

⁴ Stockdale document (from Annals of Cartmel)

“Lanc. Ps

“To the Hoble. the Deputie Lieutenants and the Justices of the Peace of the Countie aforesaid.

“The humble certificates of us whose names are hereunder written, who did view the losses sustained by the inhabitants within the manor and market town of Flockburgh, by reason of a violent fire which happened there upon the XVIIth daye of this instant Maye, about one of the clocke in the afternoon,

being occasioned (as was conceived) by the negligence of a woman who had left hempe or some other combustible matter too neare the fire, wch. bursting out in the thatch and increased by the violence of a mightie hott and drie wind, burnt downe to the ground and utterly consumed twentie-two dwelling houses, besides barnes, stables, kilnes, and out-houses, containing in all one hundred fortie-six bares of building, and the violence thereof was soo greate that itt burnt and distroyed the orchards and fruit trees, and the small porcion of goods wch. manie of them had gott out of their houses, and also their household goods, corne, graine, maulte, bedinge, bedsteads, and other goods, amountinge in the whole to the value of three thousand pounds and upwards, to the utter undoeinge and impoverishinge of most p-te of the sd. inhabitants, whereupon they make itt their humble desire that yr. honbles. would bee pleased to certifie his Matie. in their behalfe, for the speedie obtaininge of his Mat.'s most gracious lres. pattents for a collection for and towards the re-buildinge of the said towne and reparation of these losses aforesaid, beinge viewed and valued by us-

CURWEN RAWLINSON, Carke Hall
WILLIAM WILSON, Rector de Windermeer
THOMAS FLETCHER, Raven Winder Hall
GEORGE BRATHWAITE, Flookburgh
THOMAS BURSCOUGH
THOS. ASKEW
RICHARD SIMPSON
THOMAS BERRIE) Carpenters
RICHARD WITHERS)

⁵ A "brief" is a letter of authorities civil or ecclesiastical commending a charitable appeal. Few original briefs have survived in this country but in most early church records the copies of briefs are to be found sometimes jotted on the spare pages of the Church Wardens accounts or occasionally written in a separate brief book.

http://www.bunbury.org.uk/papers/Briefs_paper.htm

After the Reformation, briefs were issued by the Privy Council or (after 1660) by the Lord Chancellor, and came to the parishes in the form of "Letters Patent" which were to be read from the pulpit in Church. The Book of Common Prayer still contains the rubric after the Creed in the Communion Service which reads "...And then also (if occasion be) shall notice be given of the Communion; and Briefs Citations, and Excommunications read."

These "good cause" appeals were usually for funds towards church repair and rebuilding in various parts of the country, helping those towns or persons who had lost property through flood, fire or earthquake, towards the ransoming of Christian captives taken by the Turks, or towards aiding persecuted Protestants overseas.

Although it was usual to make the collection in church at the close of the Sunday service (the clerk standing at the door with a "decent bason") the entries show that a house to house collection was sometimes organised as well which covered the whole parish. The sums collected were then handed over by the churchwardens to a

duly authorised travelling collector or to the Chancellor at the time of the Bishop's Visitation.

Unfortunately it was a system which could easily be abused and in the hands of unscrupulous persons much of the money never reached and helped the causes for which it had been collected. Patent Officers, King's Printers and those who farmed the briefs, taking the lions share. The abuse continued throughout the 18th century and eventually, due in part to the action taken by Lord Shaftesbury, a close inspection was ordered and the formation of the Incorporated Church Building Society in 1828 helped to abolish the system.

The earliest copies of Briefs preserved at Bunbury are grouped together and bound with the oldest surviving volume of Churchwardens' Accounts (1655-1709). They throw an interesting light upon the nature of 17th and 18th century good causes, and show by the amounts given where the sympathies of the Bunbury people most lay at that period.

Maurice H. Ridgway.

⁶ (dates reflect the Gregorian calendar)

Smarden Parish Church

July 30 1665 Collected in the Parish Church on a briefe for Flookburgh in the County of

Laurassor the summe of one shilling and four pence

By Robert Combe Cur

May 10 1667 Recd' 1d and 4d by me John Stiles

Thornhill Parish Church Registers

Aprill the 16 day in the year 1665. Collected at Thornhill Church towards the relief of the inhabitants of Stilling fleet in the East Riding of Yorkshiere the sume of 5 shillings 8 pence by us Churchwardens John Inman Robert Clayton

Colected the i4th day of May towards the reliefe of Mary Jackson wife to an aged Minister of Cantley the

some of Seven shillings sixpence 1665

Colected at Thornhill the 21 of May towards the reliefe of the towne of Flookburgh in County of Lancaster the some of Seven shillings three pence

(Thanks to Dr. George Redmonds, historian, for bringing the above to my attention)

Bridekirk Parish Church Register

"Augt 20 1665, collected for the towne Flookburgh in Lancashire which was consumed with fire the sume 00Li. 08s. 08d. now paid to William Simpson. Collector

Parish Registers of Aldenham

Nov 12 Granted to the Market Towne of Flookburgh,co. Lane. For a fyer on 17th May last which burned to ye ground 146 bayes of building, Value 2000L. and upwards. Gathered 6s. Lid.

Farcet Parish Registers

Oct 3 1665 Collected for Flookburgh, Lancs 1sh. 0d.

Grasmere Parish Register

The first day of January 1665 collected in the parish church of Gresmyre the day and yeare aforesaid for the loss mad by the fire at Flouke Barrow in Lancashire the sum of 6s 10d after church was done. John Haukriggs Tho. Richardson

Ribchester Parish Register

Collected was a brief 8 Jan 1665 for the reliefe of the losses which happened by fire for the market towne of flookburgh in the county of Lancaster the sum of twoo shillings and tenne pence and payd over unto Tho. Swarthbrick, Apparatur.

Stretford Parish Church

16 April contributed one shilling and aleven pence.

Wallasey Parish Registers

*1665 Memorandum that 2s 8d was collected upon a brife for the marcet towne of flookborogh in Lancaster whose losese by fire mounted the value of two thousand pound wch was May the 17;1664
Georg Pemberton John Baly Gard'*

Hagworthingham Parish Register

For 12 Families their loss by Fire of 2000£ of Flookburgh in Lancashire. Collected October ye 22nd 1665 ye sum of 4s 9d

Whittington Parish Register

(after) 18 Sep 1664

Collected in our Church of Whittington towards the losses of Flookburgh the (sum) shilljings sixpence.

⁷ Bodleian Library, Rawlinson Manuscripts, D, 862, f155

⁸ Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire for 1883. Vol XXXV, pub 1886

"Extracts from the Registers of Wallasey Parish Church, with notes thereupon, by Edward M. Hance and T.N. Martin