

The Wells Dean sues the Rector of Benanger

No one has known for sure the name of our priest at the time of the Reformation. We have him as either *John Deane* or *John Dunne* or *John Dune*. I can now reveal he was John Dun, Rector 1525-45. I know you are glad I cleared up that mystery.

I know he was Rector Dun because the Dean and Chapter of Wells, in around 1535, hauled the “parson of Benanger” up before the Court of Chancery in London demanding the “Corn Rent of the said Parsonage”.

The Lord Chancellor, to whom the Dean addressed his plea, was Sir Thomas Audley. Previously, Sir Thomas had been Speaker of the House of Commons. He presided over the famous assembly known as the *Reformation Parliament*, which abolished Papal jurisdiction.

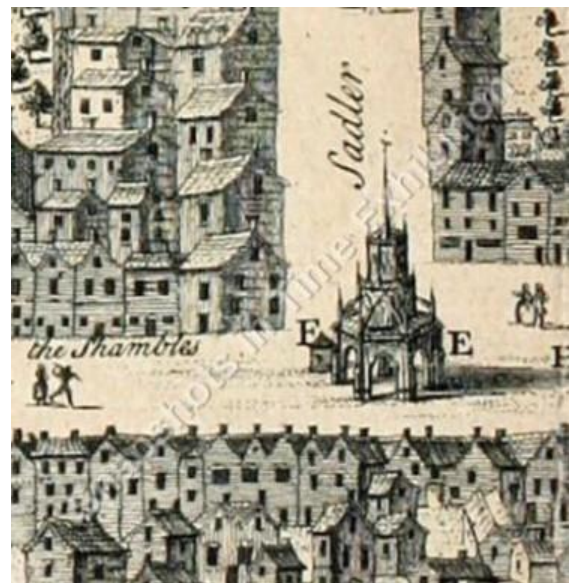
Attentive readers will say, ‘that rings a bell’. It should. Because our own Whitchurch Prebendary, Sir John FitzJames, Lord Chief Justice of the King’s Bench, was involved. Did he not draft legislation that broke with Rome and set up the Church of England for that same *Parliament*? Did not the King reward him handsomely— more than £20,000 - for this work? To both questions, the answer is ‘yes’.

The Dean of Wells was Richard Wolman. He had been the King’s chaplain. Henry then appointed Wolman to promote his divorce suit against the Queen that Cardinal Wolsey heard in 1527. Back in Wells, Wolman signed the acknowledgement of Royal Supremacy. In his Will, he left money for a shelter and market cross in Wells, built in 1542.

Do you think these three knew each other? Do you think our Parson of Benanger had any chance of winning in the Court of Chancery?

Corn rent just means rent paid in kind. It seems a trivial matter to take to the Court of Chancery. Those years, though, were ones of vicious inflation caused by huge imports of silver from Spain’s empire in the Americas. What better way to hedge against loss in the value of money than to receive payment in kind?

The worst thing about this squalid little case is that Prebendary FitzJames probably started it. Prebendaries were entitled to bushels of wheat and oats from their lands. FitzJames had not presented John Dun to the living of Benanger. What reason was there for loyalty?



W Simes, 1735, A plan of the City of Wells