

About Edwin Sandys – For stewards only as the references are not properly attributed.

By Malcolm Rose 12 March 2014

When I joined the Guild of Stewards some 28 years ago, there were some incredibly **authoritative members. They knew so much and produced 'fact sheets' which came from** their lifetime of interest and drew on what they knew. In the intervening years we have **increasingly become aware that 'facts', like radioactivity, can often have a half-life** and are really only work in progress in a given context. How we handle knowledge is changing fast and what our visitors are interested in learning from us is likewise a moving target.

During my recuperation from a knee job I pondered on the unreliable information we give our visitors and what, if anything, we should do to modify our offer. Coincidentally **while reading Diarmaid MacCulloch's book 'Silence' I came across a reference to Edwin Sandys.** This set me surfing and what a lot of possible and interesting facts there are emanating from one single monument in the Minster.

The tomb monument of Edwin Sandys

Most of us will be familiar with the monument to Edwin Sandys that sits at present in the north crossing transept close to the steps down to the Pilgrim Chapel. If you want to find out more about the man follow this link;

<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/printable/24649> and if you want to find out more about the material from which the monument is made follow

[http://www.nottsopenchurches.org.uk/Alabaster\(RayState\).pdf](http://www.nottsopenchurches.org.uk/Alabaster(RayState).pdf) In the following I have extracted from the first of these references, but it is worth exploring the story of Nottingham alabaster too – I had not realised how highly regarded it was across Europe.

Edwin Sandys 1519(?) – 1588 the person

What do we know about him? As a Steward I have been content to know he was a sometime Archbishop of York who retired here and that he had a lot of children. On the monument his head and hands appear to have been replaced at some time having probably been removed during the Civil War. Maybe other stewards know lots more about him.

Do you know about predecessors and descendants? What he looked like, what he was like, where he stood on the religious issues of the day? Was he involved with the martyrdom of Margaret Clitherow? Should he have married? Who were his friends? Did he nearly lose his head over Lady Jane Grey?

What did he look like?



His portrait and his sculpture look closer than one might expect. But when was the sculpture done?

Was it after the Civil War? If that was when the monument was de-faced and un-handled, then, yes. But does anyone really know?

What were his origins? The family can be traced back to 1300 in present day Cumbria. Edwin was born possibly in 1519 in the North-West at Esthwaite Hall near Hawkshead, then in Lancashire, where he would later found the grammar school attended by William Wordsworth. He was the fifth of the seven sons of William Sandys (d. 1548) and his wife, Margaret, daughter of John Dixon of London and sister to a merchant tailor. His father collected the tithes for the crown which before the dissolution went to Furness Abbey. Edwin was educated at Cambridge and by the time he was little over 30 years old was Vice Chancellor of St Catharine's.

There is no record of his ordination. However Sandys was a protestant from the time that anything is known about his religion. In Cambridge he was said to have been one of the extended family circle of the Strasbourg reformer Martin Bucer. His Elizabethan sermons were robustly anti-Catholic. He married a remote cousin, Mary Sandys.

Prison and Exile Only with the death of Edward VI in July 1553, does it become possible to put flesh on the bare bones of Sandys's curriculum vitae, thanks to a circumstantial narrative which first appeared in the 1583 edition of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. Sandys was forced to preach in support of the Lady Jane Grey *coup d'état* by the Duke of Northumberland, Dudley. That nine days wonder lasted nine days and Mary was proclaimed queen. This resulted in Sandys arrest on 25th July and an army of 4,000 marched him and other traitors to the Tower of London. Remarkably he survived this, getting a transfer to Marshalsea prison where the protestant sympathiser governor helped pull strings to secure his release. Another protestant sympathiser helped him get away initially to Antwerp and thence to Strasbourg.

Wife Mary joined him but within a year she and a son had died and he was very ill. Sandys was however very content in Strasbourg and in a sermon he said: '**We have lost** the saving truth at home, and found it abroad: our countrymen are become our enemies, and strangers are **made our friends**'. Later Sandys would beg Archbishop Matthew Parker, a close Cambridge colleague who had stayed at home, not to condemn '**all Germanical natures**'. It was here he taught himself Hebrew and thus equipped himself later to be the **translator of Kings and Chronicles for the Bishop's Bible**. He

moved to Zurich and when the news of Queen Mary's death came he returned without rejoicing to London on the day of Queen Elizabeth's coronation 15 January 1559. Sandys celebrated his return by remarrying, on 19 February, in defiance of what was then the law. His new wife was Cicely (d. 1611), daughter of Sir Thomas Wilford of Cranbrook, Kent, whose brother Thomas had been a fellow exile. Their 7 sons and 2 daughters can be seen on his monument in the Minster – the daughters bringing up the rear.

The Elizabethan religious settlement and politics

The Germanically natured Sandys was disappointed with the Elizabethan religious settlement. He particularly disliked the rules on vestments, so the bare-headed Sandys arrayed in a rochet and chimere, standard academic and episcopal attire, is a significant statement on his tomb in the Minster.

From August to November 1559 he was employed in the royal visitation of the northern province, a punishing circuit which took him from Nottingham through York to Chester, via Durham and Carlisle. Sandys took pride in the fact that everywhere the visitors went **'images of every kind' were removed and burned, and especially the cross, or 'rood'**. In doing this he incurred royal displeasure – the Queen countermanded and ordered crosses to be reinstated. Sandys nearly never became a bishop.

Moves to improve the settlement in the Convocation of 1563 were led by the bishops rather than by **'Puritans' in the lower house, and Sandys seems to have drafted a paper** which proposed the abolition of the sign of the cross in baptism and baptism by midwives. More than twenty years later, as archbishop of York, he would claim never to have allowed women to baptize in his diocese.

He was prominent amongst those demanding the head of Mary Queen of Scots, even it is said, giving Queen Elizabeth an ultimatum and citing the case of Saul and Agag (Saul lost his kingdom because he did not kill Agag). Elizabeth was not amused by Sandys's politics.

Worcester Sandys became bishop of Worcester on 21 December 1559. His quarrelsome and acquisitive nature began to emerge. Within two or three weeks of his arrival in Worcester, and on 17 May the great cross and image of Our Lady, which had somehow escaped the holocaust of 1559, were burned in the precincts. The newly restored Marian choir was wrecked, and the great organ, **'being one of the most solempne instrumentes of this realme'**, was demolished, **allegedly to make pewter dishes and bedsteads**. Sandys had stirred up a hornets' nest and one quarrel in particular was to dominate his Worcester episcopate. Sir John Bourne had become a powerful local magnate, having served the Marian regime as secretary of state, and had profited from his connections with the cathedral priory. Bourne was unable to stomach what he called priests' whores (**'I must confess my continuall misliking of preestes mariage, specially his'**), alleging that ecclesiastical property had been misappropriated to build a wash-house, **'necessar ye for his wyeffes laundrye'**, and to provide a nursery, **'his wyef beinge of good fecundytie and a very frutefull woman'**. Dirt stuck to Sandys from the quarrels they had and it became clear that Sandys was taking the opportunity to advance his family.

London Reluctantly Sandys was translated to the see of London in 1570. He successfully negotiated his way out of the **'tax of first fruits' which the Queen paid, saving himself a cool £1000**. (The tax of first fruits, the whole of the first year's profits from a benefice, was originally remitted to Rome – Henry VIII diverted it to the crown). When Grindal (a

fellow exile of Sandys) wrote that the bishop of London was to be pitied, he had one specific problem in mind: puritanism. Sandys dealt with the problem by reaching accommodations and extending patronage. However the crunch came when Field and **Wilcox published their 'Admonition' from prison coincidental with the St Bartholomew's day massacre.** Puritan feeling intensified with Sandys addressed as **'superintendent of popish corruptions in the Diocese of London'.** **In spite of this Sandys was still on the side** of the evangelical angels, at odds with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Parker. In 1575 Parker died and was replaced by Grindal. Sandys was translated to York to follow Grindal on 8 March 1577.

York Sandys set out to continue Grindal's efforts to 'protestantize' a conservative and recalcitrant region. He set up synods and conferences and a college of preachers. At this time he set up a synod at Southwell which continued until the late 18th century.

At the same time Sandys sought to crush popish recusancy and Catholic survivalism particularly focusing on the leading citizens of York and more specifically, their wives. So it is argued it was Sandys who was primarily responsible for bringing Margaret Clitherow to her hideous death. His hardline approach was in the end counter-productive as the number of recusants increased three-fold between 1577 and 1590.

Quarrels and vendettas began to seriously mar Sandys reputation. He got into a spat with the Dean of Durham, Whittingham, trading insults on the legitimacy of their ordination, and with the Dean of York, Hutton, **who told Sandys that Whittingham's orders were better than his.** He further upset Hutton over the issue of usury. Normal business rates of interest were regarded as acceptable (up to 10%) but Sandys did not distinguish these from higher, really usurious, rates of interest.

Sandys knew that he was being compared unfavourably with Grindal, who could do no wrong. In his later years he chose to visit York as seldom as possible, spending most of his time at Southwell or Bishopthorpe.

The Great Stapleton Scandal This scandal 1581-1584 probably had its roots in the designs of the court on two most desirable pieces of archiepiscopal real estate in Nottinghamshire, Southwell and Scrooby. To lose these to the court would effectively exclude the archbishop from Nottinghamshire, where he now spent much of his time. Leicester seems to have been behind this, alleging that Southwell was a concealed royal manor, but there were also manoeuvres on the part of Sir Robert Stapleton, a young but impecunious Yorkshire gentleman whom the queen liked. Stapleton at last resorted to blackmail. While Sandys was on visitation, sleeping in a Doncaster inn, Mrs Sysson, the **innkeeper's wife, crept into bed with him, only to be 'surprised' by her husband.**

Stapleton (a fellow high commissioner and sheriff of the county) intervened, and at his suggestion Sandys was foolish enough to hand over £50 in gold to the innkeeper, later paying him £200 more. His anxiety to end the matter in this way was sharpened by the embarrassing fact that the Syssons had been his servants at Bishopthorpe, where there had already been a whiff of scandal. Sysson was soon demanding £800, while Stapleton wanted £1000 and the leases of Southwell and Scrooby. Sandys now had no choice but to go public, complaining to Burghley and the privy council. The upshot was that under insistent pressure from Sandys, Stapleton was taken to Star Chamber, fined £300, ordered to make restitution, and imprisoned, with the lesser accomplices suitably punished. But the sad consequence for Sandys was that he became a figure of fun in his

own diocese, 'arraigned ... in all tavernes and alehouses', and a convenient target for Catholic polemicists

Property and family Sandys continued to fall out with those around him up to his death. No doubt having to provide for 9 children led to his career being compromised. Was he corrupt? It is arguable that he refused to surrender property for the good of his see. Tellingly the inscription on the tomb monument in the Minster credits him with **saving 'this church in which you now lie, itself lying prostrate'**. However he granted leases of bishops manors and rectories, profitable offices, prebends etc to his family to an extent constituting nepotism. Within 4 weeks of denying Scrooby to the Queen he had granted the lease to son Samuel. Burghley added up an incomplete list and found that the family dividend amounted to a minimum of £1549. Other unseemly quarrels **arose between Bishops over the issue of 'dilapidations' and the liquidation of** assets for short-term advantage, for example, Sandys made £2000 out of timber, deforesting 400 acres round London.

The Sandys boys all did exceptionally well. Samuel built up a large estate in Worcestershire, served as an MP, and was sheriff of the county. Himself knighted, he had a son who was elevated to the peerage. Miles settled in Cambridgeshire, eventually becoming a baronet. History records what became of Sir Edwin Sandys (another fascinating path to explore). In 1620 five of the brothers were members of the Virginia Company. And all this was done out of church revenues. Later on a descendent of his (and of William Brewster the pilgrim father from Scrooby) Zachary Taylor became US President.

How should history judge Sandys? Was he a model of grasping episcopal nepotism? Sleazy Sandys? But then by the end of the twentieth century Sandys had never attracted a biographer equipped to find and make a case for his rehabilitation. As with so much of history the facts are elusive.

Translation of the Sandys Tomb Latin Inscription

"The body of him who lies here was not of humble birth and lived with rank and in great state, but the example he set was greater: having filled two Bishoprics he was at length promoted to be Archbishop, having attained these honours at a high price with his virtues and deserts.

He was a man above all men free from malice and vindictiveness, open and free of flattery, very liberal and compassionate, most hospitable, easy-going and proud, without it being a vice. He lived no less worthily than he taught others to do and devoted himself in preaching the gospel, being assiduous in this task to the end. No one could go away from listening to his sermons without being the better for them.

He wished for eloquence and it was evident in him. Conscious of his own hard labours, he despised the idlers. He encouraged learning for the benefits it brought. He upheld Church possessions as anything dedicated to God deserved to be.

By your favour with Elisabeth, the most illustrious of mortals, oh venerable man you were able to save this Church in which you yourself lie, from despoil. You were a notable example of the chances of life who, however much you had to bear, endured all ills great and many with imperturbable spirit – prison, exile, loss of much good fortune and above all the hardest thing for an innocent mind to bear, most malicious slanders: and in one thing alone was your wish unfulfilled - the shedding of your own blood in support of your

belief in Christ.

And now after such fluctuation in prosperity and so many contests against hostility, being tired of life you have at length achieved the goal of perpetual rest in your search for God, rejoice evermore your toils are acceptable to God instead of your blood being shed. Go reader do not think it enough to know these things but copy them.

The word of the Lord abideth forever.”

The inscription translated above is on the base of the monument, beneath the head. On the side of the base

“The widow and six sons and two daughters are shown at the side of the base. The children's names are: Samuel, Edwyn, Myles, Thomas, Henry, George, Margaret and Ann. The Widow, whom Sandys married as his second wife in 1559 was Cicely, daughter of Thomas Wilford of Cranbrook, Kent. She outlived Sandys by 22 years. A monument to her is on the north wall of the chancel of the Church of Woodham Ferrers, Essex, the home of her predecessor.

Sandys' effigy was badly damaged during the Civil War period. The present head was made by an Italian craftsman at the expense of a former Lord Sandys and is based on a portrait of him at Ombersley in Worcestershire, where his descendants live. The hands, which were originally uplifted and holding an open Bible, were replaced to show the Archbishop at prayer. This might well be thought a fitting ending to a turbulent life of one who was a founder of Low Church Anglicanism”.

(These quotations are taken from "Archbishop Sandys and his Monument in Southwell Minster" by Richard M. Beaumont, now out of print).