

STORY OF THE PARVISE

Taken from Pictorial SOUTHWELL with pictures by A.J.Loughton
and text by M.Trebeck [1900]



North Porch



Interior of Parvise.

THERE was always a tradition amongst the Clays that one of their family had been born in the Parvise during the Civil War, and this is the story as nearly as it can be traced from family history and through the registers. Young William Clay, the Registrar of Southwell Minster, had been married to Joan Williamson, of Fiskerton Manor, in the parish of Rolleston, in 1642. He was a man of some position in the Minster, having the care of documents, and probably of money, belonging to the Chapter, and as he was on the side of the King, the Parliament party tried to get hold of him.

When the troubles began in 1643, the Clays had been married just a year, and they already had a little daughter called Anne, whom the parents took to be baptised at Rolleston, and (during the disturbances at Southwell) the child was probably left in the care of her grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Luke Williamson, at Fiskerton Manor, the house now belonging to Wm. Wright, Esq.

Towards the end of the year 1643, William Clay dreamt one night that danger was about to fall on his house. Next day a friendly warning was conveyed to him that Cromwell's people were searching for him, and that he must leave Southwell at once or he would be captured and forced to surrender himself and everything in his charge. Such a warning could not be neglected, but his wife was unable to move, as she was very near her confinement; to leave her seemed out of the question, to take her was impossible. In their dilemma, she bethought herself of the Parvise, the little room over the Porch, occupied not so long since by the Sacristan, whose duty it was to guard the church and ring or toll the "passing bell." It contained a fireplace, a table, a bedstead and cupboards, and a few old books —otherwise it was perfectly bare. Cromwell's soldiers, who now occupied the Nave, strangers to Southwell, little dreamt of such a hiding place.

After many entreaties on the part of his wife, Mr. Clay consented to flee from Southwell, and to leave her in hiding in this chamber, so she lost no time in secreting herself there. Cromwell was in possession of the Palace, and his soldiers, as we have said, overflowed into the Minster, and stabled their horses in the Nave. You can fancy that poor Joan had many a fright and many a false alarm. Her rest was disturbed by the rude noises of the men as they groomed their horses

and cleaned their weapons, and by the dismal songs they indulged in; but she tried to keep up a brave heart for the sake of her husband, and to be thankful for even this cold hiding place.

An old clergyman, chaplain to the Archbishop Williams, watched for opportunities to take her supplies of food, and later on the housekeeper from the Palace, an old family friend, fed and nursed her, and here, after some days, her little daughter Joan was born. The baby was at first weak and puny, and well it was so, or its feeble wail might have made itself heard beyond the Parvise walls. The font, as you know, was destroyed in the general pillage which took place at this time, when the lead was torn from the roofs, the brasses from the tombs, and every vestige of an image swept away, so that the baby could not be baptised in the Minster. As soon as Mrs. Clay could travel, the little Joan was taken to her grandfather's, and on January 13th, 1644, received her mother's name at the font in Rolleston Church.

Alas! the poor young mother never got over the fright and exposure to cold she went through in the Parvise (for though there was a fireplace in the little room, it was not safe to use it, as the smoke would have betrayed her). Sad to say, she died at Rolleston the following March, and this final entry concerning her may be seen in the church register — "Joan, the wife of William Clay, was buried March the 4th, 1644."

The little baby thrived, and in time grew up, and lived to be married to a Mr. Wilson.

I cannot vouch for the truth of this story, beyond the fact of the tradition in the Clay family, which I have often heard spoken about. I have also seen a note about it in their copy of Dickenson's "Southwell," written a hundred years ago, and the dates in the Rolleston Parish registers exactly correspond with the story. The register of Joan's marriage is to be found at Southwell.

William Clay was twice married after this, and died, leaving many children, in 1692. The little Anne married Mr. Whelpdall. Joan Clay's grave is in Rolleston Churchyard. Many people can remember her tombstone, which, in the restoration 1894-1895, was removed.

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Alfred Loughton [1865-1953] was a long-time resident of Southwell at 4, Market Place. He was a man of many interests - a cycle maker, violin maker, bell-hanger and gas-fitter. But he is probably best known for his architectural and other photographs, largely of the Minster. On his death, his family donated his collection of photographs and photographic plates to the Minster Library which includes over 1700 items.

Mary Trebeck [1845-1926] was the daughter of Christopher Wordsworth, headmaster of Harrow School, who was consecrated appointed Bishop of Lincoln in 1869. In 1874 Mary married Canon James Trebeck who was to become Rector of Southwell Minster and a Rural Dean.