



A Salisbury-Cathedral-centric view of History.

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PARISH THE THOUGHT - Minal

Minal is the locals' name for Mildenhall, just east of Marlborough, in the Kennet Valley. The parish church is St. John the Baptist and is described by Simon Jenkins in *England's 1,000 Best Churches* as 'One of England's most eccentric interiors'. He also quotes John Betjeman, an Old Marlburian, that to visit Minal was to walk into a church of a Jane Austen novel.



Although it started off life in the 11th century belonging to Glastonbury Abbey but held by Edward of Salisbury, it had become almost derelict by the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, enriched by the proceeds of the Napoleonic wars, the churchwardens and prominent members of the congregation decided to finance a virtuoso display of woodwork, completely refurbishing the nave and chancel.



This included unusual twin pulpits, box pews and a gallery for the poor, plus a band (later an organ). Note the touch of Strawberry Hill Gothic at the east end.

From Saxon times, the parishioners were required to pay various taxes in cash or kind: *church bot* covered the fabric, *light scot*, the candles, *plough alms* to tax the better off farmers whilst 'guaranteeing' their success in ploughing. There was also *mortuary* when a second-best animal

was donated after a death and *Peters Pence* to be sent to Rome. These were all absorbed into the tithe where all provided a tenth of the *fruits of the earth* by All Souls' Day and the offspring of animals by Pentecost. Bear in mind that Rectors were often given multiple parishes in which they installed curates and no doubt the odd prebend or two. So a considerable income could be amassed.

FYI Excavation of Kennet Long Barrow in the 1950s discovered the remains of 40 to 50 people in five chambers set laterally either side of a central corridor.

COURT CARDS

In the evening, when my eyes get too tired to read, I often relax with a game of *Napoleon at St. Helena* patience (family version). I do love the designs on playing cards and began pondering on the origin of the court card characters. Left, the so-called *Suicide King*, probably the result of an accidental change in design due to a worn out printer's block.



Playing cards were imported from Spain and Italy, and later, France (they invented the Queen) and Belgium. These countries had a tradition of picturing heroes on their court cards. An example is shown below:

Kings:

- David, Biblical king (Spades)
- Alexander the Great, Greek leader (Clubs)
- Charlemagne, king of the Franks (Hearts)
- Julius Caesar, Roman leader (Diamonds)

Queens:

- Pallas Athena, the Greek goddess (Spades)
- Argine, an anagram of the Latin word Regina meaning Queen (Clubs)
- Judith, from the apocryphal book of the same name (Hearts)
- Rachel, the wife of the Biblical Jacob (Diamonds)

Jacks:

- Ogier the Dane, legendary knight of Charlemagne (Spades)
- Lancelot, legendary knight of King Arthur (Clubs)
- La Hire, French military commander Étienne de Vignolles (Hearts)
- Hector, the mythological hero of Troy (Diamonds)

The Jack on the right is one of only three court cards where the figure is shown in profile; hence *one-eyed jacks*.

Packs gradually began to be standardised and then to



become double-ended - an opponent turning his card around gave away the fact he had picked up a court card. However the great breakthrough came in England in 1831 when Guernsey-born Thomas de La Rue (bust in St Peter Port, right) developed printing techniques that increased productivity and reduced cost. Manufacturers, Joseph Reynolds modernised the characters in 1840 and Charles Goodall again in 1860. It is that design that is with us today. So the pictures you see are the result of evolution and are not based on any individuals. The symbols likewise have a mixed origin: the queen holding a flower could have come from Rachel (above) and the sword from King David. There is a tradition however that the Queen of Hearts represents Anne Boleyn!



De La Rue was the first company to print cards (and introduce the back design) and now is the world's largest commercial security printer and papermaker.

When it comes to suits, it is believed that they originally came from the Tarot's swords, clubs, cups and coins. The Germans preferred hearts, bells acorns and leaves. The French then adapted the German pack, changing the bells to *carreaux* (diamonds), the acorns to *trèfles* (clovers or clubs) and the leaves to *piques* (pikes or spades). Importing cards was banned in the 1600s so Charles Goodall remodelled the designs into the *pips* we have today. In the late 19th century the New York Consolidated Company added the corner indices that enabled gamblers to peek at their cards without exposing their hand.

Some believe that the four suits represent the classes of medieval society and others that it derived from earth, air, fire and water



but like the court cards it was not based on a single idea but a gradual evolution. Finally, the ace which was shifted from the lowest to the highest card during the French Revolution as a symbolic gesture of peasants conquering kings. In the 18th century the English government implemented a tax on cards and so the ace design was altered to incorporate a stamp (left). It was then given a more complex design to deter forgers - a crime punishable by death!

FYI According to legend the white horse at Westbury was originally cut to commemorate King Alfred's defeat of the Danes at nearby Edlington. It was re-cut in 1778 to be more horse-like as it may at first have looked similar to the dragon-like one at Uffington.

Joanna Woodd comments on the Jonas Hanway piece (J&T No.119): Persian women had parasols, well they were held over the elite during the Persian Empire 400BC. Then the Greeks copied this way of living. Lovely depictions in pieces of art in the current exhibition at the British Museum. Ed: Below are examples of the umbrella/parasol in history courtesy of umbrellaworkshop.com/umbrellas/history-of-the-umbrella. Incidentally *umbrella* comes from



Pics: Persian King Xerxes (Pinterest) - Ancient Greek Woman (Wikimedia Commons)- Egyptian sunshade from the tomb of Khaemwaset (Art of Counting) - Terracotta Army, Qin Shi Huang's tomb (Pinterest) - Thailand, Royal Nine-Tiered umbrella (Wikimedia Commons) - Jean Marius folding umbrella, Paris 1710 (Palais Galliera).



the Latin for shade or shadow and *parasol* is a French combination of *parare* and *sol*, *shield from the sun*. *US slang for umbrella

FYI County Hall's strange address is Bythesea Road, Trowbridge. The road was in fact named after a family of clothiers who owned the land there. Other *woolly* Trowbridge place names are Broadcloth lane, Worsted Close and Ryeland Way (after the Wiltshire sheep, originally bred by monks at Leominster, Herefordshire).

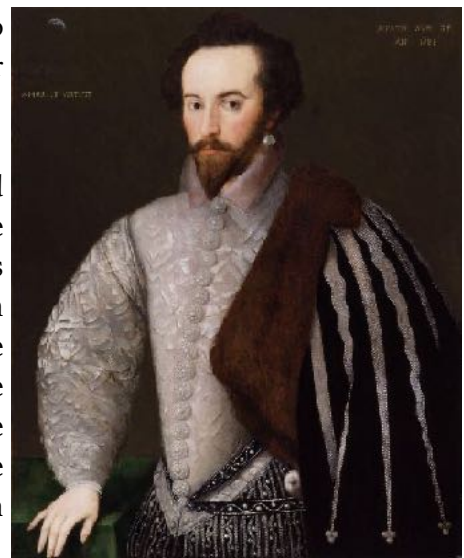
DOWNTON SURPRISE



A £1.99 impulse purchase in Oxfam resulted in a copy of *A Guide to the Avon Valley Footpath* by Sarah Moxey (Halsgrove Publishing 1997). My wife and I intend to catch the bus to Downton and walk back along the river. However, as well as excellent directions, Sarah writes of the history behind structures encountered on the way.

Of Parsonage Manor house in Downton (photo above, *courtesy of the Daily Mail*), she tells the following story. In 1576 Queen Elizabeth I applied to Winchester College for permission to rent the house, with the ulterior motive of giving it to Thomas Wilkes, who had been Clerk to the Privy Council. Downton belonged to the Bishops of Winchester and William of Wykeham had used the tithes to fund his college. Pressure though had to be brought to bear before the Queen's wish was granted.

The house was later sold to Sir Walter Raleigh's mother and brother, Carew Raleigh, who served as Downton's MP. The house was in their family for 100 years. Sir Walter was executed in 1618 but in 1588 a portrait was painted of him and hidden behind oak panelling. 250 years later the impoverished farmer owner discovered the painting and gave it to Humberts the land agents in settlement of a debt. The painting, right - which I am sure you will all know - was the first purchase (£105) by the new National Portrait Gallery in 1857.



FYI The county court in Trowbridge is situated in Studley Mill (aka Clarks Mill). Alongside is the Handle House where holes in the brickwork let in air to dry the flower heads of teasels. The wooden frames set with teasels (handles) were drawn across the damp cloth to raise the nap.

Downton was a *Pocket Borough* (controlled by one person who had at least half of the burgage tenements) before the Reform Act of 1867. This was slightly different to a *Rotten Borough* where the electorate had dwindled but still returned the same number of MPs (Discussed in J&T No.25). Another term is a *Potwalloper Borough* in which the franchise was extended to the male head of any household with a hearth 'large enough to boil a cauldron'. Honiton was one of these, and votes were sold to the highest bidder. Lord Cochrane, who's naval exploits inspired *Hornblower* stood for the town in 1806, did not give any bribes and lost the seat. He then paid those who had voted for him 10 guineas each. At the next election he won overwhelmingly but humbugged the voters by not parting with a penny. This so impressed the voters of Westminster that he was asked to represent them.

FYI For this series of **For Your Information**, I have lean't heavily upon *Did You Know Wiltshire* compiled by Julia Skinner and published by the Francis Frith Collection 2013. Frith are at Dinton and their archive covers 7,000 towns and villages.