
Bengeo Old Church Plate and Old Registers.

BY THE REV. J. C. M. MANSEL-PLYDELL.

BENGEO OLD CHURCH PLATE.

The ancient Communion Plate of Bengeo Church consists of a Silver Cup and Paten; the latter constructed so as to act as a cover to the former. Mr.

Wilfrid Cripps, one of the highest authorities on ancient Church Plate, considers the Cup a remarkably deep one, compared with others of the same period. Both Cup and Plate bear the hall-mark of London 1626-7, and the maker's mark CB, which mark occurs on much notable plate from 1606, or thereabouts, to 1632. The Cup is straight-sided, $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches high, mouth slightly splayed, arched foot, and stem with central knop. The Paten has a stem and foot about 2 inches in depth. Both pieces of Plate are quite plain, and without any engraving or ornamentation whatever. Underneath each is inscribed "Bengeo Church, An Fanshawe."

This Plate was evidently presented to Bengeo Church by Anne, Lady Fanshawe, widow of Sir R. Fanshawe, an Ambassador and Royalist of some note, who died in 1666. By some means or other the handsome gift of Lady Fanshawe was lost for an indefinite number of years. It is not unlikely that it was disposed of or stolen during the Civil War. At any rate, its existence was unknown to the present generation of Bengeo until 1882, when it was discovered in the shop of Messrs. Hincks and Radclyffe, silversmiths, Vigo Street, by Mr. J. G. Fanshawe, a descendant of the original donor of the plate. A sum of money was collected without delay, and the plate was bought for the sum of £37, and restored once more to the Church of the Parish to which it had first been given more than 200 years before.

It may be added, that all attempt to trace the history of the plate, from the time of its loss to the time of its recovery, was without success.

BENGEO OLD REGISTERS.

There are three valuable old books in the Parish Church.

(1) The Registers of the Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, from the year 1539 to about 1680. Each leaf of this book is made of parchment, and considering its age the whole is in an excellent state of preservation. Most of the names are distinct, but we cannot claim that they were written earlier than the year 1600, for the Marriage Registers are headed thus: "*Mariages in the parish of Bengeo, from y^e yeere of our Lord 1539 unto this present yeere of our Lord 1600.*" The heading of the

Burials is to the same effect, that of the Baptisms being totally illegible.

(2) The Register of Burials in Bengeo Church and Churchyard from 1680 to 1812. The reverse side of the book contains, as the words of the inscription state, "*The names of those Quakers who are layed into y^e ground (in y^e buriall place as they call it) goeing to Hertford, according to y^e Act for burying in woollen.*" This Act for burying in woollen is frequently referred to throughout the book. There appear to have been three Acts upon this subject during the reign of Charles II. The first was passed in the 18th year of the reign, and was entitled, "*An Act for burying in woollen onely.*" It continued in operation for about twelve years, but as its provisions were imperfect, and the object in view was not accomplished, in the 30th year of the same reign a much more complete and stringent Act came into force. The preamble of this latter Act recites as follows: "Whereas an Act made in the 18th year of his Majesty's reign that now is, intituled, 'An Act for burying in woollen only,' was intended for the lessening the importation of linen from beyond the seas, and the encouragement of the woollen and paper manufactures of this kingdom, had the same been observed: but in respect there was not a sufficient remedy thereby given for the discovery and prosecution of offences against the said law, the same hath hitherto not had the effect thereby intended."

By the second clause the former Act is repealed and the third clause enacts thus: "And it is hereby enacted by the authority aforesaid, that from and after the first day of August, one thousand six hundred and seventy eight, no 'corps' of any person or persons shall be buried in any shirt, shift, sheet, or shroud of anything whatsoever made or mingled with flax, hemp, silk, hair, gold or silver, or in any stuff or thing other than what is made of sheep's wool only, or be put in any coffin lined or faced with any sort of cloth or stuff or any other thing whatsoever that is made of any material but sheep's wool only, upon pain of the forfeiture of five pounds of lawful money of England to be recovered and divided as hereinafter in this Act expressed and directed."

A short act was passed two or three years afterwards

for the purpose of facilitating the making of affidavits in respect to the carrying out of its provisions.

The entries during the time when the Rev. Daniel Whistler was Vicar of Bengoe (1700-1738) are interspersed by observations from that somewhat eccentric divine. For instance, under the register of the burial of "*the son of Thomas Clarke, called William, unbaptised,*" on May 3rd, 1713, he writes, "The boy being about six years old, was brought to be buried on a Sunday afternoon when the congregation were assembled. He was put in without any ceremony, which being done in so publick a manner was the occasion that three of Thos. Clark's daughters were baptised the same afternoon, and two more the next Sunday, as is to be seen in the register for Baptisms."

The same gentleman records in the register a quarrel between himself and the squire of the Parish, Mr. Byde. The occasion was the burial of Mrs. Frances Daniel, the widow of the Rev. Thomas Daniel, a former vicar of Bengoe, who was buried April 11th, 1707, "under the Communion Table in the Chancell at Bengoe." Mrs. Daniel was brought from London to be buried by her husband's side—and in registering her burial Mr. Whistler adds this remark: "Mrs. Daniel was buried in the Chancell, and Mr. Byde ordered me to demand of her Executor, Mr. Maynard, the sum of £5, which I did accordingly, but he refused to pay it; the said Mr. Byde and D. W. differed about an election for Knt. of the Shire, and so it was never paid. The said Byde forbid me his house by letter in the beginning of April after, and so saved me much trouble. Amen.—D.W."

(3) The Vestry Book dating from 1633 to 1791. It is in good preservation, and various details of local interest are inscribed therein.