A book about Staughton May 2019

This month we look at an episode in the life of Sir Oliver Leder, the man who built Place House. It occurred during the short reign of the fiercely Protestant Edward VI, at a time when the Church had broken away from Rome, Archbishop Cranmer had compiled the Book of Common Prayer, and the bible in English was placed in every church.

Oliver Leder's religious affiliations are not known in detail but in his actions over the next decade he proved to have an independence of mind that did not, on occasion, wholly accord with his sovereign's evangelical ruthlessness. From 1546, in the early years of the reign of Edward VI, Oliver Leder was patron of the church of St Andrew's in Staughton. In December 1547, he found himself being savagely criticised, along with his colleague Sir Lawrence Taylard (his rival for the shrievalty in 1541), for being insufficiently observant to Edward's policies. It happened in St Neots, where Edward's Protestant ideals had been opposed by many in the population, who were reluctant to shed the traditional Catholic doctrine. The church in St Neots was equivocal in the matter, having illicitly concealed from the king's Commissioners the fact that they had substantial landholdings which should have been surrendered in accordance with the new doctrine.

Others in the population, however, were equally determined that Edward's will should be carried out in full, and a mob, led by a Mr Dowke, broke into the church, intent on removing *“certain images of abuse.”* Oliver Leder and Lawrence Taylard, being apprised of the threat to the church, immediately confronted the insurgents and forced them to put back the ornaments. A riot then ensued, which resulted in Leder and Taylard being hauled off to the Privy Council at Hampton Court in April 1547, to face a charge of *"unlawfully threatening the townspeople of St Neots."* Unless they renounced this behaviour, the judgement stated, they would face the heaviest of consequences. The two men offered no defence, but escaped punishment, no doubt in part due to the prominent offices both men held. It was almost certainly due to the intervention of Oliver Leder, as patron of St Andrew's, that the church of St Andrew's in Staughton came off relatively lightly when the king's Commissioners arrived in 1552 to carry out the king's will.

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