

<p>John White (1590 – 1645)</p> <p>Also known as Century White</p> 	History:	
	Topic:	Religious Persecution and a Scandalous Minister.
	Date of Record:	November 2020 & February 2023
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	Notes:	Religious Persecution and the First Century of Scandalous Malignant Priests.

## Religious Persecution and a Scandalous Minister in Hargrave

In 1642 the puritanical Long Parliament established commissions “for the defacing, demolishing, and quite taking away of all images, altars or tables turned altar-wise, crucifixes, superstitious pictures, monuments and reissues of idolatry, out of all chapels”. In 1643, William Dowsing of Laxfield was appointed to lead this activity as “Commissioner for the destruction of monuments of idolatry and superstition” and gained infamy for the trail of destruction he exercised on more than 150 Suffolk churches in 1643/1644. He kept a diary and recorded in detail his extreme actions, for example at Clare:

“We brake down a 1000 pictures superstitious; and brake down 200, 3 of God the Father, and 3 of Christ, and the Holy Lamb, and 3 of the Holy Ghost like a dove with wings; and the 12 Apostles were carved in wood, on top of the roof, which we gave order to have taken down; and 20 cherubim to be taken down”

In 1643 the commission began to inquire about “scandalous ministers”, those who were allegedly not serving their congregations to the Puritan ideal. It was an opportunity to remove ministers who were sympathetic to the Royalist cause or of high Anglican persuasion. They relied on evidence from parishioners, giving the opportunity for old grudges to be settled or favour to be bought with those exercising power. In Suffolk, 100 incumbents were ejected from their livings, often left destitute.

Richard Hart was appointed Rector of Hargrave by Charles I in 1634. On the 12th March 1643 he came before the commission and was found to be “a scandalous minister”. Roundhead troops were sent to drive Hart and his wife and children from the village, whereupon his living was confiscated on the grounds that he had deserted his ministry. Nothing is recorded of his subsequent fate, but many dispossessed priests were left destitute or even jailed. It appears that no new appointment for Hargrave was made for almost 20 years until Thomas Usher became rector, after the return of Charles II in 1660. Possibly Hargrave was treated badly because it was part of the Kytson/Gage estates with royal sympathies.

Persecution was not limited to clergy. Following the destruction of religious icons, attention turned to a purge of witches. A Suffolk born shipping clerk, Matthew Hopkins, titled himself “Witchfinder General” and fuelled subjective suspicion and prejudice against unfortunate individuals from whom between 1645 and 1647 he extorted confessions by torture. 202 people in eastern England were accused and subsequently hanged for witchcraft, many tried at the assizes in Bury St Edmunds.

## **The First Century of Scandalous Malignant Priests**

At the start of the English Civil Wars (1642-1651), the Puritan party appointed a committee for the purpose of replacing those clergy who were loyal to the king. These displaced clergy were described as 'scandalous', but in reality this often merely reflected their political and theological attitudes. The committee would hear evidence, often from local parishioners, of the misdeeds of the parish priest. If the allegations were proven the rector would be sequestered, where legal possession was taken of their assets. The process was prone to abuse with local parishioners taking the opportunity to get rid of any clergy purely on the grounds that they did not like them.

### **John White (1590–1645)**

The politician charged with compiling the evidence against the clergy was John White a Welsh lawyer and politician who sat in the House of Commons from 1640 to 1645.

White was born 29 June 1590, in the parish of Rhoscrowther, Pembrokeshire, Wales, being the second son of Henry and Jane (Fletcher) White, and was descended from a family of Tenby merchants.

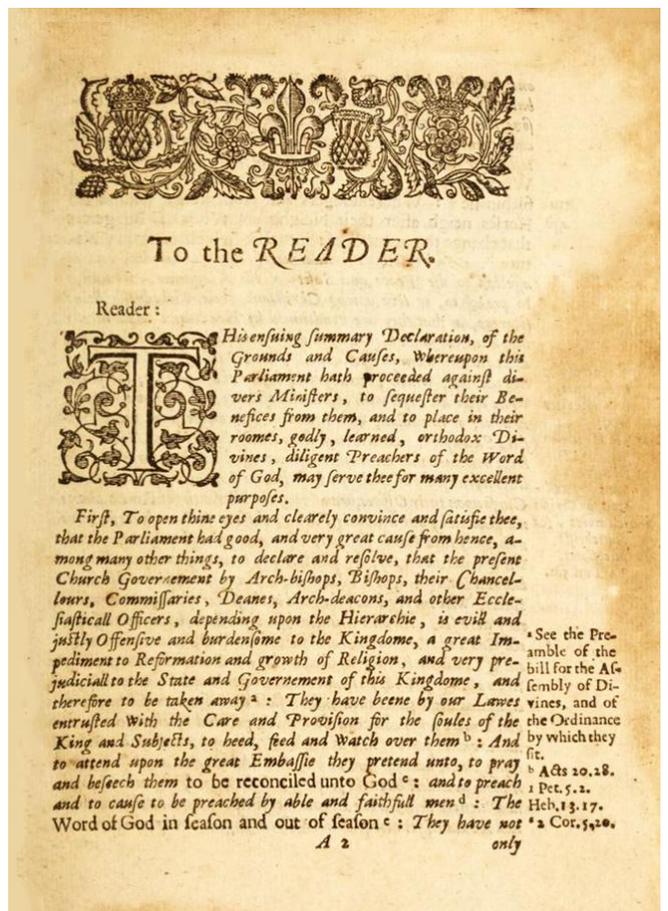
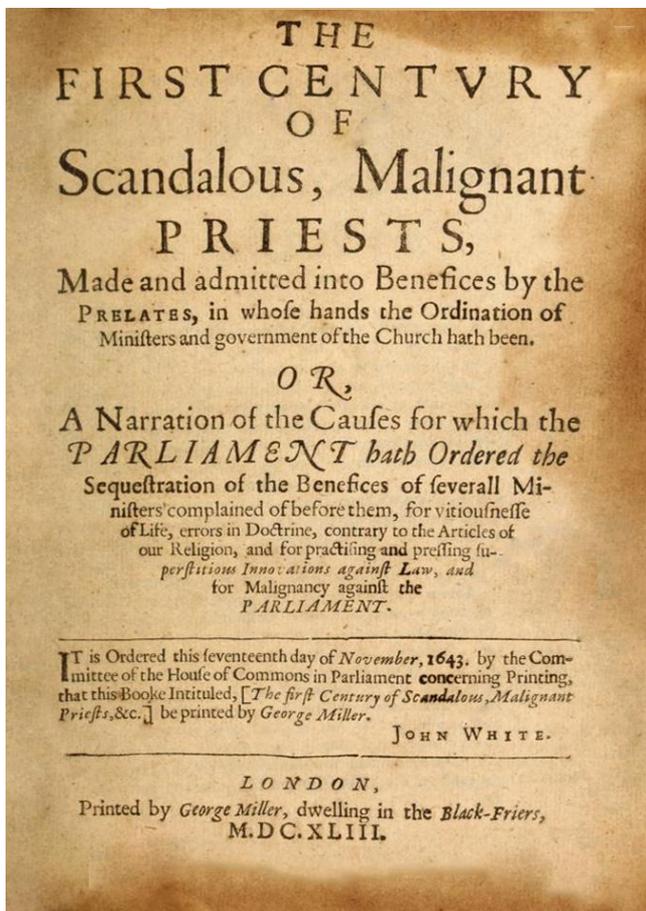
With his brother Griffith he entered Jesus College, Oxford in 1607. Then entering the Middle Temple in 1610 and was called to the bar in 1626. He was High Sheriff of Pembrokeshire in 1626, like his father and grandfather before him.

White became Member of Parliament for Southwark in 1640. In 1642 he became the leading member of the Committee for Plundered Ministers which ejected royalist clergymen from their benefices. Out of this arose his book *The First Century of Scandalous and Malignant Priests* in 1643, an account of one hundred such clergymen, which won him the nickname of 'Century White.' He died on 29 January 1645, and was buried in the Temple Church, London.

He had married three times: firstly to Janet, the daughter of John ap Griffith Eynon of Jeffreston, Pembrokeshire; secondly to Winifred daughter of Richard Blackwell of Bushey, Hertfordshire with whom he had nine children; then thirdly to Mary the eldest daughter of Thomas Style of Little Mussenden, Buckinghamshire.

## **The First Century of Scandalous Malignant Priests (FCSMP)**

The FCSMP was a remarkable register of 100 ministers removed from their homes and employment by order of the Puritan Parliament for various acts identified by the original committee to some more extreme offences. These included speaking treasonously about Parliament, joining the Cavaliers, refusing to administer the Sacrament and other doctrinal irregularities, publishing tracts without license, hiding Catholics, failing to observe the Sabbath, intemperance, fornication, cursing, gambling and even bestiality.



Transcript of Page 1.

The FIRST CENTURY OF Scandalous, Malignant PRIESTS,

Made and admitted into Benefices by the PRELATES, in whose hands the Ordination of Ministers and government of the Church hath been. OR,

A Narration of the causes for which the PARLIAMENT hath Ordered the Sequestration of the benefices of several Ministers complained of before them, for vitiousnesse of Life, errors in Doctrine, contrary to the Articles of our Religion, and for practising and pressing superstitious Innovations against Law, and for Malignancy against the PARLIAMENT.

It is Ordered this seventeenth day of November, 1643. by the Committee of the House of Commons in Parliament concerning Printing, that this Booke Intituled, [*The first Century of Scandalous, Malignant Priests, &c.*] be printed by *George Miller*.

JOHN WHITE

LONDON: Printed by *George Miller*, dwelling in the *Black-Friers*,

M. DC. XLIII.

## **Suffolk Scandalous Malignant Priests**

Among the 100 were 17 from Suffolk including Richard Hart Rector at Hargrave. The 17 Suffolk Clergy in the order they appear in the book.

Robert Cotesford, Rector of Hadleigh and Monks' Eleigh.

Edward Brewster, Rector of Lawshall.

Richard Hart, Rector of Hargrave.

Alexander Clark, Vicar of Bredfield.

Nicholas Bloxam, Rector of Great Waldingfield.

William Evans, Rector of Sancroft.

Cuthbert Dale, Rector of Kettleburgh.

Nicholas King, Vicar of Friston and Snape.

John Wells, Rector of Shimpling.

Thomas Geary, Vicar of Bedingfield.

John Rannew, Rector of Kettlebaston.

Miles Goltie, Vicar of Walton.

Samuel Alsop, Vicar of Acton.

Mathew Clay, Vicar of Chelsworth.

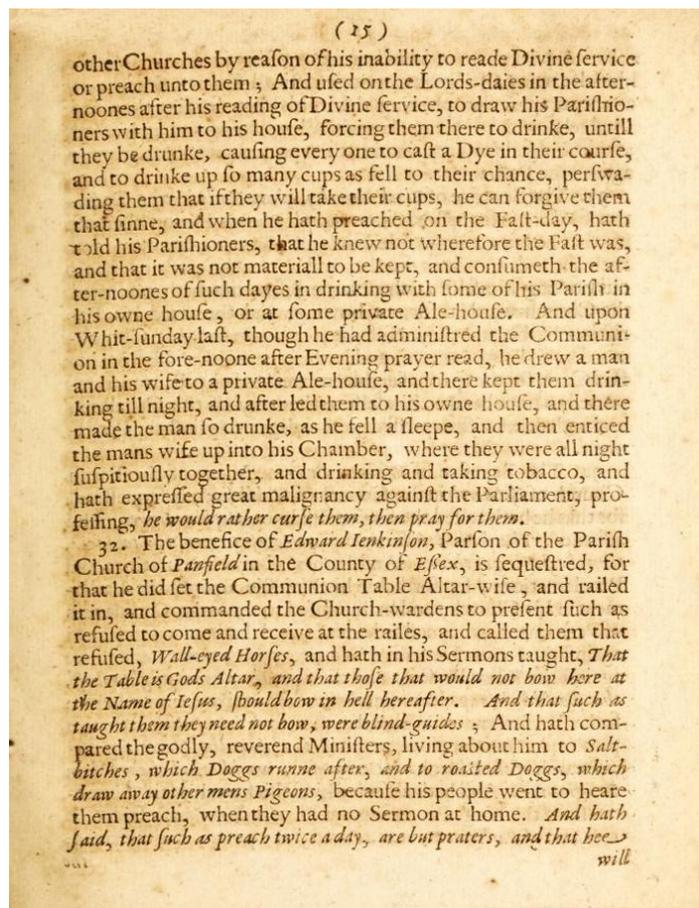
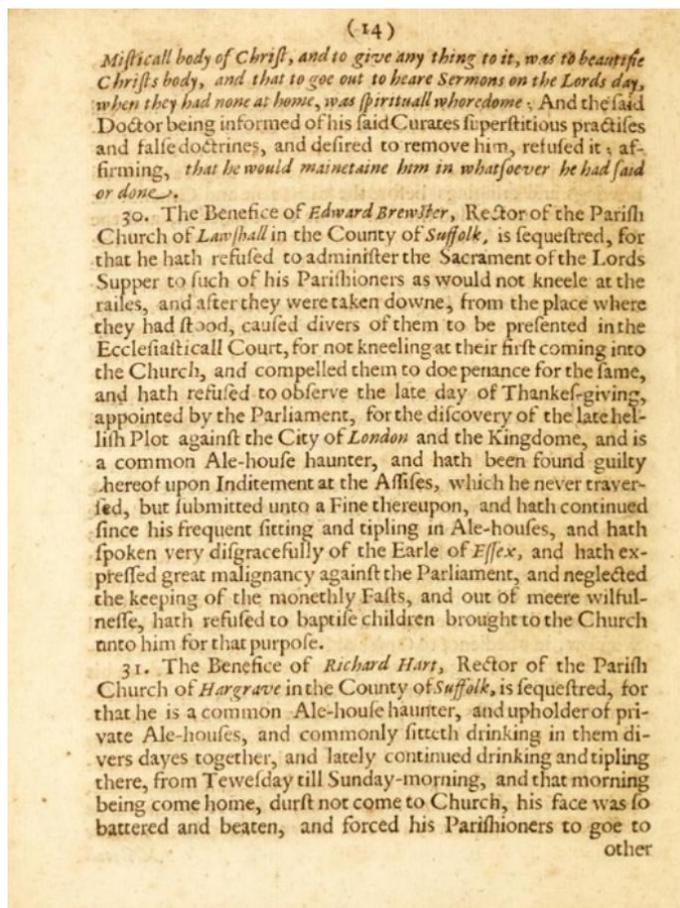
James Buck, Vicar of Stradbrook.

Robert Shepherd, Rector of Hepworth.

Samuel Scrivener, Rector of Westthorp

## Richard Hart (1610-1666) – Hargrave Rector

Richard Hart's own entry as it appears in the FCSMP, followed by a transcript:



“The Benefice of Richard Hart, Rector of the Parish Church of Hargrave in the County of Suffolk, is sequestered, for that he is a common Ale-house haunter, and upholder of private Ale-houses, and commonly sits drinking in them divers days together, and lately continued drinking and tipling there, from Tuesday till Sunday-morning, and that morning being come home, durst not come to Church, his face was so battered and beaten, and forced his Parishioners to go to other Churches by reason of his inability to read Divine service or preach unto them; And used on the Lords-days in the afternoons after his reading of Divine service, to draw his Parishioners with him to his house, forcing them there to drink, until they be drunk, causing everyone to cast a Dye in their course, and to drink up so many cups as fell to their chance, persuading them that if they will take their cups, he can forgive them that sin, and when he hath preached on the Fast-day, hath told his Parishioners, that he knew not wherefore the Fast was, and that it was not material to be kept, and consumed the afternoons of such days in drinking with some of his Parish in his own house, or at some private Ale-house. And upon Whit-Sunday last, though he had administered the Communion in the forenoon after Evening prayer read, he drew a man and his wife to a private Ale-house, and there kept them drinking till night, and after led them to his own house, and there made the man so drunk, as he fell asleep, and then enticed the man's wife up into his Chamber, where they were all night suspiciously together, and drinking and taking tobacco, and hath expressed great malignancy against the Parliament, professing, he would rather curse them, than pray for them.”

Richard Hart is thought to have been born in Hargrave in 1610 and having been driven out of the village by Parliamentary Troopers he moved to Cherry Hinton, Cambridgeshire, where he died on 31st July 1666.

The family did however receive some relief following sequestering of his property. Details can be found in the following document.

## PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH GOVERNMENT

IN SUFFOLK, 1643-1647

BY V. B. REDSTONE.

IV . Proceedings of the Committee for Plundered Ministers (1643-47).

Folio 40b.

28 May, 1647. Grant to Richard and Anne Hart, children of Richard Hart, from whom Hargrave rectory was sequestered, of 1-5th profits upon petition of their grandmother, Anne Higham, widow.

Interestingly another member of the 100 was US President George Washington's great-great grandfather:

The Reverend Lawrence Washington was born at Sulgrove Manor, Northampton, England in 1601; and was a fellow of Brasnose College, Oxford, and rector of Purleigh in Essex in 1633. During the English Civil War, he was removed from his living by Parliament, as recorded below. He died in 1652/53 at age 51. He and his wife Amphillis Twigden had a son, John (1633-1677), who emigrated to Virginia in 1658; his eldest son Lawrence, born in 1659, was the first American-born Washington and grandfather of George Washington.

Lawrence Washington's offences were as listed below.

"The benefice of Lawrence Washington, Rector of Purleigh in the County of Essex, is sequestered, for that he is a common frequenter of Ale-houses, not only himself sitting daily, tipping there but also encouraging others in that beastly vice, and hath been oft drunk, and hath said that the Parliament have more Papists belonging to them in their Armies than the King had about him or in his Army, and that the Parliaments Army did more hurt than the Cavaliers, and that they did none at all. And hath published them to be Traitors, that lend to or assist the Parliament."

## Footnote

### Parliamentary Divines

The removal of pro monarchy clergy was coupled with the introduction of pro parliamentary Divines.

Divines are followers of something (or someone) that has the qualities of a god or deity.

In the early years of the Civil War in England, from February 1642 to July 1643, Puritan parishioners in conjunction with the parliament in London set up approximately 150 Divines as weekly preachers, or lecturers, in the city and the provinces. This was an exceptional number of lecturer appointments made over the relatively brief space of time, especially considering the urgent need to prepare for the looming war and fighting it as well.

Puritan MPs and peers, in cooperation with their supporters from across the country, tactically employed the institutional device of weekly preaching, or lectureships, to neutralise the influence of Anglican clergymen perceived as royalists dissatisfied with the parliamentary cause, and to bolster Puritan and pro-parliamentarian preaching during the critical years of 1642–1643. Successfully employed, the device of weekly lectureships significantly widened the base of support for the parliament during this crucial period when people began to take sides, prepared for war, and fought its

first battles. Such a program of lectureships, no doubt, contributed to the increasing polarisation of the religious and political climate of the country.

### **Catholic Recusant Persecution in the Seventeenth Century.**

Recusants were those who refused to attend Church of England services. Under Queen Elizabeth I and James I reign, legislation was introduced which subjected offenders to weekly fines. For those who persisted in non-attendance this action could ultimately result in the confiscation of lands.

These laws were relaxed under Charles I, indeed he had a catholic wife. However at the start of the Civil War in 1640 with the summoning of the Long Parliament, this persecution was initially greatly enhanced. This was reflected in the rising number of executions with twenty executed between 1641 and 1646, compared to just two between 1625 and 1640.

Perversely as the wars proceeded, the traditional judicial system, the tool for persecution, ceased to effectively function in many parliamentarian held areas. Even in royalist held areas where such courts remained, recusancy laws were less vigorously enforced.

As the war progressed further the fear of Catholics led insurrection rapidly declined. In royalist areas, Catholics became more accepted in local society and significant numbers joining the armies of the king, subsequently rising to positions of some standing. This was not the case in Suffolk and Essex which were the parliamentary heartlands.

The early years of the Civil Wars certainly resulted in immense suffering for some Catholics who were targeted by parliamentarian troops for violent treatment and the plundering of their property and belongings. However the vast majority of Catholics took a neutral position disproving common misconceptions regarding their political leanings. By the middle of the century, whilst they were not totally accepted, opinions had certainly moved on from the Catholic phobia of the first Elizabethan era.

**Nicholas Newman**  
**February 2023**