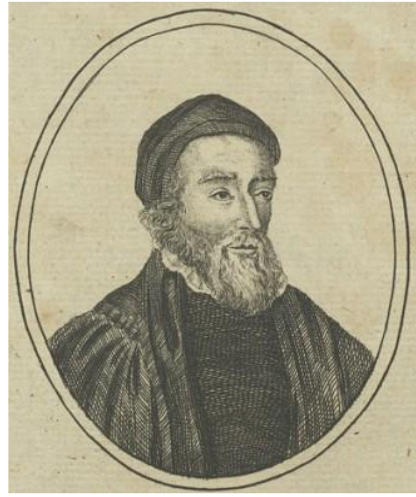


BERNARD GILPIN

RECTOR OF HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING

BY PAUL LANAGAN

BERNARD GILPIN



BERNARD GILPIN WAS Houghton-le-Spring's most well-known Rector. Gilpin, or Gylpyn as it is sometimes recorded, is often referred to as the "Apostle of the North" or "Father of the Poor" for his many good deeds throughout his lifetime, as well as during his incumbency at Houghton from 1558 to 1583. Today his tradition of feeding the parish's poor with a roasted ox between Michaelmas and Easter is still re-enacted each year at the festival of Houghton Feast.

The following time line gives us a glimpse at Gilpin's life before and during his time at Houghton. The numbers in brackets are his age, something worth considering alongside his achievements.

1517 - Bernard Gilpin was born, one of the youngest children and fourth son of Edwin Gilpin of Kentmere, Westmorland.

1533 - At the age of sixteen, Bernard Gilpin attended Queen's College, Oxford.

1540 – Gilpin [23] graduated with a Bachelor of Arts.

1542 – Gilpin [25] graduated with a Master of Arts. He was ordained in this year.

1549 – Gilpin [32] graduated with a B.D.

1552 - Bernard Gilpin [35] left Oxford and became Vicar of Norton (near Stockton) in the Diocese of Durham in November 1552.

1553 - Bernard Gilpin [36] left Norton in April or May 1553 and travelled to Europe in the early months of 1553.



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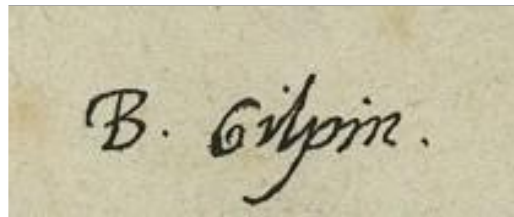
July 1553 - Queen Mary I ("Bloody Mary") ascended the throne and began the restoration of Roman Catholicism to England.

1556 – Bernard Gilpin [39] returned to England from his visit to France, Germany and Holland and was presented with the Rectory of Easington and made Archdeacon of Durham by his Uncle, Tunstall, Bishop of Durham.

March 1557 – Bernard Gilpin [40] accepted the offer of Rector for the parish of Houghton-le-Spring.

October 29th 1558 - Bernard Gilpin [41] became the Rector of Houghton-le-Spring.

Nov 17th 1558 - Queen Mary I died.

A photograph of a piece of aged, yellowish paper with the handwritten signature "B. Gilpin." in dark ink. The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted hand.

1566 – Bernard Gilpin [57] cofounded the Kepier School in Houghton-le-Spring around 1566 with his friend, John Heath, a London merchant. The Royal Charter was signed in 1574 and the school became known as the Royal Kepier Grammar School.

Oct 27th 1582 - Bernard Gilpin [65] made out his Last Will & Testament. Around this time he said in a letter to a friend: "I have a very weak body, subject to many diseases." A plague was raging through Houghton at this time and may have prompted the will-writing.

February 1583 - Gilpin [66] was in a weakened state following an incident which occurred in Durham Market Place; he had been struck down by an ox!

March 4th 1583 - Bernard Gilpin died at the age of 66 years. He was interred the next day in a grave inside the Parish Church. A large altar tomb was later erected on the site.

1884 [date adjusted] - The Tercentenary of Bernard Gilpin's death was marked. The parishioners of Houghton-le-Spring raised the funds to purchase, install and maintain a clock in the Church tower. This clock can still be seen to this day.



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1967 – Gilpin's tradition of roasting an ox to feed the parish's poor was resurrected at Houghton Feast by the Rotary Club of Houghton-le-Spring and continues to this day.

1983 [date not adjusted] – Funds were raised by the parishioners of St Michael & All Angels Church for the installation of a magnificent stained glass window in the West wall of the church to commemorate the three-hundredth anniversary of Gilpin's death. The colourful window depicted scenes from Gilpin's life.

2015 – On March 4th 2015, Houghton Heritage Society started preparations for commemorating the 500th anniversary of Bernard Gilpin's birth in 2017. The project, called *GILPIN500*, saw the creation of a website to share the story of Gilpin's many contributions to Houghton-le-Spring.

2011 – On Saturday March 5th, St Michael's Church held a Bernard Gilpin Weekend to celebrate the life of Gilpin. Amongst the celebrations was a Tudor banquet and the highlight was the singing of a new Bernard Gilpin hymn, written by Rector Sue Pinnington. Gilpin's tomb was decorated with evergreens and candles. In 2012 the Bernard Gilpin Weekend became an annual celebration, and was held once again in 2013.



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2017 – GILPIN500 - Commemorations took place in Houghton-le-Spring for the quincentenary anniversary of Bernard Gilpin's birth year. In February 2017 the Parish Church held a Bernard Gilpin Beer Festival. On Saturday March 4th 2017, the anniversary of Gilpin's death, Houghton Heritage Society placed an evergreen wreath at the Kepier Hall, the former Kepier Grammar School, in memory of his contributions to education in Houghton. That weekend the Parish Church held a Terrible Tudors fun day where Bernard Gilpin merchandise was on sale (bottled beer, beer glasses, pin badges and booklets) and an anniversary Eucharist took place on the Sunday where the Bernard Gilpin hymn, which was written in 2011 and is typically sung at the Houghton Feast church service, was sung. A new Gilpin banner, made by Carole Cunningham and featuring the Gilpin boar, was unveiled alongside a Gilpin mosaic made by members of the Space4 Christian project. The Gilpin tomb in the south transept of the Parish Church was decorated with evergreens, as is the tradition.



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2017 (CONTINUED) - In July 2017, over 80 people attended a very modern birthday celebration organised by the Parish Church - a hog was roasted in the grounds of Kepier Hall and musical entertainment was provided by singer Russ Tippins with his electric guitar. This was the third hog to be roasted by the Church in recent years, following those cooked at Houghton Feast in 2009 and 2010.



Paul Lanagan

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LOCAL HISTORIAN
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- :: The Life of Bernard Gilpin The Apostle of the North by M. Lewins, 1836
- :: The Gentleman's Magazine & Historical Chronicle Vol 63, Part 2, 1793
- :: The Life of Bernard Gilpin by William Gilpin, 1824
- :: Pronouncing Dictionary of Biography & Mythology, 1870
- :: Memories of Bernard Gilpin, 1884
- :: The Last Will & Testament of Bernard Gilpin, 1582, proved May 16th 1854.
- :: Wikipedia (Gilpin's year of ordination)

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