

## **Peter Mews.      Bishop 1672-1684**

Peter Mews is perhaps famous principally on account of the black patch on his left cheek in the portrait which hangs in the Long Gallery of the Palace. He is often believed to have been a senior army officer before becoming bishop, but in reality he was never more senior than a Captain in rank, and was no career soldier. He was, however, a committed royalist, and this is what inspired his military excursions.

He was born in 1619, and educated at Merchant Taylors School, London and St. John's College Oxford, where he was a scholar and a Fellow. Most of his activities were inspired by a fierce loyalty to the royalist cause, before, during and after the English Civil War of 1642-49. In 1642 he left Oxford to join the royalist army and was taken prisoner at the Battle of Naseby in 1645, by which time he was serving as a Captain. He was deprived of his Fellowship at St John's, when the Parliamentarians were in the ascendancy in 1648, and thought it best to exile himself to the Netherlands. Somehow, while this was going on he was ordained Priest in 1645.

A friend of Charles I's secretary, and good at disguises, his time in the Netherlands was spent as a spy for the royalist cause. He undertook several espionage missions during the Commonwealth of Oliver Cromwell, and he was also on active service during a major battle in 1658. All this meant that at the time of the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 he was in very good standing with Charles II, to whom he appealed for recognition of his services (and discharge of his debts in the Netherlands). As a result he was given several sinecure jobs, including an appointment as Chaplain to the King, and was also restored to his Fellowship at St. John's College, Oxford. In 1667 he became President of the College, and three years later was elected Vice Chancellor of Oxford University. He served in both offices until 1673.

In 1672 Mews was nominated Bishop of Bath and Wells and shortly afterwards resigned his positions at Oxford. He had held several church jobs before this (Archdeacon of Huntingdon and Berkshire, Canon of Windsor and St. Davids and Dean of Rochester), but as far as is known he had never been active in any of these roles.

As Bishop of Bath and Wells he was best known for his lavish entertaining of the local gentry, but of his ecclesiastical activities there is no record that I could find. He remained Bishop of Bath and Wells for 12 years, and was then translated to Winchester where he remained Bishop until his death in 1706. He is buried in Winchester Cathedral.

It was after he became Bishop of Winchester that Mews became involved in the King's cause during the Monmouth Rebellion. He had neither personal liking nor professional support for James II, but his royalist sympathies overrode this distaste. As a result, the Bishop of Winchester was fighting alongside the King's army at the battle of Sedgemoor, where Mews played a major role by using his horses to realign the bogged down cannons towards the rebels. It is believed that it was at the Battle of Sedgemoor that he received the wound which led to him having a patch on his left cheek for the rest of his life. Interestingly he evidently regarded his wound as a "badge of honour". It would have been easy to cover it with a skin-coloured patch, but people would not have noticed that, so he chose black instead!

Later he would have been one of the Non-Jurist bishops had it not been for illness. He made public pronouncements in their favour and clearly had no sympathy with James II's attempts to restore Roman Catholicism to England.

As a man he appears to have been equally liked and admired by some influential people, and disliked and despised by others. Clearly a man of strong will and opinions !

Brian Roberts-Wray. March 2017