

## A Lottery in Jacobean Bridgwater

BY T. BRUCE DILKS, B.A., F.R.HIST.S.

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The year is 1620 of our era ; the date — *absit omen* — is the first of April; King James the First is on the throne. Our concern is with Virginia, the distant land on the shores of the new world, so named after his great queen by Sir Walter Raleigh, who but two short years ago has been sacrificed to Spain on the altar of pacification. For King James has entirely revised Elizabethan foreign policy and has done all he can to continue the Spanish friendship which he had always maintained in Scotland.

The piracy and semi-piracy which in the spacious days had afforded an outlet for English capital and a source of valuable returns to the investors must perforce disappear. English merchants were compelled to find a more respectable way of approach to the riches of the new world. The Virginia Company formed of capitalists of London and elsewhere had obtained a charter from the king in 1608. During the twelve years intervening it had had a ruffled career, partly through ill-success in its plantations, partly through dissensions at home.

As in most of such combinations of mercantile adventurers there were two more or less distinct types ; men whose sole aim was to accumulate wealth, and men whose wish to see a return for their investments was mingled with higher motives of one sort or another. Of these latter Gabriel Barber was an example. He was a London merchant who in earlier years had not been averse from profiting by piratical expeditions, and later had been among the early founders of the Virginia company. He it is who now comes before us as its representative in its approach to the townfolk of the west-country port of Bridgwater.

The links between Somerset and the early settlements in America are numerous and are frequently attested by the enquiries for records of ancestry which reach us from time to time from descendants or those pioneers from whom our town and country-side sent out to people and plough the new lands across the ocean. So it seems to have come about that the Company in London saw a way to raising more capital through the personal interest which the people of Bridgwater felt in their sons who had crossed over. A scheme was devised whereby the net was spread as widely as possible to draw the whole borough into the undertaking. Its details can be recovered from four documents preserved among the archives of the corporation. Let these take up the story. First a message from Gabriel Barber to the mayor and corporation :

1<sup>o</sup> April, 1620 To the right worshipfull the Maior Recorder & Aldermen .& to the rest of their bretheren in the Towne of Bridgewater.

My desire is that ye would make a Receipt for sixtye poundes from the Councell of Virginia, by the handes, of their deputye Gabrieli Barbor & express the use of the said 60<sup>li</sup> viz : ten poundes therof to be forw<sup>th</sup> distributed to the poore; and the fiftye poundes to be lent to tenn poore Tradesmen Inhabitants; of yo<sup>r</sup>s<sup>d</sup> towne, five poundes a peece for three yeers free w<sup>th</sup>out use<sup>1</sup>; (Alehouseskeepers to be exempted from any part thereof) the said parties giveing good securitye for repaym<sup>t</sup> at thend of the s<sup>d</sup> three yeers, and other tenn persones to have the said monies for other 3 yeers following & so to be continued for ever ; in default therof to repaye to the Counsell of Virginia the said 50<sup>li</sup> being therunto required.

GABR. BARBOR.

It was necessary to put this undertaking into proper legal form and a pair of indentures was accordingly drawn up and duly sealed by the two parties — the one by Gabriel Barber, the other by the Mayor and Corporation. The early clauses — about a seventh of the whole — are sufficient to give us the gist of the agreement.

This Indenture made the First day of Aprill in the yeare of the Reigne of ou<sup>r</sup> Sovereigne Lord James by the grace of God of England Fraunce and Ireland king deffendor of the Fayth &c. the Eighteenth and of Scotland the three and Fyffcyth betweene Gabrieli Barber of the Cytty of London gent and for the the Council of Virginia of thone parte And the Maior Aldermen and Burgesses of the Borrough of Bridgwater in the County of Somerset of thother partye witnesseth that whereas the said Mayo<sup>r</sup> Aldermen and Burgesses have receyved the day of the date hereof of the saide Gabriell Barber by the handes of William Hill gent one of the saide Burgesses of the Borrough aforesaid the some of Fifty Poundes of lawfull money of England by the saide Gabrieli given to the use Benefittand behoof of Tenn Religions and honest handy Craftes men or Tradesmen Burgesses and iahabytantes within the said Borrough being not Inkeepers neyther Alehouse keepers neyther in Service or Retayner to any person. To be lent to every of them five Poundes a peece for the better mayntynance of their Crafte or Trade To have and to hold the saide Five Poundes every of them for and during the space of three yeers from the first day of May next ensewinge the Date hereof Taking sufficient suretyes or Pledge every of them for the Repayment thereof at thende of the three yeers.

The third document is a formal acknowledgment of the receipt of the money.

Witnesseth theis presentes that wee the Mayor Aldermen and Burgesses of the Boroughe of Bridgwater in the Countie of Somerset have received and had the daye of the date hereof of

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Gabriell Barbor of the City of London gent by the direction of the Councill of Virginia the full some of lx<sup>li</sup> of lawfull money of England, Fyfty poundes whereof is lymitted to certen uses menconed in one paire of Indentures made betweene the said Gabriell Barbor of thone parte and the saide Mayor Aldermen and Burgesses of the Boroughe aforesaid of thother parte bearinge the date of theis presentes And the other Tenne poundes is fornwth to be distributed to the poore people of the Boroughe aforesaid of wch said some of lx<sup>li</sup> and every parte thereof wee the saide Mayor Aldermen and Burgesses doe hereby exonerate aquite and dischardge the said Gabriell Barbor his heires executors and Administrators and everye of them by theis presentes; In witnes whereof wee the said Mayor Aldermen and Burgesses of the Boroughe aforesaid have hereunto sett our seall of office the First daye of Aprill in the - xvijth yeare of the Raigne of our Sovereigne Lord Kinge - James of England, of Scotland the liij<sup>th</sup> 1620.

The 10<sup>li</sup> given unto the poore above written was distributed accordingly as by amt. appeareth in Mr. hills keeping al by the hands of Tho. Anthony, Willm. Dey, Mr. Sealy and Mr. Hill.

So far no reason whatever for this philanthropic action on the part of the Virginia Company towards Bridgwater has been disclosed. The fourth document reveals the mackerel which the sprat was given to catch.

The Boroughe of Bridgwater

To the Right honorable the Lordes and of Bridgwater, others of the Councill for Virginia.

Pleaseth yo<sup>r</sup> honors to be advertised that wee have taken knowledge of M<sup>r</sup> Gabriell Barber yo<sup>r</sup> deputie concerninge the matter of the Lottery to be performed within the Boroughe And have accordingly yeilded our best assistaunce therein unto the said M<sup>r</sup> Barber with all favourable Libertie and allowaunce to use a Convenient place within this Towne during all the tyme of his abeade here for the better performaunce of the said Service. We have also taken knowledge at the said M<sup>r</sup> Barbers first repaire hither of the blankes which he delivered unto us and, which wee numbred and we perused; all so the prices and examined the true valewe with the booke which wee found very true and juste And the said Blanckes and prizes wee mingled well together in the presence of the nowe Mayor of this Towne some of the Burgesses and divers other gentlemen and honest Inhabitants of the same Towne which beinge done they weare locked upp in a Boxe appointed for that purpose under twoe Lockes and Twoe keyes And the Lottery Boxe beinge salfe locked was every night broughte unto the Mairs howse and comitted to the salfe custody of the said Mayor in a

bagg fast sealed by yo<sup>r</sup> honors said deputies And farther that every daye duringe the drawinge of the said Lottery Twoe or more of us weare present and did publiclye sitt in the place wheare<sup>r</sup> the said Lottery was soe drawn as well to satisfy our selves as all others of the upright carriadge and faire proceedinges used in the said syrvyce that everye Adventurer should have his equall right which the said M<sup>r</sup> Barber and others in trust under him in his absence have verry justlye and uprightly answered and performed accordinge to the trust in them reposed to the good contentment of all men and thir owne deserved Comendacons Wch wee thinck good to comend unto your honors and soe humbly take our Leaves praying Almighty god to prosper and give good success to that plantation. Restinge yo<sup>r</sup> honors, to be comaunded the Maior Recorder Aldermen and Burgesses of the Boroughe aforesaid.

primo April 1620.

The system would appear to have been that a ticket was sold to any buyer in accordance with the usual practice of the matter so far as he was concerned. But if he was fortunate enough to succeed in drawing a 'price' or 'prise' his reward was a chunk of Virginian stock; he became an adventurer forthwith, and from that time would be closely interested in the fortunes of the plantation on which mayor and aldermen had asked God's blessing.

As so often in the course of historical research, questions rise in the mind for which at least for the nonce we have no answer. We should like to know whether the Company received an ample return for their outlay, what the price of a ticket was, what were the varying values of the prizes, and how many of them there were. Probably Gabriel Barber knew very well what he was doing and the documents bear the appearance of a stereotyped pattern which suggests that this lottery business was being pursued in other towns than Bridgwater. A search in other municipal chests or among the archives of the company, if they are still preserved, might answer these questions.

As a private adventure the Company did not long survive but was taken over by the state. What became of the ten honest and religious craftsmen and tradesmen, and did the fortunate share-holders continue to receive their dividends? At least the poor were safe in their morsel of the ten pounds, for were not Mr. Sealey and Mr. Hill — mayors more than once — both honourable men?

### End note

1) Interest

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