

Edward Alport

Edward Alport became Rector of Dunstable in 1609, having replaced the puritan, non-conformist minister, John Richardson. Alport, who adhered strictly to the Anglican rules and procedures, soon antagonised many of his parishioners, who had preferred the ways of Richardson.

Alport was subjected to a variety of abuse, accusation and attack, which he listed in his evidence to the Star Chamber Court.

In 1616 some of the townspeople decided to bring the church, the rector and the sacrament of holy baptism into contempt. In front of witnesses, they brought a sheep into the priory, 'baptised' it in the font with the name Edward and put it up in the three decker pulpit. They said that the sheep made more sense with its bleating than Alport did in his sermons. A few men were sentenced and punished for this. When the rector tried to bring other offenders before the magistrates they could not be found and warrants could not be served. This is hardly surprising as one of the town's constables was a ring leader in the episode. His opponents also appointed opposition churchwardens and invited outsiders to come and preach in the Priory. These same people refused to pay the rector's tithes. They cut down his corn before it was ripe and destroyed his crops, which must have cost him much financially. When he complained, these miscreants 'with stones so beat and battered him that he almost died.' It is surprising that he stayed in Dunstable as long as he did. Alport left in 1625.