Croxton Abbey

By R I Hanlon Dec 1984

If you travel down Ling's Hill on the A607 road from Waltham to Croxton Kerrial, you can see on your right hand side a picturesque valley stretching towards the south. That is Croxton Park - once a royal medieval deer park, but also the site of a famous pre-monstratensian abbey.

At the bottom of the hill, a private road on your right leads into the park. And, on your right, as you go along it, you can see embankments which, in former times, enclosed the water for Croxton's mediaeval water mill. Further on you meet three fish ponds which, in former days, provided fish for the monks of the abbey.

On your left is a house which was originally called the Water Bailiff's cottage. Another few hundred yards on your left stand the ruins of an ancient hunting lodge - Park House, the home of the Belvoir, Quorn and Gottesmore hunts, and the home of the famous Croxton races which were run every year, during the nineteenth century (in the last week of March or in the first week of April) in that part of Croxton Park which is called the 'liberty of Bescaby'.

Nothing substantial is left of the once famous mediaeval abbey but we do know where it was and what it looked like. Two 13th century cartularies of the abbey say that it was founded near a spring called Haliwell (Holywell) which is situated behind the Water Baliff's cottage.

Aerial photographs (1948, 1949, 1952 and 1972) show that most of the abbey buildings lay to the east of a line running from the Baliff's cottage to Park House. The grid reference is SK824276. Older Ordnance Survey maps refer to its foundation period as Temp, Henry II.

In the early part of the 20th century, the then Marquis of Granby, grandfather of the present Duke of Rutland, carried out excavations there over many years. As a result of these, architectural drawings of the foundations were made and also pictorial reproductions of the original buildings.

According to a drawing in 1926 by Sir Arthur Clapham, the original church was cruciform in shape, without aisles (a common premonstratension feature), with a small cloister, chapter house, kitchen, frater and dorter.

In the 13th century a presbytery was added to the east end and other portions also. In the 14th century the Guest House was built, and in the 15th century the church was further extended.

The original abbey church measured 154 feet in length but this was finally extended to 209 1/2 feet (62.85m). Those who wish to see the ground plan

should check on an article in Part IV, (1944-45), Vol.XXII, of the Transactions of the Leicester Archaeological Society, by Mr. A.P. Herbert.

Historical background

At the time of Domesday (1086), Croxton, Knipton and Harston, formed one manor. Originally, i.e. prior to the Conquest, they belonged to an Earl Algar, and then they passed to his son, Earl Morcar, who submitted, at first, to William, the Conqueror, but then joined Hereward the Wake's rebellion in 1071 at Ely.

Morcar was captured and ended his days in a Norman dungeon. His lands were taken by the King and let at 'fern' for £17 a year to a Hugh Fitzbaldric, a tenant-in-chief in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire.

After his death, the manor passed to Earl Meulan. But, because lie fought on the losing side at Tenchebrai in 1106, he lost his lands. Records of the Archaeological Institute of York, 1648, say that after this, Henry I feoffed it to his nephew Stephen, who later passed it on to his natural son, William, earl of Moretaign in Normandy.

Through his wife, Isabel, the daughter and heir of William de Warenne, earl of Warren and Surrey, William became earl of Surrey. After Stephen's death in 1154, he received the titles Count of Boulogne and Moretain and Earl of Warenne, and died in October 1158.

(J. Nicholls in Volume II, Part I, of his History of Leicestershire, p.146, has a different account of the early history of Croxton Manor after the Conquest.)

Before William, the son of Stephen, died, and in the period 1154-58, he gave the site of the abbey in Croxton Park to monks of the premonstratensian order. Section 30 of a late 13th century abbey cartulary, known as Croxton Domesday, reads as follows:

> 'We have of the gift of William, Earl of Boulogne and Moreton and Warenner, the waste land behind Croxton Park and around the spring which is called Haliwelle, on both sides of the Valley, with easements of entry and exit of waters, pools and mills, pasture and fuel and all kinds of liberties for constructing the abbey; and 40 acres towards Saltby; and all the waste land towards the Three Dykes, which his men granted to us, and also the church of the same vill (Croxton) with all its appurtenances, with a messuage and orchard, with tofts and crofts; with cultivated and uncultivated lands; meadows and pastures; and one caruoate (= 96 acres in Croxton) of the demesne lands adjoining the same village, with meadows, feeding grounds and pastures and alit heir utilities and appurtenances; and common-pasture with the men of the same village; for us to have and to hold; well and in peace, freely and wholly with all liberties and easements for us and our men, for the cattle, animals and

oxen of our carucates, everywhere below the Haya and beyond with the oxen of his demesne, with all quittance, without any harrassment, in pure and perpetual aims'.

The Small Cartulary (an earlier 13th century one than Croxton Domesday) gives a similar account in folios 39(b) and 40(a), but at this point it adds - 'Icing Henry Senior (II) and John, Earl of Moreton, confirmed this grant and confirmation to us, as above.' This implies confirmation before Henry II's death in 1189 and by John in the period (1189-1200) during the reign of Richard I - John's brother.

Section 31 of the Large Cartulary continues: 'Also he (Win, son of Stephen) confirmed to us, by another charter, gifts and alms, which his men made to us, when our church was founded, namely, one carucate of land in (Nether) Broughton, of the gift of Richard Bussel with a toft; and half of Lounde towards Dalby, the church of Hokenhala with appurtenances; the church of Lotmde with appurtenances; and two bovates (i bovate = 12 acres) of land at Hertistoft; and a certain cultivated plot of the demesne for making our house and its fabric, which was in the time of King Henry, in pure alms'.

The origin of the pre-nonstratensian order

Croxton Abbey was founded by an order which originated in Laon in N.E. France at the beginning of the 12th century. A certain Norbert, son of the lord of Gennep in the duchy of Cleves (70 miles north west of Cologne and close to the Dutch border) went to work in the household of the Archbishop of Cologne at Xanton, near Cologne. At first, he became a sub-deacon. Then, some time later, after a journey to Rome with the Emperor, Henry V, he began to take his religious vows in a more serious manner.

One day, some three years on, he had a strange vision which was to change his whole life. He was out riding his horse in the forest of Caucy, when a thunderstorm frightened his horse, throwing him off and rendering him unconscious. As he lay there he saw in a vision a green valley stretching before him and a deserted chapel in the middle of it. Suddenly a long procession of white-robed men with crosses and lighted tapers appeared to pass through the chapel and out across the meadow behind it. Immediately Norbert exclaimed 'This is the place which the Lord hath chosen for us to found an abbey'.

He woke up and set out to find a place similar t o the one in his dream. Bishop Bartholomew of Laon (74 miles north-east of Paris) offered him several sites and eventually he chose the chapel of St. Vincent, which the bishop granted along with some adjoining land to establish a parent house for the new monastic order in 1120. To it he gave the name premontre (in French), pratum monstratum (in Latin), in English 'the meadow indicated' in his dream or vision. - So the new order was given the name pre-monstratensian.

The new community of 14 monks, with Norbert as their abbot, founded daughter houses in Germany, France and Belgium. In 1143 13 monks set out from Licques to found the first English abbey of the order at Newhouse (Newsom) in N. Lincs. Newhouse founded Croxton between 1154 and 1158.

Croxton was the eighth house in England and became fully operational by 1162. Its first abbot was called Thomas. (The l4c Obit Book lists its first abbot as William. He witnesses an 1177 charter in a dispute between the canons of Newsham, Lines, and the nuns of Elstow, Bedfordshire). Croxton Abbey became the parent of several other houses - Blanchiand in Northumberland in 1165 and Cockersand in Lancashire before 1190. The latter became the parent of Tungland arid Shap (itself the parent of eleven other houses). The abbot of Croxton is also thought to have then instrumental in founding Newbo abbey in 1198.

The priory of Hornby in Lancashire came under the direct control of Croxton from the earliest days. It was associated with the famous Nevile family, whose coat of arms - (Gules, a saltirojst Andrew's Cross), ermine, surmounted by a crown on a rose) is on a bench-end on the north side of the nave aisle in Croxton parish church.

A mediaeval mystery play (the MS is in the British Museum) originating from Croxton Abbey is known to have been performed in a parish church near Hornby during the Middle Ages. It is about the profanation of a church sanctuary by jews. As they touched the Host they were depicted as having been completely burnt up by lightning.

The Abbeys in this country were divided into three circaries (circuits) - Northern, Middle, and Southern. Croxton belonged to the Middle circary. The abbot of the chief abbey in a circary had a duty to visit each abbey in his particular area. The abbot of pre-montre visited the abbeys whenever he wished. And in the 12th and 13th centuries each abbot had to attend the general chapter every year at pre-montre. If he fell ill, he sent his prior or one of his canons.

The order's way of life

The rule of the Order was that of St. Augustine. The early canons were concerned with daily and nightly services, the observation of fasts and vigils, and singing masses for the souls of its various founders, patrons, famous abbots and canons.

The Croxton Obit Book - a calendar with dates and names of those commemorated, including some canons who were vicars of Croxton - gives a rare insight into the services conducted in the abbey church. The ancient benches (frontes) from the monks' choir, now in the nave of the parish church, are constant reminders of commemorations of the founders and patrons, through-out the four centuries of the abbey's existence.

The name of the founder was read out in chapter every year on his anniversary day and for 30 days afterwards a portion of food and drink was given to the poor on his behalf. On the 7th and 13th day after his death there was a vigil of nine readings in the church with a mass and commendation. This was repeated on the first anniversary of his death. And within 30 days of the founder's death every priest said three masses for his benefit. The names of other benefactors were written in the Obit Book by the cantor and were read out on the anniversary of their deaths.

The canons wore white woollen habits, which, we are told, were often teeming with vermin. They were vegetarians and lived on fish from the fish ponds. They maintained a close connection with Newson, Newbo and Welbeck Abbeys, as well as with the priory of Hornby and their daughter houses.

And they also had a number of parish churches under their control. Croxton, Ault Huclmall and Lome (lost to Newstead Priory in the 13th century) have already been mentioned. In addition they held the advowsons of South Croxton, Sproxton, Saltby, Tunstall and Welling (in the archdeaconry of Richmond).

The abbey kept the glebe tithes and offerings but, in return, the abbot had to provide for daily services as well as the spiritual care of parishioners. One of the papal privileges to the abbey says: 'In your churches you may be allowed to institute four or three of your canons, one of these you should present to the diocesan bishop, so that he may receive the cure of souls from him and answer to him for spiritual matters but to you for the temporalities'.

In the case of Croxton, the canons, who were involved in parochial work, were forbidden to eat in the homes of parishioners and wore expected to take their meals in the refectory at the abbey.

The bishops disliked the idea of vicar-canons as they thought that their interest lay with the abbey rather than with the villages. So in the late 12th century and in the early 13th century, attempts were made to put resident vicars in place of vicar-canons. The abbots of Croxton, however, continued to appoint their vicars not always canons of the abbey - right up to the Dissolution in 1538.

The dedication of the abbey

The abbey was first dedicated to St. John the Evangelist and in early charters was called St. John de Valle of Croxton. His symbol was the eagle and the carged faces of eagle owls still may be seen on one of the old bench ends in Croxton parish church (said to have been taken from the monks' choir after 1538 and subsequently brought into the parish church).

By the second half of the 13th century the abbey had a double dedication. At the top of pages in the Large Cartulary the abbey is described as being dedicated to the Blessed Mary and to St. John the Evangelist. The abbot's seal has the words,

in Latin -. 'Seal of the convent of St. John of the Valley, Croxton' but in the centre of it we find the Virgin Nary seated with the baby Jesus in her arms.

A similar depiction existed at one time in a caning above what is known as the humility door in the south porch of Croxton parish church. The late Sir Giles Gilbert Scott uncovered this carving, badly damaged by fire, when he took two casings off the inner door of the porch in the late sixties of the 19th century. The carving was put above the humility door when a side chapel dedicated to the B.V.N. in the south aisle was brought into use in the 13th century.

The burning probably occurred when Cromwellian soldiers tried to burn down the door in an attack on a royalist cavalier outpost stationed in Croxton church during the Civil War. A local craftsman replaced the burnt carving by a new one after Scott's discovery had been made in the 19th century.

History of Croxton Abbey

William, Earl of Boulogne, Moreton and Warenne, died in October, 1158, and Croxton manor, along with the patronage of the abbey, reverted to the Crown - to Henry II (1154-1189).

About 1176 he exchanged Croxton and Sedgebrook for Corsham and Culington in the south of England. A family named Porter, originally coming from Liuns in Normandy, got two thirds of the places and a Masilia de Apgard one third. Both families and their descendants made considerable gifts to the abbey.

But when Richard I was imprisoned in Germany in 1193 on his return from the Crusades, his brother John, then Count of Moreton, who ravaged the countryside from Nottingham, gave Croxton to his chamberlain, Hubert de Burgo (Burgh).

Hugh Porter was in Normandy at the time. But when Richard was released, after a ransom had been paid, in six months, Hugh came hack to England with him and recovered his estates from de Burgo.

It is of interest that the ransom raised for Richard was provided by the sale of the whole of the wool of the Cistercian and pre-monstratensian abbeys in 1193. Croxton abbey played its part for it was one of the leading wool-producers in Leicestershire.

When war broke out between King John and King Philip Augustus of Prance in 1204, Hugh Porter fled to his lands in Normandy and John gave Croxton manor to Geoffrey Lutterell of Bescaby and Saltby. He passed it on to his son, Andrew Lutterell, who became sub-sheriff of Nottingham under his father-in-law, Philip Marc, the sheriff of Nottingham.

In 1208 Innocent III proclaimed an Interdict against John and the realm of England. All services of the Church, except Baptism and Extreme Unction, were

forbidden. The dead could not be buried in consecrated ground. In 1209 John was excommunicated.

On May 13th, 1213, John submitted to the Church. Hugh of Wells, consecrated bishop of Lincoln at Melun by the exiled Archbishop Langton on 20th December 1209, was unable to return to England until John's submission. Hugh did not permanently stay until 1217. Meantime John died. As he lay dying at Newark on October 18th, 1216, Abbot Adam (1202-21) was brought from Croxton Abbey to act as his doctor and confessor.

Adam was renowned as a famous medical practitioner in his day, and we can well believe that he, more than any other spiritual adviser, was best placed to act as John's confessor, for John appeared to have a special affection for Croxton and its abbey.

His body was taken to Worcester Cathedral where it still lies entombed under a monumental effigy. But his bowels were buried on Windmill Hill to the west of the fish ponds in Croxton Park. His heart was buried in the abbey church by Abbot Adam. This event had far-reaching consequences for the future of the abbey, its influence and power.

For the soul of his father John, Henry III gave gifts of timber and 100 shillings were given each year by the Exchequer to the abbey. By 1231 the 100 shillings were taken out of rents in five different villages - Twyford, Skeffington, Tilton, Muntford and Rothley (headquarters of the master and brethren of the Order of the Temple).

In 1244, Henry III presented a chasuble to Croxton abbey 'to be used in the conventual church for celebrating the anniversary of King John's death'.

Meantime, Hubert do Burgo, sworn in as chief Justiciar at Runnymedo, in June 1215, regained possession of Croxton and Sedgbrook - although not fully until 1224.

He was at that time the most powerful man in England, controlling the Great Seal and the affairs of the Crown. When he became earl of Kent in 1227 he gave up Sedgbrook and Croxton manors and on 14th September, 1227, Henry III granted them to Hubort's daughter Magot, daughter of his third wife, Margaret, sister of Alexander, King of Scotland.

Hubert fell out of favour and was replaced as chief justiciar in 1232 by Stephen de Segrave, a professional lawyer. Magot died and the manors got into different hands, including the Abbot of the abbey after they reverted to the Crown in 1234.

Meanwhile, Croxton abbey was steadily gaining land and influence particularly in Waltham on the Wolds. There Philip d'Albini (grandson of William D'Albini Brito of Belvoir and son of his son Ralph) feoffed his lands and manor to the abbot and convent of Croxton for one knight's service.

Philip himself first received 12 carucates and a messuage near the spring before the gates of the rectory of the church and then the whole manor from Robert FItzParnell, the 4th Earl of Leicester, before his death in 1204.

Philip then became the teacher and instructor of the young prince who was to become Henry III and assisted later at his coronation. Philip, like his father Ralph, was a great crusader, and died in the Holy Land in 1235, being buried at the entrance to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre under a flat tomb-stone.

The abbey also received land in Waltham from Margaret, Countess of Winchester, a sister of Robert FitzParnell, who was married to Sayer de Quincy (Earl of Winchester in 1207, and one of the 25 guardians of Magna Carta).

On November 24th, 1227, Henry III granted the abbot and canons of Croxton a market on Thursdays at their manor of Waltham and a yearly fair there on the vigil and feast of the Nativity of St. Mary.

On January 23rd, 1228, Henry III granted to the church of St. John the Evangelist, Croxton, and the canons there in frank almoin, of all the land in Waltham which they had of the gift of Philip de Albiniaco. The abbey had 3 carucates and a virgate in the manor of Waltham and 5 carucates in demesne. The freeholders had 6 1/2 virgates and the villeins 36 1/2 virgates from the abbot.

In 1229, Bescaby and Saltby became the property of Geoffrey Lutterell and he confirmed to the abbey all the lands held by the canons of his fee by previous grants of Philip de Gaunt, 'chevalier', and Robert his brother.

All the sources of information available to us show that Croxton Abbey, became heavily endowed and highly involved in demesne farming, particularly in the 13th century in the reign of Henry III.

The smaller and earlier l3c. cartulary gives details about the abbey's possessions in 14 villages. Fourteen folios are devoted to Nether Broughton, 13 to Eaton, 14 to Croxton, 6 to Hose, 1 to Long Clawson and Ropsley, 1 to Branston-by-Belvoir, 5 to Bescaby and Saltby, 9 to Waltham on the Wolds, 1 to Sproxton, part of 1 to Humberstone, 1 to Sharnlord and 2 to Skeffington. Folio no. 84 of the same cartulary tells us that the abbey had 11 carucates (1056 acres) and 20 acres of meadow in Barrowby near Grantham.

A charter of 19th January 1247 says that Richard, earl of Cornwall, granted all the lands which Croxton Abbey monks held of the fees of the honour of Eye in the manor of Berweby in demesne and in service. (This charter was inspected and confirmed by Edward I on November 28th, 1290, at Harby).

The larger and later l3c. cartulary, known S Croxton Domesday, compiled by William of Loughborough, gives details about 70 places in which the abbey had land and possessions. Almost every village within a 10 mile radius is mentioned,

also Grantham, Leicester, Lincoln, Huntingdon, Northants, Newark, Nottingham and Norwich.

A 14th century roll (housed along with the cartularies at Belvoir) has much the same detail as the small cartulary, but mentions a number of additional charters. One of then has as a witness – 'Peter, son of Roger, Alderman of Leicester'. Another charter, dated 1251-52 says that Peter was the first known mayor of Leicester.

Croxton Abbey, like other religious houses, grabbed as many pasture rights as it could in order to put up sheep cotes, and their grants implied considerable flocks. A survey of Croxton manor in 1245 says that a virgate (approximately 24 acres) of land can keep 40 sheep.

Lawsuits show that the abbey had pasture for 200 sheep at Bottesford and for 100 sheep at Eaton during the latter half of the 12th century and during the 13th century.

The small cartulary mentions pasture for 100 sheep in Sedgbrook. Select charter no. 239 in the Muniments Room at Berkeley Castle, Gloucestershire, is an indenture of a lease for 10 years by Geoffrey Puterel (Botterill) to Ralph, Abbot, art the Convent of Croxton, Co. Leic., of pasture for sheep in Howes (Hose, Co. Leic.) Date Feast of the Holy Cross (3rd May) 1236, (written in Latin).

At the beginning of the 14th century, an Italian merchant, called Pegolotti, from Bardi, made a list of English monasteries producing wool. He also said that Florentine merchants recommended their buyers to go to Croxton Abbey because here they would get the best wool. (The Abbey at one time had 6,000 sheep). A good part of the Italian cloth industry and almost the whole of the industry of the Low Countries depended on English wool.

The abbey and the Croyll family (1242-1336)

On April 26th, 1242, 24 librae of land in Croxton was given in fief to Lord Bertram de Cryoll (Cryoil in the Charter Rolls) 'in part-exchange for the manor of Ketelberews in Suffolk, and 16.1. of land in Lechton - 'the said' 40.1. to be held rendering a pair of gilt spurs of 6d yearly at the Exchequer'.

Bertram succeeded de Burgo as sheriff of Kent in 1232 and was keeper of Dover and Rochester Castles. In 1245 Croxton passed to his son Nicholas who went to live in the Manor House. From that time the name Criol, Criel, Kitl, or Kerrial was added to the word Croxton.

The Grid shield (Argent, two chevrons and a Canton Gules) is still to be seen carved on a bench-end in the south aisle of Croxton parish church. That particular bench-end must be about 700 years old as the Oriole had their hey-day in Croxton during the latter half at the 13th century.

In 1263 Nicholas became warden of the Cinque Ports, and in 1270 sherrif of Kent and governor of Rochester Castle.

On the octave of Saint Michael, 1246, a comprehensive and 'final' agreement was made at Westminster 'in the presence of the king himself' (Henry III), 'between Abbot Geoffrey (1240-63) and Nicholas do Cryoll, concerning the dues and services which the same Nicholas required of the aforesaid abbot for his free-holding which he held from the aforesaid Nicholas in Croxton, so that he will truly allow the same abbot and his successors and his aforesaid church to enclose the aforesaid land and heath with dyke and hedge and to make a profit as he wishes from it'. This is the first enclosure of land in Croxton.

On December 28th, 1246, at Winchester, Henry III granted Nicholas and his heirs a weekly market on Monday at his manor of Croxton, and a yearly fair on the feast and the morrow of St. Barnabas' day (now 11th June). The base of the ancient market cross is now built into the dividing wall of two semi-detached houses in Middle Street at the top of School Lane.

A description of the vill in the Small Cartulary, made in 1258, shows that the Lord Abbot was then the biggest land owner. He farmed 64 carucates (624 acres) in the demesne and had full use of the water mill. His tenants farmed 60 acres in the vill.

The Lord of the manor - Nicholas de Criol - had 120 acres in demesne. The villeins had 960 acres at 8 shillings a virgate (24 acres) and the 12 freeholders 500 acres. The lord of Croxton And the lord abbot had pasture among themselves, in ths east field of Croxton in Brackendale, and in the west field for a certain part of the year. The lord abbot had also 3 carucates (268 acres) of common land in the west field.

In 1265, William of Houghton, abbot (1263-74) attended Simon de Montfort's parliament - the first attendance of a Croxton abbot. William's special interests were the charters, cartularios and the enlargement of the abbey's library. He was particularly proud of one special possession. It was a nine volume Bible, annotated by Archdeacon Solomon of Leicester and bought for 50 marks.

Throughout the 13th century Croxton abbey consistently received help from the families at Belvoir Castle. William Albini IV, who died in 1247, gave land in Harby to the abbey, and, although his body was buried at Belvoir priory, his heart was buried in Croxton abbey.

His father William Albini III, who died in 1236, gave then land in Hose and Hungerton. Isabella, the daughter of William IV gave land in Hose. In 1244 she married Robert do Race of Hamlake in Yorkshire. When he died in 1285, his body was buried at Kirkhan in Yorkshire but his heart was buried in Croxton abbey.

A stone slab, called the heart stone, which recorded these facts was taken from Croxton abbey after the Dissolution in 1538 and was fixed to the north wall of the chancel in Bottesford parish church.

A diminutive effigy of Sir Robert de Roos in knight's armour (13c.) in Purbeck marble (18" high) was also taken from the abbey and put inside the altar on a tomb on the north side of the chancel in the same church.

The heart stone also tells us that Isabella was buried at new Place (Newstead) near Stamford in 1301. Before she died, she granted Croxton abbey in 1290 all the lands which the canons had of her fee in the county of Leicester, either in demesne or in service,

It has been suggested by some that a stone effigy of a woman to the right of the priest's door on the south side of the chancel in Bottesford parish church was also taken from Croxton abbey and is that of Matilda de Vaux, wife of William, son of Robert and Isabella de Roos, who died in 1310.

So we need not be surprised that the coat of arms of the Albinis (Gales, an eagle displayed with a bordure, Argent) is carved on a bench end in the nave of Croxton parish church.

The abbey in the 14th century

The 14th century produced changes of fortune for the Criels and the abbey. The Criels failed to pay rent to Sawtry abbey and in 1318 Sir Nicholas de Criol (III) was forced to hand over the manor of Croxton along with the advowson of the abbey to Sir Stephen de Segrave.

In 1326 the abbey church, the cloister and other parts of the abbey, were burnt down as a result of an accident by a plumber and one canon died in the fire. This meant that money was needed for re-building.

In 1336 Sir John do Segrave (son and heir of Stephen) came to the rescue when he leased the manor of North Croxton to the abbey on the Monday after the feast of St. Thomas (now 21st December). A few days later Sir John de Criel released the manor and the advowson of the abbey to Sir John de Segrave,who later quit-claimed and granted the manor to the abbey which retained it until the dissolution in 1538.

Because of this, the coat of arms of the Segraves (Sable, lion rampant, crowned Or) was carved on one of the bench ends of the monks' choir, now in Croxton church. Thanks to the Segrave family the abbey was enabled to use the manor to improve its revenues in order to pay off some of its debts.

In 1339 Sir John de Segrave married a Margaret Brotherton who, in her own right, was Countess of Norfolk.

In 1348 the abbey still owed £2,000. And in the same year the Black Death struck, killing all the canons, leaving only the abbot and prior. That abbot was Thomas Pegge of Loughborough who remained abbot for 46 years.

In 1359, John de Segrave died and the advowson of Croxton Abbey passed to Elizabeth, his daughter, then married to John, Lord Mowbray (5th Lord Mowbraylater Duke of Norfolk.

John's coat of arms (Gules, a lion rampant, Argent) was carved on one of the bench ends in the parish church. It was there at the end of the 18th century, but later disappeared. The Mowbrays retained the advowson of the abbey until 1477.

In 1363 Abbot Thomas sought and was given a papal dispensation to ordain 12 canons of 21 years of age. In the same year, Sir Andrew Lutterell of Irnham gave the rents of Saltby and Bescaby manors, and followed this up by giving them the manors in 1367. His effigy in armour used to be on the wall of the staircase in the Guildhall library at Grantham.

The Close Rolls tell us that 'the King - granted licence to the said Andrew to give the said manors - to the abbot towards finding two chaplains to celebrate divine service daily in the abbey church'. Sir Andrew died in 1790 but the chaplaincies continued until the Dissolution in 1538.

All in all, Thomas Pegge must be rated as one of the ablest and most devoted of the abbots. He survived the Black Death, increased the revenues so paying off the debts, and revived the monastic community. Is he the abbot depicted by the carved bust of a monk, with a stole diagonally crossed, on the bench end in the north aisle in front of the pulpit in the parish church?

The 15th century

During the 34th century an agricultural depression gave rise to the leasing of demesne arable lands. Sheep-farming still prospered and a good deal of arable land was turned into pasture, with the result that not so many workers were required. But by the second quarter of the 15th century, the French war, combined with internal disorder, at home, produced a further depression in domestic trade.

The wool market declined and, as arable land had been leased at an earlier stage, flocks and sheep runs were leased. This had three consequences - direct production for the market ceased, income was reduced and a new class appeared (the rentier class).

Because of the abundance of land available, rents were low and labourers came to owe merely a moderate rent rather than labour services. Villains came to think of themselves as 'customary tenants' - 'copy-holders who had their lands by the copy of the record in the manorial court rolls'.

It was then that a new kind of figure emerged on the rural scene - the man who combined his trade or craft (blacksmith, carpenter, baker, butcher, tailor, etc.) with farming, using the money from it to pay for land at a moderate rent.

By the last quarter of the 15th century, the advowson of the abbey passed to the Berkeley family as a result at the partition of the property of the Mowbrays.

Isobel, the second daughter of Thomas the 6th Lord Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, by his second marriage, married in her second marriage, James, Lord Berkeley, William, their grandson and heir, inherited the manor of Melton Mowbray, and the advowson of Croxton Abbey, some time after the death of John, the 10th Lord Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk at Framlingham Castle in 1477.

William became a Viscount in 1481, Earl of Nottingham in 1483, a Marquis in 1489 and died in 1491. He was the first Berkeley to become patron of the abbey. Most likely he is the nobleman represented in late mediaeval dress with a walking stick and four dogs on a bench end on the northside of the nave aisle in the parish church.

It was in the year 1491 that the affairs of the abbey came into the careful hands of another abbot - Elias Atterclyffe (1491-1534). Thanks to him the rentals of the years 1497, 1518, and 1524 were attached to the Large Cartulary.

The 1497 rental says that the manor was let to a Thomas Bolesworth at £8 per annum, forming 13 virgates, with 3 closes - le Milne Close (2nd field on the right going out of Croxton towards Melton), the Shephard Close and Low Close 'with its appurtenances'.

Some of the abbey tenannts have familiar names - Cobley, Jackson, Nawburn, Wirsdale (Worsdale). (A lay subsidy of 1332 lists 16 names in Croxton - among them Alice do Segrave, Rose de Kyriel, Simon de Muston, Hugh Porter, Thomas de Viker and eleven others.

A lay subsidy of 1381 says that there were 67 persons in Croxton. Among the names were Porter, Cok, Greynes and Weresdale. The squire was Robert Loughborough.

In 1519 a Richard Mawburn paid £8 for the Grange (i.e. the manor home with three demesnes - Croxton, Knipton, Harston). Among the 39 tenants were a John Cobley, John and William Jackson, John and William Kellan, Thomas Remington, Robert Clarke, Thomas West, Hugh Golyn, and Richard Typping.

John Smyth gave 4 shillings for the bakery in the southern part of the village (connected with the windmill). A Henry Ward, senoscal (steward) gave £8 for the rectory tithes in Croxton and 20 shillings for the water mill.

The closing years of Croxton Abbey

In 1532, Thomas, the grand nephew of Lord Willian Berkeley, (Viscount, Earl of Nottingham and Marquis) became patron of the abbey, after the death of Thomas, his father.

In March 1534, Abbot Atterolyffe died. The canons made preparations for electing a now abbot, but Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's principal secretary of State and Visitor General of the Monasteries, wrote to them ordering that another abbot should not be elected without the permission of their patron Lord Thomas Berkeley, and that he was sending a director for the purpose.

The canons replied that, according to their rules and the king's patents, they did not need either the patron's permission or a director. They postponed the election until April 17th in the hope that Cromwell would agree to a free election, but on the 26th April, Lord Berkeley and 40 of his servants took possession of the abbey and drove out the servants occupying their rooms. Next morning, his men, armed with swords and bucklers, kept the canons out of the chapter house.

Berkeley nominated Canon Robert Derby as his candidate. That nomination paper is still extant in the Muniments Room of Berkeley Castle, Gloucestershire.

The monks' candidate was a Thomas Green. But Berkeley's men warned then to make the abbot 'at the said lord's will and pleasure', unless Green paid Lord Berkeley £500.

The abbot of Welbeck (current head of the promonstraterisian order in England) then arrived on the scene and showed Lord Berkeley the letters patent of the king, authorising him to act as visitor of the Order and to be present at all elections.

Thomas Green was elected as the new abbot, but the very next day he was forced to pay £160 to Lord Berkeley and to promise a further £160 by the end of the year.

A 'certain Dr.Hewes' got £20 and the servants of Lord Berkeley took 10 pillow cases and two pairs of sheets and cut up blankets for saddle clothe. They also took away the Obit Book (a Calendar with the names of saints, dead benefactors, abbots and canons) and over 60 charters.

These are now in the Muninents Room at Berkeley Castle and provide some interesting information about the abbey's dealings with tenants about land and in particular about the transfer of the manor and the avowson of the abbey from the Criels to the Segraves.

This was to be the final chapter in the history of Croxton Abbey. In September 1538, Abbot Green was forced to surrender it. In October, the King's Surveyors,

Robert Burgoyn and George Gyfford, arrived to survey 'the scite and demeanes of the late Monastery'.

Details were given of local buildings, orchards, the water-mill, closes, pastures and meadows etc. These details along with information in the rentals reveal that there were a good many enclosures in Croxton. Three hundred and fifty three acres were assessed at a rent of £3l.8s.8d.

Abbot Green got a pension of £80 per annum and the other 22 canons £5.13s.4d. per annum. Richard Fox was the last prior. By letters patent, dated at Westminster, 17th March Croxton Abbey and all its possessions were granted to Thomas, Earl of Rutland and to Lady Eleanor, his wife, to Hold in Fee under the yearly rent of £297.9s.4 3/4d. and by the service of one Knights Fee - 'Rents of Lands and possessions as well - spiritual as temporal' in 52 places, including Croxton.

(Thomas Manners was the grandson of Sir Robert Manners of Ethale, Northumberland, who married Eleanor do Roos at the end of the 15th century. He succeeded to his Belvoir estates in 1513 and remained a close friend of Henry VII throughout his life. Henry repaid his loyalty by making him a Knight of the Garter and Earl of Rutland in 1525.

Demolition

Demolition of the buildings began in August 1539 and ended in 1541. The Belvoir Household accounts for the period provide us with some interesting details of this.

In August 1539 the king's plumbers stripped the lead off the roofs. In May 1541 an Adam Watson took down the window above the high altar and other stone'. We hear also of a William Symson and John Hall of Woolsthorpe being involved in the same work and the removal of the 'frontes' - thought to be the benches from the abbey choir which were eventually taken to Croxton parish church.

In the same month 'Thomas Revyngton, Richard Tippyng and Robert Revyngton, all of Croxton' took down the timber of the north west aisle 'of the late abbey church of Croxton'. A Thomas Myner took down the 'stepill' for 45 shillings and 4 pence.

Much of the stone and timber was used to build houses and cottages in Croxton and Waltham. Some of it was also used to build a new house, called Croxton House, on the site of the abbey, for the Earl of Rutland, and while the work was in progress, he lived in the Guest House of the Abbey.

Subsequently it was to become a home for remaining members of the do Roos family up to the Restoration in the 17th century. It was then known as Croxton Lodge, later The Hall and Park House.

In 1650 Croxton Manor and farm were revalued and a decision was taken to make a new enclosure, comprising 371 acres, out of its lands. Towards the end of the parliamentary period, John, the eighth Earl of Rutland, was anxious to turn Croxton Lodge in Croxton Park into his family seat, but his wife insisted on restoring Belvoir Castle, and so he deferred to her wishes, parliament granting £2,000 towards its rebuilding.

From the Restoration to the End of the 18th Century

After the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, the Book of Common Prayer was introduced into the public worship of the Church of England. It was first read in Croxton parish church on October 12th,1662. A register tells us that there was a great snow in 1672 and that no ploughing took place until five days before Our Lady Day and no sowing until Our Lady Day.

A new bell in thanksgiving for the restoration of the monarchy was put in the belfry in 1674. In 1676 the Esclesiastical Census recorded a population of 173. It was a time when children were taught to read the Bible and to learn the Church Catechism, and a number of local charities were founded not only with these ends in view, but with the purpose of helping the poor.

It was a tirne too when fox-hunting became very popular, especially with the local farmers. John, the third Duke of Rutland (1721 - 1779) built a hunting seat, called the Hall, on the site of Croxton Lodge. (It appears as Park House in survey maps). From there he began hunting in 1727. and it became the nerve-centre of the first United Hunt in the Midlands, established by Duke John and Lords Gainsborough, Cardigan and Glower in 1730.

History of Croxton Abbey ends here….

In 1766 Croxton's Enclosure Act was passed. The Commissioners first made a map of the existing strips of land and then a map of the new enclosures, the award date being 4th November, 1767.

This gave tenants as much plough-land as before, except that this time it was put into blocks instead of strips, meadow-land, pasture-land and waste were shared out in proportion to the amount of plough-land tenanted,

Unfortunately, this forced some local people to stop tethering their animals and gathering fuel on waste-land and others found difficulty in raising enough money to fence their fields. In effect the enclosure meant hard times, and a certain amount of poverty, As a consequence the Amicable and Frugal Society was founded on January 1st 1771 at Croxton for the benefit of Croxton parish 'and circumjacent villages within six computed miles thereof'. Members contributed a small sum at regular intervals in order to help in time of sickness and in old age.

In the early 1780's Wesleyan Methodism cane to Croxton, through the visits of a Mrs. Ellen Christian of Skillington to the home of a Mrs. Mary Scoffield in Turn-Pike Street, now Main Street.

In 1799 a William King carried out a survey of the village and parish for the Duke of Rutland. Fifty-nine habitable houses and a hovel were listed as well as tenants and fields. Of the existing buildings at least 53 are on the same sites as in 1799. Some have been rebuilt and others - including thatched ones - have been knocked down. The school in 1799 was one half of a small building situated in the middle of the road in Middle Street, opposite Ling's View Farm House. But only a dozen boys from poor hones were taught there.

The Nineteenth Century

Apart from those living at Croxton Park and at the former Manor House, men were accustomed, up to the early years of the nineteenth century, to live in the village and to go out to work in the surrounding countryside. But from then on farmhouses called lodges came to be built: Croxton Lodge, Heath Lodge, Blackwell Lodge and Tippin's Lodge.

In 1816 gentlemen from the Quorn, Belvoir and Cottesmre hunts met together at the hall, now Park House, and inaugurated the famous Croxton races. The course was in that part of Croxton Park which lay within the liberty of Bescaby, and the races were held every year in the last week in March, or in the first week in April, the horses being mostly highly-bred hunters belonging to the local hunts,

A remarkable phenomenon about Croxton in the early part of the 19th century was the rapid increase in population from 387 in 1801 to 657 in 1841. One outcome was the building of the present Methodist Church in 1835. Another was the pressure on the local schoolmaster Mr. John Larrad to provide education for a growing school population with inadequate resources.

But in 1844 a new and resident vicar, the Rev, Frederick John Norman, procured the plot of land on which the present school stands, and the new school was ready for use in April 1845. John Larrad was the first schoolmaster and Elizabeth Goodson was schoolmistress. One hundred boys and girls attended the school.

Croxton Kerrial must have been a busy and thriving village in the 40's and 50's. The mail coach travelled to Grantham and to Leicester every day. In course of time, a post office was opened and the schoolmaster, John Larrad, took charge of it.

There were 3 inns ('The Peacock. The Butchers' Arms and The Fox), 3 grocers, 3 carpenters, 4 boots and shoe-makers, 2 blacksmiths, 2 wheelwrighits, 3 tailors and 3 bakers (one of whom combined milling at the windmill and baking bread), There were also 15 farmers and graziers, a stonemason, an upholsterer, a park-keeper and a park bailiff.

A surviving ledger of the Amicable & Frugal Society lists 99 members in 1804. Each paid 4/- in the June, October and December quarters and 4/6 in the March quarter, and Mr. J. Larrad was secretary.

After a cheek by Mr. Roberts, the surgeon, payments (not exceeding 9/- per week) were paid out to members for any period up to 12 weeks, When a member died £4 was paid towards the expenses of a funeral. The Club observed its anniversary every June by holding a feast.

In 1864 the vicar, the Rev, G.S. Ebsworth, got the old part of the vicarage restored, and had it enlarged and extended on the south side. In December of the following year, a storm of wind badly damaged and blew down parts of the parish church. Restoration was put into the hands of Mr. Giles Gilbert Scott, and the total cost was £2,300. In 1806 the day school was thoroughly restored.

In the 1870's concern was felt about Sunday drinking. In 1878 Lord John Manners presented a petition from Croxton parish to the House of Commons praying that public houses might be closed during the whole of Sunday.

Later a Temperance Society was formed and a Temperance and Friendship Club was open from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. on week-days from October until March. Books, newspapers and various games were provided for the instruction and entertainment of members. It was out of this club that the Reading Room and the parochial library arose.

In the ninth decade open cast ironstone mining began in the area around Croxton and lasted until the 1970's, On May 21st 1894, the Amicable & Frugal Society changed its name to the Croxton Friendly Society, and continued as such until June 1944.

On the 4th December 1894, the parochial electors met to elect the first Parish Council. On April 20th 1895 Mr. Thomas Roberts and Mr. J. N. Stannage were appointed Overseers.. In the following March we hear of four names being submitted to Belvoir magistrates as constables for the year.

From 1883 to 1899 the annual average attendance at school went down to 87 in 1893 and up to 116 in 1896. From 1890 to 1899 the numbers dropped again to 99. There was often a struggle to keep the school free from financial debt. It was supported by voluntary subscriptions and a voluntary rate which was often late in being paid, hence debt. Free evening classes were offered by the County Council in 1901, but nobody attended them.

The Twentieth Century

In the early years of this century the Parish Council was much concerned with the question of sewage in the village and the use of the Sheep Dyke. In 1903, under a new act of Parliament, a new management committee, consisting of four

foundation managers. one representative from the parish and a representative from the County Council, was formed to run the school, and it continued in this form until 1956.

in 1904 a new vicar, the Rev. W. E. P. Malden, and his mother. arrived in Croxton. Almost the first thing they did was to raise money to build a parochial institute, now known as the Village Hall. £307 12s 1d was raised and than Mrs. Maloet gave a further £30. The Marquis of Granby donated the site and gave building material. And two concerts were held at the opening ceremony on April 16th 1906.

Population returns show that numbers dropped from 498 In 1901 to 452 in 1911 and to 414 in 1921. A map of the village (1917 - 8), made by Mr. F. Chanrity of Top Road, shows that 15 small holders and 6 farmers lived in the village and 21 ironstone quarry workers.

Two farmers and four farm-workers lived outside the village, and a farm-manager lived at Park House.

Seven thatched cottages and 11 other houses have disappeared since men did not go far afield to work, as travel had to be by the carrier or by horse and trap.

A church magazine of the first World War period (1914-18) notes the anxieties in the village about their men at the front and also give details of the efforts run by the working party and friends for Croxton soldiers at the front.

It was perhaps out of this that the first branch f the Women's Institute was formed on 14th March 1918. Mrs Brown, the vicar's wife, was its first president and treasurer, and Miss L Prowse its first secretary.

Sons of Croxton were killed in the war, and on April 3rd 1920, a marblen War Memorial made by Mr T Fox of Croxton was unveiled by the Duke of Rutland in the parish church and was dedicated by Canon Blakeney of Melton Mowbray.

In November 1920, the Vicar's Glebe Land (192 acres) was sold to Sir. GE Manners and another for £6,000. The money was invested by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and the interest was used to pay the vicar.

In 1922 it was decided to pay to run a water main from the springs near 'The Sprout' to Belvoir Castle. As Croxton was on higher ground the water was consequently supplied by gravitation.

In March 1927 the office of Overseer came to an end, and on 1st June the names of Mr JH Wildman and Mr TE Cobley were submitted by the Parish Council to the Charity Commissioners as trustees for charities in place of the late Overseers.

In 1936 the parish of Branston was included in the Civil parish of Croxton. Befre 1940 there were 30 holdings – 8 of which had over 100 acres. Limestone and

irnonstone land were mainly arable, and permanent grass was to be found on clay land.

The small-holders were concerned ony with the grass and only the larger farms had arable land. It is of interest thatb the first tractors arrived in the parish aboutb 1938.

Most holdings were involved in thebsale of milk. The following crops were put in – wheat, barley, oats, potatos, peas, beans, Swedes, turnips and marigolds.

By 1950 working horses ceased to be used.

By 1978 there were only 10 holdings - 2 entirely in the parish and 8 with land outside the parish. There cannot be more than 200 acres of permanent grass. Only one farmer produces milk, but he milks more cows than the whole of the parish's pre-war total of cows.

As for crops, oats are now excluded. Only 10 acres of beans are put in. Besides wheat, barley and potatoes, there are crops of sugar beet, oilseed, rape, swedes and kale. Potatoes and sugar beet acreages fluctuate with Belvoir Estates and P. M Bradley's rotations, when there can be a 200-acre variation in the acreages of potatoes and sugar beet.