

MONKTON MANOR AND CHURCH.

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MONKTON Manor was conferred on the monks of Holy Trinity, afterwards Christ Church, Canterbury, by Queen Eadgiva, or Aelfgifu, widow of Edmund the Elder, in the year 961. It was a thank-offering from the pious queen for the recovery of her lands, of which she had been unjustly deprived. The parish and manor from that time received the name of Monocstun or Monkynnton,—“The Monks’ Land.” Of the previous inhabitants I can find no record. Skeletons recently dug up, with fragments of funeral urns, in a field in the parish, shew traces of an early, perhaps pre-Christian, population. The great fertility of the soil, its vicinity to Canterbury by Sarre Ferry, and to the Wantsum, then the watery highway from Sandwich and Thanet to the Thames, would make the manor a valuable possession of the Saxon kings. Its known history, however, dates from Eadgiva’s gift. The manor extended from the lech or boundary parting it from the Minster Abbey lands, to the river Wantsum, by which it was bounded on two sides; on the third it reached to the sea. It was to be free of all taxation, save the ‘*trinoda necessitas*’ of contributing to the erection of castles, and the repelling invasion, and repairing highways. It was a goodly heritage, comprising the western portion of the Isle, except the lands held by the monks of Reculver, now forming the parish of St. Nicholas. It consisted of marsh or pasturage, arable land, and forest. The woodland seems to have been confined to the centre of the manor; hence called Wode, afterwards Wood Church, and Acole or Acholt, a name which seems to imply that oak timber originally abounded here, the acorns from which would afford

pannage for the ten hogs specified in the Domesday Survey. Salt works are also enumerated among the sources of revenue. To these would be added the produce of the fisheries of Birchington and the Wantsum, to supply the monks' table on "jours maigres." We have no reason to think, however, that there was any continuous residence of the monks in their manor as a religious community. The monastery merely leased out its land to tenants, receiving as the landlords all rents and offerings, as well as the tithes and oblations made by the inhabitants to the altars in Monkton Church and the Chapel of Wode. The archbishop was then the head of the monastery, and he and the monks had an undivided interest in all the property of this important religious house. Shortly after the Conquest, however, Archbishop Lanfranc, with the consent of the Crown, caused a division to be made of the advowsons and other property between himself and the convent. It is not easy to ascertain in the case of Monkton in what their respective shares consisted. In Domesday, the property of the archbishop and that of the monastery are mentioned as distinct: on the other hand, the archbishop, in the same survey, is described as still "tenant in chief." "The archbishop himself, in Thanet Hundred, holds Monocstune." "In the time of King Edward (the Confessor) it was taxed at 20 sulings, now 18. The arable land is 31 carucates. In the domain are four [carucates] and four score and nine villains, with 21 borderers having 27 carucates. Its whole value 40 pounds." Yet the manor is described as "Terre Monachorum Archiepi." It seems that the advowson, with the whole or half the tithes, together with the right of presentation to the benefice, henceforth belonged to the primate, who as nominal head of the monastery was still regarded as tenant in chief of the manor, all the rents and revenues of which were to be enjoyed by the prior and his brethren exclusively.

As lords of the manor, the *avenia*, or half-yearly presents or offerings made by the tenants, were received by the monks. Archbishop Richard, however, who succeeded Thomas à Becket in the primacy, made a fresh change. The murder of that famous prelate would naturally draw closer the ties

between the archbishop and the monastery. At that time the wrongs of the outraged monks of Christchurch were ringing through Christendom, and gifts of every costly description were pouring in to the martyr's shrine. Archbishop Richard now appropriated the advowson of Monkton Church to the almonry of the convent for the relief of the poor, whereas the revenue from the manor lands is specified as having been expended "*pro cibo eorum,*" *i. e.*, of the monks themselves for the use of the refectory. This boon, however, was enjoyed by the fraternity for only a short season. To Richard succeeded Baldwyn, a Cistercian monk. Dissatisfied with the manner in which the revenues of the monastery were being lavished in sumptuous hospitality; and, no doubt, influenced by jealousy at the growing power of the prior of Christchurch, he resolved to found a college at Hackington, a suburb of Canterbury, and to resume the rights alienated by his predecessor. Accordingly he applied to Pope Lucius for authority to resume Monkton's advowson for the use of the see. The same Pontiff had originally sanctioned Archbishop Richard's appropriation. He now, however, revoked this decision, and testified his approval of the archbishop's intention. The prior on his part refusing to surrender the church, the archbishop, with a high hand, took possession of Monkton as well as Eastry, Meopham and Eynsford churches, and seized moreover the *venia*, or offerings from the tenants of the manor itself. He then nominated one of his own chaplains to the rectory. Gervase the chronicler states that the keys of Monkton and the other churches were borrowed on the pretence of "a wish to hear the Gospel," and the opportunity was then seized to induct the archbishop's presentee. Then came the tug of war. Appeals to Rome and to the crown, and then counter appeals, followed in rapid succession. In these Monkton Church, and the *venia* from Monkton Manor, figure conspicuously. It was notably the chief bone of contention, and must have contained meat and marrow, judging from the heat and pertinacity with which the dispute was carried on. The monks, in their turn, appealed to the Pope, who made an attempt to mediate between the belligerents, but quite in vain. The monastery

withdrew their first appeal; but on the archbishop retaining the advowson, as well as the *xenia*, which undoubtedly belonged to them as owners of the manor, a fresh appeal was made to Rome. Baldwyn then proceeded to further measures, seizing the whole of the estates of the monastery, suspending the prior, and shutting up the cathedral. To strengthen himself in his new aggression, Baldwyn appealed to the king. Henry II, whose back and whose pride still smarted from the stripes of his monkish flagellators, was secretly on the side of the archbishop, although professing to be impartial. The struggle between the primate and the monks continued under the papacy of Urban, Gregory, Clement, and Celestine. Henry II died 1189, leaving the breach still unhealed. A legate was despatched from Rome to settle the dispute, but although propitiated by the prior with a present of "a handsome grey coat and a robe of marten skin," he failed to restore harmony. He evidently feared the wrath of the new king, Richard of the Lion Heart, who, when the monks sent messengers saluting him as their lord, exclaimed, "I *was* their lord, and will be yet, small thanks to you, ye wicked traitors." In 1192 Baldwyn died, and in the primacy of Hubert, his successor, the vexed question was at last settled by arbitration. The estates of the monastery which had been seized by the late archbishop were to be restored. Symon, the sinecure presentee of Baldwyn to the rectory of Monkton, was to retain it till his death. Then a division was to be made. The manor of Monkton was to rest with the monks, as well as the *xenia* therefrom. They were also to have half the tithe, with the exception of the "altaragium," by which was meant the moveable furniture of the church and chapels, together with the offerings made at the high altar, and all tithes not "bladum, legumen et fœnum," corn, vegetables, and hay. This, with the advowson of the living and the right of presentation, was to belong to the archbishops.

So things continued till 1365. The manor during this time, as afterwards, remained the property of the monastery, as appears by an unsuccessful attempt made by Edward II, when sorely pressed for money during his wars with

Scotland and France, to deprive them of this fertile and lucrative domain. Their right of possession was distinctly confirmed by a deed of Edward II. Archbishop Islip in 1365 exchanged the advowsons of Monkton and three other churches, with the monks of Christ Church, for certain benefices in London. Monkton Church was thenceforth finally appropriated to the almonry. In connexion with this settlement, I may mention how a dry legal document can be illustrated, or enlivened, by clerky or monastic waggishness. On the frontispiece of the grave deed conveying the advowson to the almoner, still preserved in the Cathedral Library, appears the following rude sketch. A huntsman is represented as blowing a horn, which he holds in one hand, while in the other he carries a hunting pole, from which a hare is suspended; while in front another hare appears all-but within snapping distance of a greyhound in full chase after him. Possibly these hares may have been the direct ancestors of those which still afford yearly sport to the lovers of coursing in this locality. In another corner of the page appears a figure of Plenty holding her horn, or perhaps of Fame, with her trumpet, announcing to all comers the acquisition of the property. Three years later Monkton was constituted a vicarage by Islip's successor, and a residence and portion of the tithe assigned to the vicars for their maintenance; the nomination to the vicarage being probably reserved to himself by the archbishop.

I have before remarked that the monks at no time appear to have resided on the manor. A bailiff, or *villicus*, occupying the parsonage as "*persona*" of the monastery, represented them, received the tithes and probably acted as steward of the manor. It is quite possible, however, that from time to time Monkton would be resorted to by the brethren as a temporary residence. Hasted mentions twelve stalls in the chancel of the church for their accommodation; and Prior Selling is said to have built in 1480 a new dormitory, perhaps where Monkton Court now stands. In days when the plague, sweating sickness, and other diseases haunted the quaint and picturesque but narrow and ill-ventilated streets of towns and cities, such as Canterbury,

it must have been a pleasant change for sick monks to pass a few days in the breezy lands of Thanet. Possibly the right of free warren which the monastery enjoyed, and the prospect of hunting the aforesaid hares,—for even archbishops went hunting then,—may have added to the attraction. That the prior occasionally visited Monkton Manor is certain from a curious bill preserved in the Cathedral Library at Canterbury, given by one of the bailiffs to the existing prior. It contains the following items:—

“ Bill endentyed the ivth day of December in the viith year of the rayne of King Henry VIIth witnesseth that John Martyn hath received of my Lord Prior, dyvers stuffes for my Lord’s chamber and chapell in the Almonry of Monkton above such stuffes as the said John had in keeping before, as appeareth by wytness. 1. A payre of vestments, cloth of baudekin, the orphreys blewe with fleurs de lys of gold. Item in the chamber, 1 payre of sheets, 1 pillow of down coveryd with linen cloth, and a tassell of white sylke. A qvyllt with v leopards and byrdes. Item, 1 coverlete with lyons bordered with cloudys. 1 mattress with bars: also ii cochens, whereof one with a lyon and the other of red say. Item, ii curtains of blue buccram, with swanys, stayned. Item, I covering to a bed of Lord Alexander, colorys yellow and green, lyned with blew buccram. Item, one tester of the same colorys, lyned with canvas. Item, a square coffer, and a tabyll standing in my Lord’s chamber. Item, a basen with a ewer of laten, with a candlestick doble nozzyd, with two branches.”

From this may be inferred that the lord prior, when he came to Monkton, had temporary apartments found him in the parsonage by the steward or bailiff, and further, that when he paid Monkton a visit, he slept very softly and luxuriously in his dainty bed and bed furniture. I have only to add, that the manor and advowson remained in the possession of the monks till the Dissolution in 38 Henry VIII. The manor was then surrendered to the Crown, and it is to be remarked that in the deed of surrender the archbishop joins, shewing that he was still considered, as nominal abbot, to have an interest in the lands. The king bestowed the manor of Monkton on the Dean and Chapter of his new foundation. It was afterwards leased by them to Queen

Elizabeth, who bestowed it on her favourite Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Shortly after, however, the lease reverted to the Chapter of Canterbury, who hold it still.

To this account of the manor of Monkton a short notice of Monkton Church may be fittingly appended. It appears to have been built late in the Norman period, when the round arch was giving place to the pointed. Perhaps "rebuilt" may be the more correct expression; for an earlier church is mentioned as existing in the time of the Domesday Survey. It originally consisted of chancel, nave, and north aisle, with a low western tower. The windows (blocked-up traces of which are still visible in the tower and south wall) were very simple, not to say rude, consisting of narrow round-headed lights, with hood mouldings. The chancel arch rests on round piers, and the angles of their capitals and bases are carved with grotesque heads. In each pier a corbel, inserted to support the rood beam, still remains. The tower was originally lower, and contains, on the ground floor, a deeply splayed window. In Hasted the historian's time the tower contained a very ancient spiral wooden staircase, which, as I am informed, old people in the parish still remember, but on the restoration of the church it was removed. A piscina of Norman style is in the south wall of the *sacrarium*. The north aisle was divided from the nave by five pointed arches, resting on square piers, which shew the early date of its construction. The walls, unlike those of the neighbouring church of St. Nicholas at Wade, which are faced with flint, consist of rubble mixed with flint and sandstone, welded together promiscuously by mortar. The original roof was of higher pitch than the present one, and must have had a long lean-to roof projecting over the north aisle. The entrance formerly was through the tower, in which is a low weather-worn doorway, with pointed arch surrounded with herring-bone masonry. In the south wall, however, is another door, now closed, the approach apparently from Monkton Court, on the site of which perhaps were the monks' occasional lodgings. The flooring of the church, as may be seen by comparing the height of this doorway within the church with the exterior, must have been some two feet

below the level of the present churchyard. The chancel floor was originally a step lower than the floor of the nave, and, as an advocate for restoration of churches to be what their architects designed them, I cannot but regret that this peculiarity was not preserved when the church was munificently restored by my predecessor. The church underwent important alterations, some time about the beginning of the Perpendicular style. This would correspond to the period when the advowson was handed over by Archbishop Islip to the monastery, shortly after which a resident vicar was appointed. The alterations then made in the fabric seem to have been as follows: the greater portion of the north aisle was taken down, although a portion of it still stood when Lewis and Hasted wrote their histories. It had probably become ruinous, and the inhabitants and vicar may have lacked the funds to restore it. Into the arches, blocked up, were inserted Perpendicular windows, the same type of window being then substituted in the chancel and south wall for the round-headed ones of the earlier period. The monastery would probably at the same time restore or rebuild the chancel, the windows in which correspond with those in the restored nave, although, as has been said, the original Norman piers supporting the chancel arch remain. A wooden roof, with king-posts and tie-beams, was placed over nave and chancel, but of lower pitch than the former. The present porch on the north side was then built, and the tower raised, the upper story being fitted with Decorated windows. Hasted mentions stalls existing in his time in the chancel, and that the glass of the windows exhibited heads of St. Mildred, of the kings Lucius and Ethelred, as well as of some of the priors, which have now disappeared. The church was dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene, and contained her image, as well as that of the blessed Virgin, as appears from the Wills in the Registry at Canterbury, in which money is left by testators to furnish lights to burn before them. Monkton Church contains one very perfect brass, in memory of a secular priest, in his ecclesiastical vestments, the scroll of which has long disappeared. It has been assigned to about 1460, and has been thought to represent

Sir John, or as we should say, the Rev. John Spyer, or Spycer, a benefactor of the church, who died about that time.

Into the stone, containing the above, has been in later days absurdly inserted a post-reformation brass, to the memory of Lebbie or Lebbœus Orchard, who died 1580, and who is stated to have been lessee of the manor at the beginning of the reign of Edward VI. Herè the formula—“whose soul resteth with the Lord God,”—replaces the medieval prayer for the soul of the departed. This notice of Monkton Church may be appropriately closed by a curious couplet, in rhyming monkish verse, which once was affixed to the wall near the west end of the nave. We may forgive the false quantities for the sake of the insular enthusiasm of the composer:—

“Insula rotunda, Tanetos, quam circuit unda,
Fertilis et munda, nulla est in orbe secunda.”

which may be thus rendered :

“Thanet, that island round, which waters bound
So sound, with fruits so crowned, what second can be found.”

From the church, the transition is natural to the incumbents and ministers thereof. With a few details, therefore, regarding my predecessors, I will close this paper. The changes in the appropriation of the Monkton advowson of course affected the ecclesiastical status of its officials. In the earliest times, till the division by Archbishop Anselm, Monkton, with its dependent chapel, would be served by regular priests from the monastery. From that period, 1077, with a short interval in the primacy of Archbishop Richard, Monkton was a rectory conferred by the Archbishops on non-resident priests, such as Simon Sywell, Archdeacon of Wells, and Vice-Chancellor of the Archbishop, appointed by Baldwin. The rectory was therefore a sinecure, and the services provided by substitutes, or curates in charge. Among these rectors was James, nephew of Francis, Cardinal of St. Lucia, in Rome. He was appointed rector of Monkton by Pope Celestine V, during the vacancy of the archbishopric, and confirmed in the benefice by his successor Boniface, who tried hard to prevail on King Edward I to allow his presentee to retain it. This, how-

ever, the king, in a council held at Berwick for other matters, refused, as "against the right of the realm." Thus, this obscure parish again came to the front, and (as I am gratified to state) furnished an opportunity for vindicating our national independence from the claims of Papal aggression. As has been before stated, three years after Islip restored the rectory to the monks, his successor made the parish a vicarage. The deed of appointment set forth that the vicar shall have one hall with two chambers, a kitchen, a dovecote, a court lodge, or curtilagium, with fit garden or enclosure. Here I may ask, why were dovecotes always included in ancient glebe houses? Were they typical of the presumed dove-like character of those who inhabited them? Or, in days when the butcher did not, as now, make his daily rounds, were they, as furnishing pigeon pies and other parts of the bill of fare, no inconsiderable elements in supplying the reverend man's larder? The said vicar was bound (although then diocesan surveyors and Dilapidation Acts were not) to keep the premises in repair, as well as to contribute to keeping up the church. A tenth of the produce of the parish lands, together with £12. 1s. 8d. yearly in money, were assigned to him as stipend. As, however, out of this, besides his liabilities at home, he was to provide a priest or chaplain for the chapels of Wode and Birchington. At Birchington, a chapelry of later date than Woodchurch, likewise in the manor, the chaplain was to celebrate daily, if possible, at Wode, on Sundays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Wax lights for the said chapels were to be provided from the offerings to the mother church, but on the other hand, the chapels were to contribute towards the repairs of Monkton. The vicar was to provide vestments, and to *bind* the service books, the books themselves being supplied by the rectors. These liabilities proving rather burdensome to the vicars, a small pension, amounting to £6. 0s. 10d. half-yearly, was paid them, as a gratuity from the monastery; copies of receipts for this pension are still in the Cathedral Library. I append a transcript:—

Mem^d.: quod Ego Mr. Johes Heynys Vicarius de Monkton recepi de D'no Priore Ecclesiæ X. Cant. Anno D'ni. Mill'mo quinquaginta-

gesimo duodecimo die mensis Maie quinto, per manus Roberti Taylor vj^{li} x^d in parte pensionis meæ anni presentis, de manu propria.

Another receipt is in the quaint old English of the time, viz.,

Med.: "That I John Heynys vycar of Monketon have recevyd of my Lord Prior of Chrystys cherche by the hands of John Bydell the last day of Aprell the yer of our Lord mccc̄ccxxiii vi^lbs x^d in parte of my pension of this y'r present."

Bydell was steward of the monastery, and the said payments were made to the vicar, whose effigy, as I have said, lies in the front of the chancel. I ought not to omit in mentioning ancient vicars, that Sir John Spycer, above cited, as dying 1460, left, by his will, money to buy a chasuble, two tunicles, and the apparel thereunto for the parish church. After the Dissolution the vicars of Monkton were for a time apparently appointed by the Chapter, and, in one instance, by the lessee of the manor, the Earl of Leicester. At the Visitation of Archbishop Parker, 1566, Robert Flote was vicar; he is described as "*non conjugatus*" a bachelor, "*non Latine doctus*" not a Latin scholar, "*non hospitalis*" not a giver of dinner parties, "*nullum habens beneficium*" unbeneficed, *i.e.*, perhaps without other preferment.

In 1640, when the Puritan storm was gathering and darkening over the Church and kingdom, Meric Casaubon, son of the celebrated foreign refugee, Isaac Casaubon, was vicar, holding, like his predecessor, the living of Minster with Monkton. Among the complaints from aggrieved parishioners to the Parliamentary Committee of Religion was one signed by thirty-three inhabitants of Monkton, and endorsed by Sir E. Dering, J.P., which set forth that the said Meric, prebendary of Christ Church, held the vicarages of Minster, Monkton, and Birchington, his income from all ecclesiastical sources being £640 per annum. The said Meric was zealously observant of all innovations, for he hath enforced the parishioners to rayle in and separate the Communion table from the rest of the chancel to their, the parishioners, charge of £5. "When it was done, because it satisfied not the doctor's phancy, he procured new processe against the churchwardens to alter it, and an excommunication against them

for not being as speedy therein as he required, to the parish cost of 40s.; and to shew his inebriated humor (metaphorically 'inebriated,' it is to be hoped), he caused the churchwarden, then under excommunication, before he could be absolved, to bind himself by oath to perform what was required of him. And although there is sufficient means in the said parish, without the help of any other place, to maintain a preaching minister there, yet he himself seldom cometh thither, but keeps a curate there—a weak and unable man, unworthy of imitation in life or doctrine." This petition ends, a curious sign of the times, by praying not only "for the long and prosperous reign of the King," Charles I, but for "the prosperous successe of the high and honorable Court of Parliament."

Other charges, especially that of repelling communicants who would not come up to the rails, were brought against the vicar by the parishioners of Minster, who further complained that "he bowed to the altar." The doctor, in his defence, alleged that Birchington and Monkton were one benefice, and only brought him in, after paying dues and curates, £50 per annum; also, that Minster and Monkton lay close together. To the charge of having removed the Communion table in Monkton church to the east end, and railing it in, he declares he "was compelled to do so by the Court without any intermeddling of his." He only began bowing to the altar when it was commanded in the Cathedral of Canterbury, but he never enforced it on others. He always resided in one or other of the vicarages most part of the summer, except once, when hindered by the plague, and would reside longer, but for the unhealthiness of the place. Further, he deposed that "the curate he hath in Monkton is approved by the greater part of the parish, and was once so well liked for a while by some, that have now testified against him, that they offered him a good reward to preach twice, whereas I require but once." The charges brought by the Minster parishioners he also rebutted, but these, as not directly relating to Monkton, I omit; however, Meric Casaubon was deprived, and a Presbyterian, one Thorogood, made vicar of Monkton and Birchington during the Common-

wealth. After King Charles enjoyed his own again, "on the memorable 'black Bartholomew's day,'" 1662, Mr. Thorogood was among the 2000 Nonconformists who honourably resigned their preferments rather than sign the Act of Uniformity, "and undeprived his benefice forsook."

Dr. Casaubon was then restored, but soon resigned this living for a more lucrative one elsewhere.

I have just one more fact to record, or rather an alleged fact, let us hope, as regards one of my reverend predecessors, it may be a libel! It accounts, at all events, for the total absence of nearly all ancient documents relating to Monkton parish. The question might naturally be asked, What are the contents of the registers of this church? In so ancient a parish, are there no old oaken worm-eaten iron-bound chests full of parchments, yellow with age, illustrating the parochial history in bygone generations? Alas, for archæology! I can only reply, in the terms of a certain history of Ireland, in which the heading of one of the chapters purported to be, "Of Snakes in Ireland;" on turning, however, to the page, the reader was informed, "There are no snakes in Ireland;" so, as to ancient registers and records, the answer is, "There are absolutely none in Monkton." The registers only go back to 1700. The reason assigned for the disappearance of earlier records is this. At a festive meeting, at which the then vicar, churchwardens and others were present, and when the punch-bowl had perhaps circulated freely, the subject of a certain old chest in the church was brought forward. It was agreed that it should be then and there produced and inspected. The old register, archives and other papers were overhauled, and being voted as useless lumber, they were forthwith committed, like Don Quixote's books of romance, to the flames. As an apology for this act of vandalism, it must be remembered that the Kent Archæological Society was not then in existence, and had not entered on its valuable work of calling the attention of parishioners to the value and interest of the records of the days of old, and their due responsibility to preserve them. One word more, as a parting tribute to the "monks" who gave their name to this parish.

"The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones."

So it has fared with the inhabitants of monasteries in this and other countries. The mention of "the monks of old" too often merely calls up the idea of indolent, well-fed, useless, brainless ecclesiastics, compensating their celibacy with the enjoyment of the good things of this life, and sometimes with many a foul blot on their reputation. But, true as such charges may have often been, let us give the monks their due. A debt of gratitude is owed to them as benefactors of the lands where their religious houses were founded. In days of rudeness and ignorance they cultivated the arts; they were the builders, the architects, the sculptors, the painters, the illuminators of mediæval times. In their scriptoria or libraries, they preserved and handed down treasures of secular and sacred learning, which but for them must have perished. When there was as yet no poor-law, by the doles at the monastery gate the poor and needy were fed, and the sick visited, and the naked clothed at the expense of the cowed fathers. Their walls were often a refuge for persecuted innocence, and a sanctuary against lawless oppressors, offering, too, a hospitable welcome and a kindly shelter to many a homeless wanderer. Finally, within the convent walls in stately minster or Decorated chapel God was daily and nightly worshipped, His praises ever chanted, and the lamp of devotion kept burning, dimmed indeed by superstition, and crusted over with the traditions of men, but often with clear, true, and fervent flame, "a light shining in a dark place," till the day-spring of a purified faith and better knowledge dawned on our Church and land.