

WAR, PEACE AND PESTILENCE - PART 3

PILGRIMAGE OF GRACE

With the accession of Henry VII, the first of the Tudor monarchs in 1485, the new style of kingship of Edward IV was continued and the next century was to prove highly significant in English history both locally and nationally.

Henry, an effective if less than popular monarch ran a tight ship and without the need for a standing army or foreign adventures, finances were healthy. The same cannot be said for his son, the colourful and ruthless Henry VIII whose marital and reproductive problems, together with financial waywardness are among the most widely known and dramatized facts of English history.

The refusal of Pope Clement VII to grant him a divorce from Catherine of Aragon set in motion a sequence of events which would in subsequent reigns see a transformation of religious practice in the country. Henry, hitherto a staunch defender of Catholicism was content to remain in the faith but with himself as head of the Church in England instead of the Pope. He also took the opportunity of making drastic changes to the established religious institutions – a process known as the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Such institutions existed throughout the East Riding and two situated a few miles from Middleton are worth examining.

WARTER

The Augustinian Priory was founded by Geoffrey Fitzpain in 1132 and the Papal Bull issued by Innocent II in 1140 confirmed the property rights for the canons residing in the church of St James. The canons affiliated themselves to the order of Arrouise, a French house which followed a strict way of life based on the rule of St Augustine of Hippo. Later the canons known as the Austin Canons acquired land at Middleton-on-the-Wolds (Kiplingcotes) where sheep were kept and wool exported to the continent.

NUNBURNHOLME

There was also a Benedictine nunnery at Nunburnholme which appears to have been in existence by 1200. Nuns in the East Riding are said to have been more often than monks of gentle birth. In 1535 William Hungate of North Dalton, gentleman, bequeathed a dowry to the Prior of Watton in order for his daughter to become a nun in that house.

By the 1530s it was suspected that a royal campaign against the monasteries was a distinct possibility and Archbishop Lee visited Nunburnholme and Warter in 1534 with a view to ensuring that the conduct of these houses was beyond reproach following earlier reports of lax behaviour and injunctions were issued. However two officials of Thomas Cromwell, the king's minister, Richard Clayton and Thomas Lee started their inspection of all religious houses in England and Wales in 1536 in order to discover anything disreputable

about these institutions which would aid the king's ultimate aim of dissolution. Many in the East Riding were found to be satisfactory but at Warter and Nunburnholme evidence of previous sexual impropriety was uncovered.

Warter and Nunburnholme were surrendered on the 11th August 1536 by William Holme and Elizabeth Kilborne respectively. After dissolution the nuns who received a pension retreated into private life but the canons who did not receive money tended to take up priestly duties elsewhere. Most of the buildings of the suppressed houses were dismantled by Richard Bellycis servant of Thomas Cromwell and the distribution of the spoils tended to materially benefit the local nobility and gentry.

The immediate causes of the rising known as the Pilgrimage of Grace which took place in two stages between October 1536 and February 1537 are not clear cut. As Paul Johnson says in "A History of Christianity", "Their rising was not so much an effort to force the crown to revisit its religious policy as a protest against economic grievances. Indeed when we look at Cromwell's reports and are thus able to see the Reformation at a local level, we find not so much a religious or ideological conflict as a complicated morass of personal feuds and grudges, jealousies, rivalries of jurisdiction, provincial contests and sheer bloody-mindedness."

The rising which started in Lincolnshire under Robert Aske, son of Sir Robert Aske of Aughton near Selby, had a local supporter in John Hallam of Cawkeld, Kilnwick. Hallam a yeoman farmer said to be "so cruel and fierce a man among his neighbours that no man dare disobey him" took exception to Robert Holgate, Prior of Watton who following the King's injunction failed to announce the approaching feast of St Wilfrid, a man especially honoured in East Yorkshire. The Prior, because of the ferocity of Hallam's attack, backed down and made the announcement.

The king, although lacking a strong army, eventually by subterfuge outwitted the conspirators and Aske was hanged in York and Hallam in Hull.

Although Queen Mary tried to re establish the Catholic faith she could not reverse the disposal of monastic lands and during the reign of her successor Elizabeth the Church of England stabilized and by now local churches had a bible in English and the revised prayer book.

East Yorkshire was particularly receptive to the new compromise so much so that in his book on post reformation Catholicism in East Yorkshire Dom Hugh Aveling states that the county was never a great stronghold of Catholic recusancy but he does mention cases brought to the attention of the authorities in North Dalton and that of Frances wife of Joe Gillson of Middleton in 1615.

To be continued