

CROSTON PARISH CHURCH, SOUTH VIEW

TRANSACTIONS

THE ANCIENT PARISH OF CROSTON

A HISTORICAL RETROSPECT

*By Rev. W. G. Procter*¹

Read 12th November 1908

"I have considered the days of old and the years of ancient times."
—PSALM lxxvii. 5.

MY object in the following paper is to trace the history of the ancient Parish of Croston, its Church, Chapels, Clergy, Schools, and Schoolmasters, from the time of the Norman Conquest to the end of the eighteenth century, and although I have not by any means exhausted the subject, I have gathered together a good deal of information which I hope may be of interest.

The direct result of the Norman Conquest of England was the introduction of a foreign dynasty and nobility, a new language, new laws, new customs, and new manners. The Saxon nobles were dispossessed of their lands, and Norman leaders became the Barons of England. The feudal system, by which all the land was held under the King, who claimed the right of bestowing estates on whomsoever he pleased, on condition of receiving military

¹ I must acknowledge with thanks the valuable help I have received from Mr. J. Brownbill, who has most kindly placed the results of his own historical investigations at my disposal. Mr. F. H. Cheetham, of Southport, has also afforded me considerable assistance.

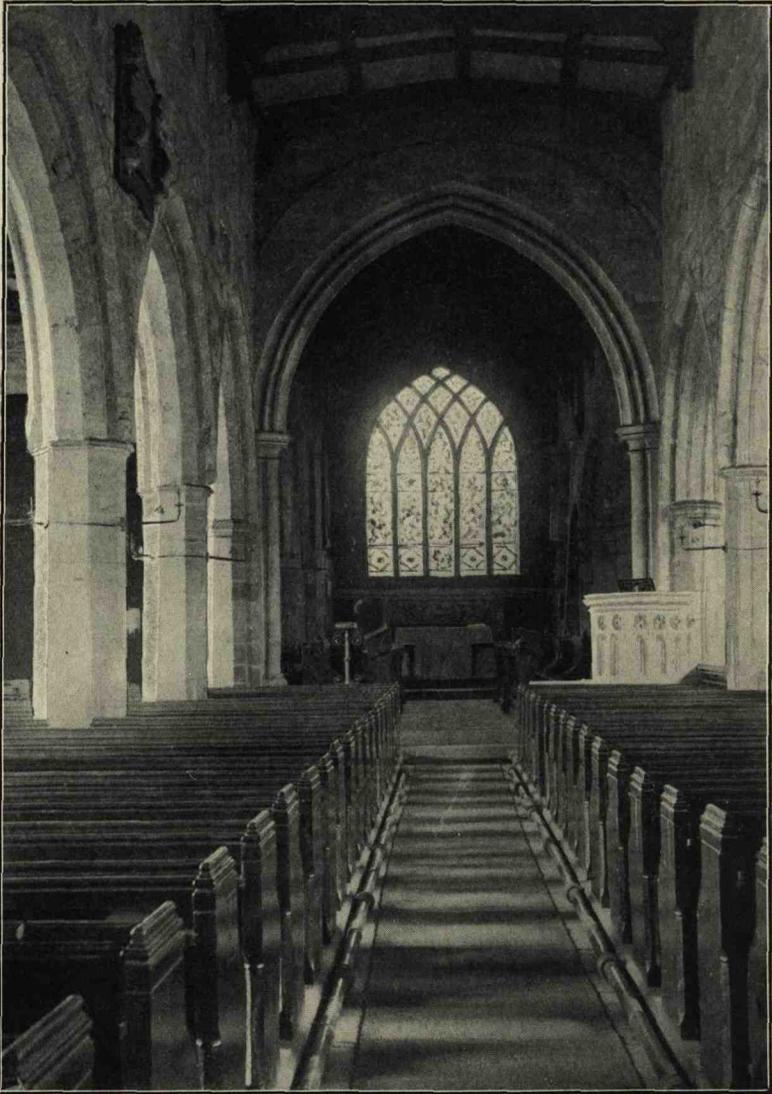
service and pecuniary help, was introduced. All the high offices in Church and State were filled in a comparatively short time by Normans, and the Church lands and revenues were granted to monasteries, many of them being situated abroad.

This was the case with the Church and Parish of Croston, the history of which dates from the days long before the Conquest.

The Parish was the most extensive and valuable in the Hundred of Leyland, and comprised within its limits the townships of Hoole, Rufford, Tarlton, Hesketh cum Beconsall, Bretherton, Ulnes Walton, Mawdesley, Bispham, and Chorley. The chief resident landowners in the sixteenth century were the Heskeths of Rufford, who had property in every part of the Parish, much of which they acquired through their alliances with the Fittons and other influential and wealthy families; the Ashtons of Croston (descended from Sir John de la Mere, Lord of Croston and Mawdesley, *temp.* Edward II., through the Leghs), who owned estates in Croston, Mawdesley, and Ulnes Walton; the Banestres of Bank, who held land in Bretherton and Tarlton;¹ the Beconsalls of Beconsall;² the Charnocks of Charnock; and the Chorleys of Chorley. Lord Derby owned much of the land in and about Bispham. In addition to these there were a few smaller gentry who lived on their own property, of whom perhaps the Mawdesleys of Mawdesley were the most important.

¹ Bank Hall, previous to the reign of Edward II., was for centuries the manorial residence of the Banestres. In 33 Edward III., on the death of Thomas Banestre, a mandate was issued from the Duchy Court claiming the property of the Banestres in Croston, Farington, and Bretherton. A Thomas Banestre (probably this same man) is mentioned as the son and heir of Sir Adam Banestre, who was beheaded in the reign of Edward II. by the Earl of Lancaster.

² Beconsall was the property of the De Beconsalls up to the time of William III., when it descended to the Molineuxes, by whom it was conveyed by marriage to the Heskeths. *Baines*, vol. iii. p. 438.



CROSTON PARISH CHURCH, INTERIOR

Croston Village.—Croston¹ is a long straggling village on the banks of the river Yarrow, and has no special attraction excepting the Church, the Rectory, the Hall, and the remains of the ancient Cross, which no doubt gave the name to the place.

Who was the original founder of the Church is lost in the mists of antiquity. It is said, on what authority I do not know, there was a Church at Croston in 1097.²

The present Church, dedicated to St. Michael, stands on the site of a much older building, of which there are traces in the Chancel walls, and consists of a Chancel, Nave, north and south Chapels, and a Tower with a clock and peal of eight bells.³

The north Chapel was probably built by one of the Fleming family; their coat of arms is now on the side of the archway by which the Chapel is divided from the Aisle.⁴ It is now rebuilt.

The corresponding Chapel on the south side of the Church was built by Thomas Hesketh, Esq., who died in 1523, and in his will refers to this Chapel, which was dedicated to St. John the Baptist. There is no Clerestory, and the Aisle windows, of three and four lights, are in a debased style. The Tower is embattled, with pinnacles and corner buttresses. There is, in addition to the Belfry windows, a west window of four lights, below which is a door. The Nave arcade is of four pointed arches, with octagonal pillars. There was originally no Chancel arch, but a Jacobean screen took the place of the Rood screen, and divided the Chancel from the Nave.

¹ According to Leyland, Croston was "a Market towne" in the reign of Henry VIII.

² A Church, dedicated to St. Michael, is mentioned in a papal grant to the Rector in 1291. *Papal Letters*, i. 525.

³ There is a tradition that three of the bells came from Burscough Priory Church. If this is true, they have been re-cast.

⁴ Sir Stephen Glyn, describing it, says it had "a sloping roof, tiled and its windows were coarse and square-headed without foils."

The Church, according to Sir Stephen Glyn, was, when he visited it, "much bepewed and galleried," but there were a few "plain and open seats." The organ was in a gallery at the west end. The roof of the Nave was ceiled. The north door is labelled and has carved spandrels; over it is a window of four lights, and built in the wall above the door are three shields, with the armorial bearings of three families holding property in the Parish, who may be supposed to have joined in rebuilding the Church about the year 1480.¹

In 1866-67 the Church was entirely restored, inside and out, as a memorial to the Rev. Streynsham Master, who held the living for sixty years. The north Chapel was rebuilt, the galleries removed, the skylights abolished, the Chancel roof renewed, the Chancel arch built, the Tower thrown open, and the bells arranged so as to be rung from the ground floor, the Church reseated, and a new pulpit provided, &c.

¹ The first Shield bears the arms of Ashton—"Argent, a chevron between three garlands gules," quartered with Legh—"Argent, three bars sable." This was set out by Lyon King of Arms in 1588. Alice, the daughter and heiress of William Legh, married Thomas Ashton, in the reign of Henry VI., 1422-61, and thus became possessed of property in Croston.

The second Shield bears the arms of Dalton—"Azure, a Lion Rampant or, between eight crosses—crosslet, argent," quartered with Fleming—"Barry of six argent and azure, in chief three lozenges." The arms of Dalton and Fleming are to be seen thus quartered at Thurnham Hall, the seat of the Daltons. Elizabeth, eldest daughter and co-heiress of William Fleming of Croston, married Richard Dalton of Bispham, *temp.* Edward IV.

The third Shield bears the arms of the Heskeths of Rufford and their connections, viz. : (a) Fitton, "Argent on a bend sable three garbs or." (b) Banestre, "Argent a cross-fleurie, sable," Baron of Newton, whose daughter Margaret married Thomas Hesketh of Rufford, 1389. (c) Minshull, "Sable, three mullets issuant from three crescents argent." Nicholas de Hesketh married Margaret Minshull, 1415. (d) Twenge, or Doddingfell, "Argent a fesse gules." In 1355 Sir William Hesketh married Marcella, daughter of — Twenge or Doddingfell.

Robert Hesketh of Rufford, Roger Dalton, and Thomas Ashton of Croston, were contemporaries, and may be fairly supposed to have joined in the rebuilding of Croston Church at the end of the fifteenth century.

In the Church are a number of mural monuments and brasses,¹ and many of the windows of the Church are filled with stained glass.²

An inscription carved in oak, taken from one of the canopied pews removed at the last restoration, has been inserted in the backs of two of the present seats in the Nave.

“This Chappel was beautified and this seat erected (1682) by Christopher Banastre, esq^r.”

The Font is dated 1663.

The Registers date from 1538, but those earlier than 1728 were removed in 1827 by William Henry Baldwin, Churchwarden, and are now in the possession of the Lord of the Manor.

The following extracts are interesting :—

“1644. There is a manie that is unregistered by reason of Prince Rupert coming into Lancashire, and this booke was hid for feare of the enemie taking it.”

“These are to certify all those whom it may concerne that James Cuten of Rufforth within the Countie of Lanc., yeoman, and Jane Tomlinson of Bursc, widow, came before me Jeremiah Aspinall one of ye Justices of ye peace within the said Countie

¹ One of these is to the memory of the Rev. James Hyett, the Puritan Rector of Croston, A.D. 1625-62.

Another to the wife of the Rev. William Pilkington, which reads as follows :—

“Near this Place lyeth the Body of Alice Pilkington, Wife of William Pilkington, LL.D., Rector of this Parish, who departed this Life the 13th Day of September & was Buried the 14th in the Year 1747 in the 83rd year of her Age. She was a Remarkable & Hospitable Economist, a generous Rewarder of those that had don her any Office of Civility. As she always spoke her mind, her aversion was very much against Flattery, Compliments, and Hipocrisy. Her Visits to the Rich were Rare, but Frequent to the Poor.”

² Most of this glass is modern, but in one of the windows in the north Aisle is the following inscription :—

“And for ye good estate of Henry Ba—— of William Bana——”
with the letters ^B_{H M}, probably the initials of Henry Banastre and Margaret Worthington, his wife, the parents of Henry Banastre in the sixteenth century.

and did contract matrimony according to the late Act. Aug. 24 1653, made and provided.

“Witness my hand and seale the 8th day of May 1656 in presence of Thomas Wilkinson and Hugh Latham.”

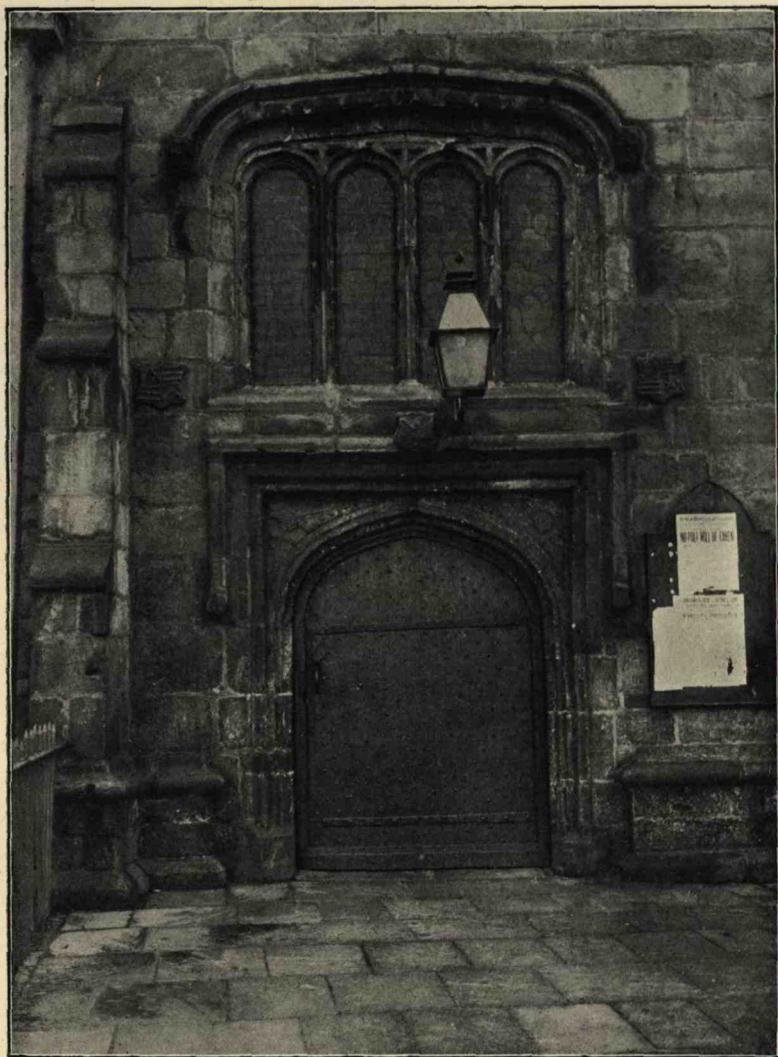
The Benefice of Croston.—In the Valor Beneficorum of Pope Nicholas IV. (1288) the valuation of the Benefice of Croston was estimated at a sum equal to the combined revenue of the remaining parishes in the Hundred of Leyland. Such a valuable possession was not long allowed to escape the notice and the cupidity of the Norman Barons, and I find that Roger de Poitou, by charter, subsequently confirmed, granted to the Monastery of St. Martin of Séez in Normandy the Priory of St. Mary of Lancaster, with a number of dependent Churches and Chapels, amongst which is named the cetiam de Crostone.¹

The prior and convent of Lancaster presented the Incumbent, receiving, of course, an annual pension from the Church revenues of Croston.

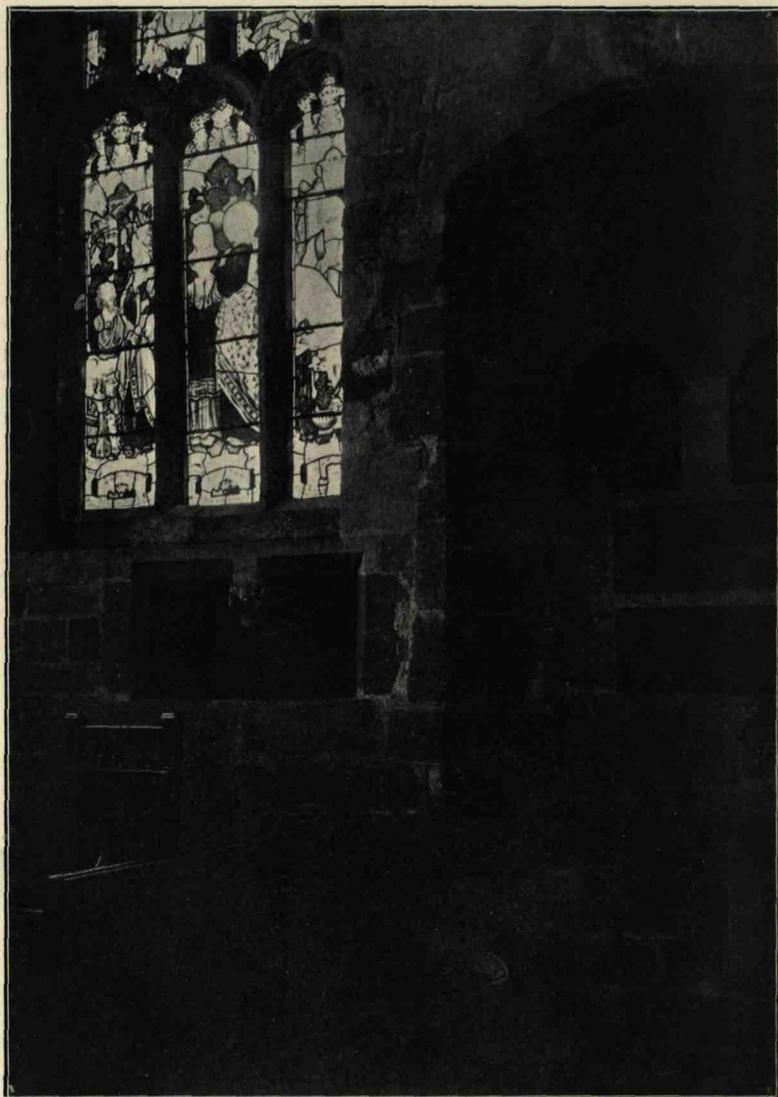
By the kindness of Mr. Brownbill I am able to give a complete list of those who from 1160 have in turn held the position of Parson of Croston.² They are forty-five in number.

¹ “No doubt, in making the grant he thought he was doing God service, but he does not appear to have troubled himself about the religious needs of Croston.” Harl. MSS., Cod. 3764, fol. 1, 2. *Lanc. Churches*, i. 24.

² “The title given to the Parson (*Persona Ecclesie*) at Croston raises a very interesting question. The Rector of a Parish is ‘a clergyman who has the charge and care of a Parish, and possesses all the Tithes,’ &c. (see Hook’s *Church Dictionary*, 7). In this sense of the word none of the Parsons of Croston were actually Rectors (though some of them were so called) between the date of Roger de Poitou granting the benefice to the monastery of Séez and the year 1625. During this period the revenues of the benefice, including the Tithe, were in the hands either of a religious community or of the Crown, and the Parson appointed by them would be a Vicar (Vicar = deputy). By 15 Rich. II. c. 12, it was enacted that on every appropriation—*i.e.* the endowment of any Monastery or Ecclesiastical Corporation—with the tithes, the Vicar should be well and sufficiently endowed. And it was further enacted by 4 Henry IV. c. 12, that in every Church appropriated there shall be a “secular” priest canonically instituted



CROSTON PARISH CHURCH, NORTH DOOR



DOUBLE PISCINA IN CROSTON PARISH CHURCH

DATE.	NAME.	PATRON.	CAUSE OF VACANCY.
c. 1160	Luilph	.....	.....
oc. 1191	Nicholas	.....	.....
c. 1230	Stephen	.....	.....
c. 1240	Geoffrey	.....	.....
oc. 1246-60	Philip	.....	.....
oc. 1291-95	Walter de Langton	.....	.....
1303?	Walter de Clipstow	.....	.....
2 Feb. 1300-1	William de Lancaster	Lancaster Priory	d. Walter de Clipstow
22 Nov. 1318	Ralph de Tunstall	" "	d. Wm. de Lancaster
1 Mar. 1333-4	Richd. de Wamburgh	The King "	d. R. de Tunstall
18 Jan. 1344-5	William de Exeter	The King	d. R. de Wamburgh
oc. 1382	Wm. de Huntlow	"	.....
25 July 1387	William Glynn	"	d. W. de Huntlow
Oct. 1398	Robt. de Farrington	"	exchange Wm. Glynn
19 Feb. 1404-5	Henry Kays	John Wakering	d. R. de Farrington
5 April 1405	Richard Kingston	.....	exchange H. Kays
22 Oct. 1408	William Lochard	The King	res. R. Kingston
14 Aug. 1409	Nicholas Starkie	"	res. W. Lochard
4 Sep. 1418	Thos. Fishburne	W. Kenmarsh	.....
19 May 1421	William Abraham	Zion Abbey	.....
16 Sep. 1435	John Oocleshaw	"	.....
1 Aug. 1439	Richard Dalton	"	res. J. Oocleshaw
oc. 1443	Thomas Tarlton	.....	.....
11 Aug. 1453	Christopher Holme	Zion Abbey	d. Thos. Tarlton
3 Feb. 1475-6	Roger Haslingden, B.D.	"	d. Chris. Holme
8 Jan. 1477-8	Thomas Mawdesley	"	d. R. Haslingden
24 Jan. 1504	Robt. Beconsall, D.D.	"	d. T. Mawdesley
1526	Thomas Bond, B.D.	"	.....
20 July 1557	Thomas Leeming	Antony Brown	.....
17 Sep. 1594	Robt. Whittaker	.....	.....
1607	George Coney	.....	d. R. Whittaker
23 Mar. 1623	Jchn Bartlett, M.A.	{ Bishop of Chester, } by lapse	d. George Coney
18 Aug. 1625	James Hyett, B.D.	The King	.....
28 Oct. 1662	Jas. Pilkington, B.D.	"	expuls. Jas. Hyett
25 May 1683	Charles Leyfield, D.D.	William Pilkington	d. J. Pilkington
10 Oct. 1688	John Riley	Charles Leyfield	res. Chas. Leyfield
14 Mar. 1689	Robt. Pickering, D.D.	{ C. Leyfield and } W. Haydock	d. J. Riley
10 Dec. 1695	Zachariah Taylor, M.A.	The King	dep. R. Pickering
28 Dec. 1703	Wm. Pilkington, LL.D.	.....	d. Zach. Taylor
21 Oct. 1755	Streynsham Master, D.D.	Leigh Master	d. Wm. Pilkington
11 May 1759	Robert Master, M.A.	Ann Master	d. S. Master
28 Sep. 1798	Streynsham Master, M.A.	Elizabeth Master	d. R. Master
1864	Robt. Mosley Master	— Master	d. S. Master
1867	Oswald Master	— Master	d. R. M. Master
1894	A. G. Raustorne, 1st Suf. Bishop of Whalley	Master Whittaker	res. O. Master

and inducted and convenably endowed by the discretion of the Ordinary . . . and no monk shall in any wise be made Vicar in any Church appropriated."

The first Parson of Croston entitled to the title of Rector was, according to the above, the Rev. James Hyett. He was the first to receive the whole of the revenue of the benefice.

The first parson of Croston of whom anything is known beyond the name is Walter de Langton, 1291-95. He was also Rector of Manchester, and held a dispensation to retain Croston and other benefices. He was engaged in the King's (Edward II.) service, and the Churches were served by deputies. He became Bishop of Lichfield in 1296.¹ In A.D. 1310-11 William de Lancaster, nephew of the Bishop of Lichfield (the above, I presume), and only in minor orders, held the living by special dispensation of Pope Boniface VIII.²

In 1344 the King (Edward III.) claimed the patronage of Croston as belonging to an alien priory, and William de Exeter was appointed by him. He was physician to Queen Philippa, precentor at Lincoln and Rector of Croston as late as A.D. 1354, the year the Statute of Provisors was passed, which limited the power of the Pope in the exercise of patronage.

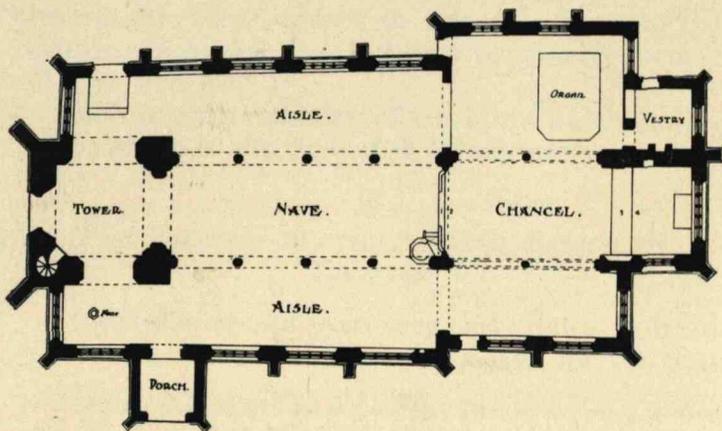
The Benefice remained in the hands of the Crown until A.D. 1420, when its constitution was changed. The advowson was granted by Henry VII. to his new Monastery of Zion near London. The Church living was appropriated, a vicarage ordained by the Bishop of Lichfield, and the Abbess and Convent of Zion became patrons. At this time the value of the Rectory was estimated at 130 marks (£86, 13s. 4d.), and it was ordered by the Bishop that the Vicar should pay the Convent 80 marks and retain the remaining 50 (£33, 6s. 8d.) together with any additional revenue that might accrue, paying all ecclesiastical burdens, including ten shillings to the poor, six-and-eightpence to the Bishop, and thirteen-and-fourpence to the Archdeacon.³

¹ Calamy, *Papal Letters*, i. 525.

² *Papal Letters*, i. 610.

³ *Notitia Cest., Cheet. Soc.*, ii. 353.

Very few of those who held the living of Croston up to the time of the Reformation did any actual clerical work in the Parish in



CROSTON PARISH CHURCH, GROUND PLAN

Passing on to the reign of Henry VIII. the gross value of the Rectory was estimated at £94, 10s. 6d., of which sum £53, 6s. 8d.¹ was paid to the Convent of Zion; the Glebe brought in £5, 7s. 10d.; Tithes, £72, 9s. 4d.; Easter Roll, £16, 13s. 4d. The Convent received the 80 marks ordered a century before, and the 10s. a year was paid to the poor. The nett value to the Vicar was £38, 6s. 10d. At this time, and for the first time so far as there is any record, the Vicar agreed to pay £4 a year to the Curate of Chorley, thus reducing his taxable income to £31, 11s. 6d.²

Such was the condition of Croston Church and its revenues up to the time of the Reformation.

THE CHAPELS IN THE ANCIENT PARISH OF CROSTON

It was the custom from very early times to build what were termed "Chapels of Ease," for the con-

propria personâ, or even lived in Croston. They seem simply to have used that portion of the emoluments assigned to them by their patrons for their own personal uses, and paid the poor priest who did the work a paltry pittance. For any practical good the majority of these men ever did in the Parish of Croston, they may be treated as having never lived. It is true some did serve the King, and even the Church and State, elsewhere, but they were pluralists of the deepest dye, and from the very nature of the case it was impossible for them to devote themselves to the performance of the duties for which they were paid.

"The more distinguished of the early Rectors and Vicars were non-resident, but the rise of chapels at Chorley, Rufford, Tarlton, Becconsall, and Hoole shows that the Parishes before the Reformation were suitably provided with clergy."—J. BROWNBILL.

¹ This sum of £53, 6s. 8d., paid to the Convent of Zion, was at the dissolution of the Religious Houses claimed by the Crown and paid to the reigning sovereign until Charles the Second's time, when that monarch sold or gave the rent charge (*inter alia*) under an Act of Parliament (22 Chas. II. cap. 6) passed for the purpose, vesting in the purchasers and their heirs and assigns the special rights and powers possessed by the Crown. Under the provisions of this Act, the "Fee Farm Rent," as it is called, is now paid to the representatives of the original purchaser or grantee by the Rectors of Croston, Rufford, Hoole, Tarlton, Chorley, and Hesketh in certain proportions.

² *Notitia*, ii. 255.

venience of those parishioners who lived at too great a distance from the Parish Church. Some of these Chapels were served by the clergy of the Parish Church, others had a permanent chaplain, though dependent, in part, upon the Mother Church. In those Chapels in which there was a Chantry, the Chantry priest very frequently undertook the duty in addition to his own special work. There were also in various parts of the country "Domestic Chapels," built by the Lords of the Manor for the private use of themselves, their families, and retainers.

The Parish of Croston, being so extensive and in many parts so inaccessible from the Parish Church, it was found needful to provide Chapels at each centre of population.

Chorley.—There was a Chapel at Chorley at a very early period.¹ At first it was a private Chapel, but afterwards became a dependency of Croston, for in 1442 Sir Rowland Standish brought over from Normandy the head and thigh bones of St. Lawrence, the receipt of which was certified by "Thomas Tarlton, Vicker of the Church of Crostone, the 2 daye of March in ye yeare of our Lord God 1442."²

Rufford.—The Chapel at Rufford was in existence in the year 1347.³

Tarlton.—There was a Chapel of great antiquity at Tarlton, dedicated to St. Helen, probably built by the Banestres of Bank, near which was a Holy Well, also dedicated to St. Helen.

Becconsall.—The origin and dedication of the pre-Reformation Chapel at Becconsall are unknown. It is believed that it was built in the sixteenth century by the Becconsall family.

¹ Henry, Lord Bouchier, granted to William de Chorley, late Lord of Chorley, the entire south moiety of his Chapel.

² Harl. MSS., Cod. 2042, fol. 23.

³ As I referred to this at length in my paper on "The Manor of Rufford and the ancient Family of the Heskeths," it is unnecessary for me to repeat what I then said.

Hoole.—The earliest and only reference to a Chapel at Hoole is “a grant, dated 1280, by Amery de Hoole to God and Saint Mary of an acre in Much Hoole for the maintenance of the lights in the Chapel of Little Hoole.” What became of it is unknown. No further reference to it can be found.¹

Bispham.—There was a Chapel on the Manor of Bispham in 1522, but, excepting a reference in the Earl of Derby’s rent-roll to an allowance of a small sum for the repairs of the building, nothing is known of its history or even of its whereabouts.

Bretherton.—A Chapel “recently built” at Bretherton is named by Dodsworth. Its fate is unknown.²

Holmeswood.—There was, according to tradition, a Chapel near to Holmeswood Hall, but the only evidence brought forward in proof of its having existed is the name given to a field close by, which is now known as “the Chapel field.”

So far as can be ascertained, none of these Chapels, excepting Chorley and perhaps Rufford, derived any advantage whatever from the revenues of the Rectory of Croston up to the time of the Reformation, so that it may be concluded that Divine service was conducted by one or other of the Chantry priests; indeed, that such was the case at Tarlton and Beconsall there is undoubted proof.

As scarcely a vestige of any of these ancient Chapels remains, except the older portions of what is now the Parish Church of Chorley, and a few stones at Rufford, it is only by examining those in other parts of the county that have survived the ravages of time that a conjectural idea may be formed of the character and size of those which

¹ Dodsworth MSS. liii., fol. 946.

² There is now a small plot of land planted with trees not far from the present Church, approached by a footpath known in the village as the “Chapel Walk.” This may be the site on which stood the old Chapel.

formerly existed in the ancient Parish of Croston. For instance, "the Stydd Chapel" in the Parish of Ribchester; the Tower and Nave of the Church at Great Harwood, which, by the way, was founded about the same period as "Rufford Chapel" by the same family (the Heskeths); "Douglas Chapel," though now only a memory; Salmesbury Church, and some others I could name, have all a more or less family likeness, all date about the same period, and from them it may be, I think, fairly conjectured what the original Chapels in the ancient Parish of Croston were like in dimensions and style of architecture. That they were for the most part primitive and unpretentious buildings is more than probable, though I have reason to believe that in most respects they were superior to the erections to which they gave place, which were poor in the extreme.

THE CHANTRIES IN THE ANCIENT PARISH OF CROSTON

Chantries were founded in Chapels, or in separate parts of a Parish Church, for the celebration of daily Masses for the soul of some individual, specified by name. A priest was specially appointed to this duty, and in some cases they acted as the Parish priests and schoolmasters in the place where they lived.

These Chantries were of two kinds:—Those permanently endowed, and those whose income was more or less precarious. For founding the first the licence of the Crown was needful. They were called "Foundation Chantries," and the incumbents, presented by the founder or his representative, were legally instituted, and had a life interest in the appointment. The priests of the latter class were simply stipendiaries, and their position was lower than that of the regularly endowed beneficed Chantry priest. The Chantry priests were, as a

rule, very poor. In Lancashire their average stipend rarely exceeded £5 a year. Their habitation was of the simplest description and their diet most frugal. They wore a coarse frieze cassock with a leathern girdle, thick clogs, and a felt-hat, or none at all. But it must not be supposed these priests were illiterate, vulgar, or of the peasant class; such was not the case, for amongst them were found members of some of the highest families in the land.¹

Croston.—There were three regularly endowed Chantries² at the Parish Church of Croston.

1. At the Altar of St. John the Baptist, founded 1500, "by John Todd the chaplain at Rufford, and by Thomas Hesketh, Esquire."³

2. At the Altar of the Trinity, founded about 1530 by Catherine Tarlton, widow, the income was 59s. 8d., and Richard Clarke was chaplain, A.D. 1535-47.

3. At the Rood or Altar of the Crucifix, founded by Christopher Walton before 1527, the income was 62s. 4d. John Walton was chaplain A.D. 1517, when he was eighty years old.

There was also a "Beconsall" Chantry Chapel, which stood in Croston Churchyard, probably on the site of the present school, and was formerly used by the Lord of the Manor,⁴ but was not permanently endowed.

Rufford.—1. In 1347 Sir William Hesketh founded a Chantry at St. Mary's Chapel, Rufford, for which he obtained a licence from the King (Edward III.) with whom he was then in France. The name of the first priest was John Laiton, and his income was £5, 10s. 8d. a year. He was succeeded by Richard

¹ Raines, *Chantries*. Cheetham Society.

² None of these Croston Chantries possessed any plate.

³ Thomas Hesketh died A.D. 1523, and his Will expressly mentions the "chapel lately built by him on the south side of Croston Church."

⁴ Townley MSS., c. 8. 13. B. 309.

Todd in 1425. Ten years later Thomas Dylle was Chantry priest, and he continued in the office forty-one years.

2. In 1495 Dame Alice Hesketh, widow of Robert Hesketh, founded a second Chantry at Rufford, and endowed it with land in Newburgh and Amunderness, value £2, 6s. 8d. In 1506 Hugh Hesketh, a member of the Hesketh family, was priest. He afterwards became Bishop of Man.¹

3. A third Chantry was founded in connection with the "Chapell at Rufforthe" by Thomas Hesketh, Esq., the son and successor of Robert and Alice Hesketh. The endowment amounted to £4, 18s. a year.

4. In 1548 Bartholomew Hesketh, Esq., of Poulton, and grandson of Thomas Hesketh, founded a Chantry "to celebrate masse and teach the scholars of the Town of Rufforthe." By his will he ordered "that vi marks or lesse of his morgage lands . . . bi Taken by his executors for the founding of a priest and his stipende. . . . Richard Deane was encumbent xi yeres and hath the clere yerely revenue of the same for his salarie" (Raines, *Chantries*).

Chorley.—There was a Chantry at Chorley founded by William de Chorley.

Becconsall.—A Chantry was founded at Becconsall by George Becconsall in the early years of the sixteenth century. The endowment was £3, 2s. 7d. The chaplain in 1535-47 was Robert Smith. The place was poorly furnished with a chalice, two vestments, and a Mass-book.

Tarlton.—George Dandy, a priest, and Richard Banestre founded a Chantry "for his soule, and all

¹ The foundress of this Chantry bequeathed by Will "to the Altar of the Blessed Virgin at Rufforth a little basin of silver, a piece of embroidery I have made for a cope to be lent to Hugh Hesketh with all hast at my death to be worn on the day of my obit every yere and to pray for my soule."

Christian soules," in 1525, at St. Helen's Chapel, Tarlton.

In 1530 Robert Smith, of Liverpool, was accused of having broken into St. Helen's Chapel, Tarlton, and stolen certain property of William Wilcock, chaplain there.¹

The Chantry priests, both at Becconsall and at Tarlton, were constrained to minister the Blessed Sacrament to the people oftentimes, because of the tides. There was an arm of the sea between them and the Parish Church, making the road impossible for days together.

John Robinson was chaplain at Tarlton, 1525. Thomas Wilding in 1547.

The endowment was derived from lands in Tarlton, Bretherton, Ulnes Walton, and Longton, and was £4, 11s. in all, but 20s. 4d. was in reversion at the date of confiscation.

In 1583 all this land was sold by the Crown to Thurston Anderton, and the Chapel and the Chapel yard, with a small dwelling, to Sir Thomas Hesketh.

The ownership of the Chantry lands and endowments, and also of the site of the old Chapel and Chapel yard, which had been seized by the Crown, was subsequently a matter of dispute. Very conflicting evidence was sworn to before John Fleetwood and Peter Anderton, magistrates. Henry Banestre affirmed that the property was originally part and parcel of his Manor, and that in order to accommodate the inhabitants of the Manor who were not able to go to Croston Church by reason of the great water and rivers, with the licence of the Pope and the Bishop, built the Chapel which was ever afterwards used as a Chapel-of-Ease, until the same was pulled down and carried away by Sir Thomas Hesketh, Knt. The Chapel and the yard were

¹ Parl. Lancashire Assize Records, 10.

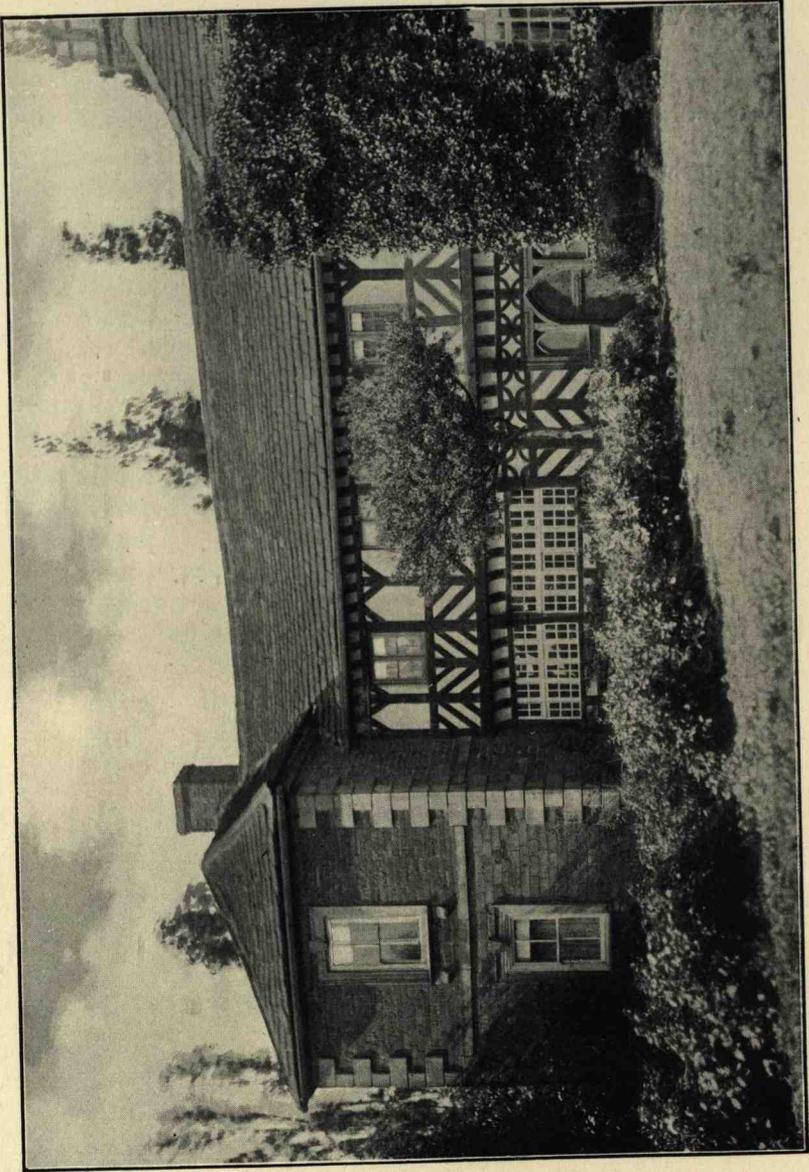
always considered to be the inheritance of the defendant's ancestors.

On the other hand, it was given in evidence that the King's officers sold the Chapel to Sir Thomas Hesketh, who afterwards pulled it down, and that Hugh Dobson, late hermit there, and his predecessors dwelt in the same tenement and received the profits of the land for sixty years and more. Hugh Dobbeson "used himself as a hermit," but one witness said, "he did not know when or by whom he was professed," and another witness said he "sometimes used himself as a hermit and sometimes not." Dobson, an old man of eighty, himself deposed that he was "a professed hermit of the Order of St. Anthony at the Parish Church of Toddcastle, within the County of York, before Dr. Bannebridge, then Suffragan to the Bishop of York." He declared he "was seized of a little house within the Chapel yard of Tarlton, and of half an acre of meadow and half an acre of arable land, which had formerly formed part of the endowment of the Chantry of St. Elyn, and that he had let the land for his own profit." Rauff Catterall said "he and his father before him had been tenants, and paid the rent to the hermet." He further affirmed that "he had known three Armettes (hermits) who had dwelt in the same house, and had all taken the profits of the land, as the Chantry Priests had before them; that Sir Thomas Hesketh, when he purchased the property from the Crown seven years ago, took down the Chapel and the house without any interruption from Banestre."¹

THE SUPPRESSION OF THE CHANTRIES, &c.

Of all the measures by which unprincipled men disgraced the Reformation, none contributed more,

¹ *Lancashire Pleadings*, vol. iii. p. 243.



MAWDESLEY HALL

by the manner in which it was conducted, to injure that excellent cause than the suppression of the Chantries (so wrote Dr. Whittaker in his *History of Whalley*, p. 146).

Let me point out one or two of its results :¹—

The Act by which the revenues of these Chantries were annexed to the Crown was passed in the last Parliament of Henry VIII. That King's death, however, prevented the Act from being put into force. In order, therefore, to secure the Chantry revenues to the Crown, a further Act was passed (1 Ed. VI. cap. 14) which was hurried through Parliament in little more than a week, in spite of the protests of Archbishop Cranmer and others, who endeavoured to get the property applied to the relief of the poor clergy, which meant, in most cases, the re-establishment of the Chantry priests, who had performed most of the clerical duties. But it was not to be, and no part of the Chantry endowments were retained by the Church at that or any subsequent period.

The Churches and Chapels were stripped of their plate and valuables. "The Halls of many of the gentry were hung with altar-cloths in place of tapestry, their tables and beds were covered with copes instead of carpets and coverlets." Chalices were used for carousing-cups, and horses were watered in the stone and marble coffins of the dead. Nothing for which purchasers could be found escaped the rapacity of the plunderers. Tombs were stripped of their brasses, Churches of their lead, bells were cast into cannon. The merciless destruction with which this violent transfer of property was accompanied is a lasting and ineffacable reproach upon those who partook of the

¹ I am here simply speaking of the manner in which this business was done. This is not the time nor the place to discuss it from a theological point of view.

plunder, or permitted it.¹ The destruction of manuscripts alone was such that Bale, who hated the monasteries, groaned over it as a shame and reproach to the nation.²

English history sustained irreparable loss, and it is more than probable that many of the ancient classics perished in this indiscriminate, ruthless, and wanton destruction.

The Chantry priests were turned adrift and deprived of their scanty means of subsistence, except in some cases, not all, where they were granted the smallest and most miserable of pensions.

What the effect of this was upon the number of acting clergy is shown by the following comparison quoted by Mr. Brownbill from the visitation lists in the Registry at Chester :—

“In 1538 there were nine clergy serving in the undivided Parish of Croston.

In 1547 there were twelve.

In 1554 there were five..and then only two, one being a decrepit curate.

In 1562 there was one in Chorley.

In 1563 there were three in the whole Parish.

In 1565 there were two only.”

It was therefore inevitable that some of the Chapels should fall out of use, as they did.

¹ Amongst other matters granted to Roger Rant and Edmund Dorning was the late Chantry at the Altar of St John the Baptist in the Church at Croston with its messuages and lands in the town of Croston, Mawdesley, and Hamilton, granted by Robert Hesketh in aid of the salary of the late Chantry priest.

Subsequently “Edm. Dorning and Rog. Rant sold to Thomas Ashton of Croston and Rog. Ashton of Leven the church’s bell to St. Jo. Bapt. cum pert. to leave to Thomas and Ralf and heres.”—Dr. Ruerden’s MSS. vol. iv. fo. c. 27.

When the Church survey was made in 1552 there was the following : “One belle, one chalyce, of sylver wt. a pattene, one corp. As to vestments tow albes, tow amys, tow stoyles with flanells, one coyphe, one payer of sensures of brasse, tow alt clothes, one cruiet, tow towells, one crosse of brasse and one byble.”—Church Goods Record Office, p. 126.

² “Our posterity may well curse this wicked fact of our age, this unreasonable spoil of England’s most noble antiquities” (Quoted by R. Southey).

The condition of the country at this time was deplorable, and went from bad to worse. The poor were the first to find out the change brought about by the disestablishment and disendowment of the Religious Houses, Chantries, and similar institutions. The land, which was either given, or sold for a nominal sum, to the King's Court favourites, was in a measure put out of cultivation. The new owners were for the most part non-resident, and had less interest in their property in consequence. All they looked for was to make as much as they could at as little cost as possible, so they turned a great deal of the land into sheep farms, and the remainder ran to waste. The tenants were turned out to beg, rob, or starve. The result was there was less work; no one gave alms, no one tended the sick, no one taught the children. The stipends of the inferior clergy were so miserably small that no learned man would undertake the duty. For instance, the stipend of a priest to officiate in Rufford Chapel is entered at £3, 2s. 2d. per annum. Is it any wonder the Bishop was obliged to confess that he "did not know twelve men in the whole of his diocese that could preach"?

During these years ignorance and crime prevailed to an alarming extent: Thousands of persons were homeless, with starving children clamouring for the bare necessaries of life. Beggars swarmed, though the laws of suppression were cruel and severe.

The Vicar of Croston, Thomas Bond by name, who was responsible for the spiritual oversight of the Parish, was a time-server. He adapted himself to every situation in which he found himself. A man of versatile power, he was also of versatile principles. Serving in turn the "powers that be," he always took care of himself. Appointed A.D. 1525 by the Abbess and Convent of Zion, like the famous

Vicar of Bray he retained his post during all the changes which took place in the reigns of Henry VIII., Edward VI., and Queen Mary. When he first went to Croston, the Church of England was under Papal supremacy, which, of course, he acknowledged. When Henry VIII., for his own wicked ends and purposes, threw the Pope overboard and arrogated to himself the title of "Supreme Head of the Church," Bond swore allegiance to the King. No doubt he was a consenting party to the dissolution of the Chantries and the turning adrift of the Chantry priests. On the accession of Edward VI., Bond became a zealous Protestant ready to uproot the Papacy.¹

The young King's death, however, put an end for the time to any further changes the extreme Protestant party were anxious to bring about. Queen Mary's desire was to have the Church once more reconciled to Rome, and she gained her end. Amongst those who received absolution for having been led into what was held to be an act of rebellion was the Rev. Thomas Bond, Vicar of Croston. He retained his Benefice at the expense of his consistency. He died in 1557, a year before the next change, to which had he lived this ecclesiastical weather-cock would, judging from his history, have doubtless accommodated himself.²

What provision this unprincipled parson made for the performance of the services at Rufford, Chorley, and Tarlton we can only surmise. So far as I can find out, they were neglected and allowed to go to ruin.

¹ This is proved by a letter addressed to him by Lord Derby, the Lord-Lieutenant of the County, respecting the arresting of a person described as "a lewd priest, one (sir) James Harrison," who was supposed to be in hiding in the Parish of Croston.

² Bond was not by any means alone in accommodating himself to the changes which took place in the Church at this period of her chequered history, for not a few of the clergy who held valuable livings throughout the country retained their positions by conforming to whatever happened at the time to be the dominant form of Creed.

In A.D. 1610 there was a minister at Rufford named Bradshaw. He is described as "a preacher," but there was no provision for his maintenance save "the benevolence of his auditory and what the inhabitants gave him."

In the year A.D. 1642 the Parliament decided upon a plan by which the larger parishes were to be subdivided, and a Commission was issued to report. They made several recommendations with respect to Croston,¹ but the only severance which actually resulted was the formation of Hoole into a separate Parish.²

THE COMMONWEALTH

For forty years the history of the Church in Croston is more or less a blank. During this period Church and King were swept away by the storm of revolution. The Bishops were deposed from their sees and the clergy deprived of their livings, their places being taken by Presbyterian and Independent ministers, except in the case of those who sacrificed their consciences on the altar of expediency, and turned their coats to save their pockets. The use of the Prayer Book was prohibited, even in private houses, by heavy fines and imprisonment. In 1644 a "Directory" was issued by which long sermons and extempore prayers were substituted for the worship and sacraments of the Church. It was a crime to observe any of the Church Seasons, and Christmas Day was especially denounced as sinful and idolatrous.

At first a professed Churchman, and, of course,

¹ Rufford and Holmeswood were to form a distinct Parish, as also Mawdesley and Bispham, Hesketh and Beconsall.

² The following memorandum in the Parish Register records the fact: "Hoole, a Chapelry of Croston, 17 Charles I. Bill for creating the Chapel or Parish Church, read 3rd June; Committed on the 10th; Royal Seal attached July 27th."

a duly ordained Clergyman, James Hyett, B.D., was appointed Rector of Croston by the King (Charles I.) in 1625. He had previously held livings at Liverpool, Goosnagh, and Childwall. He subsequently, however, became a very strong Puritan, and cast in his lot with the most bigoted and intolerant of the two dominant parties.

In 1646 he took part in the establishment of the Presbyterian discipline, and signed that strange document, "The Harmonious Consent of the Lancashire Ministers," issued A.D. 1648.¹ He was a member—indeed, moderator—of a committee appointed to see that the maintenance provided by Parliament for "preaching ministers was only given to Godly, learned, and orthodox divines," and that "no minister should receive a Benefice without a certificate of fitness for the ministerial office, signed by seven or more of the Committee." In this and other public capacities Mr. Hyett exercised considerable influence. No doubt it was through his instrumentality that Mr. Henry Welsh, "a pious preaching pastor," became the minister at Chorley,² and Mr. Wood, "a Godly minister conformable to the Government," at Rufford.

At a meeting of a Committee appointed by the Parliament to regulate Parish affairs, held in Preston October 31, 1649, "Complaint was made by the inhabitants of Beconsall cum Hesketh, and Tarlton within the Parish of Croston, that being five miles distant from the Parish Church and divided therefrom by two rivers could not resort thereto. That Mr. Hyett, the Rector of Croston, taketh no care to provide a godly minister to officiate in the said Chappell, although the Rectory is of great value."

¹ This remarkable precept vehemently denounced all kinds of Sectaries, and affirmed that "Toleration would be putting a sword into a madman's hand; a cup of poison into the hands of a child."

² Mr. Welsh was only paid 53s. 4d. by Mr. Hyett. In A.D. 1645 his salary was raised to £18 a year.

The Committee decided that "the said Mr. Hyett doe allow the tithes and profits arising within the said Chapelry for the maintenance of such godly and orthodox minister as this Committee shall appoint to officiate in the said Chappell, or show cause to the contrary."

At a meeting held the following February Mr. Hyett took objection to this order, and the Committee decided to hear both sides. A meeting was called for the purpose on the 2nd May, when it was decided that Mr. Hyett should enjoy the whole of the tithes arising from Tarlton.¹

Notwithstanding his narrow and bigoted views, which were in accordance with the spirit of the age in which he lived, Hyett was of a kind and considerate disposition. He was a learned, pious, and, I believe, a good man. In the exercise of his office as Rector he showed himself conscientious and considerate, and while fully alive to his own interests, he was no money-hunter.

The Restoration brought many changes, both in Church and State. The Book of Common Prayer, revised by Convocation as the result of the Savoy Conference, was issued in 1662, and by an Act of Uniformity, passed the same year, all ministers were required to declare their assent and consent thereto, to receive ordination at Episcopal hands, to abjure the Covenant, and take the oath of non-resistance. About 1500 refused compliance, amongst them being the Rector of Croston, James Hyett.² He did not long survive, for he died suddenly at Preston, April 6, 1663. He was buried, at his own request, at Croston without the Prayer Book service. The new Rector protested, but gave way.³ By his will,

¹ *Record Society*, vol. xxviii. p. 86.

² It must be remembered in this connection that a far greater number of Royalist divines were ejected from their Benefices by the action of the Root and Branch Act, passed 1641.

³ "We had much ado about his buryal," wrote Mr. Newcomb in his Diary, "but Mr. Pilkington at last went his way, and so he was

dated May 18, 1662, he recites that he had "procured a Free School house to be built in Croston Church Yard at his own great cost and trouble." He did not bequeath any special sum for an endowment, but, leaving a blank in his will, added a note in the margin of it: "If I fill not this up before my death, it is my wish that it should be £400."

On the 15th July 1663 Mary Hyett, the widow and executrix of James Hyett,¹ obtained an acquittance for £200; the remainder does not appear to have been paid.²

A monumental brass is placed in the Chancel of Croston Church, which records in laudatory terms the career of James Hyett.

The Rev. James Pilkington, B.D., was appointed Rector of Croston in November A.D. 1662, and he held the living until his death in A.D. 1683.

In A.D. 1664, upon the petition of the inhabitants of Rufford, it was ordered that the Rector of Croston should pay £25 a year towards the Curate's stipend, and that the Bishop should appoint a Curate in case the Rector neglected so to do within a month of the vacancy.

Charles Leyfield, D.D., was the next Rector. He was educated at St. John's College, Oxford, and was appointed to Croston, A.D. 1683. He held the living for four years, resigning it for a Prebendary stall at Winchester, with which he held the Rectory of Chilbolton. He was a benefactor to the ancient Parish of Croston.

buried without ceremony or booke, and Mr. Welsh (of Chorley), his friend and neighbour, preached his funeral sermon, 2 Kings ii. 12, a very good sermon he made."

¹ For the sake of peace Hyett "was forced in some measure to slight his own children for his wife. What a vanity is this wicked world" (Newcomb's Diary, p. 197).

Hyett "had no children to slight" (Calamy, vol. ii. p. 359).

² For twenty-four years Mr. Hyett received the vicarage house, lands, and tithes, but in 1650 he demised the tithes of Mawdesley and Bispham to James, then Lord Strange, for the third Incumbent, reserving £3, 6s. 8d. to the minister.

The Rev. Zachariah Taylor was the next Rector of any note. He was appointed in 1695, having been previously Vicar of Ormskirk. He was a King's chaplain, and was known as "the Lancashire Levite." He wrote "The Devil Turned Casuist" and other famous tracts.

At his death in 1703, William Pilkington, LL.D., was appointed, and was Rector fifty-two years. During his incumbency the Rectory House was practically rebuilt and the Church greatly repaired. His wife died eight years before him, and he erected a brass on the chancel of the Church to her memory. It is couched in very quaint terms. (See p. 5.)

The next Rector was Dr. Streynsham Master, who married Dr. Pilkington's daughter and heiress, and so became patron of the living. He was succeeded in 1759 by his son, Dr. Robert Master, who, in order, it is said, to provide livings for two of his sons, in the year 1793 obtained an Act of Parliament separating Chorley and Rufford, and constituting them independent Parishes.

In 1706 Edward Anderton, Curate of Rufford, died, and was buried at Rufford, but no stone marks his grave, and the register of his burial gives no particulars as to how long he had been Curate. On his death a subscription was raised for the augmentation of the Curate's stipend. The original list of subscribers and the amount of their subscriptions is now on the flyleaf of the oldest register belonging to Rufford Church.

Mr. Anderton was succeeded by John Wright, B.A., nominated by William Pilkington, Rector of Croston. It was during the time Mr. Wright was Curate, A.D. 1702, that the school at Rufford was built.

In A.D. 1718, Thomas Hesketh, Esq., and Mrs. H. M. Legh, joint-owners of the Manor of Tarlton, with twenty-three freeholders, on behalf of

themselves and others, petitioned the Bishop (Gas-kill) for a licence to erect a new Chapel in Tarlton, sixteen yards in length and seven in breadth. They stated that during the late unhappy usurpation an edifice was built by the prevailing faction in Tarlton and used for a pretended place of worship, which at the Restoration had occasionally in it Divine service according to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England; but the said building had never been consecrated and had no endowment. The worship of God was neglected, the Chapel in decay and ruin, the ground, once ditched and set out as a Chapel yard, lay waste and unfenced. The petitioners further stated that the population had increased, and that, owing to their being four miles from Croston and the road in the winter impassable, they had in consequence been led to divide from the Church; therefore the Lord and Lady of the Manor, to prevent such mischief and detriment to the Church for the future, gave the site of the old ruined Chapel of St. Helen on which to erect a new one, and they agreed to build it without any expense to the Rector. In order to secure a permanent orthodox incumbent they subscribed £200,¹ in the hope of obtaining a similar grant from Queen Anne's Bounty, and they consented that the minister should be nominated by the Rector on the recommendation of the Lord of the Manor of Tarlton.

A few persons, however, made objections to the Chapel being built on the site on which formerly stood the ancient Chantry Chapel, adjoining which was the "Holy Well" of St. Helen, but the objection was overruled, and the Church built on the ancient site. A Mrs. Bolton, in A.D. 1723, gave another £200 towards the endowment. The name of the first Curate, nominated by Mrs. Legh, was

¹ Mr. Hesketh gave a like sum for the purpose of augmenting the salary of the Curate of Rufford.

William Charnley, B.A. Two years later he was succeeded by William Tomlinson, collated by the Bishop. In A.D. 1746 George Barber was nominated by Peter Legh, Esq., and in A.D. 1765 George Chamberlain, M.A., was nominated by the same gentleman. Edward Master, B.A., was appointed by his father, the Rector of Croston, in 1795.

After the dissolution of the Chantry and the confiscation of its small endowment by the Crown, the Chapel at Becconsall, like the one at Tarlton, fell into disuse and became a ruin. It is named in the Visitation of 1650, but no minister or endowment is recorded. The Commissioners advised that a separate Parish should be made (Church surveys), but nothing was done. About the year 1700 the Chapel was rebuilt, but there was no income beyond £2, 7s.—a grant from the Duchy of Lancaster, which is still paid. In 1717 the Chapel was “supplied” six times a year only. In 1765 it was again rebuilt, and is now the Parish Church.

NOTE.—The history of the Church at Chorley I must leave, as it would occupy too much time. It is very interesting, and would furnish material for a separate paper.

SCHOOLS IN THE ANCIENT PARISH OF CROSTON

It is the fashion in these days of education, or rather what is popularly called education, to depreciate, if not entirely ignore, what was done in the cause of “sound learning” in the days both before and subsequent to the Reformation; but there were scholars, even in what are called the “Dark Ages,” to whom few, even in these enlightened days, can hold the candle—men who climbed the ladder from the lowest rundle, and made themselves famous for all time in the world of letters. Not to speak of our

ancient universities and grammar schools, there were few towns and villages, at the close of the seventeenth century, where there was not a school of some kind, although many of them were no doubt defective, both in the accommodation provided and the character of the instruction imparted. Of too many of the village pedagogues it cannot be said :

“ He was a scholar, and a ripe and good one,
Exceeding wise, fair spoken, and persuading.”

Yet their founders'—for they were for the most part provided by the generosity of private individuals—intentions and motives were most praiseworthy. Their desire was to establish a school in which the youth of the place they wished especially to benefit would be trained in sound and useful learning and in the principles of the Christian religion. The ancient Parish of Croston was not an exception to this almost universal rule.

The first direct mention of any special provision for teaching the young in the Parish of Croston is contained in the will of Thomas Hesketh, Esq., Lord of the Manor of Rufford, who died A.D. 1523. He left money for “a school at Rufforth.” Twenty-five years later Bartholomew Hesketh of Poulton, in founding a Chantry at Rufford, laid it down expressly in his will that one of the duties of the priest was “to teach the scholars in the towne of Rufforth.” This duty was performed for eleven years by the Rev. Richard Dean.

Now, although this is the first direct mention of a school and a schoolmaster, I do not think Mr. Dean was the first to instruct the young at Rufford. I have every reason to believe that, from the time the first Chantry was founded and endowed, it was a definite part of the priest's duty to teach the children. Where the schools were held can now be

only a matter of conjecture, probably in the Church and the Chapels.¹

This was the state of things until about A.D. 1548, when the Chantry priests were turned adrift and deprived of their scanty means of subsistence, excepting the smallest and most miserable of pensions. What provision was made for the education of the children it is impossible to say; I doubt if there was much, if any. It is true some of the priests took refuge in out-of-the-way parts of the country and lived the life of hermits, and may have continued to instruct the young.

This may have given the name of the "Hermitage" to an old farmhouse, built in 1673, in what is called "The Flash" in Rufford, and there may have been a previous building on that site to which the disestablished priests retired, and there Mr. Dean may have continued his school.

There was also a Hermitage at Tarlton, contiguous to the ancient Chapel of St. Helen, which was famous on account of the Holy Well of St. Helen, which, in passing, I may mention was very much resorted to, as late as the seventeenth century, by the devotees of those times.² Here, too, may have been a school under the charge of either the hermit or the Chantry priest.

Coming down to post-Reformation times I will first mention the school founded by the Rev. J. Hyett, the Rector of Croston in 1660. It was to be free to the children living in the townships of Croston and Ulnes Walton. The income was £15 per annum, £10 of which was received from land in Eccleston purchased with the £200 left by will of

¹ According to an old map (dated 1760) there was formerly a plot of land, now enclosed in Rufford Park, called "the priests' acre," and there may have been a school on that site. There was at a very early date a building in the churchyard at Croston, which may have been used for the same purpose; indeed, it is more than likely the present school buildings occupy the same site.

² *Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, xvii. 9.

the founder, and £5, the interest of £100 given in 1680 by Mr. William Houghton, formerly school-master. The school was under the management of a body of trustees, nineteen in number, who nominated the master, who was to teach "the principles of the Christian religion."

Every scholar had to pay 12d. (or 6d. for a cottager's child) a-piece on entrance, according to the founder's rule.

The Rector of Croston (the Rev. James Hyett) was also a party to the founding and endowing of a school at Bretherton by a Mr. James Fletcher, a London merchant, whose wife was a native of Bretherton, and who was more actively employed in the good work than her wealthy husband, who at her instigation, in 1653, gave land in Mawdesley, Eccleston, and Leyland, the profits of which amounted to £24, 16s. 8d., together with the interest of £32 in money, which was subsequently laid out in the purchase of a security situate in Accrington.

A charge of £1 per annum was made on the income of the school for the repair of a "causeway" in Thorp Row. A further charge was made to defray the cost of "a dinner for the ffeoffees every 10th April, with bread, cheese and drink for the scholars at ye same time," and also the clergyman who preached a sermon on the same day was paid 10s.; the residue to be paid to the master, who was nominated by the ffeoffees.

By the courtesy of the Rector of Bretherton, the Rev. R. Gardiner, I have had access to a very old Minute Book containing the report of the proceedings of the annual meetings of the ffeoffees, together with their accounts in detail from the date of the foundation of the school in A.D. 1653 to A.D. 1715. The book had been long lost, but was recently discovered in a solicitor's office in Preston and

restored to the Rector. Considering its great age it is in good preservation and the caligraphy excellent. The meetings of the ffeoffees¹ were held alternately at Croston and Ormskirk, and it may be noted that while the "sermon" was on a very few occasions not preached—if it was, the clergyman was not paid, as there is no entry for his usual honorarium—the ffeoffees did not on one single occasion for over sixty years neglect their own creature comforts, for there invariably appears an entry among the disbursements for "meate," "drinke," and all other charges, including fodder for their horses and gratuities to the servants at the inn. The sum varies from "£01, 15s. 00d." to "£02, 15s. 6d.," so they must have had a sumptuous repast. The charge for the children's treat, provided by the founder, only occurs occasionally. The ffeoffees seem to have been all laymen, yeomen chiefly, and from the records of their meetings they appear to have been thorough business men. With the exception of preaching a sermon and joining at the festive board annually, neither the Rector of Croston nor the Vicar of Ormskirk appear to have had anything to do with the management of the school. On one occasion there is a memo. to the effect that a certain agreement with a tenant was placed in the hands of the Rector for safe custody.

Since the Rector of Croston had great influence with the founder of the school, or perhaps it may be more correct to say with his wife, it may be taken

¹ The ffeoffees of Bretherton Endowed School at their first meeting held at Croston on the 7th February 1654, appointed Mr. William Smart as Schoolmaster at a Salary of £5 a year. He retained this office until 1675. The first receipt for the amount was given in 1655, and reads as follows: "Received the 11th of June, 1655, of and from the ffeoffees of ye Schoole of Bretherton ye sum of ffive pounds for one year according to former agreement made (with) mee by paypor.

By Me Wm. Smart.

£ s. d.
05 : 00 : 00"

In the presence of William Johnson.

for granted that the first ffeoffees appointed would belong to the Puritan party, or at any rate would be his friends. The man who was elected register (clerk) at the first meeting was a member of one of "the Lancashire classes," or committees, appointed to regulate the affairs of the Church during the Commonwealth, and it shows a sign of the times to note that at the Restoration the country was ready for the change of Government, both in Church and State. The ffeoffees of this school conformed to the change at once. They attended Church and accepted the ministrations and listened to the sermon of Mr. Hyett's successor, the Rev. William Pilkington at Croston, and the Rev. John Ashworth, who supplanted Mr. Nathaniel Heywood as Vicar of Ormskirk.

A school was erected in Rufford, A.D. 1712, by Mr. Hesketh, Mrs. Bellingham,¹ and other inhabitants.² This statement is confirmed by the fact that in the year 1712 a sum of money, subscribed for the purpose of increasing the Curate's stipend, was borrowed for the purpose of building "a new School."³

Mrs. Bellingham bound herself to pay £10 a year for her life, the Rector of Croston £1, and the rest was raised by the inhabitants.

A Mrs. Jennett Hesketh gave a subscription of £4, 10s., the interest of which was to be paid to the schoolmaster.

The master was appointed and the school managed by Mrs. Bellingham and the Rector of

¹ Mrs. Bellingham was the daughter of the Lord of the Manor of Rufford, and married William Bellingham, Esq., April 6, A.D. 1703. They lived at Rufford, and had two children baptized in Rufford Church. Mr. Bellingham died and was buried at Rufford, A.D. 1718. His family formerly lived at Levens Hall, Westmorland.

² *Cheetham Society*, vol. xxii. p. 367.

³ The original list of subscribers and the amount of their respective subscriptions, together with the memorandum respecting the loan of the money to the township, is now in the flyleaf of the oldest of the Rufford Registers.

Croston. It was free only to contributors who lived in the village.

At this time the schoolmaster was Mr. George Walker, and it is interesting to find that in June 1716 he sent into the Diocesan Registry at Chester a certificate to the effect that he had received the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper on the previous Easter Day.

This was without doubt in compliance with the provisions of the famous Test Act, passed in the reign of Charles II., A.D. 1673, which provided that all persons holding any office, civil or military, should "take the Oath of Supremacy : should sign a declaration against transubstantiation : and should publicly receive the Sacrament according to the rites of the Church of England." This Act continued in force down to the reign of George IV.

A.D. 1732, John Whiteside was recommended to the Bishop for a licence as schoolmaster at Rufford.

This was in accordance with the Canons Ecclesiastical, which enjoined that "no man should teach, either in public school or private house, but such as shall be allowed by the Bishop of the diocese" (77).

Subsequently I find one of the Curates acting as schoolmaster at Rufford, and I think it is more than probable that it was at one time the usual custom.

This, too, had the authority of the Canons.

"In what Parish Church or Chapel soever there is a Curate which is a Master of Arts or a Bachelor of Arts or is otherwise able to teach youth, and will willingly so do for the better increase of his living and training up of children in principles of true religion, we will ordain that a licence to teach the youth of the Parish where he serveth be granted . . . to the said Curate . . . this Constitution shall not extend to any Parish or Chapel in country towns where there is a public school founded already . . ." (78).

At Mawdesley there was in 1688 a small school held in a thatched cottage. The stipend of the

master, who, it was stipulated, must be a "Protestant," was £1, 3s. 6d. per annum, arising out of an estate bought by Mr. Thomas Crook of Abram for £500, "ye income of which goes to several charitable uses: this amongst the rest."

A.D. 1676, Robert Durning founded and endowed a School at Bispham. At first it was a Classical school of some repute, but the population became so sparse that there was not a sufficient number of scholars to continue it on the lines of a grammar school, though it still retains the name. It has been conducted for many years past as an Elementary school. The income is very considerable, being about £160 a year.

Here I must stop. My subject is too wide a one to be exhausted in a single paper. When I set out on my self-imposed task I had no idea it would occupy so much space, but as I went on I found there were facts too important to be omitted, and details I could not abridge, without injury to the subject with which I was dealing. Still I have been obliged to put aside much interesting matter for want of space.

I have tried to confine myself to the history of the Church in the old Parish of Croston, and when I have made a digression it has been for the purpose of showing how the various changes, brought about by those political and religious struggles which make up the history of our country, had their reflection on this part of the county of Lancaster.

In dealing with a subject of this kind, upon which there has been so much controversy and so many divers opinions expressed, I have endeavoured to be strictly impartial, and I believe I have not made a single statement for which I have not reliable authority.