

FRONTISPIECE.

H. S. OF L. AND C.



GOOSNARGH CHURCH.



THE VESTRY-BOOK  
OF THE TWENTY-FOUR SWORNE MEN  
OF GOOSNARGH.

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TRAVELLERS from Liverpool to the Lake District by the London and North-Western Railway, will probably remember something of the appearance of the land lying on both sides of the line which runs from Preston to Lancaster. They may have noticed a large tract of country, which, following a line of gradual descent from the spurs of the Pennine Range, finds its limit on the western horizon. The greater part of this tract lies in the hundred of Amounderness, a division of the county of Lancaster not less rich than its fellows in historical associations and in matter meet for the antiquary.

In the large area to which I allude, the land east of the line from Preston to Lancaster is generally known as "The Fells." On the west side of the line, confining ourselves mainly to the portion between Brock station and Scorton station, the land slopes from a general elevation of 100 feet above sea level, until it reaches an extensive plain

of rich alluvial soil, known to antiquaries as the "Mosse of Pylin," or Pilling Moss. Westward again from this tract, for the most part between the River Wyre and the sea, lies the district generally known as "The Fylde."

Not much is known to the outer world of these "highlands and lowlands." The scenery from the hills has yet to be described by some such powerful hand as, say, that of Mrs. Humphry Ward—a scenery which, as you look westward, shows a coast-line from the farthest stretch of the Lleyn Promontory in Carnarvonshire to the westernmost spur of Black Combe in Cumberland; and, as you look eastward, is bounded by the outlines of the ancient forests of Bleasdale and Bowland, and stretches away to the south-east among the hills which lie beyond Clitheroe, Whalley, and Pendle Hill.<sup>1</sup>

In one corner, so to speak, of the hundred of Amounderness lies the ancient township of Goosnargh-with-Newsham. Climbing up into the Fells eastward, and almost touching the fringe of the Fylde to the west, it starts from the foot of Parlick Pike and runs south and south-west for more than eight miles, varying in breadth from three to five miles. Its area is returned in the Preston Union Census Returns of 1891 as 7891 acres. Its highest part is Beacon Fell, 874 feet above sea level. From this elevation the township shows itself abounding in undulating reaches of pasture and meadow, ever growing fuller in herbage and richer in colour as the gradients of the land trend downward to the south and south-west.

This township of Goosnargh does not abound in mansions and lordly dwellings. It does not possess

<sup>1</sup> Parlick Pike, in the township of Chipping (1414 feet above sea level), and Beacon Fell, in the township of Goosnargh (874 feet above sea level), afford such views.

a resident squire. It is owned by a few large landed proprietors and a considerable number of yeomen. The bulk of its inhabitants consists of tenant farmers and labourers. For the antiquary its attraction lies in the number and character of its sixteenth and seventeenth century residences, houses which, in days gone by, were occupied by some of the principal families of Amounderness. These buildings now are used only as farmhouses. They are mainly characterised by their long and low strong stone-mullioned windows, by their thick and substantially built walls, their stout and often rough-hewn rafters, black with age, but as strong as they were in the days when they were first laid down. In many of these houses the door of the principal entrance is of oak, thickly studded with heavy-headed nails, and clasped top and bottom by iron bands simply ornamented, to which have been welded powerful hinges.

These houses were mostly built, or enlarged upon their original foundations, about the beginning of the sixteenth century. After the Wars of the Roses, property became more secure, and the inducement to a landowner to reside upon his own estate, to promote the cultivation of his lands, and to exercise a paternal government over his dependants, became more potent.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> A short reference to a few of these houses may be interesting. 1. White Lee. This house stands on high ground, 405 feet above sea level, commanding an extensive view of the country. It formerly belonged to the family of the Keighleys. Until about seventy years ago there stood close to the house a small chapel. 2. Ashes, in Goosnargh. This was at one time the seat of the Threlfalls. Here is to be seen a remarkable hiding-place, so situated as to be warmed by the kitchen fireplace, the back of which formed one of its walls, and communicating with an upper room, which bears signs of having been used as a place of worship. 3. Blake Hall. The seat of the ancient family of Midghall. There is still to be seen the outline of the old open fireplace, so characteristic of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the old carved oak dining table, with the square indent for the salt, bearing the initials A.M. and the date 1630. 4. Chingle Hall. The seat of the Singletons, who threw in their lot with Cardinal Allen in 1558. The house stands much as it stood three hundred years ago. A bridge of brick takes the place of the old draw-bridge. The moat is easily traceable, only about a quarter of it having been

Goosnargh in Domesday Book is written "Gu-sanarghe." There are many conjectures as to the meaning of the word. Some derive it from "goosen"—a plural of goose, and "argh"—a field. Monsr. Gradwell suggests the words "gussand" and "orgh." On the authority of the Rev. J. C. Atkinson, who has studied the Cleveland and East Yorkshire dialects, "gussand" means in Danish a divine image or idol, and "orgh" is an old Norse word meaning an altar of stone on high ground. Goosnargh, thus derived, may mean a god's altar.<sup>3</sup>

Three churches are mentioned in Domesday Book as existing in the hundred of Amounderness—

filed up. This house, like many others built in the sixteenth century, possesses a strongly built outer vestibule.

I have only alluded to four such houses. It may be interesting to some to peruse a list of houses, the properties of well-known Amounderness families in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some idea is given by this list of the importance of Goosnargh in the days of the Tudors and Stuarts.

GOOSNARGH-WITH-NEWSHAM AND WHITTINGHAM.

Name of House.	Owners.
Middleton Hall ... ..	Singleton, afterwards Rigby.
Bulsnape ... ..	Catterall, afterwards Fishwick.
White Lee ... ..	Keighlev.
White Hill ... ..	Hesketh.
Ashes (Goosnargh) ... ..	Threlfall.
Blake Hall ... ..	Midghall.
Higher Barker ... ..	Halsall, Sidgreaves, Patten.
Lower Barker ... ..	Warren.
Inglewhite Lodge ... ..	Sidgreaves.
Whinny Clough ... ..	Bamber.
Latus Hall ... ..	Latewise or Latus.
Church House ... ..	Helme.
Whittingham Hall ... ..	Whittingham.
Chingle Hall ... ..	Singleton.
Dun Cow Rib... ..	Hoghton.
Crombleholme Fold ... ..	Crombleholme.
Got Field ... ..	Warings.
Newsam Hall ... ..	Newsam.

<sup>3</sup> How is the word Goosnargh pronounced? The following story may help us to a conclusion:—"Do you pronounce the name of this station 'Grimsargh'?" was the question asked of a porter of that station not many months ago. "No, sir," was the prompt answer: "accent on the first syllable." "Then I suppose that it is 'Grimsargh,'" said the enquirer, at the same time doing full justice to the "gh." "No, sir," said the porter: "final consonant silent." The porter's canon holds good with regard to the pronunciation of "Goosnargh."

Preston, St. Michael's, and Kirkham. The patronage of Kirkham, after passing through several hands, was granted by royal charter in 1281 to the Abbot of Vale Royal; and in the ledger of Vale Royal we find an entry, date 1330, referring to a payment due from the "Chaplain of Goosner" to the Abbot of Vale Royal, of an ox, value ten shillings. The ledger speaks, four years later, of the parish of Kirkham together with the chapel of "Gosnargh."<sup>4</sup>

Goosnargh then was a part of the ecclesiastical parish of Kirkham, and so continued for five centuries, until, in 1846, the parish of Goosnargh was separated from the parish of Kirkham, and the patronage transferred to the Dean and Canons of Christ Church, Oxford.

A few words may here be said about Goosnargh Church. This church, mainly a fifteenth-century building, consists of a nave, north and south aisles, chancel, vestry, and tower. The varieties of architecture show different periods of restoration or enlargement, the oldest portion being the tower and the north aisle. The windows in the aisles are of two lights each, those in the chancel of three lights. The east window has five lights. There are no clerestory windows, but the roof is lighted on the south side by two, and on the north side by three dormer lights, in oak, of beautiful design. The roof is supported by principals and purlins—rough-hewn, as though they had been dressed by the foot axe of a 'prentice hand.

Separated from the nave by an oak screen, bearing date 1622, is the Middleton Chapel, within which lies a tombstone, rich in ornamental raised carving. This is supposed to mark the resting place of the Singletons, who founded a chantry in

<sup>4</sup> See revised edition of Baines' *History of Lancashire*, by Harland and Herford.

Goosnargh Church, and who were at one time the owners of Middleton Hall.

Among the treasures of Goosnargh Church, carefully preserved in an iron safe, is a large, well-bound folio book in manuscript. It contains an account of the meetings and deliberations of the members of an ancient select vestry, who are officially designated as "The Twenty-four Sworn Men of Goosnargh." The book is in good condition. The writing is for the most part clear, and can be easily read by those who are accustomed to decipher the hand-writing of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The paper is strong (hand-made), the ink exceedingly good, challenging fearlessly the ink of modern times.

From this book I propose to give some extracts, telling of matters which interested Goosnargh people mainly in the seventeenth century.

First, however, a word about the constitution of the "Twenty-four" whose deliberations are recorded in this book.

"Select vestries" (says Cripps, in his book, *A Practical Treatise on the Law relating to the Church and Clergy*) "seem to have grown from the practice of choosing a certain number of persons, yearly, to manage the concerns of the parish for that year, which, by degrees, came to be a fixed method; and the parishioners lost, not only their right to concur in the public management, but also, in most places, if not in all, the right of electing the managers; and this custom of government of parishes by a select number has been held to be a good custom, and the churchwardens accounting to them has been held a good account."

In the thirteenth century it was an established custom to appoint twelve men in each hundred for the purpose of making or controlling assessments. These were called "Sworne Men." It appears that

the assistants who were appointed to help them were also sworn upon oath. In the Goosnargh Vestry Book, the first deliberations and pronouncements recorded relate to questions of taxation and assessments.

Colonel Fishwick, in his *History of Goosnargh*, writes thus: "In some of our ancient cities the "chosen of the inhabitants were called 'sworne " 'men,' as we find from 'the old usages of the " 'city of Winchestre of the fourteenth century, " 'that of the heades of the city should be foure " 'and twenty y-sworne in stede of (*i.e.*, to repre- " 'sent) the most gode men and the wyseste of " 'the town for to treuleche help and counseyle the " 'meyr for to save and susteyne the fraunchise.'"

In Amounderness these select vestries were not uncommon. There were at Kirkham thirty sworne men; these ceased to exist as a body thirty-five years ago. Garstang had twenty-four men; Lancaster had twenty-four men; and Preston its "twenty-four gentlemen." The Preston Vestry ceased in 1770. It appears that the only one of these vestries surviving is that of Goosnargh, which is periodically summoned to meet for appointment of certain of its members to act as governors of Goosnargh School, under the provisions of a scheme drawn up by the Charity Commissioners.

The duties of the Twenty-four were at first, in all probability, merely secular.<sup>5</sup> The council, out of which the Twenty-four were formed, was a gathering of men prepared to act on the defensive against some injustice, mostly against the inequalities and iniquities of taxation; but as the very body which administered matters relating to the valuation of

<sup>5</sup> In connection with the subject of early village councils, the following works will be found of great interest:—*The Village Community*, by C. I. Gomme; Seebohm's *English Village Community*; Sir Henry Maine's *Early Law and Custom*.

property and assessments, was practically identical with the body which met to consider ways and means for the maintenance of the fabric of the church and its services, it was found that one body and one meeting would do the work for both objects. It is easy also to surmise how the twenty-four, though originally elected by the open vote of all the householders, would so arrange that vacancies occurring in the body should be filled up by the rest of the twenty-four, according to their own discretion.

Considering the high social status of the bulk of the twenty-four thus elected, (or, to use a modern phrase, "co-opted") in comparison with that of the remainder of the parishioners, opposition to this select body would be hopeless. In the absence of any strictly defined code of duties in matters parochial, a resolution of the twenty-four would become paramount in all matters, ecclesiastical or civil.

I have just alluded to the high social status of the Twenty-four. In the Goosnargh Vestry Book we have the following entry:—

A Catalogue of p'sons which this eight day of Aprill in the yeare of our lord god one thousand six hundred thirtie and fower and in the tenth yeare of the reigne of King Charles over England Scotland ffrence and Ireland, are of the fower and twenty sworne men of the parish of Gosenargh in the County of Lanc<sup>re</sup> viz.

Then follows the list, which contains the names of one esquire, six gentlemen, twelve yeomen, and five husbandmen.

Let us think of the composition of this body.

I take it that in the days named, an esquire was one out of a class from which were chosen sheriffs of the county, deputy-lieutenants, and members of the grand jury.

The esquire might own a parish or two. Let Tennyson complete the picture for us—

A great broad-shouldered genial Englishman,  
A lord of fat prize oxen and of sheep,  
A quarter-sessions chairman, abler none;  
Fair-haired, and redder than a windy morn.

Next we have the six gentlemen.<sup>6</sup> As compared with the esquire, the gentleman was less well endowed in lands, tenements, and hereditaments. He was, however, the possessor of more than one estate, and lived upon the rent of his properties.

The yeoman, as a rule, was simply the owner of one estate, which he himself cultivated, being thus entitled to be styled "independent." In Cumberland and the West Riding of Yorkshire, and in other parts of the North of England, such a man is called a "statesman": *i.e.*, a man possessing an estate of his own.

The husbandman corresponds to the tenant farmer of our own times.

The catalogue referred to is dated 1634, but in 1639, and again in 1640, the vestry is composed only of esquires, gentlemen, and yeomen.

We see now the importance of the twenty-four men in their day, and how hopeless would be the resistance on the part of the rest of the parishioners to their monitions and resolutions. We are therefore not surprised to learn that they took upon themselves to appoint churchwardens, sexton, clerk, and, if some authorities are to be believed, they endeavoured to put in a word about the appointment of the minister.

<sup>6</sup> The Rev. Robert Lamb, in his "Free Thoughts by a Manchester Man," p. 85 (*Essays contributed to Fraser's Magazine*), tells the story of a ploughboy who described a gentleman as one who "wears a watch an ligs by hissel." There is also the time-honoured definition of a gentleman as "a man who keeps a gig." I have often heard the story told that in the early part of this century there was only one man in the township of Goosnargh who was possessed of a "conveyance on springs." This man was popularly known as the "King of Goosnargh."

The special duty of the Twenty-four was, as we have seen, primarily, to act as a check upon unjust taxation, and to redress grievances arising from inequalities. But as time went on, and business secular became mixed with business ecclesiastical, the duties of the Twenty-four became multifarious. Upon them eventually devolved the care of the church and churchyard, belfry and vestry, the provision of bread and wine for the Holy Communion, the purchase of a surplice, the painting of a bier, the oiling of hinges, and the winding of the clock. Before them came appeals for help from distressed parishioners, nay, appeals from distant parishes, even from London, and further still, from the prisons of Barbary and the dungeons of Algiers. Sometimes they are extravagant; after a while a sudden fit of economy seizes them, in which mood they are careful to avoid involving themselves in any perpetual obligation.

It would have been most interesting to be present at the debates, in the seventeenth century, of the Twenty-four, conducted, as they would be, in language partly composed of the formal business expressions of the time, and partly of comments in the vernacular. A Hogarth could have painted for us the one Solomon of the body keeping silence whilst the discussion was at its height, knowing that the meeting must call upon him to act as judge and give the verdict. We can suppose, as we read some of the deliberations, that a resolution which has been arrived at regarding the time when bells should be rung on Sunday, might be followed by an equally vigorous resolve that a price should be set upon the head of every sparrow and mole in the parish.<sup>7</sup> Vestries of all kinds in the old days

<sup>7</sup> In a note on page 52 of Fishwick's *History of Goosnargh*, it is stated that in 1638 there was paid at Kirkham, for the heads of sparrows and magpies, the sum of £10 12s. 4d.

seemed to wage intermittent war against sparrows, magpies, and moles.

Again, some person who can behave himself is appointed by the Twenty-four as sexton. Someone else is appointed to whip the dogs out of church and churchyard, "so long as he demean himself "dutiful." From such entries you and I, reading between the lines, may not unnaturally conclude that, if any kind of stick will do to throw at a dog, it is not necessarily any kind of man that will do to throw that stick.<sup>5</sup>

Each man of the Twenty-four was bound by a solemn oath to discharge conscientiously the duties of his office. In the vestry book is the following:

Here ensueth the forme of the oath w<sup>h</sup> of ancyeut tymes hath beene used to be ministered unto everie p'son elected into the number companie or Societie of the fower & twentie sworne men of the parish of Gosenargh in the Countie of Lanc. at the tyme of his eleccion into that Societie vidz<sup>t</sup>

You shall well & truely observe & keepe all such ancyeut lawfull & Lawdable Customes as heretofore in this place have been observed & kept so farre as they shall agree w<sup>th</sup> the Lawes of this realme & the good & benefitt of this Church & p'sh or Chappellerie according to y<sup>r</sup> power & best understanding & y<sup>r</sup> owne Counsell & y<sup>r</sup> felowes you shall keepe so help you god.

The last list of "sworn men" is for the year 1740, and since that date the oath does not appear to have been administered.

It is not until 1751 that we find the name of the Vicar of Goosnargh among the Twenty-four. The following entry is taken from the minutes of a meeting of the Twenty-four, dated April 9, 1751:—

<sup>5</sup> The following is an imaginary conversation in the Lancashire dialect in the seventeenth century:

*Dramatis personæ*—JOOANAS and MATTHA.

JOOANAS—"Easta, Mattha, theer's a seet to' mony mowdies agaat."

MATTHA—"Yar reet; ther' as thick as bleaberries. How mon we ger rid on 'em?"

JOOANAS—"Sithabod, Mattha, theer's brass as is spent i' woss things than catching mowdies, easta."

MATTHA—"Fowkes as paäs raates ow't to see summat for ther brass."

JOOANAS—"Wots goodds for it we cooant paa a chap to catch mowdies?"

MATTHA—"Twenty-four 'll be meetin' belive. We num tell 'em to look to it."

IT WAS ORDERED That the Revnd M<sup>r</sup> Chr Swainson be one of the 24 for Whittingham in room of Tho<sup>s</sup> Slater deceased.

2<sup>nd</sup> That the s<sup>d</sup> M<sup>r</sup> Swainson as 24 man and M<sup>r</sup> Richard Whittingham for M<sup>rs</sup> Grimbaldstones be Churchwardens for Whittingham.

Whether the illusion, common nowadays, that a clergyman is not a good business man, obtained in the seventeenth century, or whether he had not a sufficient stake in the country to entitle him to be considered as one of the body politic, we know not. At any rate, to judge from the Goosnargh Vestry Book, there came a time, about the middle of the eighteenth century, when the minister was admitted to the council of the Twenty-four. We learn, however, that the minister and the Twenty-four were not always in harmony.<sup>9</sup>

The first principal resolution recorded in the book of the "Twenty-four" refers to a grievance, a part of which I here transcribe.

#### GOOSENARGHE.

Whereas the inhabitantes of the Townshipp of Goosenarghe doe all of them generallie fynd themselves agreed with taxacons and leyes which hitherto sithence the enclosures of their commons have not beene made by any certaine Rule but arbitrary at the taxor's discretions, The better sort of the Inhabitants complayneinge that they are oftentimes occaoned to their propper expenses losse of tyme and neglect of their owne occacons and extraordinarie payments in Regard of the non-solvency of the worsor sort, complayneinge That they are unequallie taxed, although the taxors used the most indifferenc

<sup>9</sup> In 1638 the "thirty sworne men of Kirkham" were at variance with the vicar, who took the high hand, and locked them out of the church. [The quarrel appears to have arisen on the question of the continuance of some ancient custom.] The matter was referred to the bishop, who decided as follows:—"That the Corporation or Company of the Thirty Men, not "having any Warranty from the King, was nothing in law; but that if the "parish or township did delegate the power to those thirty men as to church "matters, then their acts relating thereto was as effectual and binding as if "they had the King's sanction." The bishop accordingly issued an order for the parishioners to meet on the Saturday but one following, which they did, and gave their unanimous vote for the continuance of the ancient custom. I am indebted to Fishwick's *History of Goosnargh* (p. 52) for the above interesting extract from the Kirkham registers.

to their understandings And whereas alsoe the taxors have beene sometymes constrayned upon precepte directed to the Constables to asseesse greater somes than were conteyned in the same p'cepte In Regard many of the Inhabitants were negligent backward and obstinate in their paymts and to the end the people might bee satisfyed accordinge to the tenor thereof by the payments of the more forward sort of the Inhabitants which hath beene oftentymes an apparant greevance to them that deserved it not and hath othertymes occaconed the Constables and Collectors at such tymes as they could gather more than would satisfy the saide p'cepte to detayne the surplusage in their hands to th<sup>r</sup> owne uses without accompt thereof makinge to the generall hurt of the Inhabitants &cc. &cc.

You notice how curiously worded the resolution is, and in what a roundabout way the grievance is stated. It is evident that some paid the tax and some did not pay, some paid more, some less than they ought to have paid. The grievance so stated ends with a summons to all landed proprietors to meet on a certain day "at the church of Goose-nargh," and agree upon a certain "ley" (*i.e.*, a scheme of taxation), which may "guide lead square" and governe all taxacons leyes gaudes and assess<sup>mts</sup> "hereafter to bee made throughout the Towneshipp" of Goosenargh except the ould fifteenths to bee "hereafter granted by act of Parliaments which is "to bee paid accordinge to the ancient custome." The date of the publication of this notice is Sunday, the 10th of July, 1625.

The next entry tells us the result of the summoning of the landed proprietors, which was that "a certaine taxacon ley or goude of seaven "nobles was made" upon all proprietors or occupiers of land in the township "distributurilie" "proporconably and equally accordinge to the "quantity and qualitie of every man's lands." A certain day was fixed for hearing complaints, and a committee of six was formed for the consideration of them. It was composed of one man from each of the tithings into which the township was then

divided.<sup>10</sup> Finally there is given in full a complete list of persons taxable, and the lands in respect of which the assessment is made, and the sum due from the owner or occupier.<sup>11</sup>

About ten years later we have a record in the Vestry-Book relating to Goosnargh Church, as follows :

Here ensueth a p'ticuler note made the 19<sup>th</sup> day of July Anno dom 1635 in the Church of Gosenargh in a publique assemblie of divers of the fower and twentie of Gosenargh then and there holden declaring what formes pewes and seates in that Church are now made repayred or amended in Anno dom millesimo sexcentesimo tricesimo quarto, and by whom or at whose charge the same weare so made or repayred w<sup>h</sup> weare as followeth vidz<sup>t</sup> Imprim In the North Ile Inpr<sup>s</sup> Middleton Chappell con- teyning all the uppermost arch from the eastend walle of that Ile unto the midle of the uppermost pillar was repayred by Alexander Rigby Esqre &cc. &cc.

“ This “ p'ticuler note ” then proceeds to give the precise position of every seat, and the name of the owner liable for its repair.

In all matters, ecclesiastical or civil, the same precision of statement is noticeable. The entries are made in clear handwriting, and, in some cases, with almost unnecessary minuteness of detail. The Vestry-Book was intended to be the parochial “ final court of appeal.”

In 1636 the Twenty-four, to prevent misunderstanding with the clerk, enter the following :

Memorand<sup>m</sup> That the ancient custome of this p'she hath beene that in regard the Clarke beeing both Clarke & Sexton hath formly at all times in the yeare hath swept & made clean the whole Church savinge at the Rushbearing only and it is therefore ordered that the Clarke now & hereafter shall doe & p'forme the same according to the same custome, and at the

<sup>10</sup> The following is a list of the tithings :—1. Church Tyth. 2. Beesley Tyth. 3. Longley Tyth. 4. Aspinhurst Tyth. 5. Threlfail Tyth. 6. Kid-snap Tyth.

<sup>11</sup> The list is given in full in Fishwick's *History of Goosnargh*, chap. v, page 59.

*The Twenty-four Sworne Men of Goosnargh.* 55

Rushbearinge the Churchwardens shall yearly doe or p'cure the same to be done upon the p'she charges.

The churchwardens were obliged to show their accounts to the Twenty-four every Easter. The following is a memorandum from the Easter Vestry of 1657:—

Mmd<sup>m</sup> that the xxxi<sup>th</sup> of March 1657 the ould Churchwardens viz<sup>t</sup> Laurence Dicconson, John Beesley, Tho Slater & John Walmisley have shew<sup>d</sup> their accompts & it appeared that for the use of the Church they have disbursed three pounds sixteene shillings & seaven penc & for three foxe heades, three shillings, & for takeinge out the order of Dismission of the suit which stood heretofore in the Chancery betweane the inhabitants of Kirkham and us of Goosnargh, five shillings all w<sup>h</sup> is £4 „ 3<sup>s</sup> „ 11<sup>d</sup> of w<sup>h</sup> said sumes the Churchwardens of Goosnargh is in arreare unto the Churchwardens of Whittingham eleaven shillings & fower penc.

We know nothing of briefs nowadays by such title. But in the sixteenth century, and until the early part of this century, they were common.<sup>12</sup> In them was set forth the necessities of towns or parishes or individuals, consequent upon misfortunes and accidents; and an appeal was made for help and sympathy from Christian people. These briefs were read out in church, and collections were made for the sufferers.

In the Goosnargh Vestry Book there is an entry as follows:—

In the moneth of May 1661

Collected by the Churchwardens within the p'sh of Goosnargh by a briefe to them directed, for the use of the Inhabitants of the towne of Ilminster in the County of Somerset, the sume of £00 „ 16<sup>s</sup> „ 00<sup>d</sup>

Collected likewise by the said Churchwardens for the use of the Inhabitants in the p'sh of St Bartholomew Exchange within the Citie the sume of £00 „ 6<sup>s</sup> „ 00<sup>d</sup>

<sup>12</sup> A "Brief" is thus defined in Bailey's *Dictionary*—"An order issuing out of Chancery, or some other Court; also any Process of the King, in writing, under Seal, requiring anything to be done, especially Letters Patent granted for Collecting of charitable Benevolence to poor Sufferers by Fire or other Casualties."

56 *The Twenty-four Sworne Men of Goosnargh.*

Collected alsoe for the use of Thomas Wry of Horncastle in the County Lincolne the sume of £00 ,, 5<sup>s</sup> ,, 00<sup>d</sup>

In 1662 we have the following entry :

It is agreede that Henry Threlfall of Goosenargh shall sweepe the Church make the Alleys eaven make all graves Looke to the Bell-Roopees hacks and spades and receive the monyes due for Buriall in the Church before the grave bee made and have such allowance as hath beene formerly accustomed.

In 1668 the following entry appears :

Dec. 13, 1668. Collected in the Chappell of Goosenargh the Sume of Seaven shillings and two pence ffor the poore Sufferers by fyre within the Citie of London.

Jan. 10, 1668. Collected in the Chappell of Goosenargh the sume of three shillings seaven pence for the Inhabitants of Leaver Hill in y<sup>e</sup> County of Suffocke who had their houses consumed by fyre.

In 1669 the following :

July the 25<sup>th</sup> 1669. After the publishinge of a briefe collected for the poore captives within the Turke's dominions in the Chappell of Goosnargh the sume of three shillings sixpence by the Churchwardens for this presente yeare.

This brief would be for the purpose of ransoming the crews of our merchant vessels which had been taken by pirates in the Mediterranean.

In 1670 we have the following :

Aprill the 5<sup>th</sup> 1670. This day it is agreede that Christopher Salisburie shall take care of the Bells and Roopees and provide Liccor for the Bells. And give accompts to the 24 men at their meeteings and be paide for his paynes untill further Order.

The following entry shows the value which the Twenty-four put upon the safe keeping of parish papers :

August y<sup>e</sup> 5, 1675. It is ordered that all deeds and writings that doe relate or concerne the Church and Schoole together with the Church Books, shall be kept in the Chest with three lockes upon it standing in y<sup>e</sup> Vestery. And that the keyes shall bee henceforward kept, one by y<sup>e</sup> preachinge-Schoolmaster for the time beeing. And one by one of y<sup>e</sup> Inhabitanes of Goosnargh. And one by one of the Inhabitanes of Whittingham.

*The Twenty-four Sworne Men of Goosnargh.* 57

It appears from several entries that the mother church of Kirkham claimed a contribution from the parish of Goosnargh towards the expenses of maintaining the fabric of Kirkham Church and its services. The amount claimed was ten shillings, and there was a running controversy for many years between the inhabitants of Goosnargh and the minister of Kirkham, respecting the liability of the former to payment. In connection with this is the following entry :

April y<sup>e</sup> 16, 1677.—Att a meetinge of y<sup>e</sup> Four and Twenty Alexander Rigby Esq, Edward Rigby Sergeant-at-Bar Thomas Whittingham Esq William Helme gent John Whittingham gent Rob<sup>t</sup> Bamber gent Nicholas White gent John Parker Henry Waringe John Waringe James Johnson Rob<sup>t</sup> Barton John Mercer John Harrison Thomas Parkinson, it is agreed as followeth y<sup>t</sup> Whereas M<sup>r</sup> Sergeant Rigby did produce a Lett<sup>r</sup> from M<sup>r</sup> Clegg Minister at Kirkham intimating unto him y<sup>t</sup> y<sup>e</sup> thirty men of Kirkham had refered y<sup>e</sup> Controversy betweene them and y<sup>e</sup> Inhabitants of Goosnergh Concerninge y<sup>e</sup> arears of y<sup>e</sup> ten shillings Claymed to bee p<sup>d</sup> for y<sup>e</sup> Repaire of y<sup>e</sup> Church of Kirkham unto y<sup>e</sup> determination of y<sup>e</sup> said M<sup>r</sup> Sergeant Rigby, it is therfore now agreed y<sup>t</sup> y<sup>e</sup> endinge of y<sup>e</sup> s<sup>d</sup> difference shall bee left wholly to y<sup>e</sup> s<sup>d</sup> M<sup>r</sup> Rigby and what hee y<sup>e</sup> s<sup>d</sup> M<sup>r</sup> Rigby shall doe in that behalfe shall bee confirmed by y<sup>e</sup> said Inhabitantes of Goosnergh.

It is agreed y<sup>t</sup> at all times hereafter when any one or more of y<sup>e</sup> four and twenty of this Chapeldri of Goosnergh shall happen to dy that one or more person or p<sup>'</sup>sons who shall have an estate of lands within y<sup>e</sup> Township of goosnergh or Whittingham and shall bee thought most deserving and fittinge for y<sup>e</sup> Employ<sup>'</sup> shall by y<sup>e</sup> major part of y<sup>e</sup> four & twenty at their generall Meetinge in Easter weeke then next followinge be Elected and Chosen in y<sup>e</sup> place & stead of such as shall bee dead w<sup>th</sup>out any distinction of beinge Chosen for eyther goosnergh or Whittingham being y<sup>t</sup> each of the s<sup>d</sup> four & twenty are equally concerned for both y<sup>e</sup> said Townships.

It is ordered that the Ringers of the Parochiall Chappell of Goosnargh shall upon every Lord's Day ring one bell at 7 of the Clocke in the afore noone two bells at 8 of the Clocke and three bells at nine of the Clocke as also in the afternoone one bell at 12 of the Clocke 2 bells at one of the Clocke and 3 bells at 2 of the Clocke Unlessse the Minister of y<sup>e</sup> s<sup>d</sup> Chappell give other direction.

The following is an interesting entry :

April y<sup>e</sup> 18 1682.—It is ordered that Will<sup>m</sup> Wareing do looke to the Clocke to sweepe the Church and keepe it cleane to ring the Bell at 8 of y<sup>e</sup> Clocke to wash y<sup>e</sup> surplices to take care of y<sup>e</sup> hacks and spades and all y<sup>e</sup> utensills of the Church and for his so doeing hee shall have the benefitts of burials in the Church.

In 1684 there was a very strong "Twenty-four." It consisted of the following:—Alexander Rigby, Esq., Mr. Sergeant Rigby, Mr. Justice Warren, Mr. Thomas Rigby, Edward Rigby, Esq., Thomas Whittingham, Esq. After these come seven "gentlemen" of honourable names, the eleven remaining being entered with Christian and surname, followed in each case by the word "sworne." In that particular vestry the power would probably lie in the hands of the first six on the list.

The Alexander Rigby here named would probably be the son of the famous Colonel Rigby (himself once a member of the Twenty-four), who besieged Lathom House in 1643-4.<sup>13</sup>

Sergeant Rigby, Thomas and Edward Rigby, would probably be directly related to the Squire of Middleton.

There is reason for believing that the Mr. Justice Warren here named was an ancestor of the late Lord de Tabley, whose fore-elders exercised manorial rights at Inglewhite, a hamlet in the township of Goosnargh. These manorial rights were sold by a Lord de Tabley about forty years ago. They are now no longer in force.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The famous answer of Lady Derby, when summoned by Colonel Rigby to surrender Lathom House, was as follows:—"Tell that insolent rebel, hee shall neither have p'sons, goods, nor house, when our strength, and p'vision is spent, we shall find a fire more mercifull than Rigby and then if the providence of God p'vent it not, my goods and house shall burne in his sight: myself, children and souldiers rather than fall into his hands will seale our religion and loyalty in the same flame."—See *Chetham Socie'y's Publications*.

<sup>14</sup> The right of taking toll at the cattle fairs at Inglewhite, in the parish of Goosnargh, formed part of the privileges of the lord of the manor. The

It is probable that no parish council at the present day could exhibit on its roll the names of so many men of high social standing and personal influence as were the first six found on the roll of the Twenty-four Men of Goosnargh in 1684.

There is a curious entry in "Aprill y<sup>e</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> 1697":

At a meeting of the flour and twenty, present Tho Rigby Esq, Tho. Whittingham Esq., M<sup>r</sup> John Whittingham &cc.

Memorandum that the tenth day of Aprill 1696 there was deliv<sup>d</sup> unto our present Minister W<sup>m</sup> Bushell one table-Clothe two napkins, two fflaggons two bowlls and one pewder di-h by John Newsham one of the Churchwardens that year.

On "Aprill y<sup>e</sup> 22, 1701," we find the following:

Item—WHEREAS severall extravagant expences have been found not only in the accounts of the Churchwardens for the Year last past, but also in some former Years in entertaining of Strang Min<sup>s</sup> when they preached here it is Ordered that no Churchwarden for the future shall expend above 2<sup>s</sup> upon the account above s<sup>d</sup> More not to be allow<sup>d</sup>

As in this case, so in 1703, a severe fit of economy seizes the vestry. The Twenty-four are determined to know precisely how matters stand from a financial point of view. Under date "March y<sup>e</sup> 30<sup>th</sup> 1703," we have the following:

It was ordered . . . . That all Accounts shali be stated 10 dayes before any Generall Meeting and shewed to any of the 24 requiring them before the s<sup>d</sup> Generall Meeting.

That the Churchwardens for the Year last past shall not be charged w<sup>th</sup> the Sume of 10<sup>s</sup> 4<sup>½</sup><sup>d</sup> assessed upon Tho Rigby Esq towards the repair of the Church untill a Certaine dispute arising upon his repaireing the roof over his own Quire be stated betwixt the s<sup>d</sup> Tho Rigby & this Chappelry.

For the Regulatig of Expences, at all publiqe Meetings for this Chappelry (w<sup>ch</sup> oftentimes heretofore have proved very extravagant) It is Ordered that no Officer discharging such

right was often disputed, and at length the question of its validity was tried in a court of law. I understand that the judgment of the court went against the owner of the toll, because the lord of the manor had not kept the part of the covenant which required him to provide at Lower Barker a bull and a boar.

Expenses shall have more allowed him than 4<sup>d</sup> for every individual person necessarily appearing at every such Meeting within the Chappely and 6<sup>d</sup> if out of the Chappely.

Under date April 10, 1705, we have the following:—

Robert Harrison be Sexton so long as he demeans himself duetifull and careful in his place and service which service shall be to Ring Eight of the Clocke from the 20<sup>th</sup> of Sept: untill the 25<sup>th</sup> of March yearly except if it be otherwayes Ordered, to oyle the Bells at his own Charge, to sweep the Church and whip the dogs every Lord's day, to wash the Surplus and table Linnon, flagons and bowles, to Mow the weeds in the Churchyard and to fence the Churchyard, and that he shall have for his wages all the advantage of the buryalls in the Church without account making.

There is no doubt that occasionally the minister of the parish would find the situation awkward when he had to deal with obstinate officials of the church over whom he had no control, and who were responsible not to him, but to the Twenty-four.

We find that in 1738 the minister had to give a written admission of the vestry's power in the matter of the appointment of a sexton. The admission runs thus :

I hereby acknowledge the right of nominating of a Sexton for the parochial Chapel to belong to the select Vestry of Twenty-four, w<sup>ch</sup> right I will not hereafter contravert, and assure them that whatever opposition I've hitherto made to it was owing to misinformation And not occasioned by any designe formed by me wrongfully to usurp or invade it. But I hope the Gentlemen who constitute that Vestry will not elect a man into that Office who makes it his study to affront me dayly. But permitt George Turner to Exercise it at least one year longer in w<sup>ch</sup> time both they and I may be better satisfied of Edw<sup>d</sup> Edmundson's Behaviour both in Generall and to me in particular.

W<sup>m</sup> Whitehead  
Ministr

June the 11<sup>th</sup>, 1738.

From the middle of the eighteenth century to the present time the entries become, of course, less

interesting to an antiquary. It is true that these entries throw some light on contemporary questions, and show to us the gradual transition of power from the hands of the few into the hands of the many; but there is not the charm about them that attracts us in the earlier years. The matter becomes monotonous. It is the old story of outlay considered, expenditure incurred, rates laid, and obligations discharged.

I think that I have given a sufficient quantity and variety of entries to show the kind of work in which the twenty-four men were engaged. We have noticed that, though elected originally upon "home rule" principles, they eventually formed an oligarchy; though never at any time, as far as I can learn, was this oligarchy in conflict with public opinion. It must have happened more than once in the seventeenth century that a minority of the vestry held sway, but we may take it for granted, that, after the middle of the eighteenth century, power was more equally distributed amongst the members. From that time the strength of the Twenty-four virtually lay in the various gradations of rank amongst the members. Men of different classes were brought into common converse, geniality of intercourse was facilitated, which, like oil on machinery, obviated friction and conduced to general harmony of work.

When the records of the "Sworne Men" are edited by some man specially competent for the task, the text will occupy no small space. Justice, however, cannot be done to such a work unless there accompany the text a full commentary, throwing a search-light upon the entries, which ought, where possible, to be taken decade by decade. There must be a comparison of such entries with contemporary records of a similar nature, showing the various degrees of importance

attaching to the pronouncements and resolutions of the Twenty-four.

It may strike you as strange, but it is a fact, that there is not once found amongst the deliberations of the Twenty-four any reference to the burning political questions which agitated the country during the time of the great Civil War.

No man could be more uncompromising than Alexander Rigby, as the records of the Parliament of 1640 bear witness. Rigby is present at almost every meeting of the Twenty-four. He is always the first to sign his name, or rather to have it entered. Yet not a single resolution is there at any meeting at which he is present, which shows in the slightest degree political or puritanical bias.

It is possible that if the ideal editor of the records of the Twenty-four could disclose something about the politics of the Rigbys, Threlfalls, Whittinghams, Warings, Lancasters, Parkinsons, Helmes, Crosses, Townleys, Heskeths, Beesleys, we might find that though differences, for the parish's sake, might be sunk in the vestry, yet, outside the walls matters might be different. We may assume that not the least interesting of the commentator's notes would be those showing the number and the names of the Royalists and Parliamentarians in the parish of Goosnargh at the time of the Civil War.

That Goosnargh knew something of the war may be learnt from three simple entries in the register of burials; for in the month of August, 1644, it is recorded as follows:—

Buried was a souldier found slaine the first daie.

Buried was ffrancis Rudson souldier the XVI daie.

Buried was Roger Barton the XXIV daie, a souldier.

In the Chetham Society's publications we find, in the "Discourse of the Warr" in Lancashire, the troops of both sides occupying at this time the

neighbourhood of Preston and a considerable part of the Fylde. Men were obliged to take sides. To which side did the majority of the Twenty-four lean?

The work of editing such a book as the records of the "Sworne Men" would involve most careful research into all kinds of documents, in order to ensure its thoroughness. How certain families take the lead at certain epochs, how they fall behind, how they die away, how their names are lost, and to whom their estates have passed: such considerations force themselves upon the student of the records.

Who can give us anything like an idea of the havoc that was wrought amongst Lancashire families in the thirty years 1715 to 1745? In 1715 came the troubles consequent upon the first Scotch Rebellion; in 1720 not a few were ruined by the disasters which ensued upon the failure of Law's Mississippi Scheme; in the same year the crash which followed the bursting of the South Sea Bubble told heavily upon the North of England; in 1745 the consummation of the disasters connected with the failure of the Jacobite movement brought many of the leading houses in Amounderness to serious trouble, and in not a few cases to poverty and ruin. As the eighteenth century draws to its end, what trace is there of the great Amounderness families who hunted with Heskeths, Tyldesleys, and Threlfalls? They have most of them passed into obscurity. Such questions no man can avoid commenting upon who would seriously undertake to edit the records of the Twenty-four men of Goosnargh.

Let me now conclude by saying that a quarter of a century's experience of life lived amongst the descendants of the Goosnargh yeomen of old,

64 *The Twenty-four Sworne Men of Goosnargh.*

convinces me that the men of the present day, who form our Twenty-four, have inherited the bulk of the sterling qualities of their ancestors—*independence of spirit, a high value of justice, and a practical mind.* They do things in a prosaic way; there is not the romance of poetry in the associations of their every-day life, and their names are not known to the world; but they are content, if, in the discharge of their duties, it can be said of them that in accuracy, straightforwardness, and fair dealing, they do not fall one whit behind the “*Twenty-four Sworne Men*” who ruled the fortunes of Goosnargh in the olden time.

