

Winwick: History and Antiquities: Part 4

Contributed by Steven Dowd

WINWICK :
ITS HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES.

By WILLIAM BEAMONT. Second Edition, 1878

CONTENTS.

Part 1. Etymology of Winwick.

Part 2. Oswald, King of Northumbria.

Part 3. The Domesday Survey.

Part 4. The Church.

Part 5a. The Rectors of Winwick. 1192 - 1520

Part 5b. The Rectors of Winwick. 1520 - 1610

Part 5c. The Rectors of Winwick. 1610 - 1659

Part 5d. The Rectors of Winwick. 1659 - 1764

Part 5e. The Rectors of Winwick. 1764 - 1866

Part 6. The Winwick Chuntries.

Part 7. The Grammar School.

Part 8. Some Winwick Antiquities.

Part 9. Some Winwick Names and Notabilities.

Part 10. Some Funeral Inscriptions in the Church and Churchyard.

Part 11. Bibliography

THE CHURCH.

It has always been said that the church of Winwick was given by Roger of Poictou, the Norman grantee of this part of South Lancashire, to the priory of Saint Oswald, a house of canons regular of the order of St. Augustine, at Nostel in Yorkshire, which was founded either by Ilbert de Lacy in the time of William Rufus(12) or by King Henry I. in the first year of his reign. Ilbert de Lacy, who came over to England with the Conqueror, and obtained from him immense possessions in Yorkshire, was succeeded by his son Robert de Lacy, who was exiled for a time, but afterwards restored by Henry I. and Hugh de la Val, who during Robert's exile held the property under the King, made some grants to the priory of Nostel which Robert after his restoration confirmed. But Nostel seems to have grown out of a smaller but more ancient foundation ; for by a charter made by Robert, and which was probably made after his return,, he granted to Gilbert, the hermit of St. James of Nostel, and the brethren of the same house, Nether Sutton, with all such liberties as his father had of William of Normandy, the year after the Conquest, from which it is manifest that at the date of this charter there was a monastic establishment at Nostel, of which Gilbert, though styled a hermit, was the head.

The transformation of the house of the hermits into canons regular of the order of St. Austin is said to have occurred as follows:—Ralph Adlave, the confessor of Henry I., fell ill, when he was with the King at Pontefract and was left there while his master went upon an expedition against the Scots. Growing stronger and having an inclination to hunt he chanced to ride to Nostel, which then abounded with wood and game. There he became acquainted with the hermits of St. James (the same of which Gilbert had been the head) and he was so struck with their pious manner of life that he desired to join their society and become one of them; and with the concurrence of Robert de Lacy he assumed the habit and order of St. Austin, and afterwards by the King's mandate was made their first governor, master, and rector, the King himself becoming a benefactor of the house.(13)

It is possible that Roger of Poitou might have given Winwick to Nostel either during the reign of William Rufus or his successor Henry I.; for although like Robert de Lacy he had been sent into exile and deprived of his estates, he was certainly recalled and reinstated in them and his former position in the year 1094. He might therefore concur either with Ilbert de Lacy in advancing the hermits at Nostel or with Henry I. when at the very beginning of his reign he founded or confirmed the canons in their possessions at the place where they had their first house of the order which was ever seen in England. Robert of Poitou's grant which, if made, was like Robert de Lacy's, probably made to Gilbert the hermit and his brethren, must have been like the gift of a dying man, for not long afterwards he lost all his possessions, and was again driven into banishment, from which he returned no more. A little later Stephen Earl of Moreton, before he became King of England, and Roger de Limesi, his chaplain, granted eccViam de Macrefeld (the church of Makerfield, which was undoubtedly that at Winwick) to the canons of Nostel.(14) In making this grant, however, Stephen and his chaplain were probably doing no more than confirming Roger of Poitou's original gift. But notwithstanding the repeated allusion to his grant, and notwithstanding that the names of all the rectors of Winwick since 1192 have come down to us, we have been unable to find any express mention of a connection of the living either with the canons of Nostel or any other religious house before the year 1284. This omission may be owing in part to the ordinance made by Pope Honorius III., on 3 December, 1216, by which he allowed the prior and canons of Nostel, when the parson of any of their churches died, to place three or four of their brethren in his parsonage, one of whom was to be presented to the bishop and was to have the cure of souls.(15)

And it may also in part be owing to the attempt which the canons seem constantly to have been making to obtain an appropriation of the rectory of Winwick, of which we have evidence in their history as to one of these attempts. We learn that 1385 Richard de Womb-well, the prior of Nostel, sold Robert de Morton a pension of eight marks a year for two hundred and forty pounds, which sum the prior was to employ in procuring the appropriation of the living of Winwick; but instead of doing so, he mis-appropriated the money and involved the house in a debt of twelve hundred marks.

Winwick was undoubtedly an early Lancashire parish and the site of a very ancient Saxon village.

There is a tradition that the church was to have occupied another site, and that after the building materials were deposited upon it they were actually, by some mysterious agency, removed to the place where the church now stands.

Another story makes a pig the good spirit which thus removed the stones, carrying them one by one round its neck to the new site, thus indicating the proper place for the church, and so helping on the work, on which account it is said this working pig is honoured with an effigy on the steeple.

But the story of miraculous agency in church building was very common in early times, though church building and repairs are slow enough now. A story like that at Winwick, in which supernatural hands assisted, is told also at Christ Church, in Hampshire. Here the first builders of the church, says the legend, laid the foundations, and intended to build the church on the heights of St. Catherine, but night after night the stones were thrown down and carried to a neighbouring promontory. Not willing to disobey this implied command, the builders commenced their work anew on the new site, where daily a mysterious stranger was seen to come and labour at the work. He received no wages, and was never seen to eat. If a beam was too short he lengthened it by drawing it out as if the material were elastic. In due time the church was consecrated, and the Monks named it Christ Church, in honour of their supposed helper in the work, and who is the real builder and edifier of His church and people everywhere. Again, at the building of Old Deer Church, in Aberdeenshire, a spirit interfered, and was heard to say—

It is not here, it is not here,

That ye shall build the kirk of Deer,

But on Taptillery,

Where many a corpse shall lie.

The site of the edifice was accordingly transferred to Taptillery, an eminence at some distance from the place where the building was first commenced.(16) And we have another story of the same kind in Lancashire.

In selecting the new site of the new church at Rossen-dale, in the time of Henry VIII, it is said that the builders were thwarted in their design by some good agent-It would appear to have been the intention of the founders to build it on or near to the site of the present Workhouse at Mitchellfield-nook, and that the materials for the structure were deposited at that place, when one morning it was discovered that the whole had been transported overnight by some unseen power to the hill-side on which the church stands.

Not to be diverted from their purpose, the inhabitants again conveyed the materials to the place which they had originally fixed upon, and appointed a watch to frustrate any further attempts at removal. But one night as "Dogberry" slumbered at his post—an enchanted sleep, probably—the unseen hands had again been busy, with similar results.

A third time the materials were deposited on the chosen site, and on this occasion three of the inhabitants were appointed to keep watch and ward. As these sat toasting their noses at a wood fire they had kindled, an old lady with kindly countenance, coming past, saluted them with a pleasant "good e'en," at the same time offering them each a share of some refreshment which she carried in her hand. This they had no sooner partaken of, than a profound drowsiness overtook them, ending in a deep and protracted sleep—from which in the morning they were aroused by the shouts of the bewildered rustics, who came only to find that the pranks had a third time been repeated. So yielding to the decision of a power which was not to be out-manoeuvred, the builders erected the Church on its present site.

There is a story of a man who boasted that he had a monument in Westminster Abbey, because in a bas-relief there, on the tomb of a great man who was shot in his carriage, the narrator was represented on the box as the coachman. The pig which appears carved on Winwick steeple is not entitled to any more credit for his effigy than the boasting coachman. In reality it is only the pig of St. Anthony, and the bell hanging from its neck is the exorcising bell of the saint with which he was said to drive out evil spirits, on which account he had church bells under his special care. There was, doubtless, once a figure of Saint Anthony in one of the now vacant niches on the steeple at Winwick, and towards it the pig with its bell was hastening. So constant an attendant was this animal represented to be upon St. Anthony, and so associated was it with his name, that in the year 1131 when an order was issued forbidding that pigs should be allowed to run loose in the streets of Paris, the monks of St. Anthony obtained a special exemption for theirs, on condition that no pig was sent into the streets without a bell round its neck. Their swine, therefore, always appeared in the streets carrying each its bell, like the effigy on Winwick steeple. The bell on its neck signified the saint's power to exorcise all low desires, of which the pig with its wallowing habits was supposed to be a fit emblem.

High up on the steeple at Winwick, just under the battlements of the tower, are two shields of arms, casts of which may be seen in the Warrington Museum, one of which is the shield of Haydock, and the other that of South-worth. The heads of those two houses were doubtless benefactors to the building about the year 1358, when the structure was proceeding, and the arms were a modest way of recording their share of the work.

In later times a repairer or restorer often blazoned his Work less modestly by writing up :—

High o'er the belfry girt with fruits and flowers,

His story wrote in capitals, 'twas I

That bought the font, and I repaired the pews.

The Haydock chantry chapel, founded in 1330, and built of red stone, is very different from the rest of the church. The steeple and the body of the church were built about the year 1358, but in the base of some of the pillars of the north aisle there is a sculptured head of a bishop, on which the mitre is of the form of that in use in the twelfth century, which renders it probable that these pillars were part of an earlier church, which we cannot doubt once existed here. So much of the decorated tracery of the windows as was not injured in the rebuilding of the south wall in 1530 was probably

destroyed in the great civil war between King Charles and the Parliament. A beautiful fragment of one of those ancient crosses, which were set up to mark the spot where a future church was to be built, was dug up about the year 1830, very near the place where it now stands, and where it was set up by the rector to preserve it from further harm. When the south wall was rebuilt in (16a)1530, the architect attempted to make it resemble that on the north, but in the interior the workmanship of the pillars and arches of the north aisle is inferior to that of the south, for these have respectable mouldings, while those are bare and plain. The buttresses on the north side have five tablets, and seem to be of decorated work. There are grotesque corbel heads to every window. An inscription on the south porch informs us that it was built in 1721, by the churchwardens John Travers, Thomas Hatton, Thomas Naylor, and John Dixon, who with pardonable vanity had their names inscribed upon it and paid, as their books inform us, five shillings to the mason for it.

(12) Tanner's Monast. 92.

(13) Batty's Priory of Nostel, (Bell and Daldy,) 1856, pp. 3, 8.

(14) Testa de Nevil, quoted in Dugdale's Monasticon, vol. III 92.

(15) Brit. Mus. Addl. MSS., 15351, 43.

(16) Batty's Priory of Nostel, 20.

(16a) Notes to Lay of the Last Minstrel.

Transcribed by Steven Dowd from the original book which he owns, Originally publication is from 1878, this text version and layout, edits and errors is © 2008 Steven Dowd, for use at the Newton-le-willows website