

VILLAGE HISTORY LESSON PART 7

The Middle Ages were times of extreme piety when everyone went to church or could be fined for their absence. If you wanted to secure a place in heaven, 2d or 4d in your will to the local vicar helped. Or if you could afford it, you left a larger sum to pay for a priest to say prayers for you and your family or even build a chantry chapel, as happened here in the 14th century. In its early days our church was in the care of a provost responsible for four chantry priests (not all resident in the village) who said masses in turn for the repose of the Percys, their wives and children, together with other worthies.

But if you were really wealthy you left land to the church or, particularly in these parts, to a monastery. Until 1539 when Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries and their estates were sold off, much of the land around Kirkby Overblow was let to tenants to provide income to the Cistercians at Fountains Abbey and, particularly at Barrowby and Sawley Abbey near Clitheroe.

The first popular rebellion against this feudalism occurred in 1381. Shortage of labour after the Black Death and an attempt to enlarge a Poll Tax brought discontent to a head. Wat Tyler, leading a mob estimated at 60,000 a faction of which murdered the Archbishop of Canterbury, famously secured promises from Richard II to end serfdom. And no-one ever since has tried to impose a Poll Tax, except Maggie Thatcher and we all know what happened to that.

In our village the appendage “Orblauers” at this time clearly implies an industry of iron smelting, though there remains no evidence of this apart from the pieces of slag which gardeners occasionally turn up. It is known that townships on the border of the Forest of Knaresborough were strongholds of the iron industry and there were forges in this area in the 13th century. The steep slope below the village was ideal for bloomeries relying on a natural draught.

A rumour has it that during the Civil War swords were forged for the army of Charles I hereabouts. This is unlikely as the cloth towns of Yorkshire were republican in sentiment and the Battle of Marston Moor when Cromwell, aided by the Scots, routed the Royalists proved decisive. So maybe the swords were forged for the Republicans, but this is impossible to verify, just as is Bogg's musing that "Troopers passing from centre to centre would drain the cellar of Low Hall" At least it was stocked up for David Yeadon's recent birthday party.

Next time: local order.

Part 6 quiz question: An easy one this time – where were the village Almshouses? Answer: if you don't know, ask Ruth Denwood. They were built in 1806/7.

Part 7 quiz question: where was the old smithy?