

ART. II.—*The Manor of Melmerby.*

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*Communicated at Carlisle, April 23rd, 1915.*

SIR John de Denum, lord of the manor of Melmerby in Edward II's reign, presented a petition, complaining that :—

He has a fortress, called the "tower of Melmorby," in Cumberland, capable of being guarded by twelve men-at-arms. He has kept the tower till now, against many assaults of the Scots, always well defended by the grace of God, to their great damage and loss of their men.

But his lands are so wasted, that he cannot provide a garrison, and therefore prays help from the King, for it would be a great loss to the country around if she (*sic*) was taken.

The petition is endorsed : "Some marriage, ward, or farm to be looked out, and the king will give him a reward for looking after the safety of the country" (*Cal. Doc. Scot.* iii, p. 163).

The name of the village, formerly spelt Melmorby and pronounced "Mellerby," indicates that it was once the home of Melmor, a name mentioned in Gospatric's Charter as of a landowner living "in Eadred's days" (? 946-955). The same place-name occurs in the North Riding of Yorkshire, four miles south-west of Leyburn and again three miles north-east of Ripon.

John de Denum and Margaret his wife obtained licence, in 1322, to entail the manor of Melmerby upon themselves (*Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 16 Ed. II, p. 175), and licence, in 1324, to bar the entail (*ibid.*, 17 Ed. II, p. 362); and an important record of 1336, relating to "Derdarre in Blackhale," states explicitly that the same Margaret, late the wife of

John de Denum, was daughter and heiress of John de Wigton (*Cal. Close Rolls*, 10 Ed. III, p. 628).

John de Wigton served in the Scottish campaign of 1300, when "the good baron of Wigton received such blows, that it was the astonishment of all that he was not stunned; he bore, within a bordure indented, three gold stars on sable" (Nicolas, *Siege of Carlaverock*, p. 75). The roll of arms of the reign of Edward II (*edit.* Nicolas, p. 13), includes "Sire Johan de Wigketone, de sable, a iij moles (mulletts), de or, od la bordure endente de or."

He married, first, Dionisia de Lovetot whom he improperly divorced, and the said Margaret de Wigton, born in 1293, was his only child. He married, secondly, the "Margaret de Wigton," whose dower, at his death in 1315, included the advowson of Melmerby, valued at £20 *per annum* (*Cal. Close Rolls*, 10 Ed. II, p. 399), and one-third of the wood and moor of Blakhale, valued at three shillings *per annum*. She afterwards married Robert de Hilton, the younger (*ibid.*, 12 Ed. II, p. 31), and died in June 1333 (*Cal. Fine Rolls*, 7 Ed. III, p. 363). She must not be confused with her step-daughter of the same name, who figures so largely in the history of Melmerby.

Margaret, last of the de Wigtons, was 22 years of age on April 9th, 1315, when her father, John de Wigton, had recently died, and was then described as widow of John de Crokedayk (*Cal. inq. p.m.*, 8 Ed. II, p. 297).

She married another husband, namely, John de Weston, before her death, without issue, in 1349.

The manor of Melmerby was not dependent on that of Wigton, but was a distinct tenement *in capite*, held by the de Wigtons (these *Transactions*, n.s., xiii, p. 91), subject to the payment of 13s. 4d. yearly for cornage, and 4s. 4d. yearly for food of the king's bailiffs. But, by a fine levied in the king's court in 8 Ed. III, 1334-5, the manor and the advowson of the church were vested

in Robert Parvyng,\* the younger (*Cal. inq. p.m.*, 17 Ed. III, p. 302), and, on March 10th, 1337, the said Robert Parvyng, the younger, described as "King's serjeant," obtained licence to enfeoff Robert Parvyng, the elder, parson of the church of Hutton-in-the-forest, of the same manor and advowson, and for him to regrant them to Robert Parvyng, the younger, for life, with successive remainders to Margaret, wife of John de Weston in fee tail, to the heirs of the body of Robert Parvyng, the younger, to Adam, son of John Pacok, in tail male, and an ultimate reversion to the heirs of Robert Parvyng, the younger (*Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 11 Ed. III, p. 396), and the premises were settled accordingly, by a fine levied in the same regnal year. Robert Parvyng, the most eminent lawyer of his day, emerges suddenly, like a comet, from obscurity, and, after a short blaze of splendour, vanishes as suddenly from view. He seems to have belonged to a local family, but Lord Campbell says (*Lives of the Chancellors*, i, 245):—"I do not find any account of his parentage or early education. He was probably of obscure origin, owing his rise to his talents and his industry." He took the degree of serjeant-at-law in 1329-30 (Coke, *Institutes*, part 4, p. 79), he was one of the king's serjeants on June 24th, 1333 (*Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 7 Ed. III, p. 454), and honours were heaped upon him in rapid succession. On May 23rd, 1340, he was appointed a justice of the Court of Common Pleas (*Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 14 Ed. III, p. 519). On July 24th, 1340, he was made Chief Justice of the Court of King's Bench (*Cal. Close Rolls*, 14 Ed. III, p. 497). On December 15th, 1340, he was appointed Treasurer of the Exchequer (*Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 14 Ed. III, p. 75), and, at midnight of October 28th,

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\* The name appears in some of the Great Rolls of Exchequer as Peruyng or Paruyng (see *Year Book* 16 Ed. III, p. xcix, *note*), and was probably pronounced Parvyng. It has been surmised that Margaret gave Robert Parvyng an interest in Melmerby and its dependent manors of Blakhale and Stainton, as a reward for his defence of her rights, against Sir Richard Kirkbride, who claimed them as heir male of John de Wigton (Nicolson and Burn, ii, 246).

1341, he was appointed Lord Chancellor, and carried the great seal to his house at Aldermanbury, London (*Cal. Close Rolls*, 15 Ed. III, p. 339).

It has been asserted (Denton, *Accompt, edit.* Ferguson, p. 103); that he married Katherine, sister of Sir Richard Kirkbride. But on June 30th, 1329, Robert Parvyng and *Isabella* his wife were pardoned for acquiring in fee without licence, certain lands at Bocharby, held in chief (*Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 3 Ed. III, p. 404), and there are facts which suggest that Sir Walter de Kirkbride was his father-in-law. In 1315, Walter de Kirkbride put in his place (*i.e.*, gave a power of attorney to), Robert Parvyng, to seek and receive his purparty of the land of John de Wigton, deceased (*Cal. Close Rolls*, 9 Ed. II, p. 304), and again, in 1318, he put him in his place against Dionisia de Lovetot, in her plea of dower (*ibid.*, 11, Ed. II, p. 614), and on July 11th, 1322, when Sir Walter de Kirkbride was discharged from imprisonment as an adherent of the Earl of Lancaster, one of the sureties for his good behaviour was Robert Parvyng (*Parliamentary Writs*, 16 Ed. II, vol. ii, div. ii, *appendix ix*, p. 211). Robert Parvyng was Knight of the Shire for Cumberland in the Parliament of 1325-32.

On February 24th, 1335, there was confirmed to Robert Parvyng, king's serjeant, then in possession of Melmerby, a grant in fee, which had previously, on September 20th, 28 Ed. I, 1300, been made to John de Wigton, namely, to hold a market every Wednesday at his manor of Melmerby, and a fair there every year, on the eve, day and morrow of St. Peter *ad vincula*, August 1st (*Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 9 Ed. III, p. 149).

On May 4th, 1342, licence was granted for the alienation in mortmain, by Robert Parvyng, of the advowson of the church of Melmerby, held in chief, to certain chaplains, to celebrate divine service in that church, as he should appoint, and for the appropriation of the church by the chaplains (*Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 16 Ed. III, p. 428).

The scheme for transforming the parish church into a college of eight priests, to be endowed with the advowsons of the rectories of Melmerby and Skelton and an oxgang of land in the former parish, provided that the master and chaplains, vested in surplice, amice and black cope, should daily sing matins and prime at dawn, according to the use of Sarum (Salisbury), followed immediately by the mass of the Blessed Virgin, and that the masses of St. Nicholas and St. Margaret respectively should thereafter be said at the altar of St. Nicholas (*Carlisle Episcopal Registers*, cited *Victoria History*, ii, 204).

According to general practice black vestments were only used in offices of the dead, and their daily use here is peculiar. There is nothing in the foundation deed to support the allegation that Melmerby church is dedicated to St. John the Baptist. I infer that St. Nicholas was its patron saint. The scheme came to an end owing to the sudden death of its pious originator, who, in the events which happened, was only tenant for life of the premises.

Sir Robert Parvyng died on August 26th, 1343, at the Bishop of Worcester's house, without the bar of the New Temple, London, and, on the following day, the great seal was carried in a bag by Richard de Kirkbride and Adam Parvyng (Robert's yeoman), about the hour of vespers, to the church of the prior and brethren of the Order of the Friars Preachers, within the gate of Ludgate (*Cal. Close Rolls*, 17 Ed. III, p. 225).

The writ for the inquisition concerning his lands in Cumberland was issued upon the day of his death. The jury found that the manor of Melmerby had been settled as above mentioned, and that his heirs-at-law were his sisters, Joan, the wife of John Pacok, and Emma, late the wife of John de Scaleby, both aged 40 years and more (*Cal. inq. p.m.*, 17 Ed. III, p. 302). On November 23rd, 1343, the manor and advowson of Melmerby were, in

accordance with the said family settlement, delivered to Margaret, widow of John de Weston (*Cal. Close Rolls*, 17 Ed. III, p. 196).

On August 5th, 1349, there was an order to the escheator to deliver to Adam, son of John Pacok, the manor and advowson of Melmerby, as the king had learnt by inquiry that Margaret de Wigton, at her death, held the same for herself and the heirs of her body, with remainder in default to Robert Parvyng, then deceased, and the heirs of his body, and in default to Adam and the heirs male of his body, and that Margaret and Robert both died without heirs of their bodies (*Cal. Close Rolls*, 23 Ed. III, p. 52). And on July 12th, 1362, the escheator was ordered to deliver to Adam, son of John Pacok, knight (*militi*), "cousin" of Robert Parvyng, knight, another manor, that of Bocharaby, taken into the king's hand by the death of *Isabel, wife of the said Robert Parvyng*, who, at her death, held the premises in fee tail of the gift of Robert Parvyng, parson, of Hutton, to her and her husband and the heirs of their bodies, with remainder to the said Adam and the heirs male of his body (*ibid.*, 36 Ed. III, p. 341).

Adam, son of John Pacok, knight, is evidently identical with Adam Parvyng, knight, taken prisoner by the Scots during a truce, concerning whose release a wager of battle, between English and Scots, was being prepared on May 28th, 1357, much to the king's annoyance (*Cal. Close Rolls*, 31 Ed. III, p. 411).

Sir Adam Parvyng was Knight of the Shire for Cumberland in that year, and sheriff in 1368 and 1370. He died in 1381, seised of the manors of Blakhale, Stainton and Bocharaby in the forest of Inglewood (*Cal. inq. p.m.*, 4 Rich. II, p. 31).

Melmerby is not enumerated amongst his possessions, for it was discovered that he had parted with the manor and advowson to Henry de Threlkeld and Thomas de

Derby, parson of the church of Brougham, who assigned the premises to John de la Pray,\* vicar of Morland, William de Kendal and Thomas Walker, of Great Strickland. The last named conveyed the same to Robert Matheweson, chaplain, Thomas de Haveryngton and Thomas Lightlop, as tenants in chief, who granted them to the said Henry de Threlkeld and Robert de Threlkeld, chaplain, and the last named were, on February 10th, 1381, pardoned for the trespass (*Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 4 Rich. II, p. 595). This complicated transaction may have been an abortive attempt to carry out the scheme of a college, for which Robert Parvyng obtained a licence, but the Calendar of *Inquisitiones ad quod damnum* of the same year contains the record (p. 618) that Henry de Threlkeld and Robert de Threlkeld, chaplain, are to retain the manor and advowson of Melmerby.

And here the curtain falls upon the old history of Melmerby and is not raised until nearly a century and a half later. Mr. W. Jackson, F.S.A., who wrote an account of the Threlkelds of Melmerby, alludes (these *Transactions*, o.s., x, p. 1), to the unaccountable blank.

Melmerby, though held in chief, is not mentioned in any published record until 1526, when Humphrey Threlkeld died seised of the manor and advowson (*Cal. inq. p.m.* 18 Hen. VIII, p. 224), and it seems probable that the Threlkelds had continued in possession of the same during the interval.

Richard Singleton, rector of Melmerby, whose letters are preserved in the library of the Dean and Chapter of Carlisle, wrote in 1677 :—

The church is at this day called "Melmerby Church" and dedicated (as the old Lady, Mrs Katherine Threlkeld tells me), to St John the Baptist, on whose day our towne doth yearly keep their feast (*Machel MSS.*, vol. vi).

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\* The name is spelt del Bray (Nicolson and Burn, i, 444).

But the circumstance is not of itself evidence of such dedication, because the villagers of Cumwhitton also held "the wake on the eve of St. John, with lighting fires, dancing; &c." (Hutchinson, i, p. 177); and our late member, the Rev. G. R. Hall, writing in 1879, says, "the fire festivals, or bonfires, of the summer solstice, at the Old Midsummer, until recently, were commemorated, on Christenbury Craggs and elsewhere, by leaping through and dancing round the fires, as those who have been present have told me" (quoted by Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 2nd edn., vol. iii, p. 288). And so it is possible that the midsummer feast at Melmerby, which coincided with the church festival of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, may have been instituted before the advent of Christianity.

Over the kitchen door of Melmerby Hall, the manorial mansion, is an escutcheon of four quarters:—1st, a maunch (sleeve), for Threlkeld of Melmerby; 2nd, a cross enrailed, for Kirkbride of Ellerton; 3rd, three mullets, two, one \*; and 4th, a crossbow between three moorcocks, for Highmore, of Armathwaite, in Bassenthwaite parish.

Above the escutcheon is a helmet surmounted by a wreath and crest, the head of a woman with flowing hair, issuing from the battlements of a tower proper.

Richard Singleton refers to the popular tradition that the ancestor of the Threlkelds rescued a lady, whom a giant had imprisoned in a tower, and so won the distinctive crest.

On the left side of the crest are the letters  $\overset{\text{T}}{\text{L}}\text{K}$ , and on the right the date 1658. The initials are those of Lancelot Threlkeld, who died in 1673, and of Katherine his wife, "the old lady" to whom Mr. Singleton refers. The Herald's Visitation of 1664 states that she was the

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\* The same escutcheon is roughly tricked upon *Harleian MS.*, No. 1536, and the tincture of the 3rd quarter indicated as—argent, three mullets gules pierced, two, one (*Harl. Soc. Pub.*, vii, *ad finem*).



daughter of Nicholas Whitfield, of New Shield, Alston Moor, and describes the crest of the Threlkelds of Melmerby as "a woman's bust proper, habited gules."

Richard Singleton also gives an interesting account of the old church, which has since been hideously restored. The north wall appears to remain in its original condition, except that its door and two windows have been filled with masonry. Portions of the east and west walls are also standing. Adjoining the chancel and part of the nave, there was formerly a north aisle, separated from the body of the church by two pillars and three arches. One would infer from Richard Singleton's account that the aisle was an excrescence from the main building, but an examination of the existing walls suggests that it was an internal structure, lighted by one of the north windows. The eastern end of the aisle contained a small square vestry, with a window, and the remainder may have originally been a chapel. Between the lord's pew in the chancel and the aisle was a wooden partition, bearing the inscription:—

In templo gentes caveant simul esse loquentes.  
Demon scribit ibi cuncta locuta sibi.  
In Dno confido.

Which may be translated:—"Let people beware of talking together in church, for the devil is there, and writes down for himself all they say. In the Lord I confide."

But the most interesting feature of the old church was what, by description, appears to have been a rood-loft, surmounted by a canopy inscribed:—

Orate p. aia Willm. Maguhe. O vos omnes, qui transitis per viam, attendite et videte si est dolor similis sicut dolor meus et Christine, consortis sue.

The spelling of the surname is uncouth. Bishop Nicolson (*Miscellany Accounts*, p. 121), gives it as Maguhe, and

the final word as *mee*. But the opening sentence and last four words of the inscription ought to be read together :—  
“ Pray for the soul of William MacEwe and of Christina, his wife.” The intervening paragraph seems to refer to the large crucifix, which probably stood upon the rood-loft. William MacEwe may have been sub-feoffee of Melmerby and resident lord of the manor.

Gale Hall, the site of which is occupied by a modern farmhouse, was formerly the mansion of the manor of Gale, lying for the most part in Melmerby parish and belonging to the Huttons of Hutton Hall, Penrith (Jefferson, *Leath Ward*, p. 299) ; but it does not appear to have ever formed parcel of the manor of Melmerby.

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