

THE LAST PRIOR OF LEWES

BY L. F. SALZMAN

THE deed of surrender of Lewes Priory was signed on 16th November 1537 by the prior, Robert Croham, the sub-prior, and twenty-two monks,¹ with some of whom I hope to deal later. In a note concerning an annuity of £4 payable to John Savage, Vicar of Cuckfield, he is said to have received it from Robert Peterson, late Prior of Lewes.² As was frequently the case with members of religious orders, the prior had abandoned his secular surname, Peterson, for the local name, Croham—presumably Crowham in Westfield, with which he must have been connected by birth or residence; but upon the dissolution of the priory he resumed his secular name. Prior Robert had succeeded John Ashdown about 1526; he cuts rather an ignominious figure in Dr. Layton's report of his visitation of the priory in October 1535, whimpering on his knees for mercy and evidently terrified by the abuse of the brutal visitor.³ That he was probably a man of ability in the management of estates is suggested by a report on the proceedings of a Commission of Sewers, sent by Sir John Gage to Cromwell in April 1537.⁴ In this Sir John states that he is sending his report by the Prior of Lewes, who has been at his own cost to Flanders to see how things are done there, and has brought back two experts. It is possible that Cromwell was already paving the way for the surrender of the priory; for, according to Le Neve's *Fasti* for Lincoln, Robert Croham was collated to the prebend of Langford on 11th April 1537, and Robert Peterson was collated 'the same year' (probably after the surrender and his change of name). Moreover, under the prebend of Bromesbury, London, Le Neve gives 'Robert Croham *alias* Peterson, S.T.B., late Prior of Lewes' as collated

¹ *L. & P. Hen. VIII*, XII, 1101.

² *S.A.C.* XLIII, 57.

³ *L. & P. Hen. VIII*, IX, 632; *V.C.H. Suss.* II, 69.

⁴ *L. & P. Hen. VIII*, Add., 1217.

3rd November 1537—a fortnight before the actual signing of the surrender.

Robert 'Crome', *alias* Peterson, is given by Venn in his *Alumni Cantabrigienses* as a monk of Lewes, pensioner of Gonville Hall, the college (now better known as Caius) then patronized by Lewes, from 1512 to 1515. He was for a while Rector of Barcombe, to which living Peter Peterson was admitted on 23rd May 1528, at the presentation of the Prior and Convent of Lewes, on the resignation of Dom Robert Croham.¹ Peter Peterson continued to hold Barcombe until 1531, in November of which year he was presented to the vicarage of Brighton.² He was presumably a younger brother of the prior, and was pensioner at Gonville Hall 1526–7—incorporated M.A. at Oxford in 1531.³ Dr. Venn is, however, mistaken in suggesting that his will, dated 1548, is in P.C.C.; the testator of that name was a cordwainer.⁴

Prior Robert seems to have had an eye, or mouth, open for 'the loaves and fishes', and it is not inappropriate that among Cromwell's accounts for February 1538 is an entry of £48 17s. 4d. paid to 'Mr. Peterson by Mr. Richard [Williams, *alias* Cromwell, the nephew of Thomas and ancestor of Oliver Cromwell] for salt store (of fish) at Lewes'.⁵ In this same month he exchanged his prebend of Langford for that of Milton, in the same diocese, and about the same time he obtained the prebend of Masham, in York, which he held until 1546.⁶ On 21 March 1538 he wrote to Cromwell:

'Whereas your lordship has determined that John Delve shall have the park of Mote to farm, which Mr Mylsent had granted to my brother,⁷ I beg your favour that my brother may be your farmer at Swanburgh. Because I have been brought up in these parts, I am desirous to spend the living I have of your lordship at the late Priory of Lewes in such lodging as your farmer may spare. I have moved your officers here in the premises, but they will make me no answer till they know your pleasure. I beg you write to them.'⁸

¹ 'Clergy List' at Barbican House: from Sherborne's Reg.

² S.A.C. xxix. 203.

³ Venn, loc. cit.

⁴ P.C.C. 16 Populwell.

⁵ L. & P. Hen. VIII, xiv (2), 334.

⁶ Le Neve, *Fasti*, II. 187; III. 202.

⁷ Probably William, see below.

⁸ L. & P. Hen. VIII, xiii (1), 574.

Sometime in this year, 1538, Peterson obtained the prebend of Bury in Chichester, and in 1539 he became Treasurer of the Cathedral. Then, on 16th February 1539–40, he was collated to the deanery of South Malling, on the resignation of Nicholas Heth.¹ That collegiate church was dissolved on 10th March 1545, Robert Peterson's somewhat shaky signature being appended to the deed of surrender.² By way of compensation he received an annuity of £100 out of the issues of the manor of Beaulieu (Hants),³ but apparently the first instalment was 'borrowed' by the Treasury, as in January 1546–7 among 'loans repaid' is entered—'to Mr. Peterson, canon of Chichester, £100'.⁴ Previous to this, on 21st March 1543–4, he had been inducted to the rectory of Shere, in Surrey.⁵ He evidently managed to adapt himself to the views, or at least the ritual, of the Edwardian reformers and retained his rectory and treasurership⁶ until his death in 1555. On 9th January 1554–5 he was collated Warden of St. Mary's Hospital, Chichester.⁷

In his will,⁸ dated 18th January 1554–5, he styles himself 'Robert Peterson clerk and Treasurer of Chichester Cathedral'. He had appointed as executor Richard Brysley, Archdeacon of Lewes, who had been a pensioner of Gonville Hall and Prior of the Lewes cell of Horton in Kent.⁹ As Brysley, in spite of a legacy of £10 and a gold ring set with a sapphire, refused to act, administration was granted to the testator's brother, William Peterson, on 14th May 1555. In the pious preamble he bequeaths his soul to God, not adding the usual Catholic form 'and the Saints', and continues: 'My body I bequeathe to the earthe, there to be humate withoute great pompe or solemnitie other then prayer whiche I moste heartelie desire all Christian people of their charitie to make and effunde for my soule, to the Blessed Trinitie father of all marcie in whom is all myn affyaunce and trust.' He

¹ *S.A.C.* xxvi. 81.

² *L. & P. Hen. VIII.* xx (1), 333.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁴ *Ibid.* xxi (2), 453.

⁵ *Surr. Arch. Coll.* viii. 230.

⁶ Hennessy's *Clergy Lists*, probably following *S.A.C.* xxvi. 82, makes him Chancellor of Chichester in 1549.

⁷ *Ex inf.* Mr. W. D. Peckham, quoting D. & C. MS. Lib. K, f. 88. The List of Wardens in *V.C.H. Sussex* gives 'John Peterston' in error.

⁸ P.C.C. 25 More.

⁹ Venn, *Alumni*.

left £15, to be bestowed in equal portions at his burial, 'monthe and twelmonth mynde', to deserving poor, so that his executors 'make no common dole, nether give myn almys to valiant beggars'. There are also bequests to all residentiaries and prebendaries present at these services, and to the eight priest vicars choral, the eight lay clerks, and Bishop Sherborne's 'precurary', and to the 'quorustars', or choristers. 'Item to my owne quoruster I give iij^s iiij^d besides his portion which he taketh with his felowes.' The 'greatest bell' was to be rung for an hour between 7 and 8 every evening between his burial and month's day. He left 53s. 4d. for 'fower solempne sermons w^tin the Cathedrall Church of Chichester by one catholique preacher, to the honor of God and the faithfull instruction of the herars'. Mass was to be sung at an altar near his tomb every day before 7 in the morning for 40 days. All servants, children, choristers, &c., were to have 'a blacke coote, as I suppose to the number of xxvij or xxviii yarden in all', for his funeral, and six 'torche stanses' were to be carried by six poor men, who should each have 'a longe gowne of blacke fryes and xii^d of money'; also 12 tapers to be borne by 12 poor women or men, each to have 6d. To the cathedral he left 100 marks to buy a cross, a pair of candlesticks, a pair of censers, a pair of cruets, and a pax, all of silver; evidently to repair the Edwardian plundering of the ornaments of the church. Sums of 66s. 8d. are left to the poor of Eastbourne (of which church the Treasurer was patron), Lewes with Southover, Rodmell,¹ Bury, Shere, Milton in Oxfordshire (his Lincoln prebend), and Gillingham in Dorset. His association with this last parish is not clear, but Mr. W. D. Peckham has pointed out to me that there were two prebends of Gillingham in Salisbury; possibly one of these was among his preferments.

There are a considerable number of personal bequests. The first two are to his nephew and godson Robert Harmon and his sister Eleanor Harmon, both payable by John Randall, the elder, of Hamsey, at their coming of age and marriage respectively. Eleanor is here said to be 'dwell-

¹ Hennessy gives 'Robert Peterson, S.T.B.' as Rector of Rodmell, 1552-3.

ing with Nicholas Mascall of Sherington'. According to a writer in *S.A.C.* xxxvi (p. 26) 'Nicholas father of Richard Mascall is said by Berry to have married "Aggas sister of Robert Paterson (*sic*), last Prior of Lewes"'. This is borne out by a bequest to Robert Mascall as his nephew and godson. His 'cousin' and godson Robert Peterson receives £60, and Daniel Peterson £20, 'out of such money of mine as their father William Peterson has'. 'Item I give to John Randall my scolar at Oxforde towards his exhibicion' £20, to be paid by Nicholas Mascall quarterly in ten yearly instalments. John Harmon, his nephew, Alice Randall and Elizabeth Mascall all receive legacies. Nor are his servants forgotten. 'To Joan Adames my lavender (laundry maid) 40s., and to every one of her servants 6s. 8d.' 'To Taby thunderporter', 20s., to Ralph Chauntlen my servant £10; to other servants not mentioned by name £3 and a quarter's wages. To Henry Somerlayne £10 and a gelding with bridle and saddle, and a set of bedclothes. Small sums to Francis Pouncer, William Goodfelowe, and Richard Bottinge; and to Adam Taylor, and the heirs of Richard Hylder and John Delve, all of Kingston by Lewes. If any one proves that a debt is owing, let it be paid, but if any of his servants purloin or withhold any of his goods his executors shall obtain restoration thereof and shall use their discretion whether to pay them their legacies or not. All the residue of his goods he leaves to 'my well-beloved brother Willyam Peterson marchaunte in London', and the will is witnessed by George Sutton,¹ Austin Curtes,² clerk, Thomas Hitchcock, citizen of Chichester, and Edward Ameirs. This William Peterson was probably the Member of Parliament for Lewes³ in 1557-8, and in his will,⁴ proved 4th October 1578, calls himself citizen and haberdasher of London. To his eldest son Robert he left two houses in Lewes and to his other son Daniel his house called the 'Bell and Cheker' in Fenchurch Street, London. He also mentions his daughter Grace, wife of John Master, gentleman.

¹ Prebendary of Bargham.

³ *S.A.C.* xxxii. 165.

² Prebendary of Highleigh.

⁴ *P.C.C.* 35 Langley.