

CRESLOW PASTURES.

Creslow, formerly written "Cristlow," "Creselai," "Kerselawe," &c., is an ancient Manor, situated about six miles from Aylesbury, and one from the village of Whitchurch. Though at present containing only one dwelling-house, it is a distinct parish, and formerly had a well-endowed Rectory. From still possessing a fine old Manor-house, and the remains of the ancient Church, as well as from historic associations, Creslow deserves more particular notice than it has yet received. The Manor at the present time contains rather more than 850 acres, of which 770 are pasture, 60 arable, and about 3 in wood.

In the reign of Edward the Confessor this Manor was held by Aluren, a female, who had power to sell it; but ere the time of the Domesday Survey it had passed into the hands of a Norman lord, Edward Sarisberi, of whom it was held by Ralph, a mesne lord. Under Ralph were nine borderers or farmers, six villeins or cottagers, and five serfs or domestic servants. Probably, therefore, at this early period, from 80 to 100 souls, including women and children, were living on this Manor, which was assessed at five hides. The land was six carucates. In the demesne were four, and the borderers had two. The meadow was five carucates. The whole was worth 100s., when received £4. In the time of King Edward it was worth £6. Thus this Manor, which is still greatly celebrated for its rich pasturage, was chiefly meadow or pasture land in the Conqueror's reign; and as the extent of the Manor appears to have been always the same, the five hides must have referred only to land in cultivation, or each hide must be reckoned at one hundred and seventy acres.

"The Manor," says Browne Willis, "has always gone with the Advowson, both of which belonged before the dissolution of Monasteries to the Priory of St. John of Jerusalem, in Lond: and it seems to have been given to the knights Templars in the time of King Henry I., about



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the year 1120.* Lipscomb, probably depending on Willis, makes the same statement, neither of them giving any authority for it. Research on the subject has only led to the conclusion that the Manor never belonged to the Templars. Nor was it possessed by the Hospitallers in 1338, for in that year an account of their English estates was taken under the direction of Prior Philip de Thame, and the Manor of Creslow is not included among them. The only mention of Creslow in the Poll is that the Church paid 6s. 8d. yearly to the Commandery of Hogshaw.† Creslow Manor, therefore, did not belong to the Hospitallers in 1338, nor probably till a much later period, as the following notices indicate:—

In 1346 a fine was levied between Elizabeth, the wife of John de Stretley (or Strettle) Querent, and John More, Parson of the Church of Meriton (Morton) Deforciant, of the Manor of Kerselawe, the right of John, who granted the same to Elizabeth for her life; Remainder to John Strettle for life; Remainder to Roger, his son, for life: Remainder to William, son of Roger, and to the heirs of his body; Remainder to Lawrence, brother of William, and to the heirs of his body; Remainder to Thomas, brother of Robert, and to the heirs of his body.‡

In 1449 a fine was levied between John Stretley, Querent, and William Wolton and Dennis his wife, Deforciant, of lands in Kirslowe, to the use of John Stretley or Streley. ||

At the dissolution of Monasteries the Manor of Creslow was in the hands of the Hospitallers, from whom it passed to the Crown.

After Creslow Pastures had been appropriated to the Crown, they were used for feeding cattle for the Royal household. For this purpose they were committed for a term of years to the custody of a Steward or Keeper, who, in addition to a stated payment, was to have the produce of certain fields belonging to the estate. In 1596 James Quarles, Esq., Chief Clerk of the Royal Kitchen, was Keeper of Creslow Pastures, but having in

* Willis's MSS.

† "The Extent of the Estates of the Hospitallers in England," p. 68 Edited, for the Camden Society, by Rev. L. B. Larking, who kindly supplied this information while his work was passing through the press.

‡ Ped. Fin., 20 Edw. III. Cited by Willis.

|| Idem, 28 Hen. VI. Cited by Willis



GRESLOW CHURCH - from the Records of Bucks -

From a drawing by M. A. LOWER F.S.A.

this year completed his term, he was succeeded by Benett Mayne, who, by Letters Patent, was appointed to the "custody and keeping of the Mansion House, wherein the Herd or Keeper of the said grounds and pastures used to dwell; and also of the following closes and pastures, called Cubb Close, of 10 acres 3 roods; Sunny Hill, 80 acres 2 roods; The Great Field, 310 acres; Little Bushy Mead, 16 acres; Great Bushy Mead, 56 acres; New Field, 156 acres 1 rood; Home Mead, 69 acres 1 rood; — altogether called Creslow Pastures, let and assigned to the said Benett Mayne, and lying in the parishes* of Whitchurch, Cublington, and Dunton, in Com. Buck." The Queen also "demised to the said Benett Mayne, the Custody and keeping of all the mansion house, barns, stables, outhouses, pounds, and pens belonging to the premises," making him Herd and Keeper thereof for 21 years ; also "in recompense of his charge, trouble, and attendance, She demised to him all the 60 acres of pasture, which the Herds and Keepers of the said Pastures have always had to themselves, viz., the closes called the Further Corn Field, of 5 acres; the Hither Corn Field, 4 acres; Upper Heaven, 80 acres, Nether Heaven, 40 acres; the Warren, 15 acres; — all which are part of our said Pastures, called Creslow Pastures to be held by the said Benett Mayne for 21 years, at £1 per annum rent, during his life, and after his death at £10 per annum. Benett Mayne was bound "to preserve and keep the said closes from spoil, or overgrowing with nettles, or other weeds or bushes, and to do his best endeavour to destroy all moulles and vermine; and to repair all the premises, and to do and perform all other orders and directions from time to time appointed or commanded by any of the Officers of our Green Cloth, and to have such allowance of 4d. per day, and £10 per annum, and such other allowances as formerly have been allowed to be given to the Keeper there, for the custody of the said Creslow Pastures, for the Benefit of our Household as aforesaid." †

In 1634-5 (10 Charles I.) Creslow was committed to

* "In the parishes" probably means within or bounded by these parishes, as Creslow is itself a distinct parish.

† "Rot. Pat.," 38 Eliz. Cited by Willis and Lipscomb.

the custody of Cornelius Holland, whom Browne Willis describes as "a miscreant base upstart, born in a neighbouring cottage." Lipscomb discredits this account of Holland, and intimates that he deserves a better notice. A recent publication, which contains a cotemporaneous account of many members of the Long Parliament, gives the following notice of this Holland, whose memory in Buckinghamshire is traditionally regarded with much odium :—

"Cornelius Holland: his father died in the Fleete for debt, and left him a poore boy in Court, waiting on Sir Henry Vane, then Controller of the Prince's house; he is still Sir H. Vane's zanie, but now a Co-Commissioner with his master for the revenue of the King, Queen, and Prince: hee hath, with the helpe of his master, made himselfe farmer of the King's feeding-grounds at Cleslow, in Buckinghamshire (worth £1,800 or £2,000 per an.) at the rent of £200 per an., which he discounts: hee is possessor of Somerset House, where hee and his family lives: hee is Keeper of Richmond House, for his country retreat; hee is Commissary for the garrisons at White-hall and the Mews: hee hath an office at the Mint: hee hath ten children, and lately gave £5,000 with a daughter, after which rate the State must find £50,000 for future portions." *

Thus it appears that Cornelius Holland, having been found about the Court in a destitute condition, was appointed by the King to a lucrative post, which, at least so long as he held it, should have been regarded as a special obligation to loyalty. But, without relinquishing his hold on Creslow, he joined his benefactor's enemies, for which they bestowed on him an ample reward. As an earnest of their favour, they made his tenure of Creslow, even during the King's life, far more valuable, as appears by the following important document :— †

"Upon consideration had of the Certificate of Mr. Edward Carter, Surveyor of His Ma:^{ties} Works dated

* See "Banke's Story of Corfe Castle," p. 230.

† This document, which was sold among the effects of the Bishop of Gloucester, in Feb., 1843, was purchased by the late Lord Nugent, who gave it to Mr. Rowland, the present occupant of Creslow,

this vijth of December 1647, of the Reparations don unto His Ma:^{ties} Manor House at Creslow, in the Countie of Buckingham, by Cornelious Holland Esq^{re} now Tenant of the same, whereby it appears that the Sume of Seaven hundred and seaven pounds and eleven shillings hath bein by him disbursed towards the said Repaires. By vertue of an Ordinance of both Houses of Parliament of the xxi daye of September, 1643. These are to will and require you, out of such moneys as now are, or shall be hereafter in your hands, arising out of the Rents of the Manor of Creslowe in Buckinghamshire, paieable unto the Crowne, to paye unto Cornelious Holland Esq^r the Sume of two hundred pounds, in part of the saide seaven hundred and seaven pounds and eleven shillings by him disbursed towards the Reparations of His Ma:^{ties} Manor House at Creslow aforesaid. And for soe doing this, together with his acquittance for the Receipte thereof shall be your warrant and discharge, and also to the Auditor Generall to allowe the same upon your accompte.

"Dated at the Committee of Lords and Commons for His Ma:^{ties} Revenue sitting at Westminster the seaventh daie of December, 1647.

"A. Northumberland,

"W. Say & Seale.

" To our verie Loving Thomas Fauconbridg, Esq.,
Receiver generall of the Revenue.

"THOS HOYLE.

" F. ROUS.

" Mr. Cornelius Holland."

By the terms of his original appointment, Holland was bound to keep the house, the buildings, and the fences on the estate in good repair, but having allowed the house to fall into dilapidation, he received from Parliament a grant of upwards of £700—equal to more than £2,000 of present money—for "reparations."

In 1642 he had become a Member of the Commons House of Parliament, and, as stated in the foregoing notice of him, had been appointed one of the Commissioners for the Public Revenue. In this capacity, on January 2nd, 1648, he signed an order for the Parlia-

mentary allowance to the Royal Family.* In 1649 he signed the King's death warrant, and on April 8th, in the same year, he signed an order for the payment of the salary to the Keepers of Nonsuch Park.* In 1651, on March 10th, he signed an order for the payment of £150 to Mr. Theodore Herring, Mr. Edward Bowles, and Mr. Peter Williams, "Ministers of the City of-----, granted by Ordinance of Parliament, and continued by Order of the Committee for the Reformation of ye Universities," &c.* In the same year, on March 18th, he signed the following order, granted by the Committee for Plundered Ministers, &c.:—"These are to will and require you, out of such moneys as now are, or shall be in y^r Hands of the profit of ffirist fruites and Tenths to pay to Mr. George Bannister, Minister of the Parish Church of Brinsopp in the Countie of Hereford the sum of Ten Pounds, due unto him for one half yeare."* According to Coles, Cornelius Holland was not only an enemy to the constitution of the Episcopal Church, but a wanton destroyer of her very edifices. He says that, besides entirely dismantling and desecrating the Churches of Creslow and Hogshaw, he destroyed the Chancels of Addington, of East Claydon, and of Grandborough. On the restoration of Charles II., Cornelius Holland was attainted of high treason. Creslow, again becoming Royal property, the king, by letters patent in 1662, granted the custody thereof to Edward Backwell, Esq., for 21 years, demising to him the lands before demised to the Herd or Keeper of Creslow, at the rent of £10 per annum, and also granting to him, on the usual condition, the accustomed allowances, together with the keeping of four horses, 60 fleeces of black wool yearly, and £60 per annum, and 4d. per day.† In 1671, the king granted Creslow Pastures, said to be in Whitchurch parish, to Sir Thomas Clifford, Knt., for the term of sixty years from March, 1669; and two years afterwards, on 23rd June, 1673, the same king conferred this estate, in fee, on Thomas Lord Clifford, and his heirs male, in whose descendants it has continued to the present

* From Autographs lately offered for sale by Mr. Gray Bell, of 11, Oxford-street, Manchester, who has generally many rare books and autographs at his disposal.

† "Rot. Pat.," 2 Car. II. Test. 27 March. Cited by Lipscomb.

time, on the fee-farm rent of £10, paid yearly to certain Crown lands in the parish of Chilton.

THE RECTORY.—As no Church is mentioned in the Domesday Survey, probably one had not then been founded, although from the amount of the population of Creslow at the time we might have expected that a Church would have already been founded here, for, whatever else may have been the errors of our Norman ancestors, they generally provided Houses of Prayer for their dependants long before the population on their estates became numerous.

Browne Willis, as already noticed, states that the Manor and Advowson of Creslow were given to the Templars about 1120. Probably this is correct, as regards the Advowson, which certainly belonged to the Hospitallers early in the thirteenth century, and portions of the present Church probably belong to the twelfth century. In the year 1239 William de Dingel was presented to the Church of Kerselaw, by the Prior of St. John of Jerusalem. From this date the list of Rectors appears to be complete, and is given in Willis's manuscript and in "Lipscomb's History of Buckinghamshire." It presents a few particulars worth a passing remark. In 1326, John Berkeley was "presented by the Prior of St. John's, but the Bishop refused to admit him, and so commended it to Roger Gildesburgh." Between 1376 and 1388 the Prior allowed the Presentation to lapse three times to the Bishop. In 1369, Robert Bothe de Moncastre exchanged it with Nicholas Smith, who exchanged it with William Morgan, who exchanged it with William de Alverton, who exchanged it with John Standon, who exchanged it with Elias Finche in 1376. Thus in seven years Creslow enjoyed a succession of six Rectors.

In Pope Nicholas's Taxation, about 1291, the Rectory was assessed at £4 13 4d.

In 1534 the Rectory was valued at £3.

In 1543 the Patronage, by the dissolution of Monasteries, passed to the Crown; and in 1554 Queen Mary presented Thomas Davies to the Benefice. He was the last Incumbent. "On Queen Elizabeth's accession to the Crown," says Browne Willis, "upon Davis's voiding it, that Queen seems to have taken and swallowed up both spiritualities and temporalities of the parish." With

evident disgust at her voracious appetite, he again exclaims, in another place, "She seems to have taken into her hands the spiritualities of the parish, and to have swallowed up both temporalities and spiritualities!" Thus the Rectorial income became merged in the temporalities of the Manor, and has continued so ever since. Its present value may be fairly estimated in two ways—

I. By comparing it with those Livings for which it was exchanged:— Dodford, in Northamptonshire, stands in the Clergy List at £233; Stretley, or Streatley, in Berks, at £250; Thornton le Moors, Lincolnshire, at £310.

II. The most direct and accurate mode of estimating its value is to reckon the probable value of the tithe of the parish, which contains upwards of 800 acres. Estimating these at 6s. per acre, the result is £240, which may be considered as the present income of this suppressed Rectory.

THE CHURCH, which is now used as a coach-house, stands about one hundred yards from the Manor-house. In 1712 Browne Willis visited it, and described it as "very small, consisting only of a body and chancel, tiled, and both in length about 48 foot." About two years before his visit, as he was informed, "the foundations of a small tower at the West end were dug up, when a stone coffin and some skulls were discovered." "I could not learn," he continues, "what number of bells there had been. The Church had two windows on each side, and a lower hole had been made in the roof on converting it into a dove-house."

In 1749 Willis again visited Creslow, and gives, on this occasion, the following account of the Church:—"It has on the North side a door and two windows which are walled up, as is also an upper window on the South side. The chancel is down, and the walls made up anew at both the East and West ends. At the West end is a stone put in the wall, with this date — '1655,' and 'T. R.,' *i.e.*, Thos. Rickart, the then tenant.* What is standing is fifteen yards in length."

When this interesting Church was first abandoned to profane uses cannot now be ascertained. On this point

* As Creslow at this period was apparently possessed by Cornelius Holland, this Rickart must have been his tenant.

Willis, who had evidently no correct data, makes the following remarkable observation :— "It was," says he, "desecrated in Queen Elizabeth's time; or more probably Anno 1645, when the best Church and Constitution in the world being overturned, and the Defender of it murdered by his most abject subjects, as a reward of villany, this place was bestowed on that miscreant base upstart Cornelius Holland; who to shew his sense of religion, as he had done of loyalty, desecrated the House of God, and converted part of it into a dove-house, separating the upper or East part of it for a stable : to which profane use it has served ever since; and now still remains polluted, and like to continue so in this degenerate age."*

Browne Willis's accounts of Churches are always unsatisfactory. He seldom or never describes their architectural features, and is often loose and careless in those particulars which he does mention. At his first visit to Creslow he describes the Church as then consisting of a "body and chancel, which together measured 48 foot." At his second visit he says the chancel had been destroyed, and that what remained measured about 45 feet—thus allowing three feet only for the length of the chancel. Perhaps at his first visit only part of the chancel existed, which had been entirely demolished before his second visit. From his account, however, we learn that this desecrated Church once possessed a Chancel, a Nave, and a Tower. Of the chancel and tower no particulars can now be ascertained. The present building, which apparently constituted the original nave, is 44 feet long, and 24 feet wide, and is built of hewn stone. The South wall, which contains the entrance to the coach-house, has been sadly mutilated, and has lost one of the windows mentioned by Willis. The North wall remains in a tolerable state of preservation, and presents some features of interest. The door especially deserves attention. It is unquestionably of an early date. The jambs, which are formed of plain stones, surmounted by a plain flat squared stone for an abacus, might belong to the earliest Norman period. The architrave, which consists of two carved mouldings — the outer one enriched with the billet ornament, and the inner one with the

* This sentence has two lines drawn across it in Willis's MS., and "dele this" written in the margin.

chevron or zigzag — both features of the Norman style — might belong to the same period were it not that the arch, being slightly pointed, indicates the commencement of a later style. Taking, then, these several characteristics into account, the door-way may safely be assigned to the beginning of the transition period between the Norman and Early English styles. It should also be noticed that this door, which must always have been the principal, if not the only external entrance into the nave, is on the North side of the Church, which is the more remarkable as the Manor-house is on the South. Probably there was a Priest's door in the south wall of the chancel.

The present windows, which have evidently superseded others of an earlier date, belong to the Decorated style. Each window consisted of two trefoil-headed lights divided by a chamfered mullion. The mullions are gone, but the tracery partially remains.

The boundary of the Churchyard is not known, but all around the Church the ground has been used for sepulture. Whenever the earth has been removed sufficiently deep, bodies have been discovered, especially on the North side, which is now a rick-yard. A stone coffin, which is said to have been taken from the floor of the Church, and is probably that mentioned by Willis, is now used, turned upside down, and cracked through the middle, as a paving stone near the West door of the mansion.

The interments at Creslow appear to have been far more numerous than the size of the parish warrants one to expect; but this is easily accounted for. The Hospitallers enjoyed some privileges which gave to their Churches a preference above all others. As a reward for their faithful and gallant services at the siege of Ascalon, Pope Adrian IV. granted them, among other privileges, the following:— Their manors and lands were exempted from tythe; no sentence of interdict, suspension, or excommunication was to be published in any of their Churches; and in case of a general interdict on a district or on the whole nation, Divine service might still be performed in their Churches, "provided it was done with closed doors and without ringing of bells."* These privileges must have invested the Churches of the Hospitallers with the highest dignity, and rendered burial in

* " Vertol's History of the Knight's of Malta."

them invaluable, when the rites of the Church were considered necessary to eternal salvation. In times of a national interdict, when all other Churches were closed, no fee, however exorbitant, would deter the wealthy from seeking interment for their friends in those Churches where alone the sacred rites of sepulture could be duly celebrated. Here then, in this highly privileged little cemetery, not alone the Knights of St. John and their tenants, but some of the greatest and wealthiest nobles of the land, have probably been deposited, in the hope of finding, at least for their mouldering bones, a sacred and inviolable resting place.

"And questionless here, in this open court,
Which now lies naked to the injuries
Of stormy weather, some men lie interred
Loved the Church so well, and gave so largely to 't,
They thought it should have canoped their bones
Till doomsday. But all things have an end;
Churches and cities, which have diseases like to men,
Must have like death that we have."

THE MANSION, which has been diminished both in size and beauty, is still a spacious and handsome edifice. As seen externally it is a picturesque building with numerous gables, some ancient mullioned windows, and a square tower with an octagonal turret at the South end. Mr. Parker, in his "Domestic Architecture from Edward I. to Richard II.,"* says :— "This has been a fine Manor-house of the time of Edward III., with a large central hall of timber, of which a portion remains, now divided into modern apartments; and two wings or towers of stone, one of which has been destroyed, the other remains tolerably perfect, with the ground rooms vaulted as usual." When Mr. Parker visited Creslow he left with Mr. Rowland the following notice :— "The original parts of the house are of the time of Edward III., including the crypt and tower. Some alterations were made in the fifteenth century, of which period a doorway remains. Further great alterations were made in the time of Charles I., of which period the plaster ceilings and some square windows remain." To an enquiry from myself, Mr. Parker kindly replied— "The crypt was simply a cellar or store-room, such as we find in many houses and castles of the same period. A vaulted substructure, with a

* Page 269.

superstructure of wood, was the most common mode of building of the period; or a hall of wood, with a tower of brick or stone at one end, containing various private chambers, and the kitchen with the other offices at the opposite end, and sometimes a Chapel, either attached at one corner, or altogether detached, standing in the courtyard."

The tower now remaining is built of stone, with walls six feet thick. The turret, which is at the Western angle of the tower, and rises somewhat above it, being forty-three feet high, contains a newel staircase, with loop-holes at each story. It is not embattled, but coped with plain chamfered moulding, and ornamented somewhat below the coping with a cornice of carved heads and flowers.

The crypt, which belongs to the same period as the tower, is excavated in the solid limestone rock. It is entered by a flight of stone steps, and has but one small external opening to admit light and air. It is about twelve feet square, and is now used as a cellar. The roof, which is a good specimen of light Gothic vaulting, is supported by arches springing from four short columns, groined at their intersections, and ornamented with carved flowers and bosses, the central one being about ten feet from the floor.

Near the crypt is another cellar, which is called "the dungeon." This is entered by a separate flight of stone steps, and is a plain rectangular building, eighteen feet long, eight and a half wide, and six in height. The roof, which is formed of large massive stones, is but slightly vaulted. There is no window or external opening into this cellar, and, for whatever purpose used, it must always have been a gloomy vault of great security. It now contains several skulls and other human bones which have been dug up in the ground around the Church and the Manor-house. Some of the thigh-bones, measuring upwards of nineteen inches, must have belonged to persons of gigantic stature.

In a chamber over the crypt is a good pointed doorway, with hood-moulding following the form of the arch, and resting on two well sculptured human heads.

The ground room in the tower, now used as a kitchen; a large chamber, forty-seven feet long, with vaulted timber roof; a large oak door with massive hinges, and

strengthened with thick iron-work, and locks and bolts of peculiar construction; and various remains of sculpture and carving in different parts of the house, are objects well deserving careful inspection. The whole length of the house is eighty-eight feet, the breadth fifty-one feet. About twenty years ago four gables were taken down, before which the house was nearly twice its present size. It has been moated and slightly fortified, the vestiges of which may still be traced. The walls of an ancient courtyard are almost perfect, and the fish-ponds still retain relics of some very old sluices.

It has been supposed that the Manor-house was a Commandery of the Hospitallers, but this notion is apparently without foundation. Had it been a Commandery there would doubtless have been evidence of it both in the records of the Manor, and in the remains of the ancient portions of the house; but no such evidence is to be found in either.

In addition to those whose assistance has been already acknowledged, my thanks are due to the Rev. A. Newdigate, the Rev. J. H. Snell, and Richard Rowland, Esq., of Creslow Pastures. The drawings of the Manor-house were presented to the Society by the Rev. Bryant Burgess.

W. HASTINGS KELKE.