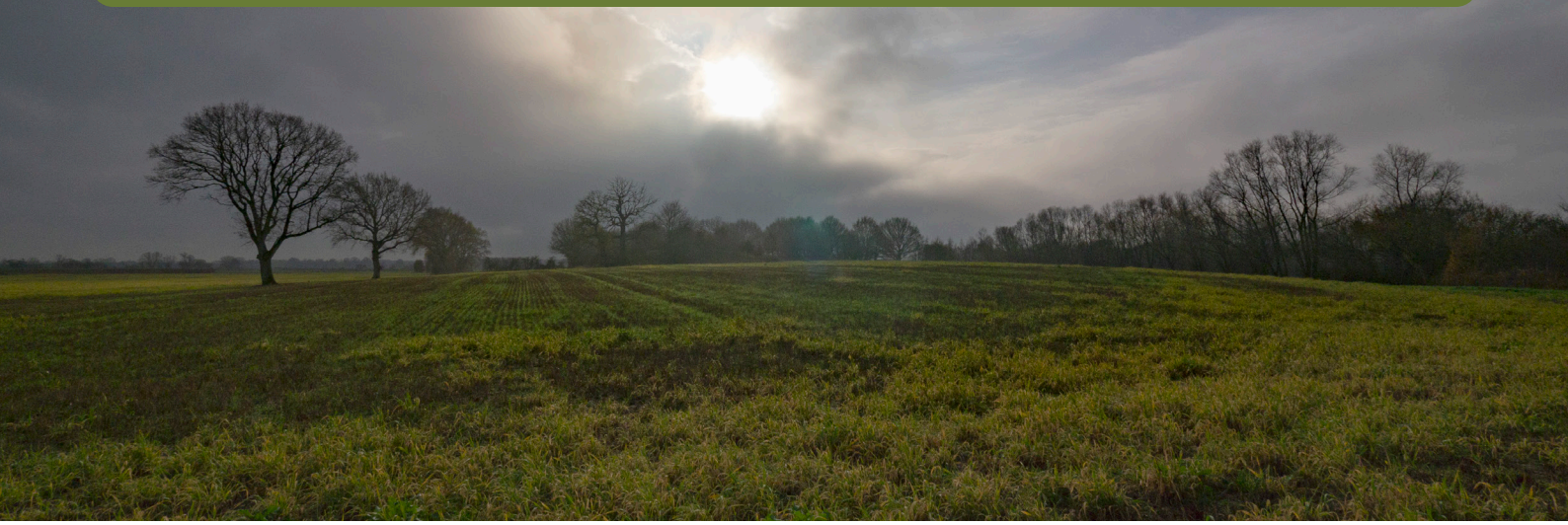
The Lossenham Project

Newsletter 5

March 2021



Welcome to the Lossenham Project newsletter.

We will be regularly keeping you up to date with the latest news and any events you can get involved in.

To sign up to the project or for further information email info@lossenham.org.uk

TEAM MEMBER INTRODUCTION

Rachel Dawson
- Artist in Residence

I am thrilled to be involved as an Artist in Residence on the Lossenham Project. As an actor and cellist, my work involves storytelling through music. It feels particularly poignant having this opportunity at this point in time, as life has become very different; I imagine we are all feeling a deeper sense of connection to nature and our environment. I am particularly enjoying responding to Lossenham through improvisations on the cello, and writing poetry on my walks around the farm. I am also currently developing a musical piece, inspired by female voices in the medieval period, drawing on their stories to enhance greater connections between us all. I also hope, when the current situation allows, to facilitate some live musical experiences on the farm.

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Lossenham Carmelites: Getting started

Richard Copsey, O.Carm

The establishment of a new religious priory was a major undertaking in the 13th century so, when Sir Thomas Aucher invited the Carmelite friars to make a foundation beside his manor in Lossenham, he must have realized that he was committing himself not only to providing a suitable site for the priory but also giving a significant amount of money for the building of the priory and for the ongoing support of the community. It is likely that a formal agreement was drawn up between Sir Thomas and the Carmelites outlining what he would provide, that is the site, the funds for the building of the priory and the ongoing support of the community.

As the initial group of friars trudged up the lane from Newenden, they would have been welcomed by Sir Thomas or his steward and shown where they could stay during the building of the priory. This could have been a convenient barn or outbuilding, or possibly some rooms in a wing of the manor house itself. It is likely that there was a small domestic chapel inside the manor house which the friars could use for their daily prayers and for celebrating mass both for themselves and for the family and their servants.

The site for the new priory was an area of land on the ridge behind the manor house on the eastern side. The first priority of the new community was to build a chapel there and accommodation for the friars. The chapel took priority as it was needed not only for spiritual purposes but also a chapel would have attracted devout people from nearby to come and attend mass, to hear one of the friar's preach and to offer their prayers. A chapel would have thus helped to provide an income for the community from the offerings, mass stipends, conducting funerals, etc.

However, building a chapel and accommodation for the friars was expensive. Such buildings needed to last a long time so they would be built of stone but there was no suitable stone available in Kent and would have to be brought from abroad, normally from Caen in France. The stone would be shipped across the channel and brought up the river Rother to Newenden (as happened when Bodiam Castle was being built). But the stone needed to be cut and shaped so stone masons would need to be employed and an experienced builder or architect to oversee and direct the work. The friars in the community would help but they were not skilled craftsmen. Once the walls were up, then there would be a need for timber to form the roof and, of course, some skilled carpenters.

Progress on the chapel was slow and it was not until July 1271 that we have a record of King Henry III giving six oak trees with their branches from the forest around Rolvenden "for the building of their priory and church". A second grant of a further five oaks was made the following year. We have no explanation of why the building of the chapel proceeded so slowly and it is possible that it was difficult to raise the funds needed. In the meantime, it would seem that the friars had some suitable accommodation and that the family chapel in the manor was quite suitable for their needs. The community at this time was still quite small and a grant from the king in 1264 indicated that there were just ten friars.

It is likely that the new church followed the common pattern for mendicant friars, with its axis on an east to west line. The main door for the lay people would be at the west end and inside the length of the church would be divided by a rood screen on which there stood a cross with Jesus being crucified and the figures of the Virgin Mary and St John on each side. Beyond the rood screen was the chancel where the friars worshipped. They had choir stalls on each side and the main altar under the large east window. There the friars would have said their daily office which consisted of Mattins, said during the night, Lauds in the morning followed at intervals of three hours by the short prayers of Prime, Terce, Sext and None. Then in the evening there was Vespers and finally Compline just before the friars went to bed. There were no printed books in the 13th century so, during the office, the friars would have gathered around a large

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Masons building a church by Adam Kossowski in The Friars, Aylesford

handwritten choir book which contained the psalms and prayers (in Latin) and the music notation (in plain chant) where appropriate. Most of the community would have learned the psalms and the common prayers by heart so the lack of individual breviaries (prayerbooks) would have not created any problem. Mass for the community would have been celebrated normally after Lauds had been said, around 6.30 am.

In the nave, there was usually an altar in front of the rood screen where mass could be said for the people and where on Sundays or holy days, a friar would preach a sermon. At some prominent position in the nave, all Carmelite churches would have a statue of the Virgin Mary to whom the Carmelites had a special devotion. Then, around the church, there would be other statues or pictures of popular saints. These would normally be given by local families or gilds for whom they had a special devotion. In Kent, St Thomas à Becket was popular but also St Lawrence who was an early martyr in Rome and St Katherine of Alexandria another early martyr. The family or group who provided these statues would also normally take responsibility for maintaining lighted candles in front of them and flowers, etc.

The priory buildings outside the church would normally form a square or cloister on the south side (the sunny side) of the church. The block on the east side would have probably the chapter room for formal meetings of the community and a small library with the cells of the friars on the upper floor. There would be a staircase near the church where the friars could come down to the chapel and enter a doorway just in front of the rood screen. On the south side of the cloister, there would be the refectory and kitchen whilst on the west side, there would be a reception room for visitors and probably the prior's cell. The cloister itself would form a sheltered area where individual friars could read books from the library or just enjoy the open air. Eventually the whole site would be enclosed by a wall (for protection) with a gateway where one of the brothers would act as gatekeeper. Lay people coming to visit the chapel or for confession, etc. would enter through the gate and cross a small open space to reach either the West door to the chapel or the door for visitors who had business with the prior and community.

How much of the foundations of these buildings will be uncovered in the excavations due to take place is unclear. Lossenham Priory was never very large and the buildings were probably fairly simple. However, any findings will be very valuable as we know so little about the priory buildings.

Mary in the Carmelite tradition:
- Part One -

Francis Kemsley O.Carm

The Carmelites dedicated their first chapel on Mount Carmel to Mary 'Our Lady of the Place', near the spring of Elijah. Therefore, Mary and the prophet Elijah are models and are an integral part of the Carmelite charism but they are not regarded as the founders of the Order. Some look upon the original community of hermits that lived on Mt. Carmel in the eleventh and twelfth century as the founders of the Carmelite Order. Mary was regarded as the Patron, Model, Mother, Sister and Virgin Most Pure.

With the building and the dedication of the first chapel to Mary, we see that the Carmelites had a devotion to Mary from the very beginning of their history. In about a hundred years the first hermits had gathered on Mount Carmel, received a Rule, and largely moved from the Holy Land to Europe. The move to Europe began in 1238 and was completed by 1291. This was due to the fall of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. The Carmelite Order moved from the east to the west.

Mary is not mentioned or referred to in the Way of Life (The Rule) given by St. Albert of Jerusalem to the hermit brothers on Mount Carmel in or about 1207. However, some have seen mention of Mary in chapter ten of The Rule that mentions the Chapel that was dedicated to her. We know that the chapel "in the middle of the cells" was soon dedicated to Mary. The Rule specified that "an oratory should be constructed in the midst of the cells as conveniently as possible, where you are to gather each day in the morning to hear Mass, where this can be done conveniently."

Another reason why Mary is not mentioned in the primitive way of life is that the absence of any mention of Mary is due to the character of the Albertine document, which was more a practical laying out of the fundamental ideal of the Latin hermits, rather than a theoretical exposition with details of their life. There are parallels with the Rule of St. Albert and that of other institutes of monks or canons notable for their Marian dimension.

John Baconthorpe, (d. 1348) the great medieval Carmelite theologian, drawing upon an early tradition from the Fathers of the Church, identified the small cloud seen by Elijah (1Kings 18:44) with Mary. There had been a long drought in Israel and there was a lot of excitement when a cloud appeared. The rain restored the fruitfulness of the earth after the long drought; so the fruit of the womb of Mary, Jesus, would restore humanity. "The love of God descended on Mary … and through Mary the rains of mercy and grace descended on what was dried up, and thus restored all things". This interpretation of the biblical story unites Elijah and Mary.

Baconthorpe's commentary on The Rule is a creative and quaint comparison of Mary's life with elements in The Rule, e.g., The Rule requires each one to have a separate cell; the angel Gabriel found Mary contemplating in her own room. An oratory is to be built in the middle of the cells; Mary was brought by her parents to the temple. The Carmelite is to remain in or near his cell meditating; Mary prayed for many hours each day. The Rule requires silence; Mary speaks no more than four times in the Gospels. Carmelites may keep assess and mules; Mary rode an ass not a horse. The Prior is to serve the others; Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months. This commentary shows a desire of Carmelites to be patterned on Mary.

The Order soon became known as the "Brothers of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel". The first reference to this is a papal document in 1252. It was about this time that Mary was our sister as well as Mother and Queen. However, there is little reference to her in the earliest documents. She is only briefly referred to in The Flaming Arrow, which is the oldest surviving document after The Rule. This letter was written by one of the early Prior Generals, Nicholas the Frenchman. However, Peter of Millau, another early Prior General, in a letter to King Edward I in 1282 asking for protection, mentioned Mary as the patron of the Order.

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The understanding of the Marian nature of the Order was further defined at the General Chapter of 1287, when it was stated: In whose honour and glory the Order was especially established overseas." It was not until 1324 that Mary is mentioned in the Constitutions as this, legislation laid down by a General Chapter to give greater expression to the original charism in The Rule. Elijah is mentioned in the Rubrica prima of the 1281 Constitutions. The Rubrica Prima was the introduction to the Constitutions, describing the origins of the Carmelites. The Constitutions was the governing document of the Carmelites and was approved at every General Chapter of the Order. It is not until the 1324 Constitutions that Mary is mentioned in the Rubrica Prima: "After the incarnation their successors built a church there (on Mount Carmel) in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and chose her title: therefore, from that time they were by apostolic privilege called the Brothers of Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel". It is later that Mary is mentioned in the Rubrica Prima, some fifty years after Elijah. It may be presumed that Mary was an integral part of the Order but it indicated that some of the younger friars were not fully aware of the "why we are called Brothers of the Order of Blessed Mary of Mount Carmel." It is seen clearly that Mary is considered to be the patron of the Order. The different titles of Mary are further defined over the years and in the 1586 Constitutions we read: "Brothers of the Order of the Most Blessed Mother of God and the Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel". This combines two titles of Most Virgin Mary and Mother of God.

The Institute of the First Monks is one of the most important works in the medieval Carmelite Tradition. It is not history, but a spiritual symbolic reflection on the Order's charism. The prophet Elijah is seen as a model of the religious life. This work has been attributed to the Catalonian Provincial, Philip Ribot (d.1391). At first it was thought to have been written much earlier, perhaps even in the fourth century, but it is now agreed that it goes back to the fourteenth century. Book Six deals with Mary. Ribot reflects upon the significance of the cloud and the prophet Elijah. "The key to its Marian symbolism is that the cloud of pure rain, that is Mary, arose from the bitter, salty sea, which is the image of sinful humanity." Ribot sees in his reflection of the cloud images of the main Marian titles of Patron, Mother and Sister.

The next century saw Arnold Bostius (d.1499). In 1479 he wrote De Patronatu et patroncinio B. Virg. Marae in dicatum sibi Carmeli Ordinem. He attempted to answer the question whether Mary favoured the Order. He drew upon the teaching about Mary that was commonly held in the fifteenth century. He was interested in the Elijah-Marian tradition. In the past Elijah was seen as the founder of the Order but Bostius wrote: "Hence Mary is the legislator of Elijah and is rightly said to be legislator and founder of the whole group of Carmel".
In the Carmelite tradition Mary is celebrated as Patron, Mother, Sister and Pure Virgin. Patron is a reminder that the hermits on Carmel dedicated their chapel to her. Since then, Mary has been regarded as Mother of the Order. Where she has been, she leads us to the mountain to meet her Son. As Pure Virgin she is an inspiration to all who are following her example of the celibate life; her heart is pure seeking only God's will. Mary shows us how to listen to the Word of God in scripture, to be open to the needs of others in a world where there is so much poverty. Mary was the first disciple of Jesus.

The full title of the Order is 'Brothers of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel'. Therefore, Mary is our older sister in faith. She is the one who leads us upon the pilgrim path. She leads us along the path, like an older sister, to meet her Son, Jesus. Where Mary has been, we will follow. It has been a common theme among Carmelite writers since the middle ages to describe Mary as Sister. Not everyone feels comfortable about this title. It does not lower Mary to our level, rather it raises us to hers. Mary remains a sign of liberation and freedom for all who cry to God in their need.

An Image of Newenden in the Early Seventeenth Century

Brendan Chester-Kadwell

Illustration Lossenham 12 captioned: Newenden Town c. 1630 from a map of the Upper Levels and Wittersham levels from Bodiam Bridge to Scots Float Sluice [East Sussex Record Office ACC2806 1/9/2]

The detail shown above, taken from a map of the Upper Levels of the river Rother c. 1630, illustrates the township of Newenden and is possibly the earliest plan of the place yet known. The layout of the township would be familiar to anyone visiting Newenden today, with the village houses strung out along the banks of the Rother to the east of the river crossing. Lossenham and other inland places which form part of the parish are not shown. This is probably because the map was designed to record features and resources directly connected to the economy of the Upper Levels. However, the course of the river and its tributaries at that time are recorded, as well as the individual levels that have been reclaimed from the estuarine landscape. Amongst them is Newenden Green, thus showing its origins. These reclaimed lands were not necessarily secure from inundation at this period, but they were considered to be a valuable asset and were often in the ownership of the greater landowners.

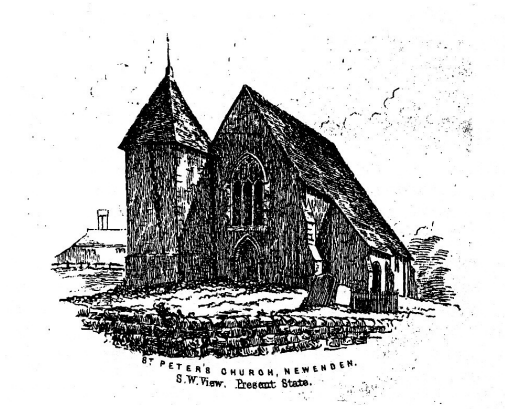
Of particular interest is how the Parish Church is drawn. It is often difficult to know whether such images are just representative of a church or the picture of the actual building. If the latter, would it suggest that the history of the church's development may have to be reviewed? It is worth pointing out that the image of Tenterden church, elsewhere on the map, although not an exact rendering is recognisable as that particular church.

A prominent feature is the river crossing itself. This is typical of the medieval way of bridging wide river channels or estuaries. A causeway would be built out from one (or sometimes both) banks to carry the road, which would then be taken over the river channel itself on an arch built typically of timber. Later, timber bridges would be replaced by stone as happened at Newenden. Other local examples of how wide river valleys were bridged are to be found at Bodiam and Robertsbridge (where there were multiple channels to be crossed). The whole structure, both the causeway and arched component seem to have been referred to as a 'bridge'. When a 'bridge' of this type failed it should not be assumed that it was the arch component that had collapsed. It is often obvious from the materials required for repairs that the causeway was the problem, needing quantities of gravel and hurdles – materials commonly associated with the construction and repair of embankments.

The map from which this image of Newenden comes is an interesting one, representing the course of the Rother and some of its tributaries from Bodiam Bridge to Scots Float Sluice at the eastern outflow of the Wittersham Channel. It was made at about the same time as the ownership map of the Wittersham Levels (1633) in the Kent History and Library centre (S/Ro/P1). Both of these maps may have been produced by William Gier (or Gire) and Ambrose Cogger, although their scope and styles differ.

A Church of Many Towers

Åke Neilson



Images from top: Playden (St Michael's) church, with its original central tower.

A drawing from the 1858 survey, showing the cracks and subsidence to the then tower.

St Peter's from the SE, showing where its central tower might have been (the chancel is from 1930)

In 1693 or thereabouts, the tower of St. Peter's Church, Newenden, fell down. Some say it was due to an earthquake, but a contemporary report refers to a lightning strike. In any event, the underlying cause was likely subsidence – Wealden clay on a hillside does not make for stable foundations. It couldn't have happened at a worse time; the village's fortunes were at a low point and the population was less than one hundred. The rubble was left in a big heap, and it wasn't until the spring of 1700 that the parishioners got round to writing a petition to the Archbishop for repair and replacement works.

During 1700 and 1701, a new tower was built on the northwestern corner, at a cost of £57 14s 3d, of which more than 10% was the cost of the faculty, i.e. the diocesan planning permission. About half of the cost was covered by selling two of the old bells, the lead from the roof and some building stones, not to mention "eight loads of Rubbish" at tuppence each. This was quite a substantial tower, as can be seen from an 1804 engraving, but unfortunately, it was again just too heavy for its foundations. By the 1850's, it was "in a very perilous condition, not only itself in imminent danger but threatening a serious injury to the West wall of the church". According to a survey in March 1858, the tower was leaning outwards from the nave, leaving a 23 inch gap at roof level, while its western elevation had a crack up to eight inches wide.

Wisely, the tower was pulled down and the present small turret was built on the southwestern corner. This time, the cost was £450, and a fund-raising exercise collected £367 5s, including £10 from the Archbishop, £25 from the owner of Hole Park (in Rolvenden) and 11s from Miss L Taylor of Preston, Lancs – who also got her poor servants to contribute 6s. So far, this third tower shows no signs of subsidence – long may it last!

But there is an interesting mystery about the first tower. In the 1700 petition, the parishioners, together with the Rectors of surrounding parishes, say that the "Steeple... fell down, & together with it the Chancel, there being one wall common to both" (my italics). This can't be possible with a conventional layout, with the tower at the western end of the church and the chancel at the eastern end. The only way these elements can have a wall in common is where the church has a central tower, with the nave to the west and the chancel to the east.

This is an uncommon configuration for a small parish church, and it is hard to find another example in the Canterbury diocese. However, one day I found a perfect example just over the border, in Playden, near Rye. St Michael's church looks very similar to St Peter's, although it is somewhat older – and it does have a central tower, in just the right configuration. Might it have been the model for St Peter's? Perhaps some sort of ground survey can eventually establish the original layout of Newenden's much loved and much rebuilt church.

Event Summary: 2 March (with thanks to Sheila Sweetinburgh)

Dr Brendan Chester-Kadwell gave the first presentation, exploring the difference between maps and plans and then showing the audience a range of estate plans, the development of county maps for Kent: Christopher Saxton's from 1579 and the more detailed (and useful) ones of Philip Symondson (1596) which include river systems and 'roads', which might in reality have been a series of lanes between places. In addition, Brendan examined parish maps, including tithe maps and the necessity of the apportionments to make best use of these resources. Finally, he moved to OS maps, beginning in 1791, and demonstrated how they had developed over the 19th century, including the move from hatching to show height to the use of contours, the high point from a mapmaker's perspective being the large scale 25 inches to a mile.

With this contextual information on the value of mapping for discovering and charting the landscape, Dr Helen Clarke then looked at the small ports along the River Rother, focusing especially on Small Hythe because of its importance as a centre of shipbuilding from the mid 14th century to the reign of Henry VIII. Small Hythe came to prominence because of the construction of the Knelle Dam to the west of the Isle of Oxney. As a result, the River Rother was diverted to the north of Oxney, thereby providing a tidal waterway to well upriver of Newenden, and thus benefitting Small Hythe. One consequence of the area's growing importance was Tenterden's new status as a limb of Rye and thus it enjoyed the privileges of the Cinque Ports. An impressive number of ships are known to have been constructed at Small Hythe, the largest known being the 1000-ton great ship the Jesus. Once the hulls had been constructed, they were floated down to Rye to be fitted ready for the sea.

These presentations drew several questions and comments, and the plan is that when we are able to actually work out in the field, as a group we will explore some of these features to see how the area developed and to examine such structures as the Knelle Dam (a road runs along it). Moreover, various non-invasive archaeological means of surveying the shoreline, especially around Small Hythe will also be taking place restrictions permitting in the spring.

Brendan Chester-Kadwell's presentation notes are available from Annie Partridge (annie.partridge@canterburytrust.co.uk)

Upcoming Events

Lossenham Project: Virtual Forum

Our next event will be Workshop 2, to be held on **Tuesday 30 March at 7.00pm**. It will be an 'Open Forum', hosted and chaired by Andrew Richardson, when we invite you to suggest topics that you would like the Lossenham Project to pursue, discuss your own favourite subjects, and/or ask questions about the Project in general.

There will be an update on our planned activities as we move into Spring and Summer, although dates can't be forthcoming right now we hope we can get outside as a group in May!

You are welcome to join; please email annie.partridge@canterburytrust.co.uk for an invitation. Links will be sent out the day before the event.

This is the second of a series of Workshops on different topics presented by members of the History Group which will be held online at roughly monthly intervals until the end of Lockdown. The workshop will be on **Tuesday 27th April** and will be an update on the findings of the wills.