

Chapter 4 The Dissolution of Sawley Abbey

Moorhouse, G., 2002. *The Pilgrimage of Grace*. Publ. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London.

Hoyle, R. W., 2001. *The Pilgrimage of Grace and the politics of the 1530s*. Publ. OUP

YASRS 1912, vol. 48 *Suppression of Yorkshire Monasteries*

Letters and Papers Domestic and Foreign Henry VIII (Lancaster University and TNA) HMSO London 1894.

Smith, R.B., *Land and politics in the England of Henry VIII*, Clarendon Press 1970.

(Full documents in Appendix 2).

The national background

The sale of the Manor of Langcliffe in 1591 was triggered by three key events which were the Dissolution of the Monasteries (1536-9) by Thomas Cromwell for Henry VIII, the Pilgrimage of Grace (1536), and the Rising of the North (1569). All these followed from the changes in church practice in England under Henry VIII and the declaration of supremacy of Henry VIII over the Pope. The monasteries had built up large consolidated estates and at the Dissolution these were returned to the Crown and in turn were granted in whole or in part to local landlords or to local families for a consideration - at least to those who had grudgingly supported the king during the Pilgrimage of Grace. Land in the feudal system was not the subject of ownership but of tenure – the king was the owner. The word ‘sold’ as used now has a different meaning concerning ownership.

In 1533 in the reign of Henry VIII the Statute of Appeals forbade appeals from English courts to Rome, part of Henry’s resistance to papal domination. Sir Thomas More died for his Catholic beliefs and Thomas Cromwell rose to power at this time. An Act was passed in 1536 to dissolve the monasteries, including Sawley Abbey in May 1536. Sawley Abbey held the Manor of Langcliffe amongst many other properties. The lesser monasteries were to be dissolved first. Strictly speaking Sawley Abbey was worth more than £200 a year so should have escaped the first round of closures (although its actual worth was reported as £147-3-10 in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* (vol. 5, p144)). The purchaser Arthur Darcy himself had already agreed that it was worth more than £200.

The Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536 started as a revolt of the peasants primarily in eastern counties of England under Robert Aske of Gray’s Inn against the ejection of monks from the abbeys (including Sawley and Whalley) and a culmination of a generation of growing discontent and fear; the lords of the manor and gentry often tried illegally to enclose land and to abuse peasants’ land use rights.

The Darcy family became the next holders of the Manor of Langcliffe after the Abbot of Sawley. They played an important role in national affairs in the 16th century: Lord Thomas Darcy (1467-1537) was a statesman and supposed friend of Thomas Cromwell with land and properties in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire. However, Thomas Darcy was involved in parliamentary matters and the rebellious Pilgrimage of Grace; he was decapitated, justly or unjustly, for treason in 1537. His elder son Sir George Darcy was heir and the younger son Arthur was favoured by Cromwell despite the behaviour of his father. Arthur complained to Cromwell in 1532 that he had not

received a penny for three years, nor his father for four years, despite him having been the King's servant for 14 years (*Letters Patent V, 1531 & 2, no. 1288*). In response and perhaps as a reward for helping to pacify the rebels in the north of England Henry VIII in March 1536 sold (granted in fee simple – then the securest form of tenure) to 'Sir Arthur Darcie and to his heirs and assigns for ever the Monastery of the Blessed Mary of Sawley' (*Statutes of the Realm C29 p578 and 624*). In 1543 Sir Arthur also requested the King to be able to purchase various other manors (*£395/7/D31 Arthur Darcy to Henry VIII 1543*). Sawley Abbey was granted to Sir Arthur before the Court of Augmentations in charge of selling the abbeys had done its preliminary survey of values. The grant was not made by Letters Patent but by an indenture of 28 March 1536. This has not been found but is referred to in the statute which passed through Parliament later in the year to confirm it. Further confirmation is found in the Patent of 1538. The speed of making the grant is suspicious since no other nobles were favoured this way and why was Sawley dissolved if its income was agreed and known to be above £200 a year?

Sir Arthur bought various properties from the Crown as shown by the entry book of the Auditors of Land Revenue, Sales of mainly monastic lands, 1536/7 (*TNA LR 9/61/1*) but Sawley is not recorded there.

Sir Arthur died in 1560 and left by his will 'the demesne landes of the late monasterie of Salley' to his eldest son Henry. (Sir Arthur also obtained property in Bolton from the Abbey and one of his seven sons, Sir Henry, sold this in 1567 for £400). In 1561 it was found by Inquisition Post Mortem on Arthur that Sir Henry held the manors of Langcliffe and Gisborne all of the Queen, *in capite*, by Knight's service (*Whitaker, T.D., 1878. History of Craven*).

The Rising of the North in 1569 tried to establish the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots to replace Elizabeth on the English throne. Defeat of the rebels led to the sequestration of northern lands of those involved which also went to Crown ownership together with ex-monastery properties.

Henry Darcy must have passed the manors of Langcliffe and Nappay to his brother Nicholas Darcy who was the fifth of the seven sons. Nicholas then sold all the manorial rights and lands to the tenants in 1591.

Local events

In the early 1500s there were grievances about taxation, revenues being improperly spent such as the extravagant cost of the show at the Field of Cloth of Gold, generally poor government and the subsidy raised specifically for war on Scotland and France, being sources of threats of Catholic rule in England. This was on top of the Poll tax of 1513 by Henry VIII which was also badly received. Tenants had to pay cornage to the Lord of the Manor (on horned cattle), avenage (payment in oats), berbiage (for pasturing sheep) and gressom (for first taking possession of a holding). There was also a rumour of tax on births, marriages and deaths (*Moorhouse, G., 2002. The Pilgrimage of Grace, Weidenfeld and Nicolson*).

Agreement had already been made with Sir Arthur that he could have the property of Sawley Abbey, by indenture dated 28th March 1536. This was confirmed by the *Letters Patent* of 9 May, 1538 'by the authority of Parliament lately dissolved and

suppressed with all houses and idifices situate and built upon and within the same and all and singular demesne lands and tenements aforesaid of the late Monastery and also the Lordships or Manors of Staynforth Langclif and Stanton (and Gisbourne) with the appurtenances etc.'. (YASRS vol. 48, 1912, p152/3 and 191). (E305/7/D62; NRO ZXF 1/32/3; LP Hen 8 vol XIII, p409, no. 1115 grant no.13 see Appendix). (Patent Roll 3 May; 1538). (Bradfer-Lawrence YAS MD335/6/68/1)

This was in exchange for the manor of Grenesnorton in Northamptonshire (*Statutes of the Realm C29 p578*). The value of all the property involved was £147-3s-10d a year (as in *Valor Ecclesiasticus* (vol. 5, p144)). The price was 'in capite for ever by the service of a Knight's fee and by the annual rental of £25-8s-10d. To be paid to the Treasurer for the time being of the Court of Augmentation of the Revenues of our Crown.....'. (In addition Whitaker (1878) says that Sir George Darcy obtained and transferred Langcliffe land in 1539 to his younger brother Sir Arthur but the evidence for this is lacking).

The Abbey was closed in May 1536 and the monks and abbot left the premises, leaving the tenants in Langcliffe and elsewhere in much uncertainty about their loss of income and their future. In the summer of 1536 the first alterations of religious practice of the laity were announced. By October 1536 there were expectations of confiscation of church property. The vicars were therefore generally on the side of the rebels, including the vicar of Clapham (*Brayshaw and Robinson, 1932. History of the ancient parish of Giggleswick*). Lord Thomas Darcy was caught up in events in East Yorkshire and was probably trying to appease both sides for his own sake but he was accused in 1537 of treason and was executed in June 1537. The people of Langcliffe were probably mainly aggravated by the treatment of Sawley Abbey - they also knew of the grant of the abbey by the King to Sir Arthur Darcy in March 1536, before the abbey had been dissolved in May 1536. The normal process was for the Court of Augmentations to arrange sales after dissolution. It was hardly a Pilgrimage of Grace in Craven, rather a display of religious grievances focussed on Sawley. The gentry had a grudging sense of duty to the King and were coerced by the commons to various treasonable acts (such as Sir Stephen Hamerton of Wigglesworth executed 15 May 1537 at Tyburn). The Clifford family supported the King and were afterwards rewarded with the title of the Earls of Cumberland.

The local tenants restored the abbot and monks to Sawley on 12 October 1536 (*LP XI, no. 784. 19 October 1536*) – restoration of the abbot against his will (*LP XII 1537 part 1 no. 506 of 25 February 1537*). A petition of the Monastery of Salley to Sir Thomas Percy (*LP XI no. 785. 19 October 1536*) (the abbey was founded by the Percys) says that '*They mistrust their most sinister back friend Sir Arthur Darcy and are advised by the commons to remain in their house*'.

On 18th, 19th or 20th October a poster was attached to the door of Giggleswick Church calling for a muster at Neals Ing. This was a proclamation summoning the Commons to join the Pilgrimage and fixing a meeting place in every parish issued by Robert Aske, leader of the Pilgrims, on 17 October (*Brayshaw and Robinson, 1932*). The monks of Sawley were also behind this bill posting (*LP XII 1537 part 1 no. 1034 25 April 1537*). '*The commons were to swear very man, priest and other, and charge them on pain of death, to come to musters, where they pick out the best men*'. (*LP XI, no. 760. part 2, 17 October 1536 Thomas Darcy to Henry VIII*).

The King wrote to the Earl of Derby on 19 October 1536

'... having since heard of an insurrection about the abbey of Salley in Lancashire, where the abbot and monks have been restored by the traitors, we now desire you immediately to repress it, to apprehend the captains and either have them immediately executed as traitors or sent up to us You are to take the said abbot and monks forthwith with violence, and have them hanged without delay in their monk's apparel....'

(LP XI, 783. 19 October 1536)

A further letter from the King (28 October 1536) to the Earl of Derby

'If on your coming to Sawley you find the abbot and monks restored again, of which they must have been authors or abettors, you shall at once cause the abbot and certain of the chief monks to be hanged on long pieces of timber, or otherwise, out of the steeple, and the rest to be executed in such places as you think fit..... let none escape.' *(LP Hen 8 LP XI, 894, 28 October 1536 signed at midnight)*

But the Earl only reached Preston and did not confront the rebels. There was then a long period of stand-off while negotiations took place between the King and the rebels in eastern England.

Edward Stanley, Duke of Norfolk, was told by Henry VIII mid-February 1537 to raise troops in Lancashire to recover Sawley but he was diverted by events at Carlisle *LP XII 1537. part 1, 1034* (*Moorhouse, 2002*). The Duke wrote to Sawley which then surrendered to Sir Richard Tempest. The abbot escaped but was recaptured shortly afterwards by Sir Arthur Darcy *(LP XII part 1, 506, 25 February 1537)*.

Sir Arthur Darcy to Cromwell:

(YASRS 1912, vol. 48 Suppression of Yorkshire Monasteries; Camden Soc. 1843/4, p158; LP XII part 1, no.506, 25 February 1537)

25 Feb. 1536-7. Ytt schall lyke yowr guid lordschip to be aduertysed ytt tt barnacastell affter ytt my lord off Norfolkke hadd herid off ye dysscomfytur off the canons of Westmorland ytt Sir Rycherd Tempest hadd delyuered to ye abbott & covent off Sawley my sayd lordes letter in ye kynges name to aduoyd ther possession off Sawley uppon ye payn to be reputtyd as ye Kynges Rebels, to whyche letter the Abbott & monkes obbeyd, & then my lord badd me choze whether I wolld go to Sawley or to send thedd', & seing the jorney broken in effect by ye dyscomfyture off ye sayd canons I toke my leffe & went by Couerdalle & Wensledale to Sawley, where I found iij seruantes off Syr Rycd Tempestes yt hadd resseyuyd ye possessyon with oon of my tenauntes, for off trewth they haue wastyd in effect all ye lyttyll gooddes. catalles, schepe & haue takyn upp my hallf yeres rentes off my holl landes, so I dyd asske for ye Abbott & no I herd priuily where he was, & I dydd send there a xij off my seruanttes & dyd take hym, & he makes hymssellff as thoff he can neyther rydd nor goo & holly dothe lay all ye blame to ye canons ytt contrary hys wyll they putt hym in, so I trust schortly to trye ye hall trewth wherin I do labor as I cam away from sawley

.....
.....

...my good lord I requyrs yow to be my good lord ytt I be nott chargyd with my

surtes for ye abbey is goodes ytt I neuer reyceyffyd, I huve payd an Clx li yett off ye rest I wolld ytt ye kynges gracr wolld releas me, I haue wryttyn to Mearrs to putt yow in remembrance..... (referring to payment made in 1535)

Arthur Darcy

addressed to To ye Ryght honerabyll & my very good lord my lord preuy seall

Endorsed Sir Arthure Darcy the xxv of February shewing the pacyfyng of the Reb'ells in the Northe & howe he tooke possessyon of Sawley Abbaye

There is some confusion in the sources about who was prior, who abbot and who was executed. In January 1536 Thomas Bolton was Abbot of Sawley (*Augmentation Office Views of Accounts*) but William Trafford had become abbot two months before dissolution in May of that year. William took part as Abbot with his Prior in the Pilgrimage of Grace (ed. J.Harland, *Hist. account of the Cistercian Abbey of Salley Abbey*, publ. J. Russell Smith, *Clitheroe*. p48) but it is possible that William was never formally confirmed as Abbot. The Abbot, the Prior and the chaplain Richard Estgate were arrested by Sir Arthur Darcy (25 February 1537).

William Trafford, Abbot of Sawley, was hanged at Lancaster on March 10th 1537 according to F.A.Gasquet, 1895 (*Henry VIII and the English Monasteries*. Publ. Hodges, (at Bury St Edmunds)). *YASRS Suppression of Yorkshire Monasteries* says that Thomas Bolton, abbot, received a pension of £20 a year (*Augmentation Misc. Books vol. 232, fol.17; LP XI, no.786; LP XIII pt.1, no. 1520*) perhaps on being removed in May 1536. Thomas was probably sent to London in 1537 to be executed but died before this could happen (*Suppression of Yorkshire Monasteries YASRS vol. 48,1912 p197*). Richard Estgate, monk of Sawley and chaplain to the abbot (*Brayshaw and Robinson, 1932*) is known to have been caught (*LP XII (i) no. 706*) and then hanged (*LP XII part 1, 1537. no. 632 , 11 March 1537*).

Late in 1536 the Royal forces had wisely decided not to fight the rebels and Aske and the rebels were (deviously) pardoned. A few months later the King arrested the leaders and executed them in 1537.

Later events

In 1539 the dissolution of the greater monasteries began. Thomas Cromwell lost his head in 1540. Henry died in 1547 to be followed by Edward VI then Mary then Elizabeth in 1558.

The Rising of the North in 1569 concerned an attempt to secure the succession of the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots to the English throne. The defeat of the Rising led to the sequestration of lands of those involved which also therefore went to Crown ownership. Many of these old estates were sold to London merchants and speculators who sold on to local gentry, tenants (generally in trust for all the tenants of the manor, who became freeholders), or other speculators. The country was swamped with ex-monastic and this other property for sale, which meant that speculators probably lost money on eventual sales, to the benefit of the purchasers. The sale of monastic and chantry lands converted the Reformation into a colossal business interest in which everyone, yeoman, merchant, gentleman, and nobleman with any free capital had invested. Lands changed hands like shares in a modern company involving a range of

speculators far greater than the actual number of holders, many as these were *Queen Elizabeth I*, 1952. J.E.Neale, *Pelican Books*). As seen later, Nicholas Darcy seemed to be in some financial difficulty in the 1580s but probably had difficulty in selling Langcliffe manor at this time.

Later James I (1603-1625) and Charles I (1626-1649) both needed money to re-develop the navy so sale of Crown lands was still helpful in filling the coffers.