



  
 Lossenham Project  
**Newsletter**  
 ISSUE 26



# Introduction

**“Duty above everything”  
– personal motto of King Gustaf VI Adolf**

On 26 January 1947, a KLM DC3 flight from Amsterdam, having stopped over at Copenhagen’s Kastrup airport, was due to take off for Stockholm Bromma airport. The tailplane control surfaces had been secured with “gust locks” – used to prevent the rudder and elevators from flapping around in the wind and damaging themselves, or the internal control mechanisms.



Gustaf VI Adolf as Crown Prince in 1938

Tragically, the elevator locking pins were not removed before the plane took off, and as a result, it went into an overly steep climb, stalled at a height of about 100 metres and crashed in flames, killing all aboard, six crew and sixteen passengers. Today, you will always see all control surfaces (ailerons, rudder and elevators) being wiggled about by the pilot, before the plane taxis out to the runway, to make sure no such problem is present.

One passenger was Sweden’s Prince Gustaf Adolf. His grandfather was King Gustaf V, who was at this time already nearly 90 years old, and Gustaf Adolf was second in line to the throne, after his father.

Three years later, Gustaf VI Adolf succeeded to the throne at the ripe old age of 68 – at the time, the oldest heir apparent to a monarchy ever (only recently surpassed by Charles in the UK). The Swedish monarchy now had a succession problem: Gustaf Adolf had five children, four daughters and a baby son who became Crown Prince, aged four (females were always behind their brothers in the then order of succession – this changed later). But a Swedish monarch needed to have reached 25 before taking the throne – would the new King live another 21 years? In the end, Gustaf VI Adolf managed 23 years on the throne and so his grandson, Sweden’s present King Charles XVI Gustaf, safely ascended to the throne aged 27.

Otherwise, Gustaf Adolf’s brother, Prince Bertil, would have succeeded to the throne. One additional wrinkle was that, before the reforms eventually resulting to some extent from the plane crash, royal princes marrying commoners were automatically excluded from the line of succession. Bertil therefore couldn’t marry his long-term love Lilian Craig (who was not only a commoner, but also a divorcée) until the succession was secure. They did finally marry in 1976, nearly thirty years after they first met.

Duty above everything, indeed!

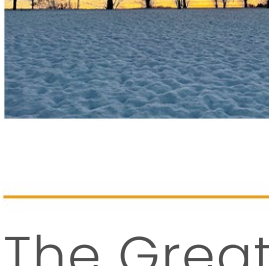
*Åke Nilson  
Chairman of the Janus Foundation*



# St Mary’s in the Snow



In mid-December I was at Lossenham for a meeting of the Janus Foundation. It was a bright but cold day, and the land was blanketed in a crisp layer of snow and ice. Before the meeting I walked down to check on the excavation, which we had worked hard to prepare for the onset of Winter. I was pleased to see that all appeared well; the tarpaulins remained in place, secured by sandbags (visible as little snow-covered humps in the photographs) and I hope that the archaeology beneath is as well-protected as possible.



I was struck by the beauty of the wintery landscape, and once again reminded that the Carmelites who built St Mary’s in the mid-thirteenth century had chosen a prominent south-facing location, well-placed to get as much sun as possible, and easily accessible from the Rother. Even on a cold day such as that, it is a fine place to be. But Lossenham, like much of the Weald, can be a very challenging environment at times, especially when the weather turns wet. I wondered how the first generation of Carmelites, many of whom would have been born and raised in the Holy Land, responded to the changing seasons and ground conditions of their new home. I suspect that whatever their backgrounds, they were a hardy community, and rapidly adapted to life at Lossenham. But their thoughts must have sometimes turned to their former homes, whether near or far across the seas, especially as they watched sea-going vessels pass below them along the river. And on days when the land was blanketed in white, some must have dreamt of the warmth of the Holy Land.

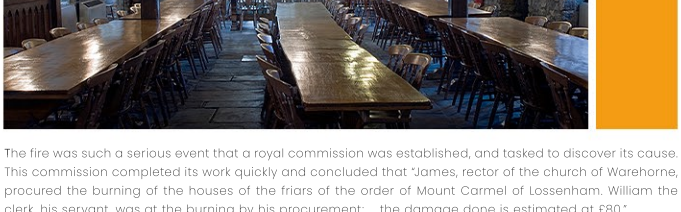
*Andrew Richardson  
Isle Heritage CIC*



# The Great Fire in Lossenham

The construction of a medieval priory was a major undertaking and it could take several decades before the work was completed. At Lossenham, the laying of the foundations might have started some time in the 1250’s. By 1271, the walls had risen to a sufficient height for work to begin on the floors and the roofing. A petition was made to King Henry III and, on 16 July 1271, the friars were given six oaks from the woods around Rolvenden.

By 1275 work on the roofs was well advanced. Then, one autumn night, disaster struck. A fire broke out and destroyed a large part of the newly erected timber floors and roofs and probably damaged some of the stonework.



It was quickly assumed that the fire had been caused maliciously. The buildings had only just been erected and were probably not yet in use, so it is unlikely that the fire was caused by carelessness. However, if the fire was intentional then who would have done it? The one group of people who would have resented the arrival of the friars would have been the local clergy who could see that the priory would draw people away from their parish church and hence reduce their income.

The fire was such a serious event that a royal commission was established, and tasked to discover its cause. This commission completed its work quickly and concluded that “James, rector of the church of Warehorne, procured the burning of the houses of the friars of the order of Mount Carmel of Lossenham. William the clerk, his servant, was at the burning by his procurement; ... the damage done is estimated at £80.”

The damage caused by the fire must have been extensive and the £80 quoted would be around £80,000-£100,000 in today’s currency. It was not until 1279 that the accused clerk William came to trial in Canterbury. However, before this trial could start another matter had to be settled. The court record showed that Brother Thomas of Newenden and brother Richard of Oxford fought together in their cloister at Lossenham, whereupon Richard killed Thomas and then left the cloister and “wickedly hid” in the countryside.

The reason for this fight becomes clearer from the next court case, the trial of James, the rector of Warehorne, his clerk William and the same brother Richard who had been declared an outlaw. The court decided that unknown malefactors set fire to the church of Lossenham and immediately fled. It is not known who they were. Afterwards it was stated in the coroner’s roll that the said brother Richard and James the rector and the cleric William, had burned the said church. Not guilty.

Now, it is possible to guess at the reason for the quarrel between the two Carmelites. Brother Thomas of Newenden appears to have come from a local family and so would be aware of who were said to be the culprits. Surprisingly, despite the commission identifying them, the jury at their trial declared them “Not Guilty.” It would be interesting to know whether this was because of a lack of evidence, or because there was local support for the action of the rector of Warehorne.

Fortunately, the developing Carmelite community in Lossenham were quickly able to put this mishap behind them. Thanks to the generosity of the Aucher family and/or other local patrons, the building work proceeded. Hopefully, as the excavations continue, it will become possible to make better estimates of the layout of the priory and its size. Will we, though, find any traces of the Great Fire of 1275?

*This is an abbreviated version of an article by Fr. Richard Copsey, O.Carm. The full article can be found at <https://lossenham.org.uk/blog/>*



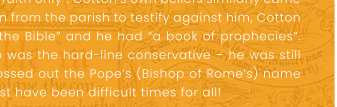
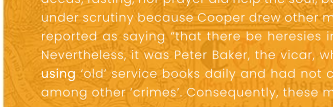
# Lossenham Frequencies

In December 2022, Lossenham’s Resident Artist Russell Burden completed the mastering, production, and pressing of his newest work, and album entitled “Lossenham Frequencies.” The CD is made up of six tracks, or “charms” as they are aptly called as upon listening, they each evoke an aura of the mystical, ethereal qualities of our natural landscapes. The aural fusion of music, place, and Russell’s own artistic sensibility with the natural world leans gently into the discourse surrounding the loss of peace within our hectic, urban lives. Additionally, the community aspect of The Lossenham Project allowed Russell to invite visiting artists to collaborate on the piece; each ‘charm’ mixes Russell’s field recordings captured in and around the physical spaces of Lossenham with his written scores into which have been blended improvised musical musings from some carefully chosen and exceptionally talented artists, from flautists to vocalists to string players. Russell had his to say of the piece in the cover notes for the album:

*“The first creative visits to Lossenham were walked in solitude. Over those early months, becoming intimate with the low, secluded landscape and its wetland levels opened a sense of artistic engagement, and investigating the space with microphones revealed stretches of time utterly devoid of human noise. [...] Sitting in stillness, listening deeply, the field of natural sound becomes an immersive experience of water, wind, bird calls – the more one listens, the more one hears [...] Slowing and emptying the mind has played such a large part in the process of making these soundscapes. I hope they invoke some sense of the beauty, presence, and spaciousness felt when holding silence at Lossenham.”*

“Lossenham Frequencies” is published under Riverwork Press, Russell’s own label which looks to make limited edition artist books, sound work, film work, and art prints.

*Natasha Cowley  
Trustee, The Janus Foundation*



# Difficult times

The wills group recently welcomed several new volunteers, and if anyone else is interested, whether you have previous experience or not, please do get in touch. sheila.sweetinburgh@canterbury.ac.uk we’ll be delighted to see you.

Among the topics we are investigating is the impact of the religious changes under Henry VIII. Wills are a great source, but for the diocese of Canterbury we are probably uniquely fortunate to have the depositions collected for Archbishop Cranmer in 1543 that offer a snapshot concerning the state of the diocese. For while the proposition, reported at the time, “that Kent is full of schisms and heresies”, was somewhat of an exaggeration, religious strife within and between parishes by those who were conservative (Catholics) and evangelicals (Protestants) is visible.

Tenterden offers one of these contested parishes. Sir Humphrey Cotton, the chantry priest there, gathered a group of eight other men to witness against Hugh Cooper, who had preached at least three times earlier that year, on the second occasion saying, “neither alms deeds, fasting, nor prayer did help the soul, but faith only”. Cotton’s own beliefs similarly came under scrutiny because Cooper drew other men from the parish to testify against him, Cotton reported as saying “that there be heresies in the Bible” and he had “a book of prophecies”. Nevertheless, it was Peter Baker, the vicar, who was the hard-line conservative – he was still using “old” service books daily and had not crossed out the Pope’s (Bishop of Rome’s) name among other ‘crimes’. Consequently, these must have been difficult times for all!

*Dr Sheila Sweetinburgh  
Centre for Kent History and Heritage*



# Dates for the Diary

We are working on dates for the coming season and will publish them in the February issue.

