The Lossenham Project

Newsletter 6

April 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

Lossenham Carmelites: From hermits to friars

Richard Copsey, O.Carm

In the Holy Land, the first Carmelites were hermits who lived in a secluded valley on the slopes of Mount Carmel. They gathered together to form a community and received a "Way of Life" from Albert, the patriarch of Jerusalem. As the perils of life in the Holy Land increased, a small group of these hermits migrated to England in 1242 where they sought suitable sites in order to continue their eremitical way of life. So, the first two foundations which they made were at Hulne, a few miles outside Alnwick in Northumberland and on the riverbank just outside the village of Aylesford in Kent. These communities were soon followed by another at Lossenham and a fourth at Bradmer on the Norfolk coast (moved a few years later to a site outside the small village of Burnham Norton). At this stage the Carmelites were known as the hermits or brothers of Mount Carmel.

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However, in 1247, the Carmelites underwent a significant change in their way of life and organization which had its repercussions on the small community in Lossenham. Apart from the four communities in England, other hermits from Mount Carmel had made foundations outside the Holy Land, the first on the north coast of Cyprus in Fortamia around 1238, a second near Messina in Sicily a year or so later and a third just outside Marseilles in France at Les Aygalades. This geographical spread and increasing number of houses persuaded the Carmelites that there was a need for new pattern of government more suited to the needs of an international Order. So, in 1247, a first general chapter was convened in Aylesford with delegates coming from all the different communities. The chapter met probably in June and English King Henry III is recorded as giving 4 marks (£2 16s 8d) towards the expenses of the gathering.

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

Up to this time, the Order had been led by the prior of Mount Carmel but due to the distances involved and the rapid expansion in Europe, the chapter decided to elect a prior general who would be charged with the overall direction of the Order. The early histories of the Order assumed that the first prior general was St Simon Stock but, in recent years, documents have been discovered which show that a "brother Godfrey" was elected. Little is known about him except that he was involved in the founding of the first community at Pisa in Italy in 1249 and probably held office until 1254. He was followed by an "Alan" and then Simon Stock was elected around 1256-1258. Simon Stock died in Bordeaux in 1265.

One of the first decisions made by the chapter was to send two delegates to the pope in Avignon to ask for some amendments to the Way of Life given to them by Albert and for formal papal approval of this Rule. Two English brothers, Peter and Reginald Folsham, who had joined the Order in Burnham Norton, were chosen. Pope Innocent IV selected two Dominican bishops to examine the Carmelite Rule and they recommended a few changes, such as the Carmelites were to attend mass daily in their chapel, to say the divine office together, to eat meals in a common refectory and to meet in chapter under the prior once a week. Most importantly, the pope approved an amendment which stated that the Carmelites could make foundations not only "in solitary places" but also in places given to the Order which are judged suitable. This meant that the Order could accept sites in cities or towns. The revised Rule was approved by the pope in September and, as soon as Peter and Reginald had returned, the English Carmelites quickly took advantage of this amendment and a community was sent to London to make a foundation in Fleet Street on land granted by the de Grey family (who has given the site in Aylesford in 1242) and, in November, another community was sent to make a foundation on the outskirts of Cambridge. These were followed a few years later by further foundations in York, Oxford, Bristol and Norwich.

This move towards having foundations in the major cities in the country marked a significant change in the Carmelite way of life. From this point onwards, the Carmelites begin to play a much more active role in society. Their churches in the cities became places where people could come to attend mass, to hear good sermons, to go to confession or to make their devotions to the Virgin Mary or one of the saints. Individual friars were also available to preach or celebrate mass in local parishes when requested, or to serve the king or local bishop in various ways. The cities also offered the opportunity to attract more vocations and this was especially true of the foundations in the two university centres at Oxford and Cambridge. This shift, inevitably, had its effect on the initial four foundations which had been founded when the emphasis was on the Carmelites living as hermits, just as they had on Mount Carmel. Hulne, Aylesford, Lossenham and Burnham Norton were the four senior houses in the province – seniority was determined by the date of foundation – but once the move to the cities had started, these four houses assumed a less significant role. London quickly became the central house and was soon designated as a studium generale for philosophy which meant that students from the other provinces in the Order would be sent there for their philosophy studies. In later years, London would have 80 or more friars in the community. Similarly, York, Oxford and Norwich became the central houses for their distinction (region) and offered advanced course in theology for the brighter students. Lossenham, in this changing situation remained a small community, 10-15 friars. Talented students would be sent to London for their studies and other friars would help out in local churches when required. In its isolated site, Lossenham would have been a quiet community but one where there was a regular prayer life and time for silent contemplation – just like on Mount Carmel.

Mary in the Carmelite tradition:
- Part Two -

Francis Kemsley O.Carm

MARY AND THE SCAPULAR

A scapular is an apron-like garment worn over the clothes of monks and nuns.

The scapular is still an important devotion to Mary. The faithful are encouraged to follow Mary as she followed Jesus as the faithful disciple. It is seen as a sign of Mary's care and protection of the Order. However, the scapular was first mentioned in the Carmelite Constitutions of 1281: "the Brothers are to sleep in their tunic and scapular under pain of severe penalty". There is no mention at this stage of either the scapular vision or St. Simon Stock. It is not until the late fourteenth century that there is an account of the scapular vision to St. Simon Stock. He was an early Prior General of the Order and was possibly elected at the London General Chapter in 1254. It was not until the early sixteenth century that devotion to the Carmelite Scapular became common.

He was Prior General at the time the Carmelites were changing from being hermits to friars. He may have come from Kent either from Stoke near the Isle of Grain or Stockbury near Sittingbourne. He died in Bordeaux in 1261 and was buried in the Cathedral. There is very little hard evidence about the origin of the scapular. There is a tradition in the Carmelites that St. Simon, while at prayer, received a vision of Mary, Mother of God and she promised protection of the Carmelites. The scapular is part of the religious habit and is a sign of Mary's protection. She is looked upon by Carmelites as their patron who protects the Order. As a flag is sacred and is respected so the scapular is a sign to all that Mary is the patron and mother of the Carmelites. The scapular also reminds us that the Carmelite way to God is through prayer and following in the footsteps of Mary.

There are different traditions about where the vision may have taken place either at Aylesford or at Cambridge. In 1951 some of the relics of St. Simon Stock were brought by the Archbishop of Bordeaux and are now at Aylesford in the appropriately named Relic Chapel.

The scapular is a sign of our confidence in Mary's care in life and in death. It is no magic charm but rather we turn to Mary in prayer aware of her motherly intercession. The scapular reminds us of the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary, as we wear the scapular, we too are clothed with her virtues seeking humble service of the people of God, looking for union with God and striving for eternal salvation.

There is no formal prayer attached to the scapular but rather it is like putting on the mantle of Our Lady and following her as she followed the Lord. She was the first disciple of Jesus and she led us along the path to meet her Son. The scapular like all devotion to Our Lady should lead us closer to Jesus. However, the first Prior of Aylesford, Fr. Malachy Lynch, suggested that every morning the short prayer "*Use Me Today*" should be recited.

There is a hymn to Our Lady of Mt. Carmel that by tradition was written by St. Simon Stock. It is still sung by Carmelites around the world. It is called *t*(Flower of Carmel). Normally only the first two verses are sung but over the years it was adapted for singing in the liturgy on solemn occasions.

Pope St. John Paul II and Archbishop Oscar Romero, the martyred Archbishop of El Salvador, both wore the scapular. There is even a martyr for the scapular: Blessed Isidore Bakanja (1887 – 1909) from Zaire who was beaten and left to die for refusing to take off the scapular. He also encouraged his fellow workers, who lived a slave-like existence, to become Christians. He certainly took the message of the scapular to heart.

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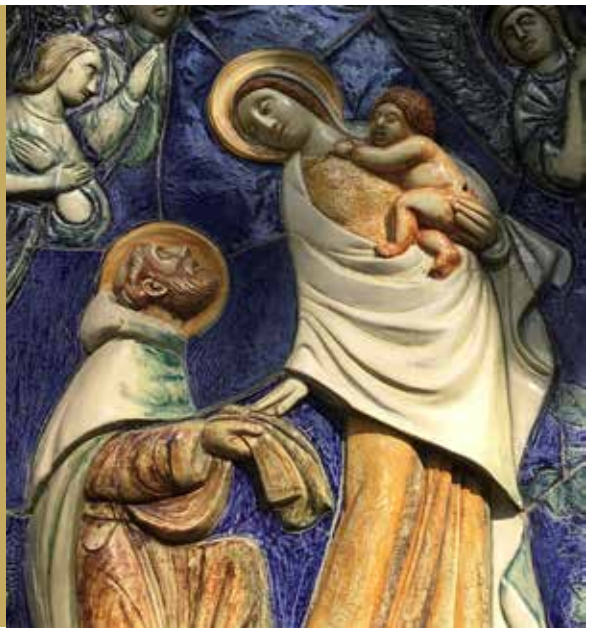
Flos Carmeli

Flower of Carmel,
Tall vine, blossom laden,
Splendour of heaven,
Child-bearing, yet maiden,
None equals thee.

Mother so tender,
Who no man didst know,
On Carmel's children
Thy favour bestow,
Star of the Sea.



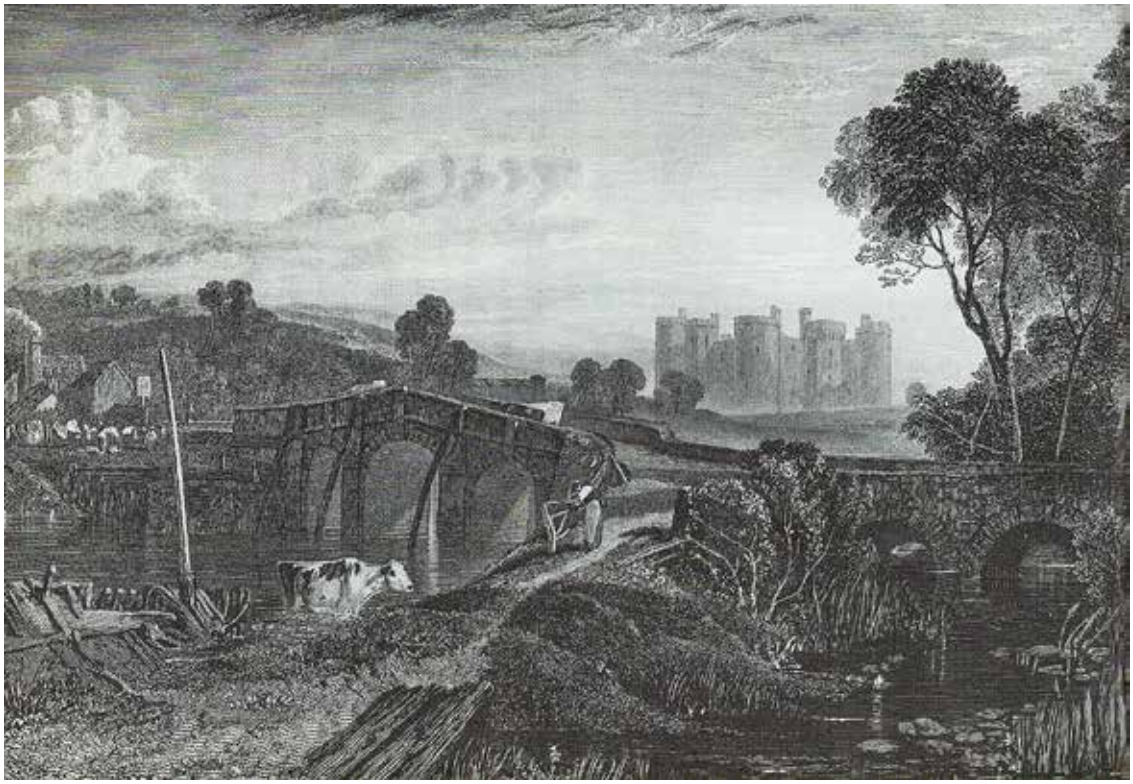
The Vision of St. Simon Stock by Adam Kossowski in The Friars, Aylesford

Spanning the Gap – Further notes on medieval bridges

Brendan Chester-Kadwell

Following the History Group meeting on the 30th March here are some further thoughts on medieval bridge-building across wide river valleys or estuaries in the river Rother catchment area. There are many examples in lowland England of medieval bridges spanning river channels, but the task was clearly much more challenging in the lower reaches of rivers where the width of the flood plain that needed to be crossed is greater. Often, as at Newenden, there were a number of channels in addition to that of the main river and the standard procedure was to build a causeway between the channels and span the channels with a bridging arch. These were typically of wood initialy, but usually replaced later by with stone. A rather grand example of this method, situated at St. Ives in Huntingdonshire across the Great Ouse, was illustrated at our meeting. However, there is also a fifteenth-century 'causeway and span' bridge between Burnham Market and Burnham Overy in Norfolk – hardly a stone's throw from the Carmelite friary at Burnham Norton, which is much more on the scale of the ones found along the Rother.

These river crossings were complicated engineering projects and established principles that continued to be used when existing crossings were up-dated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (although in modified form). The importance of timber and hurdles for maintaining the crossing at Bodiam in the thirteenth-century is mentioned by Helen Clarke (Aldridge & Clarke 2001 p. 20)*. Maintaining the causeways would have been as important as the maintenance of the spanning arches over the channels. Beach material (shingle) could be used as well as earth for the core of the causeways, but this needed to be protected from the action of the water. A facing of faggots, and possibly hurdles, were held in place by a framework of timber to achieve this. Very little is known about the timber spans themselves, but clearly thought must have been given to the movement of shipping. Its possible that in places there were lift bridges such as is found in the Netherlands (certainly the technology was known in the Middle Ages). The closest survival in the area of a medieval crossing in its original form is the



Bodiam Bridge 1817

crossing at Robertsbridge. A typical causeway and span structure, originally spanning up to six channels besides the main course of the Rother. The sites of four of these subsidiary bridges remain, but not in their original form.

More is known about post-medieval causeway construction and the charming print of Bodiam bridge dated 1817 shows that the causeway here has been partly replaced by an arched structure (most probably brick) rather as at St. Ives, but less ambitious. That stretch of the A28 which crosses the Hexden Channel between Newenden and Rolvenden is built on top of a causeway that was probably constructed sometime between 1600 and 1630. It appears on the map of the Upper Levels of about 1630** but not as a routeway on Symonson's map of Kent, 1596. Although most likely the causeway was originally constructed as part of an early seventeenth-century scheme to improve water control in the Hexden Channel, its usefulness as a road crossing must have commended it as well.

*Aldridge, N. & Clarke, H. 2001 In search of Bodiam bridge, RMRT *Irregular* 18, 13–23 Romney Marsh Research Trust (**RMRT Archive online**)

**The Upper Levels and Wittersham levels from Bodiam Bridge to Scots Float Sluice c. 1630 [East Sussex Record Office ACC2806 1/9/2]

Upcoming Events - Dates for the diaries!

Having successfully passed the first key date in the road map out of lockdown, we have put some dates together for the late spring/early summer. Please note these dates are subject to change should the government deem it necessary to alter their lockdown easing plans.

Saturday May 29 – Walk around Lossenham Farm at 10am

Join us for a morning walk to Castle Toll and along the banks of the Hexden as we talk about the landscape through time and our ambitions for the project.

There is projected to be a cap on the number of people that can meet on this date so please sign-up to this event by emailing annie.partridge@canterburytrust.co.uk Do let Annie know if you plan to bring partners or children so we can manage numbers. If there is a large response we will repeat the walk so everyone has the chance to attend.

Details:
Parking will be available at the farm. The ground is uneven and unpaved in places. Please bring suitable footwear and clothing for the weather. The walk is expected to take no more than two hours with a possibility of heading to the pub for lunch after.

Monday June 21 to Sunday June 27 – Excavation

We have set a date for our first excavation at Lossenham! There will further dates as the year progresses so don't worry if you can't make this one.
If you want to express interest in some or all of the days, please email annie.partridge@canterburytrust.co.uk

Details:
You do not need experience to participate, and we will provide all tools, equipment, and training. We will release details of open days and visiting hours closer to the time.