

THE HERMIT OF TURVEY BRIDGE

I first became aware of the existence of this historic character earlier this year when reading an essay by Dorothy Owen on Bedfordshire Chapelmans. This short monograph is to put on record information so far obtained and some conjecture particularly with regard to Turvey Bridge.

We know the name of the Hermit 'John Cumber' and that he lived on or near Turvey Bridge in 1405 and 1407, from indulgences given by in the Ely Episcopal Record for that period. There is also a reference in the book "Hermits and Anchorites of England" by R.M. Clay

Both hermits and anchorites were of some standing in medieval times and appointments to such positions were made by the church. In the case of hermits applicants from a Monastic House could obtain permission from the Abbot or Head of the House but in all other cases permission from the Bishop was necessary. A hermit was free to move about, cultivate land for his own sustenance and might have the job of keeping a bridge in repair which might have been the case of John Cumber. He may have lived in a hermitage or in part of a dwelling.* A large part of his time would be spent on his devotions and he would live mainly from gifts from parsons by and monies from the church.

An anchorite would live within four walls continuously which could be a cell or cave and would only leave the abode in case of severe illness. An anchorite could only be appointed by the Bishop and spend his time

* Probably, the chapel.

in devotions ~~and~~ and perhaps copying manuscripts. Considered a holy man or woman they would be consulted by visitors through a grill or window, it is likely they would develop ^{wise} a and saintly reputation.

It is difficult to know what Turney Bridge looked like in the early 15th C. There are earlier references to a bridge and it is likely to have been a pack horse bridge with a narrow foot where waggons and such like could have crossed. The area would have been subject to greater floods than the present day, the levels on the "Three Fykes" providing some idea the extent of flooding. The only reference I can find is for a much later period is contained in a letter from Mrs Langner Higgin to the Leeds Times in 1930. She quotes the following from the "Turney Abbey Book" a commonplace book kept by John Higgin who died in 1846,

" The old foot bridge in the Parish of Cold Brayfield was by custom immemorial (with the exception of one arch called the Abbots Arch) repaired at the joint charges of Cold Brayfield, Astwood, Hardmead Newton Blossamville and Hasenden in the county of Bucks. It consisted of 22 plank'd arches and two stone ones, which were so much damaged by the great flood in 1823 that the estimate to repair it was £100. The trustees of the Turnpike road through Turney agreed in the year 1828 in consequence of many accidents which had happened from it in high floods, to propose to the proprietors and occupants of the above named villages, that if ~~or~~ they would assist in the expence of widening the road, and building three large arches in addition to the old road bridge,

and allow the materials of the foot bridge for that purpose, all further obligations to repair it should be stopped by taking it quite away. This was done the same year, with the exception of one arch, in lieu of which the writer gave and carted 100 loads of stone from his pits in Baker's Chase, and the arch is left as a memorial and picturesque object from the road - J.H."

There is mention of a chapel in the book by R.M. Clay and in the indulgences ⁱⁿ of the indulgences in the ~~the~~ Episcopal Record but a more direct reference is that in the "Account roll of the Seneschall or Bailif of Harrold Priory for the year 1401 appears an item for the tithes of the Chapel of £1 on the .2 acres of meadow land owned by Harrold Priory on the Cold Brayfield side of the bridge. The chapel could have been on the bridge or perhaps near the bridge over the stream, traditionally known as Ladybridge. Munday in: "Former days at Turvey" suggests the name may have come from a statue of 'Our Lady' which may have been on or near the chapel.

We know only the name of John Lumber who may however have known some of the Nuns in Harrold Priory. Some names given in B.N.R.S. VOL XVII for 1390/92

JOAN CAUSOM., JOAN TROKESFORDIS,
 ELIZABETH BEWMYS, LETICIA TUTTEBYRY.
 MARGARET WYKS, MARGARET NORTHWODE,
 EMMOTA DRAKLOWE, MARGARET CROUSTON,
 EMMOTA WENDYLBOROUGH.