

## Kirby Muxloe Local History Group. November 16th 2006

### Michael Ball on **The Fall and Rise of a Leicestershire Parish: Episodes in the History of Kirby Muxloe**".

The speaker, born in Ratby and raised in Kirby, has studied local history for forty years. He reminded us that the Heath or Rothley Brook rises near Bagworth and runs south-east and then north-east, flowing between Ratby and Kirby before falling into the Soar at Rothley. The smaller Kirby Brook, formerly called the Bourne Brook, rises near Desford crossroads and flows north-east past Kirby Castle to join the Heath Brook above Glenfield. To the north is the high, rough and formerly wooded Charnwood Forest; south of Kirby Brook was the wooded plain of Leicester Forest, lying on Boulder Clay [Mercian Mudstone]. Fertile alluvial grassland borders both brooks. Until 1906 Ratby south of Park Street lay in Kirby parish, which also included Leicester Forest East.

Between uninhabitable glaciations, nomadic Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age) hunter-gatherers frequented the open valley of the Heath Brook, with its game, fish and wildfowl. Since 1880 upwards of twenty flint-dressing 'platforms' have been found within an oval bounded by Newtown Unthank, Ratby (particularly near Bury Camp), Glenfield and the A47 road, but no permanent settlement is known. Michael showed Powerpoint images of local flint cores and small knives and microlithic scrapers dressed from them.

Archaeologists excavating the new A46 Western Bypass found that about 5000 years ago, since the last glaciation, Neolithic (New Stone Age) man settled on the scarp of Big Hill, which rises 40 m above the Castle. Pollen and snail species indicate the area was oak and lime woodland without nearby grassland – the Desford place name Lindridge means lime or linden trees. In the 1860s, traces of 4000 year old barrows were discovered in Burrough Wood, Ratby, with Beaker pottery, well-made tanged flint arrowheads, and flint scrapers based on copper originals. This culture, thought to have originated in Spain, introduced beer, brewed from farmed barley in distinctive pottery beakers. By the Late Bronze Age the settlement had become substantial. A 25 m diameter wall, entered from the south east, enclosed a cluster of round wood-framed huts with conical thatched roofs above low eaves. There was another settlement at the Elm Farm estate, Glenfield. Both lasted into the Iron Age. Reconstructed huts can be seen at Flag Fen, Peterborough.

The Romans invaded in 43AD. Professor Alan McWhirr showed the Big Hill settlement was so important that the Roman road from Leicester to the west took a substantial northward kink to serve it. The route was then [via modern Kirby village], the Golf Course 9<sup>th</sup> tee, Park House Farm and on to Mancetter [on Watling Street]. Itinerant potters worked in the woods, leaving pits dug for boulder clay, and kilns. Some were excavated at Manor Road, Desford, in the 1960s and others have been observed at Barn Park. They would dig a Q-shaped hollow in the earth, inserting a central clay pedestal up to ground level to support radial fired-clay kiln-bars, some of which survive, between pedestal and rim. They stacked the pots on the bars, closing the kiln with a hemispherical clay cover with smoke holes. Wood fuel went into the stoke-hole formed by the tail of the Q.

Jumping to the tenth century, after the invading Viking army had over-wintered at Repton one of its two parts garrisoned Leicester and settled Leicester Forest, which became known as Hereswode or the Army Forest. The rougher ground of Charnwood remained unsettled, being worked from adjoining villages. West Leicestershire's population was probably less than 9 persons per 1000 acres, East Leicestershire supporting more. Although Ratby Church's dedication to an early saint suggests Anglo-Saxons, like most Leicestershire village names 'Ratby' is Scandinavian. Unlike Ratby, there was no nucleated settlement at Kirby. The 1086 Domesday Survey included Roteburie (Ratby), Clanefelde (Glenfield), Brantestone (Braunstone), Cherebi and Carbi, which were probably two clusters of farmsteads of 11<sup>th</sup> century Norse origin, lasting to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. They probably lived in rectangular thatched stave houses constructed from close-spaced upright poles; half-timbering came later. This parish of two manors required two Domesday entries, which Michael thinks unique in all England. Cherebi, sited on a second-century settlement, was around modern Kirby Grange Farm north of Kirby. Its lands included the area around the later Whitwick Colliery Arms or Railway Inn, Ratby. The Heath Brook marked the boundary, Carbi itself being south of the later Castle. Michael thinks Muxloe represents Scandinavian 'Muckleslaw', Big Hill, differentiating Carbi from Cherebi. There is little to support the derivation Muckless. A 1636 map confusingly labelled Kirby *and* Kirkby as 'Kirkby Mallory'!

To the west was the Norman Hugh de Grentemaisnil's land, with Seilo's to south-west. It is recorded that in the Confessor's day [c1050] Ulf held lands from 'Groobie' to Desford and Lubbesthorpe, which must have included much of modern Kirby, although Ricolf held land of William Peveril in Carbi, south of the Castle as far as Beggars Lane. Values increased: Cherebi to 10s, Ricolf's Carbi 30s. Peveril's land

passed via Herent – Margaret la Zouch – Herle – Hastings. Some Kirby Grentemaisnil land went to Robert de Beaumont, Count of Meulan, thence to the Honor of the Earls of Leicester including John of Gaunt, reverting to the Crown after the fall of Earl Simon de Montfort.

In the early 13<sup>th</sup> century the Seilo land went, through several owners, to the Pakeman family. Having donated some to Garendon Abbey, they changed their minds. After long litigation this land finished up with John de Anestie – who lived in Kirby with no Anstey holdings. In 1220 Pakeman inherited a lot of land. His house 'Watecroft' dates from 1234 and after marriage with the Hastings was replaced from 1480 by the Castle. Michael thought the Pakemans had such wide interests that Watecroft might have been a more imposing affair than Appleby Magna of the same era; the moat enclosed the later Castle area and there was a formal gatehouse, hall, solar and detached kitchen but no chapel. Some of the Pakeman Kirby estate went to the Herles of Braunstone. Herle daughters did well by marrying Zouches. In 1398 the Pakeman lands went to the Villiers of Brooksby and in 1415 to Robert Hastings, then to Leonard and finally to William Lord Hastings in 1471. In 1476 Edward IV granted a licence to crenellate Bagworth (where little was done) and Kirby. Flower's lithographs show how dilapidated the Castle was by the 1880s.

Elms Farm used to be called Abbot's Croft, with Le Ireland to its north and Le Golet to north-east. The name comes from the gullet or throat-shaped parcel of land; Le Stocking west of Kirby was hose-shaped. Both fields can be confirmed from recorded acreages. A huge meadow stretched from Glenfield along the Heath Brook to two fields short of New Bridge on the Newtown Unthank road, which incidentally formed part of the coal pack-road from Swannington to Leicester via Bloods Hill, then known as Cope Gate. 'Roteby milne by Hathebrok' was shared by Kirby and Ratby. The Brook was straightened in 1720. Aerial photographs show previously it ran closer to the Railway Inn. Traces of the mill platform survived to its east until recently damaged by Severn-Trent Water, despite protests. Michael guessed at a timber vertical-shaft mill, the falling stream rotating the horizontal runner, the shaft driving a pair of stones on the floor above. Ratby also later boasted a timber post windmill, owned by the Kirby Cufflin family until 1912; it became a tourist attraction when ruinous.

Kirby was prosperous in mediaeval times, with lands owned by several of the best families in England – Michael surmised it might even have been a royal manor. But from plague and pestilence deliver us, O Lord! The Black Death came in June 1349 as two Gascon wine ships docked at Melcombe Regis in Weymouth Bay. By that October Leicester's St Leonard's parish recorded 380 deaths, Holy Cross 420 and St Margaret's more than 700 – as usual, worst by rivers. Within days the disease was carried up the road to Glenfield, where its victims included the vicar, and spread west up the Heath valley. Whittington village near Whitwick, and Osbaston near Market Bosworth were wiped out; Barlestone lost 60% of its people. The last great outbreak was not until 1399. In 1445 tax rebates recognised that in many parishes few contributors remained. Braunstone was granted 13% rebate, Glenfield 17% but Kirby 39%. It is thought there were 15 Kirby households in 1086, 40 before the Plague, only 15 in 1445, recovering to 27 by 1523, followed by another decline after more plague seasons.

There were shortages of labour to get in the harvests and for skilled craftsmen Kirby had to rely on Ratby. The 77 workmen who built the Castle came as follows: Outsiders 34 [including specialists such as dykers and brickmakers], Ratby 11, Groby 12, Glenfield, Botcheston, Newtown Linford and Kirby itself only 3 men apiece. Recovery was very slow and led to early piecemeal enclosure of the three mediaeval fields, from 1603. Local farmers prospered as graziers nevertheless, woodland having given way to good cattle and sheep pasture – according to the 18<sup>th</sup> century Robert Bakewell some of the finest in England. Early enclosures included Barn Park (with Lancastrian lands to its west), Brickman Hill, Braunstone Frith and Kirby Frith.

In the Reformation the Hastings remained Catholic. The crack-down after the 1605 Gunpowder Plot, revealed that Joan Hastings had gone so far in 1601-3 as to entertain the Plot priests. Walter Hastings was heavily fined, eclipsing the family.

Kirby became a pleasant rustic village with a good atmosphere. Unlike Ratby and others, it was little affected by industrialisation, although there were a few stockingers late-on. Population gradually rose in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but lagged well behind Glenfield (among the last local villages to be enclosed) and especially Anstey. Late in the century Kirby Fields attracted the wealthy and in 1901 the Kirby Muxloe Land Society developed Barwell and Church Roads. Only after 1921 did population really rise, with much building in the Leicester Forest East ward. There was further development around the village after the Second World War; by 1951 population was 2900, almost matching Glenfield. Thus the mediaeval fall was eventually followed by the rise of Kirby as a populous suburb of Leicester.

## **Kirby Muxloe Local History Group November 2006 meeting.**

### **Ms Sheila Mileham reported her progress on researching the personalities commemorated on the War Memorial.**

The Station Road War Memorial with its gateway was opened by Colonel Sir Robert Martin on 10 June 1923, the memorial tablet following in 1933. WW2 and Korean names had later to be added. Sheila's grandfather laid out the Garden of Remembrance. Her uncle Cyril John Russell is commemorated, killed aged 19, eighteen years before she was born. She decided to explore the relationships of the fallen while there are still some relatives in the village, and is compiling a file with a page or so for each name. Known relationships include two Cullen brothers killed in WW1, two Hutchinson cousins killed in WW2 and C J Russell, who was an AB in the WW1 Royal Naval Division, formed and equipped to utilise the excess of seamen over ships, and which acquitted itself so well on land.

WW1 has proved easier to research than WW2, for most were listed in the 1901 Census, while by WW2 the population was more mobile and the village was bigger, with the expansion of Kirby Fields, Gullet Lane and Leicester Forest East. The memorial committee relied on families putting names forward and the memorial was funded by local contributions, which may influence those commemorated. Surprisingly few served with the Leicestershire Regiment. The Parish Council has made itself responsible for maintenance of the memorial.

The Memorial has 38 names: 14 WW1 (12 being soldiers), 23 WW2, and 1 Korea. Sheila has accounted for most but would welcome help with the following, all except one from WW2:

J Baines. Pilot Officer, killed in action March 1941, buried Oadby. Only apparent Kirby connection is that he was the youngest son of a Kirby family.

Andre C Decraene. The name seems Belgian. The London Gazette in 1945 gave his address as 'Regrist', 1 Stafford Leys, LFE. Regrist sounds like a contraction of Reid & Sigrist's engineering company.

Frank Dickson, WW1, is shown as Frank Dixon on a plaque in the Church East window. Sheila has been unable to identify him, although a Frank Dixon enlisted in the Leicestershire Regt and was killed in Mesopotamia. An A J Dickson lived in Church Road in 1915.

R Lewis. A hundred such are recorded, one lived at 67 Hinckley Road LFE, killed Sidi Barrani.

K McCall. Died March 1945. No known Kirby connection. The 'Leicester Mercury' noted the death of Pilot Officer K McCall of Shanklin Drive, Leicester, who had married January 1945. But his sister married a Kirby Fields man.

B Morris. Was this Lt D J Morris, died 1944 of wounds sustained in Burma. Of 65 Hinckley Road LFE, next door to R Lewis?

Smith. There were three Smiths of WW2, none on the Church of England register. Were they Free Church? Its records are patchy following its wartime bombing. Are any of them related to the H W Smith killed in WW1? Philip A Smith of Braunstone Estate was killed North Africa. The Services had 621 R Smiths, none obviously connected with Kirby.

