

The Priory.

Nigel was a generous benefactor of lands and tithes; he seems to have died only a year or two after 1089 so it must have been just before this that he gave, "a certain site in Bramham wood which is called Headley, and all the ground to the hill at Oglethorpe,..." to the priory of Holy Trinity, York which had been founded by Ralph Pagnel (also known as Faynel and Paznel). Confirmation of this is to be found in the Pipe Rolls of Henry I. It was apparently a gift marking the marriage of Fossard's grand-daughter Agnes to Pagnel's son Alexander who also owed some feudal service to his father-in-law. As the fourth son by a second wife, he could probably consider this an advantageous match, although both families were now powerful and well-connected in England.

Alexander was also given some sort of interest in other lands in the Bramham area, exactly what is not clear. Some sources suggest that it was actually Agnes and Alexander who founded Headley. They certainly gave land and a mill in Bramham to Nostell priory, later also giving up twenty acres of land to these monks in lieu of unpaid tithes owed by Agnes' father Robert at his death but they did not found the priory.

At this time there were many 'private' religious foundations, of which Holy Trinity was one. Between 1100 and 1108 Ralph Pagnel gave the priory and its three crofts west of York to the French Benedictine abbey of Marmoutiers near Tours. These crofts were

almost certainly Healaugh, Headley and Bilborough. Black-robed. monks established a cell on part of the land at Headley, possibly as early as 1125, although only the site is mentioned before 1179.

Dedicated to St. Mary, the place soon attracted gifts: Ypolitus de Braam (also named as a possible founder) gave lands at Middleton (Ilkley) before 1135, whilst Adam Fitz-Peter of Firkin gave five acres of meadow between Byram and Birkin for the souls of himself and his wife Matilda. (Various dates between 1152 and 1192 are given for this, but it was confirmed by a descendant Peter de Middleton in 1290 when he quit-claimed all rights to "William the monk there".) The charter for Adam's gift was witnessed by seventeen people including Robert de Gaunt (a member of the Pagnel family by Ralph's first marriage) and Faulinus de Leeds, Master of the priory at Kirkstall. A papal bull of Alexander III in 1179 speaks of
".....cellulam de Hedleia cum omnibus pertinentiis suis."

Headley was probably used to produce food for Holy Trinity priory in York: there was a fish-pond and in 1254 the monks obtained permission to build and stock a coney (rabbit) warren, which was a great privilege as well, as an important source of food. . It could also have provided a place of rest or recovery for fellow monks, as the rules were not strict. When St, Robert felt persecuted at Knaresborough and fled to Headley he was so disgusted by the laxity he found there that he soon departed in search of a more severe discipline, (This was a common feature of religious houses at the time,) The labourers would almost certainly have been lay-brothers

rather than fully-fledged monks, who were usually from a higher social strata and seldom soiled their hands with manual work, The name 'grange' was often given to Headley later, this being, a reflection of its monastic associations.

Few people outside the church could read and write at this period and so it is not surprising to find the monks frequently featuring as parish clerks, witnesses to legal documents etc. As early as 1233, a Rogeri de Hedlay was mentioned in connection with a grant of land at Smaws. In 1363 one Adam de Hedeley was clerk at Branham which was in the possession of Nostell Priory, also a Benedictine house. Adam had previously been clerk at Newton Kyme from where he

had reported in 1359 that

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"...certain men had broken his close and houses at Newton Kyme, imprisoned him, brought him so imprisoned to Tolleston (Toulston) and detained him until he made fine of 20L, (£) for his deliverance, took away a boat of his worth 10L, (£), felled his trees at Bekhagh (Becca) and carried away these trees with his goods there and at Newton Kyme and consumed with cattle the shoots of his copse at Hedeleye and assaulted and imprisoned his men and. servants these misfortunes did not seem to have an adverse effect upon his advancement for he went on to become Rector of Bolton Percy in 1365 and then Vicar of Kippax, where he died in 1370. Adam's report demonstrates both the lawlessness of the area and the lack of esteem for the church which had already become prevalent.