

THE ORIGIN AND USE

of

THE ROYSTON CAVE

A Report by Joseph Beldam, 1858



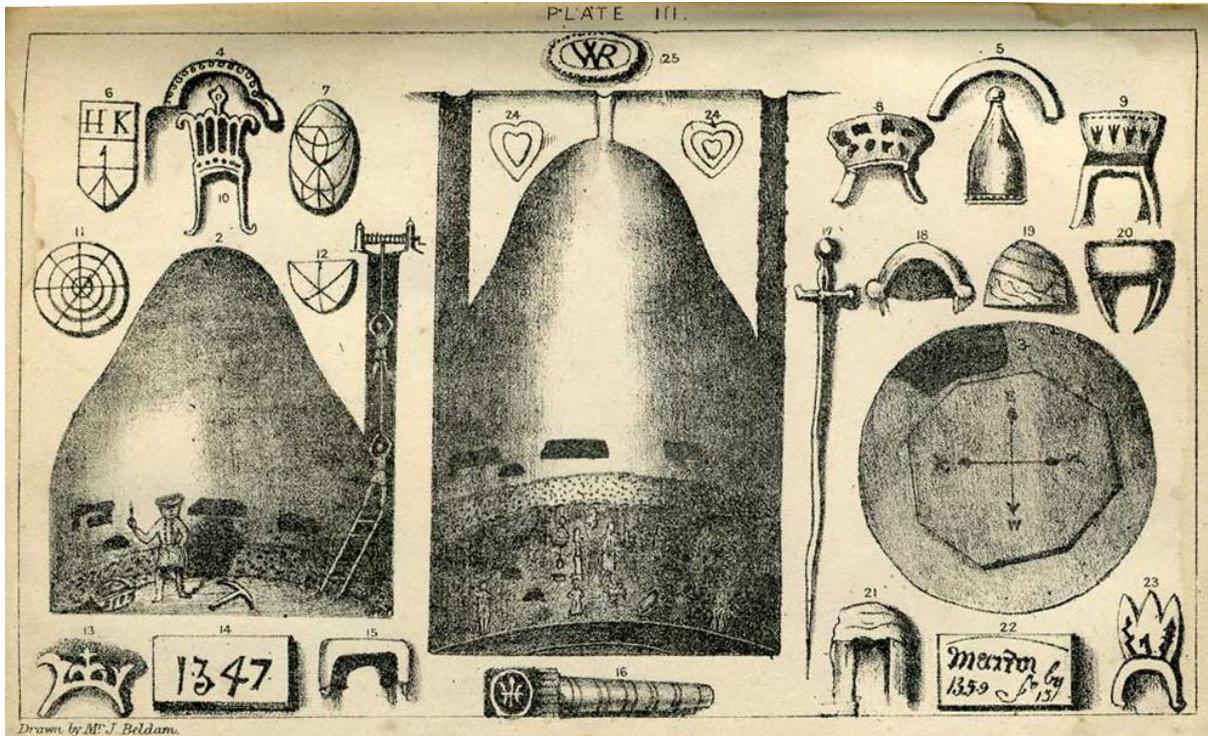
Edited by Jeremy Lander RIBA SCA AABC

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Editor's Preface



One of Joseph Beldam's drawings of Royston cave

The 6th of June 2016 marks the 150th anniversary of the death of Joseph Beldam. An exceptionally modest man, few people know Beldam's name though he was one of the principal members of that great radical movement, The Anti-Slavery Society. He was, first and foremost, a lawyer who went on to use his legal skills to bolster the abolitionist cause. He was also an 'antiquarian', the term used in those days to describe a gentleman archaeologist. He lived in the small market town of Royston on the border between Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire and became fascinated by the extraordinary beehive-shaped man-made cave that lay beneath the street just a few hundred yards from his house in Melbourn Street. With his friend and fellow antiquarian Edmund Nunn he carried out a thorough study of its mysterious carvings and presented a report on the cave and its origins to the Royal Society of Antiquaries in the 1860s. The transcript of his report forms the body of this paper.

JOSEPH BELDAM

Joseph Beldam was born in 1795 at Shepreth Hall, just a few miles north of Royston. He was the son of William Beldam and Marianne (née Woodham) and at some point the Beldam family moved into

the old vicarage opposite the Parish Church in Royston¹. Joseph trained as a lawyer and studied at Peterhouse in Cambridge, graduating in October 1818. Just before his graduation he entered the Middle Temple as a barrister and was called to the Bar in 1825, working the Norfolk Circuit briefly before retiring owing to his poor health. He then established a practice at the Old Palace Court in Fish Hill in Royston but resigned his practice shortly afterwards so that he could devote his time to the work he became best known for, the abolition of slavery.

His open letter to Lord Dacre in 1827 first brought Beldam to the attention of the anti-slavery movement. He was contacted by Zachary Macaulay, former manager of slaves on a Jamaican sugar plantation and the first editor of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*². Beldam followed Macaulay as editor of the Reporter and most of the Anti-Slavery Society's publications. After the passing of the Emancipation Act in 1833 his legal expertise allowed him to become the legal counsel for the society, acting as watchdog over the compromise measures which had been brought in by nervous legislators to end slavery gradually. The idea was that freed slaves would first become apprentices to their masters but this was subject to many abuses. Thanks to Beldam's work Parliament was forced to end the apprenticeship system in 1838, three years earlier than had been planned.

After the total abolition of slavery in the British colonies Beldam became involved in international efforts to end slavery everywhere. He joined the 'Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade and for the Civilisation of Africa', whose president was Prince Albert. He edited the proceedings of the Society's first general meeting in June 1840, a society that was decimated by the doomed Niger expedition of 1841³.

In later life he turned to antiquarian pursuits, investigating, with the curator of the Royston Museum (his friend Edmund Nunn), the fascinating Cave that was something of a tourist attraction just a few yards from his Banyers home in Melbourn Street. He was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1856 for his historical and archaeological researches. He died in Royston in 1866 and is buried in the family vault in the Parish Church.

Because he was a modest man, and because most of his anti-slavery publications were anonymous, his contribution to the anti-slavery movement was not properly recognised until the middle of the twentieth century when his papers were presented to the National Library of Jamaica. He turned down two appointments offered by the Colonial Office and made no attempt to enter politics.

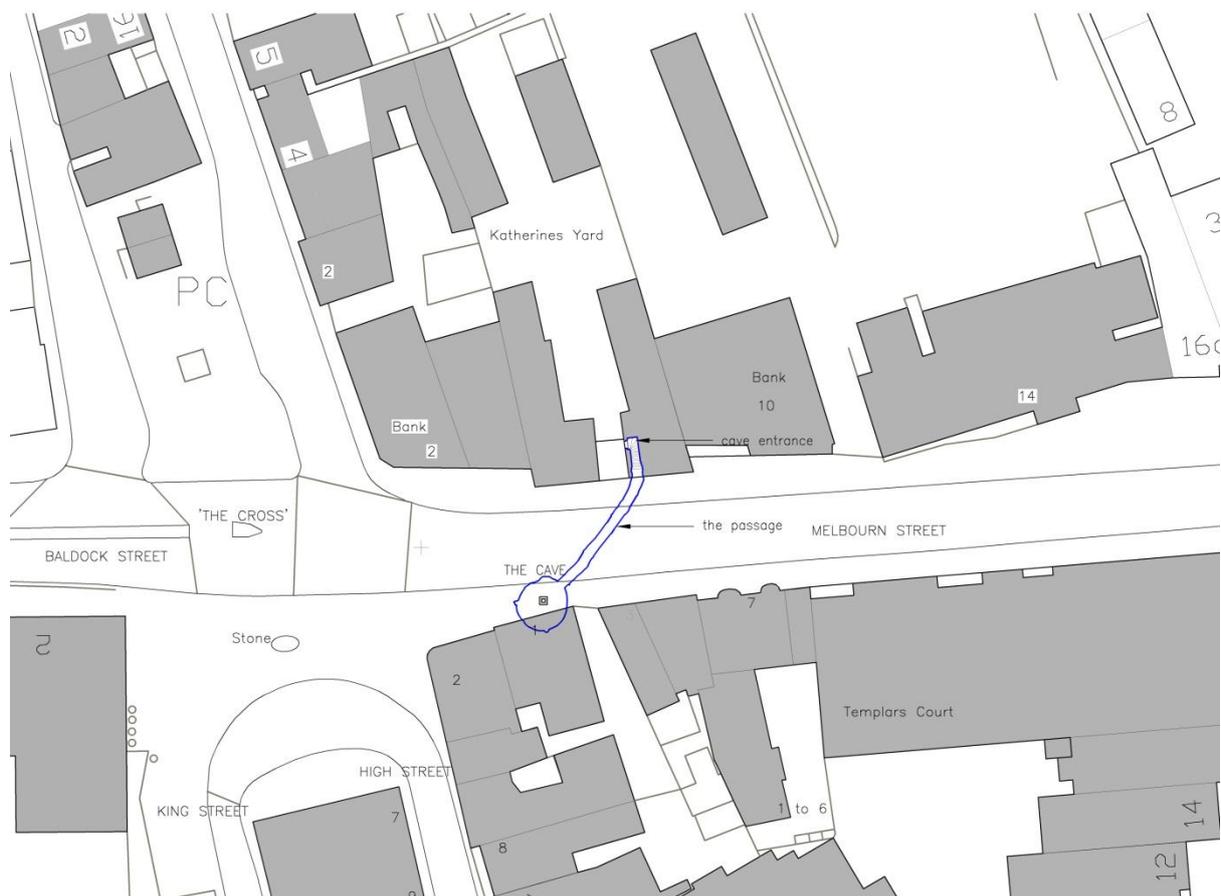
His paper on Royston cave was first published in 1858 by Beldam's friend John Warren, Editor of the local newspaper 'The Royston Crow'. Warren published at least five editions, the third of which is the version used here although they were all very similar. I have corrected some obvious typographical errors and to ease the flow I have removed several hundred commas and semi-colons which the Victorians used rather more than we do today. I have also substituted some modern

¹ The 'Banyers', now a hotel, became the home of the Beldam family after it was sold by the Banyer family (Edward Banyer was Vicar of Royston 1739-1752). It was re-fronted in the early 19th century in classical style. It is likely that Joseph Beldam wrote many of the tracts published by the Society for the Abolition of Slavery here.

² Under Macaulay, and subsequent editors such as Beldam, *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, a monthly publication, campaigned vigorously for the abolition of slavery throughout the world.

³ 150 Europeans set out on the expedition in specially built ships, designed to bring Christianity and emancipation to the African interior. Within a few weeks 42 had died from malarial and other fevers. In the face of such high mortality the naval commanders called the expedition off and withdrew to the island of Fernando Po.

spellings and added footnotes where I thought that some further explanation might help the reader and I have standardised the various spellings of Lady Roysia/Rosia. Apart from that it is Joseph Beldam's report in full. It still reads as the most authoritative account of the cave, and Beldam goes through the various theories for the cave's existence and its use methodically, weighing each of them calmly and objectively as any good historian should, using his prodigious knowledge to gently persuade the reader of their likeliness or otherwise. Like many scholars of the day he was a gentleman amateur and made mistakes, the further excavation of the cave that he and his friend Edmund Nunn made would probably have caused modern archaeologists consternation, and some important clues were almost certainly missed or lost⁴. I can't help but wonder what he would have made of the more recent theories involving the secretive medieval sect, the Knights Templar, or the cave being located on intersecting ley-lines.



The Cave and its location in the centre of Royston

⁴ They also excavated the Iron Age long barrows on Therfield Heath together.

INTRODUCTION

To give some context to Beldam's report it may help to give some background with a short description of Royston and its history. Most people who pass through the town think of it as a somewhat dull dormitory town with little of interest, but there is more to the town than meets the eye. The cave is not Royston's only claim to fame; its heath was an Iron Age burial site and, in the early 1600s, the town became a Royal retreat for James I. The cave itself is an archaeological site of regional, if not national, significance and, in a more accessible location, with better marketing opportunities, would probably be as well-known as Walsingham or Grime's Graves.

THE TOWN OF ROYSTON

Now a busy commuter town of around 16,000 inhabitants Royston is situated at the northernmost tip of Hertfordshire astride the Greenwich Meridian and on the north facing slopes of the Hertfordshire Chalk Downs, an outcrop of the Chiltern Hills. On these chalk hills to the west of the town is Royston Heath (properly known as Therfield Heath), a wonderful open space and site of special scientific interest (SSSI) where Neolithic barrows are still visible and rare Pulsatilla flowers grow. The heath was once also home to the so-called 'Royston Crow', a black and white hooded crow that was a common winter visitor to southern England, especially the fields around Royston where the sheep grazing provided carcasses on which the birds could feed. The local newspaper, founded in 1855 by John Warren (the publisher of Beldam's lecture) is called *The Royston Crow* and the bird is also featured on the crest of the North Hertfordshire District Council. The Heath has existed as a beautiful stretch of unspoiled chalk grassland for centuries and attracted the newly-crowned King James I here to indulge in his favourite sport of hunting. Some of the earliest horse-racing in England was organised on the heath by James I before his son Charles I relocated his stable to nearby Newmarket⁵. In an interesting twist a huge Parliamentary Army gathered on Royston Heath in 1647 while Charles I was held prisoner in Newmarket before being taken to the London and executed two years later.

Royston began as a settlement around the intersection of two important routes: Ermine Street, the Roman Road that runs northward from London to York, and the Icknield Way, a prehistoric field track that runs east - west along the line of chalk hills that stretch from the Dorset coast into East Anglia⁶. In common with many important crossroads, a wayside cross was erected here in early medieval times and credit for this is sometimes given to a 12th century noble-woman named Lady Roysia. A small boulder of Red Millstone Grit⁷ with a mortise hole in the top was discovered some years ago and is believed to be the base of a timber cross long since lost. It may be that *Roysia's Stone*, as it was called, provided the name 'Royston', although a contraction of *Roysia's Town* is

⁵ Racehorses are still trained on the Heath.

⁶ Sometimes called the 'oldest road in Britain', rather than being one roadway the Icknield Way was in reality a series of tracks along a broad corridor between the low-lying land below the chalk escarpment and the dense woodland on the clay 'dip' slope above; each route was used according to its condition, weather and season.

⁷ Probably an 'erratic' brought south during the last ice age and left stranded by melting ice.

equally likely. The stone is now positioned on a new base at the cross roads which is simply known to the local inhabitants as the 'The Cross'.

To the south east of the Cross the remains of what was a Priory of Austin Canons, dedicated to St John Baptist and St Thomas the Martyr, forms the Parish Church. The Priory was founded by Ralph de Rochester with seven canons around 1184. Richard I granted the Priory the right to hold a market, a common way for monasteries to raise funds. The market continues today on Market Hill, on the south side of the town, but originally it was held at The Cross.



Roysia's stone at the Cross

THE DISCOVERY OF THE CAVE

A Butter Market existed in late medieval times at The Cross. Butter Markets, often called *Buttercrosses* because they tended to be erected at busy intersections, were common in medieval Britain. They were small open-sided buildings where farmers' wives gathered behind a ring of tables to sell their butter, eggs, milk and cheese. We know from a survey carried out by Parliamentary Commissioners in 1649 that Royston's Butter Market was a small rectangular building and it may have looked like the one at Witney in Oxfordshire illustrated below. It may even have incorporated a small prison cell as part of a first floor structure. In 1742, nearly a century after the commissioners had drawn up their survey, workers doing some minor building work in the butter market found a mill stone in the floor. Dropping a line down the central hole seemed to suggest the stone was concealing a very deep hole beneath it and this was confirmed when the stone was dragged away revealing a narrow vertical shaft descending into the chalk. A boy was carefully lowered down some 20 feet or so and finding down himself on top of piles of rubbish he could look back up and see the top of the cave's dome. The workers, probably thinking they might find buried treasure, set about removing the considerable amount of debris the cave contained and its full extent, complete with its mysterious carvings, was revealed. Understandably there was a great deal of excitement and it was

not long before the celebrated early antiquarian William Stukeley⁸ visited. News of the cave's discovery spread and it quickly became a great attraction. Unfortunately in these unregulated times a great deal of damage was done to the archaeological evidence, nothing of the spoil was examined and graffiti began to be carved into the precious reliefs, a problem that continued until quite recently, as a result much of the carving you see today is of the 'Bill was here' variety.



Example of a Buttercross at Witney Oxfordshire

It is interesting to speculate about the decision taken to build the Butter Market right on top of the cave's entrance. Was it an accident, built long after the cave had been filled in and without the builders knowing it was there? Unlikely, since butter markets were going out of style by the early 1500s when surely the location of the cave was still known. Was it deliberately built to incorporate an entrance to the cave while it was still in use, as a hermitage or whatever else it may have been? This is possible, though the evidently religious use was hardly compatible with a busy market stall. The 'secret door' scenario is appealing, we can imagine the cheeses being hastily rearranged on top of the entrance door after the visitors had vanished inside, or after they popped up and disappeared into the crowd, but on closer consideration this is slightly ludicrous idea; how long could a secret like this have been maintained in the middle of a small market town? Perhaps the cave had already become redundant and it was thought that its constant cool temperature could be used to keep dairy products fresh? Perhaps this did happen for a while but it must have been impractical - how could goods have been taken up and down such a narrow shaft? The simplest, and therefore likeliest, scenario is that the cave was sealed up and the butter market built on top to use the valuable space and to deliberately conceal the redundant cave below. Whichever was the case, out of plain sight the cave was completely forgotten within a generation or two.

⁸ *William Stukeley (1687 -1765) was an Anglican clergyman who pioneered the archaeological investigation of Stonehenge and Avebury. Friends with Isaac Newton, Stukeley was also involved with Freemasonry and, despite his Anglican faith, was ordained a "druid". He is remembered as probably the most important of the early forerunners of the discipline of archaeology.*

The rediscovery of the cave led to fevered speculation as to its origin and use, and this has continued on and off ever since. It was conjectured that the cave had been created for use as an oratory by Lady Roysia in the 12th century while others believed it to be of earlier, Saxon, or even Roman, origin. More recently some historians have developed a theory that it was a hiding place created by the Knights Templar who had a base in the nearby town of Baldock, though why the knights would have had a hiding place in the middle of a rival town, underneath a busy crossroads and only accessible by dropping vertically through a tiny hole, is anyone's guess. There is no doubt from the carvings that in mediaeval times it was used for religious purposes and evidence that at least one hermit lived in Royston up until the 16th century has led to the more plausible idea that it was used as a hermitage.

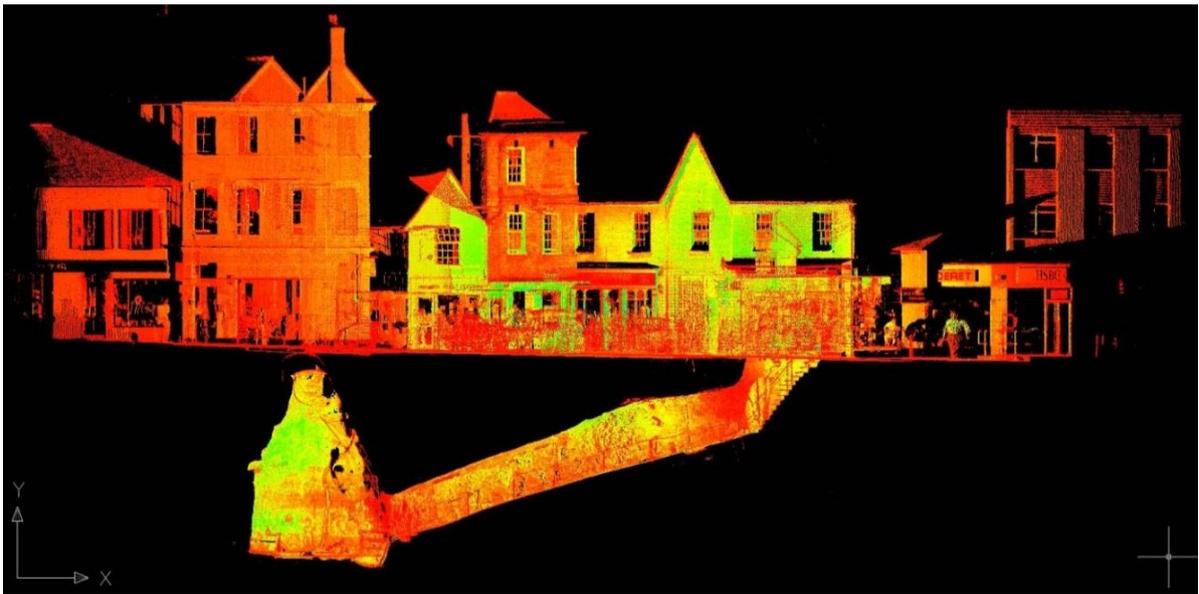


Beldam's wonderful depiction of the boy being lowered down the entry shaft and a man with candle standing on the debris that filled the bottom of the cave

In 1790 a sloping passage was cut down to the cave through the chalk and this has provided access for its many curious visitors ever since. It is a cylindrical chamber with a domed top like an old fashioned beehive, about 8.5m deep and 5m in diameter at the bottom. The walls of the cave are covered in crudely sculptured images in low relief, probably dating from the 12th and 14th centuries. They include St. Christopher, St. Katherine, the Cross of St. Helena, the Holy Family and the conversion of St. Paul. There appears to have been an upper floor inserted at one time, the walls having been cut back to receive the timbers. The two original openings, the access shaft discovered under the butter market with tiny footholds still visible, and a chimney, probably cut later to ventilate a fire for a cold hermit, can still be seen on either side of the central dome. The top of the dome was sliced off when Melbourn Street was resurfaced in the early 20th century and a small ventilated grating put in the pavement above. The public entrance to the cave is still via the 1790 passage and the door is located in the carriage entrance between the two shops on the north side of Melbourn Street.



The ventilated grating to the top of the chamber, with the cave's public entrance in the background



Topographical section through the cave and its 1790 access passage, looking north with the houses and shops of Melbourn Street above [Image: Tobit Curteis Associates, 2016]

KING JAMES I

Royston was a staging post for coaches travelling on Ermine Street between London and the North of England. The town contained numerous coaching inns with stabling for changing horses. 'The Bull' at the top of the High Street has existed since 1520 and gives an idea of what these inns must have been like. Two such inns, just north of the Cross, were converted by James I for use as his hunting lodge in 1604. He had passed through Royston the previous year, on his way down from Edinburgh to London in the month following his accession. He lodged briefly at the Priory, now a private home⁹, and learned of the excellent opportunities the nearby heath would provide for his favourite sport of hunting.

He returned shortly after his coronation and went about establishing a country retreat for himself and his courtiers. He first hired the Priory and then in 1604 began to convert 'The Cock' and 'The Greyhound' Inns into his own residence, completing the work in 1607. He spent nearly £4,000 on building work at Royston between 1603 and 1611, and such was the volume of construction that in 1610 the Hertfordshire magistrates complained of the inconvenience of carting 500 loads of building material to Royston in the harvest season.

The king visited Royston frequently. It was a convenient day's coach journey from London along Ermine Street and also close to Cambridge, the University town where James like to spend some of his time and where scholars worked on part of his new bible translation. In 1617 he was so 'exceedingly well pleased with the air of these parts' that his courtiers suspected he would 'have a more Royston life than ever he had.'¹⁰ He protected the game within a radius of 14 miles, a huge area, and appointed numerous keepers to guard against poachers and 'persons of base condition', as well as the scholars of Cambridge, who had 'so decaied' the country of its stock of pheasants and partridges. He appointed a master of the harriers, three principal huntsmen and four huntsmen in liveries, forced farmers to take down the high fences between their fields and issued proclamations against 'audacious and irregular persons' with the confidence that his 'well-affected subjects' would willingly give up 'their own delight for our desport as a special means of the preservation of our health'¹¹. To ensure his journey from London was as quick and smooth as possible great care was taken in the upkeep of the road through the chalk hills south of the town, now the A10.

All that remains of the King's Lodgings today is a building in Kneesworth Street known as the Palace with a red brick street front and two large chimneys. Timber-framed buildings south of the Palace were converted into guard-chambers and other officers' lodgings and the grounds contained his cock-pit and a large close between the gardens and the lane, now called Dog-Kennel Lane, where his hunting dogs were kept.

Charles I visited Royston less frequently than his father, but occasionally stayed there on the way to or from Newmarket. On his journey to York in 1642 he stayed at Royston while continuing negotiations with Parliament. He passed through Royston on his way to Newark in 1646 where he

⁹ *It was Robert Chester who played host to the new king in 1603 and was knighted for his trouble the following year. His family had obtained the residential part of the Augustinian Priory after the dissolution while the townspeople had purchased the Chancel to serve as their parish church. The Priory still exists as a private residence today, south of the church and accessed from Fish Hill.*

¹⁰ *As quoted in Alfred Kingston's 'The History of Royston' 1906*

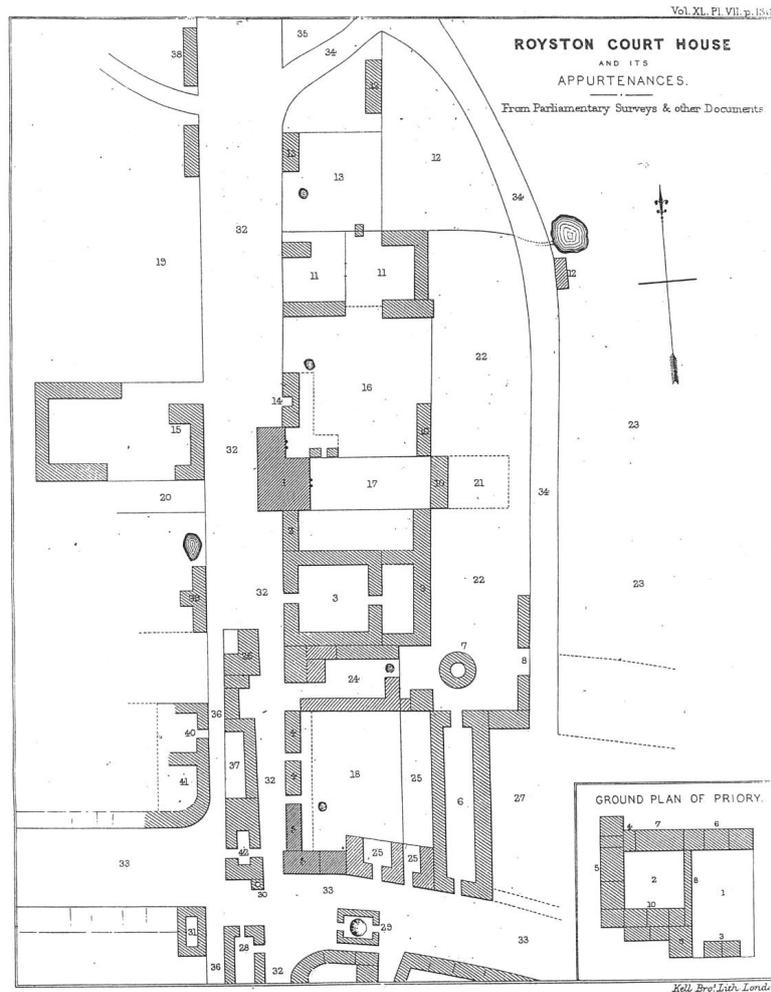
¹¹ *Ibid*

had agreed to surrender to the besieging Scottish army, returning through Royston in June the following year as a prisoner of the Parliamentary army. The townspeople do not appear to have been enthusiastic supporters of the royal cause but his execution in January 1649 roused them to assault a Parliamentarian recruiting party visiting Royston fair, killing many of them. The same year the King's buildings in Royston were seized by Parliament along with the other possessions of the Crown. Most of the buildings had already fallen into disrepair but the commissioners who surveyed them recommended they should be turned into tenements rather than be demolished and they were all eventually sold off.



The remains of James I's palace today on Kneesworth Street

A reproduction of the Parliamentary Survey is shown below taken from Alfred Kingston's book *A History of Royston*. At the bottom of the plan the small rectangular building with circle inside it (29) is the old Butter Market just to the east of The Cross and right above the cave. The circle might be the cave; it is in the exact same position but surely unknown when the survey was carried out, so possibly added in by Kingston; or it could be the Roysia Stone which would have been appropriate for a market cross but less than convenient for the Butter sellers. Beldam refers to Stukeley knowing that the stone was on the 'opposite corner' to its original position and this would place it in this location. Did the closers-up of the cave first cap the hole with a millstone, found during the rediscovery in 1742, and then set the Roysia Stone on top? This would have made a fine Market Cross-come-butter market and when the stone became inconvenient, as it clearly has done from time to time, it got moved. This would have made the rediscovery of the well-concealed cave more likely.



King James' Palace quarters in the early 17th century- from Alfred Kingston, A History of Royston

(For larger version and key see Appendix 3)

THE USE OF THE CAVE

While refraining from any firm conclusion Beldam appears to favour the idea of the cave being used as a hermitage, at least for a period. This is a theory that is eminently plausible; from the 12th to the 16th centuries it was very common practice for religious men and women, respectively known as anchorites and anchoresses, to be 'enclosed', often involving them being literally walled-up in a cell, so that they could spend the rest of their lives in prayer and contemplation, shut off from the outside world. An anchorite's cell was known as an Anchorhold, and up until the Reformation these were present in almost every town and village in the country. Although often consisting of a small chapel built on the side of a church, they could also be a separate cell in the middle of a settlement, or even in a handy cave. Because the practice involved the payment for, or at the very least the subsidizing of, prayer and chanting¹² to grant time off in Purgatory for the payee, it was denounced during the Reformation, like other indulgences, and Anchorholds were torn down in their

¹² *Why they were often called Chantryes*

hundreds, possibly thousands. From our modern perspective the willingness of people to be shut up for many years, often for the rest of their lives, is almost impossible to imagine and we have simply erased the idea from our collective memory. The destruction of almost every Anchorhold in the mid-1500s, and where they remained alongside churches their renaming as 'Vestries' or 'Sacristies', also meant that, with the visual and literal evidence gone, the gap in our understanding was made virtually complete. Further research on this subject is included as an appendix with more explanation of how this practice worked and how commonplace it was. This should help to demonstrate how Royston cave could have easily been just such an Anchorhold, with one or more anchorites at a time being lowered through the tiny hole in the road into the darkness to spend the rest of their lives there praying for the departed souls of their benefactor's relatives, carving religious imagery into the chalk. After a lifetime of prayer and penance finally the anchorite would die and be hauled out, or would fall into the grave they had prepared for themselves at the bottom of the chamber.

The evidence for a timber platform, which would have made a floor to live and sleep on, and the flue cut through the chalk on the opposite side of the entrance shaft allowing any inhabitants to have warmth from a fire, also both correlate perfectly with the idea of an Anchorhold, as does the presence of the several recesses in the chalk which could have been used for storing food and a few possessions. And what better activity for a bored anchorite or anchoress than carving into the soft chalk depictions of various saints, kings, queens and other legendary characters? The crudeness of the images fits perfectly with the carvings being created by simple people, devout but uneducated, as most anchorites would have been, and, as a cave, the location would have been seen as ideal; many anchorites modelled themselves on the Desert Fathers of the early Christian era, monks who lived in caves in the Egyptian desert around the third century AD, the most well-known being St Anthony the Great.

An archaeologist who subscribes to the hermitage theory, and tries to debunk the idea of the cave being a hiding place for the Knights Templar, is Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews. The Templar theory is a fairly recent one but it has been established in most visitors' imaginations by the information video and other literature that is available. The theory causes great fascination and of course does no harm to the cave as a tourist attraction, especially in the wake of the *Da Vinci Code* and the like. Fitzpatrick-Matthews writes on his website *Bad Archaeology*:

"What we can deduce about the material found during the initial exploration of the Cave suggests that the fills date from the late sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, not the Middle Ages. This seems reasonable and fits with documentary evidence that suggests that the Cave was occupied by a hermit c 1506 and was purchased with the Manor by Robert Chester¹³ in 1540, after which we hear no more about it. Indeed, the same Robert Chester, who died in 1574, "*buylded up in the myddest of Icknell Streate... a fayer [fair?] House or Crosse... for a clockhowse and a Pryson Howse*", apparently above the site of the cave¹⁴. This all sounds thoroughly consistent with a hermitage that did not survive the Dissolution of the Augustinian Priory in Royston and was forgotten by the end of the sixteenth century... I suspect [the cave] originated as a chalk quarry close to an important crossroads before or around the time that the town of Royston began to develop late in the twelfth

¹³ *The beneficiary of the dissolved Priory and whose son entertained James I in 1603*

¹⁴ *See figure 2*

century. A hermit attached to the Augustinian Priory took up residence, perhaps as late as the late fifteenth century; in 1540 the Priory was dissolved and there were no more hermits in Royston. The cave filled up with soil and rubbish (perhaps an attempt was made to cover over the Popish images in the seventeenth century) and its existence was forgotten until one day in August 1742..."¹⁵

One part of this analysis that could be queried is the timing of the covering up of the 'popish' images. It is more likely that the cave was filled in with reformationary zeal in in the mid-1500s thus *protecting* the images from the far more destructive iconoclasm of Oliver Cromwell's men in the 1640s¹⁶. This region was the main stamping ground of prime iconoclast William 'Basher' Dowsing; as Cromwell's 'Commissioner for the Destruction of Monuments of Idolatry and Superstition' he would not have missed such an opportunity. It would also explain why the cave was apparently unknown to James I and his courtiers, they would surely have been fascinated by the cave beneath their feet had they known about it.

As with many such archaeological sites the actual answers can never be proved beyond doubt but the re-examination of such a full account as Joseph Beldam's will always be useful. I hope that some of Beldam's insights will again throw some light on this dark and wonderfully mysterious excavation beneath the streets of Royston.



Joseph Beldam, 1795 -1866

Jeremy Lander
Cambridge
April 2016

¹⁵ Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews <https://badarchaeology.wordpress.com/2011/10/09/royston-cave-the-knights-templar-and-the-da-vinci-code-an-underground-conspiracy/>

¹⁶ As we shall see Beldam also comes to this conclusion

THE ORIGIN AND USE

Of

THE ROYSTON CAVE

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF A REPORT

SOME TIME SINCE PRESENTED TO

THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES

BY THE LATE

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THIRD EDITION

ROYSTON

PUBLISHED BY JOHN WARREN

1884

INTRODUCTION

More than a century has elapsed since a fortunate accident led to the discovery of one of the most interesting specimens of antiquity possessed by this or any other country - the ROYSTON CAVE. So great was the curiosity occasioned by this singular occurrence that it immediately gave rise to a warm controversy between two eminent archaeologists of the day, Dr William Stukeley and the Rev. Charles Parkin, in the course of which, though both parties displayed abundant learning and ingenuity, the cause of truth suffered much from their mutual loss of temper and the too eager desire on both sides to establish a rival theory. The foibles of these literary combatants have passed away and the present age, distinguished unquestionably by a much higher sense of the national value of the archaeological studies, when rightly conducted, and aided likewise by a more enlarged experience of archaeological probabilities, seems to be in a better position to exercise an impartial and correct judgment on the points disputed. Recent researches also have contributed, in some degree, to throw additional light on the origin and use of this remarkable excavation. The result has been a revival of curiosity in several quarters which has ended in a request, now complied with, to publish the substance of a Report presented a few years ago to the Royal Society of Antiquaries. In respect to which paper it need only be stated that the desire to make the subject strictly popular, has led to the omission of numerous quotations and references which would have encumbered the page without adding in equal proportion to the gratification of the general reader.

THE TOWN OF ROYSTON AND ITS VICINITY

Our present object being merely a history of the Cave, any further description of the town and neighbourhood than may be necessary to decide upon the origin and use of this remarkable excavation must be deemed superfluous. A very brief notice of the locality will suffice for this purpose. The town of Royston stands partly in Cambridgeshire and partly in Hertfordshire on a range of chalk downs which extend through the kingdom from east to west, and precisely at the point of junction of two military roads of great antiquity which here cross each other; one called the Ermine Street, commencing, as it is supposed, on the coast of Sussex, and proceeding through Stamford and Lincoln, into the northern counties; the other called the Icknield Street, probably commencing in Dorsetshire and following the chalk downs eastward through Dunstable and Ickleton to Ickleham in Suffolk.

Near Royston two vicinal¹⁷ roads ran parallel to the Icknield Street, one along the brow of the hills, and still called in some parts the Ridgeway; the other skirting the northern edge of the downs, and still known by the name of the Ashwell Way.

The whole country abounds with British, Roman, and Saxon antiquities. Along the ancient ways, especially in the direction of the Icknield Street, are numerous Roman Military posts, cemeteries and sepulchral remains, including the Roman Villa and Cemetery at Litlington, and Roman coins of most of the imperial reigns are frequently found. Dr Stukeley and the Rev. Charles Parkin both take it for granted that a Roman town or Station existed on the site of the present town, founding their opinion on the well-known Roman custom of erecting a station at the junction of their principal roads. It must be confessed, however, that this reasoning is not quite conclusive and no certain vestiges of Roman habitations can be affirmed to have been ever discovered. But the absence of these may, perhaps, be sufficiently accounted for in so exposed a country, by the subsequent ravages of Pictish, Saxon, and Danish invaders, each bent on the destruction of the works of their predecessors. And some

¹⁷ *Meaning 'Local'*

confirmation is given to the idea of a Roman station, by the recent discovery of several ancient shafts or pits similar to those found at Chesterford, and other confessedly Roman sites.

Proofs of a successive British and Saxon occupation, however, are everywhere seen. It cannot be doubted that on the beautiful turf around each of these ancient races in turn pastured their flocks, celebrated their games, marshalled their forces, and for very many ages in succession buried their illustrious dead. Their funereal mounds still form the most picturesque feature of the landscape and, as we shall presently have occasion to observe, may possibly be able to contest with Lady Roysia herself the honour of giving their name to the modern town.

But whatever may have been the antecedent history of the spot, we learn from the celebrated Camden¹⁸, that at the time of the Norman Conquest no town existed here. The place was not even mentioned by name in Domesday Book. From this, however, we are by no means obliged to conclude that it was an absolute solitude. We must bear in mind, that having at that time no parochial existence, it could not be noticed in the Norman record of parishes; and all that could be then said was contained in the recitals of the various fees and lordships which extended over it. Something like proof moreover, that the spot was in fact inhabited by a British tribe, may be gathered, not only from the innumerable British tumuli in the vicinity, but from the discovery of various circular floors and cuttings in the chalk, usually considered to mark the sites of ancient British dwellings; and evidence of a Saxon population may be equally inferred from the disclosure of numerous Saxon graves, both around and within the limits of the town as well as from the continued usage of a Saxon appellation to a part of it (the Fleet or Flett End), which seems clearly to indicate one or more habitations on the spot at a period anterior to the Norman Survey, not specifically noticed but included, of course, in the general recitals of Bassingbourn parish, to which they belong.

THE OLD CROSS

At the junction of these two ancient military roads formerly stood the old cross; and as we shall probably be able to establish a connexion between the Cave and the Cross it will not be altogether beside our purpose to offer a few remarks upon the latter. The exact position of this venerable monument is not known but it may be presumed to have stood in the south-east angle of the roads somewhere between the dome of the Cave and the line of the Ermine Street, being in the parish of Barkway, and in the fee of the lordship of Newsells. It may have occupied the site of an earlier monument, and possibly even in Roman times. It was certainly the practice of that people to set up a Hermes at crossways for the guidance and protection of travellers and it was not less common among the Saxons to erect a cross for similar purposes but the previous existence of a monument in this place cannot be carried beyond conjecture. Unfortunately for the question, also, of its Saxon or Norman origin, the form of the historical Cross cannot now be determined, the upper part having been long since destroyed. But the foot-stone, which still exists, is properly described by Stukeley, as "a flattish stone of very great bulk, with a square hole, or mortise, in the centre, wherein was let the foot of the upright stone, or tenon, which was properly the cross". And this interesting relic, after several

¹⁸ Presumably William Camden (1551- 1623), English antiquarian, historian and topographer.

migrations, first to the opposite corner of the street, where it was seen by Stukeley¹⁹, and next to the Market Hill, has lately been removed to the garden of the Royston Institute²⁰.

Camden, who is a great authority on most questions, but who seems in the present instance to have contented himself with local tradition, ascribes the erection of this Cross to "a famous Lady Roysia, by some supposed," he says, "to have been Countess of Norfolk, about the time of the Norman Conquest, which Cross," he adds, "was called after her name, Roysie's Cross, till Eustace de Marc founded, just by it, a Priory, dedicated to St. Thomas a Becket, the "Martyr of Canterbury; upon which occasion inns came to be built, and by degrees it became a town, which instead of Roysie's Cross, took the name of Roysie's Town, afterwards contracted to Royston."

An inspection of the earliest deeds connected with this Priory will shew that Camden was not quite accurate on that subject; and he may have been misled as to the origin of the Cross. A great probability undoubtedly exists, that the earliest proprietors of the fee of Newsells had something to do either with its erection or its restoration; a probability helped by the fact that among the members and nearest connexions of that noble family shortly after the Conquest, there actually were several ladies who bore the name of "Roysia." But Camden's statement by no means identifies the lady to whom the Cross, even in this case, should be ascribed. And, allowing some ground for the tradition, we should be disposed to refer it to the elder Lady Roysia, the wife of Eudo Dapifer, the first Norman possessor of the fee, and the grandmother, by marriage, of Dr. Stukeley's heroine, rather than to the second Lady Roysia, whom he so gratuitously prefers.

There are other writers, however, who, judging as well from the old Roman and Saxon practice above mentioned as from the internal testimony of the Priory deeds and the probable etymology of ancient words, have been disposed to attribute a much earlier date to this Cross. Among these, the Rev. Mr Parkins argues, with some force, that the style and title of the Priory, founded in the lifetime of the second Lady Roysia, and called after the name of the Cross, "*De Cruce Roaesie*," certainly imply that the Cross itself was at that time of considerable fame and probably of considerable antiquity. And this inference seems strengthened by the local and vernacular name of the spot, frequently occurring in the earliest Priory deeds and latinized into "Roaesie" which is variously spelt: *Roys*, *Roes*, *Rous* and *Roheys*; words which certainly have much of Scandinavian character and are not so easily derived from a female Christian name.

DISCOVERY OF THE CAVE AND ITS FIRST APPEARANCE

The Cave was discovered by accident in the month of August 1742 and was almost immediately afterwards visited by the Rev. George North of Caldecote, a member of the Society of Antiquaries, at

¹⁹ *Could this be the round object shown inside the Butter market in the Parliamentary Survey mentioned on page 8 of Preface?*

²⁰ *The Royston Institute was first established as a Mechanics Institute in 1831. Mechanics Institutes were very popular with philanthropists from the 1820s. They provided adult education to working men and were often funded by local industrialists who believed that having more knowledgeable employees would be beneficial to their workforce. In common with most Mechanics Institutes it later transformed into a Literary Institute, more like a public library, and in 1855 it moved into a larger building funded by public subscription at the east end of Melbourn Street. The new yellow brick building served as a museum and lecture hall but was sold off to the local authority in 1901 when it became the Town Hall. The opening in 1855 was marked by an exhibition, probably inspired by the Great Exhibition of 1851, that displayed objects from science, art, natural history and archaeology. It was hugely popular and visited by some 7,000 people.*

their special request. Its position has been already indicated as being in the south-east angle of the two main roads and nearly below the Cross. In a letter addressed to the learned Society in the following month of September, Mr. North states that, on examination, he had found the Cave not only different from what he had apprehended but from anything he ever saw before. The workmen, however, had not then reached the bottom by 8 feet, for which reason he could give but an imperfect account of it. But by way of illustration he enclosed a rough drawing of its appearance at that stage a copy of which will be seen among the sketches now presented to the reader. Mr North, after giving a brief description of the place and the circumstances of the discovery, to which we shall presently advert, expressed his conviction that the whole was the work of remote ages, and certainly anterior to the existence of a town on the spot. He stated, however that no relics had as yet been found except a human skull and a few decayed bones, fragments of a small drinking cup of common brown earth marked with yellow spots, and a piece of brass without any figure or inscription on it. He added that there was no tradition in the town to lead to the design of the excavation.

Dr Stukeley, the celebrated secretary to the Society, shortly afterwards went too, and found the place entirely cleared. He repeated his visit somewhat later and made sketches of the interior which he published with an account of the discovery. But he records the finding of no additional relics, except a small seal of pipe clay marked with a fleur-de-lys, which afterwards came into his possession.

From the respective statements of these two antiquaries we learn that in the year above mentioned the town's people had occasion to set down a post in the Mercat House, which then stood above it, and was used as a cheese and butter market by the Mercat women²¹. In digging beneath the bench on which these women were accustomed to sit, the workmen struck upon a mill stone laid underground at the depth of about a foot, having a hole in the centre. Finding that there was a cavity beneath they tried its depth by a plumb line which descended 16 feet. This induced them to remove the stone which covered a shaft of about 2 feet in diameter with foot holes cut into the sides at equal distances and opposite each other like the steps of a ladder. This shaft we are informed was quite circular and perpendicular. A boy was first let down into it and afterwards a slender man with a lighted candle who ascertained that it passed through an opening about 4 feet in height into another cavity which was filled with loose earth yet not touching the wall which he saw to the right and left. The people now entertained a notion of great treasure hid in this place and some workmen enlarged the descent. Then, with buckets and a well-kerb²², they set to work in earnest to draw up the earth and rubbish. The vast concourse of people now becoming very troublesome they were obliged to work by night till at length, by unwearied diligence, after raising two hundred loads of earth, they quite exhausted it.

“And then fully appeared...” writes Dr Stukeley, with the genuine enthusiasm of an antiquary, “..this agreeable subterranean recess, hewn out of pure chalk “...‘tis of an elegant bell-like, or rather mitral form, well-turned, and exactly circular”; an observation, however, which is not quite correct. “The effect...” he goes on to say “..is very pleasing. The light of the candles scarce reaches the top and that gloominess overhead increases the solemnity of the place. All around the sides it is adorned with imagery in basso-relievo of crucifixes, saints, martyrs, and historical pieces. They are, [in] design and rudeness, suitable to the time, which was soon after the Conquest. A kind of broad bench goes quite round the floor next the wall, broader than a step, and not quite so high as a seat. This bench is cut off in the eastern point by the grave, which is dug deeper into the chalk”.

²¹ *‘Mercat’ is a Scots and Catalan name for market, with similar a root to ‘Merchant’. A ‘mercat cross’ is sometimes found in Scottish market towns and the parallel with Royston and its ‘buttercross’ is interesting (see p6)*

²² *A protective rim around a well providing a surface to mount a raising mechanism*

To the actual appearance of the Cave at this period, being of some consequence to our further enquiries, a few more particulars will be added, respecting the dome, which does not seem .. to have undergone any close examination. Dr Stukeley, who saw it only from the bottom, and by candle-light, merely adverts to a piece of masonry visible near the top, which they who viewed it near, he says, told him was made of brick, tile, and stone, laid in good mortar and thought it might have been done to mend a defective part in the chalk, while Stukeley himself conjectured that it might be the original descent, afterwards walled up when the second shaft was made. Mr North, who made his observations before the cave was emptied, and therefore from a higher level, remarks that a portion of the dome had been either repaired or strengthened with free-stone and tiles, placed edgeways; and that almost opposite the shaft through which he entered, there appeared the top of an arch, which the workmen imagined was a way into it, concluding from the narrowness of this shaft that it was designed only for a vent or air-hole. He also remarks that the top or crown-work of the dome was curiously composed of tile-work and within a foot of the street above and further that some persons thought a passage ran from the cave to the priory, a notion which was discredited, however, by Stukeley.

The subsequent discovery of a date in this part of the cave gives rise to regret that a more careful inspection and a fuller report had not been made by the two first visitors. All that we can now gather from their statements is that no inscription was then perceived; that the masonry concealing the supposed passage was at that time entire; and that the dome had not then been opened to the surface. Before we pass on to another division of our subject it may be right to perpetuate the fact recorded by Stukeley that Mr. George Lettis, probably the bailiff of the manor, and William Lilley, a tailor and salesman who lived in the adjoining house, were the chief movers in opening and clearing the place.

SUBSEQUENT ALTERATIONS AND PRESENT APPEARANCE

Before we proceed to more recent investigations it will be proper to state that, since the time of Stukeley and North, several changes have occurred, considerably altering the appearance of the place.

In their day, it will be borne in mind, the entrance was by a narrow shaft in the northern side of the Cave. The crown of the dome had not then been pierced, and the place could only be seen by artificial lights. The masonry concealing the opening of the shaft on the eastern side had not been disturbed. And the part which Stukeley called the grave had not been made up to the level of the podium, or broad step, which encircles the door.

The present entrance is by an arch opening into the bottom of the Cave, just above the grave, and on the eastern side and is reached by means of a gradually descending passage, 72 feet in length, passing under Icknield Street which was cut through the solid chalk in the year 1790 by Thomas Watson, a bricklayer who occupied the Town House on the opposite side and who employed his workmen during a hard winter in accomplishing this difficult task. A glimmering light is now also admitted through a grated opening in the dome which was probably made at the same time. And either then, or at some other time unknown, the masonry closing the arch on the eastern side of the dome was broken down, plainly exposing another shaft which now appears above.

The design of affording greater facilities for the inspection of the Cave was by these means accomplished and the labour and expense of the projector were, in the sequel, amply repaid. Among the numerous distinguished personages who have since visited it may be mentioned the late King of the French, Louis XVIII, induced, possibly, by Stukeley's description of the historical figures, to pay this homage to the memory of his ancestor, Louis VII. And many individuals are still living who

remember the patriotic zeal and comical effect with which the Old Widow Watson, as ‘Pythoness’²³ of the Cave, was accustomed to descant on the exploits and piety of its heroes and heroines, mixing up the legends of saints with the fables of Stukeley and confidently supporting her statements by quotations from history, which she humorously called the "Book of Kings".

LATER EXAMINATION AND FURTHER DESCRIPTION

In the year 1852 a fresh and more careful examination of the Cave was made by Mr Beldam, assisted by his friend Mr Edmund Nunn, the honorary curator of the Royston Museum, and from a manuscript report afterwards presented to the Antiquarian Society we select the following particulars:

The height of the Cave from the floor to the top of the dome is about 25.5 feet; the length of the aperture leading up to the surface is about 2 feet; making together, with the thickness of the crownwork at the top of the dome, about 28 feet. The bottom is not quite circular, the widest diameter being from east to west. The diameter from north to south is about 17 feet and from east to west about 17 feet 6 inches, the difference being occasioned by the groove of the eastern shaft which descends this side and has not been accurately worked into the circle.

The broad step, or podium, which surrounds the floor, is octagonal, and is about 8 inches in height, by 3 feet in width, being now carried over the part which Stukeley calls ‘the grave’ upon which is now likewise placed an ancient millstone, probably the same that closed the shaft discovered in 1742.

About 8 feet above the floor a cornice runs round the walls, cut in a reticulate or diamond pattern, about 2 feet in breadth, and receding, as it rises, about 6 inches; making the diameter of the lower part of the dome, which springs from it, about 18 feet. The cornice is not, however, continued over the grave, but descends with a curve on one side, leaving the space above it unornamented and in its original rude condition. Almost the whole circle between the podium and the cornice has been sculptured in low relief, as described by Stukeley, with crucifixes, saints, martyrs, and historical pieces and many of these, if not all, have been coloured. Vestiges of red, blue, and yellow, are visible in various places and the relief of the figures has been assisted by a darker pigment. Above the cornice rude figures and heraldic devices are also here and there cut or scratched into the chalk but none in relief. In different parts of the Cave, both above and below the cornice, deep cavities or recesses, of various forms and sizes, some of them oblong and others oven-shaped, are irregularly cut into the wall, closely resembling olla-holes²⁴, niches, and recesses usually seen in Roman, Etruscan and Phoenician tombs. One of these cavities above the cornice is about 4 feet 6 inches in length by about 2 feet 6 inches in height, and another in a similar position about 2 feet 6 inches in length with a corresponding height. Besides which innumerable small crosses, perforations, and unintelligible devices are discernible in all directions.

Immediately above the grave, at the height of about 17 feet, appears the masonry supposed by Stukeley and North to have concealed the original entrance. The two lower courses only of this masonry now remain, formed of blocks of chalk neatly chiselled and coloured red, giving them the appearance of brickwork. The shaft is seen above them, here impinging on the dome and still partially filled with earth, which, on examination, was found to be mixed with small fragments of the bones of

²³ a reference to the mad gatekeeping priestess at Apollo's temple in Delphi

²⁴ An olla is a ceramic jar, often unglazed, used for cooking stews or soups and for the storage of water or dry foods.

animals and a few pieces of medieval pottery, but no human bones. The perpendicular course of the shaft proved that it formed no portion of a passage leading to the Priory.

The inspection of this part of the Cave was accomplished by means of ladders and torch-light and led to the discovery of certain numerical figures carefully and artistically cut into the end block of the upper course giving the date of "1347" which, if genuine, as their appearance certainly indicates, may assist in tracing the transition through which Arabic numerals have passed in this country and furnish evidence of the continued use of the crypt. Below this masonry the shaft evidently expanded as it descended to the grave and the chalk in this part of the Cave, never having been dressed to correspond with the surrounding surface, exhibits, as already stated, the marks of an extreme and primeval antiquity.

THE GRAVE

The grave, being opened, was found to range exactly with the shouldering of the shaft above. Its length proved to be about 7 feet 6 inches, its depth below the floor about 2 feet and its width about 3 feet. To a certain depth it had been evidently disturbed but the bottom had never been moved. It was found to contain a variety of objects, which, had they been seen by Stukeley, must have sadly disconcerted his theory of the origin and use of the place. Among these may be mentioned, first, as being nearest the surface, fragments of red bricks, described by him as enclosing the grave, not improbably Norman or Early English, and others somewhat more Roman in their character. Marks of cremation appeared on several of these as well as in other parts of the grave²⁵. Secondly, fragments of oak of great thickness, studded with large clout headed nails, and pieces of iron, apparently, the mountings of a small oblong chest. Thirdly, a rude iron instrument, probably used for holding a light, and various pieces of iron much corroded. Fourthly, a large lump of charcoal, powdered with Sulphur. Fifthly, intermixed with the above, a large quantity of the bones of animals; but none of them human. Specimens of these being submitted to Professors Owen and Quekett, were pronounced to be of the kind usually found in bone shafts and British graves such, for instance, as bones of the ox, the hog, the hare, and the goat or sheep. In the lowest stratum, which required the pick-axe to move it, were found the bones of a young deer and the vertebrae of a small fish²⁶. There were, moreover, many spherical stones of the class called "aetite" or "eagle stone" known also to the ancients as the "lapis pregnans"²⁷ and believed by them to be endowed with medicinal and magical properties and finally fragments of glass, of leather, of wood and some other articles of doubtful character.

²⁵ *There has been a lot of discussion about the significance of 'The Grave'. Its shape and size certainly suggest a hole dug to accommodate human remains, though none were apparently found inside it. This would accord with the practice of anchorites digging their own grave so that they could contemplate their own death (a 'momento mori') even if the remains were actually taken out and buried elsewhere as seems to have been the case here. See appendix p 38.*

²⁶ *All likely to be the remains of food consumed by anchorites.*

²⁷ *An 'Eagle Stone' or 'Stone-with-child' is a naturally occurring geode stone which is hollow and contains another stone inside. They were attributed with medicinal properties for pregnant women and it was believed that without one in its nest an Eagle could not lay its eggs. This is primary evidence for the theory that the cave was occupied by a healer or mystic of some kind.*

ORIGINAL CONSTRUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE CAVE

An attentive consideration of the articles found in the grave, even supposing a few of them to have been subsequently introduced, fully verified the presumption raised by the peculiarly crippled and time-worn aspect of the wall above, that the so-called grave was nothing more than a continuation below the floor of the ancient eastern shaft and it consequently furnished a probable clue to the subsequent formation and original design of the whole. It seemed clear that this shaft, in connexion with that on the northern side of the Cave discovered in 1742 and of which the traces downward are visible as low as the floor, was the original excavation and that from one or both of these, by the same or by successive operations, one or more primitive chambers were horizontally opened, which at length assumed the form of the present Cave. It might be reasonably inferred that this process began from the eastern shaft with the upper part of the dome and, judging from the large and deep niches cut in this part, it might be also presumed that the floor of the first excavation was but a little below them. The lower half of the Cave, on this supposition, with its numerous niches and recesses, was sunk at a later period. A method similar to this may be observed in the shafts and sepulchral chambers recently discovered at Stone.

The subject, however, of ancient shafts and subterranean chambers deserves a little further consideration. The formation of shafts seems common to all ages and countries. They were opened for mining, for sanitary, for ceremonial, and for sepulchral purposes. Man seems to have been always a burrowing animal. But their most common use was probably always sepulchral, either for the purpose of actual interment or as a means of access to chambers intended for that object. Thus the Egyptians often buried their dead in shafts. The tombs of the Seythians, as recent discoveries in the Crimea have shown, and likewise those of the old Etruscans, were commonly approached by means of shafts. The interment of the poor at Rome in shafts or wells called 'puticoli' gave an historical celebrity to the Esquiline Hill and even when not designed to contain the ashes of the dead they seem to have been frequently employed to deposit the embers of the funereal fire, the bones of the funereal feast, the pottery used and broken on these and other sacred occasions; and some-times also for the ornaments and relics of the departed.

Allusion has been already made to the existence of ancient shafts at Royston and many others have been discovered in different parts of the kingdom. Among them may be specially mentioned those at Ewell in Surrey, at Boxmoor in Hertfordshire, at Stone in Buckinghamshire, at Chadwell in Essex, at Crayford in Kent, and numbers more recently opened by the present Lord Braybrooke at Chesterford. The contents of most of them seem clearly to prove a Romano-British origin, and a sepulchral or religious purpose. But the indications at Royston are not so decisive, though of a similar kind. The objects found in the shaft at the Cave create some uncertainty also, as to its original design, and make it doubtful whether its first purpose was a place of deposit or a means of access only to the chamber beyond; for if the latter we must conclude that it was afterwards accommodated to the ulterior purpose of the Cave. What that purpose was has yet to be considered.

Excavated chambers of this kind appear to have been as common and as various in their use as the ancient shafts. They were adapted to the habits, customs, and necessities of the different countries where they are found in our own country and, among its earliest inhabitants, we learn from the ancient historians that they were most commonly used either as places of refuge and concealment or for the deposit of grain and other stores; but it was not the ordinary practice of the Celts and Scandinavians to bury in them. Any sepulchral application, therefore, must be presumed to have occurred in a Romano-British period. In most other countries, however, their principal object appears to have been always

sepulchral; and they were so used, either with or without the accompaniment of the shaft. Both kinds abound in Egypt, in Palestine, in the Crimea, in Etruria, and in most other parts of the Roman Empire.

Hence the original purpose of the Royston Cave, if of purely British origin, could scarcely have been sepulchral. It bears, indeed, a strong resemblance, in form and dimension, to the ancient British habitation; and certain marks and decorations in its oldest parts, such as indentations and punctures, giving a diapered appearance to the surface, are very similar to what is seen in confessedly Druidical and Phoenician structures. But this by no means militates against the probability of its subsequent appropriation to the use of a Roman sepulchre.

The Roman underground sepulchres, it is true, were not generally of a conical form, but nothing was more common with them than to appropriate the designs and devices of a conquered people. Mr. Akerman, the present learned Secretary of the Antiquarian Society, in a recent paper in *Archaeologia*, vol. xxxiv, p.27, on the Roman remains at Stone, and which contains references to most of the other shafts to be met with in this country, expresses a firm conviction that the Royston Cave was at one time a Roman sepulchre. He quotes also an instance of a similar sepulchre, discovered many years since on the Aventine hill at Rome; the only difference of form in that case being, that the shaft entered at the top of the dome, instead of at the side. Few persons, indeed, who have a fresh recollection of the old Tombs of Italy, with their niches and recesses for urns, and cists and lamps, and votive offerings-their ornamented cornices, and benches for the repose of the dead will fail to discover in the Royston Cave marks of similar design and similar uses. Nor will the disappearance of the many funereal objects it may once have contained in any considerable degree lessen the probability, after so long a dedication to the purposes of Christian worship.

COMPARISON WITH ORIENTAL CAVES

Admitting this general resemblance, however, it must still be confessed that among the ancient sepulchres of Europe there are none which correspond exactly with the Royston Cave and whether its present form existed in Roman times or is the result of more recent modifications we are led to conclude that its precise model was, most probably, derived from the East; a conclusion which need not at all disturb our belief in its early Roman occupation.

It is certain that ancient caves do exist in Palestine, which, in form and circumstance, and to some extent also in decoration, approximate so nearly to the Royston Cave, that if any historical connexion could be established between them, it would scarcely seem doubtful that the one is a copy of the other. Such a connexion we shall now endeavour to show, possibly even in Roman times, but more certainly at a later period.

The caves in question are fully described by Professor Robinson, of America, in his *Biblical Research* vol. II, p.353 et seq. He there states that in the vicinity of Deir Dubban, at no great distance from Gaza and Askelon, where the soil scarcely covers the chalky rock, he visited certain caves, excavated into the form of tall domes or bell-shaped apartments, ranging in height from 20 to 30 feet and in diameter from 10 or 12 to 20 or 30 feet or more. The top of these domes usually terminates in a small circular opening for the admission of light and air. These dome-shaped caverns, he adds, are mostly in clusters, three or four together. They are all hewn regularly. Some of them are ornamented, either near the bottom or high up, or both, with rows of small holds or niches, like pigeon holes, extending quite round. And in one of the caves he observed crosses cut into the walls. In like manner,

at Beit Jibrin²⁸, he saw numerous caves of a similar form, cut into the same chalky soil. In one cave he also remarked a line of ornamental work about 10 feet above the floor, resembling a sort of cornice; and the whole hill appeared to have been perforated with eaves of a similar kind; they seemed, he says, to be innumerable in that neighbourhood. It must be borne in mind that Dr Robinson, in describing these caves, could scarcely have known of the existence of that at Royston. He does not pretend to decide on their age or use. His acquaintance with such subjects appears, indeed, from other parts of his work, to have been limited; but he suggests that they may have been inhabited by a colony of Edomites from the resemblance they bear to some excavations at Petra. It is, at least, certain that the descendants of Esau did occupy this district several centuries before the Christian sera; and Herod the Great was born at Askelon.

But any historical connexion with the Royston Cave must be sought for at a later period. It may possibly be found in the circumstance that these caves were in the vicinity of the ancient city of Eleutheropolis, and that after the Roman conquest they were almost certainly used as columbaria or cemeteries by the inhabitants. This city is known to have been one of those most highly favoured by the Emperor Severus during his successful administration of the East. The Empress Julia was also a native of that part of the empire. Assuming, then, that the form of the Royston Cave has undergone no change since Roman times, it does not seem wholly improbable that, as this emperor spent so much of his after life in Britain, the Royston Cave may owe its existence to the officers of some veteran legion who may have accompanied him to this country and may have been quartered at one of the military posts in this neighbourhood. At any rate numerous coins of this emperor and his family, as well as moulds for coining, found in this vicinity, show how closely the country was occupied by the Romans at that period.

If, on the other hand, we conclude that the form of the Royston Cave has undergone some change since those imperial times, we shall be able to find other and still stronger probabilities of its connexion with the Oriental caves at a later period. Perhaps no stronger argument can be advanced than the fact that the district in which these caves abound was one of the great battlefields of the early Crusaders. It was here that they built their famous fortresses of El Hasi and Blanche Garde and the country all around was the scene of the adventures and triumphs of Richard Coeur de Lion, and his puissant chivalry. Again, whatever may have been the former purpose of these caves, they must, at a period subsequent to the Christian era when Palestine swarmed with anchorites, have become, in all probability, like most other grottos and tombs in that country; the abode of hermits and recluses and, as such, must have been known and respected by the Christian leaders. It seems most natural, therefore, to trace this singular correspondence of form to the piety of some distinguished Crusader, anxious on his return to his own country to perpetuate the memory of former exploits and to exhibit his devotion in a manner most accordant with the ideas and superstitions of his age.

CONVERSION INTO A CHRISTIAN ORATORY

However we may decide on these points it is certain that a time did arrive when the Cave became appropriated to Christian worship and it is to the period of the early Crusades that this change may be most reasonably referred. In that age the attention of all Europe was directed towards the East. Everything was deemed sacred which came from that region. The ecclesiastical structures and

²⁸ *The 'bell caves' of Beit Jibrin are located outside Jerusalem where there are nearly 800 bell-shaped caves some linked via an underground network of passageways. The caves were dug for chalk to cover roads. With Ermine Street next door was Royston Cave originally a source of road stone for the Roman Engineers?*

practices of the day borrowed largely from eastern models and no greater act of piety could then be imagined than the founding and endowing of oratories and hermitages, resembling those which had been devoutly visited and venerated in the Holy Land.

Now, among the Christian Knights who fought most gallantly on the plains of Askelon and Gaza, were some of the descendants and near connections of Eudo Dapifer, Lord of the Manor of Newsells. With this period, also, most nearly agrees the style of its principal decorations. And the greater part of its sculptures, so far as we can understand them, appears to belong to the same age. Connecting these circumstances together, a strong presumption appears to be raised, that the ultimate design and ornamentation are due to some noble member of the early Newsells family; and though we are obliged to reject Dr Stukeley's visionary notion of Lady Roysia's personal share in this business, there is some reason to believe that the work may be mainly ascribed to the devotion and liberality of one of her sons, probably William de Magnaville, her favourite son, a companion in the exploits of King Richard, and one of his most gallant comrades in the wars of Palestine. But the story of Lady Roysia's subsequent retirement to this oratory and of the execution of the sculpture with her own hand is purely imaginary and the fiction of her interment in this place is contradicted by the best historical evidence.

DECORATIONS OF THE ORATORY

It has already been stated that the entire space between the cornice and the floor, with the exception of the part down which the eastern shaft descends, has been decorated with sculptures, representing crucifixes, saints, martyrs, and historical personages. These do not seem to have been all executed by the same person, nor, probably, at precisely the same time; but all of them, notwithstanding their rude and inartificial manner, produce a striking effect. And most, if not all of them, have been coloured, though perhaps at a later period. The only sculptures in this country that can be compared to them are certain effigies carved into the chalk walls of the castle at Guildford in Surrey which are likely to have been of the same period.

Before we proceed to describe the principal groups we shall offer a few preliminary remarks on their probable age under the head of Costumes, Armour, Architectural Designs, and Heraldic Devices.

1. On the subject of costumes, particularly the head-dresses of the ladies, Stukeley and Parkin disagree, the former assigning them, as we think correctly, to the twelfth century the latter to the fourteenth or fifteenth. It must be admitted that similar costumes prevailed at both periods and the question must, therefore, be rather decided by the probable import of the stories to which they belong. In like manner the helmets in general and the coiffures of the men afford no certain criterion; though several of them are certainly of a crusading age. The crowns, coronets, and mitres of Royal personages and prelates, are of a very antique form; but they may have been somewhat modified by the fancy of the artist.
2. The Armour in general seems antecedent to the period when the whole person was cased in steel and, together with the absence of beards, appears to indicate the fashion of the twelfth or thirteenth century.
3. The Architectural Designs, which are few, are of the Norman and Early English character.
4. The Heraldic Devices, in the opinion of competent judges of the Herald's College to whom they have been submitted, belong to an age anterior to the general use of family badges, and may

consequently be assigned to the eleventh or twelfth century. The kite-shaped and small circular shields can hardly belong to a later period.

Before we quit this head we must, however, advert to a particular shield which became the subject of hot dispute between Stukeley and Parkin; the former claiming it for a Beauchamp, the father of Lady Roysia's second husband, the latter for a much later member of the same family. The old story of the battle of the shield was here revived; but in this case, instead of both knights being in the right, both were in the wrong, both evidently mistaking the device about which they quarrelled. There is, perhaps, more excuse for Parkin, who, for aught we can gather, never entered the Cave. The fact, however, is that the six cross crosslets in dispute appear to be simply two letters "H. K." above the fess with a Calvary cross beneath it.

The general result of this preliminary survey, admitting the possible existence of some later interpolations, appear strongly to favour the conclusion above stated that the principal sculptures are of the age of Henry II and Richard I.²⁹

EXPLANATION OF THE SCULPTURES

The various groups and figures we are now about to describe are irregularly distributed; they are of different sizes, refer to different subjects, are probably the production of different artists and exhibit little unity of design. They harmonize chiefly by their general air of antiquity and the quaintness which belongs to the efforts of a rude and superstitious age.

Several shrines adorn this oratory. The high altar, contrary to the usual practice, is on the western side. The shrine and the legend of Saint Katharine, who appears to have been the patron saint of the place, are on the right and left of the high altar. The shrine of St. John Baptist and St. Thomas a Beckett (the patron saints of the Priory) is on the southern side. The northern side exhibits the shrine and the legend of St. Christopher. The space between the effigy of St. Katharine and certain historical figures on the south - western side, is occupied by the effigies of St. Lawrence, St Paul, the Holy Family, and the Flowering Cross. Various historical personages and scenes fill up the intervals and the eastern side is the only part which appears to have been left without decoration.

We shall consider these sculptures in the following order:

I - THE HIGH ALTAR

The oldest and most venerated object must, of course, have been the High Altar. It is represented by a square tablet sunk in the wall, on which is carved the scene of the crucifixion; our Saviour extended on the cross, the Virgin Mary on one side and the beloved disciple on the other; a heart and a hand is cut on either side; the heart nearest the Virgin being composed of three lines, as indicative of most intense affection. The moulding of the tablet appears to have been removed at the bottom to make room for the effigies of two royal persons and a smaller crucifixion, which will be afterwards described. On the foot of the principal cross is cut a saltire or St. Andrew's cross.

The position of this altar, in the west, instead of the east of the oratory, has given rise to much speculation. Stukeley supposes it to have been placed here, in order to correspond, as nearly as possible, with the cross erected above thus enabling the worshipper to do homage to both at the same

²⁹ *Henry II 1154-1189; Richard I 1189-1199*

time. Another reason might be suggested by the necessity of leaving undisturbed the original entrance into the Cave which was most probably by a ladder or steps descending from the eastern shaft; and that portion of the Cave may, also, have been thought to be desecrated by its original pagan use.

II. ST. CHRISTOPHER

In describing the several groups, we will begin with those on the right hand of the modern entrance, which occupy the northern side of the Cave.

Immediately beyond the projecting shoulder of the eastern shaft appears a group consisting of two half-length personages, above one of them a female, the other a male clad in a toga or pallium; a large figure is seen kneeling on one knee beneath them, as if in the act of receiving a burden; and a small figure, almost effaced, is bestriding his neck. These figures have been painted red, and appear to represent Joseph and Mary placing the infant Saviour on the neck of St. Christopher, who is preparing to cross a river. The river is represented by the groove of the northern shaft which descends here and appears to have been scored to imitate running water.

On the other side of the river, St. Christopher appears as a gigantic personage in a short garment tucked up and a huge staff in his hand still carrying the infant Saviour on his shoulder. This figure is almost identical in form with that cut into the chalk at Guildford Castle. At an early period the effigy of St. Christopher was introduced into Christian churches. The legend was brought from the East by the Crusaders and the saint, having been a hermit, found an appropriate place in this oratory. He is represented to have been a Syrian or Canaanite of enormous bulk, who, after his conversion, built himself a cell by the side of a river and employed his great stature for the glory of God in carrying pilgrims across. The superstition of the age assigned to him the special privilege of preventing tempests and earthquakes. His effigy was usually placed near the entrance of sacred buildings, as symbolical of baptismal admission to the Christian faith. There seems nothing unreasonable in supposing, with Stukeley, that these figures were cut about the year A.D. 1185, when there happened a terrible earthquake, such as was never known before in this country, followed by an eclipse of the sun, great thunderings, lightnings and tempests, dreadful fires, and destruction of men and cattle. This saint being once on his travels is reported to have struck his staff into the ground, which, in token of the truth of his doctrine, took root and produced both flower and fruit.

We shall have occasion to remark a flowering staff, or cross, on the other side of the high altar, which Stukeley imagines, though perhaps incorrectly, has reference to this prodigy. Above the figure of St. Christopher is the entrance discovered by the town's people in 1742.

III. LEGEND OF ST. KATHARINE THE MARTYR.

Next to St. Christopher is the legend of St. Katharine of Alexandria. It is related of this virgin and martyr that being imprisoned by a cruel tyrant for twelve days without food a dove was sent down by Providence to administer to her necessities. Her prison is here represented by a recess cut into the wall and painted of a dark blue colour which still remains. She first appears at the entrance in a disconsolate position and in a dress of yellowish hue. At the farther end of the prison she again appears lying on her back, her head placed on a pillow marked with a heart and her whole person resting on a colossal arm and hand, painted in red and engraved with a heart. It is presumed that these are symbols of her piety and dependence on Providence. Above the prison appears the same outstretched arm and hand in the act of letting fly a dove which hovers over the prisoner with a wallet in its bill, the latter emblems are cut into the chalk but not in relief and have been likewise painted red. Below the prison are two deep oven-shaped cavities of unequal sizes; one of them having a groove cut

into the floor. They resemble other niches in different parts of the Cave and were probably first designed for sepulchral deposits; but in Christian times they were appropriated to the service of the oratory and were most likely used as *piscinae*³⁰ for the high altar and as niches for lights on St. Katharine's day and other great festivals. Parkin has singularly mistaken the figure in prison for that of a man and supposes the whole to represent the entombment of the Saviour and Mary Magdalene waiting at the entrance.

Next in succession comes the High Altar already described.

IV. EFFIGY OF ST. KATHARINE

Immediately beyond the High Altar appears the figure of St. Katharine in her beatified form, erect, holding the wheel, the instrument of her passion in her right hand and wearing a lofty crown, as being of the blood royal of Egypt. There is something singularly imaginative and spectral in this effigy. Occupying the place of honour in the oratory we are led to conclude that to this sainted lady it was chiefly dedicated; a conclusion rather confirmed by the existence of an ancient inn close by still called the 'Katharine Wheel' where we may presume that pilgrims who came to honour her shrine were accustomed to resort and end their devotions in the usual orthodox manner. Stukeley ascribes the preference shewn to St. Katharine in this oratory, to a great victory obtained by the Crusaders over Saladin and his host on the plains of Ramleh on St. Katharine's day 25th November 1177 and as the celebrated William de Magnaville, Lady Roysia's son, and lord in *capite* of this manor, was present on that memorable occasion the conjecture seems by no means improbable.

V. THE CROSS OF ST. HELENA

Moving round in the same direction the next object probably represents the Cross of St. Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great. Stukeley imagines it to be the staff of St. Christopher, commonly called the Palmer's Staff, but as the pretended discovery of the true cross by the first Christian princess must have been deemed an event of greater consequence to the Romish church than the private adventures of any respectable saint, and as the singular property ascribed by monkish writers to this cross of perpetually renewing itself seems aptly symbolized by the production of buds and flowers, we are disposed to conclude that the 'Invention' of the cross is here represented.

VI. THE HOLY FAMILY

Beyond the cross the figures divide into two lines. In the upper line, nearest St. Katharine, appears the Holy Family: Joseph, the Virgin, and the youthful Saviour. The leading idea of pilgrimage is here again portrayed and this group most likely represents the journey from Jerusalem after the feast of the Passover.

VII ST. LAURENCE

In the same line to the left is the effigy of St. Laurence with the instrument of passion in his hand. He wears a long garment marked with a heart at the bottom. On his breast are cut two letters "I S" of somewhat doubtful antiquity. This saint suffered martyrdom in the reign of Gallienus at Rome and his death is celebrated on the 10th of August. The date is of considerable importance as it will probably furnish the key to some of the historical portraits hereafter to be described.

³⁰ A stone basin, usually positioned to the side of an altar, for holding holy water with a drain down into consecrated ground

VIII. CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL

Immediately below the Holy Family, in the second line, appears a horse overthrown and, resting on its haunches, a man un-helmed and still holding by the bridle but in the act of falling and a small circular shield with a sword of extravagant length flying from him. Stukeley naturally concludes this to mean the conversion of St. Paul, kept on the 25th of January, and the length of the sword may be simply intended to remind the observer of the manner of his death. Parkin, however, rather absurdly as we think, discovers in this group the martyrdom of St. Hippolite, who was torn asunder by wild horses.

We can scarcely doubt that the primary allusion here was to St. Paul. But it may have been subsequently degraded into a satire on the family of William "Long Epee," or "*Long Sword*". This personage was allied by marriage to Lady Roysia but opposed in politics to her family and detested both by priests and laity for his inhumanity and sacrilege in asserting the rights of King John. The clerical historians of the time inform us that the first long Epee died an unnatural death, the second perished in Palestine and the last of his race, being unhorsed and indelibly disgraced at a great tournament, held in the year 1250, died despised and young. It seems not impossible that the monks of the Priory with a mixture, by no means uncommon, [of] superstition and buffoonery, may have contrived, by lengthening the sword, and somewhat distorting the original figure, to make their devotion subserve their revenge, in perpetuating the disgrace of a fallen enemy.

IX. WILLIAM THE LION, KING OF SCOTS

In the same line with St. Paul, and immediately below the effigy of St. Laurence, appears the half-length figure of a royal personage, wearing an antique crown, and with arms extended, in an attitude of surprise and alarm. On the breast are cut the ancient initials "WR" and the position, next to the falling saint, may not have been without its meaning. This figure seems to form part of an historical series, commencing on the southern side of the Cave. We shall postpone our reasons for considering it the portrait of William the Lion, until we reach it again from the other side.

We now return to the entrance, and take the groups in succession to the left.

The figures on this side of the Cave are, for some distance, nearly effaced. Not far from the entrance are two deep recesses probably at first intended for sepulchral uses but subsequently devoted to some purpose of the Christian oratory. The first figure that can be traced is that of a person holding a ball or globe in his right hand, on the meaning of which we offer no conjecture.

X. QUEEN ELEANOR

The next is the half-length figure of a royal lady in a cloister or cell which forms part of an ecclesiastical edifice of Anglo-Norman or Early English architecture. The lady wears a crown but has the air of being a prisoner and probably represents Queen Eleanor, the wife of Henry II, who, in consequence of her intrigues and violence, was imprisoned by her husband for many years, and only liberated on the accession of her son, Richard I, Coeur de lion. Parkin, however, supposes this figure to represent St. Katharine in prison. Our reason for differing from him will presently appear.

XL. THE SHRINE OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST AND ST. THOMAS A BECKET

Next to the royal prisoner, and only separated from her by a royal standard and a figure which probably represents the standard bearer, is the shrine of the two patron saints of the Priory Church, St. John Baptist and St. Thomas a Becket. Above the Shrine, which is a tablet sunk in the wall, and over the head of the Baptist, is a crucifix. St. John is represented as a venerable Personage, bare-headed,

and wearing a forked beard of which this is the only instance in the Cave, except that of the Saviour at the high altar. The figure is of three-quarters length, the legs being merely scratched into the chalk, and possibly intended to appear as standing in the water. He wears a short tunic, and holds in his left hand, towards the figure of St. Thomas, a crown surmounted by three drooping tendrils, probably indicating the palm and crown of martyrdom. St. Thomas is represented as a prelate of high degree, clothed in full canonicals and wearing a lofty conical cap or mitre. He holds in his right hand a globe surmounted by a cross and in his left a staff-crosier. An altar marked with a cross is cut into the space between these two saintly personages.

Stukeley supposes them to represent the Cardinal Octavian, as legate from the Pope and Hugh de Nunant, King Henry's chaplain, on a mission for the purpose of crowning his son John, King of Ireland. Another construction is that the bearded man represents the Grand Master of the Hospitallers bearing the royal standard and regalia of Jerusalem attended by Heraclius the Patriarch; both these dignitaries having been deputed in the year 1185 to make a tender of the sovereignty of the Holy Land to Henry II on condition of his hastening to its rescue from the Saracens. There seems some probability in this explanation. But on the whole we agree with Parkin that it represents the Shrine of the two patron saints of the Priory, a confirmation of which is found in its historical connexion with the figures that follow and likewise in the position of the cavity or niche beneath which has certainly been used as a piscina.

XII. KING HENRY II.

The formidable personage immediately beyond the shrine is evidently the hero of the Cave. He is presumed to be Henry II the reigning monarch of the time. He wears a low-crowned helmet; and a tabard girt about the waist, marked with a large cross on the breast, and a smaller one on either side. He holds a drawn sword in his right hand. Above him appears an array of troops and further on are two other bodies of troops headed by a prelate in a marshal vest and wearing a peculiar kind of mitre who seems to be offering an address from behind a battlement or a pulpit. The person of the King, as well as these of St. John and of St. Thomas, has been painted red. Beneath them, a fish of singular form is scratched into the wall. Mid in the space between the king and the military bishop, on the other side, there are two cavities or niches, which were probably used as piscinae to the shrines of the saints further on.

The whole of this series, from the imprisoned Queen Eleanor to the effigy of King William of Scotland, with the exception of certain genealogical figures near the military bishop hereafter to be described, appears to form a consecutive story and to commemorate a remarkable event in the reign of King Henry, interesting alike to the clergy and the people of England and peculiarly flattering to one of the patron saints of the Priory.

The circumstance was as follows:-

In the year A.D. 1175, great dissensions arose between King Henry and his sons, who were encouraged in their rebellion by their mother Queen Eleanor. The Queen in consequence, was placed in confinement, and continued a prisoner, as we have already stated, for most of the remainder of her husband's life. Henry's sons being supported by the kings of France and of Scotland, and by other powerful chieftains, King Henry prepared for war, and resolved to combat his enemies, both at home and abroad. While still lingering in Normandy, William the Lion of Scotland made an incursion into the northern counties, where he committed great ravages; when Geoffrey, bishop elect of Lincoln and afterwards Archbishop of York, a natural son of King Henry by the fair Rosamond, putting himself at

the head of a body of troops, arrested the progress of the invaders. Henry now found it high time to return to England and immediately after his arrival hastened to the shrine of St. Thomas a Becket, already become the favourite saint of England. Here he performed a most severe penance and, having received absolution for the supposed murder of Becket, he proceeded to London. On the very day on which his peace had been thus made with the martyred saint, namely the twelfth of July, the Scottish king, resting in security at Alnwick and amusing himself with his companions at a tilting match was suddenly surprised by a body of English knights and after a vigorous resistance was thrown from his horse and made prisoner. The news of this capture filled Henry and all the loyal part of the nation with joy as it entirely broke up the hostile confederacy against him.

On the tenth of August of the following year, being St. Laurence's day which is indicated by the figure of the saint just above him, King William did homage for his crown to the English monarch, and the Scottish prelates at the same time acknowledged the supremacy of the English Church. The latter event must have been very acceptable to the whole of the English clergy, but especially to the monks of Royston who were under the patronage of the saint to whose miraculous assistance this extraordinary success was ascribed.

We may remark, that these groups have been differently construed by Stukeley and Parkin. The latter against all probability maintains that the frightened monarch represents the Emperor Decius in whose reign he places the martyrdom of St. Laurence, concluding as strangely that the military bishop represents Pope Sextus, a contemporary saint. Stukeley, on the other hand, concludes that Louis VII of France is the monarch intended and supposes that this figure commemorates his precipitate retreat on St. Laurence's day from the siege of Verneuil. The recent discovery of the initials on the breast of the figure seems, however, to settle this question.

XIII. RICHARD COEUR DE LION AND QUEEN BERENGARIA

Returning to the group, beneath the figure of St. Katharine and the High Altar we perceive two royal personages represented on a smaller scale than the effigies above them. As they trench upon the tablet of the High Altar we may conclude that they are of a somewhat later date. The king stands clad in complete armour wearing his crown and resting his right hand on a large kite shaped shield marked with a fanciful device. The queen, who is only of three quarters length, appears on the other side of the shield. A crown is placed above her head, but scarcely seems to touch it and a veil descends from her head dress on either side down to her shoulder. She wears an elegant stomacher, adorned with a collar and a brooch and her whole costume resembles the style and fashion of royal ladies of the twelfth century. Ranging on the same side with the king, is the small crucifix already alluded to exhibiting the same scene as the altar above and beneath it is the holy sepulchre, represented by a Norman arch, in the interior of which is carved, in single line, a small heart and a large heart in double lines (a heart of hearts), emblematic of intense devotion, while beneath them is a band engraved with a heart, indicative of dedication to some special service.

We can scarcely doubt that these figures and symbols import a vow to take the cross. They may either represent King Henry II, who took the vow, though he never went to the crusade, in which case the lady will be Queen Eleanor whose disgrace and imprisonment, however, make this supposition less likely. Or, far more probably, King Richard I, Coeur de Lion, the most distinguished crusader of his age and Queen Berengaria whom he married and caused to be crowned on his way to the Holy Land. But this lady was never crowned in England and after her husband's death her rights as queen dowager were for some time denied by her brother in law King John, a circumstance which may own

selection of the worthies for whom these portraits were possibly intended though it is not denied that there may be some later interpolations among them:

1. Eustace de Merks, founder of the original chapel or canonry, and lord of the manor of Newsells
 2. Ralph de Rochester, principal founder of the Priory, and also lord of the manor of Newsells
 3. Hawysia, his wife
 4. William de Rochester, his heir
 5. Alicia de Scales, daughter of Ralph, and afterwards lady of the manor
 6. Richard de Clare, Count of Gloucester, afterwards lord of the manor
 7. Waren de Bassingbourn
 8. Reginald de Argentinein
 9. Margaret, Countess
 - 10 Juliana
 11. Ralph de Reed
 12. Robert de Burn
- And last, not least, as being members of the first noble family, lords *in capite* of the manor of Newsells
13. Geoffrey do Magnaville, husband of Lady Roysia
 14. Lady Roysia herself
 15. William de Magnaville, the distinguished crusader, and possibly founder of the oratory

XV. THE PEDIGREE

It remains only to allude to certain figures between the effigy of the military bishop and that of King William of Scotland erroneously supposed by Stukeley to be a crucifix but which, on closer inspection, appears rather to be a genealogical succession. Their crowded position in this spot, as well as their subject, may certainly raise a presumption of their being a subsequent addition. The figures of this group represent a line of three descents, one below the other, a female at the top, then a male, and a full length female at the bottom. Whatever be their date, they certainly resemble both in form and costume, the ladies on the other side of the Cave. On the podium or bench immediately beneath them is engraved a sepulchral slab of two sides, on one of which is the figure of a man and on the other that of a woman. By the side of the genealogical stem there is also a family picture in miniature of three youths who probably represent the children of the surviving lady. We may conclude that the whole gives us the pedigree of this lady, and the interment of an ancestral pair, whose obits were most likely celebrated on this spot. And as marks of other figures are dimly seen on the podium just by, as well as

near the altar of St. Thomas a Becket, it seems probable, that in these cases also, obits were performed in the Cave³¹.

THE HERMITAGE

We offer but one word more on the question of the Hermitage, which was the subject of another warm dispute between Stukeley and Parkin. The idea of a hermitage in this place after the death of Lady Roysia was rejected by Stukeley as altogether inconsistent with his theory of the origin and use of the Cave. Parkin, who had no such chimeras to defend, maintained the continued existence of a hermitage on this spot, even from Saxon times and he supported his opinion by the express recital of a deed which conveyed the Priory property to the Chester family. Stukeley, notwithstanding, ridiculed the notion of hermitage in the midst of a town; and Parkin replied to this objection by citing several instances of hermitages so situated. During the whole of the controversy the matter rested in mere conjecture. A fortunate discovery, however, has recently confirmed the opinion of Parkin for, although he appears to have mistaken a later grant from Edward VI which notices a hermitage for an earlier grant of Henry VIII in which no hermitage is mentioned, and although the hermitage recited in Edward's grant being described as in the manor of Hedley and in the parish of Barkway, could not have meant a hermitage at Royston, which was in the manor of Newsells, and in Edward's reign had become an independent parish, yet he was right in the main fact: of a hermitage actually existing at Royston³².

This fact has been ascertained from an entry in the old churchwarden's book of the parish of Bassingbourn, which extends as far back as the reign of Henry VII and, among other most curious details, contains a record under date of A.D. 1506 of the "*Gyft of 20d*" received "*Off a Hermytt deptyn at Roisten Parysh*". It is true that this entry does not absolutely fix the residence of this hermit at the Cave but, beside the improbability of there being two hermitages in so small a town, the position of the Cave being exactly across the line which, in that reign, separated the parish of Barkway from the parish of Bassingbourn, shows that a hermit dying on that spot, would be correctly described as *departing* within the limits of the latter parish and the existence of a cell above the Cave, moreover, seems almost a necessary consequence of its close proximity to the road and its having two shafts opening up to the surface. This inference is also corroborated by an old manorial survey made about seventy years after the dissolution of the Priory which distinctly recognises the spot as belonging to the lord of the manor and records the building of the Mercat House in a way to help the conclusion that it probably occupied the site of an older building. This survey is dated A.D. 1610, and contains the following memorandum:

"Note: that in the myddest of Icknell Street aforesaid, and at the west end of the same street, there is a *Fayr House* or *Crosse buylded* up by the Lorde of the said manor, and the whole Township for a Clock House, and a Prison House, for the use and benefit of the whole Parish, on both sydes, as well

³¹ *This is more evidence that the cave was used by anchorites. An anchorite would invariably receive money, or food, from the relatives of dead loved ones to pray and chant (hence the word chantry) for their souls in purgatory*

³² *The weight of evidence is also in Parkin's favour. Anchorholds (hermitages) were ubiquitous in medieval times and would often be if not attached to a church in the centre of a settlement: see Appendix 1*

for Cambridgeshire as for Hertfordshire syde, end *standing in both the said counties*³³. By the syde of it is wrote, *The Clock Howse, Crosse, & Prison Howse* in Icknell streete, for the whole Parishe."

CONTINUED USE AND FINAL ABANDONMENT OF THE ORATORY

Our investigations thus far have led us to the conclusion that the dedication of the ancient Cave to the purpose of a Christian oratory and the execution of the greater part of its sculptures may be assigned, with greatest probability, to the period of the Crusades and about the reigns of Henry II and Richard Coeur de Lion. We have been obliged, notwithstanding, to dismiss Dr. Stukeley's fanciful theory in favour of Lady Roysia as inconsistent with probability and on that subject we have now only to add the testimony of Leland that she was really buried at Chickesand, in Bedfordshire, in a nunnery there founded by herself and where she spent the close of her life in religious seclusion. Our concluding remarks will also furnish a satisfactory account of the skull and other human bones discovered in the loose earth, which afterwards filled the Cave.

The frequency of the religious services celebrated in this oratory must of course be open to conjecture. We may perhaps infer that they were limited to the great festivals of the church and the holidays of the particular saints who figure in it, to the obits of benefactors, to occasional masses for distinguished pilgrims and visitors and to the private devotions of the resident hermit or hermits. We have as little certainty as to the religious order to which the hermit of the Cave belonged. But it seems probable that as the monks of the Priory belonged to the order of St. Augustine, the Augustine Eremites would be preferred for the service of the oratory.

That the Cave was used for religious purposes long after the time of Richard I does not admit of reasonable doubt but the exact period of its abandonment is not so certain. It has been supposed by some that this event occurred in the reign of Henry IV when the town was almost consumed by fire. But the careful filling up of the place argues a deliberate purpose. There is little question, indeed, that the Cave was open until the period of the Reformation when it passed with other ecclesiastical property into the hands of the Crown and on its subsequent transfer to the Chester family being no longer required for superstitious services and useless for any other it underwent the common fate of the Priory and the Free Chapel of St. Nicholas and was shortly after closed and forgotten.

That this step was taken before the age of Iconoclasm seems highly probable from the unmutated condition of the principal figures and, as the age of the Reformation was one in which such desecrations were too frequent to attract particular notice or to leave behind any vivid impressions it will best explain the oblivion into which the very existence of the Cave, as well as the exact sites of the Priory, and of the Free Chapel of St. Nicholas, speedily fell. We may conclude that at the same time the ancient cross itself disappeared. This period will also account most satisfactorily for the mode of filling up the Cave as well as for the discovery of human bones and medieval pottery; for then it was that the Priory and cloisters being taken down the site was appropriated to the new manor house and gardens, the building and arrangement of which necessarily required the removal of much rubbish, and the clearing away of many bones³⁴. Some of these we knew to have been afterwards deposited in the church but a portion of them would be very naturally employed by the lord of the

³³ *The boundary between Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire used to run along the line of Melbourn Street and Baldock Street*

³⁴ *An alternative explanation for the human bone is that one or more Anchorites died and were buried in the cave- unfortunately the complete lack of analysis during the excavation means we will never know for sure.*

manor to fill up the oratory preparatory to the erection of the Mercat house and prison above it. The utter contempt with which popery was afterwards regarded must have extinguished all desire on the part of the town's people to perpetuate the memory of a former superstition and, as they had long ceased to be Romanists before they became archaeologists, no further interest was felt by anyone in the subject.

We offer a few concluding remarks on the Arabic numerals recently discovered in the Cave and, first respecting the date of 1347, already noticed as being in the dome. The care with which these figures are cut, their general air of antiquity, and their obscure and almost inaccessible position, would certainly have placed them beyond suspicion, but for a single figure (the figure '4'), which seems open to challenge, as differing in some degree from the usual form of the fourteenth century. Yet the falsification of these figures seems most improbable. It is next to certain that neither Stukeley nor Parkin was aware of their existence for had they been the former must, as a point of honour, and the latter assuredly would, as a ground of triumph, have adverted to them. Indeed, we have it in proof that no early antiquaries examined this part of the Cave and since their time we can conceive of no motive which could prompt any one to attempt a deception.

The peculiarity in the form of this numeral must nevertheless be admitted. Yet it is certain that such a form was occasionally used about the middle of the fifteenth century and the exact period when the circular shape of the old numeral merged into the angular, or by what gradations, if any, this was effected, is not precisely known. It is clear that the figure here has a transition character and contemporaneous manuscripts exist which justify the belief that as early as the middle of the fourteenth century the disputed form may, in some instances, have been used.

These, however, are not the only ancient numerals that have been discovered. We have another instance, just above the prison cell of St. Katharine, apparently written by an amateur hand in old English characters, with the name of "Martin" and the date of 18 February 1350; and in this case the figures themselves offer no insuperable objection to their authenticity. Supposing these inscriptions to be genuine, they furnish decisive proof of the continued use of the oratory up to that time. In regard to the numerals in the dome, they also seem to mark the date of certain alterations or repairs to the eastern shaft which we must conceive to have been then the principal entrance and judging from the colouring on the block itself we may further imagine that they indicate the period of the painting of the figures, a practice which from other sources we know to have been much in vogue in the reign of Edward III.

If, on the other hand, we are obliged to conclude that a fraud has been practiced, it would most probably consist in the change of a figure '5' into the figure '3', which would then give us the year 1547 - a year remarkable for the first act of parliament which suppressed idolatry and superstition throughout the land. But in this case we must also infer from the insertion of the date that it was done with the hope that at some further time the oratory might be again opened and used³⁵.

However the case be decided, it will be clear that the final exit from the Cave was made through the northern shaft which afterwards led to its discovery.

³⁵ *These are intriguing and tantalizing ideas: firstly we may have the identity of one of the anchorites, a man called Martin, carving his own name in the chalk; and secondly that possibly the last hermit to leave the cave in 1547 scratched out the date for posterity.*

RECAPITULATION

The result of our whole inquiry will appear in the following conclusions:

1. That the cave was first formed by means of shafts, either of British or Romano British construction, at a period anterior to Christianity.
2. That at a somewhat later period, the cave was used as a Roman sepulchre.
3. That about the period of the Crusades, it received the greater part of its present decorations, and was then, if not before, converted into a Christian oratory, to which a hermitage was probably attached
4. That it remained open until the Reformation, when it was finally filled up, closed, and forgotten.

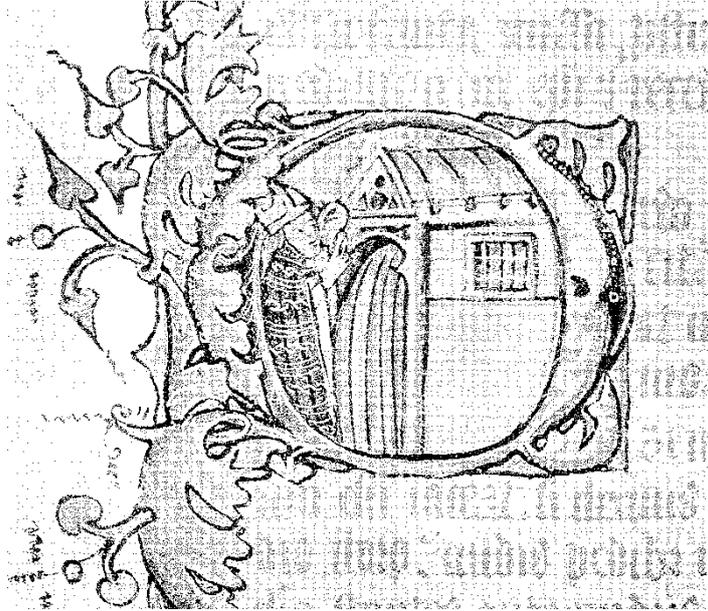
Joseph Beldam

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APPENDIX 1- ANCHORITES AND ANCHORHOLDS

by Jeremy Lander



A bishop enclosing an anchoress

From as early as the 7th century AD until the reformation a substantial number of religious people lived hermitic lives in England and all over Europe. It appears that they were most common in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries. Many lived in caves and rustic huts in remote places but there were others who were attached – quite literally – to churches. These people were called anchorites (*fem. anchoresses*) from the Greek *anachoretēs* meaning “one who lives apart”. A cell, called an ‘anchorhold’, would be built, sometimes in the churchyard or other part of the village, but often adjoining the church itself.³⁶ There were no rules as to the situation of the dwelling but it was often on the north side of the church so the anchorite could “deliberately forego the sunshine with the rest of nature’s gifts”³⁷.

Once the cell was ready the anchorite would be ‘enclosed’ there, devoting themselves to prayer and devotion, sometimes for the rest of their lives. The bishop had to vet all candidates carefully for the decision to be enclosed was an extremely serious one and it was an embarrassment if the anchorite

³⁶ The appendix of Rotha Mary Clay’s book *The Hermits and Anchorites of England* 1914 (RMC) lists nearly 300 anchorites and maintains this must be a fraction of the actual number as records are limited and few physical remains of cells survive. From this one can surmise that between the 12th and early 16th centuries virtually every parish in England would at some time have had an anchorite living in some part of the village.

³⁷ RMC p 81

left the cell early for some reason, as happened at Shere in Surrey in the 14th century when an anchoress left her cell after three years and was ordered by the bishop to return 'on pain of death'.³⁸

Because they were removed from normal life the enclosure ceremony was similar to a funeral service, the anchorite being considered "dead to the world". The order of enclosing provided that the candidate should fast and make confession, keeping vigil throughout the preceding night. After the mass and prostration before the altar he or she would process with the bishop and clergy, carrying a lighted taper, to the cell, the bishop leading whilst clerks chanted a litany. After solemn prayers the door would be shut and the procession would return to the church³⁹.

In many cases the anchorite was literally 'walled up', though they were usually locked in with the door locked or barred from the outside. Occasionally the anchorite would even venture from the cell, to dispense teaching and alms to the community, the amount of time they spent in the outside world being left as a matter of conscience rather than imprisonment. They might also receive visitors; children, for example, could be given lessons, or a priest enter to say mass or hear confession. Sometimes they had servants and in some instances there would be more than one anchorite with two or three lodged together in adjoining cells.

More commonly there would be one solitary anchorite and he or she would remain confined in the anchorhold, out of sight from the common populace. The cell communicated with the church, usually the chancel, so that the anchorite could watch and take part in church services. Through an opening they could pray to the Blessed Sacrament; on the opposite side there would be a small 'parlour' or 'world-side' window through which they could receive food and communicate with the outside world though remaining hidden by a shutter or curtain, often a black cloth bearing a symbolic white cross⁴⁰.

If the inmate were a priest the cell would be made a consecrated oratory but even if not the anchorhold could still be provided with an altar as recommended by Aeldred (an 11th century bishop and manual-writer for anchoresses): "arrange thine altar with white linen cloth" he wrote "which betokeneth both chastity and simpleness..In this austere setting set an image of Christ's passion that thou may have mind and see how he set and spread his arms to receive thee and all mankind to mercy if thou will ask it".

In her book, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England* (pub. 1914) Rotha Mary Clay describes a typical candidate for enclosure: "The would-be anchoress might be some maiden 'without the habit of a nun' who desired to devote herself to religion in the village where she had been brought up...she might be one who affects the solitary life". They were "usually attached to a church in order that they might derive spiritual advantages from it and at the same time confer spiritual benefits on the parish."⁴¹

Anchorites were not expected to support themselves, and, although there is evidence of them living by the 'labour of their hands', trading was frowned upon. Usually, prior to enclosure, the anchorite would have to make arrangements for people, from the local manor for example, to provide them

³⁸ Matthew Alexander *Tales of Old Surrey* 1985

³⁹ RMC p 94

⁴⁰ Rotha Mary Clay (RMC) p 79

⁴¹ RMC p 73

with sustenance. The bishop was careful not to license anyone unless he was satisfied that such arrangements were secure and permanent⁴². Alms could be received and by the 15th century this had become a lucrative source of income for some anchorites, attracting the disapproval of many commentators of the day.

Usually however anchorites lived in extreme poverty, sustained by simple, chiefly vegetarian, foods. The 'Ancren Riwe' (a rule book for anchoresses written by a 13th century bishop) warned anchoresses not to grumble if these were inedible. They might ask for more palatable food but reluctantly and tactfully 'less men say this anchoress is dainty and she asks much'⁴³. There was no regulation dress but in winter a pilch or thick garment to keep out the cold and in summer a kirtle with mantle, black head-dress, wimple, cape or veil. The one stipulation was that the dress must be plain.

It is hard for us, with our modern, sanitary lives to imagine how normal bodily functions could have been accommodated. There is little detail about this in the accounts of the time, probably because the standards for the general populace were so basic, but it is likely that a simple latrine would be dug into the floor. The anchorite was encouraged to wash, however and although extreme ascetics gloried in squalor the various rules for anchorites did not encourage personal neglect. One directs "wash yourself as often as you please" another quotes St Bernard "I have loved poverty, but I never loved filth"⁴⁴. The keeping of animals was also considered carefully by the manuals. The Ancren Riwe states charmingly: "you shall not possess any beast, my sisters, except only a cat...Christ knoweth it is an odious thing when people in the town complain of anchoresses' cattle".

The Anchorite was warned to watch their health, flagellation and the wearing of hair shirts was expected but wanton self-neglect was seen as counterproductive, getting the balance right was clearly not easy. The Ancren Riwe says "let not anyone handle herself too gently lest she deceive herself. She will not be able to keep herself pure ..without two things: the one is giving pain to the flesh by fasting, by watching, by flagellations, by wearing coarse garments, by a hard bed, with sickness and much labour; the other thing is the moral qualities of the heart, devotion, compassion, mercy, pity, charity, humility...yet many anchoresses are of such fleshly wisdom and afraid lest their head ache and their body be too much enfeebled, and are so careful of their health, that the spirit is weakened and sickeneth in sin".

The Riwe also warned anchoresses not to think that enclosure would get easier as the years passed. It warns of the later years, with temptations unabated, when she might think that after such a long period God had quite forgotten her: "An anchoress thinks she shall be most strongly tempted in the first twelve months...nay! it is not so. In the first years it is nothing but ball play".

Anchorholds often had a window to the outside world, screened with a veil or curtain. These were called parlour windows and one fault of anchorites was considered to be that of sitting too long at the parlour window. "Love your windows as little as possible", cautions the Riwe, "and see that they be small." It warns of "bad women who will come to the window whispering soft words and

⁴² RMC p 103

⁴³ Ancren Riwe.

⁴⁴ RMC

putting wicked thoughts into the anchoress's head" so she cannot sleep⁴⁵. Putting out a hand through the window, to heal the sick for example, was frowned upon.



Re-enactment of a passer-by conversing with an anchorite through the 'parlour window' at Willingham

On the subject of servants Aeldred advised: "First choose an honest ancient woman...no jangler, no roller about, no chider, no tale-teller but such one that may have good conversation and honesty. Her charge shall be to keep thine household...to close thy doors and to receive that should be received and to avoid that should be avoided. Under her governance should she have a younger woman to bear greater charges in fetching of wood and water and setting of meat and drink." The Ancren Riwle stipulated that the older woman who went about the village should be plain and the younger one kept inside as much as possible. It was inevitable that gossip would be brought back to the anchorhold by these servants and recycled to passers-by at the parlour window. A common saying was 'from mill and from market, from smithy and from anchor house men bring tidings'.

At the end of his or her life the anchorite was often buried in the anchorhold. Six skeletons were found at Compton in Surrey beneath where the anchorhold would have been.⁴⁶ Sometimes the grave would be made ready at enclosure and kept open as a memento mori, the anchorite bidden not just to meditate on their own mortality by staring into the empty grave but, with their bare hands, to scrape up some earth from the pit each day.⁴⁷

The most famous English anchoress was Julian of Norwich (1342-1412). She prayed for illness as a penance and got her desire at the age of 30. She nearly died in her mother's arms but survived and lived for at least another 40 years. Her writings, known as the 'Revelations of Divine Love', describe

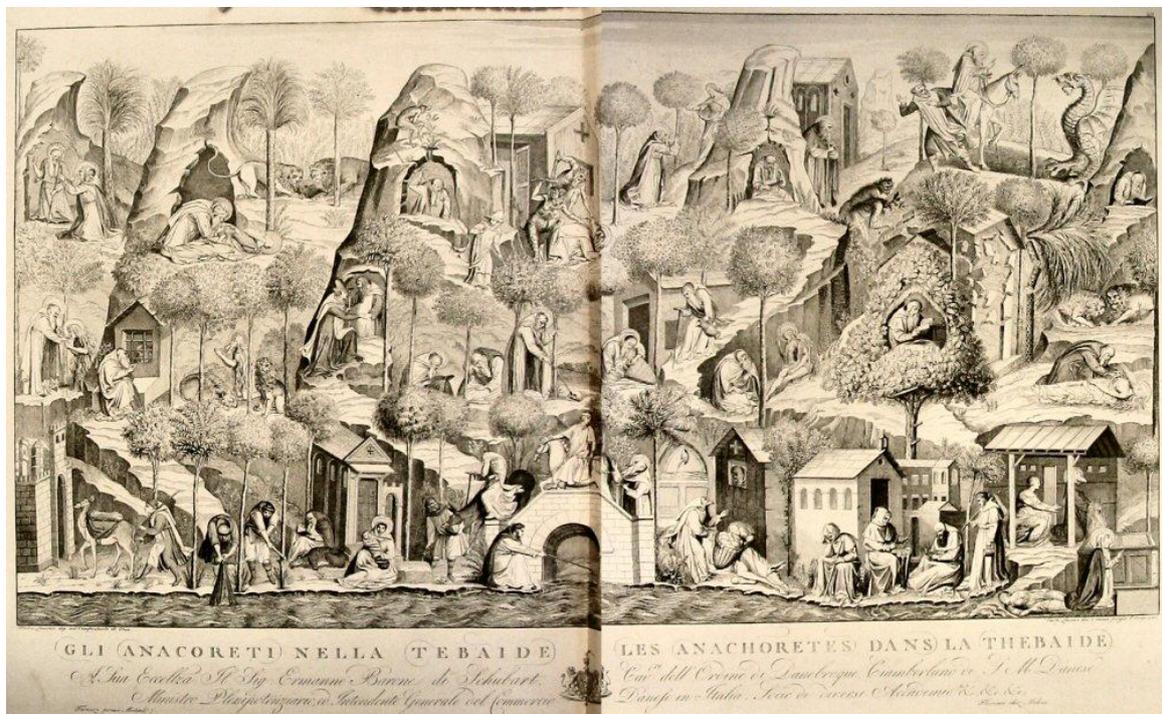
⁴⁵ RMC p 122

⁴⁶ Matthew Alexander

⁴⁷ Ancren Riwle

in detail the “shewings” she experienced during her grave illness, and are thought to be among the finest contributions to religious literature produced in England. She is best known for her optimism with such words as “All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well”, and for a kind of early feminism insisting, as she did, in calling God and Christ “Mother.”

With the coming of the Reformation the practice of paying religious people, through alms or otherwise, to pray for and on behalf of their benefactors became discredited. Prayer and devotion to God began to be seen as the responsibility of every individual and not something that could be assigned to others, however religious or selfless they may be. Hermits and anchorites became anachronisms and numbers began to decline. When the monasteries were dissolved in the 16th century anchorites disappeared from the scene altogether and the anchorholds were either pulled down or put to other uses, such as vestries.



Anchorites depicted in various habitats, including caves

APPENDIX 2

A BRIEF MEMOIR OF THE LATE

JOSEPH BELDAM, F.S.A.

From the "Royston Crow," August, 1866.

Mr Joseph Beldam was born in 1795, at Royston, in Herts, where his family have been long settled. He entered as an undergraduate at St. Peter's College, Cambridge, in 1818, and at his first annual examination was elected a Scholar on the Foundation. Amongst those who were his contemporaries at the University, are many whose names have since become eminent: amongst them, we need only mention those of Lord Macaulay, the Hon. Charles Villiers, Lord Belper, the Romillys, and Mr. Charles Austen, with most of whom he was either personally intimate or associated in the Cambridge Debating Society, in which Society he took an active part, as he afterwards did (upon entering on his legal career) in the London Academical Society, whose meetings at that time had attained considerable note, and of which he ultimately became the President.

Upon leaving the University he entered his name as a student of the Middle Temple and then devoted a year to travelling on the continent, visiting France, Italy, Germany, and Spain, thereby laying the foundation for that knowledge of art and good taste which he afterwards cultivated.

About this time (1821) he wrote a poem called Pompeii, which he afterwards (in 1825) published, together with others of his poems, in a small volume dedicated to his friend Mr Wiffen, the translator of Tasso's Jerusalem Liberata, who had accompanied him in some of his tours. On his return to England Mr Beldam commenced his legal studies as a pupil in the chambers of Mr Justice Wightman, with whom he always afterwards maintained feelings of friendship. After practising for several years as a Special Pleader below the bar, Mr Beldam was called at the Middle Temple in May, 1825, and chose the Norfolk circuit and sessions, travelling with Mr (now Sir) Fitzroy Kelly, with whom as well as with other leading members of his circuit he was intimate, and in the course of a few years became known as a rising junior. In consequence of ill health, however, he was obliged to leave the fatigue of circuit, and devoted his attention to his practice in the Palace Court, which he had purchased, Mr Frederick Thessiger (now Lord Chelmsford) and Mr Justice Erle having preceded him in that court by a few years. The Palace Court (as is well known) was a short time subsequently thrown open to general practice by an Act introduced by Lord Brougham, who omitted to compensate or pension those gentlemen who had acquired the right to practise there at a very considerable outlay, the court being in fact included in the arrangements of the royal household. Under these circumstances Mr Beldam resigned his practice in the Palace Court, where Mr Serjeant Wallenger and he then had the principal part of the special pleading.

Descended as he was from a French Huguenot family who had resigned their position in Picardy to carry out the right of private judgment in religion, Mr Beldam felt strongly on the subject of the laws

then affecting Protestant Dissenters, many of which (still un-repealed though partially disused) were very oppressive. Accordingly, in 1827, he published his first edition of *The Laws affecting Protestant Dissenters*. The want of such a work had been then long felt by Dissenters generally: Mr Park of the Norfolk circuit had commenced writing on the subject, but died before his book was completed; and Mr Justice Talfourd, who had been engaged by the dissenting deputies to elucidate the subject, had from some cause or other been prevented from accomplishing the object. Mr Beldam's work, though published independently of any professional sanction, was received by the profession at once as a standard work, and underwent a second edition; he was subsequently requested to publish a third edition of the work, the former editions being then out of print, but the general progress of public feeling on the subject of religious freedom having in his opinion rendered the book less necessary, he declined doing so. About this time he addressed a letter to Lord Dacre on the slavery question, which was published and met with general approbation; it was spoken of in terms of commendation by Mr Canning in one of his best speeches in Parliament, and led to Mr Beldam forming the acquaintance and friendship of the late Mr Zachary Macaulay, one of the fathers of negro emancipation, and also to his becoming first connected with the Anti-slavery movement, of which he continued to be ever an active supporter. He at once joined the Anti-slavery Committee in Aldermanbury⁴⁸, of which his friend, Mr Serjeant Matthews, was then secretary, and for many years devoted the chief part of his time and attention to obtaining the emancipation of the negroes in the British Colonies.

After the passing of the British Slave Emancipation Act, it soon became apparent that from some cause or other it was systematically violated. At this time Mr Wilberforce had retired from parliamentary life and the late Sir Fowell Buxton was the acknowledged chief of the Anti-slavery Committee. The question of Negro apprenticeship then occupied the attention of the public, and conflicting opinions were strongly entertained on the subject, not only by the public at large, but scarcely less by the members of the Anti-slavery Committee. It was indeed universally agreed amongst them that the system of apprenticeship worked badly and ought to be abolished; but as to the means of remedying the evil there was far less unanimity. Mr Zachary Macaulay was then residing in Paris, where Mr Beldam visited him, in order to consult his views of what steps should be taken in the emergency. The affair had now passed into a legal phase, and Mr Zachary Macaulay strongly advised Mr Beldam to take up the matter "professionally and perseveringly" and though the latter was at that time much out of health, he consented to do so; and from that time until the final abolition of slavery gave the whole of his time to the subject, being (though gratuitously on his part) not only the Editor of most of the Society's publications, but also the accredited Counsel of the party, which involved labours of a very onerous kind, including the collection and examination of all Colonial Acts, Ordinances and Public Documents. It became necessary that these should be constantly referred to and examined, and a communication having been made to the Colonial Office, Lord Glenelg, at that time Secretary for the Colonies, with his usual courtesy assigned an apartment in the Colonial Office for the prosecution of this enquiry, and liberally permitted Mr Beldam to have access to all colonial documents then bearing upon the subject. He was now invited to accept a professional stipend, but this he positively declined, as he subsequently did two colonial appointments which were offered him by the Government in recognition of his services in the cause of emancipation.

⁴⁸ In the City of London

At length, after great labour, 19 resolutions were carefully prepared by him in which the Committee of the Anti-slavery Society pledged themselves to prove the existence of a system of gross abuses of the law, as it then stood, fully justifying a parliamentary enquiry. These were brought forward by Sir Fowell Buxton in the House of Commons in 1835, and a Committee, of which Mr H. Labouchere was chairman, was appointed by the House to investigate the subject, Sir Fowell Buxton being the promoter on the side of abolition, Mr Wm. Gladstone watching on behalf of the colonists, who appointed Mr Burge, Q.C., their counsel, Sir George Stephen attending as the solicitor to the Anti-slavery Society. Mr Beldam and his friend, the late Mr Serjeant Matthews, were deputed to represent the Committee and the Society, although their knowledge of the alleged abuses under examination was necessarily founded not upon their actual experience, but upon the careful study of authentic documents. It appeared doubtful, however, whether in a matter involving interests so important, the House would be willing to dispense with personal and actual experience.

At this important crisis circumstances occurred, which led to the return to this country from the Mauritius of Sir John Jeremie, whose thorough knowledge of the practical working of slavery in all the colonies, and whose remarkable courage and perseverance in the cause of its abolition had been already fully tested. He was at once installed as leader, and Mr Beldam and Mr Serjeant Matthews associated with him, and the result of the investigation was conclusive; ample proof, not only of legislative but also of practical abuses, was established: and the colonists, seeing their cause was hopeless, agreed to the abolition of the apprenticeship system.

During the whole of these proceedings Mr Beldam's friendship with Sir F. Buxton, Dr Lushington, and other leading members of the Society continued uninterrupted, and when Sir F. Buxton's scheme for the civilization of Central Africa was brought out, he took an active part in it; being on the committee of the Society formed for that purpose, and assiduous in his attendance there. He was engaged in preparing or settling some of the most important documents connected with the expedition; and such was the confidence reposed in him by Sir F. Buxton, its promoter, that it was his wish that Mr Beldam should be offered the appointment of first Commissioner of the expedition; but in reply he was informed by the Government that a military or naval officer alone would be eligible for that appointment. The African climate and other causes, for the most part altogether beyond the control of the promoters of the first Niger expedition, resulted (as is well known) in its lamentable failure, at least for the time, and in the sudden dispersion of the Society which had commenced its operations with hopes so confident of success. On this occasion Mr Beldam, as one of the guarantees who had undertaken if necessary, to supplement the government grant for shipbuilding purposes of the expedition, contributed his quota to the expenses of the Society, and at that period, when most of the friends of the cause felt too much dismayed to venture on a public explanation of the event, Mr Beldam was one of those who strenuously recommended it, and volunteered to prepare the report, which he did, and it was afterwards read by his friend, the late Sir Robert Inglis, at the last public meeting of the Society.

It is right and at the same time most gratifying here to observe, that although the sad disasters of the first Niger expedition occasioned such discouragement as for a time indisposed even its friends to defend very vigorously the principles on which it was originated, those principles are now fully recognized, and, aided by subsequent experience, are successfully and actively applied in various parts of the African continent.

The special object which had led to the formation of the London Anti-slavery Society having now been attained, and the efforts of the African Civilization Society being so unfortunately suspended, it was thought right that a rigid examination of the colonial laws should be made, with a view to the establishment of principles on which the future freemen of the colonies should be governed, and oppressive enactments prevented. For this purpose Sir Fowell Buxton was anxious that Mr Beldam should be appointed a Commissioner. Under the circumstances resulting from this application, Mr Beldam published a pamphlet making his own suggestions on the principles which he considered should regulate future colonial legislation: much yet remained to be done in prosecuting our legislative provisions for the prevention of the slave trade, and with his usual energy he took up the subject. Having obtained the permission of Lord Brougham and Dr Lushington to try his hand at a new enactment which should comprise regulations to meet every probable case, the Act so prepared by him was introduced in the House of Lords by Lord Brougham, who took occasion to pass the highest eulogy on its author. With some alterations the Bill successfully passed the House of Lords, but on its arrival in the Commons met with the expected opposition from the commercial interests, and some of its most stringent provisions were cancelled; though even in its mutilated state Lord Brougham's Slave Trade Act of 1839 has added much to the security against the inhuman traffic in slaves.

Except indirectly Mr Beldam was never actively engaged in political life, though (as on the Anti-slavery question) he was deeply interested in various subjects on which he published his opinions; but even in so doing he always avoided rather than courted personal observation. He spoke well in public, and some of his speeches gained him much reputation, but it was only when he felt himself compelled to advocate principles on which he felt strongly that he willingly entered the arena of debate.

He was early associated with the British and Foreign School Society, and was for many years an active member of the committee, as he was also with other philanthropic societies. Amongst his publications are two or three pamphlets on education.

After the success of the Anti-slavery cause the state of his health rendered it advisable for him to retire from professional life. In 1845 he accompanied some members of his family to Italy, and from thence went on to Egypt and Syria, visiting many of the principal spots in the East, which he afterwards described in a work entitled *Recollections of Travels in Italy and the East*, published in 1850, and dedicated to his friend the late Sir Robert Inglis.

It was on his return from this tour that Mr Beldam brought to England the water from the River Jordan which, at Her Majesty's special desire, was afterwards used at the baptism of H.R.H. the Princess Helena.

For several years after his return from Palestine he devoted himself to the British and Foreign Bible Society as an active member of their committee. And having taken up his residence at Royston he acted in the Commission of the Peace as a Magistrate for the counties of Herts and Cambs, where his legal knowledge rendered him a valuable acquisition. He became chairman of the Royston Bench, and was active in many local objects tending to the general good of society. As a member of the Royal Geographical and Antiquarian Societies and the Archaeological Institute he contributed several papers to those learned bodies, some of them serving to elucidate the antiquities in the

neighbourhood of Royston, where at his leisure moments he had carried on some very interesting investigations, amongst the papers so contributed were:

A Report from the Ancient Haven of Dover

Royston Court House in the time of King James I

Explorations, etc, in the Neighbourhood of Royston and of Ashwell

A New Report upon the Origin and Use of the Celebrated Royston Cave

Also, Papers upon the Ancient Roman and Saxon Roads still to be traced in the counties of Herts and Cambs, and other Papers of Antiquarian interest.

In addition to these, Mr Beldam has left numerous Manuscripts on various subjects, including a short account of Bassingbourn in the Olden time.

With the exception of several visits to France and Switzerland with his family, and a winter (1856) spent in Rome, Mr Beldam continued to reside at Royston until his death. His health, never robust, had for the last few years become much more susceptible to atmospheric changes than previously; his activity of mind and body, however, and his usefulness, continued unimpaired to the last. An attack of bronchitis, brought on by cold and over fatigue, caused him gradually to sink, and after a few days' illness he died at Royston, on the 6th of June, 1866, in the 71st year of his age, and he was buried in his family vault at Royston. His desire through life (to use his own words) was to increase the reverence for God's Holy Word, and deepen the conviction of a wise and overruling Providence. In the true sense of the word he was a Christian Philanthropist and as such, and as a true-hearted friend, his loss will be widely felt.



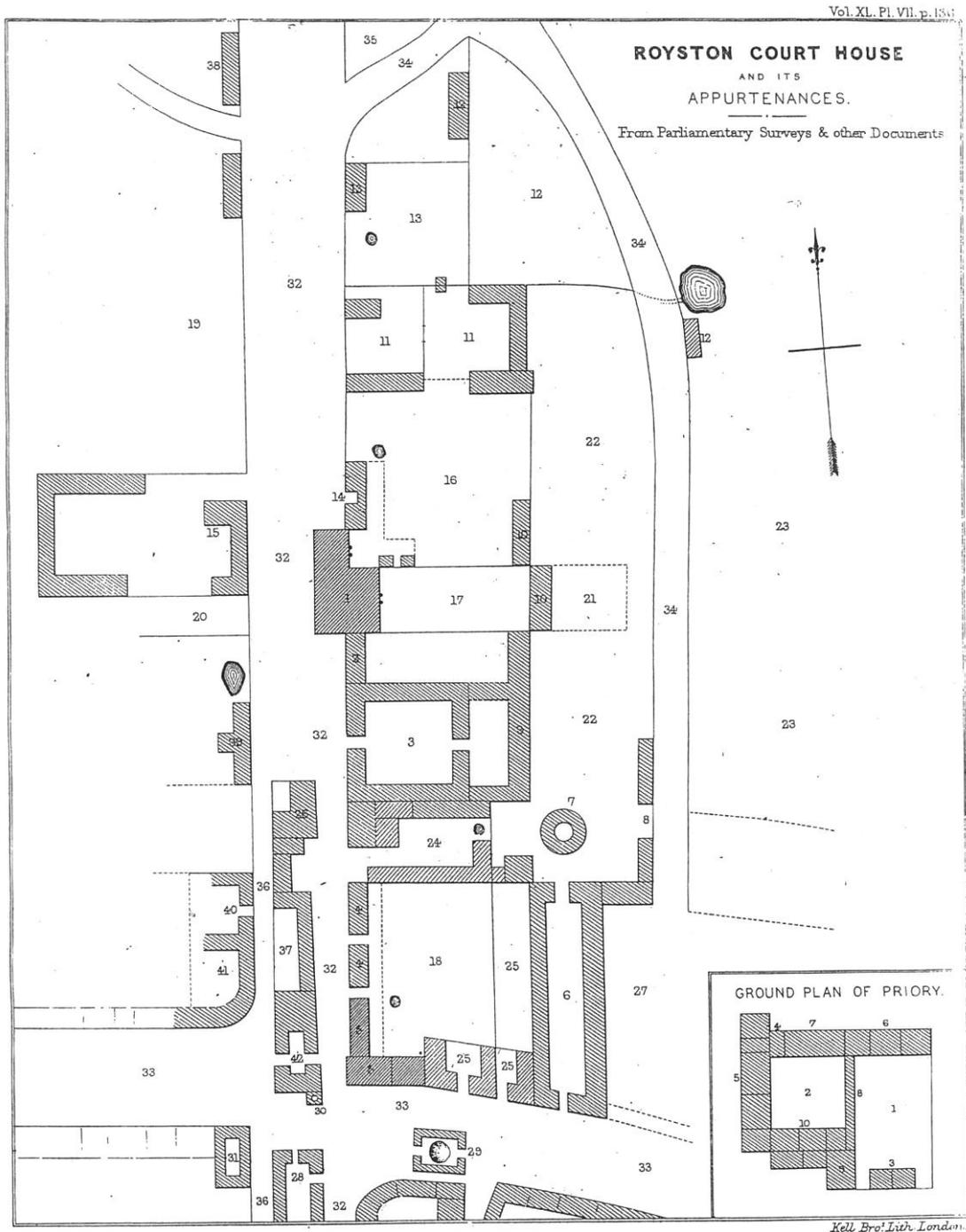
Engraving showing the disastrous Niger Expedition of 1841

APPENDIX 3

ROYSTON COURT HOUSE AND ITS APPURTENANCES

From Parliamentary Surveys & Other Documents

As reproduced in *A History Of Royston* by Alfred Kingston



Key

- 1 The King's House
- 2 The Prince's buttery
- 3 The King's guard house
- 4 Prince Charles' pantry
- 5 Prince Charles' lodgings
- 6 The King's wardrobe and housekeeper's residence
- 7 The cock pit
- 8 The Swan barns or store houses
- 9 The King's butteries
- 10 Chambers for visitors
- 11 The stables for hunting horses, stable yard and other buildings
- 12 The dog house with an upstairs apartment for the master of the hounds
- 13 Tenements for servants
- 14 The porter's lodge and gate house
- 15 The King's and Prince's coach houses, barns, stables for coach horses and granaries
- 16 The Great Garden
- 17 The King's privy garden
- 18 Prince Charles' garden
- 19 The King's Paradise or bowling green
- 20 A small garden
- 21 A small garden attached to the chambers (no. 10)
- 22 The Swan
- 23 The old pasture
- 24 Wilson's estate and King's privy kitchen
- 25 Part of Prince Charles' garden
- 26 Residence of the King's equerries
- 27 Gatward's estate
- 28 The old Talberd or Talbot Inn
- 29 Site of the butter market
- 30 Site of the old Cross
- 31 The hospital of Saint John and Saint James of Jerusalem
- 32 Armynge Street, also called Stilton Street, and towards the north end of Huntingdon Way or York Way; now called, to the north of the junction with Icknield Street, Kneesworth Street, and to the south of the junction, High Street, leading towards London.
- 33 Icknield Street, to the west now called Baldock Street, and to the east Melbourn Street, leading to Cambridge
- 34 Field Lane, now called Dog Kennel Lane. Formed a north boundary of the Royal property.
- 35 Common fields called Chapel Fields and ancient burial ground.
- 36 Dead Street or Dow Street, now called Back Street
- 37 Formerly called Middle Street
- 38 House of same date as the King's house and probably owned by Lord Pembroke
- 39 Turner's estate
- 40 The Angel Inn
- 41 Stapelton's property
- 42 The Old Crown Inn