

THE CHOIR LECTERN

As you know, this lectern came from Newstead Abbey, but because of the different stories which are told about this I thought I would do a little research so that we can all tell the same story to our visitors.

The lectern was cast at Tournai in Belgium in 1503, and so is one of the very few pre-Reformation, brass, Eagle lecterns in this country.

On the stem is the following pre-Reformation Latin inscription - "Orate pro anima Radulphi Savage et pro animabus omnium fidelium defunctorum."

The Savages came from Stainsby, nr Ault Hucknall, and it would seem therefore, from the inscription, and the fact that a Savage from Hucknall was a Prior of Newstead, that the lectern was a gift from Ralph Savage whilst his relative was head of the Abbey.

The lectern was given to the Minster in April 1805 by Sir Richard Kaye, Dean of Lincoln.

There are some ten printed accounts of this legend, of which the earliest is contained in Thomas Moore's "Life and Letters of Lord Byron", 1830 Vol I. in which he states that the lectern was found in the lake at Newstead where it was supposed to have been thrown by the monks at the Dissolution. It was sent to be cleaned and in the body was discovered a secret compartment, which contained a number of old legal papers connected with the rights and privileges of the foundation. There was also reputed to be a document which contained a full pardon from Henry V, of every possible crime (and there is a tolerably long catalogue enumerated) which the monks might have committed. One of the documents was supposed to have been the Newstead cartulary of 1344, which is at present in the Notts CRO.

One thing is certain, there are no documents in the British Museum as we have been led to believe, and neither are there any at Newstead Abbey, who have recently purchased the Thos Wildman papers, in whose family the documents were also supposed to be held.

The other nine accounts are all similar to this, with one or two variations and a little "poetic licence" here and there. One of these variations is that there were a pair of candlesticks found at the same time, and although there is a fine pair of brass candlesticks in the Minster, there is no record of these having been given with the lectern.

We do know that the lectern was purchased by Sir Richard Kaye in 1775 from Lord Byron (the 'wicked' Lord) at a sale of his effects, as there is a letter dated Dec 12th 1775 from Kaye to the Duke of Portland, in which he says "...I have bought Lord Byron's strong beer for my parish, and the brass Eagle for Southwell as being good bargains." Sir Richard Kaye was then Rector of Kirkby-in-Ashfield.

From the other accounts it would appear that the lectern was found sometime between 1765 and 1775, but who sent it to be cleaned (when the documents are reputed to have been found) is unsure. Kaye had the lectern for 30 years before presenting it to the Minster, so it was possible that he had it cleaned and restored.

From reading all the accounts, and enquiries to The British Museum, Newstead Abbey, the Nottingham Records Office, Notts County Library, and the British Library, the best possible explanation is as follows:-

The lectern is one of the few remaining pre-Reformation, brass Eagle lecterns in this country and was cast at Tournai in Belgium in 1503

The lectern was thrown into the lake at Newstead Abbey by the monks at the Dissolution, and there it lay for almost 250 years before being found between 1765 and 1775 when the lake was drained. At some time it was reported to have been sent for cleaning, when some documents were reputed to have been found inside the lectern, but as there is no confirmation of this and the whereabouts of any documents (apart from the cartulary) is not known, I think it is highly unlikely that there was anything inside (especially after being under water for 250 years.) The lectern was bought in 1775, from the fifth Lord Byron (great-uncle of the poet) by Sir Richard Kaye, then rector of Kirkby-in-Ashfield, who then gave it to the Minster in April 1805, when he was Dean of Lincoln.

Bibliography:

- "Life & Letters of Lord Byron" - Thos Moore - Vol I - 1830
- "Abbotsford & Newstead" - Washington Irving - 1835
- "A Visit to Sherwood Forest" - James Carter - 1850
- "Popular Handbook" - Allen - 1877
- "Guide to Southwell" - Livett - 1883
- "Memorials of Old Nottinghamshire"- Rev Charles Cox - 1912
- "Livingstone & Newstead" - Mrs A Z Fraser - 1913
- "Highways & Byways of Nottinghamshire - J B Firth - 1916
- "Dust of Years" - F I Cowles FSA Scot. - 1933
- "The Grey Shrines of England" - Arthur Grant.

Harold Brooke

Hon Librarian