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978-1-107-50197-3 - The Estates of Crowland Abbey: A Study in Manorial Organisation

Frances M. Page

Frontmatter

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# The Estates of Crowland Abbey

PLATE I



THE BENEFACTORS OF CROWLAND  
[Harley MS. Y. 6]

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*A Study in Manorial Organisation*

BY

FRANCES M. PAGE, PH.D.

CAMBRIDGE  
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS

1934

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*To*

P. H. P. & A. P.

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## RESEARCH

*His chamber all was hangd about with rolls  
And old records of auncient times derivd,  
Some made in books, some in long parchment scrolls,  
That were all worm-eaten and full of canker holes.*

*Amidst them all he in a chaire was sett,  
Tossing and turning them withouten end;  
But for he was unhable them to fett,  
A litle Boy did on him still attend  
To reach, whenever he for ought did send;  
And oft when thinges were lost, or laid amis,  
That Boy them sought and unto him did lend.*

“Faerie Queene”, Bk. 2, c. 9

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\*Table: the Crowland Estates

\*Map, showing the distribution of the Crowland  
Estates

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## AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

In reviewing the eight years spent in this research, I am very conscious that without the help and encouragement of others my book would scarcely have been written.

To the Electors of the John Elliott Cairnes research scholarship I owe the first three years of post-graduate work at Girton College, Cambridge, and to the President and Fellows of Queens' College the permission to use the Crowland Abbey documents upon which it was based; recently the trustees of the Ellen McArthur Prize Fund and of the Girton College Publications Fund have with great generosity helped me to publish its results.

Miss H. M. Cam, of Girton College, originally suggested the Crowland manorial rolls as a possible field for study, and throughout the whole time I have worked upon them she has given me assistance and advice, submitting my conclusions to a searching criticism which has been invaluable. I remember also with especial gratitude the late Professor Elizabeth Levett of London University, whose seminar I attended in my first three years of study; and I owe much to Dr Coulton of St John's College, Cambridge, and to Mr H. S. Bennett of Emmanuel College, who in these early years were always ready to encourage and never too busy to help.

Professor Stenton of Reading University and Mr G. T. Lapsley of Trinity College, Cambridge, gave me valuable suggestions for the development of my original Ph.D. thesis in view of ultimate publication. In that development and revision, I most fully appreciate my debt to Professor Clapham, who for the last two years has unsparingly given time and patience to

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the criticism of my material and method, and has saved me from many of the mistakes of inexperience.

I also owe much to those who have given help in points of detail. The Rev. J. F. Williams, of Sandon, had done exhaustive work upon the chronology of the rolls before I began to examine them, and his labours saved me weeks of preliminary classification. I should also like to record my appreciation of his generosity in giving up his own investigation of the Crowland material in order to give me a free field. I am greatly indebted to Miss Wretts-Smith, whose assistance is chiefly responsible for the inclusion of the tables of grain-prices and yield. The original map is due to the draughtsmanship of Mr B. B. Dickinson; while in several of its final details I was helped by Professor Gordon of London University, and by Dr Lobban of King's College, London, who also gave valuable advice in other difficulties of arrangement and subject-matter. I offer also very sincere thanks to Mr J. R. Carey of King's College, London, who has generously given his time to the reading of all my proofs.

The officials of the Cambridge University Library and British Museum have given me every possible assistance; particularly I would mention the kindness of Mr Pink, of the University Library, who gave much of his spare time to help me in checking transcripts and verifying details. To the courtesy of the Library and Museum and the work of their photographers is due the appearance of the illustrations. I owe a considerable debt to Miss Pate, of the Cambridge University Typewriting Office, and her assistant Miss Dyson, whose patience and accuracy in typing from my roughest manuscript saved me endless time and labour.

Finally, I thank my publishers, the Cambridge University Press, for the co-operation and help, particularly over the

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technicalities of the Appendix, which has been given to me during the past year.

These, by assistance and goodwill, have contributed more than it is possible to express towards the making of this book. I conclude this record of my helpers with the names of Miss M. G. Jones, Director of Studies in History at Girton College, Cambridge, Dame Bertha Newall, late Mistress of Girton; and Professor F. J. C. Hearnshaw of London University, whose encouragement has meant much; and of my Father and Mother, to whom the book is dedicated.

FRANCES M. PAGE

*University of London  
King's College  
November 1933*

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## EDITOR'S PREFACE

It is satisfactory that the manorial records of the great fenland abbey of Crowland, preserved as they are in a Cambridge College, are here edited and criticised by a Cambridge hand. By an accident of MS. survival, the information which they give is fullest for the three Cambridgeshire manors in Oakington, Dry Drayton and Cottenham. Of the Lincolnshire, Huntingdon and Northampton manors, and of the scrap of land in Leicestershire, Miss Page is not in a position to tell us so much as we could wish. These estates form a background, in parts indistinct, against which the economy and even the personalities of what a Cambridge man is tempted to call the home manors stand out in high relief.

These manors—it will be noted—with nearly all the rest were in, and not of, their various villages. Except for Crowland itself, only two of the estates were both manor and vill. True, nearly all the estates were in the Danelaw, where villages usually had several lords; but even so it is a noteworthy fact that this great and ancient abbey was sole lord of so very few villages. One result was the negotiation of those interesting agrarian agreements between the councils of the Abbot and of other lords to which Miss Page calls attention on p. 25 and elsewhere.

Students of administration will perhaps turn first to what little can be learnt about these councils (pp. 45 *seqq.*); or to the work of the stewards (p. 29); to the account of the manorial bureaucracy of the chief pledges (pp. 68 *seqq.*); or to the most illuminating discussion of certain aspects of medieval accounting on pp. 98–9. They will find many other matters of interest besides.

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## EDITOR'S PREFACE

Economists will note especially the three-fields of thirteenth-century Cambridgeshire (p. 79); the troubles with butchers on the commons (p. 27); the rarity, in these records, of a villein with a whole virgate; the productive insignificance of the villeins' *opera* and the consequent importance of the whole-time manorial staff (p. 104); the contributions of this Crowland evidence to the familiar controversies about the Black Death (pp. 120 *seqq.*); the discussion of assised rents (pp. 91 *seqq.*), and the whole discussion of manorial decline and fall in Chs. xi and xiii. In passing they will observe that from the Crowland, as from the Winchester, manors there is no evidence of falling harvest yields at the close of the Middle Ages (p. 118).

Social historians will be directed (p. 109) to further discussion of what Miss Page has aptly called the "customary poor law" of the Cambridgeshire manors. They will appreciate the lively detail of Ch. xii. Perhaps they will be attracted most of all by the fortunes and the enterprise of that family of villein blood with a great name, the Pepiz of Cottenham.

The documentary appendices have been made as nearly as possible complete. As the ninety-six rolls preserved at Queens' cannot, and need not, be reproduced entire, the appendices do not contain all the unprinted texts which Miss Page has used. But they do contain all that is necessary for comparative study of the Crowland with similar records. A great deal of statistical material is summarised in tables to save space. In this way it is hoped that all the original evidence which a student can reasonably want has been made accessible.

J. H. CLAPHAM