THE LOST VILLAGE OF RINGOLTHORP

by Richard Snodin

I am sure that most parishioners will not be aware that there was once a third village in our parish - Ringolthorp, also occasionally spelt Ringlethorpe.

There are 63 known and recorded Deserted Medieval Villages in Leicestershire, and of these 63 only four resulted from Monastic Grange formation - Ringolthorp being one of them. The site of this lost village is approximately 1 1/2miles south-west of Waltham on the Wolds at National Grid reference SK/776235, and is marked only by Goldsmith Grange on present day maps.

There must have been a farm or smallholding on the site when the Domesday Survey of 1086 was carried out, as the survey records a population of four, half a plough team and around 300 acres of land.

Ringolthorp Monastic Grange was owned by the Cistercian Garendon Abbey at Loughborough. When the abbey was founded in 1133 by Robert, Earl of Leicester, the lands at Ringolthorp – comprising two carucates - and in several other villages, were granted to the Abbey. By the end of the 12th century the Ringolthorp Monastic Grange was well established, and being farmed by lay brothers. Sheep were the mainstay of the lay brothers' farming activities at that time, and there are references to sheep-folds at the granges.

Interestingly, it appears that around the late 12th century the Cistercians of Garendon were failing to live up to the high standards of their Order. One of the abbots, Geoffrey, appears to have been a married man, and one of the monks is said to have become a Jew. In 1195 Abbot William resigned, perhaps due to the lay brothers' penchant for beer drinking! In 1196 the new Abbot, Reynold, was attacked and gravely wounded by a lay brother in the Infirmary. As a consequence of all this the General Chapter of Citeaux ordered all the abbey's lay brothers to be dispersed - however this did not happen immediately, so in 1197 the abbots of two other Cistercian houses proceeded to Garendon to enforce the order.

It would seem that Garendon's problems were far from over, because in 1368 a monk of the house was said to have harboured robbers, and to have assisted them in the commission of various offences - while in 1382 the conventual church "was polluted by two monks". In 1536 Cromwell's investigators visited Garendon and alleged that five of the monks were guilty of unnatural vice, and that three sought release from religion. The abbey was dissolved later that year.

We can only hope that the Monastic Grange at Ringolthorp was not influenced by the goings-on at "*Head Office*"*!*

Further research is needed into many aspects of Ringolthorp – such as the size of the village... I suspect it was very small, perhaps comprising the Grange Farm and some surrounding crofts...and where was the access to it? I have a theory that Moor Leas Lane led from Waltham on the Wolds to Ringolthorp – and probably on to Melton Mowbray - and aerial photos would seem to support that hypothesis.

Another interesting enigma is "when did Ringolthorp cease to exist?" – the writer has heard talk that the village was a victim of the Black Death, and that the visible mound in Thorpe Arnold churchyard may be a plague pit - but I have seen no documentary evidence of this anecdote at all so far. However, the Black Death ravaged the country during 1348-49, and 30-50% of the population died, so this theory must remain a possibility for now.

There are certainly more questions than answers where Ringolthorp is concerned, and there is scope for much more research. I have a feeling that a follow-up article may be called for at a later date.



Possible remains of Ringolthorp? A pile of building stones at the side of a field.