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THE ABBEY OF COCKERSAND

---- and its local associations

At the Michaelmas meeting of the "Old Westhoughton Club" Counc.W.E. Molyneux spoke of Cockersand Abbey and the recent visit paid to the Abbey ruins by a group of the club members.

The Abbey was founded by the Order of Premonstratensians, which was established at Premontre, France by St.Norbert (afterwards Archbishop of Magdeburg) in the year 1120. For their abbeys they generally selected remote spots, and such a site was Cockersand, on the edge of Morecambe Bay, which received its Charter from Pope Clement III in 1190. By the middle ages the Order had about 35 abbeys in this country, the best known of which was probably Welbeck, and Cockersand became the third religious house in Lancashire in respect of wealth and extent of its possessions. It acquired the Westhoughton estates in the early 13th century, and the first reference to Westhoughton occurred in a Cockersand Charter dated about 1240. Perhaps that was why it was often stated that "the history of Westhoughton begins at Cockersand."

Sale of Westhoughton

At the Reformation it came, like all monasteries, under the hammer, and various people bought parts of its possessions. The Dalton family came into possession of the site of the abbey, and several of the Daltons were buried in the Chapter House, the only part of the abbey which is now in anything like a state of repair.

The Westhoughton estates were acquired by a Mr Browne, and one conjectured that the Premonstratensians must have been good landlords, for many of the local residents would appear to have taken exception to the transfer of ownership. There was subsequently a good deal of litigation between the former tenants of Cockersand and the Browne family.

To-day very little remained of the abbey except the Chapter House (which was more or less complete), under the floor of which are understood to be a considerable number of tombs. It was to-day difficult to visualize what the abbey looked like when it covered an acre of ground, and it was rather melancholy to reflect on the glories of the abbey which had passed away. There were quite a number of tunnels, running in various directions from the abbey, which had never been explored, and these would probably provide an abundance of material for any archaeologist who cared to conduct an investigation.

The abbey appeared to have been relatively neglected by historians; very little had been written about it, and there was wide scope for research. As a conclusion Counc. Molyneux recorded that the Premonstratensian Order still existed, but it was doubtful whether to-day they had 30 abbeys throughout the world.

They ate a goose