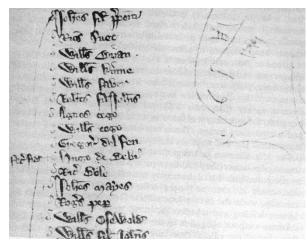
Life in Langtoft – Medieval style. Part II: People

We know the names of kings and queens, of lords and knights and ladies but what about the ordinary people of medieval England? Actually, the records can give us a surprising amount of detail about the lives of the average man and woman in the field.

Langtoft was a manor of the Abbey of Crowland whose monks were excellent record keepers. As a result, we know quite a bit about the residents of our village in the13th century, they period for which the most complete records survive. Towards the end of the 13th century there were 50 sokemen and 24 villeins recorded as living in Langtoft and doing service to the Abbot for their lands. In addition to service the villeins paid £1 each for a holding of 24 acres. One Richard Bole is listed as both a freeholder and a sokeman.

The numbers suggest that there were about 300 souls living in the village in the late 13th century.



A list of some of the men of Langtoft from the Crowland Abbey Account Rolls. About 1300AD

The drawing of the face is original.

The most important person in the village was the reeve, the overlord's representative. It was the reeve who would have lived in the new stone hall built by abbot Richard in 1280. The reeve at this time was William who served from 1267-1285. In 1273, the wife of the reeve is listed as brewster, although the fine paid to undertake the brewing of ale was paid by William himself. Sadly, because William paid the fee, we do not know the name of his wife.

We know, for instance, that John and Margery paid 4d occasional rent in 1282. In an example of the power of the overlord in the feudal system, we know that in 1297, the heirs of Elia, son of Alexander, paid 20/- (£1) a not inconsiderable sum when the average daily wage for a field labourer was 2d (1p). (For those born after 1971, an old pound (£) had 20 shillings (s) each of 12 pennies (d).) This sum would have been the amount payable to the Abbot as overlord to enable Elia's heirs to take possession of their inheritance. Similarly, in 1267, Agnes, widow of John Prest, gave the lord half a mark (A mark was 2/3 of a pound or 13 shillings and 4 pennies). and in 1299, the widow of Reginald le Ko gave the lord 5s. both so that could inherit their husband's land holding. This tells us that, contrary to popular belief medieval women could hold land on their own account and were not necessarily subject to men.

Not all women inherited their husband's holding, some became dependent on their adult sons. For example, John fitz William Attelane, promised to provide his widowed mother Beatrice, with a house, a third of a curtilage, and a yearly render of one and a half quarters of mixtil (mixed rye and other grains), one and a half quarters of drage (barley and oats mixed) and a quantity of peat, when he took over a messuage and 24 acres of land that his father had held. Mathilda Brite who died in 1332 was also a land holder. When she died her two sons, Walter and Nicholas, went to court to secure possession of her 31/2 acres and paid 16 shillings each to do so. Sadly, Nicholas died two later and his wife again paid 16s to take over her husband's share in the land until their three sons came of age.

Other land transactions are recorded in documents called Feet of Fines. Form these we learn that in January 1284 William of Francis, who was a chaplain in Langtoft entered an agreement with six other people from outside the village for 6 acres of land at Greatford, for which he gave the other parties "one sore sparrowhark" meaning one that was under 1 year old. In July 1286, Reynold de la Celer of Langtoft entered an agreement with the representative of the Abbot of Crowland concerning 1 acre of land and 6 acres and 1 rood of meadow in Croylaunde and Langtoft. Reynold acknowledged the tenements to be the right of the abbot and his church. For this, the abbot granted Reynold the tenements, "to hold to Reynold and his heirs, of the abbot and his successors and their church for ever, rendering yearly 18 pence at 3 terms, to wit, at Christmas 6 pence, at the feast of St Guthlac in April 6 pence and at the feast of St Bartholomew the Apostle 6 pence."

In August 1309, Master Thomas Huet agreed to pay Walter de Thurlby and Cecily, his wife £10 for 1 messuage (a dwelling house with outbuildings), 9 and a half acres of land and 2 and a half acres of meadow in Baston.

When it came to the law, husbands were responsible for their wives' behaviour. In a court held at Langtoft in 1291, for example, Robert fitzAndrew complained that the wife of Alan of Fen had called his wife a thief and a robber. When an inquisition was held, it was found that both women had called each other insulting names. The argument had presumably erupted in a public place, in front of witnesses, prompting one husband to bring a case to defend the slur cast on his wife's character, and by implication on that of his household. It might also have allowed him to pursue his wife's vendetta.

A few years later, in the court held at Langtoft in July 1299, William Oter was amerced (fined) six pence for his wife's trespass (offence) of beating Cecily of Alanthorpe's boy and had to give the victim's mother twelve pence for his wife's offence. Another woman in trouble with the law was Matilda Poubel who was held liable by the court at Langtoft in November 1265, when she admitted a stranger, Reginald the weaver, into her house.

In 1316, Gregory Roland and his mother, Margery broke into the house of Robert Pepper and stole a bushel of corn. When the case came to court, the jury found that Gregory should be sent to Lincoln gaol rather than being hung as he was underage. The fate of Margery is not recorded.