BLANCHLAND

A SHORT HISTORY

Printed privately for

VAUX AND ASSOCIATED BREWERIES LTD.

SUNDERLAND

1951

REPRINTED 1954
REPRINTED 1956
REPRINTED 1959
REPRINTED 1960
REPRINTED 1961
REPRINTED 1964
REPRINTED 1965

CONTENTS

I. First Impressions .... *page* 1

II. St. Norbert, Xanten, and the Abbey of Blanchland .... *page* 2

III. The Abbey of Blanchland in the Middle Ages .... *page* 4

IV. Blanchland from the Dissolution of the Abbey to the present day *page* 10

V. The Remains of Blanchland Abbey *page* 14
The Abbey Church, *p.* 14.
The Cloister, *p.* 17.
The Second Courtyard, *p.* 18.
The Outer Precincts, *p.* 19.

VI. Walks round Blanchland .... *page* 20

The following pages owe much to the help of Mr. Albert Marshall, for the last thirty-six years bailiff to the Lord Crewe Trustees; and I would like to take this opportunity of thanking him for the numerous pieces of information, which he has given me, about the church and village of Blanchland. I have also made use of the *Notes on Blanchland*, in the 1947 and 1948 numbers of the Parish Magazine, by the Reverend W. S. Wickenden, Vicar of Blanchland from 1935-1949. I would also like to express my thanks to the present Vicar of Blanchland, the Reverend W. J. Hardy, for much kindly help.

G. W. O. ADDLESHAW

I

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

THE most obvious thing about Blanchland is its remoteness. Most people usually arrive by the road from Shotley Bridge and Edmundbyers along the south side of the Derwent valley. The road seems endless and the country becomes more and more wild. The first time the present writer visited Blanchland was on a hot July day walking by the road over the fells from Stanhope. The sun beat mercilessly down and there was not a patch of shade anywhere. The second time he cycled from Durham with a head wind against him; and his companion going down hill without any brakes on about two miles east of Muggleswick went, bicycle and all, clean over a hedge at the bottom. Luckily, neither rider nor cycle were much hurt. Arriving at Blanchland whether in a car or on a cycle or just walking always gives one a sense of achievement; but whatever the rigours or excitements of the way, all are forgotten as one comes down the side of the valley into Blanchland itself. Most English villages are rather shapeless in their lay-out, whether the houses are scattered along the road or round a green. Blanchland is different. Here is a village, whose houses are for the most part built formally round an L shaped square or piazza, with an imposing gateway on its north side. It has almost a Mediterranean appearance; an Italian village transplanted to Northumberland; and in an incomparable setting. For the fells rise steeply each side of the valley, making in the autumn a gorgeous background of colour for the Abbey ruins. In the winter the tops of the fells are covered in snow, bathing the ruins in a clear, cold light, in which every stone seems to shine and glisten, and transforming them into a palace of fairyland.

2

ST. NORBERT, XANTEN, AND THE ABBEY OF BLANCHLAND

The story of Blanchland really begins many hundreds of miles away on a road outside a small German town on the west bank of the Rhine, a few miles from the Dutch frontier. The town is Xanten. Here at the beginning of the twelfth century there lived a canon of its collegiate church called Norbert. He was a youngish man of stately bearing and commanding intellect, who belonged to the *haute noblesse* of the Holy Roman Empire and was closely related to the Emperor himself. His energies were devoted to making a great career for himself in the Church; he even refused a bishopric because he did not think it important enough. One spring day in 1115 he was riding, dressed in wonderful silk clothes, and accompanied by an attendant, from Xanten to a neighbouring village. A violent thunderstorm came on. At the height of the storm there was a great flash of fork lightning, followed by a thunderbolt which fell just by Norbert's horse. The horse reared and he was thrown to the ground unconscious. When he came round, which was after about an hour, some words from the thirty-fourth psalm kept on running through his mind: " Eschew evil and do good: seek peace and ensue it ". The combined effect on him of the thunderbolt, the fall, and these words, was like the very similar happenings of the Damascus road on St. Paul. The ecclesiastical careerist became a very great saint.

Norbert rode back to Xanten and retired to the seclusion of a monastery where he spent his days in prayer and self-denial as an act of penitence for his past worldliness. But he did not want to serve God just by the life in a monastery. After two or three years he became an itinerant preacher, and went round from village to village in what is now modern Belgium, living a life of apostolic poverty and winning people to God by both his preaching and his tenderness and kindness of character. He very quickly collected a band of helpers, and the Bishop of Laon, a city in north-eastern France, who took a great interest in their work, was anxious for them to make their headquarters in

his diocese. One night in 1120 when St. Norbert was staying, in order to have time for quiet and prayer, in a little ruined chapel in the forest of Coucy about twelve miles from Laon, he had, so the story goes, a dream, that a band of white robed monks, preceded by a cross, and candles, were going round the little chapel in procession. St. Norbert took this for a sign that on the site of the chapel he was to establish his headquarters. Here he started to build an abbey, and formed his disciples into an order of monks or a religious order, as we should say to-day. The abbey was called Premontré; this being the name of the place in the forest where the chapel stood; and the order which St. Norbert thus founded, was called the Premonstratensian Order, from the name of its first abbey.

It was monks of the Premonstratensian Order who created Blanchland and to understand their aims and ideals we must distinguish between the two chief groups of monasteries which were in existence when St. Norbert began his work. The first group consisted of monasteries where the monks followed either the rule of St. Benedict and were known as Benedictines, or else a very strict form of St. Benedict's rule. These latter wore a white habit and were known as Cistercians, since the abbey where they first started was Citaux in Burgundy. The second group consisted of monasteries, where the monks were called canons. But they were not like canons of a cathedral, and to distinguish them from cathedral canons, they were known as Canons Regular, that is canons following a monastic rule or canons who were monks. Most abbeys of Canons Regular followed the principles of the monastic life as laid down by St. Augustine of Hippo, and were for this reason known as Augustinian Canons. Neither Benedictine nor Cistercian monks nor with some exceptions Augustinian canons looked after any parish churches in person. Their days were spent within the monastery, taking part in the services of the Church; any time left over from this had to be given to the administration of the monastic estates.

St. Norbert's monks belonged to the second group; they were Canons Regular. Within the walls of their abbeys their chief function was the celebration of the services of the Church with as much splendour and solemnity as possible.

At the same time they lived the monastic life in one of its strictest forms. It was a life which meant great self-denial and personal hardship; little food and coarse at that; long hours of silence and constant disciplining of the thoughts and emotions. But unlike the other monastic orders, the Premonstratensians preached and worked amongst the people in the parishes near their abbey; and the monastic discipline under which the canons lived was intended to turn them into preachers and parish priests of great power and spiritual stature. This is what gives the Premonstratensian Order its originality and interest. It was an anticipation in many respects of the ideals of the friars, and St. Norbert is a precursor of St. Francis of Assisi.

Each Premonstratensian monastery was called an abbey; it was ruled by an abbot, and the canons or monks wore white cassock, like the Cistercians, with rochet or full surplice over it and a white cloak and cap. For this reason they were often known as the white canons. Premonstratensian abbeys spread very quickly in the twelfth century, not only in France where the first abbey was founded, but also in Belgium and Germany and particularly in what is now known as Central Europe. Each abbey was subject to the Abbot of Premontré, the mother house of the Order. The first Premonstratensian abbey to be founded in England was that at Newhouse in Lincolnshire, sometime between 1143 and 1145. Other abbeys quickly sprang up; eventually there were thirty-one in England and Wales; and it was from the Premonstratensian Abbey of Croxton in Leicestershire, founded about 1159, that the first white canons came to Blanchland.

3

THE ABBEY OF BLANCHLAND IN THE MIDDLE AGES

In the twelfth century the land along the north side of the Derwent was part of the Barony of Bolbec, which had been created by Henry I for the Bolbec family out of the estates belonging to the old earldom of Northumbria. The original home of this family was Bolbec in Normandy, now a small manufacturing town, between Rouen and Havre.

The son of the de Bolbec to whom Henry I originally granted the barony, was a Walter de Bolbec. In 1165 he gave to God and St. Mary the Virgin and a house of twelve canons of the Order of Premontré, lands on the north side of the Derwent between the Acton Burn, which flows into the Derwent about two miles east of Blanchland, and the old Corbridge road, now marked by a track running due north up into the fells from Baybridge; the north-west boundary of these lands being the ford over the Shildon Burn by Pennypie farm. The canons came as we have seen from Croxton; and thus was the Abbey of Blanchland founded. In 1214 the de Bolbec family gave the Abbey additional estates, west of the old Corbridge road, along the north side of the Derwent; and in this charter the Abbey is called Blanchland. It is reasonable to suppose therefore that Blanchland, which means the White Land, got its name from the white habit of the Premonstratensian canons, who came here in the twelfth century. At the end of the middle ages the canons also owned the land on the south side of the Derwent, between the Stanhope road and the Stoney Burn, which joins the Derwent about three-quarters of a mile east of Blanchland.

Up till the coming of the Industrial Revolution, the part of Durham and Northumberland round Blanchland was a wild and desolate region, very thinly populated, and cut off from the outside world. For this reason Blanchland enters hardly at all into ordinary history and extremely little is known about the life of the Abbey in the middle ages. Only for two short periods between the time it was founded in the reign of Henry II and the time it was dissolved in the reign of Henry VIII, has anything like full information survived. The first period is the opening years of Edward III's reign, the second the last twenty years of the fifteenth century, almost on the eve of the Reformation.

In the summer of 1327, a few months after he came to the throne, Edward III was trying to bring to battle a Scottish army which was raiding the country round the South Tyne valley. The English and Scottish armies played a kind of hide and seek with each other in the fells, neither side betraying much sign of military efficiency. In the course of

this campaign Edward III and his army came to Blanchland and the king spent the night of July 31st in the abbey, using the opportunity to make his confession, as did a great many of his soldiers, as they thought they would have to fight next day. Actually there was no battle; after the two armies had spent a week looking at each other from each side of the Wear near Stanhope, the Scottish army managed to get away over the border without being caught. So ended the one occasion when Blanchland entered into national history.

The abbey lost heavily owing to this campaign. The Scotch did a great deal of damage to crops on its estate and burnt some of the buildings, including the church. It should however be borne in mind that this was not wholly wilful destruction on the part of the Scotch. Their army had no commisariat and had to live off the country. Soon after the 1327 campaign, the Abbey was in such straits that the King came to the rescue and gave it some financial help.

A few years after 1327 things had come to such a pass as regards both possessions of the Abbey and the spiritual life of the canons, that the Abbot of Croxton, the abbey from which Blanchland was founded, sought special powers from the Abbot of Premontré, enabling him to intervene and to try to put matters right. Later in the century the Abbey suffered financially owing to the Black Death. The fall in the population, particularly that section engaged in agriculture, made it difficult for the Abbey to let its farms since possible tenants were easily able to find what they wanted in less remote parts of the country; and the farms being unlet brought in no rent.

The second period for which we have fairly detailed information about the life of the Abbey is between the years 1478 and 1500. This is due to the survival of some contemporary records of visitations, or as we should say inspections, of the English Premonstratensian Abbeys made every three years between 1478 and 1505 by a Bishop of St. Asaph on behalf of the Abbot of Premontré, to whom Blanchland like every other abbey of the order was subject. So remote was Blanchland that the Bishop stayed at Newcastle or Durham, and sent for a representative of the canons to come to report to him there on the state of the abbey and

to carry back his orders to the Abbot.

These records are very revealing about the difficulties with which the Abbey was constantly beset, difficulties arising chiefly from smallness of numbers and an inadequate income. The Abbey had in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries been given the patronage of three parish churches, Bywell St. Andrew, Heddon-on-the-Wall and Kirkharle The parish of Bywell St. Andrew embraced an enormous area, including Blanchland itself, and in addition to the parish church had the dependent chapels serving outlaying villages. The canons in the years 1478-1500 were acting as vicars of these parishes, looking after the chapels in Bywell St. Andrew as well, being seconded for the purpose from the Abbey. The reader will remember that the Premonstratensian Order had started with the intention of providing parish clergy for the churches near its abbeys. The canons of Blanchland were certainly trying to be true to this ideal at the end of the fifteenth century; and it is not improbable that all through the middle ages their canons had generally in person looked after the parishes of which the Abbey owned the patronage.

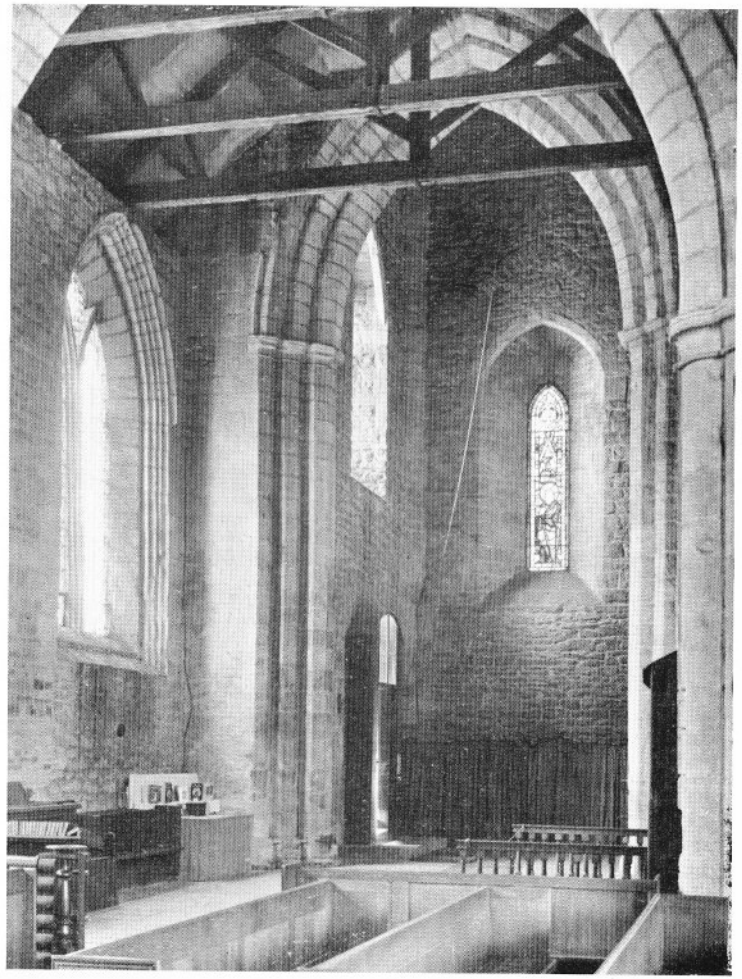
Walter de Bolbec in his foundation charter had laid down that the abbey was to have twelve canons, but the number could be increased with the consent of the bishop and the founder's heir. Between 1478 and 1500 the number of canons seldom reached twelve; once it fell to eight, which would mean that there were often not more than three or four canons resident in the Abbey itself, the rest living away in their parishes. With this small number, it was quite impossible to keep up the church services with that degree of splendour and solemnity which St. Norbert intended. The canons must have spent most of the day getting through the administrative duties, which had to be done, if the Abbey was to exist at all; it seems too that they took a hand when repairs had to be done to the abbey buildings, and helped with getting in the hay. There was little time left for living the monastic life in quietness, prayer and seclusion which the Premonstratensian rule demanded. It is not surprising therefore to find the Bishop constantly in these records telling the Abbot that he must increase the number of the canons. There were not enough of them both to live the

monastic life at Blanchland and to act as parish priests elsewhere.

Between 1478 and 1500 the Abbey was constantly in debt. This does not mean that the canons were starving : we are expressly told that they had a good store of grain and plenty of sheep and cattle ; as far as food was concerned, they would have been largely self-supporting. The debts seem to have been incurred in repairing parish churches, for the upkeep of which the Abbey was responsible. We are told too that the condition of the Abbey buildings, and in particular the chapter house, dormitory and church, was such that they were unusable. The chapter house appears to have been pretty well in ruins. The abbot is frequently told to hasten on their repairs : but in view of the shortage of money it was difficult to do this. As with a great many other abbeys in the middle ages, the income of Blanchland was simply not sufficient to keep up its buildings.

Interesting side-lights are thrown by the visitation records on the life which the canons led. They kept a pack of hounds and evidently enjoyed hunting the deer, a pastime forbidden to both monks and ordinary clergy : and the bishop orders that both the keeping of hounds and the hunting are to stop. Living out of the world they became careless about their personal appearance: and the abbot is ordered, as the rule of the Order required, to find a washerwoman, a tailor and a barber for the canons. Although people living the monastic life were not supposed to leave their abbey except with the abbot's permission and then only on necessary business, the canons appear to have enjoyed paying calls and gossiping in the houses of the abbey tenants. Often they failed to keep the periods of silence ordered by the rule of their Order : and on one occasion the bishop had to forbid them sitting about drinking after Compline, the last service of the day. But all these are very minor weaknesses, and actually the bishop often goes out of his way to commend the canons for their faithfulness to their calling.

In the year 1536 the Abbey was dissolved by Henry VIII along with all other abbeys in England whose yearly income was under £200 a year. But the act thus dissolving these monasteries gave the King power to re-fund any which he wished. Under these powers the Abbey was in 1537 given

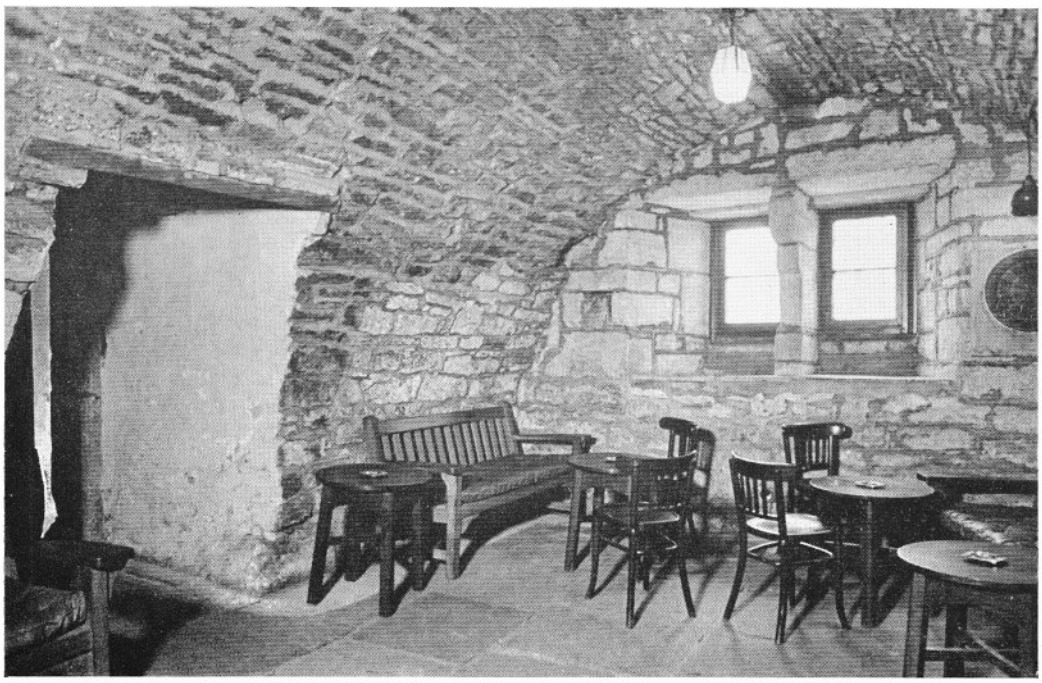


Interior of the Abbey Church, note the Tower Arch (see page 15)

Plate 2

A Terrace of 18th century Cottages on the site of the Abbey Refectory

Plate 3



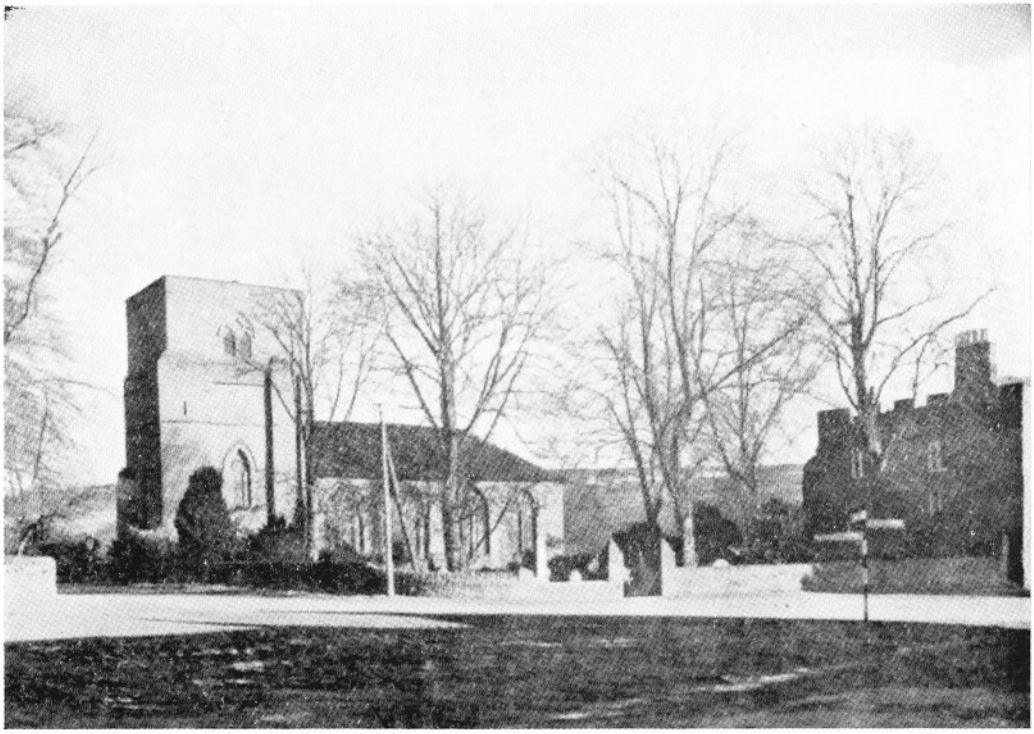
A Store Room of the Abbey, now the Bar of the Lord Crewe Arms, (see page 17)

Plate 4

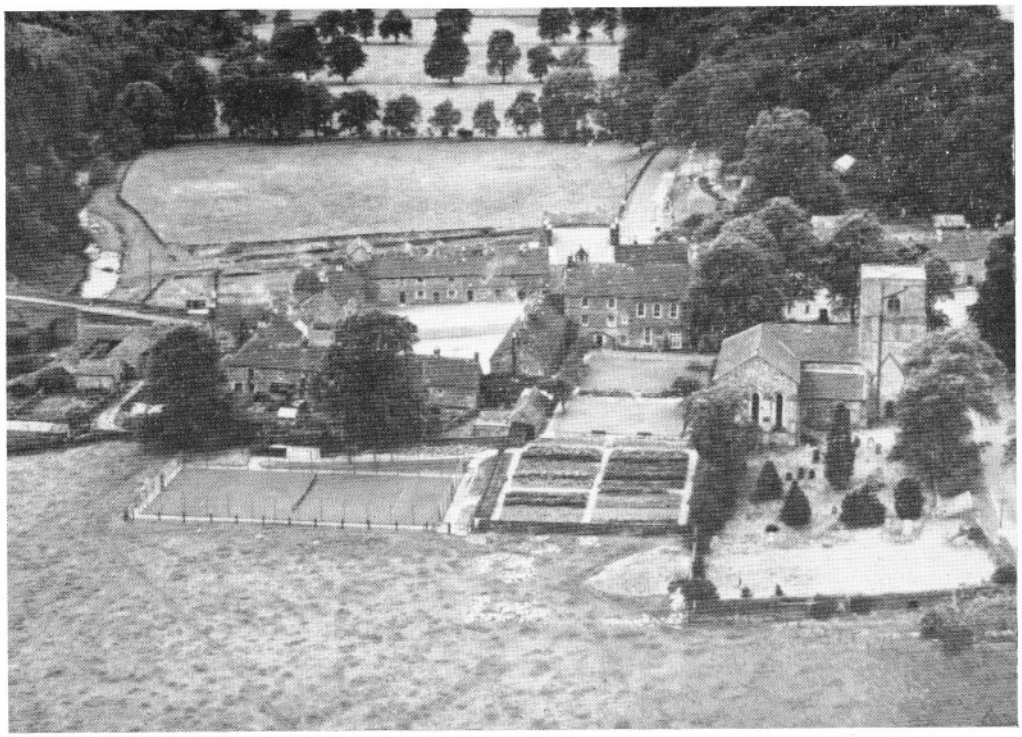
Abbot's
←Lodging

The Garden Front of the Lord Crewe Arms, (see page 17)

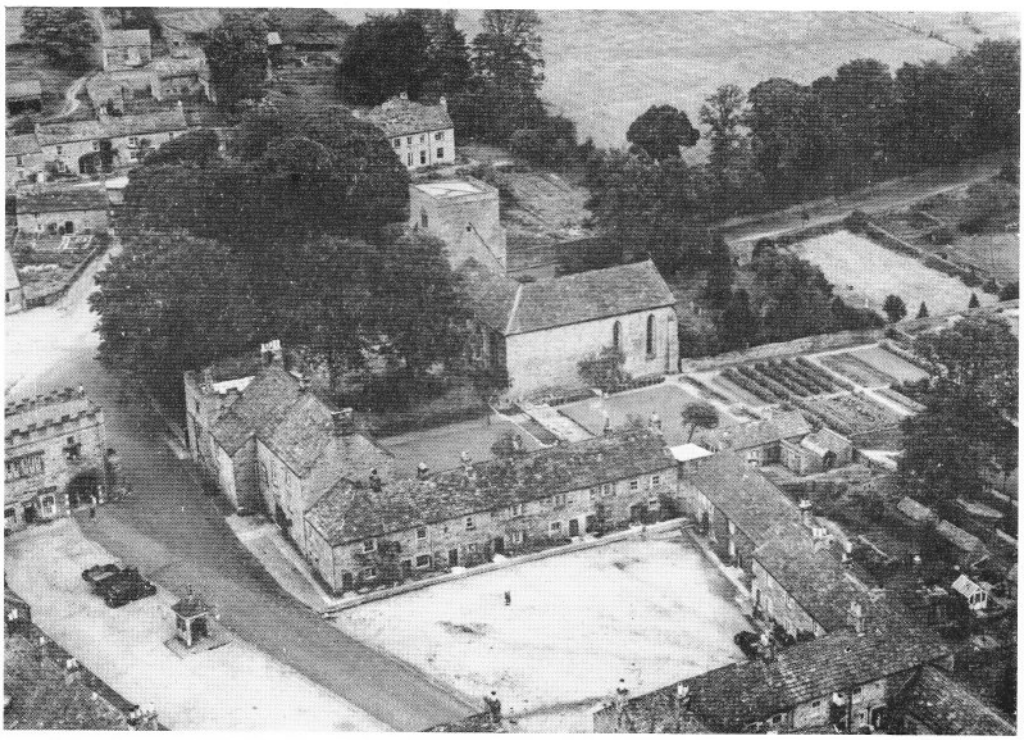
Plate 5



The Church and Abbot's Lodging from the north-west



Blanchland from the East, showing buildings round the Cloister, (see page 17)



Blanchland from the South, showing the buildings round the Second Courtyard, (see page 18)

Plate 8

The Grave Slabs in the Church, at the top of a Huntsman, the other two of Abbots of Blanchland, (see page 16)

a further lease of life, so that as the new charter says the canons might attend the celebration of divine worship at Blanchland and exercise also hospitality and other works of piety there. The mention of hospitality shows that one of the benefits conferred by the Abbey on the neighourhood in the middle ages was that it provided a place where travellers could lodge; a very important service in the days when monasteries were the only places where a traveller in remote parts were likely to find a night's lodging. But under its new charter the Abbey only lasted three years and was finally dissolved with all the other monasteries in 1539.

There is one legend about Blanchland in the middle ages which is worth remembering. It is that a band of Scottish raiders once got lost in the fells in a mist (the place is said to be Grey Friar's Hill on the road between Blanchland and Stanhope) and that they finally located the abbey and sacked it, through hearing the sound of its bells coming towards them in the mist. Another version of the story is that it was Henry VIII's commissioners, sent round to inspect the monasteries in 1535 prior to their dissolution, who got lost in the mist. The canons, thinking they had escaped their attentions, rang their bell for joy, with the result that the commissioners were able after all to find their way to Blanchland.

At the time the Abbey was finally dissolved, there were in addition to the abbot and sub-prior, five canons, and two novices. Henry VIII did not turn them loose on to the world to fend for themselves. They all received pensions; on a not too illiberal scale. So the Premonstratensians or white canons departed from Blanchland after being there not far short of four hundred years. They gave Blanchland its name, and the lay-out both of the church and village remains very much the same as when they left, and bears for ever their mark. Even Henry VIII's commissioners could find nothing evil to say against the canons, except that they had a relic in the church supposed to be the girdle of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They had been faithful to St. Norbert's ideal of the monastic life, and this too in the face of such difficulties as shortage of numbers, lack of money, damage to property caused by war and the tensions that afflict all small communities living in out of the way parts of the world. Their faithfulness deserves our respect and admiration.

4

BLANCHLAND FROM THE DISSOLUTION OF THE ABBEY TO THE PRESENT DAY

After the final dissolution of the Abbey in 1539, its estates and buildings eventually passed to the Radcliffes and then about 1623 to the Forsters of Bamburgh, both old Northumberland families. The church became a ruin, though there must have been a chapel at Blanchland; for in 1612 a Radcliffe left in his will that he was to be buried in the Blanchland chapel. It stood against the west side of the tower (see page 16). The other abbey buildings were converted into dwelling houses for the village; the abbot's lodging, guest house and kitchen becoming the manor house. Probably both the Radcliffes and Forsters used it more as a hunting box than a permanent home.

The Forsters were high churchmen and royalist in sympathy and during the Civil War the manor house was suspected of being a centre of royalist intrigue. In 1701 the last male heir of the Bamburgh Forsters was assassinated in Newcastle; and the Bamburgh and Blanchland estates passed to his two co-heirs, his sister Dorothy Forster, whom we will call Dorothy Forster I, and his nephew Thomas Forster, the son of his eldest sister by her marriage to the head of the Adderstone branch of the Forsters. This Thomas Forster also had a sister, Dorothy, whom we will call Dorothy Forster II.

In 1699 Dorothy Forster I married Lord Crewe, the Bishop of Durham, who was in his heart devoted to the Stuart cause and had solemnised the marriage between James II, when he was Duke of York, and Mary of Modena. Dorothy Forster was the bishop's second wife. He had proposed to her some nine years previously; she then refused him, probably because she thought him too old. The bishop married someone else; but on the death of this wife he again proposed to Dorothy Forster, and this time she accepted him. In

spite of the disparity of age (there was nearly forty years between them) it was a very happy marriage.

The Bamburgh and Blanchland estates, inherited by Lady Crewe and her nephew Thomas Forster, were so encumbered, that in 1704 they had to be sold. They were bought by Lord Crewe, and so Blanchland acquired that connection with his name, which it has retained ever since. Thomas Forster, Lady Crewe's nephew, was the general of the Jacobite troops in the rising of 1715. He had no qualifications whatever for such a post and surrendered to the government troops without even trying to put up a fight. He was imprisoned in Newgate, from which he managed to escape three days before he was due to be tried for high treason. The escape was planned by his sister, Dorothy Forster II, who, disguised as a servant, rode to London pillion, behind the village blacksmith from Adderstone. Eighteenth century prisons were run in a very haphazard and gentlemanly fashion. Thomas Forster was lodged in a governor's house; Dorothy succeeded in getting duplicate keys made, which she gave to her brother's servant. On the night of the escape, Forster asked the governor into his room for a drink; his servant meanwhile having got the governor's servant locked in the cellar. Forster then left the room, ostensibly to visit the latrine, and slipped out of the house, locking the governor in behind him, and leaving his dressing-gown on the steps as a memento of his stay. With the aid of the duplicate keys, Forster and his servant then made their way out of the prison, and escaped to France. Forster eventually died abroad, a hanger-on at the court of the Old Pretender.

The part played by the Forsters in the rising of the 1715 rebellion is the subject of Sir Walter Besont's historical novel, *Dorothy Forster*, published in 1884. All visitors to Blanchland should read it as some of the earlier scenes are laid in Blanchland. Sir Walter Besant's Dorothy Forster is Dorothy Forster II, the sister of the Jacobite general and Lady Crewe's niece. The plot turns on her refusal to marry the unfortunate Lord Derwentwater, because he was a Roman Catholic, Dorothy being a devout high church Anglican, and on her planning of her brother's escape from Newgate.

In the novel she rides to London behind her brother's tutor, Antony Hilyard, who is disguised as the Adderstone blacksmith, and Dorothy herself is dressed as the blacksmith's sister. At the end of the novel Antony Hilyard would have liked to marry Dorothy; she firmly but kindly refuses him and stays faithful to Lord Derwentwater's memory, as she contemplates the wild seas that rage off the Bamburgh coast. The Lord Derwentwater episode is the product of the novelist's imagination; even if she had a romantic *tendresse* for Lord Derwentwater, she settled down in real life as the wife of a Northumberland squire.

Lord Crewe has not been treated kindly by historians, chiefly because he was a pronounced Jacobite and English history has been largely written by Whigs. In any case the part which he played in the politics of his time was inglorious, some might even say shifty. But there are other sides to his character. He was extremely generous, he enjoyed good music, and cared greatly about the Church of England. And there is his celebrated will. He had the imagination to dispose of part of his great wealth in a way which has subsequently been of enormous benefit to the Church of England. It was found on his death in 1721 that the Bamburgh and Blanchland estates were left to trustees, since known as the Lord Crewe Trustees. From the income at their disposal the Trustees make annual payments under Lord Crewe's will to Lincoln College, Oxford and the University of Oxford, to alms-houses in Durham City and Bishop Auckland, to schools in Bishop Auckland, to the clergy of certain parishes in Durham and Northumberland and to a few parishes elsewhere, in which Lord Crewe was interested. The rest of the income after making these annual payments and meeting the expenses of estate management and up-keep is used by the Trustees for the relief of poor clergy in Durham and Northumberland, by way of augmenting their stipends or pensions, helping them in cases of sickness, defraying the expenses of removal from one parish to another, and contributing to the education of their children. Lord Crewe had been Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford, before he became a bishop, and his devotion to his old college is a charming trait in his character. Thus Blanchland passed

into the hands of the Lord Crewe Trustees, with whom it has since remained.

When the Trustees took over Blanchland, the village was, and remained for some years after, in a dilapidated condition. At least so John Wesley thought when he visited Blanchland in 1747 and took a service and preached in the churchyard, the people kneeling for the prayers on the grass. About the middle of the eighteenth century the Trustees rebuilt most of the houses out of ruins of the Abbey buildings, and it is they who were largely responsible for Blanchland's pre sent appearance. The high-watermark of this period of reconstruction was the provision they made for the spiritual needs of the people. Although there was a chapel up against the west wall of the tower, Blanchland had no resident clergymen, being up to 1724 in the parish of Bywell St. Andrew, and after that in the parish of Shotley; and clergy from these parishes came over to take the services. In 1727 the Lord Crewe Trustees had given a large folio Bible and Prayer Book for the use of this chapel; and they are still preserved in the present church. Then in 1752 through their initiative Blanchland was made into a separate parish with its own parish priest; the Trustees building him a house and providing part of his income. To crown their work they rebuilt the ruined choir of the abbey as the parish church. Blanchland is in fact an eighteenth century model village, built on the plan and out of the remains of a mediaeval abbey.

The subsequent history of the village has not been particularly eventful. When the lead mines, whose remains are scattered over the near-by fells, were working, it had quite a considerable population in and around the village. But the mines have been idle for a very long time, and the population has gradually declined. Some of the mines however are worked for fluor-spar, which is used extensively in the electricity industry. Apart from extensive alterations made to the interior of the Church between 1880 and 1900 (see page 15), Blanchland remains very much as the Lord Crewe Trustees made it in the eighteenth century: a memorial of mediaeval piety and eighteenth century beneficence.

5

THE REMAINS OF BLANCHLAND ABBEY

Before looking at the Church and the other remains of the Abbey, the reader is strongly recommended to study the plan on plate 9 and also plates 6 and 7, and then to begin his visit at the cross roads on the north side of the village, where the roads from Hexham and Stanhope come in, marked X on the plan. If he faces south towards the old gateway, he will be looking at Blanchland from the direction in which a traveller up to a hundred years ago or so always approached it. For the entrance to the Abbey and after the Dissolution to the village was from this side. The present bridge which brings the Newcastle road over the Derwent and into the village from the south side only dates from the last century.

From this position at the cross-roads the reader should be able to understand the plan of the Abbey. Broadly speaking it consisted of four parts. First there was the abbey church on the reader's left. Secondly a courtyard or cloister, the other side of the south wall of the churchyard. Thirdly the L shaped courtyard, which we will call the second courtyard, round which the modern village is built and which is entered by the old gateway. Fourthly the outer precincts, surrounding the church and two courtyards on the east, north and west sides.

It is only fair here to point out to the reader that there is hardly any evidence to show what the buildings round the two courts were used for. We have in most cases to guess from what we know about buildings occupying a similar position in the remains of other Premonstratensian Abbeys.

The Abbey Church. The Church of a smaller Premonstratensian Abbey had certain distinguishing features. It was without aisles, and a tower was usually a later addition to the original building, and put at the end of a transept. The church at Blanchland was true to type. The church

consisted of an aisleless nave and chancel, with two transepts built at different periods in the thirteenth century and a tower at the end of the north transept, added later in the fourteenth. The present church is not the one built by the Premonstratensian canons when they first came to Blanchland ; it was built about a hundred years later ; and all that is left of it is the choir, transept, and tower. The nave has completely disappeared ; it ran away from the present west wall of the church almost to the old gateway. A small piece of its wall with the remains of a lancet window can still be seen, abutting on to the north-east corner of the Lord Crewe Arms;and there is a piscina on the outside of the north wall of the Lord Crewe Arms, buried rather deep in the grass of the churchyard. This piscina belonged to the chapel at the west end of the nave. Naves in the middle ages were generally broken up by screens into small chapels. It should also be remembered that the old choir of the Abbey was largely rebuilt in 1752, when it was turned by the Lord Crewe Trustees into the present parish church (see page 13).

The church is now entered by the door in the west face of the Tower. It is best to begin one's visit by going through the north transept to the main part of the church, once the choir of the Abbey. Of the thirteenth century building all that is left is the north wall with its two lancet windows and part of the south wall with a lancet window and the sedilia, the seats used by the officiating clergy at High Mass. The rest of the south wall and all the west wall date from the rebuilding in 1752. The east wall with its three lancet windows was built in 1881. The ceiling dates from 1881 : the organ and reredos were completed in 1890 ; and the oak screen and seats, the latter very good of their kind, were added in 1913.

The church contains two pieces of ancient glass, one high up in the left hand window of the east wall and the other in the window in the south wall. Both pieces show a canon of Blanchland in his white habit, which the reader will remember led to the canons being called white canons, and the Abbey and village acquiring the name of Blanchland. The canons look very bulky. All mediaeval buildings were shockingly

cold in winter and people heaped clothes on themselves to keep warm ; hence the appearance of the white canons.

From the choir we come back to the north transept. The west wall and windows of the transept date from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century ; the top stages of the tower are somewhat later. The tower arch, so grand and austere in its lines, is architecturally the finest thing in Blanchland. The transept has an eastern aisle ; this is now partitioned off to provide a place for services in the winter and its outside wall is modern. The column between the two arches, dividing the transept from its aisles, is all that is left of the church built by the canons of Blanchland when they first came in the twelfth century. Between 1828 and 1851 the transept had an upper storey which was used as the village school. It is a very old custom to use part of a church as a school.

On the floor of the transept just by the round column are three grave slabs ; the two on the left are of abbots of Blanchland, and have on them the insignia of an abbot, his pastoral staff, and the middle one also has on it a host and chalice. The grave slab on the right is of a forester or huntsman, in the service of the Abbey. Carved on it are the tools of his trade, his sword, shield, arrow and hunting horn. Like people to-day in Durham and Northumberland this forester took a pride in his work ; so much so that his family thought the best way of commemorating him was to carve on his tomb the tools of his craft, of which he had been so proud in his lifetime.

On the east and west external walls of the tower are marks which show that both these walls were once adjoined by buildings with a steep pitched roof. The building on the west side was the chapel of the village (see pages 10-13), before the church was rebuilt in 1752. Afterwards it was used as a school and even at one time as a shop. The building on the east side may have been a chapel used in the middle ages. A stone in the churchyard about twenty yards off marks its north-east corner.

The Cloister. After looking at the church, the reader should make his way to the lawn at the back of the Lord Crewe Arms. This lawn with paths on all four sides is roughly where the abbey cloister was in the middle ages. The cloister would have been a court with a covered walk on all four sides and on the court side of the walk would have been open or glazed. In the wall on the north side, marking the site of the old south wall of the nave, may be traced two doors, leading from the nave to the east and west walks of the cloister respectively. On the east, south and west sides of the cloister were the living quarters of the canons. The stone foundations still visible on the east side are those of three buildings : the south transept, which would have been next to the church, the chapter house and then the canon's parlour. Over this was their dormitory. It may have stretched along the east side of the second and larger courtyard, and was in all probability divided by wooden partitions into separate cells. In the field at the bottom of the garden of the Lord Crewe Arms are some foundations traceable beneath the grass. They may be those of an infirmary. In a mediaeval abbey the infirmary was the place where sick and aged monks were cared for ; and in English Premonstratensian abbeys it usually consisted of a dormitory with its own kitchen.

On the south side of the lawn are the backs of a row of cottages. They are built out of the remains of what was the canons' refectory or dining room. Along the west side of the cloister, where is now the Lord Crewe Arms, there was at the refectory end, the kitchen, and its fireplace can be seen in the entrance hall of the hotel ; then next to it a room used for curing and storing food. This room is now the lounge of the hotel and also has a very large fireplace and over it is a portrait of Lord Crewe. The northern end of this range of buildings was also used for storing food ; and the bar of the hotel with its barrel vault is an old store room. Judging from the remains of other Premonstratensian abbeys, somewhere on the ground floor of this set of buildings would have been a passage leading from the cloister to the second courtyard ; but no trace of it has survived. In the southwest corner of the garden front, just outside what was the abbey

kitchen, is an arched recess. This was where the canons used to wash before meals. Over the kitchen and store-room was the abbey guest house, and at the south end, adjoining the nave was the Abbot's lodging, with his private rooms and chapel. The guest house was an important part of the Abbey, when one remembers that one of its chief social functions was the provision of accommodation for travellers and it was this range of buildings which after the Dissollution became the manor house first of the Radcliffes, then of the Forsters; the present rooms however over the old abbey kitchen and store-rooms were made out of the abbot's lodging and abbey guest house in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The dining room is a fine eighteenth century room, with the tops of its windows and two fireplaces in the form of agee arches. They are not however mediaeval; but eighteenth century or Horace Walpole gothic. The room beyond the dining room, known as Dorothy Forster, was made out of the Abbot's lodging and dates from the reign of Charles I. It was probably the parlour of the Forsters, when the building was the manor house. Over the mantlepiece is a portrait of Dorothy Forster II, looking kindly and good; and on the stairs outside is a portrait of her aunt Dorothy Forster I, Lady Crewe. The portrait shows that she must have been an extremely beautiful woman.

The Second Courtyard. Coming out of the Lord Crewe Arms we find ourselves in the second and larger of the two courtyards, round which the Abbey was built. Here in the middle ages were the various offices used by the canons in the administration and running of their estate. The present houses round this courtyard or piazza were built out of the remains of these offices by the Lord Crewe Trustees in the eighteenth century. There is little evidence to tell us where any particular building stood.

The houses on the east side may be the site of part of the Canon's parlour with their dormitory over, a prolongation of the range of buildings on the east side of the cloister. At the back of the row of houses on the right, as one enters the village by the road from Newcastle, there are on a stone

what look like the markings made by a mill-wheel, and traces of a mill race have been found here. So presumably the houses are built out of the remains of what was the abbey mill. Under the houses further to the right, stone channels have been found, so they may be on the site of a fulling mill. Lead scoriae have been found under the floor of one of the houses on the west side, so where these houses are, may have been a building for refining silver from lead mined in the neighbourhood. If a fulling mill and silver refinery were on these sites, they may date not from the times of the Abbey, but from when the village was owned by the Radcliffes or Forsters. In the gate-house is a room with a mediaeval fire-place; possibly this was used for the accommodation of the poorer type of traveller.

The Outer Precincts. It is wrong to think of the Abbey as consisting of the church and buildings round the two courtyards, entered by the old gate-way. The gate-way merely shuts off the parts of the abbey more intimately concerned with the life of the canons. Outside the gateway in the middle ages was a further part of the Abbey, which we will call the outer precincts. On the west their boundary was a ridge, which can still be traced about three hundred yards down the Stanhope road. It runs up from the river and then through the woods on the other side of the road up the fell side; and a similar ridge is traceable in the field below the Lord Crewe Arms marking the eastern boundary. Within these precincts were the cottages of the servants of the Abbey and the labourers on the part of the estate which the canons farmed themselves. It also contained the fish ponds. Their site is marked by three shallow pits terraced one above the other in the trees above the Stanhope road just outside the village. The ridges marking the eastern and western boundaries are probably all that are left of stone walls. The abbey though was never fortified; and both the gateway and these walls were not intended as fortifications, but like the park wall and gateways of a big house to keep intruders out. The crenellated tops of the gateway and of the tower at the north end of the Lord Crewe Arms are merely decoration added in the seventeenth or eighteenth century.

6

WALKS ROUND BLANCHLAND

The visitor to Blanchland must walk. If he is not feeling energetic, it is better to follow the roads or paths west of the village up the Derwent valley. They can easily be found on the one inch ordnance map of the district. If he is feeling really strenuous, he should walk on the fells, working out his route on the map. In fact the one inch map is essential for the fells, so also is a compass in case a mist comes down and like the Scottish raiders or Henry VIII's commissioners he gets thoroughly lost. There is nothing soft about the country, once one has climbed out of the valley. It has often been described as a man's country ; perhaps because it has a somewhat hard look ; and yet there is a bracing quality in this hardness, and also in the spaciousness of the landscape. One can walk for miles on the fells, though a look-out should be kept for disused pit shafts the deepest of which are a hundred and ninety fathoms ; and dogs should be kept under the strictest control so as not in any way to disturb the sheep. Coming down into Blanchland, after a long walk one realises the supreme beauty of the village, not only in its buildings, but in its atmosphere. For the village has witnessed in its time many noble things ; the prayer and self-sacrifice of the Premonstratensian canons, the passionate unworldly loyality of high church squires, and the imaginative and far-sighted charity of an eighteenth century bishop.