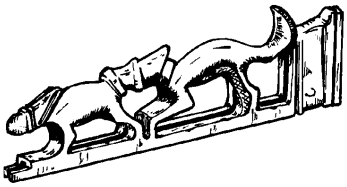
Ampthill & District Archaeological



& Local History Society

Ruxox Priory: A Small Cell of the Augustine Priory of Dunstable

TL 048360

Kevan Fadden FSA

19/1/2019

www.adalhs.org.uk

The area currently known as Ruxox is situated in the Parishes of Flitwick and Maulden. Evidence of human occupation can be traced through archaeological excavation and field walking from the Upper Paleolithic (40-50000 B.C.) through Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and Saxon periods to the present day. Historically Ruxox is recorded from the 12th Century when Philip de Saundreville gave land to the Augustine Priory of Dunstable to build a chapel dedicated to St. Nicholas and a cell for monks. The excerpt from *Flitwick: A Short History* below is a summary of the research carried out by members of ADALHS led by the late Russell Key. There are no standing remains of the Priory Cell but the huge moat which surrounded the buildings is still a prominent landmark and is scheduled.

The aerial photograph 1/ shows evidence that part of the moat was destroyed, probably in the early 1940's and shows where the ingress and outlet of water ran from the tributary of the river Flitt when it was first dug.



Photo 1/ Aerial view of the moat which surrounded the Augustine Priory Cell.

Ruxox Priory An excerpt from *Flitwick: A Short History* by T.R.Key.*

"The first authentic details of Flitwick are found in the documents of Dunstable Priory, which record that about 1150 A.D. the lord of Flitwick, Philip de Saundreville, gave to the Priory the mill at Flitwick and the churches he controlled at Husborne Crawley and Flitwick. He had already given the Priory some land at Ruxox on which to build a chapel dedicated to St. Nicholas and a cell for monks. Henceforth, for nearly four hun-

dred years, the Priors of Dunstable cared for the religious life of the village. Gradually the little Norman church was rebuilt, first by widening the chancel and adding the south aisle in the early 14th century, and later, about 1380, building the tower. About 100 years afterwards the porch was built and the roof of the south aisle flattened to allow for the continuation of the three clerestory windows. After this period, no change in the structure was made for over three hundred years. The monks at Ruxox provided priests to serve the church and people, though the mention in 1240 of the house of Simon "clericus" of Flitwick shows that the canon appointed for this work lived in a house of his own, probably near the church.

The cell at Ruxox prospered for at least two hundred years, though not always smoothly. About 1185 Gilbert de Saundreville tried to take back the charter his father Philip gave to the priory; he vexed Alexander the canon in charge of Ruxox until he regained all his father's gifts but shortly afterwards he became a leper and, at a Synod held at Woburn, repented and made full restitution of the churches and lands. His heiress, Osmunda, and her husband, William Fulcher, confirmed the grants and gave the Ruxox monks grazing rights on the common lands of the village. Leprosy remained in the community, for we read of Osmunda's son, Ralph, and also of a freeman at Priestley with the disease about 1225. Osmunda's other son, Gervinus, became a monk at Ruxox, which received extra land from William to provide food and clothing for him. Osmunda was buried at Ruxox and the manor descended to her daughter Anabil who had married David Rufus about 1210, thus founding a family who were lords of Flitwick for the next 150 years. The arms of the Rufus family may be seen in the window in the south wall of the chancel,** being fragments of fourteenth century glass carefully pieced together to show the two heraldic leopards that must once have been familiar to all the neighbourhood.

The many grants to support Ruxox which were made during the thirteenth century provide valuable information about the whole village. Roger de Denhill gave land situated in front of the gate at Ruxox; the canons were given right to graze cattle and cut turf on the moor; Robert the Clerk, son of David Rufus, gave the canons 2 strips of 1/2 acre each in the East Field, 1/2 acre in Wodesnap furlong in West Field;

the grandson of Gilbert, Nicholas of Tingrith, sold to the canons, William, son of Walter the Newman, with all his goods and chattels. Thus Ruxox prospered; in 1248 a new house was commenced there, with a dining room, a cellar, a kitchen, a room in the middle for beer making: in 1257 a great new barn was added.

By 1270 the land acquired for Ruxox and his control of the church at Flitwick gave the Prior of Dunstable a small independent farm in the village. Frequent disputes then arose between the monks and the lord of the manor, David, grandson of David Rufus. David de Flitwick bought from his cousin, Nicholas of Tingrith, a wood in Flitwick called "Le Mentel". The Prior bought from another cousin of David's, Simon, son of Sylvester, an adjoining wood and land to the south and east "below Le Stockinge". David destroyed the boundary hedge and ditch between the woods and made a cart track through Prior's wood. The Prior made a ditch across the track to prevent David from using it and also made a 10ft. ditch to separate his wood at Ruxox from David's land. David complained that the Prior had taken an acre of meadow let to J. Capucio, that should belong to the manor. When a Ruxox tenant, Galfridus Damessone (a bastard -the son of a dame), died, David took the corn from his land before the Prior could prevent him. Worst of all, perhaps, the Prior persuaded David's villeins and free men who were tenants of Ruxox to change their land, without their lord's permission, with Ruxox men who were tenants of David. Formerly, the prior had remitted the tithes of milk, lambs and calves that David and his tenants should have paid for the upkeep of the parish church. When they quarrelled the Prior ordered David to continue paying these tenths of the produce of his estate.
For a time these differences were composed by compromise. The fences and ditches remained as before; David agreed that the exchange of holdings benefited his men; he agreed to pay his tithes in silver and henceforth not to trouble the Prior unnecessarily, nor to abuse his kindness or oppose his church. Nevertheless in 1281 disputes again occurred. David complained that the monks were taking rabbits from his warren - at the present Warren Farm? - but a jury meeting at Bedford decided that he did not own the warren, whereup-

on the Prior and "several nobles" immediately hunted the rabbits there without interference. In 1286 David formally gave the Priory the advowson of Flitwick church but four years later refused to pay the church his tithe of hay. These quarrels seem finally to have ended with David's death in 1296, when the Prior received his arms and palfrey as a heriot, a payment made to a feudal superior. Succeeding lords of the manor lived in comparative harmony with the Priory and the monks at Ruxox, probably because the descendants of David de Flitwick owned other manors, their Flitwick lands being managed by stewards. The "de Flitwick" family sold the manor in 1361, but not until the early 17th century, when the Blofield family took possession, and the manor house seems to have been rebuilt, do we hear of an owner again resident in the village. The Ruxox lands of 56 acres were in 1537 leased by the Prior to Robert Hewet, on condition that he provided a roll of bread yearly at Ruxox, rushes for the floor of Flitwick Church and Dunstable Priory on feast days and straw for Flitwick Church in winter. Three years after the agreement Henry VIII dissolved the Priory and sold its lands."

*_Flitwick: A Short History_ published by The Ampthill & District Archaeological Society 1973, currently out of print.

** Now set in the East Window.



Photo 2/ Upper Paleolithic Hand Axe (Mousterian).



Photo 3/ Roman Burial found in advance of a water pipe-line which crossed the site.

Photo 1 Detail from RAF RS:CPE/UK/2159:13Jun47

Photos 2 & 3 K Fadden.