

RUFFORD OLD HALL FROM THE NORTH-WEST

THE MANOR OF RUFFORD AND
THE ANCIENT FAMILY OF THE
HESKETHS¹

By the Rev. W. G. Procter, B.A.

Read 12th December 1907

THAT portion of the county of Lancaster which Rufford is situated was, in past ages, for the most part wild and uncultivated, indeed it was, owing to its physical condition, incapable of cultivation.

It is maintained by some Scientists² that the district which extends from the Ribble to the Mersey is a vast subterranean forest, the inner line of which includes what is now the Parish of Rufford.

This theory is confirmed by the fact that the roots and trunks of large trees of various kinds—oak, beech, and fir—are now continually cropping up in large quantities on the reclaimed moss lands,

¹ For much of the information I have been at some pains to collect for the purposes of this paper, I am indebted to George Holme, Esq., who, when living at Rufford Old Hall, entertained the British Association the year it met at Southport, and read an interesting paper on its history, which he has most kindly placed at my disposal. J. Brownbill, Esq., the learned and courteous editor of *The Victoria History of Lancashire*, now in course of publication, not only allowed me to see his manuscript, but obligingly permitted me to copy out any extracts I thought proper. He also sent me some interesting documents relating to Rufford Church and Parish for which he could not find space in detail. He has, too, at my request, taken the trouble to read my paper and correct a few mistakes I had made. By the courtesy of Thomas Ogilvy, Esq., Sir Thomas Hesketh's agent, I have had access to valuable maps and books belonging to the Hesketh Estate, and also permission to take photographs of the Old Hall. James Bromley, Esq., of Latham, has been good enough to refer me to the special volumes of the *Proceedings* of the various antiquarian, historical, and other societies in which Rufford is named.

² Baines' *History*, vol. ii. p. 88.

which are rapidly sinking, and as they become consolidated, these "stocks," as they are called by the farmers, are left close to the surface, and often come into contact with the plough. Whether they grew on the ground where they are now found, or whether they have been swept down by some mighty deluge, and, being mixed with sand and mud and vegetable matter generally, have filled up the estuary of the river, as some affirm, I cannot now stay to discuss.

It is sufficient for my present purpose to notice the fact, as having an important bearing on the history of Rufford, that from very early times there was a large sheet of water known as the LINUIS or LAKE, situate partly in what is now the Parish of Rufford. It is described by Leyland as: "The greatest Meare of Lancastershire iii myles in length and ii in breadth. It comprised 3132 statute acres and extended from the river Douglas, with which it was once connected to Crossens."¹

In times of flood the whole country was more or less under water. In an ancient deed it is stated that: ² "Rufford Chappell is in the Pōch (Parish) of Croston, distant from the Pōch Church iii myles, and one arm of ye sea betwixt the said Chappell and ye Pōch Church, so that often and manie tymes ye tyde will be so high that no man can pass betwixt."

Harrison, Chaplain to Lord Cobham, A.D. 1580, describing the course of the Douglas, says: "The Douglass . . . goeth on towards Rufford Chappell. . . . It meeteth also on the same side with Martin Meere water, in which Meere is an islande called 'Netholme,' beside other, and when it is past 'Hanging Bridge' it is not long ere it fall into the Yarrow."

¹ Camden says: "Near the mouth of the Douglas is an extensive Meer called Merton, which discharges itself at a mouth of its own."

² Church Surveys, A.D. 1650.

The shores of the Mere would be very swampy and probably dangerous. An old rhyme, quoted by Mr. Harold Brodrick in his paper on Martin Mere, may well describe the condition of things :

“The horseman rides with breathless fear
Around the shores of Martin Mere,
The awful swamps and quagmires there
Have parted many a man and mare.”

Martin Mere is, according to old chronicles,¹ the scene of the last battle fought between the famous King Arthur and the Saxons, *cir.* 540, and one of the Knights of the Round Table, Sir Lancelot du Lake, is supposed to have lived in these parts, but the whole story is legendary. Near Holmeswood Hall there is a pit known as “King Arthur’s pit,” and the tenant of the Hall farm told me there were boggarts and ghosts to be seen in the vicinity of this pit, a belief no doubt fostered by the gamekeepers for obvious reasons. It is situated close to a favourite pheasant breeding-place.

There are records of a ferry over the Mere and that the ferryman lived on the Rufford side, but this is not marked on the oldest map I have seen.

The situation of the Ford was, I think, at or near the place where the Liverpool and Preston Highway crosses what is now known as “The Sluice.” It is now part of the system of drainage, but it formerly connected the Mere with the Douglas, as shown on the map.² The course of the river Douglas has been greatly changed from what it was in years past.

¹ Baines' *History*, vol. i. 30-32 ; Roby's *Traditions of Lancashire ; The Legendary Ballads of England and Scotland*, edited by J. S. Roberts, p. 61.

² Several ancient boats or canoes, and other very interesting remains, were found embedded in the mud when the Mere was drained. One of these primitive vessels was, for several years, placed in the grounds at Beech House, the residence of the late Mr. Porter, formerly agent to Sir Thomas Hesketh.

I need therefore go no farther in search of a derivation of the name RUFFORD, RUGFORD, RUFFORTH, RUFFOURD (it is spelt in various ways). The "Chappell," around which were no doubt clustered a few houses, besides the Hall of the Lord of the Manor, was near this rough and at times dangerous ford, by means of which communication with the outside world was kept up.

Such was the district up to the time of, indeed long after, the Norman Conquest, when, according to one authority, the land was bestowed on Roger de Bussel, and through the grandson of this Norman baron the Manor of Rufford became the property of the Fitton family, who also possessed large estates in other parts of this country.¹

Mr. Brownbill, the editor of *The Victoria History of Lancashire*, affirms that "Rufford was given to St. Werburgh's Abbey, Chester, by Richard Bussel, *cir.* A.D. 1150," and he presumes "the Abbot granted the Manor to Richard Fitton," but, he says, "there seems to be no record of this."

From "The Genealogye of the worshipful and ancient familie of the Heskforths of Ruffourd in Lancashire" (see Baines' *History*, vol. iii. p. 438) it appears that "Hellarth," the first of the family, was great-grandfather to William Heskylth, to whom, in 55 Henry III., Richard, son-in-law to Richard Tottleworth, gave lands in marriage with Elbora, his daughter and heiress. His son was Sir William Heskylth, Knt., Lord of Heskayte and Beconsall

¹ Henry de Lacy granted the Manor of Great Harwood to Richard de Ffyton, J.P. of Chester A.D. 1233; Richard de Ffyton died A.D. 1247. His son was Hugh, who had a grant from his son of all the Manor of Harwood in Blackburnshire, with homage of Richard Phitun. He had a son, Edmund, who died A.D. 1296. Edmund, before the birth of a son of his own, granted to his kinsman (nephew) Richard Ffyton all his land in Harwood. This Richard Ffyton had a son William, who died in his father's lifetime, and three daughters—Maud, Annabel, and Elisabeth, co-heiresses.—Abram's *History of Blackburn*.



ALABASTER PANEL OF HESKETH ARMS

(4 Edward I., 1275), who married Maud, one of the three daughters and co-heiresses of Richard Fitton, and thus became owner of one moiety of the Manor of Rufford, besides an extensive and valuable estate at Great Harwood.¹

Mr. Brownbill, on the other hand, says "that Sir William Hesketh was not Lord of Hesketh and Becconsall, though it is quite likely he was a descendant of the Lords of Hesketh. If so, he must have been a younger son or 'poor cousin,' for he does not seem to have owned much there, if anything at all."

Subsequently, his grandson, Thomas Hesketh, married Alice, the daughter and heiress of Edmund Fitton, the possessor of the second half of the estate. In this way the whole of the Manors of Rufford and Martholme passed into the hands of the Hesketh family. This alliance resulted in the adoption by the Hesketh family of the armorial bearings of the Fittons (on a bend three garbs), although they did not discard their own crest (an eagle displayed).

I have tried to find out, but I have so far been unable to ascertain definitely, whether the Heskeths had a house of residence at Rufford from the time they first acquired the Manor. It is more than likely there was a House on or near the site of the "Old Hall" from very early times, and it may be there was also a Hunting Lodge where Holmeswood Hall now stands, even if the Castle of Sir Launcelot is a myth, but there are no remains of either, unless it be that a ditch near the Old Hall marks the position of the moat, by which, in all probability, the old house was at one time protected.

¹ Edmund de Legh married Amabilia; Roger Nowell married Elizabeth. By this an arrangement was made by which the Heskeths of Rufford, the Nowells of Great Mearly, and the de Leghs of Hapton became joint Lords of Harwood. Subsequently the Heskeths purchased the de Leghs' share, and thus became possessed of two thirds of the manor.—Abram's *History of Blackburn*.

In 1345-7 Sir William Hesketh, with a number of his retainers, was in France with the King, and took part in the famous battle of Crecy, which was followed by the siege and capture of Calais. After a truce, which was broken in 1355, the campaign was brought to a successful termination by the defeat of the French at the battle of Poitiers, 1356, and it was at this time that Sir William—who was evidently a favourite at Court—obtained a royal licence to “found a Chantry¹ at St. Mary’s Chappell, Rufforth.” An “Indulgence” was granted by Hugh, Bishop of Damascus, then living in Rufford (1352), to such as should assist in the building or enlarging of the Chapel.

At this same time Sir William also secured a charter to hold a weekly market on Fridays, and a fair for one day on the Feast of SS. Philip and James. This fair has been held ever since, though the exact day has not always been adhered to.²

¹ On the dissolution of the chantries the lands with which they were endowed were forfeited to the Crown, but the amount of the pension paid to one of the chaplains was charged to the revenues of the Duchy of Lancaster, and is still paid to the Rector of Rufford.

A second chantry at the same altar was founded by Alice, widow of Robert Hesketh. After her husband’s death this lady became a nun. She left three sons—Thomas, who succeeded to the estate; Richard, who was Attorney-General to Henry VIII.; Hugh, who was in Holy Orders and was appointed by his brother chantry priest at Rufford. He became Bishop of the Isle of Man in 1522. His cousin, Alice Holte, widow, bequeathed by will to the altar of the Blessed Virgin at Rufforth “a little basin of silver, a piece of embroidery I have made for a cope, to be lent to hym (Hugh Hesketh) with all hast at my death, to be worn on the day of my obit every yere and to pray for my soule.”

A third chantry was founded in connection with the “Chappell at Rufforthe” by Thomas Hesketh, Esq., who died 1523.

Bartholomew Hesketh, Esq., of Poulton, and grandson of the above, founded a chantry “to celebrat masse and teach the scholars of the town of Rufforthe” (this is the first mention of a school or of a schoolmaster). By his will Bartholomew Hesketh ordered “that vi marks or lesse of his morgage lands . . . bi taken by his Executors for the founding of a priest and his stipende.” “Richard Dean was incumbent xi yerres, and hath the clere yerely revenue of the same for his salarie.”—*Lancashire Chronicles*, 59-60.

² The remains of the old Market Cross were removed in A.D. 1812, when the highway was changed and the Park enclosed.



INTERIOR OF GREAT HALL, RUFFORD

At this early period of their history the Heskeths no doubt made Martholme their chief place of residence. For one thing, it was more accessible than was Rufford. It was, I have ascertained, built originally by the Fittons at the time they acquired the Harwood Manor. Abram, in his *History of Blackburn*, describes what it was in its palmy days, and what it is at present. In the days of Sir Thomas Hesketh, A.D. 1577, it was greatly enlarged and repaired, and must have been an extensive and imposing block of buildings. Only fragmentary portions now remain. The whole of the west wing has gone, but the picturesque gateway which led the way into the courtyard has survived. It bears the Fitton arms on a shield, with the initials R.H. 1607. There is, too, a second gateway, in the midst of a two-storied building, with a panel above the door with mantlets, helmet, and crest, and the date T.H. 1561. Another shield, with the Hesketh crest and the date 1577, is inserted in the wall of the house as it now stands.

Martholme remained the property of the Heskeths (though they ceased to occupy it themselves in A.D. 1678, when it was let to a family named Turner) until early in the last century, when it was sold to Richard Lomax, Esq.

Although, as I have said, Martholme was for a very long period the chief place of residence of the Heskeths, they nevertheless spent a good deal of their time at Rufford.

It was, I believe, for the purpose of protecting their sporting rights on the Mere that Holmeswood Hall was first built. What little remains of the original structure shows it to have been a house of considerable importance and size, and it was most substantially constructed; the walls are

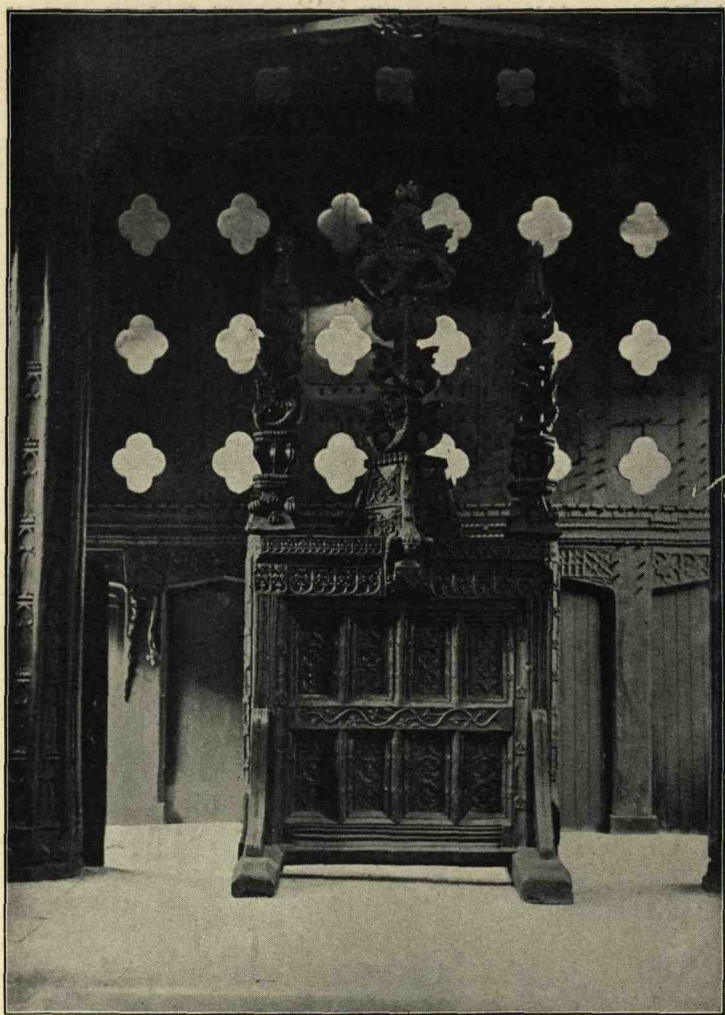
four feet in thickness. There was a Chapel attached. It was repaired and renovated in A.D. 1539 by Sir Robert Hesketh. Now it is, and for a very long period it has been, tenanted by a farmer; indeed, it is no longer the property of the Heskeths.

It was doubtless needful, when "might was right," to be well fortified and protected. The right of fishing was a constant source of quarrel. The feuds between the various riparian owners were perpetuated from the reign of Edward III. From time to time the retainers of the rival claimants destroyed each other's nets, and free fights were the result. Eventually a lawsuit established the claims of the Heskeths to control the fishing over the Mere.

The earliest direct mention of Holmeswood as a family residence is an entry in an old book I found in the Library of Rufford Hall, of the birth of Nicholas Hesketh's son Thomas at "La Holmes." He was baptized at Croston, A.D. 1406. He was father of the Sir Thomas Hesketh whose monument still remains, and to which I shall refer later.

The grandson of this Sir Thomas was one of the richest and most noted in the family. He was seized of the Manors of Rufford, Howick, Great Harwood, and Martholme, with lands, woodlands and rents in fifty-seven townships and hamlets in Lancashire, Yorkshire, and Westmorland. He had a great taste for building, in which his ample means enabled him to indulge. He rebuilt or very largely added to the house now known as "Rufford Old Hall," and which was, Mr. Holme considers, completed by his son and his grandson.

The building in its original design must have been a very beautiful specimen of the half-timbered



OAK SCREEN IN THE GREAT HALL, RUFFORD

style of architecture. It consisted of two wings, connected by a central hall, 50 feet by 23 feet, with an oriel window. This grand apartment, which is ornamented with carved work of a costly and elaborate character, was originally heated by a brazier placed in the centre of the floor. The smoke from the fire made its escape through a louvre in the roof, which occupied the position of the present lantern. The stone fireplace was built subsequently. The open hammer-beam roof of seven bays is enriched with carved figures of angels, bearing shields which show the various intermarriages of the Heskeths with families of influence and position. There is no Minstrels' Gallery, which customarily concealed the corridors which communicated with the servants' quarters, but that purpose was served by a most beautifully carved oak Screen or "Speer" of massive proportions, which happily has not been altered, since it left the workman's hands 400 years ago, except for some grotesque and uncommon finials of later date. Under the canopy, also embellished by armorial devices, was the daïs upon which the high table stood. The two doors now opening into the garden formerly communicated with the private apartments of the family. This part of the house was injured by fire and removed long ago.

The east wing anciently contained the kitchens, and the huge fireplace and massive chimney shaft still remain. It was largely rebuilt by Sir Thomas Hesketh, who was Lord of the Manor, A.D. 1662, and remained as he left it until it was abandoned by Sir Thomas Dalrymple Hesketh, Bart., in A.D. 1798, when he erected the large plain building known now as the "New Hall." At the same time the position of the highway was changed, and by so doing the Old Hall was deprived of a considerable portion of the Park which had formerly

belonged to it. The Old Hall was after this for a time occupied by a tenant farmer, and the Banqueting Hall was used as the village School until the eldest son of Sir Thomas Dalrymple, wishing to marry, the ancient dwelling of his ancestors was repaired and fitted for his reception. The Hall remains to-day as it was when Mr. Hesketh left it on succeeding to the title and estates of his father in A.D. 1842. It contains some delightful old oak furniture, mostly of the seventeenth century.

But to return. The Thomas Hesketh, who died in A.D. 1523, by his will (see Add. MSS. 32104, 1393) bequeathed his Manors to his natural son Robert;¹ made provision for the chantries at Harwood, Rufford, Croston, and Longton; for masses for his soul and gifts to the poor; for almshouses and a school at Rufford; for building a bridge where there was a "hyugard brigge" over the Douglas; for paving the roads and repairing a number of other bridges in Croston, Tarlton, and elsewhere. He left money for a new aisle, 20 feet by 40 feet, to be built on the south side of Rufford Chapel, the east end to have a window like that at Upholland Priory, or a new chapel might be erected at the east of the existing building. A steeple of stone, like that at Brindle Church, was to be built at the west end, and four bells were to be bought and placed there. The chapel yard was to be surrounded by a stone wall. There is, however, little evidence now existing that the provisions of this will were carried out in their entirety.²

¹ Robert Hesketh's mother, Alice, daughter of Christopher Haworth, is styled second wife of Thomas Hesketh in the visitation of A.D. 1568 but his father did not acknowledge her as such, for he married Grace Townley, who died in A.D. 1510.

² From a deed in the possession of Mr. Fitzherbert Brockholes, dated 16th Aug. A.D. 1524, 1400 pounds weight of plate was delivered for safe custody to the Abbot and Convent of Whalley by Thos. Hesketh, Esq., and Sir John Townley, as heirlooms for Robert Hesketh, according to the will of Thos. Hesketh.

Robert Hesketh, his son and successor, had a lawsuit with the heirs-at-law, who disputed the will, but he proved his case.

"He served the king (Henry VIII.) in Fraunce, and for his valoure, forwardness, actyvyite, and good service was knighted by the king's own hand with greate countenance and manye good words." This took place after the battle of "The Spurs." He died at Rufford, February A.D. 1540, holding much the same possessions as his father. His wife was a member of the Townley family, and bore the same Christian name (Grace) as his step-mother. He had two sons and two daughters. The youngest, Jane, was married at Croston to Richard Ashton, Esq.

His eldest son, Thomas, who was a minor when his father died, was a man of very considerable note and influence in his day. He was knighted the day after Queen Mary was crowned, A.D. 1553. In A.D. 1557 he was appointed captain of a troop he raised for the Scotch wars, and "performed many valourous deeds at the siege of Leithe, where he was sore hurt in divers places, and had his ensigne strooken down, which he recovered again." In A.D. 1563 he served the office of sheriff of the county. "He greatlie repaired the house at Mart-holme and Holmeswood Hall and the Chappell at Rufford." He built the Chancel, which was completed the year he died. He married Alice, daughter of Sir John Holdcroft and Ann, daughter of Ralf Standish of Standish. He seems to have tried to adapt himself to the changing circumstances of the times in which he lived. Whatever his religious opinions really were, he was loyal to both Queen Mary and her sister Elizabeth; but, for all this, he was not merely suspected of being in sympathy with the Roman Catholics, but he was put under arrest in A.D. 1581 as a "disaffected

Papist," and for not "keeping strict rule in his own house." He was in the custody of Sir Edmund Trafford.¹

His wife and all her family connections were Roman Catholics. His nephew, Roger Ashton,² the son of his sister Jane, was captain in the regiment Sir William Stanley raised for foreign service. Lady Hesketh herself was accused of harbouring "a lewd priest," one (Sir) James Harrison.³ He was supposed to be in hiding at Rufford, and the discovery of a secret chamber over the canopy of the banqueting hall, on the floor of which a Latin service book was found, confirms this supposition. That Sir Thomas Hesketh, under these circumstances, was suspected, is not to be wondered at. He, however, gained his liberty and spent the remainder of his days in attending to his own affairs, domestic and otherwise. He is spoken of as being "a notable good housekeeper, a benefactor to all men, and singular in every science."

His will, dated A.D. 1588, shows no trace whatever of his being in sympathy with Rome. In this document he speaks of himself as being:—

"Of good mynd and full remembrance, and humbly giving thanks to God therefore, and willing my goods and lands to go for the benefit of my children, servants, tenants, and other persons, in

¹ At this time the Trafford family were zealous Protestants, and Sir Edmund Trafford is represented as being "a most bitter enemy of the Catholics"; but in the year 1632 Sir Cecil Trafford abjured the reformed faith, and the family have been Roman Catholics ever since.—Baines' *History*, vol. ii. p. 269.

² This Roger Ashton was executed at Tyburn for "procuring a dispensation from Rome to marry a second cousin and for entertaining seminary priests."—Gillow's *Dictionary*, vol. iii. 286.

³ A native of the diocese of Lichfield, ordained at Rheims, A.D. 1583, and sent to England the following year. In A.D. 1602 he was arrested in York, brought to trial, and sentenced to die on a charge of high treason, or for exercising his priestly office. His head was preserved many years at Douay.—Gillow's *Dictionary of English Catholics*.

such manner whereby I hope God shall be better honoured and pleased, my soule comforted, and those I doe mean well, benefited and quieted. I resign my soul into the hands and to the mercy of the most mighty and everlasting God my only Maker and Redeemer: trusting by the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the shedding of His most precious blood I shall rest with Him for ever as one of His elect, and my body I will shall be buried by God His grace and sufference, in the new work and Chancel of the Chappel of Rufforth in such place and manner and sort as I shall hereafter appoint, that is to say: my will is that a tomb of stone shall be raysed and made to stand on[e] yard in heygth above the ground in the middle of the sayd chancel of the length of two yards and in brede four foote, and in the middst of it a slender wall either of brick or stone as shall be thought most convenient by my executors, and my body to lie on the north syde thereof and the body of Alice my wife to lye on the south side when it shall please God to take us from this lyfe. And upon the top of the sayd tomb both our bodies to be wrought in proportion of alabaster stone in such full manner and good sorte as may every way awnsere our callying."

After providing for his family and dependants, he gave to Robert Hesketh, his son and heir, "his chain of gold, two silver cans, his best silver basin and ewer, the newest hangings, the cup and cover whereon was engraved the Spread Eagle, all beds, bed coverings, carpets, and quishions whereupon his arms or crest were either carved or wrought with needle, and all armour munitions and weapons wherewith to serve her Majesty."

This will was proved at Chester by Sir Richard Sherburne, Henry Stanley of the Cross, Thomas Hesketh of Grey's Inn, gentleman, Hugh Hesketh,

his bastard son, "whom I acknowledge," he declared, "to be my real son whatever the law of this land do adjudice or decree to the contrary."¹ Sir Thomas Hesketh was succeeded by his son Robert, who then made Rufford Hall his chief place of residence. His first wife was Marie, daughter of Sir George Stanley, knt., of the Cross.² They had five sons and three daughters, all born at Martholme, where their mother died two years before her husband succeeded to the property. She was buried at Great Harwood, July A.D. 1585.

Robert Hesketh appears, outwardly at any rate, to have conformed to the Church as by law established, but his mother and two brothers were strong Roman Catholics. Thomas, the elder of the two, lived for some time at Martholme with his widowed mother.³ He subsequently practised as a physician at Clitheroe, where he died.

Richard, the third son, born A.D. 1562, was a soldier, and joined the Roman Catholic refugees in Flanders, where he served under Sir William Stanley with the Spanish army at the siege of Antwerp. On the death of Henry Stanley, 4th Earl of Derby, he was

¹ This Hugh Hesketh married the eldest daughter and co-heiress of Barneby Kytichene, or Kitchen, Lord of the Manor of North Meoles, and so acquired that estate. From him is descended the present family of Heskeths of North Meoles.

² In this connection there is an entry in the Derby household book, which shows there was a considerable intimacy between the Derby and Hesketh families at this time.

"On Sundaie [Oct. 11, 1587], Mr. Robert Hesketh at dinner and manie others.

"On Thursdaie, My Lord and Lady Strange went to diner at Rufford.

"On Sundaie, Mr. Richard Houghto, P'son of Moberley, preached. Mr. Bartholomew Hesketh at dyner."

In 1613 the steward made entry that he delivered to his master in gold, before he went to Rufford, £13, 4s.; and on another occasion £333, 6s. 8d. (500 marks) for Mr. Robert Hesketh.

³ The church book at Great Harwood has the following entry:—

"1593. Thomas Hesketh, Esq., a Recusant, did notify his coming to the Martholme, to dwell with his mother, to me, W. Harris, Curat of Harwood, the fourth day of October anoⁿgenia (Elizabeth) 36."—Abram's *History*.

commissioned by Sir William Stanley at the instigation of the Jesuit priest, Fr. Holt,¹ to come to England to encourage the earl's son and heir, Ferdinando, Lord Strange, to lay claim to the succession to the Crown of England on the death of Elizabeth, on the ground that he was closely related to the Royal Family.² Hesketh was commissioned to promise Spanish aid. The new earl, although at first probably inclined to entertain the proposal, as is thought by some, took fright when he found the Government spies had discovered the plot, and in order to save his own neck, threw Hesketh to the wolves. He was condemned, and executed at St. Albans on the 29th November A.D. 1593. When on the scaffold he named Sir William Stanley and others, and cursed the time he had ever known them.³

Lady Hesketh went from Martholme to stay with the Ashtons of Penketh, where she died in 1604. She was buried at Great Harwood, and not, in accordance with the wishes of her husband as expressed in his will, at Rufford.

Sir Robert Hesketh died A.D. 1620, and was

¹ William Holt, born A.D. 1545, was a member of the ancient family of Holt of Ashworth. Student at Brazenose and Oriel Colleges, Oxford; in 1573 he took his degree at Cambridge; went to Douay in 1574, and was ordained priest, 1576; came to England, A.D. 1581, on a political mission under the name of Peter Brereton; arrested at Leithe, but set at liberty and ordered to quit the country; was agent for the King of Spain in Flanders for ten years. He died in Spain, 1599.—Gillows' *Dictionary*. Holt offered Edmund York 40,000 ducats if he would murder the Queen (Elizabeth).—*Foley Records*, i. 355.

² "James VI. of Scotland was the direct heir to the throne of England, but was a foreigner. Ferdinando was first English heir of undoubted legitimacy."—*Brownhill*.

³ *Stanley State Papers*, iii. 20, Appendix.

Dodd repudiates the statements made by Richard Hesketh that the Catholic exiles had sent him on the errand he went.—*Church History*, vol. ii. 160.

Sir William Stanley, with two other Popish recusants, were placed under arrest at Brussels on suspicion of being concerned in the Gunpowder Plot, but the English ambassador stated that Sir William was not yet so deeply charged concerning this last treason as to be put on his trial.—*Baines' History*, vol. i. 580.

succeeded by his son, also Robert. His daughter, Holcroft, the widow of Lawrence Rawstone, Esq., of Hutton Grange, married Roger Dodsworth, the antiquary,¹ who visited Rufford on the 25th August A.D. 1620 (it may be to attend his father-in-law's funeral), when he made the following report respecting the monuments, &c., he saw in Rufford Chapel:—

1. A man in armour with his wief in brass. Hic subtus iacent. Thomas Hesketh armiger et gracia uxoris . . .

2. Richard Hesketh. Quarterings, Hesketh et Townley.

3. Sir Robert Hesketh, knt., and Dame Grace (filia Johnni Townley).

4. A fair monument of alabaster with the portraitures of a man in armour and his wife with eleven children engraved thereon (of this more anon).

5. A brasse of Robert Hesketh and his wife (VI. Henry VII.).

6. A crossed legged knight in armour, the lowest part broken.

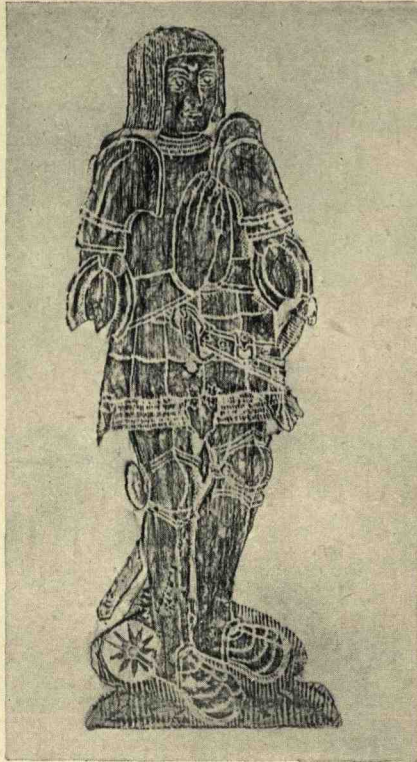
7. In the quyer a comely monument of Sir Thomas Hesketh, knt., with the portraiture in armour thereon.²

Dodsworth further states that "over the chancle

¹ Roger Dodsworth was the son of Matthew Dodsworth, Registrar of York Cathedral. He was born at Newton Grange, Oswaldkirk, July 24, 1585. His maternal grandfather was Ralph Sandwith. In 1599 he attended Archbishop Hutton's School, Walton, Lancashire, under Miles Dawson, afterwards Vicar of Bolton. In early life he became known to the Fairfaxes of Denton, who were his patrons. He married Holcroft, widow of Lawrence Rawstone of Hutton Grange, Lancashire, and eldest daughter of Sir Robert Hesketh of Rufford, and took up his residence at Hutton Grange, only leaving it when on antiquarian expeditions. In 1635 he received a pension of £50 from Lord Fairfax. He died, 1654, and was buried at Rufford. One hundred and sixty-two volumes of his MSS. are in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

² This is undoubtedly the monument referred to in his will, and it confirms the statement that Lady Hesketh was not buried with her husband.

³ Portions of this monument, and a parcel of ancient stained glass, have recently been found, and will be restored to the church.



Here lyeth buried Sir Robert Bellamy
 knight and dame Grace his wyf
 which was Robert wyf the son of
 in the year of the death of our lord
 was in the year of the death of our lord
 Grace wyf the year of the death of our lord
 the year of the death of our lord

RECENTLY DISCOVERED MONUMENTAL BRASSES

or quyer dore of the said chappell was the inscription T. H. K. mayd this chancele in the yere of our Lord God MDLXXXVIII. In which yere he dyed."

In 1652 Sir Robert Hesketh was threatened with sequestration though he protested that he had been "a most perfect and firm adherent of the Parliament, and their just and honourable undertakings." It is not improbable that Alexander Rigby of Middleton, a distinguished member of the Long Parliament, whose daughter, Lucy, was married to Sir Robert's eldest son, and his brother-in-law, Dodsworth, whose patron and friend was Lord Fairfax, an influential leader of the Parliamentary party, interested themselves on his behalf with success. He had previously saved his estate by a small payment (£45, 18s. 9d.), and no doubt would congratulate himself that he got off so easily. He died A.D. 1653. It is very likely it was during the latter part of his life that the monuments, which Dodsworth saw, and described with such minuteness, and in such detail, were destroyed; that is, if they were not removed and hidden away. The Rector of Croston (Hytt) at this time, like all perverts, was a bigot of the deepest dye,¹ and there is little doubt that both he and "Mr. Wood," who was stationed at Rufford in A.D. 1650, and is described as being "a godly minister conformable to the state and government," would rather encourage than restrain the iconoclasts when they came, as they did, through the country breaking down "with axes and hammers" all the carved work, sculpture, stained glass, indeed, everything which had been left of any value, by those who pillaged, robbed, and destroyed the churches and religious houses in the days of Henry the Eighth. It is true the Chapel

¹ He said that "Toleration would be putting a sword into a mad-man's hand; a cup of poison into the hands of a child."

at Rufford was left standing, and continued to serve its sacred purposes until the year A.D. 1736, when it was taken down and replaced by a building of no pretensions, at a cost of £1165. This was demolished and the present church built, A.D. 1869.

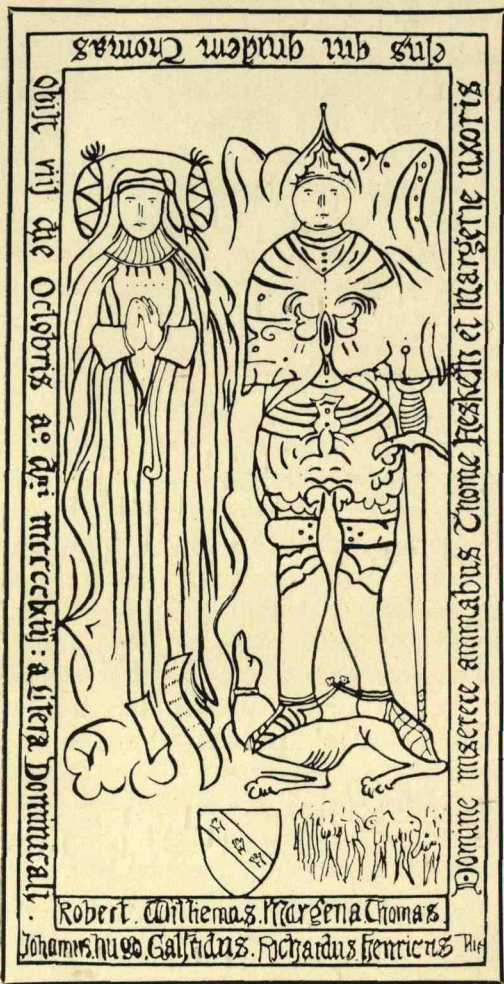
What the old Chapel was like originally can only be a matter of guess-work, so effectually and so completely was it destroyed. If the tower for which money was left by Thomas Hesketh in A.D. 1523 was ever built, according to the directions contained in his will, it was like the one at Brindle, which is a square, massive erection with buttresses and battlements. That a Chancel was built by Sir Thomas Hesketh in A.D. 1588 there can be no doubt, since Dodsworth distinctly says that the monument was in the "quyre or chancel" which was built "the yere he dyed."

We need not wonder that, taking into consideration the fanatical spirit of the age, the Chapel was damaged and its monuments broken and mutilated by those who, in their zeal, considered they were "doing God service"; but that, with one exception, the monuments should be absolutely wiped out of existence and not a trace, or hardly a trace, of them, or of the building in which they were lodged, be left, is, indeed, strange and incomprehensible.

The old abbeys and other monastic buildings, when they were pillaged and let go to ruin, became quarries, and stones

"Carved with figures strange and sweet"

are now to be found in the walls of many of the old houses for miles around. Take, for instance, Whalley, and Fountains, and Furness; but a very careful search and examination of the old houses in and about Rufford has not resulted in the discovery



SKETCH OF ALABASTER GRAVE SLAB
 OF THOMAS HESKETH AND
 MARGERY HIS WIFE

of any remains of the old Chapel, except the following :—

1. Two stones, which in all probability formed the corbels from which the chancel arch sprang, and which I recently discovered, one in the rectory garden and its fellow in another garden in the village. They are now placed, one on each side of the Church porch.

2. The base of the churchyard Cross, which has been replaced by a modern erection of very questionable taste and design.

3. The mutilated remains of a dog carved in alabaster, found at the Old Hall, and a stone panel with armorial bearings. These may have formed part of the "comely monument" of Sir Thomas Hesketh (A.D. 1588), as described by Dodsworth, and ordered in his will.

4. The faire monument of alabaster, with the portraits of Sir Thomas Hesketh and his wife, dated A.D. 1464, which was found under the seats of the present church, broken into six pieces. It has been carefully restored and placed in the "Hesketh Chapel" at the expense of the present baronet.

5. A number of gravestones, the earliest of which is dated A.D. 1632.

These are all that remain, except what is recorded in books, to tell of the existence of the old Chapel of St. Mary Rufford.

Amongst all the improvements which have been effected in the domestic relations of English people, none present themselves more readily to the eye as the appearance and the convenience of their dwellings. In "the days o' auld lang syne" it was only the highest classes who ever gave a moment's thought on their habitations. Houses, for the most part, were chiefly built of wood, assisted by mud or clay, which, cracking by the heat of the sun

in summer, and by the action of the frost in winter, was repaired by the application of the same primitive materials. Shakespeare alludes to this in the following lines :—

“Imperious Cæsar, dead and turned to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.”

—*Hamlet*, Act v. sc. 1.

It was this rude kind of habitation which caused the Spaniards in the days of Queen Mary to say in their wonder and astonishment :—

“These English have their homes made of sticks and dirt, but they fare as well as the king.”

These mud-built cottages, with

“The whitewashed wall, the nicely sanded floor,
The varnished clock that click'd behind the door ;
The chest, contrived a double debt to pay,—
A bed by night, a chest of drawers by day,”

are gradually giving place to more substantial, but less picturesque, erections, for it cannot be said that modern houses have improved in architectural design. Up to quite recent years architects have not shown much, if any, originality in their designs ; they have simply copied one model, and that distinguished by its deficiency of external ornament. We are, I hope, improving, but there is still room for the development of the beautiful and artistic, especially in the designing of cottage dwellings. This by the way.

There are a few of the old-fashioned whitewashed mud-built cottages, with their roofs of thatch, still remaining in Rufford. Some of these date back to the early years of the sixteenth century, though, —like the Scotchman's pistol, which he told people once was the property of his great-grandfather, though he acknowledged it had had in the course of years “a new lock, a new stock, and a new barrel,” so

that there was, in point of fact, not much of the original weapon left,—these dwellings, as time has gone by, they have been renewed and renewed until little, if anything, of the original remains. The thatch wears out, though I am told a good roof of straw will last fifty years, and it is needful from time to time

“To patch a wall t’ expel the winter’s flaw.”

In most cases, too, new window panes have taken the place of the old lead lights. Still, they give an old-time look to the place and add to its picturesqueness, and I shall be sorry when they all disappear to make room for modern commonplace.

The oldest house of any pretensions, after the Old Hall, is the “Grey Gutter Farm” (why so called I cannot even conjecture). It was built for or by a family named Banks in A.D. 1675, and has undergone very little change in either its external or internal construction. It contains some quaint and valuable old furniture of the same date as the building.

The “Hermitage” was the original home of the Bridges,¹ one of the oldest of the old Rufford

¹ The following is copy of a letter from Edward Bridge, agent to Thomas Hesketh, Esq., addressed to Mr. Whalley of Sparth:—

“RUFFORD, *July 3rd*, 1684.

“SIR,—I have acquainted my Master with the result of our business yesterday at Blackborne, as also of your answer that is to be returned by the Archbishop’s gentleman upon Tuesday next. And he saith that as to the six fifteenths, he is content they be paid in case his Lordship’s allowance will be considerable, and that there may be no new Innovations brought up about the Tythe Hay, but as to the 20s. that he hath paid for some time yearly to Mr. Colton, the Minister, he will not be tyed to pay it, if the six fifteenths be paid, for that was given upon the account of his tenants heretofore, and he must pay part of the fifteenths himself for his desmesne, though he hath as little to give as any man, but that he is a true lover of the Church, for he finds by ancient deeds that there is a very good quantity of land given by his Ancestors to the Church at Harwood, which, at the dissolution of the Abbeyes and Chantries, was seized into the King’s hands, which I believe was the reason of that allowance out of the Duchy by

families. It dates from A.D. 1673, but has been considerably altered. It has the reputation of being "haunted," but although I have inquired of several people, who ought to know, I cannot find any one who has actually seen the spectre, though they say they have heard unaccountable noises at the "witching hour of midnight." Probably the rats were playing high jinks in the rafters. I was, however, told by one who lived in the house before it was altered, that there was plainly to be seen on one of the flags on the kitchen floor spots of blood, which the application of soap, water, and brush would not efface. It was, in this good woman's opinion, proof positive of some foul and unavenged murder, which

". . . though it have no tongue, will speak
With most miraculous organ."

The Sluice Farm is probably the oldest inhabited house in Rufford. It has been the home of the "Altys" since the time Richard Alty married Ann Tootle, Nov. 17, A.D. 1672.

The old "Manor House" is about the same date, but that, too, has been greatly changed from what it was originally.

The Church Registers,¹ which date from the year A.D. 1670, give very little information respecting those whose births, deaths, and marriages they

Edward VI., and likewise land in Harwood was given by his Ancestors to the Abbot of Whalley in leu of the Tyth of Martholme desmesne, which land belongs to the Abbey to this day. But my Master notwithstanding as ill dealt was in his tyth as in the Rectory. I only hint these things to you to let you know in some measure how things stand, and desire you to make use of as you see occasion, but not to part with out of your hands, which is all at present from your humble servant,
EDW. BRIDGE."

¹ The following entry is interesting:—

"Burials for ye year 1678 all notifd to be buryed in woolen according to ye law. Act of Parliament entitled an Act for burying in woolen only."

record. During the 237 years which have elapsed since the first entry was made, the same names, both Christian and surname, occur over and over and over again, and there is no doubt that the ancestors of many of the people now living in the parish have been settled here as long as the family of the Lord of the Manor. The Rufford folk do not appear to have sought husbands and wives from outside, but they have usually mated with their own neighbours, so that the whole community may be looked upon as one large family. They lived their lives and served their generation

“Far from the madding crowds’ ignoble strife
Their sober wishes never learned to stray ;
Along the cool sequestered vale of life
They kept the even tenor of their way.”

Nor do many of the gravestones in the Churchyard convey much information as to who or what they were whose remains they mark. Of the great majority the words are true :—

“How loved, how honoured once, avails thee not ;
To whom related, or by whom begot.
A heap of dust alone remains of thee—
’Tis all thou art, and all the proud shall be.”

There are a few exceptions, however ; for instance, in the Church there is a very beautiful monument, the work of the great Flaxman ; another, of which Noble, R.A., was the sculptor ; a third, on which is an original verse written by the poet Cowper, who was cousin to the wife of the Sir Thomas Hesketh to whose memory the monument was erected. In the Churchyard there is a stone which covers the grave of one of whom it is recorded that “his universal character was that of an honest man.”

Of another it is written :—

“An honest man is the noblest work of God.”

What better epitaph would any one desire ?

With Burns we must acknowledge :—

“ A prince can make a belted knight,
A marquis, duke and a' that :
But an honest man's aboon his might,
Guid faith, he manna fa' that.”

On another is inscribed the following :—

“ Could goodness youth and beauty separately or conjointly have spared her invaluable life Mary Clark wife of the Rev. Thomas Clark whose body lies interred near this place had not died July 7 1809 aged 30 years.”

One man, while he did not exactly follow the example of Shakespeare, on whose gravestone is written :—

“ Blest be ye man y' spares these stones,
And curst be he y' moves these bones ”—

did give, what he doubtless considered very distinct and definite instructions with the same purpose in view, that his gravestone “ must not be taken away by nobody.” On one gravestone are the words :—

“ Richard Alty Bassoon.”

This gave rise to my being asked by a visitor if some of the people of Rufford were of French extraction, whereas the inscription was a reminder of the time when the choir, stationed in the west gallery, sang Tait and Brady's version of the Psalms to the accompaniment of “ Instruments of Music,” which included a bassoon, which was played by Richard Alty.

I found in the estate office a survey of the property belonging to Sir Thomas Hesketh in 1760, situated in 21 townships in this county. From the maps in this interesting book an idea may be formed of what Rufford was like before the crooked was made straight and the rough places plain. The formation and the enclosure of the

Park, the reconstruction of the principal roads, and the demolition of a number of old houses have contributed to this change, which, while it has undoubtedly detracted from the picturesqueness of the village, has improved the place and its approaches in other respects. In the old days the roads were so deep and dangerous that in winter, and frequently in summer, waggons, carts, and other wheeled vehicles could not get along without much danger and loss of time. In many places the roads were a foot deep in mud, and had holes in which a sheep might be buried.

Situated on the top of Church Lane was the Village Green, where the weekly market and the annual Fair were held round the Cross, which was only removed in A.D. 1818. Here, too, stood the parish stocks, but they have long disappeared.

No doubt, on the Fair day, surrounded with much of the rough jocularly, both in language and action, which was characteristic of the "Merrie England" of ye olden times, but nevertheless not without its pleasing features:—

" . . . The village train from labour free
Led up their sports beneath the spreading tree,
While many a pastime circled in the shade,
The young contending, while the old surveyed,
And many a gambol frolicked o'er the ground,
And sleights of art and feats of strength went round."

Then there were the Morrice dancers, and the plough jacks, and other ministers of harmless revelry; and more objectionable were the cruel sports of bull-baiting and bear-baiting and cock-fighting. That the latter was a favourite amusement in Rufford, as elsewhere, is shown by the fact that I find on this old map the site of the "Cock pit."

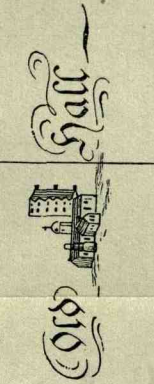
But here I must stop. Time will not allow nor your patience permit me to give extracts from some

parish books and documents I found in an old chest which throw a side-light on the habits, customs, and manners adopted in the country villages in those good old days, so called, when Farmer George was king and when light and knowledge were taxed.

About the middle of the eighteenth century the population of Rufford was very much larger than it is at present. There are not many more than one half the number of inhabitants there was in A.D. 1740-1801. Like many another village, the people have migrated to the towns, attracted, in the first instance, no doubt, by the prospect of better wages; but I am one of those who fully believe Oliver Goldsmith when he wrote the lines with which I will conclude :—

“ Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.
Princes and Lords may flourish or may fade,—
A breath can make them, as a breath has made ;
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroy'd, can never be supplied.”

Part of
RUFFORD
upon this
PLAN



Fifty Poles Eight Yards to the Pole.