

# A SHORT HISTORY OF THE VILLAGE OF EASTOFT

by

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This year Eastoft church celebrates its building one hundred years ago, but the village itself has been in existence for about one thousand years. Today unfortunately there is little material evidence for this long history, since none of the present buildings in the village are much more than two hundred years old and they were probably built upon more ancient foundations. The settlement of Eastoft was made by the Danes, who came over to England during the 10th Century A.D. Sailing up the Humber, they scattered over various parts of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, following the rivers Trent, Don and Ouse. The name Eastoft is of Danish origin and the earliest records spell it in a variety of forms from:- ESCHETOFTH, ESSETOFT, ESTOF, ELTOFT, ESTOFT, to the most common one, that is EST TOFT. "Toft" means the 'site of a house and its outbuildings or fields' and so the name Eastoft means "the homestead east," that is east of Crowle. Eltoft and Eschetofth have a slightly more detailed meaning of the "homestead at the riverpool" and "mooring waters" respectively. So we can see that the full original meaning of the name was - "the homestead and enclosure at the mooring waters of the river pool, east of Crowle". This is interesting since it tells of an early connection between Eastoft and Crowle (an older settlement) and we also learn that the river Don must have played an important part in their lives. Eastoft is not mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086, but Crowle is shown as having thirty-one fisheries and some of these must certainly have belonged to Eastoft. In these early days, the village consisted of a few houses, hardly worthy of the name since they would be most wretched hovels built of clay, straw and wood, and these would stand by the river Don, which in those times was a tidal river without proper banks and therefore much of the nearby land would be waterlogged by fen pools and side waters from the river. The villages depended upon these waters for much of their living, fowling and fishing being major occupations. They also kept a

few cattle and pigs, cultivating as much land as they were able with their primitive equipment and lack of proper drainage. However most of the land was semi-waste ground, a breeding ground for rabbits and hares, with perhaps an occasional deer strayed from Hatfield Chase. The only fuel available was wood and peat, although the latter was very easily obtained.

The development of Eastoft under the Influence of Selby Abbey during the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries.

Gradually the village grew and became more important so that it was mentioned in various records. The development of Eastoft along with most other villages in this area was closely connected with the growth of Selby Abbey. The great Benedictine Abbey of Selby came into being soon after 1066 and claimed William the Conqueror as founder, for in 1069 he made a small grant of land for the actual foundation. The King owned much of the land in this part of the world and at Eastoft there was a royal game keepers lodge ( incidentally still shown on a map as late as 1600) where the King's keeper saw that his Lord's rights were not infringed by the villagers, for in those days only the King had the right to kill certain animals, and offenders against this rule were severely punished by the "Laws of the Forest". As the Abbey of Selby grew it gradually gained control over more and more land in the area and was soon collecting rents and dues from various properties. The Abbot of Selby did not own the land at Eastoft at the time of the conquest, but so powerful had the abbey become by 1300 that the abbot claimed that his predecessors had held the "hamlet of Eastoft from the time of the conquerors to the time of King John who gave the land to a certain Roger Lord of the manor of Snaith". Since then the abbot said he had held the land from the Lord of Snaith paying him yearly a rent of 34s. 8d. From the time of the twelfth until the fifteenth century the village must have been a profitable source of income to its owner, yielding a good sum of money in rents and other dues. Because of this value, there are numerous records of disputes over its ownership occurring between Selby Abbey and various important nobles. A valuable source of information for the history of this area during the period of the middle ages

is the "Caucher Book of Selby" - a number of documents written or gathered together by the monks of Selby and all relating to the history of the abbey and its numerous possessions.

The earliest written document mentioning Eastoft by name dated from 1164, when a dispute occurred between, Germane, abbot of Selby, and Walter, "vicar" of Adlingfleet, over the tithes of Reedness and Eastoft. Roger, Archbishop of York, was called in to settle this quarrel and he decided that the vicar of Adlingfleet should possess the tithes for life, providing he rendered 40s. yearly to the abbey for them. Evidently Walter's successor failed to carry out the terms of the agreement for in 1199 the abbot of Selby claimed that his rights were being infringed once again. In the thirteenth century the abbey was at the height of its fame and at this period too Eastoft must have been fairly well inhabited both in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire. The villagers must have been prosperous since many gifts of land in Eastoft were made to the monks of Selby. The rents from these lands would be used for rebuilding or extending parts of the abbey, for various works of charity, and often to ensure that prayers were said for the souls of the departed donors. The growing power of the abbey is reflected in the special privileges granted to it in 1252 by Henry III, in which the royal right of hunting small game in the manors of "Rauclif and Eastoft, in the county of York" was transferred to the abbot, provided he did not commit any offence against the king's harsh Forest Laws. After this, between 1254 and 1280 a number of charters were drawn up between the inhabitants of Eastoft and the abbot of Selby - there were naturally written in the ecclesiastical Latin of the time by the monks, and today are preserved for us in the British Museum. They are very interesting since there are more than forty and they show that the population of Eastoft, which had increased considerably, must have been fairly prosperous. They indicate too, in the numerous gifts of lands and rent, the desire on the part of the villagers to please the Selby monks. More than forty measures of plough land

about ten acres of meadow and numerous money rents were made over to the abbot by these charters. In addition gifts of fisheries, "peat-lands", marshes and swamps are recorded. Various local place names are given, all of which have now disappeared and the names of more than forty inhabitants are given. It would be tedious to mention them all but one or two are interesting as they throw light upon the various types of people living there in the Thirteenth Century. For instance one "Walters of Eastoft" made a gift of land there "beginning at the Banks of the Don" and "reaching as far as the marshes" and his son William gave five acres of land "next to the barn of the Selby monks" which they would use at harvest time to store their crops and the produce given to the abbey by the villagers. William also made a gift of a rent of eight shillings, collected from the holdings of Nicholas the merchant and John Fader, and this rent was to be paid in two equal parts at the Feast of St. Martin in Winter, and also at Pentecost. Walter's family were especially favoured by the abbot since another son was allowed to exchange a piece of his land "alongside the Don" with a similar piece of the abbot's land, so that he could farm it more conveniently. Even in those days there were several women landowners who were able to make their own charters - usually they were the daughters of important local people or else wealthy widows. Thus Emma and Matilda Dayuill made charters with the vicar of Adlingfleet as did their sister Edusa described as "once the wife of Hugh of Stanford". Another person whose name occurs several times is Nicholas described as "chaplain" and "priest", another priest Richard is also mentioned, as is Germane, a chaplain. It is improbable that there was a church at Eastoft in those early days, and the persons mentioned may have been officials of the abbot of Selby, or at a time when the clergy were much more numerous than they are today, they may have retired from some nearby living. Perhaps they ministered to the spiritual needs of the people of Eastoft in a small chapel, but definite evidence for the erection of a chapel in the village during the thirteenth century was not forthcoming. Among the people in the

village were some who had originally come from other nearby parts of Lincolnshire, such men as Adam, son of Hugh of Redbourne and Walter of Crowle. Another villager mentioned was Simon Turpin and one wonders whether he could have been an ancestor of the famous highwayman Dick Turpin, who also came from Yorkshire.

Disputed over the Ownership of land in Eastoft during the Fourteenth Century.

The fourteenth century was an important one for Eastoft since several important men in the country were involved in quarrels over land there. It appears that in 1302 Henry de Lacy, 3rd Earl of Lincoln, had taken into his own hands some land at Eastoft. Henry was a most important statesman and had been Joint-Lieutenant of England during King Edward's absence abroad. Edward indeed had a high regard for him and gave him command of the English army, and he was able to maintain this strong position under Edward's son Edward II. There is no doubt that, in common with most statesmen of the time, he used his authority to acquire more property for himself and Eastoft was just one of the many manors he must have seized. When he died in 1311 his lands passed into the hands of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, Edward II's cousin and Lord High Steward of England. On account of the King's misgovernment of the country Lancaster and many other nobles rebelled against him, forcing him to submit to their wishes. Eventually the tables turned and Lancaster was taken prisoner by the King at Boroughbridge and immediately beheaded. All his lands, including Eastoft, were confiscated by the King. But Edward II himself was soon forced to abdicate in favour of his son Edward III. At this point the abbot of Selby petitioned the rewriters of the kingdom in the hope that his lands at Eastoft might be fully restored. A full enquiry into the matter was immediately ordered and this took place at Eastoft, itself in 1326 in the presence of William de Herle and Thomas de Eyuill, keeper of Pontefract Castle. The actual place where these officials met was the "Manor at Eastoft", which was probably stood where the present Hall in Lincolnshire now stands. It was found that the abbot of Selby had certain ancient rights in Eastoft such as the right to dig peat, to pasture his beasts and

other profits, all of which had been seized by Henry Lacy, together with about 500 acres of land and a rent of 16s. It was alleged that the abbot had voluntarily surrendered his rights to the Earl, but when the matter was taken to higher authority for a final decision, King Edward III, at Westminster in 1327 decreed that the lands should be returned to the abbot.

During the fourteenth century there disputes about land were frequent, since many nobles had small "armies" of retainers and if they had even the slightest claim to a piece of land held by a weaker person, they took the land by force. This was especially so in the North where because of poor communications it was difficult for the king to maintain peace and good order. Some men, however, were able to get back their lands by appealing to the royal courts, but this was often an expensive process. The abbot of Selby having secured some of his lands in Eastoft is recorded in 1332 as petitioning <sup>king</sup> ~~the~~ to restore some more lands in the same village. The abbot claimed that John de Warenne, Earl of Surrey had illegally taken 800 acres of pasturage with appurtenances in Eastoft. Then there followed considerable wrangling in the law courts for the earl claimed that "the tenements are in Thorne" (which he owned) "and not in Eastoft", whilst the abbot maintained that "the tenements are not parcels of the manor of Thorne". The earl tried to stop court proceedings whilst the abbot urged that they should continue, and the latter finally besought the king to provide a remedy. The king was thus placed in an awkward position since the earl was one of his best supporters and he had granted him lands in 1327, amongst which may have been the disputed land in Thorne or Eastoft. This case was therefore postponed for some time, but eventually the lands were restored to the abbot, although whether or not it was a complete restoration is not clearly known. These events probably caused little actual trouble in the village, but some of the inhabitants tried to use these events to escape from the somewhat strict

authority of the abbot. For instance in 1366 Galfridus, Abbot of Selby is said to have unjustly deprived "William Bene de Garthorp - of a freeholding in Eastoft". Although William claimed that he was a freeman, the abbot maintained that he was his personal serf (i.e. he had no rights over property or his own person) and forced him to remain in that inferior position. This unfortunate man and his wife Joan were then attacked by a number of men, no doubt sent by the abbot to enforce his authority. Not all the villages however were unjustly treated and several are recorded as having paid fines for various misdeeds. For instance John of Eastoft owed £25 to John de Ellerker which he refused to pay and was consequently fined. Another John, on account of his good services in the war with France, was given a special pardon for causing the death of John Pypynell of Hook. Even the clergy indulged in a little poaching, for William of Eastoft, together with the vicar of Adlingfleet and others in 1377, entered the kings hunting chase at Belton and Crowle "hunted therein, killed and carried off certain deer, and chased others from there, so that the case was destroyed". For this crime they paid a heavy fine.

Generally speaking this century was one of progress for Eastoft in which waste land was gradually being reclaimed. For instance in 1337 John de Mowbray Lord of the Isle of Axholme gave permission to enclose five acres of waste land in Eastoft next to Leme. Dykes, walls and hedges of any kind could be made, but the villages were warned not to reclaim more than the stated amount of land since "only the Lord John and the abbot of Selby could normally enclose land and build houses". This shown how restricted life was in Eastoft in those days. But the abbot was responsible for the upkeep of the area and later in the century was told by the king to contribute towards the upkeep of "dykes, sewers, and drainage" and to ensure that the River Don was dug to "a breadth of 16 feet and one grain of barley" - a quaint way of measuring a distance - nor was the rivers to be obstructed by "bridges, weirs, and other things so that the said breadth is not kept whereby the passing of ships is impeded and the land adjoining. Evidently the rivers

was still important and used as a means of transport as well as for fishing. In 1304 the earl of Lincoln gave licence to the abbot of Selby to rebuild the chapel of St. Mary Magdalene at Whitgift so that the inhabitants of Whitgift, Reedness and Eastoft and others might hear divine service and partake of the sacraments. Thus it appears that early in the century the people of Eastoft did not possess a chapel of their own, although later in the same century the vicar of Adlingfleet was paid 26s. 8d. annually for serving the inhabitants of Eastoft as minister and parish priest. By 1390 a chapel had been built at Haldenby and it is probable that the chapel which stood at Eastoft until the last quarter of the eighteenth century, was built during the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century.

The gradual Decline of Eastoft from the 15th to the early 19th Century and the first occurrence of the names of families, whose descendants still live there.

During the fifteenth century there is little mention of Eastoft in any records, since this was a time of civil war and decay throughout the country, it is probable that there was also little growth or development in Eastoft. Like most monasteries Selby abbey lost its great influence and its monks became less zealous losing active interest in farming or trading. With the Reformation and Dissolution of all monasteries in England in the sixteenth century, the lands formerly belonging to Selby abbey passed into the hands of the King, Henry VIII. His son, Edward VI granted the manor of Eastoft (together with other properties) to Lord Clinton and Saye, later earl of Lincoln and Lord High Admiral of England. But when Roman Catholic Mary I became queen she refused to confirm his possession of Eastoft and Luddington until he had made his peace with her, which he did in 1554 and on payment of a fine in 1555 he was granted "the site of his manor of Estofte in Lincoln with all houses, lands etc.", then there followed a full description of the various lands but the names of all the fields seem to have altered since those days, although "two pieces of land in Estoft in the meadows called Eastoft Bottoms with all buildings therein" seems to have an almost familiar ring about it. Lord Clinton's main tenants in Eastoft were



William and Robert Pynder, who were to maintain a close family connection with the village for many years to come. William Pynder and his son paid a rent of £10 3s. 4d. annually for their tenancy. There were of course many other smaller tenant farmers in the village and during Queen Elizabeth I's reign several grants of land were made, including "rents and lands in Estofte, Co. York and a fishery in the Donne there" to John Hay and John Hyché. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century practically all agricultural development ceased in the village. One of the main reasons for this were the drainage scheme of the Dutchman Cornelius Vermuyden who completely altered the course of the river Don. Consequently at Eastoft the river dried up, but this drying was a long process and without any adequate drainage facilities the waste land and marshy ground in the village could not be used. By this time the village had reached the full extent of possible growth and all the reasonably well drained land had been used over and over again until inevitably it became to lose some of its former richness. Nor were any new methods of cultivating the land more efficiently discovered at this time. This decay continued into the eighteenth century and at that period the chapel in the village fell into disuse, so that in 1723 the Bishop of Lincoln reported that "the chapel at Eastoft has long been neglected between the two incumbents of Crowle and Adlingfleet, but at length is mutually supplied by each". Evidently it soon fell once more into disuse for again in 1743 it was reported that "in the chapel of Eastoft - within the parish of Crowle but it belongs likewise to Adlingfleet - the service was a long time neglected but at last was agreed upon by both". By 1800 the chapel had virtually disappeared, the stones, no doubt having been used for various buildings, and all that was left at the beginning of the century were a few stones, at the back of the Yorkshire Hall - which I believe have now disappeared altogether. The inhabitants were thus forced to use the church at Crowle and Adlingfleet and in the register of those churches we find the names of various Eastoft families. The

earliest mention of a family name still common in the village occurs in 1615 when Robert son of John Proctor was buried. After that the Proctor family appears frequently in the records up to the present day. Another early record in 1663 mentions Elizabeth Everatt, and her family are also specified several times after that. From the beginning of the eighteenth century we begin to see other familiar Eastoft names; Thomas and Ann Boaman, in 1702, William Chancery, John Hart, Robert Fowler, Robert Empson, together with members of the Read, Johnson, Wilson and Grevil families. In the 1790's we find other names such as the Kendall, Tune, Shipley, Smith, Legott, Scholey, Wroot, Halliday and Harrison families. Thus by 1800 many of the forefathers of the present inhabitants had already settled in the village.

Prosperity returns to the Village in the 19th Century with a consequent increase in Population and Facilities.

The nineteenth century saw many changes in the village which brought about an increase in prosperity and population. The most important changes were made in 1813 when much open common and waste land was enclosed by Act of Parliament - all tithes were also commuted at this time. Enclosure meant that improvements could be made to the land by building more drains. In 1816 an act was passed allowing the land to be made fertile by warping and this process was carried out with great success at a cost of £25 per acre. But this was soon repaid by the vast improvement in the quality and amount of land available. Together with a growing stock of improved farming equipment which was being developed in the country, and increasing demand for more and varied crops, people were consequently attracted to the area to work. A glance at the census returns for the first half of the century show a steady increase in population.

Population of Eastoft (Lines)	Date
128	1801
151	1811
232	1821
224	1831
282	1841

Eventually later in the century the population reached about 691 in Lincolnshire and 100 in Yorkshire, but since then the figures have fallen somewhat to about 400 and 50 respectively, today. Let us take a look at the people in the village both before and after the building of the church and see what they did or who they were. In 1842 the land was mostly in the possession of the Lister, Brunyee, Gibson, Scholey, Stephenson, Johnson and other families. The main occupation was naturally farming and amongst the small farmers we find Messrs. Brown, Everatt (2), Foster, Fowler, Kendall, Lazenby, Leggott, Till, Thompson and Wroot. Mr. Joshua Morley lived in the Yorkshire Hall. Messrs. Fowler and Stephenson kept shops and the two beehives belonged to Messrs. Stone and Cash. Mr. John Belton had a tailor's shop and it is interesting to note that one of the direct descendents of one of the Dutchmen who came over with Vermuyden, Miss Sarah Ann Van Valkenburgh lived in the village. <sup>Y</sup> At this time both the New Connexion and the primitive Methodists had a chapel there. An interesting document which I came across in the Lincoln Record Office shows the first attempt of the Methodists to have their own form of worship in the village. This was a certificate drawn up in 1803 and presented to the bishop giving notice of a "Methodist Meeting house lately erected on ground belonging to Mrs. Elizabeth Kendall of Eastoft". The Methodists would then be licensed by the bishop to hold their own religious meeting there. The document was signed by John Thompson, John Kendall, John Gravil, Thomas Kirk, William Parkin, George Hall and Thomas Wrathma.

At this time the Anglicans in the village held occasional services in the kitchen of Eastoft Hall or else attended the services at Adlingfleet or Crowle. Thus with the increase in population it soon became obvious that the people of Eastoft needed a church of their own. That need was furnished by a generous endowment of Lady Strickland who at that time owned all the Yorkshire part of Eastoft, and today her descendents are still the major owners of the land. According to Kelly's directory of 1855 the church when built was to have been dedicated to St. John but in that same year it was completed and dedicated to St. Bartholomew

by the Right Reverend Dr. Musgrave, Archbishop of York, in whose diocese the church was built. The village was erected at a cost of £5,000 by Messrs. Kirk and Parry of Sleaford and was designed by G. L. Pearson, Esq., of London, in the early English and Decorated style. Indeed it is said by some to be the best example in North Lincolnshire of early English architecture. Today it is well furnished with brasswork, including altar and processional crosses. The turret is unique having three bells manipulated by a single bellringer, who operates one with each hand and the other with his foot. During the hundred years of its existence St. Bartholomew's Church has been served by ten vicars, the first of whom was the Rev. G. F. Wade, the present incumbent the Rev. S. Henshaw has held the living for three years. The adjoining vicarage and grounds were also built at the expense of Lady Strickland. The school attached to the church was however built some years before it in 1849, by public subscription and was planned to hold eighty children. After that it was twice extended to allow up to 120 scholars to attend. Today there are only about 30 pupils since it provides only for the education of juniors. The Wesleyan chapel, rebuilt in 1854 was closed through lack of members in 1901-2, passing into the hands of Mr. G. Sampson, who used it as a saleroom. A public fund was set up and in 1908 the Church purchased the building, furnishing it as a Church Institute. Mr. Robert Fowler kindly provided an adjoining cottage as a boilerroom and store room. Previously a small room belonging to Mr. Fowler had been the only room available for public functions and the setting up of a Church Institute was a great benefit to the village. Today this room is still used for such occasions. In 1869 the Primitive Methodist chapel was also rebuilt, together with an adjoining schoolroom. In 1918 Mr. Bradley left his property to the chapel and consequently considerable additions and improvements have since been made.

The principal work carried on in the village in 1855 was still farming and in particular the growing and dressing of flax was profitable and "furnished employment to a great many persons." Amongst the flax growers and dressers in the village were Messrs.

Bowling, Brown, Fowler, Huntingdon, Richardson, Slight, Smith, Stone and Till. The farmers in the district were Messrs. Belton, Coleman, Cowling, Ducker, Everatt (4), Foster, Kendall, Lazenby, Leggott, Lister, Scholey, Stephenson, Sykes, Thompson, Till and Wroot (2). Mr. George Belton was still the village tailor, although now also a grocer, the other shop was kept by Mr. Halliday. Mr. Joseph Fowler was the miller, Mr. Needham the shoe maker and potato merchant, Mr. Richard Oades the blacksmith and Messrs. Sampson and Sykes were wheelwrights. Thus a hundred years ago the great-grand parents of many Eastoft men and women were carrying out the same kind of work as their descendents are doing today.

#### Recent Developments

By 1870 with the influx of several Irish catholic families the population had probably reached its limits and began a steady decline, and since then has remained fairly steady. Eastoft has always been slow to receive new developments and it was not until 1898 that the railway was built there. In 1898 the first piece of turf which commenced the buildings of the Goole and Marshland Light railway (later the Axholme Joint Railway) was ceremoniously unearthed by Mr. William Halkon of Fockerby, who came to live at Eastoft in 1900. The spade used, so I am told, was suitably inscribed and is still in the family's possession. At this period the railway proved of immense value in the transportation of farm produce, and in 1902 a passenger service was inaugurated, which was also well patronised. Today with the increased development of motor transport, the passenger service has long been closed down, and the "goods" service is not greatly used. Thus Eastoft today remains very much as it was fifty years ago. The only important developments being the setting up of a small light industrial concern, and the building of quite a few new houses.

So we have seen Eastoft grow and develop on either side of the Don, in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, for practically one thousand years. Throughout these centuries its people have been closely associated with the land for their daily bread and they will continue in this way for many more years. The village has a

unique charm, especially in spring when the bed of the Old river Don is covered with daffodils, a sight which attracts many visitors. Today the village remains quiet and tranquil preserving its own individuality in the modern world and accepting progress only gradually. No great moments of history were decided here, no great battles fought and no ancient buildings remain, yet Eastoft has a distinctly individual history which is by no means short - and this history is part of the great rural history of England which has helped to mould the character and nature of our numerous villages and their people, who no doubt cherish their traditional heritage.

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