



## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Manorial Government

In 1086 Kirby was one of eight vills or ‘parishes’ that were part of the overall manor of Melton.<sup>1</sup>

In the Leicestershire Survey of 1124-9, Kirby Hundred comprised Sixtenebia (Sysonby), Chetelbia (Eye Kettleby), Alebia (Welby) and Kirby itself, all held by the Melton overlord, Roger de Mowbray.<sup>2</sup> In 1316 Roger Beler (I) granted certain lands to his newly founded chantry, and he included the attached fealties (homages) and suits of court, which meant that the sub-tenants of these lands were under the jurisdiction of the chantry court.<sup>3</sup> However, some of the holdings of the same sub-tenants were excluded from the donation to the chantry and Beler retained their fealties and suits of court. This suggests that Beler continued to be in charge of the manorial court. In 1319 the chantry was enlarged to a collegiate chapel and further donations by Beler included the manor of Buckminster with Sewstern. The chapel was also given responsibility for the court with regard to its tenants in that parish.<sup>4</sup> In 1359, at the conversion of the collegiate chapel, all homages and services of the associated free Kirby tenants went to the newly-formed

---

<sup>1</sup> A. Williams and G.H. Martin (eds.), *Domesday Book: A Complete Translation* (London, 2002), 643, 644.

<sup>2</sup> *VCH Leics.*, 1 (1907), 352.

<sup>3</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Linc. Reg. III, 1316, 211-213; A. Hamilton Thompson, ‘Chapel of St Peter at Kirby upon Wreake’, *Trans. LAHS* 16 (1929-31), 155.

<sup>4</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Linc. Reg. III, 1319, 340-4; Hamilton Thompson, ‘Chapel’, 167.

priory.<sup>5</sup> In 1548 the ex-priory estate was gifted to Lord John Grey of Pirgo.<sup>6</sup> A long list of items granted to Grey included oversight of the view of frankpledge and suits of court.

Only two manorial documents survive; these tell us little about the governance of the manor other than that a view of frankpledge and six-monthly courts leet were held between 1423 and 1426,<sup>7</sup> and between 1551 to 1552.<sup>8</sup> However, during the medieval period and beyond the lords of the manor were frequently resident, so it must be assumed that they had a strong influence on local decisions. For example, Sir Roger Beler's foundation of a chantry in 1316 and its enlargement to a collegiate college in 1319 had a major impact on the development of the village, as an employer, a customer for farm produce, a landlord of 13 tenants, and by attracting passing travellers, thus boosting the local economy.<sup>9</sup>

The lords also had the power to make changes that were to the detriment of the lives of the villagers, as was seen when Thomas Markham was cited in 1607 as having converted arable land to pasture and having decayed two houses of husbandry.<sup>10</sup> Then in the 1630s, Erasmus de la Fontaine (II) destroyed the daughter settlements of Easthorpe and Westhorpe to create a park around his newly-built mansion.<sup>11</sup> De la Fontaine was fined £600 for depopulation in 1636, but this was little consolation to many residents who had to emigrate from the parish.<sup>12</sup> The partial destruction of Royalist De la Fontaine's mansion house by a Parliamentarian force in the

---

<sup>5</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Linc. Reg. IX, 1359, 372d-373d; Hamilton Thompson, 'Chapel of St Peter', 209.

<sup>6</sup> ROLLR, DE 311/87, grant of ex-priory property to Lord John Grey of Pirgo.

<sup>7</sup> TNA, SC 2/183/81, description of manorial courts at Kirby Bellars 1423-6.

<sup>8</sup> TNA, SC 2/183/54, description of manorial courts at Kirby Bellars 1551-2.

<sup>9</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Linc. Reg. III, 1316, 211-13; LA, Linc. Reg. III, 1319, 345.

<sup>10</sup> TNA, C 205: Chancery: Special Commissions of Inquiry, James I; TNA: PRO STAC 8/17/16, James I.

<sup>11</sup> J. Nichols, *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* (1795, reprinted 1971), II, 231.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

subsequent Civil War may have been partly due to some former inhabitants seizing the opportunity for retribution.<sup>13</sup>

At a higher level than the parish Kirby lay at the western edge of Framland Hundred. Despite its being on the periphery, the lord of Kirby manor was for some years responsible for the operation of the hundred court. This duty may have started with John of Kirby who owed money to the hundred at the time of his death in 1290.<sup>14</sup> His heir was his brother William of Kirby, who died in 1301, and owed suit at the hundred court every three weeks.<sup>15</sup> This obligation was certainly given to Roger Beler I, for it was mentioned at his inquisition *post mortem* in 1326.<sup>16</sup> He received various rents totalling £12 10s 8d for the privilege. His widow and descendants continued to hold Framland to at least 1429, on the death of Margaret Gray, his great great granddaughter.<sup>17</sup>

### **Parochial Government**

The weakening of the manorial structure in the post-medieval period may have been felt more strongly in Kirby Bellars from 1736. Until then, most lords were partly resident in the parish, and several were buried in a vault beneath the nave of the parish church.<sup>18</sup> Sir John Meres died without issue in 1736, and in 1740 his sister, Dame Elizabeth Pettus, conveyed the manorial property to the Sanderson family of Surrey.<sup>19</sup> It may be a coincidence that the earliest surviving documentary evidence of parochial government is a constables' account book, which starts in

---

<sup>13</sup> TNA, C3/453/16: Chancery Proceedings, Series ii, 1648; BL, Harl. MS., 911; Nichols, *History*, II, 232.

<sup>14</sup> TNA, C133/57/9, inq. p. m. 1290, John of Kirby.

<sup>15</sup> *Cal. Inq. p.m.* IV, 54, William of Kirby.

<sup>16</sup> *Cal. Inq. p.m.* VI, 443, Roger Beler.

<sup>17</sup> TNA, C1326/13/1: inq. p. m. 1381, Roger Beler (II); TNA, C 136/73/8: inq. p. m. 1391, Robert Swillington; TNA, C 138/32: inq. p. m. 1418; Margaret Aylesford; TNA, C 138/48/71: inq. p. m. 1420, Robert Swillington; TNA, C 139/46/40: inq. p. m. 1429, Margaret Gray.

<sup>18</sup> ROLLR, DE 682/12, plan of coffins in church vault.

<sup>19</sup> Nottingham University, Portland Collection, P1 F7/2/1/3: conveyance of manor to Susannah Sherard and Anna Maria Sanderson.

1741.<sup>20</sup> Over the next 14 years other records of parochial government start to appear, or at least to survive, including apprenticeship indentures, filiation orders, removal orders and bastardy bonds.<sup>21</sup>

The later 18th century saw the development, in the Melton Mowbray area, of fox hunting as an organized sport for the gentry. Kirby Bellars was involved in this activity, but members of the gentry were only resident during each hunting season and took no part in parish administration. Throughout the nineteenth century the parish appears to have run by a closed vestry of the more important farmers and graziers of the parish.<sup>22</sup>

The main offices were churchwarden, overseer of the poor, parish constable and overseer of the highways (waywarden). In the late 18th and early 19th centuries there were 12 farmers and graziers who regularly attended each of the vestry meetings, and they usually took it in turns to act as officers for one year.<sup>23</sup> In 1813, eight of the twelve vestry members were proprietors of land, the other four being tenants.<sup>24</sup> Meetings usually took place in the parish church, but also at times in the Flying Childers Inn. Later in the 19th century the curate acted intermittently as chairman.<sup>25</sup>

Two churchwardens were usually appointed, one by the vicar and the other by the parishioners.<sup>26</sup> Their accounts, from 1824, show the collection of money from ratepayers and disbursements made to the harmonium player, the grass and hedge cutter, the mole catcher and the Sunday School teacher. In 1878, for example, the highest amount paid by a rate payer was £2 from Mr Fox at the Manor House. Miss Lyne the harmonium player and Sunday School teacher received

---

<sup>20</sup> ROLLR, DE 801/37, constables' account book 1741-1838

<sup>21</sup> ROLLR, DE 801/31-34

<sup>22</sup> ROLLR, DE 801/18, 37, vestry book 1829-94 and constables' account book 1741-1838

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.; ROLLR, DE 801/19, account book of overseer of the poor 1798-1836

<sup>24</sup> ROLLR, MF 76

<sup>25</sup> ROLLR, DE 801/18.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

£5 in September and £10 in March. For three years in the 1860s Mr Pym received £4 per annum for conducting the singing.<sup>27</sup>

Under the 1601 Poor Law, one of the churchwardens was also overseer of the poor, along with others. In Kirby Bellars a churchwarden was usually involved with removal orders getting rid of unwanted paupers but also receiving them from other parishes.<sup>28</sup> The surviving overseers' accounts run from 1798 to 1836, when the parish became part of Melton Mowbray Poor Law Union.<sup>29</sup> The income was received mostly from a levy on the ratepayers, which was 10d. in the pound in 1798, raising £72 6s. 10d.<sup>30</sup> There was no parish workhouse in 1777,<sup>31</sup> but by 1809, the parish maintained nine poor houses, which were newly thatched that year, and a coal house.<sup>32</sup> Other payments to and for paupers included buying and mending bedding, shoes and clothes, dressing the itch (scabies), the schooling of children, to masters for taking on apprentices and the costs of settlement examinations.<sup>33</sup> Costs increased from £8 1s. 1d in 1776, to £53 15s 6d by 1803.<sup>34</sup> In that year, six adults and three children were on poor relief, which was near normal for the size of the population. Disbursements continued to rise, reaching a maximum of £327 18s in 1831-2,<sup>35</sup> due to high unemployment, with relief paid to those who were out of work.

In 1836 Kirby Bellars parish became part of the newly established Melton Mowbray Poor Law Union, and the vestry appointed a guardian to the board of that organization.<sup>36</sup> Overseers of the poor were still appointed in the parish, with duties including producing a new valuation list and

---

<sup>27</sup> ROLLR, DE 801/16

<sup>28</sup> ROLLR, DE 801/32/1-23, removal orders 1745-1842

<sup>29</sup> ROLLR, DE 801/19

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> *Abstracts of Returns made by Overseers* (Parl. Papers 1777, sessional papers 1775-80, vol. 31), p. 85.

<sup>32</sup> ROLLR, DE 801/19, account book of overseer of poor 1798-1836.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> *Abstract of returns relative to the expense and maintenance of the poor* (Parl. Papers, 1803-4 (175, xiii), pp. 254-5

<sup>35</sup> *Poor rate returns* (Parl. Papers, 1835 (444) xlvi), p. 96.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

collecting the rates for the poor and later for the highway board and sanitary authority.<sup>37</sup> A union workhouse was built in Melton in 1836,<sup>38</sup> and Kirby's poor houses were sold in 1838.<sup>39</sup> The cost of poor relief to the parish fell, to £84 in 1835 and £44 in 1847-8; by the 1860s it was rising again, to £168 in 1867-8 and £238 17s. 10d. in 1877-8.<sup>40</sup> In 1871 the vestry paid for the education of nine poor Kirby children at the new Asfordby National School.<sup>41</sup>

One duty of the parish constable was to go to Melton Mowbray magistrates to obtain warrants for the apprehension of those accused of criminal behaviour.<sup>42</sup> He was expected to attend the assizes in Melton Mowbray. He drew up a list of freeholders, collected the County Rate and other taxes, such as the window tax and land tax. He also attended coroner's inquests, sometimes in other parishes, for example in Frisby on the Wreake in 1742 and Dalby in 1766. He also moved on any 'big-bellied' unmarried women vagrants.<sup>43</sup> Quite frequently he would give money and provide overnight accommodation to vagrants and strangers, particularly if they had passes. Soldiers and sailors, especially if they had been wounded, expected some financial help for themselves and any dependants. In some cases he would escort people to settlement examinations and if necessary to their parish of settlement in response to a removal order. For example in 1764 he went with Hannah Bruster to Melton Mowbray for her settlement hearing.<sup>44</sup>

The constable was required to attend the annual Statute hiring fair in Melton Mowbray, to help keep order at an event that was often accompanied by drunken, unruly behaviour.<sup>45</sup> In the later

---

<sup>37</sup> ROLLR DE 801/19, 21, 22 account book of overseer 1798-1836 and poor rate books 1836-7, 1838-42.

<sup>38</sup> ROLLR, DE801/18 Kirby Vestry Book 1829-94; <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/MeltonMowbray/> (accessed 8 Nov 2013).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> *Second Annual report of poor Law Commission* (Parl. Papers, 1836 (595) xxix), App. E, p. 178; *Poor rate returns* (Parl. Papers, 1847-8 (735) liii), p. 62; (Parl. Papers, 1854 (509) lvi), p. 155; (1871 (441) lix), p. 8; ROLLR, DE 801, 20 account book of overseer of poor 1878-95.

<sup>41</sup> ROLLR DE 801/18.

<sup>42</sup> ROLLR DE 801/37, constables' account book 1741-1838.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

eighteenth century he was responsible for drawing up a list of those eligible to serve in the county militia. The actual selection of militia men was then made by drawing lots.<sup>46</sup>

The constable paid parishioners for bringing in various animals that were regarded as harmful to crops and farm animals. They included sparrows, magpies, carrion crows and foxes. In the eighteenth century a mole catcher was employed for an annual fee of £3. The constable paid for the upkeep of the pinfold which was used to hold stray farm animals that might have done damage to crops.<sup>47</sup> A pinder was often appointed and paid to deal with this problem.<sup>48</sup>

Accounts survive for the overseer or surveyor of the highways, later called waywarden, for the period 1803 to 1836.<sup>49</sup> Again rates were collected to pay for the work done. In 1804 payments received by the surveyor ranged from sixpence to £7 11s. 1½d. per head. In 1804 he was paying people to repair roads usually by shifting earth and spreading gravel. Frequently men were employed to look for gravel, sometimes using exploratory boreholes. In 1807 the overseer paid 18s. for two days' work to two men from Manchester to do this. In 1833, and again in 1834, he purchased a boat load of stones for the roads. In January 1807 he paid seven men for 'cutting snow'.<sup>50</sup>

### **Post-1894 arrangements**

Parish councils were established in 1894. However, the population of Kirby Bellars was not large enough for a civil parish council, so the authority was invested in a parish meeting, which was held at the Flying Childers Inn.<sup>51</sup> All male heads of house over 21 years old were eligible to

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> ROLLR, DE 801/18.

<sup>49</sup> ROLLR DE 801/42, highways surveyors' accounts 1803-36.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Kirby Bellars parish council, parish meeting minute book Kirby Bellars 1894-1936.

attend and elect a chairman once a year. At the first meeting in 1894, there were 13 electors present and ten of these were farmers and/or graziers, some proprietors and some occupiers.<sup>52</sup> Although this group made up approximately half the male heads of households in the parish, they comprised about three-quarters of the men at the meeting. Also present were a cottager, a farm labourer and a railway ganger. The electors chose William Chandler who had been chairman in the last year of the vestry. He was the tenant farmer of the largest farm in the parish at Kirby Lodge Farm, off the Great Dalby Road.<sup>53</sup> In subsequent annual meetings he was elected as chairman each year to 1905.<sup>54</sup> From 1894 until the final meeting in 1936 there were only five chairmen, three of whom were farmers and two were graziers. They included George Slatter, who was chairman for 18 years from 1908 to 1925.<sup>55</sup> He was a tenant farmer of 131 acres at Ash Tree Farm (now Ash Trees) on the Main Road.<sup>56</sup>

In 1918 the franchise was widened to include all men over 21, and some women over 30 qualified through ownership of property. This seems to have had no immediate impact on the composition of the Kirby parish meeting, which was still dominated by male farmers and graziers.<sup>57</sup> The virtual universal suffrage introduced in 1928 meant that practically all adults over 21 were eligible to attend and vote at the meetings. However, women only attended meetings for particular topics, such as a new scavenging scheme in 1933, arrangements for the Silver Jubilee of King George V in 1935, and the Coronation of George VI in 1937.<sup>58</sup>

In 1936 the parishes of Kirby Bellars and Frisby on the Wreake were combined and a new Frisby and Kirby parish council was formed. At the first meeting of this parish council Kirby Bellars

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>53</sup> ROLLR, DE 558/29 Kirby Bellars valuation list 1908; TNA, RG 13/3012, 109, 8.

<sup>54</sup> Kirby Bellars parish council, parish meeting minute book Kirby Bellars 1894-1936, 1-30.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 34-64.

<sup>56</sup> ROLLR, DE 558/29 Kirby Bellars valuation list for Melton Mowbray Union 1908.

<sup>57</sup> Kirby Bellars Parish Council, minute book 1894-1936, 63.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 72, 76, 78.

was represented by two people on a council of six: farmer Musgrave Slatter, the last chairman of the Kirby meeting, and farmer John Charles Wilford.<sup>59</sup>

In 2005 the combined Frisby and Kirby parish was split into the two original parishes and for the first time Kirby Bellars had a parish council with five members.<sup>60</sup>

Kirby Bellars also sent one representative to Melton Mowbray Rural District Council from 1894.<sup>61</sup> This was formed from the Melton Mowbray Sanitary District, which had been established in 1875.<sup>62</sup> Responsibilities included local planning, council housing, playgrounds and cemeteries. Until 1930 the rural district councillor also acted as the poor law guardian for the parish in the Melton Mowbray Union. In 1935 Melton Mowbray Rural District and Belvoir Rural District were combined into the Melton and Belvoir Rural District.<sup>63</sup> In 1974, Melton and Belvoir Rural District Council was merged with Melton Mowbray Urban District Council to form Melton Borough Council. In 2013, Kirby Bellars is part of the Frisby on the Wreake Ward, which has one member on that council. At county council level the parish is part of the Asfordby Ward, which consists of the parishes of Asfordby, Frisby on the Wreake and Kirby Bellars. The ward is represented by one county councillor.

---

<sup>59</sup> Parish of Frisby on the Wreake Minute Book 1894-49, 236.

<sup>60</sup> Office of Deputy Prime Minister, Local Government Statutory Instrument No. 2587, Melton (Parishes) Order, 24 Sept. 2004; oral testimony.

<sup>61</sup> Kirby Bellars parish Council, The parish meeting minute book Kirby Bellars 1894-1936, 1.

<sup>62</sup> GB Historical GIS/University of Portsmouth, Melton Mowbray RSD through time/boundaries of Sanitary Districts: A Vision of Britain through Time.

<sup>63</sup> ROLLR, DE 7547/ 15, Melton and Belvoir Rural District Council minutes, 1933-6; Youngs, *Admin. Units 2. Northern England* (1971), 229; <http://www.frisby-pc.org.uk> (Accessed 14 November 2010).