

## THAMES DITTON CHURCH.

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THIS church, which is dedicated to St. Nicholas, was formerly one of the chapels belonging to the parish of Kingston, and although the date of its foundation is not known, it is probable that there was a chapel here in the early part of the 12th century, as Gilbert Norman, Sheriff of Surrey, the founder of Merton Priory, who died in 1125<sup>1</sup> or in 1130, presented the advowson of Kingston,<sup>2</sup> with the chapelries of Thames Ditton, East Molesey, Shene, and Petersham, to the prior and brethren, and they retained the patronage until the suppression of the priory in 1538.

The church at "Ditune," mentioned in the Domesday book,<sup>3</sup> in the return of the land held by Richard de Tonbridge, was doubtless at Long Ditton, which was a separate parish.

The present church at Thames Ditton must have originally consisted of the nave, the chancel, and the tower, the walls of which and the north wall of the chancel are probably the only portions now existing.

In the chancel wall there is a plain lancet window with a semicircular inner arch, and there are similar arches inside the tower windows, but the external jambs of these have been replaced by brickwork.

The earliest addition to the church seems to have been the small chapel on the north side of the chancel, opening into it by an arch to the west of the lancet window.

<sup>1</sup> Manning and Bray, vol. i. p. 245. Brayley and Britton, vol. iii. p. 457.

<sup>2</sup> Leland's *Collections*, vol. i. p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Manning and Bray, vol. iii. p. 12.

A narrow aisle with a lean-to roof was built on the north side of the nave in the 15th century. This was pulled down and enlarged in 1836.

In 1639 Sir Dudley Carlton, of Ember Court (the nephew of the Sir Dudley Carlton buried in Westminster Abbey), obtained a license from the bishop to build a chapel on the south side, "equal and similar to that on the north, to belong to him, his heirs and assigns, lords of the manor of Ember Court for the time being, as a church-seat and burial-place, they keeping it in repair."<sup>1</sup> This chapel was never built.

In 1676 the second chapel on the north side of the chancel, which is now used as the vestry, was built as a burial-place by the Hatton family.

The church was restored, and enlarged on the south side in 1864, under the superintendence of Mr. B. Ferrey, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A.

Probably the oldest work in the church is the Norman font, which has rude carvings of the "Agnus Dei," a goat falling down on its back, a star of six points, and a cross. At the angles there were carved heads, two of which have been broken off, and a cable ornament below. The base of the font is modern.

A small stone shaft, which also appears to be Norman work, and was probably part of a piscina (as there is a hole bored through it for a drain), was dug up in the chancel in 1864.

In the north wall of the chancel, close to the east end and below the lancet window, there is a very low 15th century arch, probably intended for an Easter sepulchre, or for an effigy to be placed below it; and under the larger and much earlier arch, between the chancel and the small chapel on the north side, stands a carved 15th century stone erection, worked on both sides alike, and pierced by two arched openings, with seats below them. Within these openings there were, until recently, wooden partitions, to one of which was attached the brass to the memory of Erasmus Forde, and as the top of the brass is

<sup>1</sup> Manning and Bray, vol. i. p. 462.

nearly the same shape as the arch, it seems to have been made to fit it. Hence it is supposed to have been Forde's monument; but I think there can be no doubt that the stonework is at least fifty years older than the date of Forde's death in 1533, and that it could not have been intended for the position which it now occupies. At what is now its east end there has evidently been a stone screen, which has been sawn off so as to leave a passage between the chancel and chapel, and the projecting impost of the arch under which it now stands has also been hacked off, probably to make the passage wider. I think that it was intended for a sedilia on the south side of a larger chancel, with what is now its west end placed close to the east wall, and with a stone screen to the westward, separating the chancel from a chapel. Possibly Forde or his executors may have bought it, and erected it in its present position as his monument, and had the brass plate made to fit it. In the lower cornice there are plug-holes, probably intended for fixing small metal shields, which may have been removed. The small openings in the stone partition between the arches gave rise to the local tradition that it was a confessional.

The inscription on the brass to Forde's memory, which is now fixed to the wall, is—

“Here resten the bodyes of Erasm<sup>s</sup> fforde Esquyer sone et heyre of Walter fforde sometyme tresorer to Kinge Edward the iiij<sup>th</sup> in his warres at ye wynnyng of Barwyke Who was heyre in discent to Adam fforde Knyght, and Julyan the wyffe of ye sayd Erasm<sup>s</sup> doughter et one of ye heyres of William Salford et Elyn his wyfe doughter of Richard Chawrey knyght W<sup>ch</sup> Erasm<sup>s</sup> dyed ye xxi of July 1533 and the sayd Julyan the xvj of June 1599. On whose soull<sup>s</sup> ihū have m<sup>ci</sup>.”

The figures on the brass represent a man in armour and his wife kneeling, with six sons and eleven daughters behind them. Between them are Forde's arms, and below are the arms of Forde impaling Legh, and Forde impaling Salford.

The family of Forde were large landowners in the counties of Wilts and Somerset, and also in Northumberland, but I cannot find that Erasmus Forde (or fforde)

ever owned land at Thames Ditton, or that any of the family lived there until 1791, when Francis Ford purchased the manor of Ember, and was created a baronet of Ember Court. He sold the estate about two years afterwards.

The brasses now on the north wall of the chancel were all on one slab of Sussex marble, on the chancel floor. The upper one has the figures of a man and his wife, and four sons and three daughters, the inscription being—

“Here under lyeth the Bodyes of Robert Smythe gentelman and Katheryn his wife dawghter to Syr Thomas blounte of Kinlett, Knyght, whiche Robert dyed the iii daye of September 1539 and the sayd Katherin the x daye of July 1549.”

Below them are the figures of a man and woman, fourteen sons and five daughters, with the inscription:—

“Here under lyeth the Bodyes of William Notte Esquyer et Elizabeth his wife dawghter to the above named Robert Smyth et Katheryn his wife whiche William dyed the xxv<sup>th</sup> daye of November 1576 and the sayd Elizabeth dyed the xv<sup>th</sup> of May 1587.”

In the return of the sale of Church goods belonging to this parish, made by the King's Commissioners in the reign of Edward VI., and which are published in the Society's *Collections* (volume IV. p. 164), the name of William Note is mentioned as the purchaser of a green velvet cope.

Another brass, which was on a slab in the chancel, has the figures of a man and woman, with their six sons below them and a coat of arms above. The inscription is:—

“Here vnder resteth the bodie of John Cheke, gentleman who married Isabel the daughter of William Seilearde of London & had issue by her vi sonnes nameli Roger Humfrey Anthony Robert John and Willi'm who departed this transitorye Lyfe the xxi<sup>th</sup> dave of october in the yeare of our lorde God 1590 and the Lxiiij yeare of his adge.”

On the wall close to the pulpit there is a curious monument of Sussex marble, and the brasses of a man and woman and four daughters, with a coat of arms over, and the following inscription:—

“Here resteth the bodye of John Polsted gent who depected this life the fyrst daye of September An<sup>o</sup> Dñi 1540 who had to wyfe Anne Wheeler daughter of Robert Wheeler gent by whom he had issue, Anne Jane Elizabeth and Julian the which Julian erected this monument An<sup>o</sup> Dñi 1582 and in the LXXIII year of her age.”

She also erected the marble slab against the north wall of the small chapel on the north of the chancel, with brasses of herself and her two husbands (both of them officers in the royal household), and their eleven children. The inscription is :—

“Here with in do rest the boddyes of Cuthbert Blakeden Esquyer while he lyved Sarjant of the confectionary to King Henry theight who departed this lief in Anno dñi 1540. Also of John Boothe Esquyer while he lyved one of the ordynary Gentlemen usshers as well to the said King Henry theight as to his sonne King Edward vi<sup>th</sup> who departed this lief in Anno dñi 1548. Also the boddy of Julian sometym the wyef of the said Cuthbert and John who was the youngest dawter of John Polstead Gentleman and Anne his wyef one of the daughters of Robart Whelor Gentleman which Julyan had yssew first by the said Cuthbert, Anne Mary John Cuthbert Julyan and Katheryne and after by the said John Boothe Jane Dorothe Johane John & Myllysent and which Julyan made & erected this monument in Anno dñi 1580 and in the LXXI yere of her aag and dyed in the moneth of July the 3 1586. She lyved 77.”

The coats of arms of Blakeden and Boothe are over their figures, and over that of their wife the arms of Polsted impaling Whelor.

In 1538 Cuthbert Blakeden obtained a lease of the manor of Cleygate, in this parish, from the Abbot of Westminster, and the lease was subsequently assigned to Juliana Boothe.<sup>1</sup>

There are also two small brasses without figures. The inscription on one is :—

“Here lyeth buried Ann Childe the daughter of William Child of Est sheene in the parish of Movreclack in the county of Surrey gent who died the 12 day of May anno Doñi 1607 of the age of one yere, a moueth and three dayes at the time of her death.”

And the other is to the memory of one of the Hattons, many of whom were buried here. There are also several

<sup>1</sup> Manning and Bray, vol. i. p. 460.

monumental tablets in the church. Aubrey<sup>1</sup> mentions a gravestone with the inscription,—“Phillipi de Lucy Canonicus hujus Ecclesie,” and Manning and Bray<sup>2</sup> say that it was near the south porch; but it could not be found when the church was enlarged in 1864.

The bells were cast by Thomas Swain in 1754 and 1758, and have the names of the churchwardens and parish officers on them. On the tenor is “E. Hopkins, I. Monday, Churchwardens. Thomas Swain made us all, 1758.” On one of the others, “M<sup>r</sup> Simmonds, M<sup>r</sup> Hewett. Tho’ Swain made me feset 1754.” I suppose “feset” is intended for “fecit.” The others have the names of Charles Gardener, M. Radford, and I. Monger, vestry clerk, and the date 1758.

Thames Ditton was separated from Kingston and made a perpetual curacy by Act of Parliament in 1769. After the dissolution of Merton Priory, the advowson passed into private patronage until 1786, when it was bought by the Provost and Fellows of King’s College, Cambridge. The great tithes were sold by the Earl of Onslow, of Ember Court, in 1786, to various landowners in the parish, except those arising from his own estates.

In 1532, one John Lee charged his house and certain lands in the parish with payment of six shillings and eight pence for an obit, the curate and three other priests and the parish clerk to say a dirige and four masses, each priest to have 8d., the clerk 4d., the curate of Beede Roole 4d., and 3s. 4d. for bread and cheese for the poor.<sup>3</sup>

King John occasionally visited Ditton, where his Justiciary, Geoffrey Fitz Pierre, had a house. Some records of his visits will be found in Mr. Hart’s paper on the Manor of Kennington, in volume III. of the Society’s *Collections*, pp. 24, 25, and 26.

<sup>1</sup> Aubrey, vol. i. pp. 236–7.

<sup>2</sup> Manning and Bray, vol. i. p. 462.

<sup>3</sup> *Id. ib.*