



## The Antiquities of Wallingford.

*By John Edward Field, M.A., Vicar of Benson.*

---

*(Continued from page 23.)*

### III.—THE FOURTEEN CHURCHES.

The existence of fourteen churches in Wallingford in the reign of Henry II. is a well-established fact. Eleven of them appear to have been strictly parochial. The diminution of their number followed upon the decay of the town, resulting partly from the ravages made by the plague in 1349, and partly from the removal of the great high-road to the west which had previously crossed the Thames at this point, but was diverted to a new crossing at Abingdon in 1415. An inquisition in the reign of Henry VI. (1439) shows that only four of the eleven parish churches were then preserved.\*

Without assuming that these churches were located in strict accordance with the special needs of the inhabitants, we may nevertheless regard them as affording generally an index to the lines upon which the population lay in the period which followed the Norman Conquest. In the northern portion of the town, between the Benedictine Priory with its monastic church on the one side and the Castle with its collegiate church on the other side, there was the parish church of All Hallows on the intervening thoroughfare; while outside the southern fortifications there was the Church and Hospital of St. John Baptist and the parish church of S. Lucian; and in the southern half of the town itself there were apparently nine parish churches. Four of these were along the river-side on the east; four (if the sites of two are rightly identified) along the central line of streets from the south gate to the High Street; and the remaining one was in the upper part of High Street, near the west gate and opposite the Priory.

I.—THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY THE MORE stands in a central position across the broad open space which has been already des-

---

\* Hedges' History of Wallingford, II., 336.

cribed as the chief thoroughfare of the town from north to south, just at the point where it was crossed by the southernmost of the three parallel crossways.\* Originally its site must have been the summit of the rising ground south of the central watercourse, and it may be that here was the first church which the original settlement erected. From 1644 to 1704 it was the only church in use. In Parker's "*Ecclesiastical Topography of Berkshire*," 1849, it is described as having an Early English south† doorway and porch, Decorated pillars and arches, the pillars octagonal with moulded caps, the windows chiefly Perpendicular but some Decorated, the chancel debased Perpendicular. An engraving of the year 1824‡ shows that there was a north porch, and a north window to the west of it having two lights and a circle in the head of geometrical character, belonging to the transition from the severe Early English to the more developed Decorated style. Probably, therefore, the nave and aisles were of this transitional or Early Decorated character, retaining their original arcades together with the doorways and some of the windows, all of the close of the thirteenth century, while several perpendicular windows had been inserted. This portion of the Church was taken down and re-built in 1854. The aisles were thrown out to a greater width north and south, and the nave was lengthened by shortening the chancel, two wide arches on each side being replaced by three narrower arches. The details of the old arcades seem to be more or less faithfully reproduced in the new work, while the new windows are of the same geometrical type as the old one which has been described. The chancel was entirely remodelled, though the walls were not taken down. The east window was replaced by one of geometrical character; on the south side an arch was cut through and a side chapel added, in which the organ has recently been placed; while on the north side a large square-headed perpendicular window was destroyed and a vestry built against it. The organ was erected in a gallery over the altar in 1809 and removed to a west gallery a few years later, when the large figure of the ascending Saviour was placed in the central light of the east window, which has now been moved to the west window. The tower is of special interest. It was built, according to an inscription outside, in 1653, by William Loader, who was a builder in the town and had been dismissed from the Mayoralty by an

---

\* See p. 20, above.

† Apparently a mistake for *north*, as there never was a south porch.

‡ The year is shown by the dedication "*To Job Wells, Esqr., Mayor.*"

ordinance of the Long Parliament in 1647. The materials probably came from the Castle, which had been demolished in 1652, and among them are some massive beams with good mouldings, and also the head of a piscina in the belfry. On the north front is a stone panel with a sculptured figure of an armed warrior on horse-back crossing a river, similar to the design on the Borough Seal. It is said to have belonged to one of the gates of the Castle, and to represent King Stephen ; but it is thought to be more probably intended for Richard, King of the Romans, who lived much at the Castle and was a great benefactor to the town. There are indications that the pinnacles of the tower, with crowns on their summits, are a later addition, and this agrees with the tradition that they were erected at the Restoration of the Monarchy as a witness to the loyalty of the inhabitants.

2.—ALL HALLOWS CHURCH, of which the grave-yard remains, was built in a similar position to St. Mary's, across the middle of the central thoroughfare of the town ; the breadth of which no doubt extended originally from the western side of the present Castle Street to the western edge of the Castle moat. We may imagine that a barbican, fronting the outer gate of the Norman Castle, had been built forward across this open space, and that the Church was added under the south side of it. The Church existed in the second year of King John,\* and was probably founded by one of the Norman lords for the benefit of the population about the Castle-gate. It was a rectory in the gift of the Crown or the Duchy of Cornwall, until in 1389 Richard II. granted it to the College of St. Nicholas in the Castle. When this was dissolved in the first year of Edward VI., a yearly pension of 40 shillings was allowed "to one of the priests of the said Colege, serving the cure of All Hallowes w<sup>o</sup>ut the Castell Gate."† But no appointment appears to have been made from this time, and from the close of the sixteenth century the Church was entirely disused. It was destroyed in 1643, but the parish retains its separate existence. Ecclesiastically it has been recently united with St. Mary's.

3.—ST. PETER'S CHURCH stands on an eminence at the foot of the High Street. The elevated ground is evidently artificial, and appears to be a primitive tumulus raised upon the river-bank to protect the ford. A few yards away to the west of it, in a stable on the

---

\* Hedges' History of Wallingford, II., 287.

† Hedges' History of Wallingford, II., 312.

other side of Thames Street, some pre-historic remains were discovered in 1875, consisting of a circular urn filled with black earth and fragments of bone, covered with rough stones, and on either side of it a perfect human skeleton, one of them being in a contracted position.\* The first records of the Church given by Mr. Hedges are of the year 1320. It was destroyed by the Parliamentary troops during the siege in the Civil Wars, and was re-built in 1769. The body of the Church is a plain example of the ordinary Georgian type. In 1775 the slender tapering spire was added, springing from an octagon of pointed arches which surmounts a plain square tower. It is a remarkable instance of an early effort to return to mediæval forms. Of the same character is the monument to Mr. Justice Blackstone (who deceased 1780, aged 56), outside the south wall, with the *Kyrie Eleeson* at the head of the epitaph, affording another illustration of the strong Church feeling which occasionally appeared at this period.

4.—ST. LEONARD'S CHURCH, in the extreme S.E. angle of the enclosure, was given by King Henry I. to the Priory of St. Frideswide in Oxford. It was probably built about the time of the Norman Conquest to meet the growing needs of the town in this quarter. Its apsidal end, the lofty arches of the apse and of the chancel enriched partly with diaper work and partly with interlacing patterns and other ornaments of a very early style, and also the herring-bone flint work which appears outside the north wall, are its most characteristic features. The north door and several windows are also of the Norman period. Two of the original windows also are traceable outside the south wall of the chancel, but here and in other parts of the Church Early English lancets have been inserted. One of these in the nave has the original staples for the hinges of its shutters. There is also an Early English sedile with a lancet light in its head, in the south wall of the chancel, outside the apse. A doorway has been made through it, probably in the repairs of 1704, and the oak framework of this doorway with a triangular head has been recently uncovered on the outside. Man's MS. of 1818, and Skermer's MS. of a century earlier, both quoted by Mr. Hedges, agree in saying that the piers and arches of a south aisle were built up in the wall of the nave. Man specifies three arches "supported on enormous square pillars."† This looks as if the nave had been of the

---

\* Hedges' History of Wallingford, I., 149.

† Hedges' History of Wallingford, II., 399.

ordinary Norman type, and the aisle an after-thought, the arches being simply cut through the wall by the late Norman or Early English builders. In the civil wars this church was used as barracks, and left a ruin. The apse and the aisle were destroyed by fire, but happily the edifice escaped the complete destruction which befel St. Peter's and All Hallows'. Repairs commenced in 1685, and in 1704 the church was re-opened for divine service, the eastern and southern arches being built up. Afterwards a small bell turret of wood was erected at the west end. The single bell is inscribed, "Thos. Swaine fecit 1781." In 1850 the present west tower was added, and the eastern apse was rebuilt, the foundation of the original apse having been uncovered. At the same time a new south aisle was erected; and as the old piers were deemed too massive to be conveniently reproduced, an arcade of rich Norman character was substituted.

5.—THE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN SUPER-AQUAM stood on the river bank between St. Peter's Church and the house known as the Castle Priory. Upon the north side of it was St. John's Ditch mentioned in a document of the year 1452.\* We may presume that this ditch was originally the outflow of the brook through the centre of the town, and was made to serve afterwards as the outflow of the sewer known as the Black Ditch, which crossed the High Street near the entrance of Wood Street. Probably, therefore, St. John's Ditch was in early times a considerable inlet of the river; and the close proximity of the two churches, each with its own parish, would thus be explained, St. Peter's being on the north of it and St. John's on the south. The document of 1452 above mentioned speaks of the two parishes as united. The site of St. John's was an orchard in 1764.

6.—ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH stood between St. John's SUPER-AQUAM and St. Leonard's, on the west side of the street. The churchyard was still existing in the early part of the last century, as shown by Skermer's MS. He says that "the church stood over against Mrs. Wing's Wharf-house";† which appears to be the house a few yards south of the entrance gates of the Castle Priory, facing the end of the lane which leads up to St. Leonard's square. In and about the angle of the wall on the right hand as one enters this lane, there are considerable portions of wrought freestone, among

---

\* Hedges' History of Wallingford, II., 337.

† Hedges' History of Wallingford, II., 415.

which a large stone like part of a window or door head was lately exposed by the falling of the surface flint-work. These evidently belonged to some ancient building, and perhaps it may be assumed that they are relics of St. Michael's, utilised in the construction of this wall upon the site. The first recorded institution of an incumbent of this church is in 1330, and the last in 1348. In 1374 it was united with St. Peter's. The existence of four churches along the line of Thames Street between the bridge and the lower wharf seems to imply that this was one of the most populous districts of the town. The street originally ran in a direct line, passing close to the Castle Priory House, but was curved off a few yards westward in the present "New Road" by Sir William Blackstone; and the recent drainage operations along this road revealed beneath the surface large quantities of débris which showed that the ground must have been entirely occupied by buildings.

*(To be continued.)*

