



Notes on the Churches of Aldermaston, Padworth, Englefield and Tidmarsh.

By Charles E. Keyser, M.A., F.S.A.

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FOR some years past I have been endeavouring to justify my position as President of the Berkshire Archæological Society by bringing to the notice of its members a brief description of some of the most important, or remote, churches in the County. It has not been my ambition to give too detailed an account of the several edifices, but to treat the subject as if one were actually in the church, and there pointing out the salient features, together with any information as to its history, which may have been gleaned from any previous accounts which have been written. I will ask you therefore to view this lecture in this light, and to feel that by the aid of the excellent lantern slides prepared for me as usual by Mr. Marcus Adams, you will, in a comparatively short time, be conducted round the churches, which I have selected for my paper this afternoon. In choosing for our discourse the churches of Aldermaston, Padworth, Englefield and Tidmarsh, I shall, I know, lay myself open to the remark that I am traversing ground which has already been trodden by learned archæologists in the immediate past, and I can only therefore hope that, as an acute and fairly accurate observer, I may possibly be able to bring to your notice some details which have not been commented upon by previous writers. Let us now imagine that we have started on our excursion and have arrived at Aldermaston Church, approached by the private drive leading up to the Court. The history of this ancient place has already been fully written, and accounts of the Manor, and the early houses and families connected with this village have appeared in the *Topographer*, *British Archæological Association Journal*, *Transactions of the Newbury District Field Club*, *Nash's Mansions*, *J. P. Neale's views of the Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen*, *Jones' views of the Seats, Castles and Mansions*, etc., and elsewhere, and I have since through

the assistance of my archæological friends been able to obtain mainly from the Record Office and Bodleian Library at Oxford, much additional information, which has been partly communicated to our Parish Magazine, but which I hope to be able some day to publish in more ample form. In 1898 I read a paper on Aldermaston Church before the Royal Archæological Institute, which was published in the *Journal*, p.p. 367—396, for that year. As this gives a very detailed account of the church, I shall be obliged to take it as the basis of my description to-day. I do not however intend to overload this paper, with the ancient history of the Parishes we shall travel through, as I trust some notes on Padworth and Englefield collated by Miss Sharp, of Ufton Court, will find a place in the *Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archæological Journal* at an early date.

The ancient history of Aldermaston may be briefly summed up as follows. At the time of the Norman invasion it was one of the many estates of Earl Harold, and after his death at the battle of Hastings, was seized by William the Conqueror, and held by him, William Rufus and Henry I. as a hunting ground, and possibly an outlying portion of the honour of Windsor. Henry I. granted this and several other manors to one of his knights Sir Robert Achard, and the property remained in the hands of his descendants passing through the female line to the Delamares and Forsters for nearly 700 years. Their chief residence seems at first to have been at Spars-holt, near Wantage, but at least as early as the beginning of the 15th century they had an important mansion here, and Sir Thomas Delamare who was High Sheriff in 16th of Edward IV. is described as of Aldermaston. A stately brick edifice was built here by Sir Humfrey Forster, the first baronet, in 1636, and this was unfortunately mainly destroyed by fire in 1843 and entirely removed and rebuilt on a new site in 1849. The fine blocks of chimneys, relics of a much earlier mansion, the old staircase, some panelling, mantel pieces, and a considerable amount of heraldic glass has been saved, and may be seen in the present modern house. Many of the Delamares and Forsters served the office of High Sheriff of the County, and several represented the County in Parliament as Knights of the Shire, one Sir Humfrey Forster in 1597, resigning his seat for the County in order that he might become the representative for Reading. The last Sir Humfrey Forster, who was member for the County in several Parliaments, died in 1711, and the property then descended to Elizabeth Pert, his sister's daughter, who married as her second husband Lord Stawell of Somerton, and who left an only

daughter surviving him, who married as her second husband Mr. Ralph Congreve. The property remained in this family till after the death of Mr. William Congreve in 1843, when it was sold to Mr. Higford Burr, whose son sold it to Mr. Charles E. Keyser, the present owner, in 1893.

The advowson of the Church of Aldermaston, with the tithes, and other possessions was given in 1166 by William Achard to the Alien Priory of Sherborne (now called Pamber), which was a cell to the great Abbey of Cerisy in Normandy; and tradition relates that a Monk used to ride over every Sunday on a palfrey provided by the Lord of the Manor, to perform the services of the church. On the other hand Vicars seem to have been regularly appointed since the year 1298, and it is more than likely that the Monks nominated one of their own brethren to this office in order that they might enjoy the whole of the emoluments of the living. We find however as a significant evidence of the many wars being waged between England and France, that the presentation to the living was constantly being exercised by the Crown. When the Alien Monasteries were suppressed the property of Sherborne Priory seems at first to have been granted to form part of the endowment of Eton College, but in 1461 it was given to the hospital, Domus Dei, at Southampton. After the dissolution of the religious foundations, it appears to have been granted to Queen's College, Oxford, who leased the advowson of Aldermaston for 500 years to William Forster in 1567. Mr. W. Congreve purchased the reversionary rights, and it is now attached to the estate. The living is a donative, a charge on the property having been established for the endowment of the Incumbent. The Parish Church dedicated to St. Mary, stands close to the site of the old Manor House, the ancient brick wall of about the 1636 date, separating the churchyard on the south and east sides from the "pleasaunce" attached to the Mansion. It was built at some distance from the village, situate just outside the old park gates, and with its ancient Inn still commemorating the Forsters by its sign, the Hind's Head, the crest of that family. At the time of the Domesday Survey a church is mentioned as being in existence here, but no part, apparently, of the present edifice is earlier than the Norman period. It consists (fig. 1), as we now see it, of a west tower with low shingle spire, nave with south transept or chapel, and chancel with vestry on the south side. There is no division between the nave and chancel, and it is uncertain where the chancel screen originally stood. As will be noted the church is most irregular in

its form, there being no centre line, the narrowest part being in the middle, opposite to the transept or chapel, and it has clearly been enlarged and altered at several different periods.

The approximate dimensions are as follows : Full length, internal measurement, from east wall to the interior west wall of the tower, is 103 feet. The tower is 11 feet east to west by 10 feet 2 inches north to south. The nave is 57 feet in length to present step to the chancel by 20 feet in breadth opposite the transept, and 25 feet at the west end. The chancel is 30 feet in length by 22 feet in breadth ; the transept or chapel, 18 feet 3 inches from north to south by 15 feet 3 inches east to west, and the vestry 12 feet 8 inches north to south by 15 feet east to west. The earliest part of the church seems to be the eastern portion of the nave facing the transept, and the narrowest section of the church. This is clearly the original Norman, as a doorway of that period remains closed up on the north side. The first enlargement appears to have been towards the east during the Early English period ; and there are some indications, which will shortly be referred to, of the church having extended further to the east than it does now. Towards the latter part of the thirteenth, or early in the fourteenth, century the church was extended towards the west, and the transept or chantry chapel was added on the south side. The tower arch is of Decorated date, but the west window is of the fifteenth century, and probably the tower was reconstructed at that period, and the fine Norman doorway reinserted in the west wall. In the latter part of the seventeenth century the vestry was added, no doubt over a new vault for the Forster family, and a new south door to the chancel inserted ; and at the beginning of the last century the restoration of the church was taken in hand, with the usual disastrous results attendant thereupon at that degenerate period. The roofs were underdrawn with plaster ceilings : solid deal battens were placed against the walls, with laths, and 4 inches of mortar fixed over them ; and in some instances, where, as in the chancel, the walls have settled outwards, reducing the width of the church by nearly 2 feet.* The floors had been laid with similar deal battens with plain stained boards nailed over them. A gallery remained at the west end projecting some distance into the nave, and entirely hiding the view of the tower

*Dovercourt Church in Essex, also in 1897 undergoing restoration, has been treated in an exactly similar fashion. A date, 1811, chalked in several places on the original walls, seems to indicate the date at which this beautifying process was carried out.

arch and the west window. A tortoise stove occupied the centre of the nave, with an iron pipe carried up to and through the roof. Such was the state of the church in 1893, well and reverently cared for by the vicar and churchwardens, but too much like a barn to inspire that feeling of awe and reverence for the Divine object for which our sacred temples were erected. Within the arch between the chapel and nave had formerly been situated the squire's pew, approached by a staircase in the east wall of the chapel. This fortunately had been removed some years ago.

It has not been my custom to refer at any length to modern restorations. It will be sufficient to state that everything undertaken here was carried out under the strictest supervision. The west gallery and various accumulations on the walls were removed, and everything of antiquarian interest most carefully preserved. Six new windows by Mr. C. E. Kempe have been placed in the chancel, and three in the nave and one in the chapel by Mr. P. H. Newman. A very elaborate scheme of wall decoration has also been executed by the skilled hand of Mr. P. H. Newman. The roof has been repaired, a new ringers' gallery erected in the tower, the floor has been repaved throughout, and with other much needed additions it is hoped that the church is now thoroughly equipped and in a sound condition both within and without.

Let us now make our perambulation of the church starting as usual in the interior of the chancel (fig. 2). The east window has three lancets within a plain containing arch, the central one being loftier than that on either side. They have chamfered heads and are separated by plain chamfered mullions. In this window were two very interesting panels of glass, which clearly were not in their proper position, and eight shields of arms, exhibiting the various alliances of the Forster family. These were equally out of place, two of them having been put in upside down, an evident proof that they had been brought from elsewhere, and carelessly fixed in here by the local glazier. This glass has all been carefully repaired and inserted in more suitable situations. On the north of the chancel are two large widely splayed lancets. In the sill of the east one were found traces of a water drain, and a piscina has been inserted here, though probably on inadequate authority, as it is exceedingly unusual to find a piscina on the north side of the church. The head of the western lancet is composed of old tiles, possibly Roman and brought from Silchester. Some alteration seems to have taken place with regard to these lancets, as on the exterior side some moulded

stone fragments now form the angle of the sill, with remains of decoration in red and black still visible on them.

In the eastern lancet has been inserted with suitable surroundings one of the early panels from the east window. Within a circular medallion (fig. 3a) is a representation of the Annunciation. St. Gabriel is on the west, with a yellow cloak having a kind of feathering on the upper part and green under garment; the right wing is painted red, white, and yellow, while the left wing is coloured white and yellow, and is extended over the scroll, with the words "Ave Maria Gra," which he holds in his left hand, while the right is raised in attitude of benediction. He has bare feet and a crimson nimbus. The Blessed Virgin has a white kerchief over her head, red nimbus, yellow dress and red cloak, and holds a book in her left hand, while her right is upraised. The Holy Dove, painted white, is descending towards her left ear. The ground on which they are standing is green. A scroll border in white on a black ground is carried across the centre of the medallion. The general groundwork is a very rich blue. In the western lancet (fig. 3b) is inserted the second panel within an octagonal border, and representing the Coronation of the Virgin. The Deity, to the east, with golden crown ornamented with three strawberry leaves, and brown hair, white vestment and red cloak, and with bare feet on either side of the orb, is seated at one end of a yellow settee, with left hand holding a book, and His right placing a crown on the head of the Virgin, who is also seated, with light hair, yellow dress, and green cloak, and both hands clasped and upraised in devotional attitude. There is a small portion of green below the figures, but the general groundwork is the same rich blue as on the other panel. The date of these is probably of the latter half of the thirteenth century.

On the south side of the chancel near the east end is a semi-circular-headed brick arch opening to the vestry, and probably dating from about 1660. Ashmole, in *The History and Antiquities of Berkshire*, states that "on the south side of the Chancel is a Chapel, having a vault under the same lately made." It is probable, therefore, that an earlier building was reconstructed at this period. Above the arch was found in the wall the hoodmoulding of the window or doorway formerly existing here, and apparently of the Decorated period.

On the south of the chancel was a large plain Palladian window, set within the original Decorated containing arch. The base of the mullion still remained in the sill, and the turn of the arch of the

original window could be clearly made out. It was therefore thought that here an attempt might be made to restore the original and a segmental two-light window of Late Decorated character has been constructed. Farther west, and now to the west of the step leading up to the chancel, but probably within the former chancel, is one of the curiosities of the church, viz., a low and high side-window on either side. On the south the containing arch of the early low window remains, but a debased semicircular-headed light has been inserted; while the upper light, now a plain oblong has also been altered: indeed, the whole south wall of the chancel appears to have been reconstructed at some comparatively recent period. During the restoration a circular space was found in the wall, probably for the staircase leading up to the roodloft.

On the north (fig. 4) the low side-window has a cinquefoiled head, and appears to be of Late Decorated date. The upper window has a plain semicircular light, apparently an insertion of the early part of the sixteenth century. Both are set within plain square openings having a wooden frame or lintel across the upper part, partially old. The chancel roof dated probably from the 1660 period, with the exception of the tie-beams and king-posts of the early structure. These, three in number, have been carefully preserved, and a low-pitched oak-panelled ceiling has been introduced below the higher-pitched roof.

The head of the east window is formed by another tie-beam continued in the wall to the wall-plate of the north and south walls; and it seems possible, as has been suggested, that the chancel has been curtailed, and the east wall and window reconstructed. The pulpit is of varnished oak, a very good specimen of Jacobean work, with nicely-carved panels and sounding-board. A boss in the form of a rose showing remains of gilding and colour, now fixed to the centre of the sounding-board, appears to have belonged to one of the earlier roofs.

The vestry on the south side of the chancel has been recently (in 1898) restored. It is entered through a semicircular-headed brick arch, and was added or altered, as has already been suggested, partly to cover a vault of the Forster family, about the year 1660. It is composed of brick plastered over, with a high-pitched roof, and nicely moulded wall plate, a two-light window on the south, and single lancet on the east and west. In the head of the south window is a Hebrew inscription within a halo. There is also in the upper part of the eastern light a patchwork shield with the Royal,

Achard, and Kingsmill coats-of-arms, probably coeval with the chapel. Hanging up in the east window is a small circular medallion in Flemish glass with a representation of the Crucifixion, presented by Mr. Walter Money, F.S.A. A tablet recording various benefactions to the church is here preserved.

On the north of the nave, opposite the chapel or transept, is a large two-light window of late decorated character with flowing tracery and a quatrefoil in the head (fig. 5). The lintel of the containing arch is of wood and apparently old. Here have been reinserted the eight armorial shields (fig. 6) removed from the east window. Six of them have the various heraldic bearings assumed by the Forsters, viz., Achard, Delamare, Popham, Harpsden, St. Martyn, Zouch of Deene, Milbourne, and one other—Roches quartering Brocas of Beaurepaire, but the tinctures are incorrectly rendered. The other two shields impale the arms of Sandys of the Vyne, and prove conclusively that this glass was put in by Sir Humfrey Forster, the son of Sir George Forster, who married a daughter of Lord Sandys of the Vyne, Hampshire. He was a man of considerable importance, and a member of the body-guard of Henry VIII, who was entertained by him at Aldermaston in 1540. He had a residence in London, and was buried at St. Martins in the Fields, where there was formerly a brass to his memory. He received a most sumptuous funeral, full particulars of which have been preserved. Each shield is enclosed within a circular border or wreath, and is a fair specimen of the heraldic glass of this period. In the quatrefoil in the head of the window are preserved some fragments of old glass, formerly in the south window of the Chapel, namely the head of a bishop (probably St. Nicholas), and portions of heraldic and ornamental patterns.

A little to the west of this window is a late Norman doorway now closed up. It has a segmental arch in the inner wall, and a lower chamfered arch on the interior side of the outer wall. The recess in the wall has been utilised for a seat, and a small oval window has been pierced through the head of the wall blocking the doorway to light the occupant of this favoured situation. To the west of the doorway is a small niche for lamp or figure, and a similar one remains in the opposite wall on the south side. It is doubtful if these are in their original position. Above the Norman doorway has been inserted a stone corbel head of a bearded male figure, probably of the Norman period, discovered in the wall during the restoration. The roof above this portion is high-pitched and old, but it was in a bad

state, and had not, it appeared, been ever open to the nave. It was therefore carefully repaired, and a low-pitched panelled oak ceiling, similar to that over the chancel, introduced below it.

Some nice oak panelling, formerly in the chancel, now forms a dado to the western portion of the nave. It is said to have been brought from Ufton Court, and is of late sixteenth or early seventeenth century date. To the west of the Norman doorway, and at the east end of the broader part of the nave, is another low side-window, almost identical with that in the chancel, with cinquefoiled arch and flat timber lintel to the containing arch. On the verge are painted a series of chocolate or deep red crescents, and some traces of these appear within the window head, thus proving the early date of these wooden frames. The situation of this low side-window is certainly unusual. It seems to have been inserted to enable any one from outside to get a view of the painting of St. Christopher on the south wall of the chapel, which can be well seen from this position. To the west again is a large and rather singular window within square-headed containing arch, having two cinquefoiled ogee-headed lancets. It is probably of early fourteenth century date.

On the south side, but not quite facing it, is another large two-light square-headed window, of good decorated character, and of early fourteenth century date. The roof over this part is wagon-shaped. It was formerly concealed by the whitewash, but this has been removed; and this interesting late fifteenth century work now adds an attractive feature to the church.

The tower (fig. 7) arch is probably of the Decorated period, with two chamfered orders, the inner dying into the jambs, and the outer carried down without impost to the ground. There is a solid oak framing formerly, though apparently not now, supporting the timber work within the tower. The west window is of Perpendicular character, of two lights, with large quatrefoil in the head. On the north side of the tower is a small four-centred arched doorway, opening to a newel staircase, leading up to the belfry of late fifteenth century date. There are eight bells—two dated 1681, one 1787, two recast 1860, and one presented in 1896, and two in 1900. A board with the Royal Arms of Charles I, with date 1632, in excellent preservation, is fixed to the nave wall over the tower arch.

The south transept (fig. 8) seems to have been a chantry or the lady chapel, and to have been for many years specially attached to the adjoining court or manor house. It has been the burial place of many of the former lords of the manor, and their monuments will shortly

be described. It opens to the nave by an obtusely-pointed arch, which was thought to be of Transitional Norman date; but, on the removal of the yellow wash, it was found that the upper part of the arch was of wood, and a brick arch had been thrown across the wall above it to support the roofs. The jambs and the lower portion of the arch remained, and have been carefully preserved, and are probably of late thirteenth century date, and of the same period as the rest of the chapel. It is traditionally reported that some years ago this arch fell down, seriously injuring the beautiful monument erected below it. The arch has been restored in stone in the style of the lower portion, which remains *in situ*.

The chapel has a nice two-light south window of good Early Decorated character, and a single trefoil-headed lancet in the east and west walls. That on the west has been filled in with the armorial bearings of the owners of the Aldermaston Estate, Achard, Delamare, Forster, Stawell, Congreve, Higford Burr and Keyser. The Forster and Achard shields were presented by Mr. Walter Money, F.S.A. The latter was originally in the old house, and shows the effect of the fire in 1843. There is a large niche for an image in the east wall near the south side, and a trefoil-headed piscina in the south wall of the same date as the rest of the chapel. The roof is of the same date as that over the eastern portion of the nave, and has been treated at the restoration in the same way.

(To be continued.)

THE SYKES FAMILY.—Mr. Monypenny, in his "Life of Disraeli," says that Henrietta was the daughter of the fifth Earl of Berkeley and Mary Cole, the question of whose marriages constitutes one of the most interesting peerage cases on record. But Mr. K. Tulkinghorn, of Lincoln's-inn-fields, writes to "Notes and Queries" to say that Disraeli's Henrietta was the Henrietta Villeboise who was married in 1846 to Sir Francis William Sykes, of Basildon, and who died in 1861. This Henrietta was the daughter of Mr. Henry Villeboise of Marham Hall, Norfolk, and she was the mother of the fourth, fifth, and sixth (present) baronets of Basildon. The Sykes family of Sledmere are a younger branch of this ancient house, whose possession of lands in Yorkshire can be traced back to 1200. There must be many people still living who remember this Lady Sykes. The present Sir Henry Sykes is still alive; and the widow of the late Baronet (Sir Frederick Sykes), resides at Purley. The Basildon estate was some time ago sold by the family to the late Mr. Charles Morrison. The mansion was built by one of the family in imitation of one of the Indian Government houses, and one of its (not too comfortable) features is that the main stairway from the ground to the first floor is outside the house.