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Notes on the Churches of Stebenton, Harwell, Didcot and Hagbourne.

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

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A DRIVE by a somewhat circuitous route of rather over two miles will bring us to Harwell, a large and picturesque village with numerous old houses, but perhaps fortunately possessing few ancient records of historical interest. The Manor, with which the advowson of the Church seemed always to have been associated, belonged in the 13th century to Richard, Earl of Cornwall, commonly known as the King of the Romans. His son, Edmund, died seized of it in 1299, but Edward III granted it to Sir Nicholas De la Beche, from whom, through many changes, it descended to the Chetwodes. Mrs. Webster is now the Patron of the Living. The great tithes of Harwell, which were given by Edward the Black Prince to the College of St. Nicholas in Wallingford Castle, belonged some years ago to the family of Jennings, who sold them to Sir Jemmet Raymond. They have since passed with the Manor. A lady of the Jennings family in 1715 founded and endowed almshouses here and Mrs. Anthony Loder gave an estate which produces £32 per annum for the education of twelve poor children.

Though the parish thus has so few accessible records relating to its ancient history, it can boast the possession of one of the finest and most interesting Churches in the County (fig. 14), but as usual we have no evidence, except from the architectural details of the fabric, as to

when or by whom the various portions of the edifice were erected. There is a short account of the Church written by the then Vicar, the Rev. Henry Chetwode, and with an illustration, in a rather rare work entitled "Sketches of Churches" compiled by W. E. Relton and published in 1843. (This same volume contains a brief account of the Churches of Childrey, East Hendred, Sparsholt, Uffington and Wantage, and of several more in the Counties of Gloucester, Oxford, Worcester and Wiltshire). Harwell Church is dedicated to St. Matthew, is built of stone, and has a western tower, nave, aisles, transepts and Chancel (fig. 15). It is mainly of early 13th century date, though it is not very easy to interpret the several alterations to the original structure, which have resulted in the present condition of the Church. The transepts with small and plain lancets may date from the end of the 12th century, and may have been a part of the earlier Norman Church, of which the font is now the only relic. The nave arcades are also of transitional Norman date, probably not earlier than 1200. The west tower is a good, but advanced specimen of the Early English style. During the Decorated period the Chancel was rebuilt, and other restorations were carried out, especially in the north aisle. Very little was done after this date, the battlements and top of the turret of the tower and a few minor alterations only exhibiting the characteristics of the perpendicular period. The Church was restored in 1867.

Let us now take up our position in the interior of the Chancel (fig. 16), which is a most interesting example of decorated work, and possesses many unusual features of that style. The east window is of five lights of very elegant and uncommon design. The mullions on either side of the central light are carried right through to the head of the arch and enclose a trefoil headed lancet and quatrefoil above. The tracery and cusping of the side lights is very good. Within the quatrefoil is a shield in old glass, vert six eagles displayed or, the arms of Piers Gaveston, created Earl of Cornwall, the favourite of Edward II. It is said that there was more old glass in this window, which has got into private hands. There is a containing arch with the quarter round moulding carried round the head and down the jambs of the window.

On either side of the east window is a large bracket supported on a head. On north and south of Chancel are three two light decorated windows, the sill of the west window on each side being brought down to a lower level than the other two, to provide a low side window. Some of the decorative glass with various designs

and rich ruby colouring seems to be old. A stringcourse runs right round forming a base mould to the windows. The side windows all have containing arches with a roll enriched with a fillet band, dying into the wall. On the south side is the piscina with two trefoil headed arches resting on a central shaft with foliage on the capital and with roll on the arches carried down the jambs on the east and west sides. Between the heads of the canopies is the head of a Bishop within a quatrefoil. Projecting from the wall below the western arch is the piscina basin with a well carved quatrefoil on the interior of the bowl. The stringcourse runs along above the piscina and is then carried up about one foot and continued above the sedilia and then at the west returned to its former level. There are two graduated sedilia with very elegant ogeeheaded arches and continuous hoodmould terminating east and west on the head of a lady and with head of a man at the centre. There is a solid partition, with a half round enriched with a fillet band carried down the front, separating the two seats. On the north side is a segmental headed priests doorway with the stringcourse carried round above it to form the dripstone or hoodmould. To the west of this is a quaint sculpture (fig. 17) in stone of a young man squatting down on the stringcourse, with his right hand raised to his right cheek, and his left holding a jug. The Chancel roof is high pitched with tie beams and king posts, and is probably of the same date as the rest of the Chancel. The Communion rails are good specimens of Jacobean work. Under the Communion Table is preserved the old altar stone, with four of the crosses still visible. On the Chancel floor is a large blue-stone, nine feet eight inches long, on which is the matrix of a large cross on a stem with richly floriated head. It is of 14th century date, the cross was probably of silver, and may have commemorated a former rector, who was instrumental in rebuilding the Chancel. In the account of the Church in Relton's sketches of Churches we find the following:—"The walls of the Chancel are "ornamented with small paintings; on the north side is David "playing on his harp; on the south Abraham offering up Isaac, and "on either side of the east window are Moses and Aaron, with "angels and cherubims." These have disappeared. They were probably of 18th century date.

The Chancel Arch (fig. 18) is lofty decorated with two chamfered orders, the outer continued to the ground, the inner on curiously sculptured capitals (fig. 19) of the same type as the sculpture on the north wall of the Chancel already described.

On the south side is the figure of a monk, or lady with hood over her head, with a dragon biting his or her arm, on the north is the figure of a man, curled up, with his right hand held up to his ear. A large dragon is biting his right arm. It is difficult to suggest any special interpretation for these quaint designs. The Chancel screen (fig. 20) is very interesting. The beam is embattled and this and the upper tracery is probably of 15th century date, but the shafts supporting this are slender and banded, and have round capitals of the decorated period. The lower part is quite plain. These decorated screens are comparatively rare. A good example remains in the transept at Sparsholt Church. The arch opening from the nave to the south transept is plain obtusely pointed with chamfered edge, and grooved abacus resting on plain responds. It may be of transitional Norman date. There are two deeply splayed lancet windows in the south wall and two more on the east side, each within a containing arch with chamfered edge. A stringcourse with the roll moulding runs round the walls. The roof is high pitched. The arch (fig. 21) opening to the north transept is similar to that on the south, and there are two lancets in the north wall corresponding with those in the south transept. On the east side is a three light square headed window, an insertion of the early 14th century. Set up in the north wall are the brass effigies of a yeoman, his wife, six sons and five daughters and the following inscription (fig. 22):

Here lyeth buried the body of John Jennens
 Who deceased the XVII day of November anno
 Dni 1599, who had issue by Margaret his wife
 VI sonnes and five daughters
 Good wife and children agree
 Serve the Lord and come to mee.

When Ashmole made his notes, this brass was on the floor of "the middle aisle" that is the nave. There is a low plain arch with early abacus opening to the aisle, and above this on the aisle side part of a corbel table, with two plain corbels and one ornamented with conventional foliage. Could this ever have been an exterior wall? On either side of the nave is an arcade (fig. 23) of three lofty arches with chamfered edges, resting at the east and west ends on plain responds with grooved abacus, similar to that of the arches opening to the transepts. The arcades are supported on each side on two circular columns with octagonal abacus, and varied stiff leaved conventional foliage on the capitals, and well moulded bases.

It is very excellent work probably of the commencement of the 13th century. The nave roof is high pitched with tie beams and king posts. In the north aisle are two three light windows of early decorated character with intersecting mullions. In that on east are some canopies and borders in ancient glass. There are three two light windows on south side of the south aisle. The two eastern with a quatrefoil in the head are late decorated, with very solid mullions, and chamfered segmental headed containing arches, the western one is smaller and earlier. The font (fig. 24) at the west end of the aisle is plain tub shaped, set on a square plinth with the angles bevilled off, and with a roll moulding carried round the lower part of the bowl. It is probably Norman, and as we find in many other instances, the most ancient object in the Church. It has a low wooden cover of 18th century date. There is an arch opening eastward from this aisle to the south transept. It is quite plain and rests on an early abacus. It is rather loftier than the arch from the north aisle to the north transept. At the east end of the nave hangs a very fine bronze candelabra presented by Mr. Christopher Elderfield in 1766. The tower arch is Early English with plain outer order and jambs, and chamfered inner order supported on slender cylindrical shafts with semi octagonal capitals, and small abacus. There is a plain arch above opening into the tower. The west window is Early English with two trefoil headed lancets and small vesica shaped opening above with a plain containing arch. There is a shouldered arched doorway to the turret on the north side. The old Communion table with nice carving probably of the 17th century is preserved here. "A tablet under the tower as stated by Lysons" records a singular benefaction of Christopher Elderfield, an eminent divine, who was a native of this Parish and died in 1652; 'he gave lands for the purpose of purchasing, in the spring of every year, two milch cows to be given to 'two of the poorest men in the parish of Harwell, (burthened with 'families), for their sustentation.' His benevolent intentions have proved abortive from the impossibility of a poor man's procuring pasture for a cow in this parish, where the land is chiefly arable. The trustees of the Charity purchase two cows, or oxen, in the winter, if the rent of the lands will suffice, kill them, and distribute the meat among the poor." The south doorway within a porch has a plain chamfered edge to the arch and jambs, and stops on each side at the lower part of the jambs. The outer arch to the porch is of the decorated period with hoodmould and chamfered edge to

arch and jambs. The north doorway has plain chamfered arch jambs and hoodmould. A stringcourse runs along the north aisle wall. The windows to this aisle have a well carved external dripstone or hoodmould, characteristic of this particular period. The windows of the north transept are simply cut out in, and flush with, the wall. There are some low buttresses, one on east has some quatrefoil panelling. There is a similarly carved stone in the Vicarage Garden. The north Chancel doorway is good Early English with crowned head at the apex of the undercut hoodmould and a small roll, and then a larger one enriched with a fillet band set within a hollow on the arch and down the jambs. The east (fig. 25) window has a head at the apex and termination of the hoodmould on either side. There are contemporary buttresses on either side of the eastern angles and between the windows. The two east windows on north of Chancel have a hoodmould terminating on heads of a gentleman and lady, the western one is plain. Those on the south side of the Chancel correspond with those on the north, and the lancets in the south transept are quite plain and flush with the wall, like those on the north. The south aisle windows have no external hoodmould.

The tower (fig. 26) is an excellent example of rather late Early English work. It is low and embattled with a series of billets forming the corbel table, and two light belfry windows with chamfered hoodmould and edge to the containing arches, which enclose two plain lancets having between the heads a small vesica shaped opening, and a quatrefoil on the tympanum above. On each face on the middle stage is a single lancet within a containing arch having a trefoiled fringe. The west window has a plain chamfered hoodmould to the containing arch which encloses two trefoil headed lancets with a vesica shaped opening on the tympanum above. There are shafts at the angles of the upper, and low buttresses supporting the lower, stage. There is a turret with conical top on the north east side. The clock face on the west side is old; the clock dates from 1702. There are six bells dating from the late 16th and 17th century. The south aisle roof has the old lead. The nave is tiled, and the Chancel covered with Westmoreland slates. The base of the old Cross remains in the Churchyard. In the Vicarage Garden is an early holy water stoup, and some other fragments from the Church.

(To be continued.)