

On a brass plate affixed to the lectern and prayer desk is the following inscription :—

“To the Glory of God and in loving Memory of Ralph Charles Price, who died March 1st, 1868, aged 59 ; and of Edmund Price, his son and rector of this Parish, who died September 15th, 1872, aged 36.” *

FARNBOROUGH CHURCH, NEAR WANTAGE, BERKS.

Memorial Stone on the Floor of the Nave.

“Here lieth the Body of Thomas Mott, gent, who departed this life April 22nd, 1763. The 73rd year of his age. He was born at Wheatley in Oxfordshire, and married to Mrs. Mary Stevens of this place, by whom he had one daughter.”

* Both the above mentioned were Patrons of the Rectory, Ralph Charles Price and his son Edmund Price, of Farnborough.

History of the Parish of Beenham.

CHAPTER I.

BEFORE THE REFORMATION.

MR. Stenton, the author of a small publication on “The Place-Names of Berkshire,” gives the derivation of this name Beenham, or, as it has been variously spelt at different periods, “Benam,” “Benham” or “Beneham,” and in its earliest form “Bennan Hamme” (A.D. 956), as Benna’s Meadow, the terminal “hamme” signifying an enclosure or more particularly meadow land, or sometimes as the equivalent of the modern English “home,” but whether as homes or meadows, the Saxon Benna seems to have been possessed of much land and many settlements in Berkshire ; for, besides the subject of the present notice, there are no fewer than four ancient manors bearing this name in the western district of the County, Benham Valence (properly so called), Benham Lovel in the parish of Welford, Hoe Benham and Marsh Benham by the river—all of

them lying within a few miles of each other. It may be readily understood that this repetition of the same name attached to different sites has given rise to much confusion. A conspicuous instance of the mistakes that have been made from the above cause is the misappropriation of the name of Valence to the parish now known as Beenham. It is enough to say here that the second name of any place almost invariably gives the name of an ancient lord of that manor, and it is a well ascertained historical fact that William Valence, Earl of Pembroke, held vast grants from the Crown, of lands and manors in western and northern Berkshire, while no connection has as yet been found between his family and the parish of Beenham. It is strange that the first to make this mistake, was no other than the Herald and Antiquarian, Ashmole (1666). Rightly describing the village as in the Hundred of Reading, and stating that the then patron was Mr. Blagrove and the incumbent Philip Goddard, he unfortunately also gives its name as Beenham Valence and explains that the addition of Valence was given as signifying the name of a former Lord of the Manor. (Ashmole.—*Antiquities of Berks.* Vol. II. 1719. p. 327).

The Parish of Beenham is not included in the Domesday Survey. The Benham there mentioned as part of the possessions of the Abbey of Abingdon is the manor of Benham Valence in the modern parish of Stockcross to the west of Newbury. That the above statement is supported by the best modern authorities, is shewn by the fact that the compilers of the Victoria County History have omitted altogether the name of our Beenham from the map appended to their translation of Domesday Book. To account for the omission of a place which, certainly very shortly afterwards, contained a church, one must remember that the Domesday Book was not a survey in the modern sense of the term, that is, it was not so much the land that was noted as the Estates held by the King, or granted by him to Religious Houses and to the various Knights whose names are given, followed by a list and a minute description of their possessions.

So much had to be said on this subject, to clear the ground before starting on Authentic History.

It would appear that our Parish had been reserved in the King's hands at the general distribution of lands after the Conquest, for the earliest reliable record we have of it, is of a grant of the Church and manor of Benham to the Abbot and monks of the Abbey of "Rading" (*sic*) by King Henry I. Now we know that the manor

and the advowson of the vicarage were held by Reading Abbey up to the time of the dissolution of the monastery by Henry VIII.

FINGALL CARTUTARIES.—The deed recording it is one in which Hubert Walter, Archbishop of Canterbury (1154—1189) confirmed the grant “to the Church of Rading of all the possessions and goods which King Henry the founder of this Church of Rading confirmed to this Church (including) the church of Benham.” And later on the Bishop of the Diocese, that is, Robert Bishop of Sarum (1229—1247), also gave the grant his sanction and authority :—“We grant moreover and confirm to the same monks in the Church of Benham, all the tithes of corn pertaining to the same Church,” the great tithes “and the demesne hay, except the tithes of peas and other vegetables.”

The book in which these records are found—a beautiful volume, written on parchment in mediæval monkish script with illuminated capitals—has a history scarcely less interesting than its contents. This is related on a flyleaf of the book itself by an unknown writer, living nearly two hundred years after Reading Abbey and its vast possessions and rich treasures had suffered confiscation and ruin. It is as follows :—“This Book of the Charters of Reading Abbey was found secreted in a very concealed and unknown corner in my lord Fingall’s house at Shinfield near Reading. It was brought to Woolhampton great house, now Mrs. Crew’s, by Gul. Corderoy, the Steward, with several other books, found by a bricklayer necessitated to pull some part of the house, or rather, part of a wall, down, in order to repair thoroughly a chimney in Shinfield house. This account I had from the forementioned Mr. Corderoy on Wednesday, the twentieth of June 1792, who likewise supposes the bricklayer, who is now living at Reading, found no small sum of money or something valuable, as shortly after that time he advanced much in the world by means of money which no one knows how he could be worth.

Wrote this account on June 23rd, 1792.

N.B. Mr. Corderoy told me that in this concealed place there was convenient room for three persons, there being three seats.”

It requires but little imagination to fill in the earlier part of the story. How the monks, feeling more and more anxious about the future as they saw that nothing but spoliation would satisfy their rapacious sovereign, and perhaps by the last directions of their martyred Abbot, entrusted their valuable title deeds to the care of a patron

and friend to be preserved, as they hoped, for a return of better days. The friend was true and kept their secret, but better days never came, and little recked Henry VIII. for title deeds, and time passed on, and the secret and the hiding place were alike forgotten.

The old house at Shinfield is now pulled down, but the Book of the Charters is preserved as a treasure by its owner, the present Earl of Fingall.

In it have been copied out by the scribes of the Monastery in varying handwritings, as one succeeded another at the task, the various grants made to the Abbey by Henry I. and his successors, and also by private persons. These last entries afford much valuable information concerning the names and the properties of the land-owners of the surrounding district. It is true that the entries are not dated, but as the name of the Abbot or of the Bishop of the Diocese is generally given, it is not difficult to identify the particular period.

The next historical event, following on the grants recorded above, which affected the Parish of Beenham, was that known as the Taxation of Pope Nicholas, 1291.

In that year Edward I. was preparing to take part in what was probably the last of the Crusades. He applied to the Pope to help him with funds from Church property towards the necessary expenses for the pious object of carrying on the war against the infidels, and Pope Nicholas responded by granting him, for six years, the tenth of all the ecclesiastical benefices in the kingdom. The tax was raised in the Deaneries, and the Deanery of Reading reports that the Abbot of Reading has lands in Tylehurst, Wytele, Silhamsted, Offington-Richer, Benham, Pangbourn, Wyndelsore and Grayshall, and that the taxation amounts to £80, a tenth being £8. It may perhaps be explained that the value of money being much greater in those days than now, this probably represents a sum of about £100 in the present day.

In the *Nomina Villarum*, a document drawn up in 1316, the rights of Reading Abbey in the hundred of Reading are said to have extended over the Vills, or Manors, of Bucklebury, Thatcham, Beenham and Cholsey, and by a grant of the Parliament then sitting at Lincoln, these Vills were allowed the cost of one man at arms each (or was it that they had to supply them?)

No complete list exists of the names of the Vicars of Beenham. Their appointment, as we have said, was part of the endowment granted to the Abbey of Reading on its foundation in 1121 by Henry I. The earliest record existing of the institutions does not go

further back than the beginning of the XIVth. century. It is to be found in the Bishop's Diocesan Register in Salisbury, in which Diocese Berkshire was included till recent times. The following is taken from the above named authority, except for such notes as are added below.

DATES	PATRONS.	VICARS.
Kalends July 1314.	Religious men of the	Alex de Quppelade (1)
Nones Aug. 1317	Abbey & Convent-	Steven de Innelcaster.
6th Ides of May 1320	tual Monastery of	Thomas de Wynchodon.
30th May 1349	Radyng.	William le Yonge.
11th March 1362	" "	Nicholas Risele (on resignation of John Atto (2))
8th December 1378	" "	Richard Alwyn (by exchange with Nicholas Risele.)
19th February 1380	" "	William Vanewell (by exchange with Richard Alewyn.)
1st June 1383	" "	Henry Langham (by exchange with William Vanewelle.)
18th March 1389	" "	John Makeseye (by exchange with Henry Langham.)
31st August 1391	" "	John Wygynton (by exchange with John Best.) (2)
23rd February 1439	" "	William Carswell.
13th January 1442	" "	John Marslet (by exchange with William Carswell.)
15th June 1454	" "	John Andrewes (by exchange with John Marslet.)
7th October 1455	" "	David ap Evan ap Meryk (on resignation of John Andrewes.)
11th May 1462	" "	Thomas Stephyns (on resignation of David Apmerik.)
26th May 1511	" "	Henry Olyver (by the death of Godfrey Watson. (3))

(1) Had been previously Vicar of Cholsey, Berks. 1310.

(2) These Institutions are not entered in the Dion Regr

(3) Godfrey Watson's institution is omitted.

Of Godfrey Watson, the last but one in the above list of priests of Beenham, although his nomination is omitted, we know something more than his bare name, from the fact that his will has survived to the present day. A rather full abstract of it is here given as the details are characteristic of his time and office.

In the name of god amen. In the yere of o^r lord god 1510 The 12th of July. I Sir Godefrey Watson, Vicar of Benham, Barkeshire, in my goode and hole mynde not Withstonding seeke of my body make my present testament and last Will in this man^r. | First I bequeth my soule to almighty god to o^r lady the blissid virgyn and to all the holy seynts in heven, my body to be buried in the Chauncell of our lady church of Benham. Also I bequeth to the moder

*Somerset House. P.P.C. Bennett. Test. of godefr Watson cleci.

churche of Sarum | ij^d. It. I beqth to xv preests the day of my burying ev^y preest vj^d. And in like Wise at my moneths day to pray for my soule and for the soules of my fader and my moder. Also I bequeth half my stakke of Whete at Benham to the repacon of the bellfrey there | And the other half I bequeth to george Ildisley | Also I bequeth to the churche of Solemstede Abbott of Ufton of Padworth and of Wollonton to eu^y of theym xx^d. Also I bequeth to Edmunde Watson my broder my stakke of Whete at Silchest | Also I bequeth to the same Edmunde my horse with the bridell and saddill Also I bequeth to sr Robert Balding pson of Ufton my best gowne And to the pson of Solempstede my typpet of Sarsenett | Also I bequeth to Thomas gilbert my srunt A cowe A heckford A materas and ij courlets ij blanketts and a payre of shets | Also I bequeth to Thomas Bolter A Sherte and to his wif A payre of shets A table clothe A peyre of Coberds & A litell broche | Also I bequeth to Richard Wheder my blewe gowne and A peyre of hosys | Also I bequeth to Edmunde Ayshepole my godson xij^d. And to godefrey Kent xij^d to pray for my soule | Also I bequeth to the pson of Ufton iij^s | to geve for my soule helth | Also I give and bequeth to William Illisley xl^s to this intent that he see and cause this my testament to be p^rformed Whom I ordeyn and make my very trew and faithful executor. And all the Residue of all my goods my detts paid I geve and bequeth to my said executor to geve and distributte for the helth of my soule as shalbe thought by hym most expedyent and necessary | Goven at Benham the day and yere above written | Herto Witnesses sr Robert Baldyng pson of Ufton Edmund Cordrey Thomas Kent | Richard parker | Richard Wheder and others.

Proved 5 Feb. 1510 by Thomas mercer the proctor (for the executor named in the Will.)

He seems to have been a man possessed of more worldly wealth than was usual in his class, since he had a horse and saddle and bridle to bequeath, also a "sarsenet typpet"—did that mean a Cope or chasuble? George and William Ildisley must have been members of the Beenham family before mentioned. P. Robert Baldyng's name appears in the list of the Ufton Rectors but has been mis-spelt Halding. Godfrey also in the Sarum Register has been wrongly given (Galfridus.)

Henry Oliver's nomination is the last recorded as having been made by the monks of Reading Abbey before its dissolution in 1539. It will be seen that the prefix "de" is attached to the second name of the three earliest Vicars on the list. This does not in any sense

betoken noble birth. It is merely a means of identifying the particular Stephen or Thomas, as surnames were not then in general use. For the same reason, William the young was probably so called to distinguish him from a William the Elder.

Several omissions will also be noticed, cases in which certain vicars resigned or died whose appointments have not been recorded. Civil wars and disturbances were, as we know, common occurrences, and at such times the Register was not, perhaps, always kept up to date.

As to the lay landholders during the same period ; very few names and still fewer details are discernable through the mists of time. It seems doubtful whether there was more than one manor in the parish, or one only, belonging to Reading Abbey. But in the same Book of the Abbey Charters already quoted, in a deed of grant of land to the Abbey in "Offintone" (Ufton) by Ralf de Offinton. the following names are given as witnesses : "Elyas de Englefeld, Edmund de Benham, Turston de Whiteleia* and many others." Ralf was living about 1130, and as Edmund's name occurs with those of the lords of Englefield and Witeleia as a witness to a gift made by a neighbour at Ufton, perhaps we may safely assume that Benham, the place of his residence, was the present parish of Beenham, and that he himself was a man of some importance there, probably a landowner.

There is also a John de Benham named in a Close Roll, A.D. 1300, who may be taken to be of this parish, as he is said to have given evidence by oath, together with Roger de Burghfield and Peter de la Hoese of Padworth, both neighbouring lords of Manors, concerning the boundaries of the Forest of Windsor. This matter would fall within the cognisance of men who lived at Padworth, Beenham and Burghfield.

It is interesting at the present day to record that in *Fuller's Worthies*, among some names of Berkshire gentlemen in the twelfth year of Henry VI. occur those of Richard Iremonger, Phillip Englefield (of Englefield), and William Parkins (of Ufton). Representatives of the first of these names have been living in the parish of Beenham till very recent times.

In a grant of the confiscated property of Reading Abbey in Beenham mention is made of a Johanna Carter, widow, of Beneham, who then "held by indenture the farm of Beneham with all the

*(?)Whitley near Reading.

arable lands, meadows, moors, waters and pastures in the Parish of Beneham," also, as it is added, "in Ufton and Sulhamstead Abbotts, and renders for it for the whole year £17." For how long before this date the family had been tenants of the Abbey lands at Beenham we have no means of knowing. They were evidently well-to-do people, a further proof of which is afforded by a print of a brass once existing in Beenham Church but now lost. The engraving is to be seen in Tomkin's "Views of Reading Abbey and the neighbouring Churches," and it is here reproduced. It represents a man of middle life, handsomely dressed in the civil costume of the period, and the inscription below is as follows:—

Here under lyeth buried the Body
of William Carter Gent. decessyd
the 22d day of Novemb. Anno Dom.
1586 in the 39th year of the
Reigne of our Sovereigne Lady
Queene Elizabeth.

Near the above, on another Brass plate fixed in a gravestone was this inscription:—

Here lyeth the Body of
Alice Carter who decessed the
15th day of July 1609.

This William Carter may have been the son of the above mentioned Johanna. At any rate the family were evidently settled in the Parish before the Reformation, and on the evidence of the parish Registers, from that time to the present day, there have always been representatives of the name in Beenham.

Another name which occurs in contemporary documents is that of Hildesley or Hyldesley. In the Herald's Visitation of 1566 their pedigree is traced back to a William Hildesley of Beenham, living in 1376. He was entitled to bear arms, and his descendants appear on the Commission of the Peace with neighbouring squires and noblemen. It seems reasonable therefore to conclude that the family were freehold landowners in pre-Reformation times. William Hildesley's son was named John; he may have been so named after an ancestor John de Benham, who was living in 1300, a time when surnames were little used, and when individuals were often called after the place of their residence.

The Hildesleys of Beenham never claimed, in Wills or other documents to be lords of the manor. Their probable residence, or as it is called, a messuage and lands, was the farm and its surround-



Here vnder this stone lyeth buried the Body of
William Carter Gentleman deceased xxij day
of November Anno dñi 1586. in y^e xxij^e yere of
y^e raigne of o^r soveraigne ladye Queene Elizabeth.

ing, rented in later times by the Iremonger family. There is an entry in an old tithe account book of 1720, belonging to the Vicar of Beenham, mentioning that "Richard Iremonger" was "occupier of Mr. Parker's farm, formerly Hildesleys." The Farm is now called "Hall Place" but the present house is modern.

An Edward Hildesley's name occurs in an Aldermaston Court Roll dated 1550. The following is an extract :—

"At a lawe Day holden at Aldermaston by Sir Humphry fforster Knight lord of the said manor on Monday the XXth day of January Anno iij Edwardi Sixti.....the watercourse called Holbroke being all foundered and in Rewyne was then viewed and sene as well by the homage (i.e., Jury) of the Parishioners of Aldermaston as also by the inhabitants of West Beynam.....which ought to be repaired and amended by those whose names followeth.....Item : at the Du acres end the heyres of Edward Jelsley ought to make good the same untill the middle of the Kings highewighe called Harrowe waye leading from Newbury to Reddinge."

This mention of the present Bath Road as then called "the Harrowe way" is interesting, though it is difficult to identify the stream "Holbroke" as crossing it.

The heir of Edward Ilesley, or Hildesley, was his brother John† who, in his will, dated 1573, styles himself "of Beneham Gentleman." He had married the daughter of a certain John Rafe Yeoman of the Cross bowes to Henry VIII. He left his property to his sons and his body to be buried in Beneham Churchyard‡. His grandson Richard is the last of the family of whom any record exists connected with Beenham. We learn from Ashmole that "on the south side of the Churchyard, near the entrance into the Church, there was (in his time) a brick tomb supporting a Freestone plank, with the following inscription :—

"Here lyeth the Body
of Richard Hildesley Gent.
who dyed Munday the 22nd
of Nov. An Dom. 1641."

By his will he left certain sums to the poor of Beenham, Aldermaston and Padworth, and also towards "reparacons" of his parish Church. His widow Anne died in 1644 and shortly afterwards their name disappears from the parish register.

†Arch. Berks. Reg. F. p. 359.

‡Ibid. Filed Will.

(*To be continued.*)