



Notes on the Churches of Frilsham, Yattendon, Ashampstead, Hampstead Norreys and Aldworth.

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AS I have stated in previous years, I feel it is a part of my duty as long as I hold the honourable position of President of the Berkshire Archæological Society, to which I have now for so many years been re-elected, to endeavour to familiarise our members with the objects of interest in our own County, and especially to bring under their notice the salient features of the ancient Churches still existing in Berkshire; and accordingly I have selected groups in the different districts, and with the invaluable aid of the lantern, have been able to take our friends round and point out the principal architectural details of the several edifices. By carrying out this scheme once a year, I feel that we can more conscientiously extend our researches into objects outside our County, and encourage the reading of the many interesting papers with which we are favoured on subjects beyond the pale of our local influence. I have, therefore, selected the group of Churches, visited by a few of us in company with the Members of the Newbury and District Field Club last year, nestling among the Berkshire Downs in and near the valley of the Pang, and propose to take you round to Frilsham, Yattendon, Ashampstead, Hampstead Norris and Aldworth, reserving Bucklebury, Stanford Dingley and Bradfield for some future occasion.

We will commence our ramble with Frilsham, about 8 miles from Newbury, remotely situated, and one of the smallest parishes

both in area and population in the County. It is happy in possessing little history, and very meagre information can be obtained as to the former owners of the Manor or benefactors of the Church. This is dedicated to St. Frideswide, and attempts have been made to connect the name of the Parish with that of the Patron Saint of the Church, but in the early documents referring to the place the spelling of the name is substantially the same, so that it seems unlikely that the first syllable can be a contraction of the name of our diocesan Saint.

In Murray's Guide mention is made of a Roman Villa having been discovered at Frilsham, but no particulars are given, and Mr. Walter Money, F.S.A., whose knowledge of the County is unequalled, assures me that no villa has been found here.

Lysons, in the Berkshire Volume of the *Magna Britannia*, devotes seven lines to this Parish, and informs us that in 1409 Sir Hugh Berwick died seised of this Manor, but in 1424 the Haute family became the possessors. Afterwards it came to the Norreys family and by descent to the Berties. We shall hear more about them in connection with the adjoining parishes of Yattendon and Hampstead Norreys. A short description of the Parish and Church is given in the *History and Antiquities of Newbury and its Environs* published in 1839.

The Church (Fig. 1) is picturesquely situated in the centre of the churchyard which is circular and enclosed by an iron fence. Close by is the river Pang with a small Mill adjoining the churchyard, which is overshadowed by the numerous barns and other buildings of the Manor Farm. As we have already stated, the Church is dedicated to St. Frideswide, and is the only Parish Church in the diocese consecrated in honour of the patron Saint of Christchurch Cathedral, Oxford. It is composed of flint, and of simple design, consisting of a modern west tower, nave, chancel and sanctuary. With the exception of the tower, and perhaps the east end of the sanctuary, which may have had an apsidal termination, the structure belongs entirely to the Norman period, some windows having been inserted late in the 15th century. Like many of the other Churches in this district it was restored much too early, and has suffered severely in consequence. This was in 1834, when the former tower of wood was pulled down and the present brick tower and south porch were erected. The dimensions of the Church are given in Murray's Guide as 69 feet in length by 18½ feet in width, but the different parts of the Church vary in their width, the internal

measurement of the nave being 18 feet, of the chancel 13 feet 11 ins., and of the sanctuary 11 feet 7 ins. The arch separating the chancel from the sanctuary is not in the centre of the nave, which shows an increased width more on the south than the north side.

Let us now take up our position in the interior of the chancel (Fig. 2). This, as has been stated, has been divided into two parts as at Avington and other Norman Churches, the eastern possibly, as has been suggested, terminating in an apse, and probably there was a second arch opening from the chancel to the nave, but no trace of this now remains. The east window is of three lights, late perpendicular, and on the north and south of the sanctuary, is a two-light square-headed window with segmental-headed containing arch of the same date. It is probable that these alterations were made at the cost of the Norreys family, when they became owners of the Manor. The Communion table is nicely carved of the Elizabethan period, and there is some Jacobean work incorporated in the pulpit and reading desk. On the south side of the chancel is another three-light segmental-headed perpendicular window, but on the north the original plain Norman window remains. The arch (Fig. 3) dividing the chancel from the sanctuary is wide and low plain semi-circular Norman, and rests on modern abacus and plain jambs with engaged angle shafts. There is no arch remaining between the nave and chancel. The roofs are high pitched with tie beams and king posts, and of the date of the 15th century restoration. On the north of the nave is a plain Norman window (Fig. 4), and on the south a three-light perpendicular one similar to that on the south of the chancel. The interior arches both of the north and south doorways are more lofty than those on the exterior. The west end has been modernised. The font (Fig. 5) has large plain tub-shaped bowl with a band round the base. On the exterior the south doorway (Fig. 6) within a porch has plain semi-circular arch and jambs. On the west jamb is a votive cross, and part of a sundial on that on the east. The door is old with ancient iron hinges. These are semi-circular with dragon's heads at the terminations. Let in to the south wall is a stone (Fig. 7) sculptured head, the upper part cut off, of early date. The north doorway (Fig. 8) is much larger than the south, and seems to have been the principal entrance. It has a plain outer arch supported on a deeply grooved and chamfered abacus, and one cylindrical shaft on each side with a leaf on the east and inverted trefoil on the west capital. There are plain inner jambs with the abacus supporting a segmental-headed lintel and

plain flint tympanum. The perpendicular windows all have the usual form of external label.

A drive of about two miles will bring us to the pretty and picturesque village of Yattendon. It was a place of considerable importance in early times, and was granted the privilege of a market in 1258, which was confirmed in 1319, to John de la Beche, but this has long been discontinued. In Saxon times the Manor belonged to the Crown, and King Alfred granted it by will to his wife. In the History and Antiquities of Newbury and its environs it is stated that William the Conqueror granted it to a De La Beche, whose family were in possession for upwards of three centuries, and one of them received a licence to fortify and embattle the house, but Lysons, in the *Magna Britannia*, states that in the time of Edward I. it was held under the baronial family of Somery by the Braundestons, and afterwards was successively in the families of De La Beche, St. Amand, and Norreys. Sir John Norreys seemed to have married the heiress to the property, and built the Manor House. He also built the Church in or about 1450. The Manor passed from the Norreys family to a younger branch of the Berties, and after other changes is now owned by the representatives of the late Mr. Alfred Waterhouse, R.A. A good deal of ancient pottery has been dug up in the parish, and is preserved at the Manor House. A complete list of Rectors has been drawn up from 1297 to the present time, and is hung up in the Church. Several members of the De La Beche, Norreys, Bertie, and other distinguished families presented to the living.

The Church (Fig. 9), dedicated to St. Peter and Paul, consists of a west tower and low spire, nave with modern south porch, and chancel with organ chamber and vestry on the north side. The Church was restored in 1858, and various alterations and additions were made under the direction and at the cost of Mr. Alfred Waterhouse between 1881 and 1896. The Church (Fig. 10) is built of flint and entirely of one date, a good specimen of the perpendicular style of the middle of the fifteenth century. During the course of the several restorations the tower has been re-built, and a west porch, which is specially commended in the *Ecclesiastical Topography*, has disappeared. An old font has been superseded by a new one, and a good deal of old glass, heads, &c., has ceased to exist. In Ashmole's *History and Antiquities of Berkshire* mention is made of the following, which was existing in his time:—In the east window was a kneeling figure of a knight, his two wives,

sons and daughters, and part of an inscription, "orate pro bono statu Johannis . . . cccc . . . & Regis precat." In the south window was the inscription "orate pro bono statu Johannis Noreys armigeri, qui istam ecclesiam . . . nova edificavit." In the north window was the commencement of another invocation to John, but all this has now disappeared.

The description of the Church (Fig. 11), as it is all in one style, cannot take us long, but we will, as usual, commence our inspection in the interior of the chancel. The east window is of five-lights, and there is one of three-lights on the north, and two similar windows on the south of the chancel. There is no division between the nave and chancel, and the roof is high pitched and open throughout. When the Ecclesiastical Topography was written there was a panelled wooden ceiling to the chancel with boss over the altar. The rood-screen has been restored, the older portions on which, on the occasion of a visit thirty years ago, some traces of colouring were visible, being incorporated with the new work. In the north wall of the nave at the east end are the lower and upper doorways (Fig. 12) of the staircase to the roodloft, the steps being carried up within a projecting turret in the wall. The pulpit is Jacobean (Fig. 13), and there are two bench ends with linen panelling. There are two three-light windows on north and south sides of the nave similar to those in the chancel. The tower arch (Fig. 14) is in the same style, the inner order terminating on brackets. The west window is of two-lights, and has been preserved from the original tower before the re-building in 1896. There are six bells, of which the fifth is a pre-Reformation one, the others dating 1627, 1653, 1656, 1660 and 1756. The earlier bell was, I was told, a Saxon one, but with some difficulty I managed to get up into the belfry and made out the following inscription: "Sancte Nicollas ora pro nobis." The lettering is clear, and above the first letter of each word is a pretty fleur-de-lis pattern. After the inscription is stamped a leopard's head, then a coin with an inscription, which, owing to the position of the bell, I could not decipher, and then a very elaborate cross flory. I never like to demolish a theory, but have no doubt that this bell was given by Sir John Norreys when he re-built the Church, and dates from the reign of Henry VI.

On the north wall of the nave is a large tablet with long inscription to Sir John Norreys, knight, which is set out in full in Lysons' *Magna Britannia and the History and Antiquities of Newbury, &c.* This Sir John was the second son of Henry Lord Norreys of Rycot.

In the time of Queen Elizabeth he filled many important and confidential offices in France, Ireland, and elsewhere, and died at Yattendon in 1597, aged 68. In some notes furnished to me by Mr. Money it is stated that he was born in 1547, not 1529, and that he did not die at Yattendon. Anthony Wood observes that he was discontented at not having been rewarded according to his worth. The tablet has undergone various vicissitudes. It was restored by Norreys Bertie, Esq., about the year 1755, taken down and laid flat on the Church floor in 1858, and recently, with a new frame, restored to what is believed to be its original situation by Mr. Waterhouse.

The south doorway within a porch has been almost entirely renewed. It is square-headed. The door is old with the original lock, and a very good iron escutcheon above (Fig. 15). The tower was re-built in 1896, but the west doorway was preserved (Fig. 16). It is a good specimen of 15th century work with a label terminating in circles enclosing roses. The two-light window above is also the original one. There are some grotesque corbels, heads, round the upper parapet, which, in the re-building, has been preserved. The windows all have labels, one on the south of the chancel, terminating on circular medallions. The east window has been renewed. The exterior is partly covered with roughcast. On the north side of the chancel adjoining the wall, and surrounded by iron railings, is the tomb of the Rev. Thomas Carte, the editor of Thuanus' History of his own Times, and author of a Life of the great Duke of Ormond, and a General History of England, by which and other pieces he approved himself one of the best writers of his time. He died at Caldecot, near Abingdon, and was buried at Yattendon in a vault on the north side of the chancel in 1754 by G. Bellas, the then Rector. The tomb has been moved westward, when the vestry was built. There is an ancient banded iron chest preserved in the vestry.

In the History and Antiquities of Newbury a full description is given of some "chalk mines" which were accidentally discovered in a field near Yattendon kiln. There were numerous large chambers, and from inscriptions on the walls they were visited or used as late as the year 1700. They were closed up again in 1839. An account is also given of the discovery of the ruins of a Roman villa, with a vast quantity of bricks and tiles, in a chalk pit at Everington in this parish.

(To be continued.)