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

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The north doorway at Hampstead Norreys (Fig. 33) within a porch is semi-circular-headed and very late Norman. It has two rows of billets arranged alternately within hollow channels on the hoodmould, and plain arch and jambs with chamfered edge and stops to the jambs, and chamfered abacus with small band below. There is one votive cross on the east jamb. The porch is of the Perpendicular period with a two-light window on the east and west sides, and an outer arch with two plain chamfered orders.

The tower (Fig. 34) has a plain projecting turret as far as to the lower part of the upper stage. It (the tower) is oblong and not square, and seems to be in part the transitional Norman structure altered in the Perpendicular period. In the upper stage is a two-light Perpendicular window and small semi-circular light on the north side, a single trefoil-headed light on east, a double light on

south, and another one, not in the centre, on the west. There are some grotesque gargoyles. On the middle stage, north and west, is a small plain window, probably of the Transitional Norman period. The west window of the lower stage has the tracery renewed, but the old label terminating on shields. The west doorway is four-centred late Perpendicular, with square label terminating on shields, and with shields within the spandrils. There are graduated buttresses at the west angles of the tower. On a quoin at the north-east angle is the numeral viii. It may be the concluding portion of an inscription recording the date of the reconstruction of the tower. There is a sanctus bell turret or perhaps a beacon at the top of the tower. The south doorway (Fig. 35) is blocked up, semi-circular-headed with roll on the hoodmould, plain arch and jambs with the edge chamfered off, and late form of abacus with band below. The south Chancel doorway is Early English with plain chamfered arch and jambs much renewed. Many of the windows are new or much renewed. The high side window (Fig. 36) on south of Chancel is the original 15th century one. The south Chancel lancet windows have double grooves round the heads, and are old, as are those on the east (Fig. 37) and north of Chancel and north of nave. In the Churchyard to the north-west of the Church is the base of the old Cross, with quatrefoils carved on it, probably of 15th century date. In his interesting work on the subject of the Inventory taken in 1552 of the ecclesiastical vestments and ornaments at that time in the Berkshire Churches, Mr. Money gives a long list under Hampstead Norreys, showing that it was unusually well endowed, but unfortunately only to provide a rich haul for the greed of the spoilers of Church property at that time.

A drive of about four miles will bring us to Aldworth, the final stage of our journey, where the little Church stands far away from the madding crowd, but claims to be the most interesting Church in Berkshire, owing to the magnificent series of monumental effigies still preserved here. These effigies have been often described, and little can be added to the accounts which have already been written. A very interesting paper was read by the late Vicar, the Rev. R. Lloyd, on the occasion of a visit of the Newbury and District Field Club in 1885, and a comprehensive account with a history of the De La Beche family has been compiled by the same Vicar and kindly lent to me by his successor, the Rev. G. F. Mattinson, the present incumbent.

On Monday, July 25th, 1905, a visit was paid by the members

of the British Archæological Association and the Berkshire Archæological Society to Aldworth Church, and a most interesting address was given by the Rev. G. F. Mattinson, the Vicar, which is set out in Vol. xi., page 77, of the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archæological Journal.

A very large number of notes compiled by Mr. Walter Money for a revised edition of the History of the Hundred of Compton have also been most generously placed at my service, but owing to the superficial manner in which the history of the various places is treated, my object being to describe the Churches, I dare not make much use of the most interesting information entrusted to me.

The early history of Aldworth is closely connected with that of Hampstead Norreys and Yattendon. At the time of the Domesday Survey the principal manor was in the hands of Theodoric, the goldsmith. In 1276 it was conveyed by Thomas de Clare to Robert de Musgros, whose daughter Hawise brought this and the Manor of Hampstead Norreys to the noble family of Ferrars. Two other manors in the parish belonged to the De la Beches, with whom, on account of the monuments, we chiefly associate Aldworth. Through the last co-heiress of this family it descended to the Langfords, and thence, as at Yattendon and Hampstead Norreys, to the Norreys and Bertie families. Although there were so many important families connected with the parish the Rectory got into the hands of the Nunnery of Bromhale, near Windsor. This was a small conventual establishment, and shortly before the Reformation was found to be in a very reduced condition with only three nuns remaining. It was accordingly dissolved, and the revenues, including the Rectory of Aldworth, were used to provide an endowment by Bishop Fisher for the new foundation of St. John's College, Cambridge, to which they now belong.

On approaching the Church from the south-east, the first object which attracts attention is the magnificent yew tree (Fig. 38), one of the finest, not only in Berkshire, but in the United Kingdom. At about four feet from the ground it is said to measure about 28 feet in girth. It was probably here long before the Church was built, its existence being possibly a reason for building the Church in this somewhat isolated situation. Most of the bark has perished, and its vitality seems to be at rather a low ebb, but it will probably last for many generations yet for to come.

The Church (Fig. 39), dedicated to St. Mary, consists of a west tower with conical top, nave, south aisle or chapel, with south porch,

and chancel with vestry on the north side. It is asserted that there was a church here in very early times, and no doubt this had fallen into disrepair or proved inadequate to the wants of the inhabitants, at the time when so much enthusiasm was being shown in church building in this district, and indeed throughout the County. Accordingly we find the west tower and nave dating from the early part of the 13th century. The Chancel is about a century later, 1315 is given as the precise date, and the south Chapel was added to accommodate the De la Beche effigies, it is averred about the year 1340, though the architectural details would suggest rather a later date. No further alterations were made until the wanton destruction of the Covenanters irretrievably ruined the magnificent series of monuments, and this has been further aggravated by the drastic restoration to which the Church was subjected in 1871.

Let us now take up our position in the Chancel and commence our architectural survey of the Church. The east window is new and very poor in the Decorated style. On the south side (Fig. 40) are two two-light Decorated windows. The eastern one has two cinquefoil-headed lights and a quatrefoil in the head, and a fluted containing arch; there is a plain circular sundial on the west jamb, no doubt a relic of the earlier structure. The west window is more elaborate and rather uncommon in its design. It has two lancets with a fillet band on the central shaft and inner sides of the arches, and quarter-round to the jambs forming the outer supports of the lancets. These are carried up so as to unite and form one arch in the head with plain quatrefoil in the space between this and the heads of the lancets. Within each of these is a trefoil canopy with solid masonry filling up the space between the canopy and head of the lancet. On the north side is one window of two-lights with two cinquefoiled lancets, and plain chamfered head to the containing arch.

The piscina in the south wall is rather peculiar. It has an oblong lower portion with projecting circular basin, then a solid stone shelf and a cinquefoiled canopy to the arch above. The space is small and suggests the possibility of a relic having been preserved here, as in the somewhat similar situation at Stanford-in-the-Vale in the western portion of the County. Within the sill of the east window on the south side are the sedilia, which are graduated in two plain steps. There is no division or arch between nave and Chancel. The nave roof is high-pitched with tie beams. In the north wall behind the effigy of the first Philip De la Beche on a

low level is a two-light Decorated window. There are three effigies under rich canopies along the north wall, which will be referred to later on.

The tower arch (Fig. 41) is Early English with two plain chamfered orders, undercut abacus, and plain jambs. The west window is a plain Early English lancet. The pulpit is a good specimen of Jacobean work. It was brought from St. Laurence's Church, Reading, having been turned out to make way for a three-decker in the 18th century. There is some excellent 17th century panelling worked up into the reading desk, brought from a farmhouse in the neighbourhood.

At the west end of the nave are preserved three ancient bench ends (Fig. 42) with panelled sides and large well carved poppy heads. The sides are divided into three trefoil-headed compartments. On the poppy head of the east on the north side is carved a Tudor Rose and a bell shaped ornament below; on the west is a lion in the head and on the lower part two serpents, one erect on its tail, the other head downwards, the head being in the form of a bird with long beak. The bench on the south side has an eagle on the poppy head and beading below. Between the nave and the Chapel are three arches of very good design. On the nave side they have a hollow and quarter-round moulding, and rest on well moulded capitals and solid octagonal columns. The bases of these are in the Perpendicular style, and there is little doubt that the Chapel was built not earlier than the middle of the 14th century. The arcade is more elaborate on the Chapel side, as it has a continuous hood-mould with small roll and a hollow, resting over the columns on corbels sculptured into very grotesque animals (Fig. 43). Under the east and centre arch are two of the series of De la Beche tombs. There is a small bracket in the east wall. The east window (Fig. 44) of the Chapel is a very good specimen of late Decorated work, of three lights with two large quatrefoils and then a small trefoil in the head. On the south side is a three-light, smaller but of similar design, and at the west end another three-light somewhat renewed but almost exactly similar to that at the east end. There are three more of the De la Beche monuments under canopied recesses in the south wall. At the west end is the font (Fig. 45), a relic of the earlier Church, with plain tub-shaped bowl, on large circular plinth.

In the vestry is preserved part of a figure (Fig. 46) of a bearded man with hands folded on the breast. It was found walled up in the lower part of the west window of the aisle in 1845, and in 1884

was brought back to the Church. It is supposed to be a representation of our Blessed Lord being reviled, and was probably part of a reredos, and one of a series of subjects of the Passion.

It will be convenient to continue our round on the outside of the Church before attempting the description of the monuments, especially as I cannot profess to add anything to the voluminous accounts which have already been contributed by those who have had a far better opportunity than I have of coming to a conclusion as to their age and identification.

There is not very much on the exterior worthy of special note. The walls are composed of flint and are covered with roughcast. The tower (Fig. 47) has been much renewed or re-built, the lancet in the lower, and a double lancet in the upper, stage on the west side being the original Early English windows. The north (Fig. 48a) doorway has been altered, when the south chapel was built. It has the quarter round and small roll below on the arch, and plain chamfered jambs, which are part of the Early English doorway. The south doorway (Fig. 48b) within a porch is fine but somewhat renewed. It has the quarter round and small roll on the hood-mould, then a fluted outer order and half round to arch and jambs. There is a hoodmould terminating on heads to the east and south windows of the chapel, and the usual characteristic dripstone to the two windows on the south of the Chancel (Fig 49). On the south of the chapel is a walled up arch. Here, it is said, was another cross-legged effigy in the outer wall, with a canopy above, which has been destroyed. Some very beautiful fragments (Fig. 50) which have been outside, but are now preserved within the Church, may have come from here. They have the ball flower ornament.

As I have said, very full descriptions of the unrivalled series of effigies, together with the biography of the several distinguished personages who are supposed to be commemorated, have already appeared in print, and it is difficult to add anything more. There is no doubt that, even in the 16th century, before the wanton spoliation of our Churches had commenced, and when more of these monumental memorials existed, the Aldworth series was unrivalled, and accordingly we can seriously believe the tradition that Queen Elizabeth turned aside on one of her journeys to visit the Church, that she was shown by the Earl of Leicester a genealogy of the De la Beche's which hung in the Church, and that from that time the said genealogy disappeared. In 1644 a certain Captain Symonds visited the Church and sketched the monuments, and

these sketches are now in the British Museum, and I hope to give an account of them in the next number of the Journal. There was at that time in the middle of the Church a brass with figures of a knight and lady said to be Lord Nicholas De la Beche. There was also one of an ecclesiastic, perhaps Edmund De la Beche, the Archdeacon. It was in or shortly before 1658 that the then Vicar resigned because he would be no party to the spoliation of his Church, which no doubt referred to the wanton destruction wrought by the Cromwellian troops during the great Civil War. Would that these works of art could have been transmitted to us in their pristine splendour, instead of being the objects of the senseless fanaticism of an ultra evangelical section of the Christian community.

All the figures were sketched by my late grandfather, Mr. E. Blore, and are included in the volumes of Churches and Monumental Remains of which I am the fortunate possessor. These were all done in the first half of the 19th century, and I shall have the opportunity of comparing the details as they were then with those at the present time.

I would hazard one conjecture as to the date. It has been suggested that they were all executed to order at one time, and that was at the cost of Sir Nicholas De la Beche, who was tutor to the Black Prince. I entirely agree that they are all of one date, of course varied in costume to suit the several persons represented, and no doubt this Sir Nicholas might have borne the cost, though I am inclined to think that the militant Archdeacon, Edmund De la Beche, being the last direct descendant, was the more likely person to desire to commemorate his ancestors and family in this way. The fact of the canopies being of one design shows at any rate that the scheme was planned to accommodate all the effigies which still exist. In briefly showing the various figures I have adopted the description given by Mr. L. Lloyd, the late Vicar. He attached much importance to the finding a seal of the Lady Isabella on the site of the Manor House, which confirmed the conjectures as to the position she held with regard to the property.

The canopies are very light and elegant in their design, with a profusion of small roses, etc., but unfortunately they are almost entirely modern, copies of the damaged originals and executed at the time of the 1871 restoration of the Church.

(To be continued.)