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Notes on the Churches of Fyfield, Besselsleigh, Appleton, Cumnor, Wootton, and Sunningwell.

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I HAVE this year had some difficulty in keeping up my custom of bringing under the notice of our Members a fresh group of our Berkshire Churches, as the necessary restrictions on our means of locomotion, the limitation of the use of some of the indispensable articles connected with photography, and the shortage of labour, have combined to undermine my principle of personally obtaining a thorough knowledge of my subject, and of presenting to you here, and later on to the readers of our Journal, a fairly complete architectural description of the Churches selected. I have therefore been fortunate in finding a group, in the north-western corner of the County, which have at various times been photographed by my friend Mr. H. W. Taunt, of Oxford, who has so efficiently assisted me on many previous occasions, and thus has enabled me in one more visit in the company of my colleague Mr. Marcus Adams, to obtain the lantern illustrations, about 130 in number, which I propose to submit to you this afternoon.

Although I have on several occasions visited the Churches of Fyfield, Besselsleigh, Appleton and Cumnor, I am not so well

acquainted with their details as I could wish, and I can only hope that I shall not exhibit any want of accuracy in my attempt to describe them. Wootton and Sunningwell I inspected for the first time a fortnight ago, and though they are not architecturally as interesting as the other four Churches, still I shall hope to view them again, before these notes appear in the Journal.

Of the history of the Parishes I shall attempt to say very little. As might be expected, the great Abbey of Abingdon appears from early times to have acquired large vested interests in this part of the County, and no doubt various distinguished individuals have been connected with the several parishes and manors, and this information will, I trust, be compiled by the editors of the Victoria County History, when that important work may be completed for the benefit of the public.

Starting from Abingdon along the upper Faringdon road, a drive of six miles will bring us to Fyfield, passing the modern church of Tubney, and the noble elm which stands at the junction of the Oxford road. Fyfield, or Fyfhide, seems to have got into the possession of Abingdon Abbey at a very early date, but apparently both Manor and Church were taken away, as in the 12th century they were held by the Fifehide family, and were subsequently acquired by the Golafrés, one of whom married the heiress of the last of the Fifehides. Later again they were purchased from Lady Gordon by Sir Thomas White, the founder of St. John's College, Oxford, and were presented by him to the College as part of its endowment, with the proviso that his family should be the lessee of the Manor, and have certain privileges in connection with the College. Fyfield Manor House, close to the Church, is a very interesting building, dating from the early part of the 14th century. It was the home of the Golafrés, and is said to have been built by the first Sir John Golafré, who also rebuilt the adjoining Church. A view of the house as it was before it became the residence of that distinguished antiquary, Mr. James Parker, is here given (Fig. 1). It was then in a very dilapidated condition, but was restored by Mr. Parker, as we now see it (Fig. 2). The most interesting and earliest parts of the house, are the porch with the quarter round on the outer arch, and a very good inner doorway enriched with the ball-flower ornament, and a room above, and three interior arches, all of early 14th century date. There are also some good old beams to the roof of one of the upper rooms.

The Church is dedicated to St. Nicholas, and the advowson with

the Manor was purchased by Sir Thomas White, and presented by him to his new foundation, St. John's College at Oxford in 1555, to which they still belong.

The Church consists of a low west tower and turret above, nave, north aisle, south chapel and Chancel. It was greatly injured by a disastrous fire on October 27th, 1893, which destroyed the roofs, screens and glass, and damaged the stone work of the pillars, windows and monuments. A very careful restoration was undertaken, and as far as possible the mischief has been repaired, and the Church still contains much of architectural interest.

The west and north doorways prove the existence of a Church of the beginning of the 13th century, but a drastic rebuilding seems to have been undertaken according to tradition by the first Sir John Golafre, the Chancel being of early 14th century date. The north aisle was built by the second Sir John Golafre, and was completed with the two eastern bays as a chantry to St. John the Baptist in 1442. The monument to Lady Gordon, or Easter Sepulchre, on the north side of the Chancel is of early 16th century date. There are numerous later monuments to the Dales, Whites and Perrotts, which will be referred to in due course.

The illustrations have been arranged as follows: Two of the Manor House, one before, and the other since its restoration by Mr. James Parker; three of the Church taken before the fire of 1893, five showing the damage wrought by the fire, and the rest portraying the Church in its present condition. In our perambulation it will be impossible to keep these in their proper order, but it is hoped that no trouble will be experienced in identifying the references with the several plates. It will, however, lessen the difficulty, if we depart from our usual custom, and commence our description of the Church from the outside.

The west tower (Figs. 4 and 11) is described by Parker in the Ecclesiastical Topography as "modern, very bad." The lower stage is rectangular, the upper, octagonal; and this before the fire was surmounted by a very picturesque octagonal bell-cote, capped by a lead cupola. This was entirely destroyed by the fire, and a plain octagonal upper stage to the tower has been substituted at the rebuilding. The two lower stages do not look modern, but are in the late debased Perpendicular style, with square-headed west doorway, with label above, and single-light window on the lower west front of the octagonal portion. This has been built on to the original west wall of the Church. Here we have a relic of the

Church existing at the beginning of the 13th century, in the west doorway opening to the nave (Fig. 12). It is semicircular-headed, and so closely corresponding with the main entrance arch of Appleton Manor House, that it may undoubtedly be asserted to be of the same date, and the work of the same architect. It has an undercut hoodmould and two recessed orders, with, on the outer, a roll and keel-shaped member with hollow between, and roll with a slightly pointed edge to the inner order. The abacus is undercut, and there are two engaged shafts on each side with foliated capitals. The interior arch is more lofty than the exterior one. The north aisle (Fig. 3), built by the second John Golafré and completed in 1442, has very good Perpendicular windows at the east and west ends. These are of three lights and have very rich upper tracery of the same character as those at Sutton Courtenay. On the north side is a large square-headed three-light late Perpendicular window, and near the west end a two-light window, also square-headed, but of 14th century date. This and the north doorway were no doubt moved from their original situation in the north wall of the nave when the aisle was built. The north doorway (Fig. 13) is of the same date and character as that at the west end of the nave. It is now blocked up, semicircular-headed having a chamfered hoodmould, and with the keel-shaped moulding on face and edge of the arch with hollow between. The abacus is undercut, and a fluted capital remains on each side, the shafts having been destroyed. This must date about 1200, or very early in the 13th century.

The Chancel (Fig. 7) is entirely the work of the first Sir John Golafré. It is traditionally reported to date about 1350, but this seems to be at least 30 years too late. It has an east window, and two windows on the north and south sides. The east window (Fig. 14) is a very fine example of the Decorated style, of four lights, with rich geometrical tracery and a series of quatrefoils in the head. It has an exterior hoodmould or dripstone terminating on the heads of a bearded gentleman and lady. The north (Fig. 3) and south (Fig. 15) windows are of two lights with a quatrefoil in the head, and with hoodmould terminating on heads; the west on north, of a dog and monkey; the east, of a jester and monkey; the east on south, of a king and queen, alleged to portray Edward II. and Isabella; and the west, of a gentleman and lady, claimed as representations of Sir John Golafré and his lady. There are graduated buttresses supporting the angles and side walls of the Chancel. The south Chancel doorway is of the same date, with hoodmould ter-

minating on the heads of two monks in their cowls, and chamfered arch and jambs. The south window of the Chapel and the south window of the nave (Figs. 4, 6 and 11) are new in the Decorated style with flamboyant tracery. The Chapel is described by Parker as being of plain Perpendicular character.

The south porch is modern and of very poor design. The outer arch of the south doorway has been renewed. The interior has a segmental hoodmould, undercut, of the 14th century period. Taking up our position in the centre of the Chancel, we find much of great architectural interest, which fortunately escaped the ravages of the fire. The roof is described by Parker as underdrawn and very poor, but in the illustration (Fig. 5) it appears to be wagon-shaped of 14th century date. Probably at the previous restoration this was brought to light. The present timber roof is panelled and of a different character to the one destroyed. Along the north and south walls below the wall plate is a cornice enriched with the ball flower ornament, and below the windows a good stringcourse with what is, I believe, designated the wave moulding. The east window (Fig. 17), as has already been stated, is a very fine example of the Decorated style, with four lights, having a series of quatrefoils in the head. The angles of the containing arch are chamfered. Below is the embattled canopy of the original 14th century reredos (Fig. 18), but a cornice enriched with foliage has been inserted above it at a later period, and is of 15th century date. In the centre of the canopy is a beautiful tabernacle niche (Fig. 19), either for the reservation of the Host, or possibly for a relic, as at Stanford-in-the-Vale. It is octagonal in plan with a cinquefoiled arch on each face, angle buttresses, formerly capped by finials, and a small pedestal for a figure within the main west recess. It is of the 14th century period, and an exceedingly rare example of a niche of this character in such a position.

On north and south of Chancel the two two-light Decorated windows with quatrefoil in the head have also a chamfered edge to the containing arch. In the south wall in the usual place is the piscina and three sedilia. The former (Fig. 20) is very beautiful within an oblong frame, having an embattled ornament along the upper cornice. There is a buttress supported on a bracket on each side, that on west with an animal with bearded human head, that on east on head of a lady. The buttresses are panelled on the upper part with crocketed canopies and finials. Above the basin is a rich triangular crocketed canopy and finial, with, in the spandril space

on each side, a quatrefoil enclosing a shield, and trefoil below. Within the canopy is a large quatrefoil within a circle, a trefoil above, and two trefoils within irregular oval frames below. These and the quatrefoil have foliated cusps. There is a pretty cinquefoiled fringe below with central ogee-headed arch. The basin projects from a stone shelf and rests on a bracket. The whole appears to have been coloured, and is a very fine example of late Decorated work. Immediately to the west are the three sedilia (Fig. 21) of the same date, but of much simpler design. They have plain ogee-headed arches with cinquefoiled fringe, supported on detached, and engaged respond, shafts, all octagonal on plan, with a rather late form of capital and base. The seats are level, and not graduated. The interior arch of the south Chancel doorway has a segmental head.

On the north side of the Chancel is a large late Perpendicular monument or Easter Sepulchre (Fig. 22). It is alleged to be the tomb of Lady Gordon, "the white rose of Scotland," daughter of Alexander, the third Earl of Huntley, widow of Peter Warbeck, and at the time of her decease, which occurred in 1527, the wife of Christopher Ashfield, of Fyfield. It has a flat canopy with cresting and cornice enriched with foliage, and with four-centred arch having an open quatrefoil and trefoil within each spandril space. There is a panelled pilaster shaft at each angle. At the back are the indents of brasses of kneeling figures of a knight and lady, he with two sons behind him, and below has been a plate with inscription. An invocation on a scroll has issued from the mouth of each, and above has been a sacred subject, probably a representation of the Blessed Trinity, with a shield on either side. The lower part of the tomb has a flat slab, and the front divided into three and two half panels very elegantly sculptured. Ashmole, Lysons and Parker all mention the upper part as richly painted with dark blue colouring, etc., but this was all destroyed by the fire. Ashmole does not give any account of the brass at the back, and it is doubtful if this is in its original position. He states that it is "called the Lady Gorgon's monument." I am told that this lady had no sons, and if this was so the brasses at the back cannot be intended to portray her and her husband. There can, however, be no doubt that it was erected early in the 16th century to serve the joint purpose of a monument and an Easter Sepulchre, as we find many other similar instances, especially at this period. Much havoc seems to have been wrought with the ancient memorials since Ashmole's notes were taken in the

latter part of the 17th century. He records that "Upon another Grave-stone in the Chancel are the Figures of a Man and his Wife insculped on a Brass Plate, and fixed upon a Grave-stone, underneath whom is this defective Inscription : '. . . Armiger and Elizabeth Uxor ejus, nuper de Padworth, qui obiit . . . Dni mcccc. tricesimo ; quorum animabus propicietur Deus. Amen.'" He also gives the full inscriptions of several later monuments, which were at that time in the Chancel, but are now, some in a very damaged condition, preserved in other parts of the Church. He also mentions some heraldic glass, the arms of Golafre and others, as being in the east window, in his time. Did these survive till, and perish during, the fire of 1893 ?

The Chancel arch is lofty and good Decorated in style with outer chamfered order carried down to the ground, and inner supported on semi-octagonal responds. It has been much renewed, although in the illustration (Fig. 8) it does not appear to have been so much damaged as the pillars and arches in the nave. A Decorated arch near the east end of the nave opens to the south chapel (Figs. 5, 8 and 16), which seems to have been much altered, with large new south window, etc., since the Ecclesiastical Topography was published in 1850. Here are several large memorial slabs, formerly in the Chancel. On the east wall within a frame is the alabaster tablet to George Dale. His bust is represented as a civilian with ruff and with right hand holding a skull, to which he is pointing with his left. Above his head is a shield with the arms gules three bugle horns or or argent. [The same arms appear on the monument of Anthony Forster at Cumnor.] Above again is the carving of a skull within a wreath of leaves and between two palm branches. The inscription in capital letters has been much injured by the fire, but can be thus restored from the record in Ashmole's "Antiquities of Berkshire," the portions within brackets now being illegible :—

Memoriæ Sacrum

Georgii Dale, nati antiqua et illustri
 Familia in Agro Somerset, quondã Coll :
 Oriel Oxon Socii, Academiae Procurator^{us}
 Aulæ [*B Mariæ Virg Præfec*] ti et ll :
 Doct [*oris, viri literis*] et moribus
 Ornat[*issimî qui senio ta*]ndem confectus
 Anima [*m placide cælo re*]ddidit Novemb
 [*xxvi MDCXXV. Æt. suæ*] 66
 Uxor M[*aria, filia Guliel et Amit L*]eech

Pronep[*tis Thomæ White fundat*]
 Coll. D. [*Joan Bapt. Oxon pii*] affectûs
 E[*rgo superstes pos*] uit.

which he translates as follows :—

“Sacred to the memory of George Dale, sprung from an Ancient and Illustrious Family, in the County of Somerset, late a fellow of Oriol College, Oxon, Proctor of the University, President of the Hall of the blessed Virgin Mary, and Doctor of Law; a Man of most ornate Literature and Manners, who worn out with Age, quietly gave up his Soul to Heaven, Nov. 26th, 1625, of his age 66. His Wife Mary, Daughter of William and Aunt* of Leech, Great Grand-Daughter of Tho. White, Kt., Founder of the College of St. John’s the Baptist, Oxon, out of pious affection, his Relict erected this.”

On the west wall of the chapel is the white marble frame of a large tablet. This is now laid on the floor, being somewhat damaged by fire, and commemorates Charles Perrott, the third son of James Perrot, of Amersham, and Anne, heiress of George and Mary Dale. It was formerly on the north wall of the Chancel, and the epitaph in Latin, which is of unusual length, is fully set out in Ashmole’s “History and Antiquities of Berkshire.” From this we learn that Charles Perrott was an “incomparable man,” an LL.D., and Fellow of the College of St. John the Baptist, Oxford. He was thrice elected Member of Parliament for the University, was a Justice of the Peace for the County of Bucks and City of Oxford, and appointed a Counsellor by the Vice-Chancellor. His innumerable virtues are described at great length, and after four days’ illness “a loss scarce to be repaired in so many ages,” a violent fever removed him, after he had liv’d 43 years, on the 10th of June in the year of our Lord, 1636. The epitaph concludes as follows: “Luge Lector, Mirare, et si possis, imitare.” Lament, Reader, Admire, and if thou canst, Imitate. The epitaph to Sir Edward and Lady Katherine Yate, date 1648, at Buckland, has a similar ending, “Reader, depart, imitate.”

On the floor of this chapel close to the Perrott monument is a slab of Purbeck marble with the indent of a brass plate of pre-Reformation date.

* This is an error. Mary Dale was daughter of William and Anne Leech, the said Anne being daughter of Thomas and Mary Bridgman, she being sister of Sir Thomas White. Mary Dale was therefore, as the inscription properly states, great niece of Sir Thomas White. Anne, daughter and heiress of George and Mary Dale, married James Perrott, of Amersham, in the County of Bucks, and there were three sons, William, James and Charles.

(To be continued).