

# THE PARISH CHURCHES OF LEWES IN THE 14<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY.

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WHEN William Figg wrote his *Memorials of Old Lewes*<sup>1</sup> he made three statements, the inaccuracy of which can be proved, concerning the ancient churches of the town, and since these statements are commonly repeated at the present time, their correction seems overdue. They are the following:

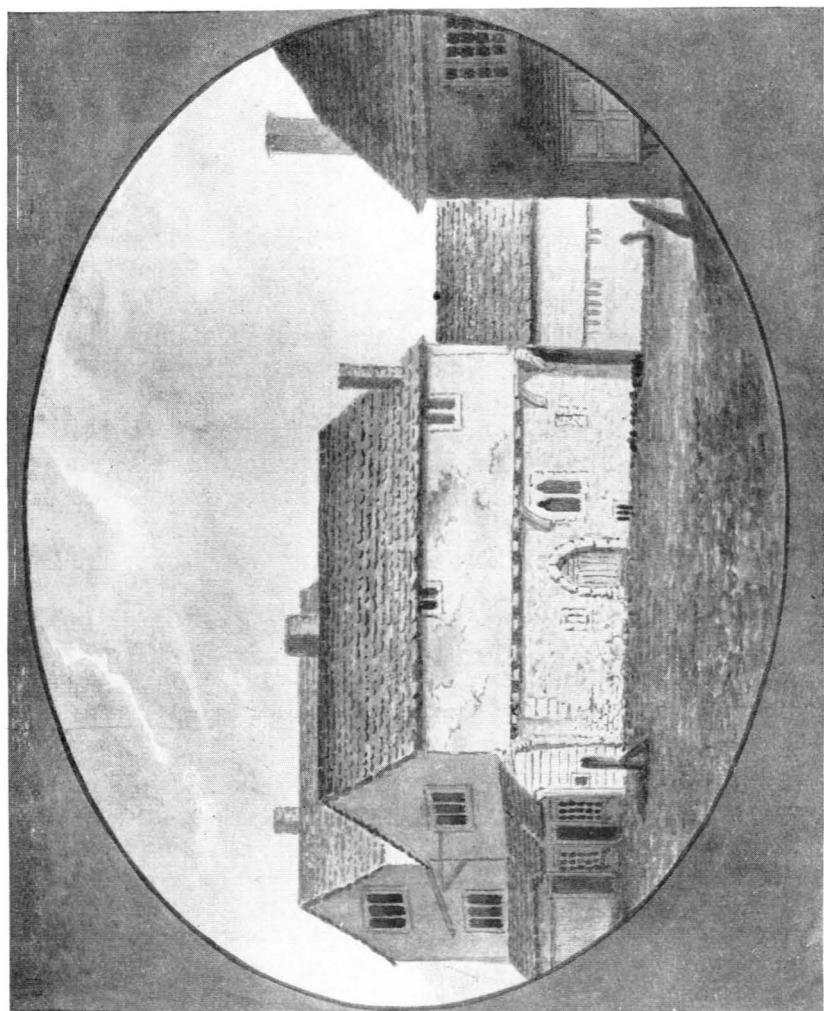
(a) That "upon the union of the parishes of St. Nicholas and the Holy Trinity with St. Peter the Less, the two former churches having gone to decay, the latter edifice was fitted up, and became the parish church of All Saints, the name being given to the united parishes." (p. 23.)

(b) That "at the corner of St. Mary's Lane on the East side stood the church of St. Mary Magdalen, which appears to have been a separate parish from St. John Sub Castro, with which it was at some subsequent period united." (p. 27.)

(c) That "in the High Street on the east side of Watergate Lane stood the church of St. Mary-in-the-Market, the last remains of which were destroyed in 1856 when the house into which the church had been transformed, was pulled down." (p. 24.)

The first statement betrays its falsity by its innocent explanation of the dedication of All Saints. It is controverted by the institution of rectors to this church in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries by its patron the Bishop of Chichester, and by the following entry in Bishop Rede's Register: "29 April, 1409, in the 10th year of King Henry IV. . . . a convocation of

<sup>1</sup> S.A.C., XIII., 1-48.



“ST. MARY’S, LEWES, 1783.” A DRAWING BY JAMES LAMBERT IN THE BURRELL COLLECTION,  
BRITISH MUSEUM.

the clergy of Lewes and Pevenese Deaneries was assembled at All Saints Church Lewes."<sup>2</sup>

The second and third statements may be considered together. There is no record of a second church of St. Mary *within* the walls of Lewes. The church of St. Mary in the Market was dedicated to the Virgin, and the parish was united to that of St. John Sub Castro in 1538. Mr. W. D. Peckham who has kindly consulted the entry<sup>3</sup> regarding the union in the bishop's registers at Chichester, tells me there is no mention of the name "Magdalen."<sup>4</sup> The numerous deeds extant which refer to properties in the parish of St. Mary in the Market, mention repeatedly St. Mary's Lane or St. Mary's Street, and there is no reason to doubt that the church stood at the north-east corner of this lane, now called Station Street. The site to which Figg refers at the corner of Watergate Lane lies within the united parishes of St. Andrew and St. Michael, and before the union of these parishes it was within that of St. Andrew. The mistake seems to have arisen from some similarity in appearance between the two old houses occupying these sites. Lambert's drawing in the Burrell collection entitled, "St. Mary's, Lewes, 1783," is clearly of the present building at the corner of St. Mary's Lane (Station Street), and this may be confirmed by comparing his drawing with old illustrations of the Town Hall, where the building also appears. The unfortunate acceptance by the Ordnance Survey Department of the wrong identification is likely to hinder the laying to rest of this error.

An interesting document to which my attention was called by the late Miss Helena Hadley, will enable us, I think, to arrive at a correct list of all the parishes in medieval Lewes. The document is numbered A. 14181 among the Ancient Deeds (uncalendered) at the Public

<sup>2</sup> *S.A.C.*, VIII., p. 148.

<sup>3</sup> Chichester Episc. Reg. (Sampson, ff. 7 and 8).

<sup>4</sup> The only reference I have been able to find to a parish of St. Mary Magdalen is in a grant to Lewes Priory of a messuage in the West Port of *Southover* in the parish of "St. John the Baptist and St. Mary Magdalen." P.R.O. Ancient Deeds A. 4095 (temp. Hy. III.).

Record Office and is dated 1337. It purports to be an instrument for the amalgamation of certain parishes by John, Bishop of Chichester, and was apparently sealed, although its provisions were not carried out. It refers in detail to all the parishes *within* the walls, and gives us the name of one parish hitherto unknown, except by a single reference in a grant to Lewes Priory.<sup>5</sup> This is the parish of St. Sepulchre which appears to have been in the vicinity of School Hill. It would be supremely interesting if it should ever be found that Lewes shared with Chichester the privilege of possessing the site of one of the small number of round churches in England.

I am enabled to give a full translation of the 1337 document, which has been very kindly furnished by the Rev. W. Budgen, F.S.A., who has also compared Miss Hadley's transcript with the original. The following is a list of all the parochial churches known, those that have been destroyed being printed in italics:

Within the walls:

St. John Sub Castro	Patron, Prior and Convent of St. Pancras, Lewes.
<i>St. Peter (the less)</i>	„
<i>Holy Trinity</i>	„
<i>St. Nicholas (in foro)</i>	„
<i>St. Sepulchre</i>	unknown
<i>St. Mary (in foro)</i>	Prior and Convent of St. Pancras, Lewes.
<i>St. Andrew</i>	„
<i>St. Martin</i>	„
St. Michael	Prior and Convent of Christchurch, Canterbury.
All Saints	Bishop of Chichester.

Without the walls:

<i>St. Peter Westout</i>	Patron, Prior and Convent of St. Pancras.
St. Mary Westout (St. Anne's)	„
St. John the Baptist, Southover	„
St. Thomas à Becket, Cliffe	Archbishop of Canterbury.

<sup>5</sup> Grant by Philip, Chaplin and Vicar of Rotindene, to the monks of St. Pancras, Lewes, viz. to their keeper of the refectory (refectorarius) for the time being, in frank almon, of a messuage in Lewes in the High Street, in the parish of St. Sepulchre. A.D. 1230—A. 4225, in Catalogue of Ancient Deeds, P.R.O.

From the terms of the document of 1337 it was evidently the intention of the bishop to preserve within the walls only the churches of St. Michael, All Saints and St. John Sub Castro. Since all the parishes (except the two last-named) seem to have included property both north and south of the High Street,<sup>6</sup> the apportionment of their areas to All Saints and St. John proved difficult.

The proposals were (a) to unite St. Mary in Foro and St. Peter the less to St. John Sub Castro. We have no means of knowing the boundaries of St. Peter, but it may be that this arrangement was actually carried out when St. Mary in Foro and St. John Sub Castro were united in 1538.

(b) That the Churches of St. Andrew and St. Martin should be joined to All Saints. This did not occur, but after St. Martin had been absorbed, St. Andrew was united to St. Michael in 1545.

(c) That the Churches of SS. Trinity, Sepulchre and Nicholas should be divided between St. John Sub Castro and All Saints according as they lay north or south of the High Street, namely, School Hill. We know the Church of St. Nicholas<sup>7</sup> stood at the top of School Hill, and was known as the Broken Church, long after it had ceased to be used for ecclesiastical purposes. The site of Holy Trinity was probably on the north side of the East Gate. The whole area of the three parishes seems to have been absorbed by All Saints, although the actual record of the union has not been traced.

Robert the Spicer's house must have been somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Star Inn—the present Town Hall, which (it is perhaps worth noting) incorporates the basement of an important 14th century house. Robert the Spicer was M.P. for Lewes, 1322–1324.

<sup>6</sup> Even St. Mary in Foro seems to have been partly north of the High Street, as a house in the parish adjoined another in Fisher Street. P.R.O. Ancient Deeds, A. 340 (37 Hy. VI.).

<sup>7</sup> John Rowe says St. Nicholas was formerly St. Peter the Less. Is it possible these two churches were united?

P.R.O., ANCIENT DEEDS, A. 14181.

[*Translation.*]

To all sons of Holy Mother Church to whose notice this writing shall come, John, by divine permission, Bishop of Chichester, Greeting eternal in the Lord. The care of pastoral office stirs us and zeal for souls challenges and persuades us that, to the utmost of our power, we should uphold the sheep of the flock committed (to us), lest lacking the shepherd's guidance, by the prolonged vacancy of the churches undermentioned, and wandering through impassable paths, they may be carried away by the cunningly (devised) wiles of the enemy of the faith, which God forbid (*quod absit*). Forsooth, the report and constant assertion of trustworthy men have been forced upon our ears that the parish churches of S. Mary and S. Nicholas in Foro and Holy Trinity, S. Sepulchre, All Saints, and S. Peter the Less and SS. Andrew and Martin of Lewes in our diocese, accustomed to be cared for by themselves and to be governed by their own priests as their Rectors, are so diminished and impoverished in these days that the revenues and issues of them or of any one of them are not sufficient for the maintenance of a priest of their own, with the result that the cure of souls and the divine office is neglected in them. Hence it is that directing our anxious eyes (*lit.* the eyes of our solicitude) towards the matters before mentioned and desiring to apply such remedy as we appropriately can in the circumstances, we caused enquiry to be diligently made concerning the truth of the said matters, having called together all those who by right ought to be summoned; and it appeared as certain from such enquiry—which we record with sorrow—that the aforesaid assertion contains the truth in every respect. Therefore, with the consent of the patrons of the said churches and of others whom it concerned, and other necessary matters agreeing, after invoking the grace of the Holy Spirit, for the increase of divine religion and out of regard for the health of souls, we have decreed that the said churches be united and consolidated in this manner, that is to say, that the churches of the saints the Blessed Mary in Foro and the Blessed Peter the Less in Lewes of the patronage of the Prior and Convent of the Priory of the church of S. Pancras of Lewes, the parishioners of which at their decease have been accustomed to be buried in the churchyard of the church of S. John Sub Castro, be united to the church of S. John Sub Castro, with all the parishioners and the revenues thereof whatsoever. So that henceforth all their parishioners be parishioners of the church of S. John aforesaid and of the Rector of the same for the time being in future. And that the churches of SS. Andrew and Martin of Lewes of the patronage of the said Prior and Convent with all their parishioners and the revenues of the same, on the Rector thereof resigning or dying, be united to the church of All Saints of Lewes of our patronage. So that all the parishioners of the said churches shall be parishioners of the said church of All

Saints and of the Rector of the same for the time being in future, saving the accustomed burial of the parishioners of the aforesaid churches to the church of S. Michael of Lewes. And that the parishioners of the churches of SS. Trinity, Sepulchre, and Nicholas in manner and form underwritten be united to the churches of All Saints and S. John Sub Castro aforesaid, that is to say, that the Rector of the church of All Saints for the time being shall receive and have henceforth the revenues, offerings and tithes whatsoever and howsoever arising from the inhabitants on the south side of the highway of the town of Lewes, which way extends from the Clyde bridge, from east to west, to the messuage which sometime was of Robert the Spicer. So that all the inhabitants on the south side of the said way, together with all places adjacent to the part of the said way on the south side, henceforth shall become and be parishioners of the parish church of All Saints aforesaid and of the Rector of the same for the time being in the future. And that the said parishioners there after their death shall be buried as hitherto has been accustomed to be done. And the Rector of the church of S. John aforesaid for the time being shall receive and have henceforth the revenues, offerings and tithes whatsoever and howsoever arising from the inhabitants on the north side of the highway aforesaid as parishioners of the same and from all places adjacent to the part of the said way on the north side, and they shall become and be henceforth parishioners of the church of S. John Sub Castro aforesaid, the Rectors of which church for the time being from time immemorial have buried the bodies of deceased persons who while they lived were inhabitants of the said north side of the said way in the churchyard of S. John aforesaid and have borne and acknowledged the responsibility of the burial of such deceased persons for the whole of the said time. But the churches and parishioners aforesaid, with the tithes, burial offerings and all other offerings, we unite and consolidate with the said churches of All Saints and S. John as is aforesaid, and we decree that they shall remain so united and consolidated for ever. But we specially reserve to ourselves and our successors the power to make clear and correct, if need be, the aforesaid matters. Saving also to us and our successors episcopal rights and the dignity of the church of Chichester; and to the Prior and Convent of the church of S. Pancras of Lewes their pensions, if any are due to them by right, from the before-mentioned churches. In witness of all which matters we have caused our seal to be affixed hereto. Given at Aldyngbourne the seventeenth of the Kalends of August in the year of our Lord 1337 and the year of our consecration the 32nd.

Endorsed:—Union of the churches of the town of Lewes by Lord John, Bishop of Chichester.

Tag for seal, seal gone.