

# TYTING HOUSE, AND ITS PRIEST'S ORATORY.

BY

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TYTING HOUSE lies about two miles east of Guildford, under the north-west slope of St. Martha's Hill, in the valley between the hill and the main ridge of the Downs. The immediate neighbourhood has obviously been the site of habitation from very early times.<sup>1</sup> In the Domesday Survey we read :—

“The Bishop himself (Osbern, Bishop of Exeter) holds Tetinges. Elmer the huntsman held it in the time of King Edward.”

And Tyting belonged to the See of Exeter till 1549.

The present Tyting House is very largely of modern date, having been substantially rebuilt and greatly enlarged of recent years to serve as a gentleman's residence, after use for a great number of years as a farmhouse. The present south and west sides of the house are of modern date, but some half-timbered gables on the north side (with modern and incongruous bargeboards) are of the 16th century, as are certain internal features of this part of the house, including several massive and heavily nail-studded oak doors.

But the primary interest of the house to the archæologist lies in the room on the east side, which now serves as the dining-room, but was used, during the occupation of the house as a farm, for the kitchen.

<sup>1</sup> Abundant traces of occupation by early man remain in the district in the shape of flint implements and hut circles. A large barrow stands across the road from Tyting House, now covered with fir trees.

Two theories exist as to the original use of the building which first occupied this site, and of which



fragments seem to remain in this room. One is that it was used as a house for the rest and accommodation

of pilgrims on their way to Becket's shrine along the Pilgrim's Way, which runs over the crest of St. Martha's Hill. If this was the case, the room under consideration would have served as a chapel for the pilgrims. The other theory is that the house was the residence of the priest serving St. Martha's Chapel, and that this room was his private oratory.

The room has in its east wall a group of three very perfect lancets, carved in chalk, and dating, probably, from the early part of the 13th century.<sup>1</sup> But this window and the interesting roof, which is probably coeval with it, appear to be the only features remaining of this early date. The room has been restored on somewhat incongruous lines. Oak panelling has been placed round the walls to about half their height, and a fireplace of *temp.* Charles I has been inserted, and looks quite out of place. Also, a large window and a door have been pierced in the south wall.

It seems a pity that the room cannot be restored to more or less its original state and use. A piscina may remain under the panelling.<sup>2</sup>

A carved chalk mantelpiece, dated 1609, was removed from Tyting House (probably in the 18th century) to Shalford Park House.<sup>3</sup>

An underground passage is said to run from Tyting to St. Martha's, and though this seems improbable, the entrance to a passage from Tyting is still shown.

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My thanks are due to Mr. P. M. Johnston for reading these notes before publication, and for pointing out the interest of the roof.

<sup>1</sup> They have been copied in an adjoining room in the restoration.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. C. R. B. Barrett, in his *Highways, Byways and Waterways of Surrey* (1895), p. 175, says: "I tapped the wall carefully to see if I could detect traces of a piscina, but was unable to do so."

<sup>3</sup> *Victoria County History of Surrey*, Vol. III, p. 110.