



THE RUINED CHAPEL, WEST HUMBLE.
From a painting by Beckett c. 1830-40.

WEST HUMBLE CHAPEL.

BY

EDWIN HART, F.S.A.,

AND

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HISTORICAL NOTE.

By Edwin Hart, F.S.A.

THIS ruined building was brought prominently to the notice of our Society in 1937 by the public-spirited action taken by Lord Ashcombe and the Cubitt Estates in offering the ruin and its plot of ground, free of cost, to any public body that would undertake its preservation. The Ancient Monuments Department of the Office of Works and the County Council both thought it was unsuitable for their purposes and it was then put before our Society and our late Hon. Secretary, Mr. Nevill, asked me to inspect and make a report on it to him for submission to our Council. Much doubt had been previously entertained as to whether it had ever been a Chapel, and it seemed clear that unless that fact could be established there would be insufficient ground for recommending its repair and preservation. Mr. Blake (whose sister lives opposite the ruin and who had known it for many years) told me the prevalent view was rather against the Chapel theory, but he was good enough to suggest that if its religious authenticity could be proved he thought that Mr. Wood, the Chairman of the Box Hill Preservation Committee, would be the right man to approach for local support.

We cannot be too grateful to Mr. Wood and to Lady Lawrence, who co-operated with him, for the immediate and very generous help they provided. It is due to this aid and a moderate grant from our Society's funds that at a cost of over £100 most of the Chapel site has been excavated, the

ruins cleared of heavy growth of ivy and trees and restored to a safe condition under the able and sympathetic supervision of Mr. Hugh Braun, F.S.A., A.R.I.B.A. The site has also been fenced and, through Mr. Wood's kind efforts, the ruin taken over by the National Trust. A large number of our members were able to visit the spot during one of our Spring excursions in 1938.

As regards its history I was soon able to assemble sufficient evidence from Surrey Books to satisfy our Council, beyond doubt, that the building had long been known as a Chapel, and its ecclesiastical character was also firmly established by Mr. Braun's discoveries as to the ruin itself and the burials close to it. It is actually included as such in our own Schedule of Antiquities over twenty years ago.

It has not, however, been possible yet to ascertain why or by whom it was originally built, nor whether it eventually passed under the care and ownership of the Priory of Merton or that of Reigate. Nor is it known of which of the various sub-manors of Mickleham it was ultimately part.

It seems clear however from the *Victoria County History* that even before the Conquest there were two estates in Mickleham—Norbury was held by Oswald under the Confessor and in 1086 by Richard of Tonbridge, and never passed to either Priory; in 1200 when the Chapel was built and till about 1300 it was held by the Dammartin family. Although Norbury is directly north of West Humble there is nothing to show that the Chapel Farm or the Chapel ever formed a part of it. Chapel Farm belonged apparently to Merton and West Humble Manor to Reigate, and we can assume the Chapel itself was in one of these estates.

The main estate in Mickleham was in 1086 the property of Odo and was held by Ansfrig under the Confessor. A family of "de Mickleham" were holding it under Henry I and at least until Edward I, and a grandson John still held it until 1332. We are therefore led to assume that the Chapel of 1200 was built on land belonging to the de Mickleham family, and by them, for the benefit of their tenants south of the Mole, who would be frequently cut off from Mickleham Parish Church, especially as regards burials.

Reigate Priory (then only a Hospital) in 1253 obtained a

tenement in Mickleham from Robert de Wateville, and in 1344 the Priory had a grant from John de Mickleham which included the advowson of Mickleham Church.

These possessions became known as the Manor of West Humble and were still held by the Priory at the Dissolution—but there is no proof that they included the Chapel, and they certainly did not include Chapel Farm on the opposite side of the Lane, for that belonged to Merton.

In 3 John, Merton had a grant from Walter de Polesdon in Fetcham and Polesdene. This land seems later to have been known as the Manor of Polesden Lacy, and included Chapel Farm until the Dissolution, but here again we find no proof that the Chapel itself was in this Manor.

The whole question of the boundaries of Manors and estates in Mickleham became still more confused and of little local importance owing to the fact that a family of Stydolf gradually absorbed all the south-western part at least of Mickleham, including Norbury, West Humble, and Polesden Lacy, and, we must assume, the site of the Chapel also.

It appears that John de Mickleham in 1332 conveyed the Manor of Mickleham (except Fridley and apparently West Humble) to Roger Apperdele, whose grandson John was outlawed in 1366, and soon after (43 E. III) the King granted the same lands to William, Bishop of Winchester. The Bishop and various clerks, by gift or sale from him, held until 1431. Thomas Stydolf married Isabel (probably a great granddaughter of Ralph Wymeldon who had purchased a part in 1464) and himself purchased the other part in 1535.

As to Norbury, this part of Mickleham passed from the Dammartin family to William Husee, who held in 1314 under De Clare, and he had license for an oratory between 1323 and 1333. This oratory, however, was probably at his own house of Norbury (our Chapel is of 1200). Apparently William Wymeldon married the heiress of Husee and so Norbury passed with her great granddaughter to Thomas Stydolf.

As to Fridley, John de Mickleham in 1336 granted this part of his Manor to his son-in-law John Dewey. It later passed to the family of Wydewson (who, according to *V.C.H.*, presented it to the living in 1492, although as stated above the advowson had been given in 1334 to Reigate Priory). Fridley never

passed to the Stydolfs, and Juniper Hall, part of it, now belongs to our Member Miss MacAndrew.

As to West Humble, Reigate Priory had leased this (in 1515?) to Thomas Stydolf early in the sixteenth century for 99 years, and subject to this it passed with other Priory Estates to the Howard family at the Dissolution. *V.C.H.* states the lease must have been renewed, as rent was still paid in 1684. Polesden Lacy was granted at the Dissolution to Mr. Sackville by purchase, and included farms called "Capeland and Bowett's." All this part was sold to another Stydolf in 1564, and the Manor, if not the farms, also remained with the Stydolfs until 1734.

Although Reigate Priory seems to have obtained its West Humble lands from De Wateville and John de Mickleham, the latter of whom succeeded to Odo's share of the Parish, yet, according to Manning and Bray, the Priory holdings belonged to the Honor of Clare, and were therefore originally lands of Richard of Tonbridge in the same way as Norbury; this would well agree with their situation west of the Mole. It is possible that the de Mickleham family took over part of the de Clare portion as well as Odo's.

Mr. Braun has referred in his report to the position of the Chapel and Chapel Farm on an ancient way, and the possible pilgrim use. Salmon (1736) refers (p. 99) to the old church or chapel near West Humble Street, and suggests service may have been here "for that populous Hamlet, perhaps a Parish in the Saxon times," but he makes no reference to pilgrims. He also records (p. 89) Roman coins found at Bagden Farm, a little to the west. I cannot find any mention of West Humble in Aubrey. Manning and Bray make no reference to pilgrims in their account of West Humble and the Chapel.

The Promenade round Dorking, published by John Warren, 1823, mentions West Humble, but not the Chapel or pilgrims, but (p. 245) usefully records that the Mole near here had such a rapid current and such depth that a boat was upset and several gentlemen drowned. This fact is useful as supporting the suggestion that the Chapel was built owing to the difficulty at certain times of getting across the river to the Parish Church.

The Garden of Surrey, &c., by W. Thorne, 1829 (pub. Dorking), has a plan showing West Humble and the Chapel and (p. 35)

refers to Chapel Farm and the Chapel ruins. It records that a former proprietor of Norbury had a dream respecting the ruins which caused him to dig about them and to find pieces of old armour, coins, and other antiquities, but there again is no reference to pilgrims.

A Handbook of Dorking, pub. John Rowe, 1855, has a good plan showing West Humble and Bagden Farm and (p. 84) shows a good view of Pray Bridge in Fridley Meadows, mentioned as the "way to West Humble," and leading at once "into the Street" a short distance from Camilla Lacey. This book reproduces the plan of the Mole from Manning and Bray, and marks the buildings of Chapel Farm and the Chapel without further notes.

Dorking, G. J. S. Bright, 1876 (p. 65), has a chapter headed "Pilgrim's Walk" and suggests that pilgrims would gather from various parts near Guildford and proceed east by Ranmore Common and Chapel Farm. The Chapel is mentioned in a footnote.

Bygone Surrey, by Clinch and Kershaw, 1895, has a chapter on Ancient Roads and Ways and (p. 87) mentions the Pilgrim's Way and suggests that a branch might have come from Gloucester, Oxford and Reading, and proceeded by the Bookhams and Effingham to West Humble Street and Burford.

Our own *Collections* contain two papers on this subject in recent years by Dr. Hooper and myself, but these deal principally with the more direct east and west track below the south face of the Downs which crosses the Mole where the Pip brook joins it and keeps low on the south slopes to St. Catherine's Chapel or Guildford. An alternative, but less direct, route leaves this other way just north of the main bridge over the Mole on the Reigate side of Dorking and is easily traceable to a more northern ford leading direct to West Humble Street and Ranmore Common.

As regards the evidence of Surrey Maps on the Chapel:

Rocque shows "West Humble Street" and "Old Chapel Farm."

Kitchin, *Thirty Miles round London*, 1773, West Humble Street, and again in 1764.

Edwards, *Companion*, 1787, West Humble Street and Ruins of the old Chapel.

Cary, 1794, West Humble Street.

Faden, *25 Miles round London*, 1802, West Humble Street.

Ordnance Map, 1816, West Humble Street and Chapel Farm.

Smith, 1804, West Humble Street.

Stockdale, 1805, West Humble Street.

The antiquity of the use of the word Street should be noted. It is often found in old villages, and may perhaps suggest that some metalling had been used to improve the old ways.

A REPORT ON THE EXPLORATION CONDUCTED BY THE BOX HILL COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL TRUST IN THE WINTER OF 1937-38.

By Hugh Braun, F.S.A., A.R.I.B.A.

Beneath the southern escarpment of the North Downs passes the ancient route known to-day as the "Pilgrims' Way." At the foot of Box Hill above Dorking the Way crosses the River Mole or Emlyn Stream by a ford situated about 350 yards SSW. of Burford Lodge, climbing thence up a westwards-thrusting coombe, apparently known at one time as Polesden. After leaving the ford, the track is first known as Adlers Lane, but after about three-quarters of a mile, when it has reached the site of the hamlet of West Humble, it becomes Chapel Lane.

West Humble appears to have been at one time an outlying hamlet of Mickelham, in which parish it is still situated. To-day, however, the population has shifted half a mile eastwards towards the river and the modern main road, and all that is left on the old site is a large farm and the ruins of the chapel. The evidence suggests that this building was erected sometime towards the end of the twelfth century as a chapel-of-ease to Mickelham church, which stands in its village on the opposite bank of the river. Communication between the village and West Humble was at one time effected by means of a wooden bridge, known as the "Praybridge," which stood approximately where the railway bridge now crosses the river by Fredley meadows.

West Humble Chapel is a small building, consisting of nave



WEST HUMBLE CHAPEL, FROM THE S.E.



WEST HUMBLE CHAPEL, FROM THE N.E.

and chancel only, and built of flint with some stone dressings. Not all the angles were quoined in freestone.

The dimensions are almost exactly identical with those of the parish church of Wisley, situated seven or eight miles away to the north-west.

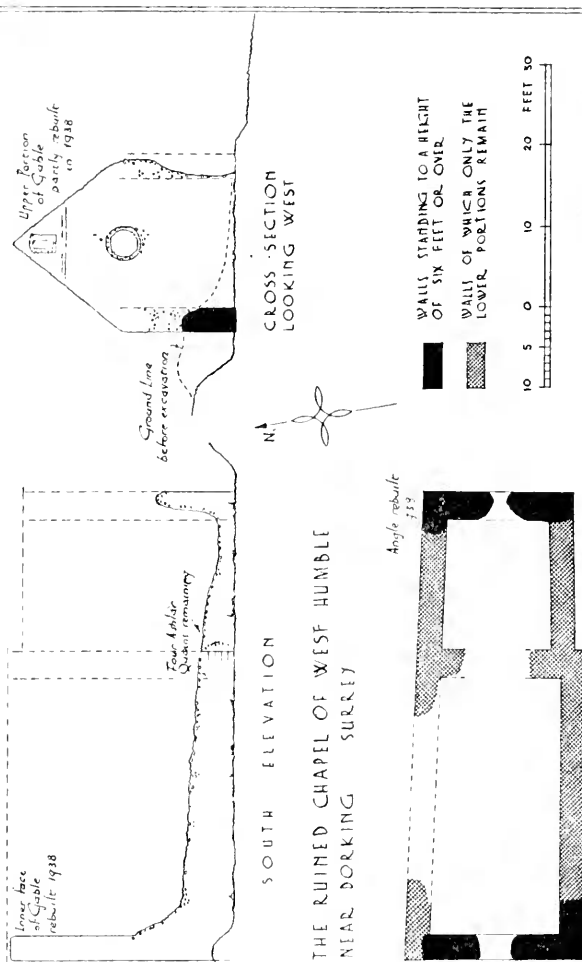
The plan shows that the village "pole" of sixteen feet in length was used in the setting-out of the building, as the nave is, at its west end, of this width and thirty-two feet in length. The chancel is sixteen feet long and about twelve feet wide. The walling is from three feet to three feet six inches in thickness, the gable walls being thicker than those at the sides of the building.

On the south side, the chancel sets in fifteen inches from the nave, but on the opposite side this break is omitted, the whole of the north wall of the building being skewed so as to make up for the different widths of chancel and nave. It would seem possible that this distortion was deliberately planned in order to allow for a subsequent enlargement of the chapel by building a north aisle along both nave and chancel.

The nave has a circular west window, and a small single-light window, possibly a late insertion, remains in the gable above it. The chancel had a single-light east window, the site of which may be seen. The west gable is complete, and shows the roof to have been pitched at about fifty degrees to the horizontal.

Four of the freestone quoins remain at the lower part of the south-east angle of the nave, and these stones show Norman axed tooling. The pitch of the roof is somewhat acute for a Norman building, and the proportions of both nave and chancel suggest the longer, thirteenth-century, type of plan rather than the more squat plans of the earlier twelfth-century chapels in the south of England. The circular window is a late-twelfth-century feature, and everything seems to point to the latter part of the century as the period of the foundation of the chapel.

The hamlet which it served may have been wiped out by the Black Death, or, more probably, depopulated during the agrarian troubles of the latter part of the fifteenth century and the early years of the next. Either for this reason, or because of the dissolution of the monastery which was its patron, the



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5, VERULAM BUILDINGS
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chapel appears to have become desecrated at some period soon after the year 1500. The chancel was allowed to fall to ruin, but the nave was kept in use, probably eventually as a farm building, until comparatively recent times.

Last year, the enclosure now represented by the fenced garden about the chapel was a wilderness of vegetation of all descriptions, including some large trees growing in the ruins themselves. The west gable and the remains of the east wall were completely covered in ivy, and hardly recognizable as masonry structures. The tiles on the south side of the nave roof had slid to the foot of the wall and formed a mound which had eventually buried the lower portions of that wall, after the upper part of it had been removed for road metal.

The clearance of the ivy, and those trees which were growing on the site of the walls, was a difficult operation. Some of the trees which had taken root on the site of the chancel were of considerable age and size, and the removal of their huge boles gave the excavators a good deal of trouble.

The ivy was found to have done much damage to the inner face of the upper part of the west gable, and some of the flint-work at this point had to be rebuilt.

The north part of the east gable had been so much weakened by the ivy that it was about to fall, and it was therefore found necessary to rebuild the north-east angle of the chancel to provide it with support.

The clearance of the interior of the chapel exposed no floor other than late mud floors in the nave which appeared to have belonged to the period when this was in use as a farm building. The interior of the chancel had been completely churned up by the tree-roots, one of which occupied the site of the altar.

The south side of the chapel was found to have been erected directly upon the chalk, but the ground fell away rapidly towards the bottom of the coombe, and the interior of the building seems to have been filled-in to level it. A trench cut across the site from north to south showed that the whole of the area to the north of the chapel was made-up ground.

Much of the middle part of the north wall of the nave had disappeared without trace, and with it the site of the original doorway. The site of the chancel arch, however, was clearly discoverable, although its actual span could not be determined.

The remains of the north wall being limited to its foundations only, and these having to be buried when the interior of the chapel was levelled for turfing, the sites of this wall and of the responds of the chancel arch were marked out in flints lain on the surface of the ground. The site of the doorway not being discoverable, the wall at that point has been shown continuous, it being considered undesirable to guess at the position of the entrance, although this could in fact be fairly accurately decided by analogy with other chapels of the same period.

The area to the north of the chapel has been cleared of vegetation, roughly levelled, turfed over, and provided with a few small trees to give a little æsthetic interest to the site, which has been enclosed with a new fence.

The exposure of the outer face of the south walls of nave and chancel necessitated the cutting of a sort of ha-ha, the slope of which has been planted with primroses.

The cutting of this trench unfortunately disturbed three skeletons, which were discovered lying close to the south wall of the chancel, and were obviously, from their attitude and position relative to the chapel, ordinary interments connected with it. The erection of the fence at the east end of the site disclosed the presence there of three more.

The mound formed by the fallen roofing material of the south side of the chancel contained a silver penny of Henry VIII, minted in London between the years 1544 and 1547. These pennies were actually de-monetized in 1561, but probably ceased to be in common circulation well before this year.

The soil immediately above the interments at this point contained a number of pieces of pottery, a report on which appeared in Vol. XLVI of S.A.C. A small fragment of a Ballarmine was found in the disturbed soil outside the north wall, near to the site of the north door. A number of pieces of window-glass were found from time to time scattered about the ruins, but they were too damaged for investigation into their antiquity.

Much still remains to be done in connection with the consolidation and repointing of the newly exposed walling, and it is hoped to effect these repairs from time to time as occasion occurs. But a great deal has already been achieved by the

Box Hill Committee, and much credit is due to their employee, Mr. Miles, for the care and interest which he always showed while the work was in progress under his charge.

Thanks are also due to Mr. Donald Bargman, of Dorking, who was frequently in attendance at the site, and supervised the difficult repairs to the east and west walls.

It is pleasant thus to record the rescue of an ancient building from desecration and neglect. It is to be hoped that it will not again be suffered to fall into such condition. Moreover, it is to be greatly desired that the surroundings of West Humble Chapel may not be spoilt by the erection of unsuitable buildings. . . . Or, indeed, of any buildings at all in the field immediately to the east of the chapel, where, it is known, so many of its one-time worshippers have been sleeping through the centuries in the peaceful soil of their lovely valley.