

# ANTIQUITIES OF THE PARISH CHURCH OF BATTERSEA.

*Read at a Meeting of the Society at the Church of St. Mary, Battersea,  
May 13th, 1911,*

BY

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## THE CHANCEL WINDOW.

THE East window in our old Parish Church may well be called the Bolingbroke window, and is one of the finest Heraldic windows in any church in London. The first impression of it is a beautiful harmony of colour produced by the warm reds, yellows and browns, most of which are produced upon a white glass; therefore it is a painted and stained window having very little coloured glass, except here and there a small piece of ruby or blue. In style the window is somewhat Flemish, a fact which may be accounted for because at the time of the Restoration a large number of artistic craftsmen came to this country from the Netherlands. A search through the Church records does not help in fixing the date of installation or the donor of the window, but there is little doubt that it was given by one of the Bolingbroke family, probably Henry St. John, Bart., who was made a Peer of the Realm in the reign of George I., with the title of Viscount St. John and Baron of Battersea: a fact which is recorded on a beautiful illuminated manuscript now in the Church vestry, and which is dated at the Herald's office, 6th May, 1719. That this nobleman was the donor of the window would also appear from the device in one of the top panels, wherein is depicted an

eagle with outspread wings with the hames or horse collar upon the breast (this device comes from a Norman ancestor) surmounted by a Viscount's coronet. This seems to be strong proof of the identity of the donor, who would desire to make known the ancestry of his family. In the records of the parish, in the minutes of the Trustees for rebuilding the Parish Church of Battersea, 3rd November, 1774, the following statement is found:—"By ajournment at the Castle, ordered that the painted window in the Chancel be placed over the altar," "the rebuilding commenced in 1777."

The window is lancet shape, and consists of three principal panels or lights with smaller and irregular lights at the top. About the centre of each light there is a heraldic coat of arms, and underneath each of these there is a portrait. A narrow border with various small shields of arms runs round the entire window.

The small circular light surmounting the central panel has the Tudor rose with Royal Crown. Below this the central light or panel of the window has the Royal Arms, with supporters and the motto, "Dieu et mon droit." The quarterings include the French lilies which, it will be remembered, disappeared from the Royal Arms in 1801. Underneath this is a portrait of Henry VII., with the inscription, "King Henry VII., grandson to Margaret Beauchamp, wife to Sir Oliver St. John, ancestor to the family of St. John of Lydiare Trego," etc. The left-hand light contains a portrait of the Duchess of Somerset, with the inscription, "Margaret Beaucleare, grandmother to Henry ye VII. from Patshull, Grandison, Trego, ancestors to ye family of St. John of Lydiare, Trego and Bleisho, Earls of Bul-

lingbrooke." The motto under the coat of arms in this panel is "Deus providebit," and above, in the small light at the top, there is a crest, Spread Eagle surmounted by a Viscount's coronet. In the right-hand light there is a portrait of Queen Elizabeth, with the inscription, "Queen Elizabeth, daughter of Henry ye VIII., by Anna da of Thomas Bullen, Earl of Wiltshire, great great grand-daughter of Ann, daughter of Thomas Leighton, wife of St. John St. John, of Lydiare, Trego."

The motto under the shield of arms is "Sanctus in Terra Beatus in Cœlio." The small light at the top has the Falcon with a crown encircling its neck, which is the crest of the St. John family.

It is a great misfortune that this beautiful window shews signs of decay, which is not surprising considering the corrosive nature of the atmosphere in this particular district. It is hoped that the decay has been arrested, as our late Vicar had protecting glass placed on the outside.

The previous Church being a Gothic building, the old window did not fit the new framework very well and there are signs of cutting down or removal of borders, indeed some of the painted glass may be covered up by the frame, giving the impression which would be produced by a badly mutilated engraving where the margin and part of the subject has been cut away. Despite this circumstance, this memorial window remains one of the most interesting possessions of our old Church. It may be useful to note that the quartering of the Royal Arms in the centre light is the same as that adopted by William III. and Mary. The arrangement in the following reign, Anne, is quite different.

When the claim of the Bolingbrokes to be related with the Tudors is examined it seems to rest upon small grounds and entirely on the female side, and is as follows:—The widow of Sir Oliver St. John (who died in 1437, leaving two sons) took as her second husband John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset; their daughter became the wife of Edmund Tudor, Earl of Richmond, and the mother of Henry VII., and so on! The claim seems somewhat remote.

One of the most interesting members of this family was Oliver St. John, who was the 1st Lord of the Manor of Battersea and Wandsworth and the first of the family to settle in Battersea. He was brought up to the law, but accident or inclination made him a soldier. Happening to quarrel with a captain of the guard to Queen Elizabeth a duel followed in which the captain was killed. Oliver fled the country and served abroad under Lord Vere until the Queen's death; afterwards he went to Bohemia, serving in the wars, and from there to France, where he became acquainted with the Duke of Buckingham, under whose patronage he was knighted and sent to Ireland as General of the Forces, Lord Treasurer and Lord Deputy, and in 1620, by reason of his descent from an heiress of the Grandisons, was created Viscount Grandison of Limerick, on condition that the title should in default of male issue pass to Sir Edward Villiers, brother to the Duke. In 1626 he was made an English Peer by the title of Baron Tregoze of Highworth in Wilts; he died in 1630, and one of the oldest lead coffin plates in the crypt records this fact.\*

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\* Manning and Bray, "History of Surrey."

It is rather difficult not to confuse the identity of the three famous St. Johns who died early in the 18th century. Sir Walter St. John, Bart., who died in 1708, aged 86, was eminent for his piety and moral character; he was the founder of the well-known school in Battersea and he furnished it with that stirring motto: "Rather deathe than false of faythe." His son, Sir Henry St. John, was created Viscount St. John and died 1742, aged 90; and he was the father of the famous Henry St. John, the statesman who was created Viscount Bolingbroke in 1712. Viscount Bolingbroke was buried in the crypt of the former Church, and a fine monument by Rubillac was erected to his memory which is now on the wall of the Gallery; the inscription is as follows:—"Here lies Henry St. John, in the reign of Queen Anne, Secretary of War, Secretary of State and Viscount Bolingbroke; In the days of King George I. and King George II. something more and better, etc., etc. He died 12th December, 1751, aged 73. In the same vault lie the remains of his second wife, Mary Clara des Champs de Marielly, Marchioness of Villette and niece of Madame de Maintenon, she died in 1751, aged 74."

By the side of this monument and in the window recess there is a gilt coffin plate "removed from the Crypt" to the memory of Angelica Magdalen St. John, daughter to Mr. Pellisary, Superintendent of all the ships and gallies of France and Treasurer General of ye marines, wife of the Right Hon. Henry Lord Viscount St. John, objt. August 5th, 1736. The Arms in this case have the same device, viz., the hames and a Viscount's coronet as in the window.

## THE MONUMENTS.

Taking them in the order of size and importance, there is a large one in the North Gallery with the busts of a gentleman and his wife, Oliver Nicolai St. John de Lydiard, which has a Latin Inscription. The busts are in the costume of the period, 1630. This is the famous Oliver, 1st Lord of the Manor of Battersea and Wandsworth. To the left of the chancel arch is one to the memory of Sir John Fleet, an elaborate monument with cherubs, shields of arms, drapery and rococo ornament, mace, sword, and cap of maintenance; also Cornucopia with fruit and flowers, and a laudatory inscription which was the fashion in those days. It runs as follows:—

“Sacred to the memory of Sir John Fleët, Knt.-Alderman of the City of London, who was unanimously elected Lord Mayor of that city in 1693. He received Royal Favour and all marks of the greatest honour and esteem from his fellow citizens, having been one of their representatives in Parliament 13 years, and constantly trusted in their higher stations, in all of which offices and honours he was universally applauded, died 6th July, 1712, aged 65.” This gentleman’s claim to distinction has passed down to our own time in indelible characters. He seems to have worked hard in the public service, and he rose from a small beginning to influence and wealth. According to one authority, Sir John commenced life as a sugar baker, to another as a wine cooper. He became Governor of the East India Company, Sheriff of London, Captain of the City Horse Volunteers, and Lord Mayor. Upon his accession to this office a Pageant called the Triumphs of London was performed at the Grocers’ Hall.

On the walls of the South gallery is a well-designed monument by Coade, of Lambeth, 1792, which represents a female figure weeping over an urn, and is classic in style. It is to the memory of John Camden, Esq., who died in 1780, and his daughter, Elizabeth, wife of James Neild: also a tablet to Harriet, the daughter of John Camden.

Near the entrance to the Gallery is a tablet to the memory of Richard Rothwell, Alderman, and formerly High Sheriff of the City of London, July, 1821. On the left, to the eldest daughter of R. Rothwell, and wife of Henry Pounsett.

An interesting monument is that to Holles St. John, the youngest son of Viscount St. John by his second wife. This young man was half-brother to Lord Bolingbroke, and appears to have been of an amiable character. Close by is the monument, surmounted by a bust, to Edward Wynter, 1685-6, whose adventures are recorded upon a tablet in low relief, also in flattering verse, as follows:—

“Born to be great in fortune as in mind,  
 Too great to be within an isle confined;  
 Young, helpless, friendless, seas unknown he tryd,  
 But English courage all these wants supply.”

As a record of old Battersea will be found a useful Tythe map, dated 1838. At that period the houses were concentrated round Church Street, High Street, the Square, and a few in Lombard Road.

On the staircase leading to the North Gallery is a wall tablet to Russell Manners, 4th son of Lord William Manners, a General in the Army, and Colonel in His

Majesty's 26th Regiment of Light Dragoons, who died at Billericay, in Essex, 2nd September, 1800, aged 63.

On the staircase leading to the South Gallery there is a large and somewhat florid monument to James Bull, 1713, with a shield charged with three bulls' heads, and the head of a bull as a crest. The style of the monument shows the influence of Grinling Gibbons, and there is some fine workmanship in the cherubs and other details which make it an excellent example of this class of work. There are also some smaller tablets to the same family, which appears to have intermarried with the family of Sir John Fleet.

In the south wall of the South Aisle there are monuments to Thomas Astle, F.R.S., F.S.A., keeper of the records of the Tower of London, and a trustee of the British Museum—died 1803; Sir George Wombwell, Bart., of Sherwood Lodge, and his wife, 1816; Rt. Rev. John Inglis, D.D., Lord Bishop of Nova Scotia, and others.

William Curtis, author of "Flora Londinensis," was buried in the island space facing the entrance to the Church and near a monument surrounded by railings; a flat stone covers the grave, and the lettering is nearly obliterated; but what is far more important, a copy of his book "Flora Londinensis," in five volumes, beautifully illustrated, exists at the Central Library, Lavender Hill, and may be seen in the reference room. The book is upon such plants as grow wild in the environs of London, and was published in 1777, the year when the rebuilding of our present Church commenced. Curtis was born at Alton, in Hampshire, in 1746; as a boy his love of plants was so great that he would spend all his

pocket-money in buying Botanical books; he was apprenticed to his grandfather, John Curtis, a Doctor practising at Alton, but determined to retire from the medical profession and devote his whole time to Botanical study. He was appointed "Demonstrator of Plants" to the Company of Apothecaries of London, and he established a Botanical Garden (the first of its kind in London) at Lambeth Marsh, afterwards removed to Brompton. Many of the field grasses now in common use were first introduced by William Curtis, and he also gave us the useful vegetable, Sea Kale. He died suddenly in 1799, aged 53; on his tombstone, now obliterated, was written:—

"While common herbs shall spring wild,  
Or garden cherish all that's blithe and gay,  
So long his works shall praise dear Nature's child,  
So long his memory suffer no decay."

#### THE CRYPT.

It is difficult to fix the date of the present structure, with its short stone columns and brick arches supporting the floor of the Church above. It has a Gothic look older in appearance than the Georgian Church surmounting it. The supporting walls are independent of the walls of the Church.

There are many indications which point to the supposition that this was part of the old Church, and was left standing on account of the difficulty in dealing with the coffins deposited there.

It will be observed that the outside circular windows under the first stone string course are not arranged to

light or ventilate the Crypt; in some instances the piers and springing of the arches completely hide the circular space of the window, and in others a small portion of the window only gives light. The setting out of the piers is irregular, not being upon the usual rectangular plan.

In consultation with some members of the congregation qualified to give an opinion, I have arrived at the conclusion that the Crypt of the previous Church was not disturbed, and that the present Church walls were built outside it, and many of the old bricks from the former structure were used up to the stone string course. This view also receives support from Mr. Hudson, of St. John's Hill, whose firm had the work of clearing the Crypt in 1872; before this clearance, I am told the floor was from two to three feet higher than at present, some of the coffins were buried, some protected by brickwork, and others on shelves, in all about 300; the remains were interred within the Churchyard and the coffin plates preserved. Those remaining are of lead, brass and copper, forming a most interesting and probably unique collection, the earliest dating from 1630. I do not remember to have seen anything similar in any London Church, and we are indebted to our late Vicar for providing the funds for rescuing them from destruction. There is reason to believe that many have disappeared; the remainder are arranged in the window recess and on the piers of the Crypt.

They are fine examples of repoussé and engraved lead work, the earliest dated 1630, to Sir Oliver St. John, first Lord of the Manor of Battersea and Wandsworth; this is in a decayed condition and shows signs

of the corrosive action of lime and damp; others are fresh and clear, the lettering firmly engraved with the character belonging to late 18th century work; the borders are in relief and engraved. Leadworking seems to have been much in vogue at this period, as may be seen by the handsome water cisterns, spout headings, figures, vases, etc., found in old houses of the 17th and 18th centuries; many of these artistic objects may be seen in museums. It is well to notice in these coffin plates the gradual decadence of the hand wrought and the development of the plate stamped out by machinery, the name only being engraved by hand; this occurs about 1800. There are several small plates of beautiful design, the oblong shape used for boys and the diamond for girls; some of these when cleaned showed traces of having been silvered over, probably by the same method of silver deposit practised by the manufacturers of old Sheffield plate, who deposited a coating of silver upon the leaden relief ornaments used upon their candlesticks and other articles.

Amongst the plates to children will be found one to the Hon. Miss Charlotte St. John, 1762, aged 2 years; Ann Leuasor Akerman, 1763, aged 3 years; Mary Broadhead, 1771, aged 7 years; Master Henry Chatfield, 1719, aged 2 years. There is also one engraved on copper to the son of the Earl of Lichfield, 1686, aged 1 year, 10 months, 9 days. One connects us with York House, which stood on the site of Price's candle factory, and was at the time the home of the Battersea enamels; it is to Francis Calverley, of Leeds, in Yorkshire, died at York House in this town on her return from Bristol Hot Wells, 29th January, 1777, aged 25.

Many names of old Battersea families will be found amongst these plates, viz., Akerman, Carkess, Wix, Willis, Varden, Smith, Rothwell, Noble, etc.

The present entrance to the Crypt from the Churchyard was made in 1872. A stone slab marks the position of the grave of Lord Bolingbroke, whose remains I am informed were not disturbed.

#### CHARITIES AND RECORDS.

Battersea is rich in charities. On the panels in front of the gallery (in gilt letters, almost obliterated) will be seen a record of the charities formerly belonging to the Old Church. These bequests were left to the poor of Battersea by charitable churchmen at a time when the poor-law either did not exist, or was administered in the harshest manner. The income in many instances is derived from investments in Government stock, in other instances from investments in land which has increased in value.

Under the London Government Act of 1899, these charities were transferred to the Borough Council, and are administered by a committee of members, with the addition of the Vicar of Battersea.

These charities are now distributed at the Town Hall during Christmas week, and all poor persons in the borough are eligible, and may apply for forms to be obtained at the Council's offices, Lavender Hill. The only one still remaining to be distributed by the Wardens of the Church is a portion of the Pavin Charity, which is distributed in the form of bread every month at the Parish Church.

Amongst the names of the donors will be found:—

Lady St. John, A.D. 1704, £100 for apprenticing a poor boy or girl.

Mr. Charles Wix, 1704, bequeathed £200 for clothing and fitting out boys when apprenticed from Sir Walter St. John's School.

Mr. Henry Smith, 1625, bequeathed certain sums to be appropriated to the purchase of apparel of one colour to the impotent and aged poor (or else in bread, flesh and meat on each Sabbath day).

Mr. John Banks, 1716, Citizen and Haberdasher, bequeathed 50s. per annum each to five poor single men and five poor single women of the age of 40 years and upwards, inhabitants of Battersea not in receipt of parochial relief.

Mrs. Anne Cooper, 1721, gave £300 to purchase an estate, the profits to be disposed of to the poor people not receiving alms, or to apprentice poor children with the approbation of Henry Ld. Viscount St. John and his heirs.

Mr. John Edmonds, 1708, bequeathed £10 per annum for putting out boys as apprentices.

Sir Walter St. John, 1700, founded a free school for 20 poor boys of this Parish, £570.

Mr. J. Pavin, 1806, £1,000, the interest to be disposed of as follows:— $\frac{1}{4}$  in aid of the funds of Sir Walter St. John's School,  $\frac{1}{4}$  to be given in bread of the Sunday every fourth week,  $\frac{1}{4}$  to be laid out for poor aged women, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  for poor aged men inhabiting the workhouse who are in the habit of attending divine service in Battersea Church.

The charities devoted to Sir Walter St. John's School are still administered for the benefit of that admirable Institution, and in accordance with the Founder's intention the 20 free seats are allotted.

In the S.W. porch over the door will be found two boards with semicircular tops which give an additional list of benefactions (mostly small sums) dating from 1682 to 1713; some of these are repetitions of the bequests on the gallery panels, several are for apprenticing poor children, a duty which at that time seems to have been considered of the highest importance, and to which we in these days seem inclined to return.

#### THE REGISTERS.

Among many interesting links with the past history of Old Battersea Church and the inhabitants of the Parish are the records of births, deaths and marriages, commencing in the year 1559; many of these were beautifully kept in writing which shews a fine example of penmanship, and which, if funds permitted, would be well worthy of reproduction. One volume, dated 1751 to 1778, was compiled by the Vicar, Thomas Church, from previous registers. There are also tithe charges, indentures of apprenticeship of boys to the sea, map of the Parish of S. Mary, Battersea, 1838, and of the Hamlet of Penge, 1844

There are many interesting details set forth in these old records of the Parish. One entry, dated 1695, is pathetic:—

“Buried, Gervas How, infant of 2 years and a half, son of Mr. How, Vicar of Battersea, which child was

drown'd in a little tub of water in the Vicarage back yard, Aug. 29, 1695."

In the same year we have:—

"1695, married, Mr. John Bull, of Clapham, to Miss Frances Fleet, daughter of Sir John Fleet."

One relates to a pall, and is as follows:—

"At a vestry held 27 May, 1712. That if any one person in a family in this Parish hath not been a benefactor or contributed to the purchase or buying of the Pall and hath a desire to make use of it at any time for his or their decd. friend or friends, those persons upon every such single occasion shall pay 5s. and those who have contributed 2s. 6d."

It also seems that fines inflicted upon law-breakers were distributed amongst the poor.

"Recd. from Wm. Ash, of Lambeth, for being drunk, and gave it to poor people at ye same time, as ye law directs, 5s."

"1759, ordered that the hanging of linen to dry in the Churchyard be recommended to another Vestry as a great nuisance."

"Edwd. Wilton, for swearing, 3s., and gave it away to poor people."

"Recd. of Robt. Chapman for drawing drink, not having a licence, 20s., and gave it away as ye law directs."

It seems that certain fines were paid if people were buried in an unusual manner. In some parts of the country, more especially in Sussex, people were ordered to be buried in wool, and the fact recorded; this was done to benefit the agricultural industry.

“Received from Mr. Boulter, being buried in linen, £2 10s., and gave it away to several poor people as ye law directs.”

The osier beds situated on the river bank and small intersecting streams must have been a source of profit to the Church, as appears from the following entry:—

“1770, from Mr. Pryor, 1 year’s rent for the osier grounds, £12.”

#### THE CHURCH PLATE.

On one chalice is engraved: “The gift of Sr. Edward Winter and his Lady Emme, to the Parish of Battersey, in Surrey, 1682.”

On its companion the inscription is: “Belonging to the Parish of Battersey, in Surry, 1736.”

The two handsome flagons bear the inscription: “The gift of Thomas Waller, Esq., to the Parish of Battersea, A.D. 1778.”

On the larger alms dish the inscription is: “The gift of George Errington, Esq., to the Parish of Battersea, 1778.” And on the smaller one: “The gift of Joseph and Mary Beechcroft, to the Parish of Battersey, in Surry, 1736.”

#### SOME INTERESTING DATES AND DATA.

Much information still remains to be gathered respecting Old Battersea. There is little doubt that in the early days, when the river spread out over the low-lying ground, there existed a ford not far from the Church, as beautiful bronze weapons of fine design have been discovered in the river bed, notably a Celtic shield

of fine workmanship, now in the British Museum. The earliest settlement appears to have been upon and near the site of this Church.

Also, that a Church existed here in the 13th Century under the control of Westminster Abbey, as may be seen from the list of Vicars at the foot of the gallery stairs.

The building of the present Parish Church dates from 1770, but there are some things about it which go farther back.

Near the Churchwardens' seat there are fixed two wands with metal knobs at the top. These recall the ritual of old-fashioned days. It is a tradition that when Battersea was a fashionable village—with the next best show of Sunday carriages to St. George's, Hanover Square, whose bounds meet those of Battersea in the centre of Chelsea Bridge—it was the custom of the Vicar to proceed in his full canonicals from the Vicarage to the Church, while the beadle, in gold-laced coat and hat, went before him bearing one of these staves.

The inscription on the larger Beadle's Staff has the quaint inscription:—

“Vertue and integrity are there own fence  
Care not for envey or what comes from thence.  
The gift of Capt. Tho. Stibbs, Anno 1736.”

On the smaller Staff the inscription is:—

“Nicholas Pether } Church Wardens of  
Francis Gilliard } Battersea, March 1, 1737.”

It is said that in the 16th century Battersea was under water at every high tide, and in Mary's reign a rough embankment was made.

There is a map of Battersea in 1605 which shows but few houses. This map is taken from the description in the survey made by the surveyors of the Crown lands under a Special Commission and by a jury on oath in 1603, showing boundaries between Battersea and other districts.

Battersea was a corn-growing district, and numerous mills existed, which may be seen in old engravings.

In 1663 there were 156 houses chargeable for the health tax and 123 not chargeable (Nat. Hist. and Antiquities of Surrey, 1719).

Difficulty of approach seems to have prevented the early development of Battersea, the only approach from the North being by ferry from Chelsea until 1771, when the first Battersea Bridge was built by Earl Spencer.

York House (sometimes called York Place) was formerly the residence of the Bishops of the diocese, and afterwards became the home of the manufacture of the famous Battersea enamels; but as this industry lasted but ten years, it is astonishing to meet with so many so-called Battersea enamels. They were also made at Bilston. York House stood upon the banks of the creek which enters the river at Price's Candle Works.

The rights of common over Battersea fields were purchased by the Commissioners of Battersea Park under an Act of 1853, the purchase money being applied to the erection of Lammas Hall. The fields were of evil report, being the resort of the roughest characters, and a public-house stood on the river bank, known as the "Red House." The land was also known as the Marsh, and

was intersected by numerous watercourses. Upon this marsh a duel was fought between the Duke of Wellington and Earl of Winchelsea, 1829. Charles II nearly met his death at the hands of Col. Blood on the river bank.