

THE DESECRATED CHURCHES OF
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

DEANERY OF BUCKINGHAM (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 69.)

BUCKINGHAM. — St. John's Chapel. — *Addenda.* — This Chapel, having been fitted up with seats from the old Church, was used for Divine Service from A.D. 1770 to A.D. 1780, during the erection of the present Parish Church, which was consecrated in the latter year. In the year 1781 it became used for a Sunday School, which is supposed to have been the second Sunday School established in England. This school, though not at first in connection with the Church, was afterwards merged in the National Schools which were established A.D. 1819.

2.—At BORETON, a hamlet in the parish of Buckingham, there was a house with a large arched doorway standing in Willis's time, which was said to have been a Chapel. This tradition was strongly supported, if not confirmed, by the fact that the ground around the house was found to contain the remains of human bodies.

3.—GAWCOT, another hamlet of Buckingham, formerly possessed a Chapel dedicated to St. Catherine, the site of which is commemorated by a field, named Chapel Close, and the lane leading to it bearing the name of Chapel Lane. No remains of the Chapel existed in Browne Willis's time; and this hamlet, more than a mile from the Parish Church, and containing a population of six or seven hundred, was left destitute of a house of prayer by the destruction of the Chapel, for probably some centuries. In 1806, a new Chapel was built and endowed by Mr. West; but in less than twenty years it became so entirely dilapidated that it was necessary to rebuild it, which was done in 1828, at the cost of £1,700, and a Parsonage-house was also then erected.

4.—BIDDLESDEN or BETESDENE. — This small parish lies about six miles from Buckingham, on the borders of Northamptonshire. Here was a Cistercian Convent, the Church of which was also used by the inhabitants of the village; but at the dissolution of monasteries it was dismantled, together with the abbey. The bells, five in

number, were conveyed to Denham, near Uxbridge, where they were subsequently recast into eight. "The ruins of the Church and Abbey House," says Browne Willis, "were left in good part standing when I visited it, Anno 1712, and there were then to be seen the walls of the East side of the Cloyster, and a part of the Tower, together with a small Chapel and the Chapter House, which was an handsome arched room of about 40 foot square, supported by four pillars. In the Chapel lay the broken effigies which was on the tomb of one of the Lord Zouch's: it was of alabaster, and in armour. But besides the Lord Zouch, there were, as I have seen, several persons of note buried here, particularly the Founder's family, the Bosco's, and divers others, as of the Family of the Billings and the Lovetts, as appears by the inscriptions which I have met with, which were affixed to their gravestones, on brass plates, as follows:— 'Orate pro Animabus Thomas Billing, quondam Capitalis Justiciarii Domini Regis ad Placita coram ipso Rege tenend. et Catharine Uxoris ejus. Qui quidem Thomas obiit 5 die Mensis Maii, A.D. 1481, et dicta Catharina obiit 8^o die Mensis Martii, A.D. 1477. Quarum Animabus propitiatur Deus.'

Under this inscription were the portraits of five sons and four daughters.

On another, — ^fHic jacet Thomas Billing Arm. Filius et Heres Thomas Billings Justiciarii Domini Regis, qui obiit 23 die Mensis Martii, A.D. 1508. Cujus Animae propitiatur Deus.'

These two gravestones were, as I am informed, removed into Wappenham Church; but I suppose their bodies were left here.

'Hic jacet Thomas Lovet Armiger, qui obiit, 16 Die Mensis Februarii, 1491. Cujus Animae Propitiatur Deus. Amen.'

I have preserved a drawing of the Ruins of the Chapter House, and of the said Lord Zouch's Effigies."

About five-and-twenty years after his first visit, Browne Willis again visited this spot, and has left the following record of the change:— "The present proprietor, Henry Sayer, Esq., has so totally demolished everything, that not the least Remains appear, or even the site of any building whatsoever, where the Abbey

stood, or any of its offices. In digging about it, there were, as he informed me, several stone coffins found, one of which was most scandalously perverted to profane uses, and several thousand of human bones removed, and thrown away, as he gloried in, to level the ground, together with the rubbish, with great indecency." *

5.—Besides the Abbey Church, there was in the village of Biddlesden a small Chapel dedicated to St. Margaret. "This Chapel," says Willis, "adjoined a dwelling-house, and had a tiled roof and a turret with one bell. It was a very plain fabric, entirely destitute of ornament, and not more than forty or fifty feet long, and sixteen or seventeen wide."

After the destruction of the Conventual Church, the parishioners used this Chapel for Divine Service, and also for interment. Amongst other tombs and inscriptions, it contained one to Francis Dayrell, the son of Paul Dayrell, of Lillingston, who died in A.D. 1614; one to Dorothy Verney, wife of Edmund Verney, Esq., and daughter of Sir Edmund Peckham, Knight, who died in A.D. 1547; and also one to Susan, the wife of George Peckham, who died in A.D. 1555. The two latter memorials had effigies in brass, and the last had a long and curious epitaph, beginning thus :—

" Here Susan sleeps, George Peckham's wife,
Which Death in child-bed took;
Who xiii. months in marriage spent,
And then this Life forsook:
The only heir of Henry Webbe,
The chieftest joy he hadde ;
The quiet stay, and greatest happe,
That made her husband glad."

Edward Coles, priest, in his will, dated 8 October, 1557, bequeathed his cross-bow and arrows to his master, Sir Robert Peckham; his old Mass-book to the "Church of Westbury; and 12s. to Sir Leonard Hurst, priest, to pray for his soul; and desired to be buried in "St. Margaret's Church, at Bitlesden."

This little Church or Chapel, which was entire when Willis visited it in 1712, had, before his next visit, been totally destroyed by the same Henry Sayer who demolished the remains of the Abbey, and so wantonly profaned the sepulchres of the dead. He appears, however,

* Browne Willis's History of Buckingham,

to have felt some degree of shame in violating the tombs of those who had been comparatively but recently buried, and so caused a low arch to be turned over those in this Chapel which he had entirely destroyed.

6.—There was also another small Chapel at Eversaw, a hamlet in the parish of Biddlesden, which was dedicated to St. Nicholas, and given about A.D. 1180 to Luffield Priory. About A.D. 1291, it was assessed for Pope Nicholas's Tax, at 13s. 4d., and undoubtedly was in existence in A.D. 1551, *probably* at a much later period; but in Browne Willis's time not a vestige of it remained, and its site had been diverted to common purposes.

Thus in the small parish of Biddlesden not less than three consecrated Churches and Cemeteries have been entirely destroyed, and their sites desecrated. The ancient Abbey Church appears to have been for some centuries the only Parochial Church, as no other, except the small Chapel at Eversaw, is mentioned in Pope Nicholas's Taxation. No description is given of this Church in Dugdale's Monasticon, nor in any other work or record that has come under my observation; nor is it known exactly when the parishioners ceased to use it for Divine worship; but as the "bells, lead, and other buildings" were valued among "the moveable goods" when the Abbey surrendered to the King, the Church was probably robbed of its roof and internal furniture immediately after its dissolution.

The Chapel at Eversaw was doubtless chiefly designed as a Chantry for the family of the founder, Hugh de Eversaw; but, as it is named in Pope Nicholas's Taxation, it was most probably used for Divine Service by the inhabitants of the hamlet.

The other Chapel in the village of Biddlesden was unquestionably only founded as a Chantry or Oratory for the proprietors of the residence to which it was attached; although, as Willis suggests, it might have been occasionally used by the parishioners during the existence of the Abbey Church, and probably its surrounding enclosure was the ordinary parochial burying-place.

Mr. Sayer having demolished the last consecrated Church in his parish, "fitted up," says Willis, "an unconsecrated Chapel in the left wing, or office, of his dwelling-house," which, apparently, is the only Church

that Biddlesden now possesses, and which must have been constructed some time between A.D. 1712 and 1735, and not, as stated by the "Ecclesiastical Topography," in the time of Charles II. As I have not been able to visit this parish, and my letter of enquiry about it being one of the very few which received no answer, I have no recent information on the subject; but as it appears Biddlesden Church has not been consecrated, I trust it will ere long receive due attention from the Right Rev. the President of our Society.

7—LILLINGSTONE DAYRELL lies five miles from Buckingham, on the border of Northamptonshire, and contained a portion of the ancient Priory of Luffield. In the reign of Henry III., Robert Dayrell, and Ralph, his son, gave to Luffield Priory "a certain place in his wood at Lillingstone," in which a Chapel was built and dedicated to St. Thomas the Martyr. When Browne Willis visited the ruins of the Priory, this Chapel was still standing, but had been converted into a dwelling-house.

8.—STOWE.—BOYCOT, a hamlet of this parish, had once a Chapel of Ease, but having become entirely depopulated and included in the grounds of the mansion, the Chapel has long since been swept away, and its site passed into oblivion.

[The writer requests corrections and additional information on this series of Papers.]