

THE DESECRATED CHURCHES OF  
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

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DEANERY OF MURSLEY.

15. IVINGHOE ASTON is a large hamlet in the parish of Ivinghoe, and situated in a picturesque valley at the foot of Beacon Hill. It is distant about two miles by the carriage road from Ivinghoe Church.

The Chapel which formerly stood in this hamlet was dedicated to St. James, and founded by Ralph Halywell, but at what period is not known. The earliest notice I have met with is in the Patent Rolls of 11th Edward III., A.D. 1337. In A.D. 1395, John de Comerly, Incumbent of Aston Chapel, Ivinghoe, exchanged it with John Houchens for the Vicarage of Kimble Parva.\* In A.D. 1547, the Commissioners appointed to enquire concerning Colleges, Chantries, &c., made the following Return:—

"Aston Chapell or Chantrie, founded by Radulph Halywell, to the intent that a Priest should be found to singe Mass for the easement of the inhabitants of the Hamlet of Aston, and to pray for the soules of the said Radulph, his Father, and his Grandfather, his Grandmother, and his Wife; and also to saye every daye in the week Dirige for the soules of the persons aforesaid.

"The said Chantrie or Chapell is situated in Aston aforesaid, and is distant from the Parish of Ivinghoe by Estimation one mile and an half, and there is three hundred and forty houseling people (*i.e.* Communicants)† 'within the said Parish, and none do helpe the Vycar, but only the said Priest; and there is resorting dayley to the said Chantrie a great parte of the Parishioners, which cannot come to their Parish Church conveniently in the winter; and soe it is righte necessary."‡ Among "the ornaments of the said Chappell, one Chalice worth 40s., in the hands of Sir Thomas Barker, now Incumbent. And it does appear by the Foundation that Diverse other lands and Quit Pence should be belonging to the said Chantrie, which, is unknown to the Incumbent and other Inhabitants at this day. And the said Chappell was repaired by the Parishioners at their own charges." ‡

By this Return, which was given A.D. 1547, it appears evident that the Chapel at Aston was founded chiefly as

\* Lipscomb, vol ii., p. 352.

† From Housel or Housle to give or receive the Holy Eucharist.

"A Priest, a priest, Sir Aldingar,

While I am a man alive,

Me for to housle and shrive."

‡ Browne Willis's MS.

a Chapel of Ease for the inhabitants of the hamlet; that there was a daily service there, at which a large proportion of the three hundred and forty communicants of the parish attended; that the Chapel was repaired by the inhabitants — a clear proof that it was not a mere family sepulchral Chantry — and that the Chaplain officiated as assistant Curate to the Vicar of Ivinghoe. Well then might the Commissioners state in their Return "And soe it is righte necessary." But our next notice gives a melancholy proof how such necessary things as Chapels of Ease were then often regarded.

In 4th Edward VI., A.D. 1550, a Grant was made to Thomas Reeves and others of the "Chantry Chapels of Dytton, Olney, DAGNAL, IVINGHOE-ASTON, Chipping Wicombe, and Fenney Stratford, with the stone walls, Bells and Lead, and Waste Lands, to the said Chapells belonging, to be held by them, their Heirs, &c., for ever."\*

The Chapel at Aston, however, was not then demolished, or diverted from its sacred purposes. For by another Record, dated 1553, it is stated that "Sir Thomas Barker was Incumbent, and taught the children of the Hamlet to read, and held no other preferment."† The annual value of the Chapel is also stated to be £3 6s. 8d., "over and above all Reprises." ‡

When the Chapel was demolished is not known. No remains of it have existed within the recollection of any living person, but the spot on which it stood is still known. Within the memory of many persons it bore the name of "Chapel Hill," and is so marked on the parish map. It contained rather more than half-an-acre of turf land, enclosed by a fence; and two old people still living have heard their grandfather say that within his recollection the mounds of graves were distinctly visible. It continued thus marked and protected by a surrounding fence, and its ancient turf was left undisturbed till about thirty years ago, when this district was enclosed by an Act of Parliament. It is some satisfaction to find that this consecrated burial-ground, even after the destruction of its sacred House of Prayer, continued to be respected down to so recent a period as 1820; and it is said that Lord Bridgewater, who purchased this pro-

\* Browne Willis's MS. † Lipscomb. ‡ Lipscomb, vol. iii., p. 398.

perty, having been informed of the tradition respecting the inclosure of "Chapel Hill," intended to keep it in his own hands to secure it from further desecration, but he died soon after it came into his possession.

Adjoining "Chapel Hill" was another ancient enclosure of about an acre and a half in extent, called "Chapel Wick," on which stood an old house that has been pulled down within the memory of many living persons. This was probably the manse or Chaplain's residence. Another ancient enclosure, containing nearly four acres, called "Chantry Close," and separated from Chapel Wick only by the carriage road, was doubtless part of the endowment of the demolished Chapel. When this district was enclosed, about thirty years ago, "Chapel Hill" and "Chapel Wick" became part of allotment gardens, and are still used for the same purpose. The tenant of "Chapel Hill" states that in digging up a portion of this ground he found large wrought stones, such as apparently had been the jambs and heads of doorways or windows of the ancient Chapel; and in other parts of his garden he still continues to dig up human bones.

The present value of this Chapelry may be easily estimated with a probability of accuracy. We find it was exchanged for the Vicarage of Little Kimble, which now stands in the Clergy List at £107; and by comparing its value in the time of Edward VI. with that of neighbouring Livings, nearly the same result will be produced.

The population of Aston, as given by Lysons, was, in 1801, two hundred and thirty, and is probably double that number at the present time. Yet this large hamlet, which must necessarily contain many aged and infirm persons, unable to attend their Parish Church, has been deprived of an ancient Chapel of Ease, and the services of a resident Pastor. The endowment of the Incumbency, which would now have been worth at least £100 a-year, has long since been annexed to private property; and the consecrated burial-ground, still abounding with human remains, has been converted into a garden to produce food for human beings.

16. There was also in the parish of Ivihghoe another large hamlet called St. Margaret's, from a Convent of Benedictine nuns, dedicated to a Saint Margaret. This Nunnery, which was founded in the reign of Henry I. by

William Giffard, Bishop of Winchester, "was valued at its suppression, in the reign of Henry VIII., at £14 3s. 1d.,"\* and soon afterwards was converted into a private residence, as stated in the following notice by Leland:—

"Mergate was a Nunnery of late Tyme. it standith on an Hil in a faire Woode hard by Watheling-Sheate on the Est side of it. Humfrey Boucher, base Sunne to the late Lorde Berners, did much Coste in translating of the Priorie into a maner Place: but he left it nothing ended."

Much of the Convent, however, must have been left standing, for Lysons, speaking of it, says, "The building was in 1802 almost entire;" and from an old man who lives near the spot, I learned that it was inhabited about forty years ago by a gentleman who shot himself there. When the Convent was suppressed there was a Chapel attached, for among the articles valued the bell and leaded roof of it are specified. The old man also before alluded to, informed me that a portion of the building "looked like a Church." And as this hamlet is four or five miles distant from Ivinghoe Church, and formerly contained a large population, a Chapel here was much needed. In 1801 the population was 424, and 60 inhabited houses.† Now there are only a farm-house and two or three cottages. There are no visible remains of the Convent, Chapel, or of the Manor-house mentioned by Leland, but the site is marked by vestiges of a moat and buried portions of the building, surrounded by ancestral trees.

\* Dugdale's Monasticon.

† Lysons,