

## CHURCHES WHICH HAVE BEEN LATELY BUILT OR RESTORED.

**FLEET MARSTON.**—The little church of Fleet Marston, dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin, has recently been re-opened, after a thorough restoration promoted and completed by the Ven. Archdeacon Bickersteth, D.D., under the direction of G. G. Scott, Esq., R.A., Architect.

Before giving an account of the church and its restoration, it may be interesting to offer a few historical notices of the parish.

Fleet Marston, a small oblong parish of little more than nine hundred acres, lies about three miles north-west of Aylesbury, on the road to Bicester. The new line of railway from Aylesbury to Buckingham, by the Verney Junction, sweeps round the eastern boundary of the parish, passing very near to the church. The parish lies in the low flat, where the watershed from Stewkley and Whitchurch receives the drainage from the high ground of Quanton and Oving, and passing underneath the elevated ridge of Upper Winchendon, forms the principal tributary of the Thames. From this circumstance it takes its name of Fleet Marston, or *running marsh town*.

The early history of the parish is involved in much obscurity. The first possessor of the manor of note, after the conquest, was GILBERT DE BELLA AQUA, in the twelfth century. Early in the thirteenth century his possessions were found to be in the hands of JOHN DE CHESNEY and MILO NERNUYT, in right of his two daughters, Alice and Maud, their respective wives, as co-heiresses. Not long afterwards we find the name of Verney connected with this property; and in the reign of Henry VIII., Fleet Marston is mentioned in the settlement made by Sir Ralph Verney upon Elizabeth Breton, his third wife. Thence it passed to his grandson, Edmund Verney, and was by him conveyed to Sir Richard Anderson, Bart., in 1652. In 1729 the representatives of Sir R. Anderson sold this portion of the Fleet Marston estate to the trustees of the Duke of Marlborough, in whose family it remained till 1822, when it was conveyed to William Williams, Esq., of Wandsworth. This property included about 600 acres.

The other portions of the estate of Gilbert de Bellâ Aquâ passed, by the marriage of his second daughter, Maud, to the family of Nernuyt. There appear to have been several Rectors of Fleet Marston of that name between 1245 and 1312. From that family it passed by marriage to the Herveys (Marquis of Bristol), and was sold by Sir George Herveys's representatives in the sixteenth century to the family of Lee. Sir Henry Lee died possessed of this manor and the advowson in 1611. Ultimately this property was sold by the twelfth Viscount Dillon to John Tirel Morin, Esq., of Weedon Lodge in Hardwick. From him it passed to his only daughter, Jane Elizabeth, wife of Captain Salusbury Humphreys; and under a local and private Act of Parliament, dated June 10, 1809, "for vesting part of his devised estates," it was sold to William Williams, Esq., who ultimately became possessed of the whole property of the parish, excepting only the large meadow in which the church stands, and the acre of glebe attached to what was the rectory-house, now converted into three cottages.

It should be mentioned that Medmenham Abbey held lands in Fleet Marston and in Blackgrove in the fourteenth century, and until the dissolution, the value being then estimated at £3 0s. 9¼d.

The large meadow called Chapel Ground is said to have been in 1694 in the possession of Thomas Somner, of Cuddington, from whom it descended to his son, Henry Somner, a Magistrate for the county, who took the name of Sedley. This ground was ultimately sold by Mr. Grace to Wm. Rickford, Esq., in January, 1813, from whom it passed in right of his daughter, Lady Cooper, to her son, Sir Astley P. Cooper, Bart., the present proprietor.

Upon the death of Miss Williams, the only daughter of Mr. Williams, in 1867, the Fleet Marston estates were sold, New College, Oxford, purchasing Putlowes\* (or *hill pond*), one of the finest grazing farms in the county, and Christ Church purchasing the other portions.

The Advowson passed from the co-heiresses of Gilbert de Bellâ Aquâ to the successive possessors of the principal estate, until after the conveyance of that property by Charles, twelfth Viscount Dillon, to John Tirel Morin,

\* Putlowes;—from *putta*, a pond; and *lowe*, or *loe*, a hill.

Esq., of Weedon Lodge. After his death, and that of his daughter, Mrs. Salusbury Humphreys, in 1808, the advowson was severed from the estate, and conveyed to Mr. Dobree, whose son, the Rev. John Gale Dobree, became patron and rector. It has thence passed through several hands to the present patron and rector, the Rev. Wm. Wilson King.

The church is of small dimensions, but possesses some interesting architectural features. It now consists of nave and chancel only, with north porch; but it is not improbable that there may have been formerly a south aisle, the southern wall of the nave being apparently of later date than the rest of the building, with a four-light window evidently brought from elsewhere, reduced in size, and otherwise adapted to its present position. The west-end gable seems, from its one-sidedness, to justify this conclusion. In most other respects the church is of Early Decorated character. The chancel arch in particular deserves notice; the capitals from which the arch springs, containing the characteristic ball flowers in the hollow of the moulding; there are also the remains of the stone screen which originally separated the chancel from the nave. The roof of the chancel is entirely new, with the exception of the tie-beam (the only relic of the old roof), from which there now rises a king post, with other ornamental features, in harmony with the general character of the building. At the east end of the chancel, there is a small fourteenth century hooded single-light window. This window has been filled with stained glass, and is the gift of Mrs. Bickersteth. It contains the figure of the Virgin and Child, the work of Messrs. Burlison and Grylls. There are two other single-light windows in the chancel on the north and south sides, and one double light, square-headed window on the south side eastwards, in the cill of which was discovered, in the course of the restoration, an ancient piscina. There is also an aumbry or credence shelf in the north wall. But the most interesting feature in the church is the roof of the nave, an original and massive structure of the Decorated period. It consists of a succession of queen posts, with springs or braces, resting on strong tie-beams of rude but substantial workmanship. This roof had, for many years, been hidden by a low, flat ceiling, but is now laid open, and thoroughly

repaired, and is highly ornamental. Externally, the buttresses have been rebuilt, their foundations being carried down to a bed of gravel, an admirable natural concrete, lying below the loamy clay on which the old foundations insecurely rested. The walls have been fresh pointed, and two elegant stone crosses have been erected at the gable ends of the chancel and nave respectively. Internally, the church is fitted with open benches of deal in the nave, with a small screened inclosure at the west end, which serves the purpose of a vestry. The pulpit is of oak, supported upon a stone basement, and all the chancel furniture is of oak also. The altar cloth, given by Mrs. Bickersteth, is of rich Utrecht velvet, and the carpet for the altar steps was worked specially for the church, and presented to it by Mrs. C. Hooper. The stonework was executed by Mr. W. W. Thompson, of Aylesbury; the woodwork by Mr. Crook, of Waddesdon; the painting and leadwork by Mr. Goss, of Aylesbury. A small fund, raised some years ago by the Rev. H. Wanklyn, a former rector of the parish, and which had accumulated to about £250, formed the nucleus of the restoration fund, to which both the present owners and the occupiers have contributed generously. Amongst the former are Christ Church, Oxford, £100; New College, Oxford, £100; the Dowager Lady Cooper, £50; J. Du Pre, Esq., the owner of the adjoining parish of Quarendon (the inhabitants of which resort to Fleet Marston Church), £50, etc. Of the occupiers, Mr. William Mason, the churchwarden, contributed £25; Mr. Sanders, £10; Mr. J. P. Terry, £20; Mrs. Simons, £10; Mr. Thorpe, £5, etc. The whole cost of the work has been between £700 and £800; a moderate sum, when it is remembered that it includes the thorough renovation of both the interior and the exterior.

The church was re-opened by the Lord Bishop of Oxford, April 11, 1869, in the presence of Archdeacon Bickersteth, J. G. Hubbard, Esq., Mrs. FitzGerald, of Shalston House, near Buckingham, the Rev. W. R. Fremantle, Rural Dean, etc. The collection (exclusive of £20 from Mr. J. P. Terry, and £10 from Mrs. FitzGerald), was £15, 16s. 10d. The Archdeacon preached the following Sunday, when £8, 3s. 2d. was collected.