

HORSENDON CHURCH, BUCKS.

This little Church having within the last two years been much improved by an extension eastwards, under the direction of Mr. W. White, the architect, some account of its previous fortunes may not be uninteresting.

Lipscombe gives this brief account of it :—

“This church, which is dedicated to St. Michael, 38 feet long by 21 wide, appears to have been in a neglected state when visited by Browne Willis in 1728, and then consisted of a nave and chancel tiled, and an embattled tower at the west end, in which hung a single bell; the others having, as is presumed, been taken away during the civil war. It was rebuilt (?) in 1765, under a faculty obtained for that purpose from Dr. John Thomas, Bishop of Lincoln.”

In a note Lipscombe gives further particulars to the following effect—that the Bishop was petitioned by Edward Stone, then rector; John Grubb, Esq., patron; and Joseph Stevens, churchwarden. The petition was dated May 15th, 1765; and it set forth that the Parish Church had been erected more than 500 years, that it was decayed and unfit for Divine Service, and that the inhabitants did not exceed twenty in number; but that the Chancel being still a substantial building, capable of hold-

the Ninths in A.D. 1342-43. It is valuable as throwing a light upon the state of the Parish and Nunnery at that period, and has unfortunately been omitted by those who have written the local history of the village :—

“Inquisitiones nonarum in curia scaccarii, p. 334, col. i. Parva Merlawe. Tax' xxiii, marcarum. Valor nonæ in eâdem parochiâ per presentiam Thomæ de Farndone, Thomæ Laweman, senioris; Thomæ Laweman, junioris; Johannis Couherde, Johannis de Hedesore, Johannis de Lyndlee, Thomæ Le Cartér et Johannis Hurtepyk una cum nonâ de temporalibus priorissæ de parva Merlawe xviii marcæ et non plus, quia dicunt quod sexta pars terræ arabilis in parochiâ prædictâ jacet frisca et inculta; dicunt etiam quod vi. faldæ ovium quæ solebant esse in parochiâ prædictâ deficiebant hoc anno; dicunt etiam quod nulli sunt in parochiâ prædictâ qui ad quintam decimam taxari possunt. Valor nonæ, xviii. marcæ.”

The following references to public records, relating to the possessions of the Nunnery, are given by Tanner :—

“Close Rolls.—9 Hen. III., m. 12, pro feria apud Ivingho.”

“Charters.—11 Hen. III., p. 1, m. 13, n. 115, pro feria ibidem in vigilia, die, et crastino Sanctæ Margaretæ, et x acris assarti in Hemilhamsted.”

“Close Rolls.—11 Hen. III., m. 16, de terris in Hemilhamsted.”

“Close Rolls.—14 Hen. III., m. 11, de redditu in Mareto.”

“Charters.—17 Hen. III., m. 2, pro ecclesia de Merewe.”

“Patent Rolls.—35 Hen. III., m. 13, dorso.”

“Patent Rolls.—8 Edw. I., m. 3, vel. 4.”

ing 100 persons, the patron proposed at his own expense to take down the nave and the tower, and to erect another tower at the west end of the Chancel out of the old materials if permitted to do so. Upon this a commission was issued, and after due inquiry the license was granted December 16th, by which the Chancel was converted into the Parish Church, the cost of the future repairs of the said Chancel, so converted, being appointed to be divided between the rector and parishioners, in the proportion of one-third to the former, and two-thirds to the latter.

In addition to this information from Lipscombe, the following particulars have been kindly placed at the disposal of the Venerable Archdeacon Bickersteth, by the Rev. C. S. Grubb, late Archdeacon of Maritzburg, Natal, and now Vicar of Mentmore, whose family were formerly possessors of the Manor of Horsendon. There is in possession of a member of Mr. Grubb's family a letter from Dr. Browne Willis to Mr. John Grubb, the father of the Mr. John Grubb who took down the Church. This letter is dated June 4th, 1750. After giving a list of some of the rectors, he says :—

“The successor of Thomas Chapman was Joseph Willis, A.B., 1697, whom I knew a little, and he was rector here in 1728, when I visited your Church last, and took the descriptions of it, viz., that it consisted of a nave or body, and chancel, which were tyled, and had at the west end an embattled tower open there at the lofts, with only one bell left, two others being seemingly stolen away or sold, and that the chancel windows, good part of them, were stopped up, and that there had been a south aisle, as was visible by stopping up the arches, and that the chancel had been, as appeared to me, anciently leaded, and that the walls were green, and the church officiated in but once in about three weeks, and that here were only three families and sixteen souls.”

The letter goes on to state that he (Browne Willis) took an account of the monuments of the Grubb family. He also noted that the Manor House had been moated about and garrisoned for King Charles; and that the owner (Denham) was sequestered for delinquency. He adds, “Hon. service to all gentlemen with you, especially Mr. Sawyer. *I hope all will plead ‘for your keeping up the steeple or tower.’*” This last sentence, says Mr. J. Eustace Grubb (brother to Rev. C. S. Grubb) seems to show that some alterations were in contemplation at that

time, 1750. Mr. J. E. Grubb adds the following particulars from personal recollection :—

“The old Church extended as far as the stables, the eastern or front wall of which occupies the site of the western end of the Church or tower, or nearly so. About 1812, when my father came to Horsendon, the old key of the church was dug up under the threshold of the stable. It had evidently been lost in the rubbish when the church was pulled down. Its discovery confirmed the tradition that the present lock on the Church door is the same as originally belonged to the old Church. It was kept at the Manor House for many years ; but, I believe, it was lost about the time when the family left Horsendon.

“As the old Church extended to the stable, the question arises how came the road to intervene between the present Church and the stable? I have never been told how or when this happened ; but I think I can explain it, or, at all events, I can give the clue.

“The John Grubb to whom Browne Willis wrote the letter already referred to, died at a great age in 1760, and was succeeded by his son John, whose portrait hangs in the drawing-room here (29, Holland Park). When he first came to the property, the road to Thame by Horsendon ran out of the present road right across Millbank to the haw-haw fence, which separates Millbank from the terrace opposite the moat ; it then ran beside the haw-haw till it came nearly to the mound, then it took a sharp turn towards the cottages, and then another sharp turn towards the church, crossing the churchyard moat, not where it does now, but higher up, and nearly midway between the present bridge and the bridge which carries the road up to the house. I have never found any person who knew which course the road took after crossing the moat, but I suspect that it ran at the foot of the mound on which the church is built, and between the church and the house, skirting the churchyard, and passing at the back of the stables into the present road at the corner of the farmyard nearest the parsonage. The ‘John Grubb’ who altered the church, altered the course of the road to its present direction ; viz., instead of crossing Millbank, keeping a straight direction past the cottages, and thence by a curve at the back of the churchyard to the point where the old road came into it at the

corner of the farmyard above referred to. The effect of this alteration might have been to add a little to the churchyard at the eastern end, near the moat, or indeed to throw the old road into the churchyard from where it used to cross the moat till it came into the present road leading from the stables to the house; and as a compensation for this addition to the churchyard a portion of the site of the old Church and churchyard might have been taken in exchange, and converted into a road and stables. I never myself could make out accurately where the churchyard ended, and the private property began, and I doubt whether any person knows it, though no doubt it can be made out by documents and the agreements. I have also often tried, but without success, to get an old map that shows the course of the old road. There is no doubt, however, that a slice of the churchyard, or possibly only of the site of the Church, has been taken off near the stables. I have myself picked up human bones protruding from the churchyard into the roadway at this point. Mr. Partridge told me, the last time I was at Horsendon, that in a recent digging between the present Church and the stable, within the limits of the present churchyard, for some purpose, the foundations of a pillar had been found. This I take to have been one of the pillars which separated the nave from the south aisle.

“What became of the materials of the Church and tower, beyond what was required to build the new tower? No doubt a large proportion, perhaps the largest, went to mend the roads! This I knew was my father's idea. He told me that when he was a boy, the roads about there (meaning, I presume, about the Church, and more especially the comparatively new road round the churchyard from the farmyard to the cottages) were repaired with old tombstones and church materials that had been broken up. I take it these were partly the old materials, and partly, perhaps, some tombstones, which tradition says my grandfather got to be removed from the churchyard. I do not suppose that there were ever many in the churchyard; but it is said that what there were he caused to be removed, and would never allow a stone to be put up which could be visible from the house. He was not fond of this kind of ‘*memento mori.*’ You pro-

bably remember an arched doorway that used to lead out of the wainscoated room into a closet. Formerly it led into the ante-room, or the landing just outside the ante-room. I think I have heard that this came from the Church. There was also a piscina in one of the walls of the dining-room, not visible, but bricked up and plastered over. Its position was indicated in our days by a difference of colour in the paper, but I fancy its existence is remembered no more. Meade referred to this as one of his proofs that the house had been formerly a religious house of some sort. It is far more probable that this piscina was also borrowed from the old Church. Indeed, I knew the history of the place too well to entertain Meade's theory for a moment. The present house no doubt occupies the site of the old Manor House, which was always in lay hands.

“I think it is probable that old John Grubb (he I mean who altered the Church) used more of the old church materials, fit for the purpose, about the house, in which he made great alterations. Probably the refuse stuff was used in making the new road.

“J. EUSTACE GRUBB.”
