

NORTH MORETON PARISH CHURCH.

BY MR. H. STAPYLTON.

One might have supposed from the beauty of the design that these buildings were the work of some great monastic establishment, or were in some way connected with the Royal Castle of Wallingford, but there is no reason for supposing either to have been the case. I think I shall be able to prove that the church (or, at any rate, the chancel) and the chantry, were the work of two private persons, each animated by one common motive, that of commemorating a deceased relative, perhaps with the hope also of securing grace for themselves and the souls of their friends, both dead and living.

In determining the date of the buildings the fact that both are in the early decorated style and connected by early English arches seems strong evidence that they were built at the same time, just when the early English was first merging into the decorated. The chantry, at any rate, was already built in 1299, and I believe there are few specimens of the decorated style in England earlier than 1290; so we shall not be far wrong if we fix the date of both chancel and chantry in the last decade of the thirteenth century.

The earliest mention of the chantry is contained in an *inquo. ad quodd annum* of the 27 Edward I., held before the king's escheator, in full assembly, of the county of Berks (in *pleno comitater Berks*), the 16th March, 1299:—"To ascertain whether any loss or injury would result to the king if Milo de Stapelton were allowed to give and assign one messuage, one virgate of land, and two acres of meadow in North Morton, to the chaplains and their successors, to celebrate mass daily in the chapel of St. Nicholas there."—*Inq. A.D. 27, E. I.*

The jurors found there would be no damage to the king, but only to the Lady Joan, widow of William de Valence, of whom this messuage and land were held, with other holdings in North Morton, by service of one knight's fee.

From this we learn that the chapel of St. Nicholas was already in existence in 1299, and that Milo de Stapelton held his estate here under the widow of de Valence. I think we shall come to the conclusion that it is to the piety of these two persons that we owe the church (or at least the chancel) and the chantry.

Lady Joan's husband, William de Valence, was one of those needy foreigners who flocked into England in the reign of Henry III. In fact he was half brother of the king, King John's widow having married the Count de la Marche, of Poitou, after the death of her first husband. They had a numerous family, and on the Queen

dowager's death (1264) their children were sent over to England to thrive, under the protection of their royal half-brother. William, the third son, was at once made Governor of Goodrich Castle. Several anecdotes related by Dugdale represent him as hard-drinking, mean, and unscrupulous, no uncommon character in those days. Nevertheless, he was always faithful to the king and helped him much to win the battle of Evesham.

His wife was the Lady Joan, only daughter of Gwarin de Monchensi, one of the most noble, wealthy, and prudent warriors of his time. Camden calls him "the Crœsus of England, his will amounting to above two hundred thousand marks." Lady Joan's mother was daughter and eventually heiress of William Marshall, the great Earl of Pembroke, Protector of the kingdom in the early days of Henry III. At her (the Lady Joan's) death, which occurred in 1308, she was found possessed of the castles of Goodrich and Pembroke, and other manors in Wales, the manors of Sutton Valence and Braborne in Kent, the manors of Shrivenham with lands, at Burghton and Cote in Berks, and property in Ireland. We find her at one time living apart from her husband, and sharing the troubles of Queen Eleanor, when she was turned out of Windsor by the barons; at another time, travelling from the Abbey of Waltham to join her husband in a long waggon (*in longa quadrigâ*) with a quantity of money secreted in woolpacks. At the time we speak of, she had just lost her husband at the battle of Bayonne, in 1296.

However unworthy of her, his violent death in a distant land may have been a sufficient motive for the building of a church. We have a memorable example in the same family. Her third son, Aymer de Valence, the Earl of Pembroke of the reigns of the first and second Edwards, died in a tournament given by himself in honour of his marriage with his third wife, Maria, daughter of Guy de Chastilian, when his widow, says Camden, "entirely sequestered herself from all worldly delights, and devoting herself to God," founded Pembroke Hall, in Cambridge, to the memory of her husband.

Aymer de Valence was lord of North Morton at his death, and was succeeded in his estates by his sister Isabel, wife of Lord Hastings. Following the example of Dorchester Abbey, we might have expected to find the arms of De Valence or Monchensi here, but Pembroke (or Clare with a label) and Stapelton are the only names that I am aware of.

This is all the positive evidence I have to lay before you that the Lady Joan de Valence was the founder of the church. She was lady of the manor; she was rich, and the death of her husband in a distant land may have been her motive. There is much less difficulty in identifying the builder of the chantry.

Milo de Stapelton, mentioned in the Inquo. ad quod with which we began, was the head of a family settled at Stapelton-on-Tees, from a very early date. Benedictus de Stapelton confirmed a grant of land there in the time of Archbishop Roger of York (1154-81.) Dus Rogus de Stapelton was joint Sheriff of Yorkshire with Brian Fitz-Alan in 1235. Nicholas de Stapelton, "filius Galfridi," was

made Governor of Middleham Castle by King John, and another Nicholas, the father of Sir Miles, was one of the Justices of the King's Bench for the first eighteen years of the lawyer king, Edward I.

We learn from his reply to a writ of *quo warranto* declared before the Justices itinerant at York, in 1293, that Sir Miles had inherited North Morton, and other lands at Hathelsay, in Yorkshire, from his grandfather, Milo de Bassett, who had a grant of free-warren in all his demesne lands at both places in the 48th Henry III.

Very scanty materials exist for attempting a sketch pedigree of the lords of North Morton before this time, and I must help out with conjecture. "One knight's fee at North Morton" was among the possessions of Thomas Earl of Warwick at his death in 1242, and Dugdale tells us he inherited the estates of the d'Oileys, of Hooknorton, in Oxfordshire, from his mother, the last heiress of that family. The d'Oileys were lords of Wallingford Castle in the Conqueror's time, and perhaps we may go a step further, and suppose that North Morton formed part of their lands, and that the Earl of Warwick had his rights free from the d'Oileys.

At the Earl's death, the great inheritance of Warwick passed to his sister Marjery, wife of John Marshall, who was brother or nephew of William Marshall the great Earl of Pembroke. But Warwick's widow, Ela, daughter of William Longespe, Earl of Salisbury, had Hooknorton and other lands formerly d'Oiley's, for the present for dowry. She subsequently married Philip Basset, Lord of Wycombe, grandson of Thomas Basset, of Hedendon (Headington, Oxon), who was one of the King's Justices in the reign of Henry II. The Lady Joan de Valence had her seignorial rights at North Moreton as granddaughter of Pembroke, but the link between Warwick and Pembroke is by no means clear. It seems much easier to trace the property in demesne, if we suppose that Philip Basset, or one of his family (whoever Milo de Basset was), had a grant of land at North Morton in demesne from his wife, the Countess Ela, to hold subject to the superior lord of the fee.

Philip Basset was Governor of the Castle of Oxford in 44 Henry III., and the King's High Justiciary the following year. He was also Sheriff of Oxfordshire, Berks. Somerset, and Dorset, and Constable of the Castles of Corfe and Sherborne. He died in 1372.

The circumstances attending the grant of free-warren to Miles Bassett, in the 48th Henry III., deserve a passing notice here. The charter is addressed to the Archbishop and Peers of Parliament in the usual form, and is "Given under the King's hand, at Canterbury, the 1st October, 1264." This was a few months after the defeat at Lewes, when Henry retained only the semblance of a king in the hands of his barons. The witnesses who composed his court on this occasion were five of them insurgent barons or gentry, one monk, and only one Royalist. The grantee himself was probably a Royalist, though the Bassets were divided. Philip Bassett, of Wycombe, was the King's Chief Justiciary, but his son-in-law, Hugh Despencer, was the Justiciary recognised by the barons. Ralf Bassett, of Sapercote,

was the Barons' Castellan of Northampton, and Ralf Bassett, of Drayton, was on the same side.

In the same way, though not exactly pertinent, acting under compulsion, Henry was forced to appoint Drogo de Barantine, a rebel (whose descendant of the same name had land in North Morton, and other members of the Honour of Wallingford in 1452-3, and who was, I believe, ancestor of the present Viscount Barrington), to be Governor of Windsor Castle, turning out his own Queen and the Lady Joan de Valence. The Queen was ordered to Westminster, and the Lady Joan, being near her confinement, was directed to retire "to some convent or other fitting place."

Reverting to the Inquo. ad quod damnum, with which we commenced, the Lady Joan's claims seems to have been only formal, as we should expect if she were the founder of the church; and less than a fortnight after the inquest, Sir Miles obtained letters patent from the King, "as a mark of special favour," to set aside the statute of mortmain, then recently enacted, to enable him to give the messuage and land for the endowment of chaplains to say mass daily in the chapel of St. Nicholas, "saving, however, the customary dues and services to the chief lords of the fee."

The value of the property is set out in the inquest. The messuage is worth *xiii*d. a year, the virgate of land *xxs.*, and the two acres of meadow *ivs.* per annum; and the other lands and holdings (tenements), which remain to Sir Miles after the grant, are worth *xix*d. per annum.

Twenty pounds, therefore, constituted a knight's fee, which was the same as the Earl of Warwick had. Assuming the virgate to be twenty acres, the agricultural land is assessed at a shilling an acre, the meadow at two shillings, and the total value of Stapelton's estate at North Morton represents about four hundred acres. The land may perhaps still be identified by the description of the "Manor of Hemsaye," which occurs in later inquisitions. The moat near the church may mark the site of a manor house (for another messuage is mentioned in subsequent fines), and the messuage assigned to the priests may have been a smaller house within the moat.

If there is still any doubt about the founder of the chantry, the glass in the east window, which is contemporary with the building, will, I think, remove all difficulty, and will also supply a clue to the founder's motive. The theory which I shall endeavour to establish is, that Sir Miles de Stapelton, the son of one Sir Nicholas and the grandson of another, had an elder brother of the same name, who was a Templar, but died early, before his father; and it was to his memory that Sir Miles built the chantry at North Morton.

Mr. Winston, who restored the windows in 1856, no mean authority on the subject of glass painting, fixes the date of the glass between 1300 and 1310. He adds, "It is a very fine specimen of the period. Its colours are magnificent." In the heading of the window "a fragment of a sable lion still lingers on his argent shield," though it has been reversed in the process of restoration, and is now heraldically wrong. We know from Mr. Powell's drawings in the British

Museum, that when he visited the church the lion faced the other way.

This Sir Miles de Stapelton was the first of his family to bear these arms, "*Postavit in clypes argentes Rapientem et Rugientem Leonem nigrum.*" In the British Museum are several charters with wax seals, bearing the lion rampant on a shield, encircled with the letters M.I.L.S. The lion rampant was an old bearing of the Bruces. It is found on a charter of Peter de Brus, in the reign of King John, and on a seal engraved in Surtees' History of Durham is a cavalier "well mounted and armed with a lion rampant on his shield." Sir Miles' first wife, Sibill, was one of the two daughters and co-heirs of John de Bella Aqua (or Bellew), by his wife Laderina, one of the four sisters and co-heirs of Peter de Brus, the last Baron of Kendal and Skelton Castle. Sir Miles took the arms of his grandmother's family. By this marriage, the Stapeltons not only became possessed of Carlton in Yorkshire, which is still the residence of Lord Beaumont (Stapelton), but it was probably in some way due to their "one-eighth share" of the ancient barony of Bruce by tenure, that both Sir Miles and his brother-in-law, Anchor FitzHenry, had writ of summons to Parliament as Barons on the same day, in 1313.

St. Nicholas is the patron saint of the Chauntry, and for at least four generations (if we include this supposed elder brother of Sir Miles) it was the custom of the Stapeltons to dedicate their firstborn to this Saint. No doubt it took its rise from some story of the Crusades. The legend of St. Nicholas forms a conspicuous feature in the window. St. Nicholas was Bishop of Myra A.D. 326, and was regarded as the protector of sailors, from a tradition of his having calmed the sea on a voyage to the Holy Land. The legends of the saint were dear to Crusaders also. He is here represented, in accordance with a common tradition, rescuing three noble ladies from a life of infamy by the help of three bags of gold, and restoring three children to life who had been murdered to provide food during a famine. A tradition of the Crusades has been frequently repeated that in the reign of Richard I. one of the Stapelton's ancestors "went to ye Holy Land, and upon his return md. Peurodasy da. to the King of Cyprus." The story seems to point to that Cypriote Princess, daughter of Isaac Comnenus, King of Cyprus, who accompanied Queen Berengaria to Palestine after her marriage, and by her beauty occasioned such jealousy between Cœur de Lion and his Queen, as led to his returning home alone through Germany and his being captured by the Archduke.

Mr. Powell's drawings of the window show there were some pieces in his time which have since disappeared. On one were the letters "M. I. L." On another "the shattered figure of a Templar on a horse of mail."

With this Templar at North Morton we may, I think, identify a monument at Kirkby Fletham, in Yorkshire, where Sir Miles had a residence. It is engraved in "*Whitaker's Richmondshire,*" and represents a knight in armour, with his legs crossed (indicating a Templar previous to the disestablishment of the Order in 1311), and bearing a pointed shield with the arms of Stapelton, surmounted with

a label to denote an eldest son during the lifetime of his father. The date of this monument may be further ascertained by a comparison with another of Sir Brian Fitz-Alan, in the neighbouring church of Bedale, about 1301. Adopting Mr. Blore's description of the Bedale monument, both figures are "bareheaded, a mode by no means common." In both "the surcoat is bound round the waist with a small girdle, from whence it falls over the thighs in light and graceful folds, reaching almost to the feet." On the left arm of each is "the long pointed shield," &c. The description of the one applies almost equally well to the other. Stapelton's regard for the Templars is also shown in his gifts of land to the knights at Templehurst.

"Milo de Stapelton, knight, granted to God, and the blessed Mary, and the master and brethren of the Knights of the Temple in England, a croft and a wind-mill in East Hathelsay, opposite the gate of Templehurst, &c."

Another work of piety ought to be recorded here to his honour, viz., his rebuilding the church at Hathelsay in 1311, and providing an endowment "to celebrate masses for the soul of Sibill, his late wife."

Sir Miles was distinguished both as a soldier and as a civilian. He joined Roger de Mowbray in the expedition to Gascony in 1294, and the earl granted him "sixteen acres of waste" at Hovingham, in Yorkshire, for his service, which grant was confirmed by the king before the expedition started. In 1298 and the following years he had frequent summonses to the war in Scotland with men and arms, and he was one of the first judges of Trailbaston, for the suppression of robbers in Lancashire. From being in the Prince of Wales' household (*de l'ostel le Prince*) at the siege of Stirling in 1304, he became steward of the king's household when the Prince came to the throne, and had letters of protection (2nd Jan., 1308) going abroad about the King's marriage ceremonies at Boulogne. He received several substantial marks of favour from Edward II., and was summoned to Parliament as a baron three times in 1313, notwithstanding he and his three sons and his second wife are all named in the list of those who were "pardoned for the murder of Gaveston," in the October following. He was killed at Bannockburn in 1314.

His campaigns in Scotland brought him some good alliances. It was there he contracted his eldest son Nicholas (then a youth of fifteen) in marriage with the daughter of John de Bretayne, Earl of Richmond, his old companion in arms. John was the king's favourite nephew, being son of the second Duke of Brittany, by his wife, the Princess Beatrice, daughter of Henry III. Six years later he contracted his second son Gilbert to one of the two daughters and coheirs of Brian Fitz-Alan, Lord of Bedale, whose monument has been referred to, who had been the king's viceroy in Scotland after Balliol's surrender of the crown. At her father's death (1301) the little lady, then only eight years old, was put in ward of Henry, Earl of Lincoln. Tradition says that her mother (Fitz-Alan's second wife) was a daughter of Balliol. An old MS pedigree of Christopher Stapelton, of Wighill (date about 1530), calls her "Annes (Agnes) dau. of Sir Brian Fitz-Alan, by Annes, dau. to the King of Scots,"

and there is a drawing of the king and the arms of Scotland in pen and ink. By this marriage Gilbert had Bedale from his wife, and Sir Miles settled the manor of North Morton on them and their heir.

Here we take leave of Nicholas de Stapelton and the elder branch. It terminated in an heiress who married Sir Thomas Metham and carried away Stapelton and Kirkby Fletham, and all that was not limited to male heirs to that family. Gilbert, the younger son, had two sons, who both became Knights of the Garter; the younger son, Sir Brian, purchased Wighill, and afterwards inherited Carlton (both in Yorkshire) as remainder-man under an entail. Brian was ancestor of the Carlton (or Beaumont) and the Wighill branches of Stapelton. Gilbert's eldest son, Sir Miles, had Bedale, county York, and North Morton, and afterwards acquired a large estate at Ingham, in Norfolk, by his marriage with Joan, widow of Lord Strange, of Knockyn, and daughter of Sir Oliver de Ingham.

This Sir Miles confirmed his grandfather's endowment here, and in 1349 had licence from Edward III. in very similar terms, "to give and assign a messuage and twenty-two acres of land in North Morton for a chaplain to celebrate mass daily in the chapel of St. Nicholas there."

Eleven years later he founded a priory or college of the Holy Trinity at Ingham, of the same order as that which was established at Donnington, in this county, but the history of Ingham and its lords has been already distributed by the Rev. James Lee Warner in an ably written paper, printed in the transactions of the Norfolk Archaeological Society for 1878.

North Morton continued in possession of the Stapeltons of Ingham for five generations. The last Sir Miles of that branch left two daughters only, and at his death was found seized of "the manors of North Morton and Hemseys, and of the advowsons of the churches of North Morton and Hemseys, held by the Abbot of Dorchester by service of one pound of pepper annually." In previous inquisitions Hemseys is described as "a tenement, called Hemseys, in the vill of North Morton." Under a settlement made by his father just before his death, the North Morton passed in freehold (in *d'nico suo ut de libo tenements*) to his widow for life (she died 1489-90) and afterwards to his two daughters as co-parceners, viz., Elizabeth, wife of Sir William Calthorpe (she was living in 1506), and Joan, wife of Sir John Hudleston.

It seems unnecessary to pursue this inquiry further. Our present concern is rather with the fortunes of the Church at North Morton. The Reformation was about to begin, and the priestcraft of the middle ages to give way to the "new learning" commencing in Oxford. Things fell into an opposite extreme at first. A recent writer says of this time, "Patrons of livings presented their huntsmen or game-keepers to the benefices in their gift; the churches were falling to ruin, and the chauntries despoiled." North Morton shared in the general neglect. Among the "Certificates of Colleges and Chauntries" returned by the Commissioners in the reigns of Henry VIII. and Edward VI., is the following report of Pishe of North Morton:—

" One chauntre there, founded by Myles Stapleton to the entente to have a prest to celebrate and saye ye devyn s'oyce dayly wt'in the P'ish Church of North Morton, whych ys not done nor obs'ved accordyngly. The said chauntre ys scytuat nyghe to the P'ishe Church of North Morton. The value of the lands, tent's, and other possessions belongynge to the same chauntre, lxvis. viii*l*.—ffor the kyng's ma'ties, tenth, vis. viii*l*.—and so remayneth lxs. which Syr Richard Nyelson, clerke, doth receyve, doynge no s'vice therfore, as they ought to do by the foundacon. Ornaments, plates, juells, goodes, catalls, merly app'teyngnge to the said chantre, as apperyth by an inventorye thereof made,—not prayed " (appraised).

However much we may regret the loss of the jewels and ornaments and the goods and chattels of ancient days, we cannot be otherwise than deeply thankful that their loss has been more than compensated to us in these modern times by a pure and reformed worship, celebrated in the same beautiful church, now so admirably restored by Mr. Street.

