



Notes on the Churches of Steventon, Harwell, Didcot and Hagbourne.

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AS most of you are aware it has been my endeavour now for some years past to make more generally known the interesting architectural features which are to be found in the majority of our Berkshire Churches, and with this object in view to select a small group of those which possess details which perhaps have not been sufficiently appreciated, and with the assistance of the excellent series of lantern slides prepared for me as usual by Mr. Marcus Adams, to conduct my audience round the several edifices.

This year I have chosen the Churches of Steventon, Harwell, Didcot and Hagbourne, forming with Blewbury, which was most comprehensively described to our Society only two years ago, a cluster of ancient structures of considerable architectural merit, and all possessing details which will, I trust, merit our careful attention. They all seem to be affected by the same influences which have handed down to us the noble Churches at Cholsey, North Moreton and Long Wittenham, all in this same district, and which I have already brought under the notice of this Society. As usual we can obtain little evidence as to the builders of the Churches, and the history of the parishes and the former residents and owners is of the most meagre description.

Let us now fancy that we are starting at Steventon, about four miles to the south of Abingdon, and that we have been landed in one of the most picturesque villages in the county. It is singular that though it has a station on the Great Western main line, and is also situated on one of the great highways leading from the north through Oxford and Abingdon to Winchester and Southampton, it is but seldom visited by, and little known to, the Berkshire folk, and as far as I can ascertain has not yet been included in any of our Society's excursions. It is hoped, however, that this omission may be shortly remedied, and a visit to this and some of the neighbour-

ing Churches be arranged during the ensuing summer. Very little information is to be gleaned as to the history of the parish, and Lysons, in the Berkshire volume of the *Magna Britannia*, is only able to devote thirteen lines to a description of it. From this we learn that the Manor was granted by Henry I. to the great Abbey of Bec Harlewin in Normandy, who founded here a small cell or alien Priory, which stood to the south of the Church. It is stated that this Priory was dissolved during the wars with France in the reign of Edward III., but it is more probable that the Monks of Bec parted with the Manor, and abandoned the Priory, thereby anticipating the suppression of the alien Priories and sequestration of their property, which took place in the reign of Henry V. Anyhow, the Manor, with the advowson of the Church, was sold to Sir Hugh Calveley, whose trustees conveyed it in 1393 to John, Bishop of Salisbury, and Roger Walden, supposed to be trustees for the Crown, as the Manor was soon afterwards in the hands of the King, who granted it to the Abbot and Convent of Westminster, and it is still held by the Dean and Chapter. The only families of note who are recorded to have resided here are the Wisemans, who came from Suffolk, but had their chief residence in Essex, and the Smalebones, who, according to a visitation of date 1664-1666, were located here at that period.

As has been stated, the village is an exceedingly picturesque one, and can boast of quite a row of ancient half-timbered houses, some of which are said to date back to the 15th century, with high gables, and in two or three instances with curiously painted mantel pieces, apparently of early 17th century date. Another remarkable feature is the Causeway, a raised footpath, commencing at the Church, and continued through the village and out on to the moorland on the east side. It is paved, and for part of its course shaded by an avenue of trees. It is not known when it was first made, but a considerable sum of money has been left for its maintenance, and trustees are regularly appointed to keep it in proper substantial repair.

Let us now return to the Church (fig. 1), which is exceedingly irregular in its ground plan, and the various changes which the fabric has undergone are somewhat difficult to determine. It is built entirely of stone of rather coarse quality, and is dedicated to St. Michael and All Angels, and now consists of a south tower, nave, south aisle, chancel, and south chancel chapel. Some of the stones in the south wall are very large, and it has been suggested that the south aisle

and chapel were the original portions of the Church. If so, considerable alterations have been made here, and at a time subsequent to important additions to the fabric.

The earliest visible portion of the church is the eastern arch of the arcade between the nave and aisle, which is of the Early English period, rather late in the style, or circ 1240. If one may judge by the west window on the north side, the chancel appears to have been built about fifty years later in the early decorated style, and perhaps thirty years later again, the tower, western portion of the aisle, and the south chapel were erected. About the year 1500, a considerable amount of restoration took place, the nave being lengthened, and a new window inserted in the east wall of the chancel (fig. 2). The roofs seem mainly also to belong to this date. The church has been restored. Let us now according to our usual custom commence our survey of the church in the interior of the chancel (fig. 3). The east window is large of five-lights with an embattled transom, and is of late perpendicular style, circ 1500. It has been filled with rather dark and peculiar glass of some merit. In the east wall of the chancel on the south side of the window is a large tabernacle niche (fig. 4), which has been cut away flush with the wall, but part of the underside of the canopy with rich tracery still remains. This also dates from about the year 1500. On the south of the chancel close to the east wall is a long narrow square-headed two-light window of rather nondescript character, but probably of the late perpendicular period. In the usual place in the south wall is the piscina with projecting basin, trefoil headed canopy, and a stone bracket at the back. Adjoining this are two sedilia with projecting seats, ? old, and cinquefoiled ogee headed canopies. There is no central shaft or other impost, but they are enclosed within an oblong frame. Both the piscina and sedilia belong to the perpendicular period. To the west of these is a small doorway with hoodmould and fluting to the arch and jambs of the decorated period, leading to the chapel. To the west of this again is a large wide spanned arch of modern date, opening to the chapel. On the north side of the chancel is a two-light late decorated window square headed within segmental headed containing arch, and further west a three-light window with intersecting mullions, and a chamfered edge to the containing arch of early decorated date. Both these windows have been much renewed. On the floor are the small brass effigies (fig. 5) of a civilian, about 15 inches high, and one wife, about 13½ inches, to the north of him, and the outline of another on his other side.

He is standing on a mound, with hands clasped on his breast, has a plain garment down to the ankles, a belt round the waist and attached to it a rosary and gypciere or purse, with the haft of the anelace or dagger showing behind it. It is singular to find both the gypciere and anelace, as Haines in his *Manual of Monumental Brasses*, part 1, page ccii. states that about the year 1470 some change took place in the civilian costume and "the anelace was superseded by a short rosary and a gypciere or pouch, attached to the girdle," and he gives as an illustration the brass of Geoffrey Kidwelly at the neighbouring church of Little Wittenham, which has been previously described. The lady also has hands clasped on her breast, a kerchief over her head, long gown to her feet, and with close sleeves. We get from Ashmole's notes taken about the end of the 17th century, the following description of the brass as it was in his time :

"On a plate of Brass fixed to a Gravestone in the middle of the Chancel is engraved the Figure of a Man lying between his two Wives and this Inscription :

"Hic jacet Ricardus Do qui obiit v die Mens Febr Anno

"Dominini, MCCCCLXXVI. & Agneta & Johanna Uxores

"Quorum animabus propicietur Deus. Amen."

In English thus :

Here lies Richard who died in the Lord the v day of

February in the year of our Lord 1476, and Agnes and

Johanna his Wives, on whose souls the Lord have Mercy.

Amen.

Ashmole took the word "Do" to be the shortened form of domino, but it is now alleged that the name of the deceased was Richard Do, and this is probably the case. The chancel roof is very handsome, wagon shaped with open timbers, but has been mainly renewed. The south chapel has a two-light east window with a quatrefoil in the head of the late decorated period, and with the characteristic hood-mould of that date, and there are two similar windows on the south side. Within the quatrefoil of the east window have been collected some fragments of old glass with a pretty oak leaf and acorn pattern. There was formerly more ancient glass here, which it is alleged has been taken away and placed in the chapel of Milton House in the adjoining parish. In two windows there are, in one a crowned female head, the Annunciation and Nativity, in the other the Resurrection, Ascension and Christ in Majesty. It is certainly

surprising that less than sixty years ago the removal of this beautiful glass could have been sanctioned.

In the usual situation in the south wall is a piscina with canopy and trefoiled fringe and well moulded basin of the same date as the windows. The doorway on the north side leading to the chancel has a segmental headed arch on this side. On the floor are two large black marble ledger stones, one with the epitaph and shields on white marble panels, to Dulcibella, first wife of Edmund Wiseman, and daughter of Samuel Dunch of Pusey, who died in 1656, and inscription on the black marble to Edmund Wiseman, who died on All Saints Day, 1689. The other stone (fig. 6) commemorates Edmond Wiseman, younger son to Thomas Wiseman, of Thornham in the County of Suffolk, who was son and heir to Sir John Wiseman, knight, and his wife, Anne, daughter and heiress of William Hawkins, of London. Their effigies are represented in brass, his, 2 feet, hers, 1 foot 10 inches high. He is in armour of the Elizabethan period and standing on a mound. She has a richly brocaded dress. There are two shields in brass above them, one with the Wiseman arms, sable three cronels or coronels argent quartering another coat. There are also two brass plates with long inscriptions which have been reset in the stone upside down. One is in Latin, the other in English, as follows :

Plate I.

Quæ charo fuerat perchara marita marito
Wismanni conjux hoc jacet Anna loco
Quæ matrona fuit frugi pia casta benigna
Digna viro conjux dignior illa deo
Spiritus æthereas per Christum scandit in arces
Jungitur atq deo quæ fuit ante dei.

Plate II.

Here lyeth buried the bodyes of Edmond Wiseman in the Countye of Berk, Esquier, younger sonne of Thomas Wiseman of Thornehame in the Countye of Suffolk Esquier, who was sonne and heire to S^r John Wiseman knighte & Anne his wife one of the Daughters and heires of William Hawkins late of London Esquier, which said Edmond and Anne had Issue foure sonnes & foure daughters. She decessed the xxviith daye of Januarye in the xxviith yere of the raigne of our soveraigne ladye Queene Elizabeth MCCCCCLXXX & foure. The which said Edmond dyed the daye of

Below on another brass plate are figures of four sons and four daughters. This stone was used again to commemorate the death of William Wiseman, with a short inscription recording his decease in 1703. Ashmole informs us that in his time this stone was on a raised monument on the south side of the chancel.

The nave (fig. 7) is three-and-a-half feet wider than the chancel, the north wall being set back to that extent, and as there is no chancel arch this adds to the irregularity of the building. It was apparently re-built and much enlarged, probably lengthened, late in the fifteenth century. In the north wall, near the east end, is a good two-light window with quatrefoil in the head, and a hollow round the containing arch, and there is a similar window to the west of the north doorway, now set within a squareheaded containing arch. The west window is of three lights, rather poor perpendicular, and set within a segmental-headed containing arch. On the north side, to the west of the tower, is a two-light squareheaded window, also set within a segmental containing arch. The roof is very fine wagon shaped with open timbers and large bosses. The nave is separated from the aisle by three arches with a break between each. The eastern arch is Early English, with a chamfered hoodmould resting on a mutilated head on the west side, and with chamfered rib, supported on a low circular column (fig. 8) on the east with undercut abacus and rich conventional foliage on the capital, similar to that we have noted at Long Wittenham and North Moreton, and shall also find at Hagbourne. The arch rests on a plain respond with moulded and chamfered abacus, and stops at the base. On the side towards the aisle (fig. 9) the springer of another Early English arch remains. The next arch is of decorated date with two chamfered orders resting on a plain respond on east side with well-moulded capital and abacus carried along the wall to the next arch. The west respond has a well-carved abacus and row of oak leaves on the capital and terminates on a large corbel bracket. The next arch is the northern arch supporting the tower and now opening from the tower space to the nave. It has a chamfered outer order, then a hollow with pointed member on either side, and the quarter round to the inner order. The abacus, capitals and responds are all nicely moulded. The graduated buttresses on the north side of the tower stand within the nave on either side of this arch. The eastern tower arch opening into the aisle is similar to that on the north, but on the north side the inner order has rested on a head now mainly cut away, though the hair and neck can still be made out. In a hollow of the capital (fig. 10) on the north side is a course of ball flowers, and of that on south a series of roses (fig. 11) connected by a twining stem. The west window of the tower is decorated of two lights, with triangular chamfered hoodmould. On the south side,

eastern bay of the aisle, is a two-light window similar to those in the south chapel.

The font, which stands by the east side of the north tower arch, is of fifteenth century date, octagonal, with a rose within a quatrefoil on each face of the bowl and plain stem. The pews, both in nave and aisle, are interesting, of oak with well carved backs and ends, and some at any rate date from the fifteenth century. On the back of one in the nave is carved I : MART. 1769, and on one in the aisle, R : DL. 1659. The aisle roof is very poor. In the north-east corner of the nave is a fine old Jacobean pulpit with excellent carving, and shields on two of the panels, one charged with a chevron between three lilies, the other a chevron between three fleurs de lis. Near the south door is a large and curious old poor's box, with three slits for the coins, supported on a baluster shaft. It has a well-carved front, and the date 1633 twice repeated, and some initials partly concealed by later ironwork.

The south doorway, opening into the tower space, is on the interior side segmental-headed with two chamfered orders. It is of the late decorated period, and on the exterior side (fig. 12) has a well-moulded hoodmould with plain terminations, a chamfered outer, and quarter round to inner, order, to the arch, and down the jambs without imposts to the ground. At the apex is a small head with long ears, and an oak tree springing from it. It may perhaps be a rebus on the name of the builder of this part of the Church. Above the head of the arch is the lower part of a niche for an image of St. Michael, or the Blessed Virgin. The door is panelled, and partly of fifteenth century date. The tower is of the decorated period, with good angle buttresses, the two northern ones, as has already been mentioned, standing within the nave. It is embattled, and has a two-light window with a quatrefoil in the head of the decorated period, on each face of the upper stage. On the west face of the tower is part of the weather moulding of a former lean-to roof, suggesting that an aisle formerly existed, or perhaps may only have been contemplated, to the west of the tower. On the south-east buttress are two stones incised with shallow sundials, probably relics of a former Norman Church. Higher up is an 18th century sundial with a painted head above, now nearly obliterated. The gnomon still remains, and its inclination seems to show that this Church does not follow that strict orientation usually observed in our English Churches. There is a similar sundial on the south-west buttress. The west window on the lower stage has no drip-

stone or hoodmould, but those to the south aisle and chapel all have the hoodmould similar to that in the interior, and characteristic of work of the late decorated period. The south aisle has a plain stone parapet. The roofs are, mainly of lead. The south window of the nave has an undercut label. The west doorway is semi-circular headed and of late perpendicular date, with an undercut label having a head at the apex and at each termination. That at the apex seems to have supported a small figure, the lower part of which only now remains. The mouldings of the arch are very good, and are continued without imposts down the jambs. The door has nice panelling, and is coeval with the arch. The window above has the undercut label, similar to the doorway. There is a small and ancient cross on the west gable. There are buttresses at the angles of the nave. The two windows on north of nave have the undercut labels similar to those on west and south. The western of the two, which is squareheaded on the interior side, has the arch corresponding with the eastern one in the exterior wall. The north doorway (fig. 13) seems to have been the principal entrance, and is of good late decorated character. It has the quarter round on the hoodmould which terminates on heads now much worn, and with some mutilated sculpture at the apex. There is a hollow and then the ogee formed by two quarter round mouldings on the arch and jambs. There are two buttresses on the north of the nave. The windows, buttresses, etc., on the north of the chancel have been renewed. The east window has the same label as those in the nave, terminating on the head of a king on the north, and of a lady much renewed on the south. The south-east buttress is old.

To the north of the Church are the steps and base of the old cross, and to the north-west a very fine yew tree.

(To be continued).