

Some Notes on the Whistler and Simmons Charities at Goring.

By ETHEL CARLETON WILLIAMS, M.A.

Every year on Saint Mark's Day (April 25), in the parish church of Goring a sermon is preached recalling the names and benefactions of Ellinor Whistler and Lettice Simmons, who left money for the poor of the parish. After the conclusion of the service, the recipients are called by name, and walk down the church to the space beneath the tower at the West End, which is stacked with loaves, until it resembles a prosperous baker's shop. There each poor widow receives a shilling and a loaf of bread, and other necessitous people are given two loaves. As this custom has been going on for the last three hundred years, and as few charities in Oxfordshire have such a long and unbroken history, it is worth while to pause for a few moments to see what is known of the donors and how the charity came into being.

The Whistler Charity owes its existence to the piety of Ellinor Whistler, who died in the year 1630. She was the great grand-daughter of Ralph Whistler of Fulscot, Berks, who bought the manor of Gatehampton, and whose descendants lived there for the next hundred and seventy years. The manor house stands on the banks of the Thames, a mile below Goring lock, and although the house has been rebuilt and modernised, traces of the old walls and foundations of the original building can still be found. The manor is mentioned in the Domesday Survey as consisting of five hides, which were held by Milo Crispin and its history under the de Cowdrays and the Redes has been traced by Dr. H. E. Salter in the *Boarstall Cartulary*.

Ellinor Whistler, the third daughter of John Whistler, was one of a large family of brothers and sisters. Although she died at the early age of twenty-seven, she was noted during her life for her piety and austerity. The inscription upon her tomb in Goring church set forth her asceticism in such glowing terms that

it excited the interest of Thomas Hearne, when he visited Goring in the year 1717, and he has recorded a detailed description of her monument in the pages of *Gulielmi Neubrigensis Historia sive Chronica*. This is the more fortunate as Ellinor Whistler's monument has entirely disappeared, and except for Hearne's industry all trace of it would have been lost. He says :—

“ The other is a fine costly monument on the north wall of the chancel, to the memory of Mrs. Elenor and Mrs. Margaret Whistler, the former of which is the constant discourse of the parishioners of Goring to this day, who have a very unusual respect for her memory, particularly upon account of her piety and her abstemious way of living. For they think that she lived without bread and drink for seven years together, and cite the inscription upon the monument to confirm the notion, which shall be here subjoined :—

HELINOR WHISTLER

FILIA TERTIA JOHANNIS WHISTLER DE GOARING

FILII PRIMI WILLELMI WHISTLER

DE STAPENHILL, FILII TERTII

RADULPHI WHISTLER DE FOWLE—

SCOATE IN COMITATU BERK. QUAE

DEDIT 20L. IN PERPETUUM USUM PAUPERUM

DE GOARING ET PAUPERIBUS CIVITATIS

OXON. SUPERPLUSSAGIUM STATUS

AETATIS SUAE VICESIMO SEPTIMO

ANNOQUE SEPULTA FUIT 25 DIE JAN

1630. IN EODEM TUMULO CUM

MARGARITA SORORE

NATU MINIMA.

After this we have the figures of two young women : that on the right is the figure of the said Elenor Whistler, and that on the left of her youngest sister. Then follows :

HAC HELENOR WHISTLER VIRGO PIA, PULCHRA, PUDICA

CUM MARGARITA, MOLE, SORORE JACET.

QUAS AMOR UNIVIT, QUAS SPIRITUS UNUS IN UNO

UNICUS INCLUSIT FRATER IN AERE SUUS.

FLERE SOLET SEMPER, RARO RIDERE PER AEVUM,
VOTA, PRECES, LACHRYMAE POTUS ERANTQUE CIBUS.
HAEC BINAS, VITA VISA EST SUPERARE SORORES,
TANQUAM ILLIS FUERAT, MORTUA, VIVA SIMUL
POST QUARUM CINERES PANEM POTUMQUE PER ANNOS
SEPTEM NON TETIGIT PASTA TIMORE DEI.
VOTA, PRECES INOPUM GORINGAE OXONQUE PENATES
MUSA MORI PROHIBENT, MORTUA VIVIT ADHUC.

It is very remarkable that though the said Mrs. Elenor Whistler be described as altogether (as it were) free from mirth, yet her effigies on the monument, represents her as one of a smiling countenance."

When the Rev. Walter Sweeting visited Goring on 5 September 1883, the tomb with the effigies had disappeared, but on the floor, inside the chancel rails, he saw an oval with the inscription in large and small capitals to Ellinor Whistler, which he has correctly recorded.¹ Of the second inscription about her abstemious way of living, he makes no mention, so it had presumably been lost.

Amongst the documents preserved in the Parish Church at Goring is the register, containing Ellinor Whistler's bequest. It is written in a seventeenth-century hand, and sets forth that the twenty shillings' interest upon her gift of twenty pounds, was to be distributed annually to the poor of the parish after evening service on St. Thomas' Day by the heir of the Whistlers. By the kindness of the Rev. T. R. Walker, the Vicar of Goring, I have been allowed to transcribe the document which runs :—

"I, Ellinor Whistler, the third daughter of John Whistler, late of Goringe by the last will and testament in writinge bearing the date the xxii day of May, Anno dmi 1630. And proved in the prerogative court of Canterbury by John Whistler of Graies Inne in the countie of Middlesex, did amongst other charitable workes give unto the churchwardens and overseers of the parish of Goaringe xx li. to bee for ever put forth for a stocke. And the profite thereof to be yearlie on the feast of St. Thomas Thappostle

¹ British Museum. Add. MSS. 371, vol. 3. f. 96.

distributed amongst the poore as her brother John and his Heires should think fitte (if he should be pleased to be there), or in his absence as the Curate of the parish for the time being, the churchwardens and overseers of the poore of the said parish or the main parte of them present should lymitt or appointe soo that noo person hath above twelve pence nor under six pence. And of that will did constitute John Whistler of Graies Inne her executor.

1. I the said John Whistler of Graies Inne being acquainted with her intention doe appointe that the saide money bee yearly put forth on St. Thomas daie immediately after eveninge praier.
2. And bee divided into fower equall partes, viz. 5 li apeece and lent unto fower poore inhabitants of the saide parish such as can give good securitie therefore, viz. two able securities a peece at the least.
3. That the bonde be taken^r . . . the heires of the said Elleanor kept by them but in the manner herein expressed.
4. That there be suche xii pence in the pound taken for interest and no more.
5. That the bonde bee made payable yearly with the interest upon the feast daie of St. Thomas the Apostle in the portal of the parish church of Goaringe betwixt the houres of twelve and one of the clocke in the afternoone.
6. That the bonde and this booke bee kept in a cheste or Trunke with sixe lockes in the custodie of the Senior Churchwarden. And that the curate for the time beinge, everie churchwarden and overseer of the poore have one key to open the chest or trunke.
7. That in case anie question shall arise whoo shall have the said money soe to be disposed at interest those persones shall bee preferred whom the heire of the said Elleanor for the time beinge shall then and there nominate, if he can give as good securite as others. And if the said heire shalbee absent then those shalbee preferred to have the said money

^r This part of the page is damaged.

whom the said curate churchwardens and overseers or the maior parte of them shall nominate And in case there shalbee equalitie of voices then he or they to whome the curate or the time beinge shall give his voice.

8. That noe person shall have anie more of the said money than five pounds at anie time. And that noe person shall hold anie parte of the said money anie longer time than one yeare together. And that noe parte of the said money shalbee lent unto anie one that hath rented anie parte of the said money at anie time within one yeare next before.
9. That the poorer sorte of the said parish shalbee preferred before others in case they can give good securite for the said money.
10. That the interest of the said money shall yearlie be distributed and divided amongst the poore of the said parish yearlie on the feast daie of St. Thomas the Apostle imediatelie after eveninge praier by the heire of the said Elleanor according unto the said will in case hee or she shalbee pleased to bee there present at that time And in his or her absence by the curate for the time beinge the churchwardens and overseers of the said parish or the maior parte of them that shalbee present And in case there shalbee equalitie of voices then accordinge unto that side or parte with which the curate for the time beinge shall give suffrage or voice.
11. That this booke bee also kept in the said chest or trunke and when this booke is full that a newe booke be bought with some of the interest of the saide money And that that yeare the surplusage onelie be divided over and above the price of the said booke.
12. That everie feast daie of St. Thomas the Apostle the contente of the saide bonde and conditions that shalbee soe taken shalbee entered into the said booke And the interest of the last yeare and the names of the persons that have received or shalbee appointed to receive the same be then entered into the said booke with the daie of doeing the same subscribed with the hande of such persons as shall soe distribute the said money and interest.

13. That when the accompte is done the bonde and booke bee locked upp and kept as aforesaid.
14. That in case the said chest or trunke shall by time or other waies decaie that a newe trunke or chest bee bought with the interest of the said money for that yeare and the surplusage onlie be divided over and above the price of the chest or trunke."

Then follows a list of the recipients of the charity year by year together with the name of the curate or overseers who supervised the distribution. This shows how village names persist throughout the centuries, for in the list for 1650 appear Lewenden, Critchfield and Aldridge, all well-known families in Goring to-day, and two of these names, spelt in a more primitive way, appear as early as the year 1639. Perhaps the list for the latter year may be quoted, as typical of the earlier lists.

1639.

On the feast day of St. Thomas the Apostle 1639 was received xx shillings of Thomas Wyld, sen, William Moorcock, sen, Richard Buy and Thomas Miles for the interest of xx li. for one year last past which was distributed to the persons following whose names are subscribed.

Ralph Hust. 1s.	Reynold House. 6d.
Thomas Buy. 1s.	Katherine Chapman. 6d.
Thomas Quash. 1s.	Thomas Cray. 6d.
Widd. Heaver. 1s.	Widd. Grove. 6d.
John Lewndon. 1s.	Widd. Matthew. 6d.
Widd. Farvice. 1s.	Widd. Florence. 6d.
Robert Wincott. 1s.	Widd. Joanes. 6d.
Widd. House. 1s.	Widd. Grove, sen. 6d.
Thomas Adams. 1s.	Widd. Prydden. 6d.
Widd. Symons. 6d.	Mattingley. 6d.
John Aldrig. 6d.	Brimmere. 6d.
John Norris. 6d.	Widd. Philipe. 6d.
Robert Grove. 6d.	Miles. 6d.
Gregory Adams. 6d.	Widd. Pace. 6d.
Nicholas Wylder. 6d.	Taylor. 6d.
Widd. Heamoe. 6d.	

By the appointment of J. Wharton, Curat.

So far there is no mention of the annual sermon, which precedes the distribution. This originated in the benefaction of another pious Goring lady, Lettice Simmons, who died seventy years later. In her will, made in the year 1700, she leaves forty pounds to the parish of Goring, of which sum ten shillings is to be paid every year to the minister of the parish church, for preaching a sermon on March 26, being her birthday, and after this, thirty shillings is to be distributed amongst "the honest poor" of Goring.

The executors of the will can have had no light task, for her benefactions consist of money owing to her. The provisions run :—

"A copy of the last will and Testament of Lettice Simmons, Widdow of the Parish of Goring, taken out of the Register at Oxford in the year 1700 for the Use of the said Parish and now here Register'd in October 1702 in *perpetuam rei memoriam* viz : In the name of God. Amen. I Lettice Simmons of the Parish of Goring cum Gatehampton in the county of Oxon Spinster being aged but in sound and perfect memory, praise be given to God for the same, And knowing the uncertainty of this life on earth, and being desirous to settle things in order, do make this my last Will and Testament in manner and form following, that is to say

First and principally, I commend my soul to Almighty God, my Creatour assuredly believing that I shall receive full pardon and free remission of all my sins, and to be saved by the precious death and merits of my Blessed Saviour and Redeemer Christ Jesus, And my body to the Earth from whence it was taken to be buried in such decent and Christian like manner as to my Executrix, hereafter named shall be thought meet and convenient. And as touching such worldly Estate as the Lord in mercy hath lent, my will and meaning is the same shall be employed and bestowed as hereafter by this my will is expressed.

And first I do revoke renounce frustrate and make void all wills by me formerly made and declare and appoint this my last will and testament.

- Item.* I give and bequeath to the Parish of Goring cum Gatehampton fourty pounds, that is the twenty pounds which John Taylor of the said Parish of Goring cum Gatehampton oweth me, and twenty pounds which Edward Frewin of the Parish of South Stoke in the County of Oxon oweth me, That is to say The use of it to be bestowed as followeth, That is ten shillings to the Minister of the said Parish of Goring for the time being to preach a Sermon every year the twenty sixth day of March, being my birthday, thirty shillings every year then on this day be given to honest poor people of the said Parish of Goring cum Gatehampton presently after Sermon by the discretion of the Minister and the Churchwardens and Overseers of the said Parish for the time being to the world's end.
- Item.* I give and bequeath the ten pounds which Robert Plott of the Parish of Checkenden in the County of Oxon oweth me to the said Parish of Goring to buy a black Cloth for a burying Cloth marked with T for Thomas and a W for Wild and L for Lettice and a W for Wild and a Carpet for the Communion Table, and to be marked with the same letters above named and what remains of the said ten pounds to be bestowed upon ornaments for the Pulpit, that is, this ten pounds to be bestowed against the second six and twentieth day of March after my decease.
- Item.* I give and bequeath to my Neece Elizabeth Cox twelve pence.
- Item.* I give and bequeath to my Neece Lettice Greenwood, now Crooke, twelve pence.
- Item.* The five and thirty pounds which Richard Williams of the said Parish of Goring oweth me, I give and bequeath to my four Neeces, Anne, Elizabeth, Elianor and Mary Greenwood to be equally divided between them within two years after my decease.
- Item.* I give and bequeath my house and land, that is, the rest of it, to be equally divided between the above named Anne, Elizabeth, Elianor and Mary Greenwood. And

if it happen, that either of them dye without Issue of their body, the said part or parts to go equally to the Survivors.

Item. I give and bequeath to the said four Neeces each of them a gown and a Pettycoat, and each of them a suit of small linnen.

Item. I give and bequeath to my nephew John Greenwood and his three Sons twelve pence a piece.

Item. All the rest and residue of my Goods Chattels and Creditts, not herein before bequeathed, I give and bequeath to my loving Neece, Elizabeth Greenwood whom I do make Sole Executrix of this my last Will and Testament. She first paying my debts and funeral expenses. And I do desire my loving friend Henry Alnut Esqre to be my overseer of this my last Will and Testament, and for his pains I give him ten shillings to buy him a ring. In witness whereof I have hereunto got my hand and seal this three and twentieth day of December in the eleventh year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord William the Third, by the Grace of God King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, etc. Anno Dom. 1699.

I have forgiven Roger Paine and Matthew Read their debts before the Sealing hereof.

The mark and seal of

LETTICE SIMMONS.

Signed, sealed published and declared in the presence of

Richard Gutteridge

Mary Read

The mark of

Anne Blackwell."

I have not been able to find why the date of the preaching of the sermon and the distribution of the charity have been changed from March 26 to April 25.

Nothing now remains of the carpet for the Communion Table nor the ornaments for the pulpit, but this is not surprising, as Goring, like many other village churches, underwent a period of great neglect in the early years of the nineteenth century. How desolate the beautiful old Norman church must have been is revealed in the notes of a chance visitor, who came to Goring in 1835. Even if his geography be not above criticism, his words paint a vivid picture of the low esteem into which religion had fallen.

"This is probably the most curious church in the Vale of Berkshire," he writes, "but it is in a filthy condition. The east End of the aisle is used as a coal hole, and a handsome brass is thus disfigured.¹ The church does not seem to need substantial repairs, but it wants the care of a resident incumbent."

¹ This is the brass of Elizabeth Shilton, née Loveday, who died in 1401. It is now on the North Wall of the Chancel.