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Notes on the Church of St. Mary, Watford.

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We have agreed of late to a very salutary rule, which is not to have papers of any length during our excursions, but to examine our subjects with a chiefly oral description, and to commit our notes to paper with some additions later, should they be thought worthy of a

place in the published transactions of this Society. I shall therefore detain you in our view of this Church to-day for as short a time as will suffice for a very brief sketch of its history so far as it is known. It will interest us to remember that Watford, like so many other Churches in this district, originally belonged to S. Albans Abbey, the convent, as was the wont of such establishments in Mediæval times, appropriated the *great* tithes, and appointed a Vicar, supported by the *small* tithes, for the discharge of the spiritual duties of the parish. It will be well to explain here that these great tithes, for the matter has become of some interest of late, were tithes on cornlands, then regarded as the most valuable of landed possessions, while the *small* tithes were only charged on grazing lands, orchards, or gardens. These greater tithes in more modern days have been called the *Rectorial*, and the *lesser* the *Vicarial* tithes, Abbots often as we have seen, held the former, and the parochial Clergy the latter. At the dissolution however, these greater tithes were not generally restored to the Church, but were the spoils of Court favourites, hence the origin of "*Lay Rectors*," or as they are sometimes called "*Lay Impropriators*." In some favoured instances, however, the Abbey tithes were retained by the Cathedrals or Collegiate Churches, which took their places, or went to the support of Colleges in the Universities founded with the money of dissolved religious houses. It appears that all the Vicarages in this Hundred of Cassio were in the patronage of S. Albans Abbey, which will show that the *greater* tithes were the property of the Monastic Rectors, till the time of the dissolution. Mr. Cussans, in his valuable history of Hertfordshire, has recovered a list of the Vicars of Watford from the year 1309 to the present time, which is most valuable for reference, for it often happens that some of the architectural features of a Church may be assigned with much probability to the date and superintendence of some diligent and skilful incumbent of the olden time. As to the building before us, it ranks as one of the largest parish Churches in Hertfordshire, it has been considerably restored, and some portions, notably the south wall, have been rebuilt. Its architectural period is chiefly *perpendicular*, but some old fragments which have been preserved point to work

here of a considerably anterior date. The finest external feature is the tower before us, which is an unusually lofty example of a type very common in Hertfordshire, with the angular staircase, capped with a battlemented turret. These turrets have sometimes been called "beacon," turrets, and it is not improbable that when found on the coast, as for instance in Dorsetshire, where a fine example is seen at Wyke, near Weymouth, and in view of the dangerous Chiswell beach, they might have been so constructed as to contain lanterns, but I don't think that our Hertfordshire Towers were so employed, for the same needs were not apparent here. Access had to be obtained of course to the tower roofs, and the angular staircase had to be enclosed from the weather, and a covering of sufficient height to admit of a door of exit had to be provided. Hence our corner turrets, not always much to be admired, and if the spirelet which carries the eye above them is absent, give an effect which has been described as that of "an object with one ear." To remedy this necessarily constructive effect, the Mediæval Architects were wont to make use of some expedients, which were not difficult of execution in counties where they could get stone; even with the resources of Totternhoe they concealed their one turret for the staircase by three companions at the other angles, in the beautiful, though sadly decayed, Tower of Luton, while its very existence is forgotten in the noble groups of Pinnacles, and magnificent Parapet arrangements, which make up the surpassing beauty of so many of the Towers of Somersetshire. Of our own Towers however, built as they are with the minimum of freestone, and that of a perishable nature, and the maximum of flint and rubble, we must be satisfied that the best was done with the materials then available, and that proportion made up for their meagreness of detail, for as we look at the Tower before us we can admire the former, while confessing that there is much to be desired in the latter. I observed that this was one of the loftiest of this character of Tower in Hertfordshire, another of about equal height has been seen by this Society at Aldenham, and recently described in our Transactions, while a less lofty, but to my eye the best proportioned Tower of the kind

we have, has been visited by us at Kimpton; this with its beautiful Spirelet is now in perfect order, having been repaired by that most skilful of builders, Mr. John Thompson, of Peterborough, under the direction of Mr. John Oldred Scott. We have a Paper on this Church, and a sketch of its Tower in some previous Transactions. But we are now at Watford, and when we enter the Church you will notice a singular arrangement in the fact that the Arches of the Chancel and Tower do not stand even with the roof of the Nave. You will also notice that the fine Chancel has side Chapels, that to the North is built apparently on the site of an Ancient Sacristy, but is now famous for its remarkable Monuments, which by the courtesy of the Earl of Essex, we are permitted to examine to-day, and we hope to view them under the guidance of the custodians of this Church. They have been so often, and so fully described that I need only refer to our County Histories for their record, and mention that the builder of the Chapel, as we see it, was Lady Bridget, Countess of Bedford, the mother of Sir Charles Morrison, of Cassiobury, in 1595. I have only now to add to the Architectural history of this Church, that the Chapel on the South side of the Chancel, now occupied by the organ, known in later years as the Haydon Chapel, was originally the Chapel of S. Catherine. Speaking of the organ reminds me that this Church was one of the first to exhibit an instance of that wonderful choral revival which the present generation has seen. I believe I am right in saying that its choir was the second in this County, that of S. Albans Abbey being the first, to wear surplices. To this, much opposition, as in many similar cases, was shown, but if "fools" are proverbially said to "set the fashion," "wise men" generally "follow it" and such choral "fools" should certainly have been suffered gladly, when it has been seen how contagious has been their example. For in my own experience in the "S. Albans Church Choral Union" when we founded it some 30 years ago we had but four surpliced choirs at our first central festival, while at our last, in 1896, we had none unsurpliced, and most wearing cassocks also. This is a digression, neither Architectural nor Archæological, but certainly Historical, and so I trust pardonable. Another Historical fact, and then I

have finished, the Registers of this Church are of interest and date from 1539 ; being on the high road, some poor travellers are mentioned as having fainted and died by the way, and the dangerous proximity of London, not then as it now boasts itself to be "the healthiest Capital in Europe," is responsible apparently for many out-breaks of infectious diseases. The awful Plague too, which devastated the Metropolis in 1665, appears to have continued its march of death to Watford. So were things once, but now happily Watford rejoices in brighter days.

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