



WATFORD CHURCH,
before the restoration.

Watford Parish Church: Some Further Research.

BY HELEN RUDD.

THE Parish Church of Watford stands on the S.W. side of High Street, near the centre of the town, and ranks as one of the largest parish churches in Hertfordshire. It is dedicated to St. Mary; research has not yet revealed the date of its consecration, and it is doubtful now whether this will ever be known.

No record remains of any Saxon church of Watford, though the existence of a Saxon town has been proved. Built originally in what is known as the Early English style of architecture (A.D. 1150-1250) it so remained for many years. That an earlier church was already existing on this site in the twelfth century appears evident from the fragments of a twelfth-century font and some early masonry found in the walls during the restoration in 1871, by the late Mr. Christopher. These relics clearly point to the earliest church of which we have any evidence. No part of this building as it now stands shows detail older than about A.D. 1230, and the only portions now remaining of the original fabric are to be found in:—

The Chancel Arch and adjacent walls.

The South Arcade of the Nave (Pillars and Arches).

The double Piscina at the East end of South wall of Chancel.

The Rood-loft Doorway over the Pulpit.

The architectural "period" of the existing building is chiefly Perpendicular (fifteenth century).

THE TOWER (fifteenth-century) is the finest external feature of the church, being unusually lofty. It is of faced flint-work, sixteen feet square, and of three stages totalling about eighty feet in height, finished with a plain parapet, from within which rises a small leaded spikelet, twenty feet high, of a type common in the county and known as the "Hertfordshire Spike." The angular staircase is capped with battlemented turrets, which once carried a "Beacon-Cresset," the signals from the church

tower thus playing their part in the national life when telephones and wireless were unknown.

“All night from tower to tower they sprang,” immortalized thus in Macaulay’s stirring lines on the Armada. John Britton, writing in 1806, describes “A beacon at the north-east corner.” At the west, south and east corners were three unsightly stone ornaments in the form of large cones. On the 29th of May in each year great branches of oak were tied to these “ornaments” on the top of the tower, while the bells rang merrily. In a coloured print by R. Slowgrove, Watford, Jan. 1st, 1856 (James Pennell del. et lith.) the excrescences are shown at the corners as described. In 1871 they were removed and placed near the front entrance of the Vicarage grounds.

The upper part of the tower was largely composed of those pieces of early masonry and wrought stone, some as late as the “Decorated Period” (A.D. 1272-1400), which were found in the walls in 1871. It is highly probable that the foundations of the old Norman tower still exist as those of the present massive and embattled structure, and the extreme thickness of its walls is evidence of their Norman origin. The floor of the North Vestry shows signs of the site of the ancient tower foundations. The door and window of the present tower do not “centre” with the Nave—an unusual feature. It is not uncommon to find a Chancel out of line with the Nave (and this construction is known as the “Agony Bend,” being intended to suggest the bowed head of Christ on the Cross), but it is very exceptional to find the tower out of line.

A modern arch, dating from 1871, opens to the Nave, the arches north of the tower being fifteenth century, while those on the south are thirteenth century, similar to the Chancel-arch. A fine old carved chest of the seventeenth century stands beneath the Ringers’ Gallery, and others are to be seen in the north Vestry.

THE BELFRY. Access is given to the upper stages by a Vys (or Vise) in the N.E. angle. Ascending this spiral staircase, the windows are seen to be of two lights in almost entirely modern masonry. There are eight bells and a Priest’s bell.

The Commissioners, appointed in the last year of the

reign of Edward VI. to make an inventory of all goods and furniture then remaining in the churches of Hertfordshire, include in their return for "Watforde":—

"Imprimis v. Belles in the Steple and one mrket bell." This market-bell, which was hanging in the steeple in 1552, became known later as the "Priest's Bell," in accordance with the terms of a bequest made in the reign of James I by Elizabeth, Lady Russell, when a Preacher was appointed to deliver a sermon in the church every Tuesday morning before the ringing of the market bell. No corn was sold before that hour, which, as a rule, was ten o'clock. The existing "Priest's Bell" is dated 1705.

Chauncy, in 1700, says:—

"At the West end of the Church adjoyns a square Tower, in which hang a Ring of Six Bells, with a short shaft or Spire erected thereupon."

Perhaps these bells were those of Edward VI, which were soon after recast into a ring of eight, all of which, with one exception, remained from 1750 till 1919.

In Cooke's "County Directory," c. 1825, we are told of:—

"A flying Dragon fixed upon the summit of an hexagonal spire, to shew the point from which the wind blows. In the tower there is a good Ring of Bells and also a Clock with Chimes."

The set of Chimes used to play four tunes:—

The Scolding Woman,
The Hymn of Eve,
113th Psalm,
The Woodlands.

The tune was changed twice a week, and on each occasion was played through four times, at three, six, nine and twelve o'clock.

THE WALLS (exterior) are faced with modern flint, and the dressings are of stone. Owing to the decay of the greater part of the exterior of the church, nearly the whole of the walls, etc., had to be refaced and restored in 1871, and to-day they bear witness to the sterling qualities of Mr. Christopher's work. It is a source of great satisfaction that none of the usual signs of "raw-

ness," as seen in restored work, are visible here. The short bands of red tiles, which hold the new stone-facing together, are in complete harmony with the cold grey stone.

The oldest work now standing dates back to about 1230, and includes the walls of the Chancel. Built into the north wall of the north aisle outside is a coffin-slab of the fourteenth century, with part of a carved cross.

THE ROOFS, lead covered to-day, had evidently fallen into a bad state of dilapidation in the earlier part of the fifteenth century, as we find among the many legacies left for church repairs one as late as 1449 :—

"For the repair of the lead-work of the nave-roof."

This must have been the old roof of the earlier building, before the higher clerestory was added in the fifteenth century. Johannes Attewelle made this bequest, and Chauncy, in 1700, gives the following imperfect inscription, now hidden by the organ in the Katherine (or Heydon) Chapel :—

"Hic jacet Johannes Attewelle, qui obiit mensis
An. Dom. 14— et Alicia uxor ejus, quae obiit 16 die Septembris
An. Dom. 1450 quibus animabus"

In 1556, the inhabitants of Watford held freely for ever four tenements and three closes called Blaketts, probably after the family of that name :—

"as well towards the repair of the Parish Church of Watford as towards the wages of a man called the Towne Clarke."

THE DOORS AND PORCHES. The fine stone doorway in the north porch is early fifteenth century, and has a four-centred arch under a square head. There is a small arched recess for Holy Water near this doorway, a little to the east inside, probably part of a fifteenth century "stoup."

The north porch and all its details are modern, as also are the south porch and doorway in Bath stone masonry, but the rear arch of the south doorway is old. In the will of Andreas Bures, who died in 1426, he desired to be buried :

"at the south door of Watford Church, opposite the door of the Chapel in the Churchyard."

This chapel has long disappeared. It probably occu-

piet a similar position to that of the Chapel of the Charnel on the south side of St. Peter's Churchyard, St. Albans, remains of which are still visible.

To the eastern side of the south porch is a large tablet with arms above, to the memory of Jane Bell, wife of John Bell (ob. 1796). The inscription was written by the famous Dr. Samuel Johnson, and is mentioned in Boswell's "Life" as a fine eulogium from the outline of her character and Johnson's knowledge of her worth. In her will she directed "her dear husband to distribute £10 a year to ten poor house-keepers in Watford."

The small south door near the Katherine Chapel is rather an unusual feature in old churches, and was there before the restoration in 1871. It may have been put there when this chapel was built in the fifteenth century, to take the place of the Priest's door, which probably existed in the south wall of the Chancel. There was undoubtedly an altar at the east end of the south aisle before this chapel was erected.

THE NAVE ROOF, dating from the second half of the fifteenth century, should be noticed. Although considerably restored, much of the old work remains. At the enlargement of the church in the fifteenth century, when the growing town of Watford needed a larger building, this beautiful timber-roof was added, with its finely sculptured angels bearing shields and carved on the supports of the roof-beams. This was also the age of "Grotesques," and the four supports of the beams at the ends of the Nave take the form of large grotesque heads. The characteristic Early English "mask" is noticeable at the south side of the chancel arch (thirteenth century). The only other "mask" surviving is the carved head of a soldier west of the south aisle.

Before the restoration of the church interior in 1848, the roof was concealed by a plaster ceiling. In that year many other alterations were made; side galleries and box-pews were all cleared away, but the fabric of the church was left in a very bad condition, and it was not until 1871 that a very thorough restoration was made at a cost of about £11,000.

The men of the fifteenth century had indeed left a splendid legacy to posterity in their timber roof.

THE NAVE (71 feet × 25 feet) is divided from the aisles by six-pointed arches on each side. Above the arches is the same number of windows, forming the Clerestory. These are of three cinque-foiled lights dating from the period (about 1460) when considerable additions were made to the church, and the earlier roof was taken away to give place to higher walls, the beautiful open timber-roof, and as much light as possible, in accordance with the new vogue of that period. From the Wills of the Archdeaconry of St. Albans it appears by bequests that much work was done on the fabric of the church between the years 1416 and 1427.

The earlier church of the thirteenth century was, however, the origin of the present fabric, and must have been nearly, but not quite, as long as the present one, having no aisles and but a narrow chancel, with a Rood-loft or "Beam" across that thirteenth century chancel arch. In the north-east angle of the nave, over the pulpit, is the upper doorway of the ancient Rood-loft. Part of the circular staircase thereto projected into the Essex Chapel, and was clearly visible before the chapel was "restored" in 1916, but the lower door had been removed or built up. The existence of this stair is ample evidence that a Rood-loft existed at one time, and we know that a "Rood-light"—the symbol of Christ, the Light of the World—the "Light Shining in the Darkness"—had to be kept burning, in accordance with certain bequests. That stone staircase, all blocked up now, led to a platform across the chancel arch, on which in the fifteenth century were stationed the Holy Rood and the figures of the Crucifixion. No trace now remains of Chancel-screen or of Rood-loft above it. Very few of these lofts have survived, but part of one still exists at Redbourn, near St. Albans.

In the Nave a curious feature is to be noticed: three of the pillars of the south arcade (Early English, 1150-1250) are seen to be of much later date than the others—to be, in fact, exact copies of the pillars of the north arcade. Probably it was found that those pillars of the Early English arcade, being of slighter and softer stone, were unable to bear the added weight above them when the roof was raised. These larger pillars were therefore put in place of them. Typical of the thirteenth century

are the "Water-courses" round the base of some of the pillars.

When, in the fifteenth century, the north aisle was added and the south side reconstructed, their western ends were prolonged on the north and south sides of the tower, thus forming the present Vestries, both of which have arched openings communicating with the aisles. The whole of the south aisle had to be rebuilt in 1871, and the men engaged in removing the old foundation had a very narrow escape as the wall fell while they were at work, bringing down with it part of the roof.

The seating is all modern, and the old coloured print "from Nature, by J. C. Oldmeadow," shows the box-pews in existence before the restoration of the church interior in 1848. John Britton says that the church in 1806 was "a very spacious building, crowded with high pews and galleries,"—so high that the congregation could not be seen when sitting or kneeling, and only their heads were visible when standing. The middle aisle was much wider than now, and forms were placed down the centre for poor people and children.

In 1766 was built a spacious and lofty Gallery in front of the arch which divides the nave from the tower. It was entered by a small doorway from a staircase leading also to the belfry, the floor of which was removed when the restoration of 1848 took place under the superintendence of Sir Gilbert Scott, R.A. The bell-ropes were lengthened so that the ringers might stand on the ground floor. This gallery was supported by fluted columns of oak with carved capitals, and in the tower-arch was fitted a pair of handsome folding panelled doors in oak, with carved moulding.

There were galleries over both north and south aisles, approached by wide staircases near the tower, and narrow ones near the chancel-arch. The floors of these galleries were supported by massive joists, the ends of which were let into the ancient pillars, very much defacing and weakening these. Some of the pews in the galleries were entirely enclosed on three sides, forming comfortable rooms furnished with chairs and tables, stoves and coal-scuttles, even fire-irons and hearth-brushes! The fronts of these pews were three feet high, the book-board being covered with velvet.

THE PULPIT had a sounding-board and an oak canopy, which were removed at the restoration of the church in 1848. An old print before this date shows the edge of the pulpit higher than the capitals of the pillars, and in proximity to the side gallery. Hexagonal and of good design, carved and moulded with cornice and inlaid panels having garlands in high relief at the angles, after the manner of Grinling Gibbons, perhaps this pulpit is by the master himself, as he executed a great deal of carving at Cassiobury in the seventeenth century.

A PISCINA of fifteenth century type is in an arched recess east of the small south door. When the whole of the south wall was rebuilt in 1871, from the west end up to and including St. Katherine's Chapel (now the organ place), and when the south porch was also rebuilt, this Piscina was put in, and was probably a copy of one previously there. Before this chapel was erected in the fifteenth century, and the arches formed between it and the south aisle, there was no doubt an altar at the east end of this aisle—hence the presence of a Piscina in this wall.

THE CHANCEL (39 feet × 20 feet) opens from the nave by a large pointed arch of the same date as the south arcade, c. 1230, and the substance of the walling is probably of the thirteenth century also. The roof is of low pitch, the rafters being modern. The walls were cut through and back, to allow of the addition of the chapels on the north and south. The East Window of five lights is fifteenth century, much restored.

Returning to the north wall, we again note the arcade of two bays, opening into the north (or Essex) Chapel and having a Roman Doric central column, with the characteristic eggs, darts, and abacus. This pillar supports the junction of these two Gothic arches (of late sixteenth century date, c. 1595) at the entrance to the chapel, and one would have to travel far to see another instance of this unique feature of the Renaissance influence. The arches between the chancel and the Heydon (or St. Katherine) Chapel are earlier, and date from about the year 1500.

THE CHAPELS. There can be no doubt of the existence of former chapels in both transepts, before that of the present North and South Chapels, as we find three

chaplains serving the church from the Abbey of St. Albans in the early part of the fifteenth century, c. 1416. We also learn that there was a chapel dedicated to our "Lady of Pity," and another to the "Blessed Mary," which has not yet been identified, and in which was buried Philip Terry, Vicar of Watford, who died in 1424. At this period there was also a "Chapel of Our Lady within the churchyard of Watford." Chief in interest among our Tudor memorials is:—

THE ESSEX CHAPEL (39 feet × 21 feet), formerly known as the Morrison Chapel. It opens from the north side of the chancel with late sixteenth century arches, of which that on the east has been walled up. The classic column, its capital enriched with egg-and-dart moulding, has already been described. Fragments of early masonry (old twelfth century stones) from the earliest church of which we have any evidence, are preserved in this chapel. The panelled oak roof is but little higher than that of the north aisle, into which the chapel also opens through a carved oak screen in which are inserted large panes of glass. This dates from the restoration of the church in 1848, when a similar screen was also erected round St. Katherine's Chapel, and the chancel separated from the nave by a dwarf screen with gates of carved oak.

The north window is noticeable as being secular rather than ecclesiastical in character, being exactly the type that was introduced into many fine halls built about the country in Elizabethan times. A second window of three lights is blocked by the monument before it. The five-light east window of the same period is large and square-headed, with a transom. Beneath it stood the altar-tomb of the foundress of the chapel, Bridget, daughter of John, Baron Hussey, and widow of Sir Richard Morrison, Knight, of Cassiobury Manor.

On 29th August, 1546, this Manor was granted by Henry VIII to Sir Richard, not as a free gift, but for purchase-money, and in exchange for certain properties in Yorkshire, the native county of the knight. This purchase followed the surrender of the fortieth and last Abbot of St. Albans on 5th December, 1539, Cassiobury having been held by the Abbey since A.D. 793. Sir Richard is not buried in this chapel, says the chronicle:—

“To the Great Grief of all good men, he died on the 17th day of March, 1556, at Strasburg, whither he had fled in the reign of Queen Mary, a voluntary exile, to escape persecution as a Protestant.”

His widow, the Lady Bridget, built this chapel in 1595, perhaps on the site of the ancient Sacristy, or Vestry, which was probably of about the same extent in the fifteenth century as the chapel of to-day, and a great part has been renewed. The north aisle of the nave was opened out when the chapel was built as a burial place for the Lords of the Manor of Cassiobury, who were patrons of the Vicarage of Watford. For generations the Lady Bridget's tomb stood in stately splendour before the east window here, until its regrettable removal in 1907 to Chenies, the seat of the Duke of Bedford, in view of the preparation of the chapel for Divine Service later on. She had married twice after the death of Sir Richard, her husbands being Henry Manners, Earl of Rutland, and Francis Russell, Earl of Bedford. In the Parish Registers her burial is recorded thus:—

“A.º 1601.
Burialls. Comitissa Brīdgida mih. mult. nomibq honoratiss.
e vita emigrauit die Januarij 11, et sepult. erat splend.
18 die februarij.”

The inscription on her monument describes her as:—

“One of the Noblest Matrons of England for her Wisdom and Judgement, and after livinge 75 years in most honourable reputation, this noble Countess of Bedford died most quietly in perfect sense and memorie.”

A slab on the floor in this chapel is now the only memorial of the fact that her tomb had rested here undisturbed for more than three hundred years (1602-1907). Her son and grandson—each in his turn Sir Charles Morrison, Knight, and M.P. for Hertfordshire—are both buried in the spacious vault below the chapel. It is curious that neither the “Victoria History of Hertfordshire” nor the “Inventory of National Monuments” notes that there are two Sir Charles Morrisons here, with a monument for each, which were executed in the best Jacobean period, an: 1619 and 1628, by the famous “Tombe-maker and Carver, Nicholas Stone, of St. Martin-in-the-Fields.” The elder knight's son kneels

at the east end of his father's tomb; his daughter, Bridget, wife of Robert Ratcliffe, Earl of Sussex, is kneeling at the west end, facing her brother. Stone describes these memorials as "being of white allabaster and touchstone; one pictor of white marble for his father, and his own, and his sister, the Countess of Sesex (*i.e. Sussex*) as great as life." This refutes a supposition that Dame Dorothy Morrison is represented by the latter effigy. The date of the death of this Countess of Sussex, in December, 1623, conflicts with the date of the Earl's subsequent marriage to Frances, widow of Edward Shute (*Settlement 10 June 1623*) as given in works on the Peerage.

On the north side of the chapel is the monument of the younger Sir Charles, and we therefore see two life-size figures of one man. This tomb was made by an agreement between Stone and "Dame Mary Morrison of Kashbury," widow of Sir Charles, and afterwards twice married, her husbands being Sir John Cooper and Sir Richard Alford. The List of Benefactions in the north vestry gives her name as Dame Mary Morrison and Dame Mary Cowper. Her burial is recorded in the Register of 1638 (Dec. 13th) as "Ladye Alford." None of the works on the Baronetage records the date of her death, nor that she is buried at Watford.

For this monument to her first husband she paid Stone:—

"£400 of lawful money of England.....the faire and staightly tombe to consist of good and pure white marble, royally carved..... on a basement of allabaster and enrich with touchstone, or black marble, to be done roially and in the best manner."

At the head of this noble monument to her parents, kneels a young girl with the short curls of the Stuart ladies beneath her veil—Elizabeth Morrison, their daughter and heiress, who married Arthur, 1st Baron Capell of Hadham, thus bringing Cassiobury into the Capell family. Her portrait by Vandyck was among the family pictures sold by auction at Cassiobury in June, 1922. She is buried at Little Hadham, where her husband's body also rests since his beheadal on Tower Hill in 1648-9, for his devotion to his King in the defence of Colchester. While incarcerated in the Tower he composed the following philosophical lines:—

“ That which the world miscalls a jail,
 A private cloister is to me,
 Whilst a good conscience is my bail,
 And innocence my liberty.
 Locks, bars and solitude, together met,
 Make me no prisoner, but an anchoret.”

These lines recall the more famous poem of Lovelace (1618-1658):—

“ Stone walls do not a prison make,
 Nor iron bars a cage;
 Minds innocent and quiet take
 These for an hermitage.”

His eldest son, Arthur, whose existence has been ignored in all works on the Peerage, died in infancy, and his second surviving son, also baptized Arthur, was the 1st (*Capell*) Earl of Essex. The older Devereux earldom being extinct, the title was revived in the Capell creation on the restoration of King Charles II, hence the name “Essex Chapel.” This Earl lies buried in the vault below, after dying a violent death in the Tower for complicity in the Rye House Plot, 1683. He was imprisoned in the cell occupied in 1648-9 by his father, Lord Capell of Hadham, and was survived by his wife, Elizabeth, daughter of Algernon Percy, 10th Earl of Northumberland.

At the foot of the monument to the younger Sir Charles, and facing his daughter, Elizabeth, are her two little brothers, who both died young. The Latin inscription at the back of the tomb says of them:—

“ Baptistae et hickso morisonis suavissimis filiolis in ipso blandissimo pueritiae flore extinctis.”

Baptist's name was that of his mother's father, Baptist Hicks, 1st Viscount Campden: his younger brother was christened “Hix,” as the Register of 1621 spells it, his mother's maiden-name.

Of Dame Dorothy Morrison, grandmother of these children, we find no memorial here. In the centre of the chapel there stood for nearly three hundred years a magnificent monument to her daughter by a former marriage—Elizabeth, daughter of Henry Long, wife of William, Lord Russell of Thornhaugh, step-daughter of the elder Sir Charles Morrison, and daughter-in-law of

Francis, 2nd Earl of Bedford. Her monument was, alas! carried off to Chenies in 1907 with that of her grandmother, Bridget, Countess of Bedford. The inscription says:—

“This noble ladie passing the fewe and evil days of her pilgrimage heare, and being grown wearie of this present lief, desired to be with Christ. She quietlie and sweetlie slept in the Lord, the 12th day of June 1611.”

“Dame Dorothy Morryson, her most loving and affectionate mother, for an eternal pledge of her motherlie love consecrated this monument.”

ST. KATHERINE'S CHAPEL (32 feet × 13 feet) is also known as the Heydon Chapel from the name of its founders, William Heydon and Johanna, his mother, “who built the South Isle of this Church, and died Anno 1505.” In the fourteenth century this family owned the Grove, Watford, which since 1776 has been the seat of the Earls of Clarendon. On a shield, hidden by the organ, are carved the Heydon arms, and the inscriptions to this family from the year 1400 are also, alas! lost to sight.

THE VESTRIES, which open out from the north and south aisles at their west end, date from about the middle of the fifteenth century. In the South Vestry is a tablet of white marble to the memory of Robert Clutterbuck, the historian, who was Churchwarden here for more than thirty years. A painting of the Royal Arms, dated 1736, was moved to this vestry from a position over the Chancel arch at the restoration of the church in 1848.

In the North Vestry appears the original base course of the Norman tower externally. The archway opening into the north aisle is blocked by a very fine carved oak vestment press, and there is also a sixteenth century coffer of wrought iron. Two beautiful carved oak chests of the seventeenth century are also preserved here, and a writing-table of the same date.

The Parish Registers (1539 to 1813) are in twelve books, and are noted as being a splendid set, with only one small gap, 1712 to 1716. There are a Cromwellian Civil Register, 1653-1659, and the Affidavit Book of Persons Buried in Woollen, 1678-1713.

As early as the year 1119 tithes are recorded from this parish to the Abbey of St. Albans, who owned Watford

Parish Church. After the Dissolution the Rectory of Watford, "a late possession of Markyate"; was obtained by Sir John Russell, whose son, Francis, 2nd Earl of Bedford, married Bridget Morrison, foundress of the Essex Chapel. Her son, Sir Charles Morrison, purchased the Rectory and Advowson of Watford from his step-father, thus becoming the "Lay Rector":—

"Queen Elizabeth granted her License to Francis Russell, Earl of Bedford, to alienate the Advowson of the Vicarage of Watford to Charles Morrison, of Casshobarye, Herts, Esq., June 1, 1583."

From this point the Parish Church was connected with Cassiobury until 1907, when the advowson was sold to the Bishop of Newcastle and others.

[The writer desires to tender her thanks to Mr. J. P. Taylor, of Watford, for his kindness in lending the two old prints which are here reproduced, also to Mr. Ernest Woolley for kindly photographing them for this volume. They show the Church as it was before the restoration in 1848, and date from about 1837.]