

## CHARING CHURCH.

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THE name of this parish used to be pronounced *Char-ring*, or the Market Place. When had Charing first a church? None is mentioned in Domesday Book; but I think there must have been a church here prior to the Norman Conquest and long prior to any distinguishable portion of the present edifice. A reference to the church of Charing, with its chapel (meaning Egerton), is found in the Taxation of Pope Nicholas A.D. 1291.

The area now included in this parish seems to have been rather over-furnished with churches during the Middle Ages, when no less than five sacred edifices existed here. The Lambeth Registers record presentations of incumbents not only to the Parish Church, but also (i) to the Church of Pette-juxta-Charing; (ii) to the Chantry Chapel at Burleigh, sometimes called the Church of Burleigh; and (iii) to the Norman Chapel of Newland; of all of which remains are still to be seen within the parish of Charing. There was also here the private chapel of the Archbishop within his Manor House.

In the Parish Church the oldest visible marks of date will be found in two lancet windows; one in the north wall of the nave, and another (with a slightly different heading) in the north wall of the chancel. There are also remains, now covered with plaster, of an Early English string-course, running just below the window-sills, along the north and south walls of the nave and round the north transept.

Guessing from the date of these remains, the earliest portion of the present church may have been erected between A.D. 1220 and A.D. 1250, built perhaps when Henry III. was King, and when Stephen Langton, as Archbishop of Canterbury, resided from time to time in the adjoining Manor House.

The transepts appear to be of a little later date, although the string-course before mentioned was found in the north transept; but the labels above the windows there are in character Transitional, between Early English and Decorated.

The south transept has been much altered. Hasted mentions the Burleigh chantry as situated there, but it would rather seem that

when the chantry adjoining Burleigh Manor House was suppressed, the owners of that manor acquired in substitution certain rights in the south transept of the parish church. The occupiers of Burleigh Farm retained till quite recently the right of sitting in this south transept. After the great fire in this church A.D. 1590, Mr. Darell of Calehill, as lord of the manor of Burleigh, restored the seats in the south transept. The panels dated 1592 and bearing the arms of Mr. Darell and of Ann Horne his wife, which are now preserved against the south transept wall, originally formed part of the Burleigh pew.

It may be conjectured that somewhat similar rights in the north transept were granted to the owners of Pett Place when the church of Pette-juxta-Charing ceased to exist, as the families of Honeywood and Sayer appear to have had the right of sitting and burying in this transept for several centuries. With reference to the church of Pette, it is worthy of note that the researches of Canon Scott Robertson have discovered sundry presentations to this church ranging from A.D. 1318 to 1390 inclusive; and amongst the Kent Fines, during the 12th year of Edward II., there is one between Roger de Eggerindenn and his daughter and Hamo de Remenale, parson of the church of Pette, dealing with land and rents in Westwell and Hotfelde. (*Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. XIV., p. 255.)

In the chancel are three Sedilia of varying height, for the priest, deacon, and sub-deacon; here, perhaps, occupied by the Archbishop, his chaplain and cross-bearer. The present Sedilia are for the most part a modern restoration by Mr. Christian. Sir Stephen Glynne, in 1854, called them "three plain rude Sedilia mis-shapen and obtuse."

The windows of the church vary much in character, and indicate in a marked manner the people's progressive desire for more light; increasing from the narrow Early English lancet to the Perpendicular window of unusually large size, to be seen on the north side of the nave below the transept.

On the south side of the nave is a Decorated reticulated window of great size, which is very remarkable of its kind. It is square headed, and is itself nearly a perfect square. The design is ingenious and the effect good. I believe it to be pure Decorated, of about A.D. 1350. In the north transept there are also reticulated windows, probably of the same date.

The chapel known as the Wicken Chapel, on the south side of chancel, deserves particular attention. This is the chapel of St.

Mary, built by Amy Brent, the widow of William Brent, who lived in an interesting old house in this parish called Wickens. She died in the year 1516, and by her will directed that she should be buried "in the chapel of Our Lady of her own edification." John Brent, the brother of Amy Brent's husband, by his will, proved in 1501, likewise ordered his body to be buried in the new Chapel of St. Mary, in which no burial had then been; so that as to the Wickens chancel there is no question as to the date of the building being circa A.D. 1499.

The vestry on the north of the chancel is also worthy of notice. It is an earlier building for that purpose than is usually found in parish churches; but in recent times it has been adapted by the insertion of a modern window to the purposes of a modern vestry. No doubt it was originally intended for the church vestments, and probably in it were kept the three copes of white damask, the suits of tawny damask and bawdkyn, the vestment of blue taffeta, the altar cloth of popyngay or parrett colour, and other church goods which appear in the Charing Inventory of A.D. 1552. (*Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. VIII., p. 128.)

Attention should next be directed to the tower, with its fine arch opening into the nave; a singularly well-proportioned example of what have been called Kentish towers, and having angle buttresses of a remarkable character; the face of each buttress being formed anglewise. The porch plainly appears to have been built at the same time as the tower; both being of good ragstone masonry and of Perpendicular work. Weever, writing about the year 1592, said, "On the outside of the belfry do remain carved in stone the badge of Edward IV. (being a rose within the sun-beams), and a wivern, being the arms of Hugh Brent, who, in the reign of Edward IV., was the principal founder of this belfry, which was before of wood." The tower has a fine west doorway, no doubt intended as the processional entry for the Archbishop and his attendants; the porch having been built for the use of the people, to supersede an older and loftier doorway, traces of which may be seen above the inner porch door.

Parker, in his *Glossary of Architecture*, vol. iii., speaking of buildings erected between the years 1479 and 1515, says, "The tower of Charing Church built; style Late Perpendicular; the upper part is very poor work." On this it may be remarked that the author of that sentence could not himself have seen the tower, for it is equally and uniformly good from bottom to top, except in the upper windows, which were injured by the great fire.

Within the porch are the remains of the stoup for holy water, with a hooded covering, and outside, between the porch and the tower, is a niche intended doubtless for an image or statue, of which, however, there is no vestige. For the fine roofs in both nave and chancel, of distinctive Elizabethan character, the church is indebted to those parishioners who witnessed the great fire, which happened in the year 1590; respecting which Robert Honeywood of Pett, a lineal ancestor of the present owner of Pett Place, who is the writer of this paper, made at the time the following note in his diary: "Mem.:—The parish church of Charing was burnt upon Tuesday the 4th of August, 1590, and the bells in the steeple melted with the extremity of the fire; nothing of the church was left but the bare walls, except the floor over the porch and the floor over the turret, where the weather-cock doth stand. The fire chanced by means of a birding-piece discharged by one Mr. Dios, which fired in the shingels; the day being extreme hot and the same shingels very dry."

Weever states that this "birding-piece" was discharged at a pigeon, then upon the church. The date of the new roofs is happily placed upon them. That of the nave appears above the chancel arch as follows, 1592, E. R. 34; and on the chancel roof may be read Ann. Dom. 1620, Anno Regni Jacobi XVIII. From which it would seem that the parishioners were more prompt in their restoration of the nave than the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's with respect to their chancel, there being an interval of twenty-eight years between the completion of the two roofs. Church restorers will do well to note how far finer is the effect of the roof in the nave than in the chancel. In the latter (which was restored by Mr. Christian) there is a dark boarding on the upper side of the rafters; in the former (restored by Mr. St. Aubyn) the intervals between the rafters are plastered.

We learn from the Inventory of 1552 that previous to the fire there were four bells in the steeple; and a "sauncts" bell, which probably hung in the opening above the chancel arch. The same inventory shews that a good many of the shingles, which were set on fire by the birding-piece of Mr. Dios, were paid for out of the proceeds of a chalice and pax of silver, sold by the churchwardens to Master John Brent of Wickens for £5 6s. 8d.

The Inventory of 1552 is very interesting, with its long list of vestments and church goods, but it fails to mention the block on which St. John the Baptist was beheaded, which tradition affirms

was brought into England in the reign of Richard I., and kept in this church, and which (says Dean Hook) afforded some measure of consolation and support to Archbishop Stratford in his troubles about the year 1340.

Of the church sittings set up after the fire of 1590 but few specimens remain. Those now in the Wickens chancel represent the general seating of the nave. The bench-ends now in the tower were probably placed originally in the chancel; there being just twelve of them, furnishing the two benches and the book desk on either side.

It ought not to be omitted that there is in the tower a very tuneful peal of six bells, given to the parish by Bishop Tufnell a few years ago, when he acted as curate in charge of the parish. Under his auspices the recent restoration of the church was set on foot, and completed. Previous to Bishop Tufnell's gift, there had been only one bell; a circumstance which gave rise to a foolish and untrue distich:

"Dirty Charing lies in a hole;  
It has but one bell, and that was stole."

The one bell in question bore the date 1608, and was no doubt cast out of the material of the four bells melted by the fire; and Charing, situated on the slope of the chalk hills, can scarcely be said to lie in a hole.

The church is dedicated to SS. Peter and Paul, a dedication which it shares with thirty or more other churches in the county, though not, I believe, common in other parts of England.

As regards monuments, Charing has little or nothing to arrest attention save a mural tablet, in the Wickens chancel, to a son of Edward Dering, vicar of this church: *Infans Suavissimus*, a most sweet infant, who, after two years four months and thirty-three days, "*abreptus est ad Christi oscula*, was snatched away to the kisses of Christ." A flat slab in the same chancel commemorates Catherine Dering, wife of the Rev. Ed. Dering; and the inscription states that she was the daughter of Wm. Levet, Esq., who served King Charles I. many years, and attended him on the scaffold at the time of his martyrdom. She died Dec. 4, 1701.

Under the yew-tree in the churchyard, which stands between the vicarage and the church, may be read the following warning to all vicars of Charing: "Oh Vicar! whoever thou art, reflect and profit by the reflection, how small the distance and perhaps quick

the transition from yon house thou inhabitest to the caverns of the dead."

The church plate is at present as follows :

1. A chalice, date mark 1688.  
 2. A paten, forming cover to the above, and with the same date mark.

3. A large flagon, 13 inches high, date mark 1704; inscribed, "Charing Church in the county of Kent 1706."

4. An alms dish, with the same inscription.

5. A silver gilt cup and cover, height 1 foot 7 inches, weighing 37 ozs.; date mark 1599; ornamented with scallop shells; a very handsome and interesting piece of plate bequeathed to the church by the will of Elizabeth Ludwell, who died in 1765, and which, in Mr. Lambert's judgment, is an ancient *goddet* or grace cup, and was not originally intended for sacred purposes.

6. A large two-handled cup, or bowl, with cover; date mark 1676; inscribed, "Gift of Mrs. Ludwell to the Parish Church of Charing for the use of the Communion Table."

The parish registers commence in August 1590, the earlier books having been destroyed in the great fire of that year, mentioned by Robert Honywood of Pett. There are two interesting old books of parish accounts, very regularly kept and signed, from A.D. 1616 to A.D. 1724. The first of these books also contains the entries of births, marriages, and deaths from 1590 to 1598 inclusive; probably the original entries from which the register books now usually produced were copied.