

THE OLD CHURCH OF ST. MARTIN, AT
DOVER.

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THE history of "Old St. Martin's," or the church of St. Martin-le-Grand in (but now behind) the Market Square, at Dover, is somewhat remarkable. It was at first a Collegiate Church. In A.D. 691, Wihtred, King of Kent, removed the College of Canons from Dover Castle into the town, where he built for them a church dedicated to St. Martin. This church was then accounted "a royal chapel," and the canons were increased in number, so that there were twenty-two of them. These canons of St. Martin were so largely endowed, that in the *Domesday Survey* their lands occupy a separate and considerable place, under the heading "*Terra Canoniorum S. Martini de Dovre.*" Their church, built for them originally by King Wihtred, in 691, could not well survive the great fire which devastated Dover about A.D. 1066-67. So terrible were the effects of this fire, upon the town of Dover, that the *Domesday Survey* makes specific mention thereof. It records that on King William's "first arrival in England the town itself was burnt, and therefore its value could not be computed, how much it was worth when the Bishop of Baieux received it."

If the Saxon church was partially or entirely destroyed by fire, a handsome Norman church must have been erected *circa* A.D. 1070. Canon Puckle has proved that the site upon which it was built had been occupied by Roman baths. He found the actual floor of the Roman building, beneath part of the east end, and north aisle, of the choir of Old St. Martin's Church, and he traced Roman masonry in an arch of the north transept, see *Archæologia Cantiana*, XX., p. 121. Fragments of the choir and transepts remain still behind the houses on the west side of the market-place. The nave with

its aisles was pulled down soon after A.D. 1536. Its pews were given by King Henry VIII. to the parish of St. Mary, for use in St. Mary's Church. The site of the nave was used as a churchyard for burials, and within it was interred the body of Charles Churchill, the poet, in the year 1764.

The history of this Norman church between the years 1070 and 1536 was not of the ordinary type. Its privileges as a royal chapel were lost in A.D. 1130, when King Henry I. granted it to Archbishop Corboil and his Priory of Christ Church, at Canterbury. Archbishop Corboil and his successor, Theobald, turned out the canons of St. Martin-le-Grand on account of irregularities, and considering that the position of that church within the town was to some extent conducive to irregularities, a new priory and church were erected outside the walls of Dover, and filled with Benedictine monks. The new priory was endowed, by those Archbishops, with all the property of the old canons of St. Martin's. It obtained the name of St. Martin Newark (that is, "of the new work"), while the ancient church in the market-place was thenceforward known as Old St. Martin's,* or St. Martin's-le-Grand.

This old church, from A.D. 1139 to A.D. 1536, had a parochial character of a very peculiar kind. It was, like many others, exempt from the jurisdiction of the Archdeacon of Canterbury, and subject only to the Archbishop himself. Archdeacon Richard de Ferringes endeavoured to exercise jurisdiction over Old St. Martin's, but the Mayor and Commonalty of Dover energetically disputed his claim, so that in 1284 Archbishop Peckham issued a commission of inquiry, whereat the matter was settled.

The incumbent of St. Martin's-le-Grand was called the archpriest (*archipresbyter*), like the incumbent of the parish

* It was styled "the Old Church of St. Martin" seven hundred years ago, in a charter granted to the Priory of St. Martin Newark, by Archbishop Richard, *circa* A.D. 1180. This charter confirms to the Priory "veterem quoque ecclesiam Beati Martini, *cum parochiis*, et libertatibus, et omnibus aliis, sive in terra sive in mari ad ipsam juste pertinentiis; ecclesiam etiam Sanctæ Mariæ; ecclesiam Sancti Petri; ecclesiam Sancti Jacobi; quæ in Burgo Dovorra sitæ sunt et fundatæ," etc. (Dr. Sheppard's *Literæ Cantuarienses*, iii., 873).

of Ulcombe in Kent; but the extant Registers of the Archbishops do not contain the record of any appointment to this office. Evidently the church of the Newark Priory of St. Martin assumed all the parochial rights, dues, and duties of the Old Church of St. Martin. An Indulgence mentions "fabricam parochialis ecclesie Sci. Martini Novi Operis" (*Reg. S. Martini*, 52^b).

The special peculiarity of Old St. Martin's Church in Dover was, that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it combined beneath its one roof the churches of three parishes. They were those of St. Martin, St. Nicholas, and St. John the Baptist. This peculiar arrangement continued even in the time of Leland. He visited Dover before the death of Henry VIII., and apparently before A.D. 1536. He says: "The towne is devided into vi paroches, wherof iii be under one rofe at St Martines yn the hart of the town." The other three parishes were those of St. Mary, St. James, and St. Peter, which are named in the Charter granted, *circa* A.D. 1180, by Archbishop Richard, quoted in a note above.

A cathedral has in some cases contained the church of one parish beneath its roof. At Rochester Cathedral, the parish of St. Nicholas was permitted to use part of the cathedral's nave as a parish church. The case of St. Faith under St. Paul's, in London, is well known.

St. Martin-le-Grand, at Dover, is almost unique in its peculiarity of having combined, within itself, three separate churches of three distinct parishes. In Devonshire, the parish of Tiverton was divided into four portions, each having a rector, while there was but one church; at Pontesbury, in Salop, there are three similar "portions," as there were also, until recent times, at Bampton, Oxon., and at Waddesdon, Bucks. The arrangement at Dover was far more convenient than in those parishes. At St. Martin's-le-Grand, each of the three incumbents had a separate high altar, and a distinct area to occupy.

As time went on, all mention of the archpriest of St. Martin's disappeared from the Archiepiscopal Registers. Perhaps his office fell practically into abeyance after the Primacy of Archbishop Courtenay. Thus, from 1384 to

1536, it may be that, practically, only two incumbents occupied the large building. They were the incumbent of the parish of St. Nicholas, and the incumbent of St. John the Baptist's parish. Each of these incumbents was admitted and instituted by the Archbishop to his office, and to the cure of souls in his parish, but every entry of such admission and institution states distinctly that the altar of St. Nicholas, and the altar of St. John the Baptist, stood within the Old Church of St. Martin. The absence of all mention of the archpriest of St. Martin's for 150 years shews that the new Priory's Church absorbed the rights and duties of Old St. Martin's. His office comes into notice in A.D. 1511, in a statement that its "wages" are too small to induce any "honest preest" to accept it. The laity in Dover still desired to maintain the fabric of the old church. Two years later, in 1513, John Claryngbold, of St. Mary's parish, bequeathed 3s. 4d. to the reparation of the "Church of St. Martyn of Dovor"; and John Clercke of St. James's parish bequeathed 6s. 8d. to the same old church.

Architecturally the Old Church of St. Martin was noble. A plan of its ruined east end was given, by Dr. Plumptre, to the Kent Archæological Society, and will be found in *Archæologia Cantiana*, IV., opposite p. 27.

The structure, cruciform in plan, was undoubtedly grand in its design and its proportions. The choir was apsidal; it had two choir-aisles, vaulted with tufa; from its eastern end projected three apsidal chapels. It possessed a triforium, above which was the clerestory. Its three eastern apsidal chapels were carried up into the triforium, so that upon their site stood two tiers of chapels, six in all. It had transepts north and south of the great central tower, and the discoveries made, in 1892, by Mr. Edward W. Fry, prove that these transepts had each a chapel projecting from its east end.

When Archbishop Warham held his visitation in 1511, it was found "that the church and steeple of S^t Martin are unrepaired; the which doeth great hurt to the Church of Seynt Nicholas." Also, that the church of St. Martin "is

not served with more masses a day but the passage masse." Also, that "the wages of th'archpreest of Seynt Martyns in Dover is so small that noo honest preest will tary there, and so Divine service is not dewly kept."

At the same visitation, the churchwardens of St. Nicholas's parish reported "that the church of Seynt Martynes doeth the parisshe churche of Seynt Nicholas great hurt in fawte of reparation of the said church of Seynt Martynys." Also, they complain "that the parson paieth a pension to the Prior of Dover xjs. a yere, and the benefice is but v marks a yere" (equivalent to £3 6s. 4d.).

The report made, in 1511, by the churchwardens of the third parish (St. John the Baptist) shews that they had abandoned all idea of attempting to have Divine service in their portion of the grand old edifice. The churchwardens of St. John say "that they have no preest to serve the church, but at the parisshe fynding; & the parish is in such debility that it sufficeth not for a rector's sustenance." They add also "that the parsonage [of S^t John's parish] is decayed bicause there is noo parson and by reason of that is nyghe lost."

The reader will gather, even from these visitation presentments, that there had been a rector of St. Nicholas's parish and a rector of St. John the Baptist's parish. The records of the institutions of these clergymen are worded in the peculiar manner which we should expect, when we know that the high altar of St. Nicholas's Church and the high altar of St. John's Church were both beneath the roof of St. Martin's Church.

As an example we will translate from the register of Archbishop Islip (folio 253a) the record of collation of one such rector: "On the 7th of the Kalends of April A.D. 1350, at Mortlake, the most reverend Father, the Lord Simon, by the grace of God archbishop of Canterbury, conferred on Richard, called 'of Woodstock,' a chaplain, the Rectory of the Altar of S^t Nicholas in the Church of S^t Martin at Dover, now vacant, and to his collation of full right belonging by reason of the vacancy of the office of Prior of Dover, and did canonically institute him rector of the said altar," etc. In

the register of Archbishop Arundel, Simon Passemer was described as "curator* of the altar or *altaragium* of St Nicholas in the Old Church of St Martin at Dover." He exchanged that position with John Flewe, who, for it, gave up the vicarage of St. John's in Thanet, August 26, 1400. In the year 1445 John Lascyngham was instituted by Archbishop Stafford "to the rectory, or portion, of the altar of St Nicholas in St Martin's, Dover." His successor John Skales resigned in 1447 the incumbency of St. Nicholas, which was given to a University graduate Master John Hunt (Stafford's *Register*, fol. 94^b). Mr. Skales then accepted the incumbency of St. John the Baptist's altar with its cure of souls, which he retained until 1469. The entry in Archbishop Stafford's Register (folio 92^b) employs these words:—
 "... Dominum Johannem Skales, capellanum, ad altare Sancti Johannis Baptiste curatum, in ecclesia veteri Sancti Martini, Dovorr. Cant. dioc., per liberam resignationem Domini Johannis Goldsmyth, ultimi curati ibidem, vacans Idemque admissus institutus fuit Rector sive curatus in eodem, cum suis juribus et pertinentibus universis Curam animarum," etc., etc.

In the Registers of the Mediæval Archbishops of Canterbury, every admission of a rector of St. Nicholas, Dover, or of a rector of St. John Baptist, Dover, is similarly worded. Not one such entry omits to mention the connection of these rectors with the Old Church of St. Martin.

About one-eighth of a mile south-east of Old St. Martin's Church, there remained in Bench Street, until the end of the last century, a mediæval house with a tower, connected with which was one of those vaulted basements, so common in mediæval houses, but by modern observers generally called a crypt. This in the last century was dubbed "St. Nicholas Church," and is so mentioned by Hasted in his *History*. That this building was not the church of St. Nicholas, the

* Every entry of admission, to these peculiar parochial altars, contains phrases which connect the cure of souls with the incumbency. In Archbishop Bourghier's Register (folio 96^b) it is fully stated that when Thomas Smale was instituted to the Rectory of the Altar of St. Nicholas in the Old Church of St. Martin, "the cure of souls of the parishioners was committed to him."

presentments of the churchwardens of St. Nicholas's Parish clearly prove. They allege, in 1511, that the default in reparation of St. Martin's Church does the Parish Church of St. Nicholas great hurt. This would have been impossible unless the walls of the two churches were contiguous, or common to both. In like manner, Hasted alludes to a building, which had stood in Biggin Street, as the church of St. John. The authentic records of the Archbishops, and the ocular testimony of Leland, prove that up to *circa* 1520 the churches of St. Nicholas and St. John were so contiguous to the ancient church of St. Martin-le-Grand as to justify the assertion that they were all three under one roof.

As three apsidal chapels, at the east end of the choir of Old St. Martin's Church, were surmounted by other three upon a higher level (that of the triforium), those beneath might well be distinguished as "sub volta." One of them seems to have been so. Probably the central, or easternmost, chapel of the three was a Lady Chapel, containing the altar of St. Mary-sub-volta. At all events, an "altar of St. Mary-sub-volta," in the Old Church of St. Martin, was dedicated by three bishops of Scotland. Pope Innocent III. spoke of it as very poorly endowed. Pope Honorius III., in *A.D.* 1226, granted an indulgence, for one-fourth part of their crimes, and half their venial sins, truly confessed, to all pilgrims visiting it on the anniversaries of its dedication (*Registrum Sci. Martini*, Dover, fol. 56^b, in Lambeth MS. No. 241).

A century and a half later, in 1371, this chapel greatly needed repair, and Cardinal Langham, who had been Archbishop of Canterbury, and Pope Gregory XI., granted indulgences of 100 days to every benefactor to the repair of this altar (*Ibid.*, 55^a, 56^a). This needy chapel was sustained throughout the following century. In the year 1513, John Byngham, of the parish of St. John the Baptist, in Dover, made his will and desired to be buried within the church of St. John the Baptist, which (as we have seen) was beneath the same roof as Old St. Martin's. He bequeathed to the "Light of St. Hillary, before our Lady undercrofte 6 tapers, every of them weying three quarters of a pounce of wax, to be renewed yerely" during five years.

Wills of old inhabitants of Dover prove that within the precinct or area assigned to St. Nicholas's Parish Church there was an altar dedicated to St. John of Byrlyngton. In 1519 Thomas a Barrowe expressed his wish to be buried in St. Nicholas's Church, on the right hand of the altar of St. John of Byrlyngton. Probably the saint in question was St. John of Bridlington who was popular at the close of the fourteenth century; his translation took place on the 8th of May 1404. This saint is not often heard of in Kent.

In the Priory Register and in the Registers of the Archbishops, at Lambeth, I have examined records of the incumbencies of the following

RECTORS, CURATORS, OR PORTIONARIES of the ALTAR of ST. NICHOLAS in the Old Church of St. Martin, Dover.

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| 1302 | | Stephen de Polton, rector (<i>Priory Reg.</i> 51 ^b). |
| 1308 | | Tho ^s Clement (<i>Wynchelse's Reg.</i> 51 ^a). |
| 1316 | Dec. .. | John de Sutton (<i>Reynolds' Reg.</i> 18 ^b). |
| 1318 | Aug. .. | Peter Scott (<i>Ibid.</i> , 23 ^b). |
| 1350 | Mar. .. | Richard of Woodstock (<i>Islip's Reg.</i> 253 ^a). |
| 1355 | June .. | Nic. Godaventure (<i>Ibid.</i> , 269 ^b), resigned
1376. |
| 1376 | Oct. .. | Simon Passemer (exchanged in 1400). |
| 1400 | Aug. 26 | John Flewe, vicar of St. John's, Thanet
(<i>Arundel's Reg.</i>).
Henry Bishop (exchanged in 1416). |
| 1416 | Aug. 1 | Tho ^s Radford, vicar of Brynsete (<i>Chichele's
Reg.</i> 76 ^a), exchanged in 1420. |
| 1420 | Jan. 11 | John Dalby, vicar of Codeham (<i>Chichele's
Reg.</i> 105).
Richard Blake (resigned in 1445). |
| 1445 | Aug. 18 | John Lascyngham (<i>Stafford's Reg.</i> 84 ^b).
John Skales (resigned in 1447). |
| 1447 | June 19 | Master John Hunt (<i>Stafford's Reg.</i> 94 ^b).
Richard Blake (again) resigned in 1459. |
| 1459 | Aug. 14 | William Fuller (<i>Bourghier's Reg.</i> 74).
Roger Hoose (resigned in 1467). |
| 1467 | May 13 | Thomas Smale (<i>Bourghier's Reg.</i> 96 ^b).
John Kydde, died in 1480. |

- 1480 July 3 Ric. Multon (a Canon) by dispensation
(Bourgchier's *Reg.* 125^b).
Robert Smyth died in 1516.
- 1516 June 19 John Gynor* (Warham's *Reg.* 360^b).
- RECTORS, CURATORS, or PORTIONARIES of ST. JOHN BAPTIST'S
ALTAR, in the Old Church of St. Martin, Dover.
- 1346 Andrew, rector (*Priory Reg.* 51^a).
- 1349 Mar. . . Hen. Fraunkeleyn (Islip's *Reg.* 252^a).
Thomas Cokyl, exchanged in 1375.
- 1375 Oct. . . Thomas Wit (Sudbury's *Reg.* 115^b).
Thomas Harry (exchanged in 1419).
- 1419 Oct. 14 Milo Faunt, vicar of St. Nicholas, Thanet
(Chichele 102^a), died in 1426.
- 1426-7 Mar. 6 John Goldsmyth† (Chichele 167^b) resigned
in 1447.
- 1447 April 15 John Skales (Stafford's *Reg.* 92^b) resigned
in 1468.
- 1468-9 Jan. 2 Stephen Willes (Bourgchier's *Reg.* 99^a).

The parish of St. Nicholas possessed some land in Dover during the fourteenth century. It seems always to have been better endowed than the similarly situated benefice of St. John the Baptist in this Old Church of St. Martin. At the Archbishop's visitation, in 1511, the procurations due to his Grace were from the church of St. Nicholas 2s. 6d., and from the church of St. John 1s. 8d. In like manner the pension payable to the priory of St. Martin of the New Work from the parish and "altarage" of St. John was only 6s. 8d. per annum; while the parish and "altarage" of St. Nicholas had to pay 11s. per annum to that priory.‡

It seems that, although the western portion of Old St. Martin's Church was pulled down in 1536, or soon after, its altars were not removed until 1546. At that time the Corporation began to let the site of the church and churchyard

* Written "Joyner" in a contemporary deed.

† Styled "rector of St. John Baptist Parish" in a contemporary deed.

‡ Both parishes and churches had fallen into such decay, before 1536, that when the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* was compiled, it was therein distinctly stated that the pensions due to St. Martin's Priory were no longer exacted because the churches of St. Nicholas and St. John Baptist were so impoverished and decayed.

to tenants upon leases, reserving, however, "a sufficient and lawful way to approach the burying-ground from the market-place." This way of approach to the burial-ground was kept open as lately as the time of George IV.

The Corporation sold for £13 2s. 6d. the silver-gilt pyx and bells of St. Martin's Church, in September 1548. Their total weight was 52½ ozs.

In July 1875, our Kent Archæological Society visited the site of Old St. Martin's Church, and saw relics of the north aisle of the choir (in the yard of Mr. Gregory's house), the groined roof of the western bay of that aisle (in Mr. Humphrey's yard), and the north-east pier of the tower and chancel-arch, with the triforium passage through that pier.

Early in 1892, in Market Street, upon clearing away the floor and foundations of an old cottage, which stood on the south side of the street, two graves were found hewn out of the chalk. One grave was that of a priest, with whom had been interred a coffin-chalice, and a paten, of pewter. The date of these may be early in the thirteenth century, as Mr. Franks and Mr. De Gray Birch think.

Close to this grave, on its north side, was part of the north wall of the north chancel of Old St. Martin's Church. Its Norman masonry was uncovered when the cottage was removed. Further south, parallel with the two graves, was seen part of a Norman turret staircase. It stood south-east of the north transept of the Old Church, adjacent to the north wall of the choir-aisle. No doubt the graves and the stair-turret were at the west end of a small chapel or chancel, which projected eastward from the north transept. These features of the ancient church could not be seen in 1846, when the Rev. Dr. F. C. Plumptre, master of University College, Oxford, made a plan of the ruins, which will be found fully described in vol. iv. of *Archæologia Cantiana*, pp. 23-26. In fact, Mr. Plumptre wrote thus: "So far as could be ascertained, there were not any traces of projecting chapels in the transepts."