

NOTES ON CARVED BENCH-ENDS IN BADLESMERE CHURCH.

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IN Volume XXI. of Sir Charles Igglesden's *Saunter Through Kent with Pen and Pencil*, when describing the village and Parish of Badlesmere, a reference is made to the well-known bench-ends in the Parish Church. Sir Charles Igglesden says in regard to them, "[Their] carving is elaborate in design and beautifully executed and [they] probably date back to about the year 1500."

Sir Charles gives an excellent photograph of the upper half of the bench-ends taken by Mr. G. C. Druce, F.S.A., the Hon. Secretary of K.A.S., and a full description by him of the details of the carvings as they appeared in or about 1926-7. Mr. Druce's description, as quoted by Sir Charles, is as follows:—"On the inner face of one end are the words, 'Sancte Leonarde' and 'Ora Pro Nobis' and on the outer face, 'Sancta Maria' and 'Ora Pro Nobis'. On the standard is a shield with the common device of the Trinity, composed of circles. On the second bench are the words, 'miserere nobis,' and 'Anno Domini——,' on the inner face, while on the outer face we find 'Sancta Trinitas' and 'Unus Deus.' On this standard is a shield with star, surrounded by a garter bearing the legend, 'Honni coit [sic] qi mal y pence.' It is believed that these elaborate benches were not originally made for this church but came from some other building of greater importance."

Several of the earlier writers on Kent refer to these bench-ends and it may be of some interest to compare them with each other and with Mr. Druce's recent description.

Of the various accounts I have come across, by far the fullest is by Cozens in his *Tour Through the Isle of Thanet*, published in 1793, and, moreover, he gives a well drawn

picture of the bench-ends as they were at that date. Before giving his account, however, I will give those of earlier writers.

The first to mention them that I have met with is Harris in his *History of Kent*, published in 1719. When describing the Parish of Badlesmere he says: "no memorials of this (Badlesmere) Family are now remaining; except a Star and Garter, carved fairly on a wooden Board, which formerly (as now) made the End of a Pew in the church; on the back of it is this date, 1411. Opposite it is another such Board put to the like use; on which is carved a Circle, within a Triangle, and some Latin Words,(as usual) to express the Trinity in Unity of the Divine Nature."

Later, when writing about Giles, the last Lord Badlesmere, Harris tells us that "he erected here a House for Black Austin Canons," and then goes on to say that his property was divided between his four sisters, the youngest of whom, Maud, married John de Vere, Earl of Oxford, who and his successors assumed the title of Lord Badlesmere. Hasted says nothing about the bench-ends but agrees with Harris in regard to the marriage of Maud with the Earl of Oxford; he tells us that she was the eldest sister of Giles, Lord Badlesmere, and curiously enough, the D.N.B. says she was the second sister. They all agree that one of her sisters was named Elizabeth.

Hasted says further that there was a chapel on the south side which "had a door opening into the middle of the aisle of the church, were (*sic*) the tombs of several of the family of Badlesmere."

Brayley, in his *Original Delineations of Kent*, published in 1818, says, "it (i.e. the church of Badlesmere) had formerly a small Chapel adjoining to it, on the south side, in which were the tombs of the Badlesmeres; but this has long been destroyed.¹ In the porch are the fronts of two ancient wooden Seats, carved in high relief; one of them displays a shield, containing the star ribbon, and motto of the Order of

¹ The visitations and Presentments of 1616 confirm this, as they say: "there is a chapel which the farmer (Robert Giles) of Badlesmere Court should repair, is very ruinous and noisome to our Church."

the Garter ; on the other, are sentences expressive of the Athanasian Doctrine of the Trinity, curiously arranged on a second shield, in four circles united by bands, so that the words, *Pater, Filius, Sp̄ī s̄co* and *Deus*, though only once repeated in the circles, form part of every sentence."

Glynne in his *Churches of Kent* refers to the bench-ends thus ; " some good bench-ends with poppy-heads, having an inscription and a representation of the Archbishop's pall," by which I suppose he refers to the emblem of the Trinity.

We come now to Cozens's lengthy, minute and very interesting statement. He says : " The Church is dedicated to St. Leonard. At the south side of the church was formerly a small chapel which had a door into the aisle, the foundations are still very visible. In this chapel were the tombs of several of the family of Badlesmere. It was fallen to ruins in the beginning of the present century (i.e. the 18th).¹ In the chancel, against the ends of some modern seats, are judiciously preserved two very antique pieces of carving ; they were originally the fronts of two rows of stalls, which belonged to the canons of St. Augustine, a religious house, founded in this Manor by Bartholomew Lord Badlesmere, in the reign of Edward III, who had generously restored to him the estate which his father Bartholomew had forfeited by joining the barons, etc.—for which he was tried and beheaded at Canterbury. The son, considering this restoration as a special interposition of Heaven, founded this religious fraternity. These curious relics are of sound oak, most exquisitely sculptured, in high relievo, and certain several ornaments and inscriptions, in black letter, as follows, (see Plate.) :— Fig. 1. is the front ; fig. 2. the reverse of that on the North side of the chancel, being principally a representation for the Trinity, and is to be read as follows :

PATER NON EST FILIUS, FILIUS NON EST SP̄ITUS, SPIRITUS
NON EST PATER.

PATER EST DEUS, FILIUS EST DEUS, SPIRITUS EST DEUS !

On the top, S'TA MARIA ORA : P : A'IA. In the Gothic compartment, IHS. Under a coronet is M ; probably for

¹ See note ¹ on preceding page.

Maud, who married John Vere, Earl of Oxford, and conveyed unto him the title and estate of Lord Badlesmere.

Beneath an opposite one is E; not unlikely for Elizabeth, the sister of Maud, who married Edward Mortimer; and after him William Earl of Northampton.

On the reverse is, S'C'T: LEONARDE ORA: P: NOBIS. Fig. 3. and 4. are the front and reverse of that on the opposite side.

On a garter encircling a star is, HONNI, SOIT QI MAL Y PENSE.

On the top, S'TA. SANCTUS JUUS DEUS. On the reverse, MISIRERE NOBIS ANNO D^m 1415. Below in the compartment, is J.B.; probably for the above John, Lord Badlesmere."

First as regards the date, Harris gives it as 1411, whereas Cozens says 1415, and I think that it will be clear that Cozens is most likely to be correct.

On the other hand, Cozens reads S'TA SANCTUS JUUS DEUS, while Mr. Druce reads SANCTA TRINITAS and UNUS DEUS, and Cozens's S'TA MARIA ORA P. A'I'A IS is somewhat obscure. Here Cozens's transcription is clearly wrong and Mr. Druce's correct.

Cozens's account of the founding of a religious house of Canons of St. Augustine in the reign of Edward III which he appears to have borrowed from Philipot, is undoubtedly incorrect both as to date and fact. It was Edward II who gave Bartholomew the Badlesmere licence to found a house of Canons in his Manor of Badlesmere which was *confirmed* by Edward III but was never carried out.¹ We now have to consider Cozens's explanation of the letters M and E, each under a coronet and the two letters given by him as J.B.

His suggestion is that the M and E stand for Maud and Elizabeth, two of the sisters of Giles, the last Lord Badlesmere in the direct line, which seems very probable as they were co-heiresses of their brother.

¹ Hussey, quoting from Tan. Mon. 225, says, "K. Edward II in his thirteenth year, gave licence to Bartholomew de Badlesmere, that he might in his manor of Badlesmere found a house of Canons regular, etc. The licence was confirmed by Edward III, but was never carried out." And see Hasted, Vol. II, p. 774, note.

We still have to consider to whom the letters J.B. refer and the significance of the Garter emblem. It appears that only two Lords Badlesmere were members of that Order, i.e. Robert,¹ 9th Earl of Oxford, who died in 1392, and had been elected to the order in 1385, and Richard Vere, 11th Earl, who died in 1417.

I suggest therefore that Cozens misread J for R and that the letters refer to Richard Vere, the 11th Earl.

Finally, as regards the original site of the bench-ends: since 'St. Leonard' is carved on them, and seeing that the church was dedicated to that Saint, it seems only reasonable to suppose that they were intended to be placed in it and, presumably, in the Badlesmere Chapel.

Note.—Since I finished my "Notes" Mr. Druce has very kindly sent me the photographs of the bench-ends, which he took some years ago. They are so wonderfully clear that they give a much better idea of them than can be obtained by personal inspection now.

¹ See Ashmole's *Institutions, Laws and Ceremonies of the Order of the Garter*, and Nicholas' *History of Knighthood*. The latter says that Richard Vere was elected in 1415 or 1416, receiving the robes in the latter year, and died 15th February, 1417.