

THE PARISH CHURCH OF MARSH CHAPEL

DEDICATED TO SAINT MARY

It has been recently suggested to me that I should write a short account of this Church for the benefit of visitors and others; any profits arising to go to the church Repairs Fund. The price of this leaflet is 2d.

I will begin by extracts from an article by the Rev. J. K. Floyer, D.D., F.S.A., son of a former incumbent of Marsh Chapel.

"The Cistercian House of Louth Park Priory was founded in 1139. . . . and the monastery was soon endowed by its benefactors with large lands, part of which were in the Marsh district. The Church of Fulstow was also granted to it, and this would give the monastery the right to levy tithe for the church."

In 1387, when the Rector of Fulstow was appropriated to this Priory, it was directed by Bishop Bokingham, that the Vicar shall find a chaplain to officiate in the "Chapel of Mersh" - Marsh Chapel - showing that a chapel was in existence at that time. It will be seen, therefore, that we must look for a founder of the Chapel or Church earlier than the days when the monks took possession of it.

Low on the south side of the church, at the extremity of the aisle, outside, the coat of arms, almost certainly of the Founders may be seen. Mr G. S. Gibbons describes the shield, on which are the coat of arms, as follows:- 1 and 4 (argent), 3 chaplets (gules) . . . *Lascelles*. 2 and 3 (argent), 2 bars (azure) . . . *Hilton*. He continues, "Sir William (or Robert) Hilton married the heiress of Lascelles about the beginning of Edward I." As early as 1115 A.D. Pigot de Lascelles held lands in Fulstow (which included Marsh Chapel). In 1251 we find John de Lascelles, sub-deacon, presented to Fulstow. After the union with the Hilton family came the union with the Hildyards. We find H. Hildyard Lord of Fulstow and Marsh Chapel in 1704. Thus the Hilton - Hildyards held lands here in unbroken descent from the Lascelles of 1115 A.D. until 1704 at least.

In the will of William Whyte of ffollestow Mersh, proved in 1420, he makes a bequest for the bells newly hung. The present building was then probably completed; as to the existence of any earlier building no sufficient traces exist.

In this shield, low on the south side, the 3 chaplets and 2 bars are, by other authorities, described as Hildyard quartering Hilton. On the battlements of the tower (west side) may be seen, but not clearly, the arms of the Willoughby family—1 and 4 (sable) a cross engrailed, 2 and 3 (gules) a cross moline (argent). In Spilsby Parish Church five monuments of this family, Willoughby de Eresby, are to be seen. On the northern battlements may be seen the shield, probably of the Ludburgh family, a chevron (gules) between three leopards' faces (or).

Again quoting Dr. Floyer: "The great tithes of Marsh Chapel . . . went to Louth Park Priory until the Dissolution, when the King (Henry VIII.) granted them . . . to Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, for the part he played in putting down the Lincolnshire rising in 1536" —caused, we may continue in the words of J. R. Green— "by agrarian discontent, and love of the old religion," known as The Pilgrimage of Grace. Having acquired these tithes, and the advowson, by inheritance. Dr Floyer's father, incumbent of Marsh Chapel, endowed Marsh Chapel with the major part of its present tithes. The income of the Benefice when he came in 1845 was only £6 13s 4d. a year.

THE INTERIOR

Having entered the Church we notice its great length and the splendid tower arch, yet leaning slightly to the north—not the effect of an earthquake (which was recorded in the parish registers as happening on Christmas Eve, 1601). A settlement seems to have taken place a year or two after the arch was built.

The size of this temple of God is accounted for by the salt works here, of which frequent mention is made from the Domesday Book onwards.

The Lincoln Diocesan Architectural Society has described the Church thus:— "This Church is one of the finest fabrics in the district, of the Perpendicular period. It consists of a tower, nave, north and south aisles, south porch and chancel of two bays, with an aisle of one bay on the north and a sacristy. The nave arcades are of four bays, the pillars being octagonal with concave sides, their caps are moulded and battlemented: the arches being of two orders and are four-centred. The tower arch is lofty and of three orders; those to the chancel and chancel-arch are of two orders and without caps. The tower is of two lofty stages, with double buttresses at the angles; on the west side is the main doorway, with a four-light window above it, and small loops on the north, south and west sides. The belfry window has a two-light window on each face, above which is an embattled parapet with seven pinnacles, and at the south-east angle a crocketed spirelet over the octagonal turret staircase. The north and south doorways are well-moulded, and have four-centred arches with ogee hood mould, in the spandrels of which are niches. That on the north side has a ribbon round it, upon which is the following inscription: *Non est hic aluid nisi domus Dei et porta coeli*. The inscription is from the Latin of the Vulgate (Gen. 28. 17): 'This is no other but the house of God, and the gate of heaven' (Douay trans.)"

I think the ribbon suggests Jacob's ladder leading up to the gate of heaven.

The south doorway niche has an angel corbel, and on the ribbon worked in the hollow of the arch-mould is the following inscription: *Orantibus in loco isto dimitte domine peccata*: 'To those who pray in this place forgive O Lord (their) sins.'

"The windows are all of similar character, flat-headed, similar to the arcades; the last one is of five lights, and the whole of those of the aisles are

of three lights; the clerestory has four two - light windows on each side,. The whole of the rood is battlemented." That is, the beam, a restoration, is battlemented. The screen itself is ancient.

The spacious nave is supplied with very handsomely carved massive benches through the liberality of the late incumbent—the Rev. A. Floyer, who devoted himself, among other good works, to the restoration of this church which he lived to see almost completed."

He was buried August 30th, 1872, on the eastern side of the churchyard, aged 50, after an incumbency of 26 years.

The simplicity of the memorial tablet to him and George Wadham Floyer will be noted, on the north side of the chancel. On the south side a fine alabaster tablet will be seen put up in 1628 to the Harpham family. Anne Harpham "gave to the repairing of the church and to the store of the poore xis," (ten shillings), so the old register tells us.

The modern carving throughout the church and restoration of the fine, ancient rood screen and beam was done by a village carpenter. An inscription to his memory, inside the lectern, reads as follows: "The maker of this book stand and stall heads, master workman in 1864, is Thomas Swaby, of Marshchapel, born there 15 Nov., 1799." The Rev. Floyer speaks of him as devoted and loyal. The date 1864 is of the completion of the restoration; the whole expense of which was borne by Mr Floyer.

The stone under the altar is part of an original altar stone. The present floor of the church is four inches above the old floor line. The floor of the tower was laid in 1840. Near this will be noticed part of a memorial stone to Joanna, a married lady, with a commendation to mercy.

The ancient oak chest attracts attention, with provision for three locks, one for the parson's key and one for each warden's. The massive oak table, near by, was made from the sounding board of the former pulpit. The bosses on the roof of the south aisle (restored in 1915) are a replica of the originals. The Hewson memorial window will be noticed, and nearby, appear traces indicating the existence, formerly, of newel steps leading up to the rood loft. The very noble chancel roof, with angels bearing shields, should be studied. The altar appears small, but there was no uniformity in ancient times, as some suppose. The sacristy was formed at Mr Floyer's restoration by the wall, dividing it from the organ chamber. The organ is one of the first built by Cousans, of Lincoln. It was restored in 1923 by Forsters, of Hull. The pulpit, added in 1881, is by Kett of Cambridge: a memorial to Rev. Ayscoghe Floyer.

Benches belonging to the church previous to 1840 may be seen near the tower and in the vestry.

The Bells. 1. The sanctus bell, mentioned in the inventory of Ed. VI., has disappeared. 2. The inscription on the treble bell before it was re-cast by Taylors in 1919, reads as follows: "Daniel Hedderly made me, 1742" The present inscription tells of the Great War, bearing the names of eight men of the parish who made the supreme sacrifice. 3. This bell (1689) bears the

names of Matthew Addison and Thos. Farrow, wardens. Their initials appear on a beam above the bells. They repaired the steeple in 1699. No 3 bell has a ribbon running round it with a bell-pattern ornament and the maker's initials (S. S. Ebor) (*i.e.* Samuel Smith, the elder, of York). So Mr Gibbon kindly tells me. 4. This is the heaviest bell and has some ancient coins embedded in the rim. It is named John, and bears the design of an eagle feeding (or devouring) a child, and also shows the Tudor rose and crown. It is a rare example of a late-named bell—dated 1584.

THE EXTERIOR

Leaving the church by the north door—the doorway has already been described—we notice the striking original gargoyles with head-dresses of the period when the church was built. Passing the massive western doorway, towards the south porch, we observe the Lascelles-Hilton arms already described. The stump of the ancient churchyard cross is seen in the usual position, with a portion, I think, belonging originally to it, lying at its base. By the south porch, and at intervals along the south side of the church, may be seen, more visible after a shower, traces of seven ancient mass—or clock—or scratch-dials, which indicate the time; usually 9 a.m., for celebrations. A fine cross stands over the porch, and near by is a king's head represented. We cannot but admire the delicately designed chancel cross. Looking up from the east we get a fine view of the tower with its pinnacles and spirelet, and of the whole building.

Returning by the north aisle we see some inferior stone has been used here. The ashlar of the aisles and clerestory was repaired in 1840 with inferior porous sandstone, from which we still suffer. It was taken from the former church wall, and is responsible for penetrating dampness.

The sacred vessels and registers are kept safely at the Vicarage: the chalice and paten (or cover) of date 1569, are complete specimens of the "mint" church plate, probably made at Boston.

The first legible entry in the registers is of date 1589. On some paper leaves, sewn into the earliest register, is found an interesting list of books belonging to the church, and churchwardens' accounts—beginning in 1582.

The Vicar of the parish is always at the disposal of any visitors interested in the history of the church and parish.

Norman Cottage, near the church on the south side, was built by Mr Ayscoghe Floyer for Mr Fox, the Curate he found here in 1845. The cottage illustrates Norman architectural ornament and design in numerous details. It was well restored by Mrs Davidson in 1921, and is now the country residence of Mr and Mrs Chas. Griffin.

I need hardly suggest that the charge upon us of keeping up this perfect specimen of a parish church is no light one. Parishioners never fail to respond—though they are few—when the preservation of a building, which is their pride, is in question.

W.H.R.

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