



The Story of
THE PARISH CHURCH OF
ST. LAWRENCE
HUNGERFORD

Price - Sixpence



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The Parish Church of St. Lawrence, Hungerford

The present Parish Church of Hungerford has been standing for little more than a century and a quarter, but its site has been occupied by a Christian Church ever since the early part of the twelfth century. The modern building is known to have had two predecessors, but the later of these was wholly demolished in 1814 and the present Church then erected in its original form. Not long after the beginning of the twelfth century the church of Hungerford and the manor of Eddington were assigned to the Abbey of Bec Hellouin, in Normandy, as parts of its endowments. This meant that the Abbey received the great tithes and the advowson, or right of presentation, the Abbot being thus in the position of Rector; in return, the Abbey was bound to keep the chancel in repair and to provide a Vicar to conduct divine service and to minister to the spiritual needs of the parishioners. The record of this "appropriation" shows at least that there was a church building at Hungerford before 1118: this was clearly a Norman structure, for there was no church here when Domesday Book was compiled. During the ensuing century- perhaps after the Church was made part of the endowment of a prebend of Sarum (p. 17) - this Norman Church was replaced by an Early English edifice: some fragments of stone work preserved from the ancient Church show the ornamentation typical of that period.

Later, this Gothic building doubtless underwent alterations and received additions. We know, for instance, that part of the south aisle was repaired and fitted up by Sir Robert de Hungerford as a chantry chapel in 1325, and that another chantry chapel was similarly formed.

In 1451. A drawing of the mediaeval Church from the north side executed by Samuel Prout immediately before its demolition shows that it comprised chancel, clerestoried nave with aisles, north transept and embattled west tower. It can be seen from the drawing that the clerestory was a Perpendicular addition, but that other parts of the church were of earlier periods. The lithograph of 1809 signed "C.W." which hangs in the vestry may also be studied. This is actually all that can be stated about the ancient Church, except that many of its sepulchral monuments have been preserved and find place in the modern building, the most notable being the mutilated effigy and inscribed stone (see p. 14) commemorating Sir Robert de Hungerford, founder of the chantry mentioned above.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Hungerford Church had become so dilapidated that parts of it were threatening to collapse and it was difficult to hold services there in bad weather. It was hoped that the trouble could be overcome by rebuilding the tower and other portions, and by thorough repairs elsewhere ; and in 1811 a special Act of Parliament was obtained permitting the Vicar, the Churchwardens and other Trustees to raise £3,000 for necessary repairs, alterations and improvements. A start was made: the tower, already partly demolished for safety, was rebuilt and the north aisle of the nave enlarged ; but this task was barely completed when all the ancient part of the edifice collapsed, bringing down with it much of the new work. This disaster did not however, dishearten the Trustees or lessen their determination that the parishioners should have a spacious and seemly place of worship ; and in 1814 another Act was obtained authorising them to raise a further £6,000. Here it may be said that the actual sum expended was nearly £30,000 : the large balance was obtained partly by generous private donations , partly by a financial device seldom heard of nowadays-a tontine, a form of cumulative insurance.

Between 1814 and 1816 the ancient Church was demolished, and every bit of it cleared away (the fragments mentioned above are rare relics). In its place a new fabric was erected, from designs of Mr. Pinch, of Bath, who was also constructing at Bathwick a church which he took at his model for this one. This original building, completed in 1816, seems to have embodied many serious faults typical of Georgian Gothic. Externally not only the tower but other chief portions of the Church were finished off with heavy embattled parapets. Internally there were flat plaster ceilings and high pews and, in place of arcades, painted iron pillars supporting clerestory and roof. Twenty years later Hungerford was transferred from Sarum diocese to Oxford; and Bishop Wilberforce, never afraid to speak his mind, expressed strong disapproval of the building, which was, he said, both inconvenient and unecclesiastical ; and in his time Hungerford candidates for Confirmation actually had to attend other churches for the Sacrament. Mr. Pinch's work has been vastly improved upon, but he deserves posthumous gratitude for building the church of Bath stone. The Kennet and Avon Canal which skirts the churchyard had been opened in 1811 and the first task of magnitude entrusted to the new Company was the conveyance of stone for this rebuilding.

In the middle of last century taste in ecclesiastical architecture was constantly improving and knowledge of it spreading. Leading parishioners of Hungerford began to feel that their Church was aesthetically unsatisfactory, and that drastic improvements were called for. Under an energetic and business-like vicar, the Rev. J. B. Anstice, a

Committee was formed in 1879 and within eighteen months raised nearly £2,500 by subscriptions. Of this sum £540 was expended on a new organ, which was built by Messrs. Forster and Andrews, of Hull ; the remainder was devoted to general improvements. The heavy exterior battlements, except those of the tower, were replaced by plain coping. The clerestory was reconstructed ; the unsightly iron pillars were removed and for them were substituted Decorated-style arcades of Bath stone. The foliated capitals of the arcade pillars were individually carved by Monsieur Devine, a French artist residing at Reading. The flat ceilings of the nave and aisles were replaced by roofs of pitch-pine, panelled, with moulded ribs. The raising of the roof and putting in the new pillars was a work of great skill carried out by Mr. Wooldridge. The corbels that carry the main supports of the roof-angel figures bearing shields charged alternatively with the arms of the town and the badge of St. Lawrence-were similarly carved by M. Devine. The church was reseated throughout, the old heavy pews, except one (since then removed) occupied by the Willes family of Hungerford Park, being demolished. Heating and lighting arrangements were improved, and a vestry formed out of the tower basement. In 1887 the work of 1880 was completed by repairs to the chancel and the rebuilding of its roof in similar style to those of the nave and aisles by the appropriators, the Dean and Chapter of Windsor (see p. 19).

As completed and reconditioned the plan of Hungerford Parish Church comprises nave of four bays with aisles, sanctuary with shallow apsidal east end of semi-circular outline, west tower, south porch, and small porch in the angle between the apse and the south aisle. The most ancient piece of furniture is the fifteenth century font, octagonal in plan with panelled bowl and shaft : the bowl is carved on each face with a quatrefoil within a circle. The pulpit, which is of stone with alabaster cornice and bosses of foliage, was presented in 1891 by the Misses Lidderdale in memory of their parents. The lectern, presented in 1932 by Miss Lockett as a memorial to R. H. Barker, M.D., is of wainscot oak, and takes the form of a buttressed column springing from a triangular base and supporting a revolving desk, on which rest the Old Testament and the New Testament with the Apocrypha, both volumes being richly bound.

It is hoped soon to remove the font to a far more appropriate place near the door, removing the pews to afford room for a Baptistry and also a "Children's Corner" at the west end of it. In 1940 a bronze font ewer was presented by Miss Low, in memory of Frederick Low.

The west tower, which is of three stages and has an embattled parapet with angle pinnacles, contains a peal of eight bells. In Edward VI's time the Church had three bells and a sanctus bell. These have vanished : the new Church was provided in 1816 with a peal of five cast by James Wells of Aldbourne, a small out-of-the-way village near Marlborough, which, however, produced two notable dynasties of bell-founders-the Corrs, who started in 1696, and the Wells. In 1830 was added a tenor bell cast by Mears of Whitechapel. These six were in 1927 rehung on a steel frame, quarter-turned and returned, and two light bells added to make up the peal of eight. This work was carried out at a cost of £590 by Messrs. Mears and Stainbank of Whitechapel. There is also a small bell made in 1847 by William Taylor of Oxford, member of a firm that is now world famous as Taylors of Loughborough. The treble bell was given by Major Edward Robert Portal in memory of his son Nigel Hugh, killed while flying in 1926; the second bell by John H. Wooldridge and his sisters. It was Mr. Wooldridge's father that, under the direction of Mr. Stallwood, architect, of Reading, carried out the work of the 1880 restoration. The timber of the old bell-frames was used to make the present west door.

The Church Plate of Hungerford comprises a handsome and valuable service presented in 1736-7 by Mrs. Mary Hungerford, widow of John Hungerford, Esq., barrister, of Lincoln's Inn, and M.P. for Scarborough, 1692-5 and 1702-5. The service is of five pieces: a large chalice, a paten, two flagons and a bread-holder. Each piece is inscribed with the words "The gift of Mrs. Mary Hungerford, widow of John Hungerford, late of Lincoln's Inn, Esquire, deceased, who was lord of this Mannor of Hungerford : 1737 ", and bears also the maker's initials, "G.F." and a lozenge containing the Arms of the town quartered with a saltire in an engrailed border impaling a boar's head rased and erect, dripping blood. Other pieces are an eighteenth century cup, a chalice of 1891-2, a paten of 1897-8, and a ciborium of 1935. John Hungerford was a member of one of the branches of the noted Wiltshire family so called, which originally took its name from this manor of Hungerford : there is a mural monument to him and his wife on the south wall. In 1940 there was an addition made to the list of sacred vessels ; by the beneficence of Mrs. Giles, a chalice and paten made of handmade beaten silver was presented to the Church in memory of her husband, William Henry Giles.

Recent improvements and embellishments have rendered Hungerford Church a seemly and beautiful temple of God and a place of worship that attunes the mind to devotion. The War Shrine, originally erected at the east end of the north aisle has, since the conversion of the latter into a Lady Chapel (see below), been stationed in the south aisle.

It consists of a triptych supported on an oak pedestal decorated with linen-fold panelling. In the central panel, below a foliated canopy, is the Crucifix with two attendant figures, all being richly coloured and gilt; below is a suitable inscription. Names of fifty-nine Hungerford men who gave their lives in the Great War are inscribed in Gothic lettering on the flanking panels. Which are headed by the arms respectively of St. George and St. Nicholas, patron saint of sailors. The shrine was designed by Messrs. Rogers & Howard of Oxford. It is hoped to add to the War Shrine the date of the recent World War. - 1939-45 and a list of those who gave their lives in the great Conflict.

Near the Shrine stands a small Jacobean table. This came from the old church and had probably served as the Communion Table since the time of the Commonwealth. After the 1880 restoration a temporary Altar with a painted reredos was placed in the sanctuary. For this, in 1930, was substituted the present Altar, a beautiful piece of ecclesiastical furniture designed by Mr. H. S. Rogers of Oxford. It is of oak, with turned legs and moulded rails and stretchers. About it are set four riddel posts with carved and gilded angels supporting four candle prickets. The whole is set off by handsome curtains and a dorsal in blue and gold. The handsome red frontal – three panels richly embroidered with various silks and gold thread – was re-made for this High Altar, the panels being worked by the late Messrs. Morrice, who lived at Hungerford Park. The church possesses also other

beautiful frontals and a Lenten Array, which, with the fair linen for the altar, were gifts of various devout parishioners and friends, and were designed by Mr. H. S. Rogers.

In the north wall of the sanctuary is an aumbry given by the Rev. B. D. Gotto, assistant priest 1928-31, in memory of his father. Its oaken door conceals a safe in which the Blessed Sacrament is perpetually reserved for the Communion of the Sick by the sanction of the Bishop the Diocese. The new Altar and the aumbry were dedicated on 26th October, 1930, by the Rev. T. B. Strong, D.D., then Bishop of Oxford. The chancel screen, the gift of Major E. R. Portal, late of Eddington House, was erected in 1925. It is modelled on a parclose screen in Slapton Lea Church (Devon) and is richly carved, mostly with the vine-leaf motif prevalent in Devonshire screens. It consists of four panels, two on either side of a central arch. Along the inner top margin is a Latin inscription.

As a thank-offering for the Silver Jubilee of his late Majesty, King George V, parishioners undertook the rearrangement and furnishing of the east end of the north aisle as a Lady Chapel. The oak Altar, credence table and kneeling rail were given by Mr. J. H. Wooldridge and were made by Messrs. Wooldridge and Son from designs by Mr. H. S. Rogers of Oxford. The Altar is similar in general design to the High Altar. Dorsal and curtains, frontal, and embroidered kneelers, were bestowed by generous members of the congregation, and the wrought-iron curtain rods and candle-prickets were made and given by Mr. Fred Oakes, a local craftsman. The silver-plated altar cross was given by the Hungerford branch of the Mother's Union; candlesticks to match by members of the Guild of St. Agnes. The Chapel was dedicated on the Feast of The Falling Asleep of the Blessed Mary, 15th August 1936. The prayer desk was made from the old lecture and decorated with panels carved by the Rev. T. Hungerford Michell, to whom the glass of the chapel east window is a memorial. Two relatives of Sir Ralph Sadleir, the Tudor statesman, are commemorated by inscribed brasses on the floor of the nave near the prayer desk.

A new heating apparatus – the MacClary Pipeless system – was installed in the church in 1929, and electric lighting in 1930. In 1938 certain small changes made to south porch more convenient.

The most ancient and remarkable monument preserved in the Church is the mutilated effigy of Sir Robert de Hungerford (died c. 1350), with which is associated an inscribed stone. These have now been placed in the south aisle. The stone measures 22½ inches square, but in a central panel 7 inches square, surrounded by a quatrefoil within a large circle, is the copy of an Indulgence of 550 days for all who pray for the soul of Sir Robert. This is couched in Norman-French, and the words follow the outline of the quatrefoil. Outside the latter. And also outside the large circle, are several clauses of a credo, in Latin: two of these clauses, which are taken from the Book of Job, often appear on mediaeval brasses. For the convenience of visitors an accurate copy of the slab, made by Miss Packard, formerly of Parsonage Farm, has been placed in the south aisle. Professor A. Hamilton Thompson of Leeds, says: "I have little doubt that the date of the French inscription is c.1340".

It was this Sir Robert de Hungerford who in 1325 founded a chantry in the church of St. Lawrence for Masses to be sung for the souls of his wife Geva and, after he should decease, for his soul; also for the souls of their ancestors and of the faithful departed. The chantry chapel was in the south aisle and was dedicated to the Holy Trinity. Before his death Sir Robert twice augmented the endowment of the chantry. Mention is made also of chantries of St. Mary and St. Anne during the fourteenth century; and in 1451 John Morreys and other burgesses of Hungerford obtained a licence to found a chantry in "honour of Our Lady and St. Lawrence for the good estate of King Henry (VI) and Queen Margaret": this was to be the particular chantry of the burgesses. Probably this was a refounding of the

earlier chantry of St. Mary. When chantries were dissolved under Edward VI only two, those of Holy Trinity and St. Mary, were mentioned at Hungerford.

Relations between the Parish Church authorities and the administrators of the civic government of the town have always been friendly. Local affairs are here in the hands of a Constable and Trustees, elected annually with elaborate old-world ceremonies: those who are interested in such things will have read of Hungerford's "tuttimen" and the Hock-tide Jury. The town arms – a crescent and a star, which remind us of Hungerford's association with John of Daunt – may be seen on the wrought-iron entrance gates of the churchyard (given and kept repair by the civic authorities), on the bosses below the modern clerestory, and on the pews assigned to the Constable and Trustees,

The monument to John Hungerford has as already been mentioned. Almost opposite, on the wall of the north aisle, is a mural monument – the oldest in the church, except for the Indulgence slab – surmounted with coat-of-arms, helm, crest and mantling, and recording the burial (1673) of Henry Hungerford of Standen, a son of Sir Hungerford of Black Bourton (Oxon). Other notable monuments in this aisle are that of Eliza Lucas (d. 1804), one commemorating an aged couple, William and Ann Cheyney, barbarously murdered in their own home (1762) and a beautiful modern monument to Captain Edward Dugdale D'Oyley Astley, consisting of the figure of St. George in mosaic work framed in alabaster. On the west wall near the gallery stair are interesting memorials to Thomas E. Blackwell (d. 1863), engineer of the Kennet and Avon Canal, and to Henry Capps (known as "Trusty"), a faithful servitor of the Hungerfords of Standen. In the south aisle are several monuments to members of the Willes family, of Hungerford Park, ranging in date from 1796 to 1921. The Whitelock family, for centuries in possession of the Chilton Lodge Estate, are represented by a panelled slab in memory of six ladies of the house (1777 to 1812).

Space does not permit a detailed account of the numerous stained glass windows that adorn the church: all are modern but are artistically designed and mellow in tone. The Rev. J. B. Anstice, Vicar 1866 – 94, is commemorated by three windows: the restored east window, which shows Our Lord's Charge to St. Peter: one in the south aisle representing the Sermon on the Mount, and erected by assistant clergy who served under Mr. Anstice; and one in the north aisle by the Parishioners in 1889 as a token of sympathy for the Vicar, whose sight was then failing: the central light shows the healing of blind Bartimaeus. Two other windows in the north aisle commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, their cost was defrayed from a window fund organised by Mr. Anstice: they represent the transfiguration and the raising of Jairus' daughter.

The churchyard, now closed for burials, is well-kept and singularly free from the glaringly white tombstones too common elsewhere. Rows of pollarded limes lead to the church doors, and flowers set off the mellowed grave-slabs. The entrance-gates have been previously mentioned. In 1939 a scheme to provide light for worshippers approaching and passing along a long-shaded pathway

to the principal church door was devised by Miss Packard in the shape of an arch over the entrance gates. Carrying an electrical illumination. Through the beneficence of the late Mr. H. D'O W. Astley, the project materialised and has proved of much benefit besides adding importance to "God's Acre", to which it gives access. Another interesting feature is the very ancient style which terminates the path on the vicarage side: it is of a design almost unique. Tombstones covered with an iron grid are to be seen at the north-west corner of the churchyard, reminding us of the time when protection was needed against body snatchers. Visitors should read the quaint inscription on the grave of James dean, who drove the Bath Coach in the days before the railways.

Hungerford church has suffered strange vicissitudes in respect of its rectorial tithes and advowson. The appropriation to the Abbey of Bec in Normandy has already been mentioned. In 1208 the Abbot of Bec, in his official capacity, was made a prebendary of Sarum; the prebend was that of Okeburne (i.e. Ogbourne) and was endowed with the churches of the two Ogbournes and those of Wantage and Hungerford. This did not alter the fact that the Abbots of Bec were still Rectors of Hungerford and bound to provide Vicars. There was a priory at Ogbourne which was a "cell" of (i.e. subsidiary to) the Abbey of Bec; and records state that the Prior of Ogbourne "held" Hungerford Church for two periods during the fourteenth century: this was perhaps due to some arrangement between the Prior and the Abbot of Bec. During the Hundred Years' War the property of the priory – or perhaps the endowment of the prebend – passed to the Crown and was granted in 1401 to John, Duke of Bedford. It became his absolute property on the dissolution of alien priories, and included the Church of Hungerford, which by his gift passed to the Warden and College of St. George, Windsor. Hence it is that the present patrons of the living are the dean and Chapter of Windsor, but the rectorial tithes are in present days by exchange transferred to the Dean and Chapter of Winchester. Who are therefore the Rectors.

The Priory of St. Frideswide at Oxford also figures in the history of the parish. The Abbot of Bec in 1147 handed over Eddington Manor (bestowed on Bec at the same time as Hungerford Church) to St. Frideswide's Priory in exchange for other property. It was stipulated that the Priory should build no church here, but the stipulation was broken, and as a consequence there were disputes about tithes. The matter was settled on one occasion by allowing the Vicar of Hungerford to collect tithes from the tenants of the Manor. The memorial window placed over the south doorway, is the gift of Major E. R. Portal of Eddington House. It portrays in the central light St. Lawrence to whom the church is dedicated. He is shown holding the instrument of martyrdom, the gridiron. (in the window near the gallery stair this Saint also figures, this time holding a book and pen). In the west light appears St. Frideswide, and in the east light St. Osmund, an early bishop of Sarum. The above brief account has shown that Hungerford Church was indirectly linked to St. Frideswide. The connection with Sarum was closer; for over 700 years the parish was in the diocese of Sarum or, as it became in the twelfth century, New Sarum or Salisbury. The transference to Oxford diocese was made in 1836. In the Anglo-Saxon period, after the mission of St. Birinus, this part of Wessex was attached successfully to four sees – those of Dorchester, Winchester, Ramsbury and Sherborne.