

## The Beauchamp Castle and Free Chapel at Stoke-under-Ham.

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THOSE Members of this Society who may from time to time have joined its excursions to the village of Stoke-under-Ham, may perhaps remember that, they who are regarded in the light of authorities, have always struck a somewhat uncertain note as to the situation of that important building which is known to have existed in the parish, and has gone by the names of Beauchamp Castle, Gournay House, and Gournay Castle; and of the Free Chapel dedicated to St. Nicholas, which was attached to it.

The writer has more than once known the Chantry House, the former residence of the Provost and four priests doing duty at St. Nicholas's Chapel, accepted by learned Societies as the Gournay House; and the belfry there, although a chamber only about ten feet square, pointed out as the old chapel. It is difficult to understand how such a mistake could have occurred, but still more difficult to understand how it could have been perpetuated. The only way in which I can account for it is, by supposing that the matter was not considered of sufficient importance for very careful, and perhaps troublesome investigation.

Recent discoveries have, I think, gone far to set the question at rest, and to confirm the idea of the inhabitants, which has been handed down to them by tradition, that the castle stood in that part of the village known from time immemorial by the name of "Castle."

I purpose to lay before you, firstly, the documentary evi-

dence bearing on the subject, and then explain to you as best I may, the traces which still exist, and the things which have been recently found in connection with these buildings. The documentary evidence I shall give very briefly, as much of it has already appeared from time to time in papers, by Mr. Greenfield, Rev. Mr. Rowland, and others, and published in the transactions of this Society.

This building—which it would be more correct to call a fortified mansion than a castle, and *Beauchamp Castle*, than *Gournay Castle*—was built by Lord John de Beauchamp of Hatch, in the time of Edward I, who died in 1284; and was the first of four Lord Johns, who in direct succession owned and, we may presume, occupied it.<sup>1</sup>

The second Lord John, in 1304, with the consent of his mother, Cecilia, founded a Chantry House for the residence of a Provost and four priests, to say five masses daily in the Free Chapel, built in honour of St. Nicholas, on his domain at Stoke.<sup>2</sup> From the terms of the foundation deed, this chapel had existed some time previously.

He applied for, and obtained licence from the King to embattle and fortify this mansion in 1334, 7th Edward III, and died three years after, in 1337.<sup>3</sup>

He was succeeded by his son, the third Lord John, who died in 1344, leaving a widow, Margaret, with an infant son, the fourth Lord John, who subsequently married his cousin, Alice of Warwick, and died in 1361, leaving her a widow without children, and with the Manor of Stoke for her dower.<sup>4</sup> Alice married, secondly, Sir Mathew de Gournay, and died without issue in 1383.<sup>5</sup> Shortly after her death Sir Mathew married Phillipa, the widow of Sir Robert Assheton, and the Manor of Stoke was settled on them for their lives, and their children after them; and in default of issue, to Sir Mathew's right heirs.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Collinson.<sup>2</sup> Foundation deed of Chantry.<sup>3</sup> Collinson.<sup>4</sup> Inquis., 7th Richard II.<sup>5</sup> *Idem.*<sup>6</sup> *Idem.*

In 1404, Sir Mathew died without issue, and was buried before the choir door, but without it, in the Chapel of St. Nicholas.<sup>7</sup> He was the only Gournay connected with the Manor of Stoke. His widow, Phillipa, on whom the manor was settled for life, married thirdly Sir John Tiplot,<sup>8</sup> who, after her death in 1418, became Lord of the Manor, as in 1420, and again in 1438, he, as such, presents the Church of St. Mary at Stoke.<sup>9</sup>

In 1459, time of Henry VI, Edward Prince of Wales presents to this living;<sup>10</sup> from which we may infer that the Manor of Stoke had then become annexed to the Duchy of Cornwall.

In 1540, time of Henry VIII, Leland visits Stoke, and sees the "ruins of a great Manor House or Castelle in *the bottom* hard by the village,"—not on *the Hill* where the Chantry House stands,—and in the Manor Place "a very ancient chapel,"<sup>11</sup> the tombs in which he describes. Their number tells us that this chapel must have been of very considerable size to have held them. Leland also speaks of the Provost having a large house in the village,<sup>12</sup> no doubt referring to the Chantry House.

From Mr. Green's survey of the Somerset chantries, we learn that the Stoke Free Chapel was little affected by the two Acts aimed against all chantries in Henry VIII's reign; but in the first of Edward VI another Act was passed, vesting all chantries in the Crown, and shortly after, a survey was ordered of their revenues and possessions—of course with a view to their appropriation. We find in that survey, by Hugh Poulett and Thos. Dyer, that the revenues of St. Nicholas's Free Chapel, in lands, tenths, tithes, and hereditaments, amounted in the clear to £11 2s. 10d. That there was a chalice of silver, weight not stated, remaining with the incumbent, Thos. Canner. It also gives the weight (with a view to seizure, or more probably after its seizure) of the lead

<sup>7</sup> Leland's *Itinerary*.

<sup>8</sup> *Inquis.*, 13th Richard II.

<sup>9</sup> Weaver's *Incum.*, p. 189.

<sup>10</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>11</sup> Leland's *Itinerary*.

<sup>12</sup> *Idem.*

of the chapel as four foders—a foder, according to old Nat. Baily, the Philologist, being half a cwt. short of a ton. It also gives the weight of bell-metal as 3 cwt.<sup>13</sup>

I may here mention that lead and bell-metal taken from Somerset chantries, and weighing together 3,647 lbs., was sold to Lawrance Hyde, servant to Sir John Thynne, for the sum of £128 10s.

In the 13th of James I (1616), at a Court of Survey of the Manor of Stoke, the Homage, in reply to a question, say, "There was a castle as we have heard in a certain ground called Gardens."<sup>14</sup> Lastly, Collinson, writing in 1792, says, "The once noble mansion of the Beauchamps and Gournays is now in ruins, its small remains being converted into offices for a farm house, and the chapel into a cyder cellar."<sup>15</sup> I would suggest that he wrote this from hearsay, and that his informant was speaking of the Chantry House at the top of the village as the mansion, and of the belfry before alluded to, as the chapel containing the cyder barrels; for it seems from the answer of the Homage that the mansion had disappeared 200 years before.

Such is the brief *résumé* of the documentary evidence. What are the traces which this mansion and chapel have left behind them? I will first tell you what I consider to have been the boundaries of that which Leland calls the Manor Place, and then describe to you what is to be seen, and what has been found, within these bounds.

Beginning at the south-west point of a somewhat irregular oblong, which I conceive to have been this Manor Place, you find the remains of an old gate-house, where a 16th century house has been erected on the lower courses of a much older building; going back, perhaps, to the 14th or even 13th century. Fortunately, the worked plinth on the southern side

<sup>13</sup> Green's *Survey of S. Chantries.*

<sup>14</sup> Old deed.

<sup>15</sup> Collinson's, *Somerset.* The fields in "the bottom" are still called Garden Closes."

has not been destroyed, neither the south-west and north-west corners, which show the remains of the jambs of a double gateway, the gates of which must have enclosed between them a space of about 19 feet. This space was originally no doubt arched over. There are also in the walls the holes into which the large bolts of the gates were shot. From this point, going in an easterly direction, you have the remains of an old wall on which a more modern one has been built. After about a dozen yards this wall ceases for 90 yards, when it re-appears in almost its original state, being about 10 feet in height, and continues to bound the Manor Place for another 80 yards on the south, and 60 yards on the east.

On the *south* side, 40 yards from the south-east corner, is a fine gateway, built of Ashlar stone; some of the stones weighing many hundred-weight. This gateway measures 14 feet in width; and on the *eastern* wall, 37 yards from the south-east corner, is a similar, but smaller one, measuring only 11 feet 4 inches. The whole of this wall is of a thickness varying from 31 to 37 inches. It is pierced at regular intervals of 12 feet by holes, 7 or 8 inches square, and about 5 feet above the inner ground line; whether for the purpose of looking through, or shooting through I will not venture an opinion.

On the west, and for a considerable distance on the north, that which I consider to have been the Manor Place was formerly bounded by two large ponds, connected by a ditch about 20 feet wide, all which are now dry. These ponds were known in the memory of old people as the Castle fish ponds. The west pond has been filled up in my recollection, and the stream supplying it conveyed away by a large under-ground gutter. The ditch, I am informed by old people, was partially levelled up to allow persons to pass over dry shod, by the late John Tatchell Bullen. I have carefully taken the levels of the ground about here, and find that a hatch placed in the gap now existing in the bank of the east pond would have flooded both ponds and intervening ditch.



From near the north-east extremity of the east pond you may trace foundations of a wall, extending to where the eastern wall terminates, thus completing the entire circuit and, I may say, defences of the Place.

Now, what has been found within these boundaries?

As you enter by the gate-house there is a steep descent to the west pond on the left, and to the ditch in front of you. From this space tons of Ham stone have been taken for building purposes in the memory of those now living, and tons still remain; this accumulation reaching as far as the east pond. In this locality were found three well carved heads, probably gurgoyles; two of which form part of a garden wall near, the third is in my possession.

By turning to your right at a distance of about 50 yards you come upon what is the undoubted site of the St. Nicholas Chapel. It has been for many years a garden, the soil having an uniform depth of a little over a foot, beneath which you get a foot to eighteen inches of mortar, rubbish, and stones, many of them of a considerable size; and beneath again have been found numbers of fragments of encaustic tiles, and a few entire, or nearly so. They appear to have been wilfully beaten up and destroyed, none of them being in their original bed, but varying some inches in the depth at which they laid. Up to the present time I have discovered 17 different types. Six of these are heraldic, with no attempt to indicate the tinctures; two others with figures; and the remainder, designs of birds, leaves, etc. The following is a list:—

I. *A double-headed eagle displayed.*

A somewhat similar tile, but lozenge shaped, is in St. John Baptist's Chapel at Wells, and according to the Rev. Mr. Pereira, bears the arms assumed by Richard Plantagenet (second son of King John) as King of the Romans. Similar tiles have been found at Poyntington, Muchelney, and South Petherton.

II. *A lion rampant contourné within a bordure bezanté.*

Arms of Edmund Plantagenet (son of Richard), who married Margaret of Clare. Similar tiles at St. John Baptist, Wells; Poyntington, and Muchelney.

III. *Or, three chevronels gules.*

The arms of Clare. They held lands at Porlock,<sup>16</sup> and during the first three Edwards were Lords of the Manor of Stapleton,<sup>16</sup> about two miles from Stoke. Similar tiles were taken from Poyntington, but with the dark and light shades reversed, and the chevronels narrower; it is also like one at St. John Baptist, Wells.

IV. *Three lions passant guardant in pale.*

The arms of England, according to Rev. Pereira, from 1154 to 1340;<sup>17</sup> but Planché says, "first represented on the second Great Seal of Richard I (1194), on his return from Jerusalem, and after his captivity in Germany."<sup>18</sup> Similar tiles from Poyntington and Wells.<sup>18</sup>

V. Variety of IV.

VI. *Four fusils in fess, each charged with an escallop shell.*

Arms of Cheney. In 1367, William Cheyne was escheator for Somerset and Dorset, and resigned the office to Edmund Cheney in 1371.<sup>19</sup> Nicholas de Chenne presented to the living of Poyntington in 1315, and Kathne. de Chenne in 1413.<sup>20</sup> John Cheyne presented to the living of Lymington in 1456 and 1465.<sup>21</sup>

VII. *A chevron between ten crosses paté, six in chief and four in base.*

Arms of Berkely. Thomas Lord Berkeley was the first who in the beginning of the 13th century charged his coat with ten crosses, in addition to the chevron. His son Maurice married Isabella, the daughter of Edmund Plantagenet and Margaret de Clare.<sup>22</sup> Sir Nicholas Berkely was one of the

<sup>16</sup> Collinson.

<sup>17</sup> *Proc. Som. Archæol. Soc.*, vol. xxxiv.

<sup>18</sup> *Poursuivant of Arms.*—Planché, p. 76.

<sup>19</sup> *Inquis.*, 42nd Edward III. <sup>20</sup> *Weaver's Somerset Incumbents.* <sup>21</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>22</sup> Collinson, vol. iii, p. 276.

grantees under the marriage settlement of Alice de Beauchamp with Mathew de Gournay.<sup>23</sup>

VIII. A variety of VII.

It seems rather remarkable that there should be a total absence of any tiles with the arms of Beauchamp, or those with whom we know they had formed alliances.<sup>24</sup> I think it is worthy of remark that five out of six of the heraldic tiles found, bear the arms of those closely connected by blood or marriage, viz:—(1) Richard I; (2) his nephew, Richard Plantagenet; (3) Richard Plantagenet's son, Edmund, (4) who married Margaret de Clare, (5) whose daughter, Isabella, was married to Maurice de Berkely.

IX. *Figure of huntsman or perhaps herald, blowing a horn.* Similar tiles from Muchelney and Poyntington.

X. *Knight on horse-back, with flat topped, cylindrical helmet, having a plain horizontal breathing hole in front.*

Tiles with knights on horse-back were found at Muchelney, and one far better designed and executed, at Poyntington.

XI. *Two birds on a church.* Similar at Muchelney.

XII. *Two birds in a foliated design.* Also at Muchelney.

The other seven are all foliated designs. Some like 14 were found at Glastonbury and Muchelney, and like 16 at Muchelney. These tiles, I think, must vary a good deal in their dates, some being very early; but I must confess much ignorance on the subject, so will not attempt to assign them to any particular periods.

Parker, in his *Glossary*, says that "in almost every instance where ornamental tiles have been accidentally discovered on

<sup>23</sup> Inquis., 48th Edward III.

<sup>24</sup> Since this paper was read, the writer has unearthed a fragment of tile bearing the arms of the Stoke Beauchamps; also one with three lions or leopards—passant, instead of regardant, and facing the sinister side of the shield. The foliated ornamentation appears to be of an earlier period than that of No. IV. Also one with the fish (*Vesica piscis*), and another with a nondescript figure, having the body and legs of a lion, and the head and arms of a man with weapons in his hands.



the site of a mansion or castle, there has been reason to suppose that a consecrated fabric has there existed." "The more elaborate pavements were reserved for the choir, the chancel, or the more immediate vicinity of the altar; whilst plain tiles were usually employed for the other parts."<sup>25</sup>

I think, then, we may fairly assume that these tiles formed the floor of the choir or chancel of St. Nicholas. At the extreme east of where the tiles were found, excavations show a plinth, raised 5 or 6 inches above the level of the original floor, with a chamfer of 3 inches round the upper edges on the front and sides. It measures 7 feet 6 inches in length and 2 feet in width, and is ragged at the back, as if built into the east wall, which it doubtless was. This I would suggest to be the plinth on which stood the stone altar. Immediately in front of it is a burial in stone; a grave two feet deep, 5 feet 10 inches in length, and 19 and 21 inches in width respectively at foot and head. The cover of another coffin has been apparently utilized in forming one of the sides, and bears on its surface a foliated cross. It contains the skeleton of a middle-aged man. I must not allow my imagination too much play, but I think it more than probable that this grave contains the bones of the founder of the chantry, the second Lord John Beauchamp. Leland speaks of tombs with images of men in armour, with shields, all bearing the arms of Beauchamp; three in nave, and one on north side of choir. These can be none but the tombs of the four Beauchamps who successively owned Stoke; and if so, why was one given the greater honour of burial in the chancel? I think we may reasonably answer, Because he was the founder.

There was another skeleton of a female near, with her feet towards the head of the first; but whether in stone, or no, I cannot say, as some drainers had disturbed it before I saw it.

The foundations of the north wall of what I assume to have

<sup>25</sup> Parker's *Glossary*, p. 267.

been the chancel have been laid bare 5 or 6 feet below the present ground line, and at a distance of 9 feet 9 inches from the centre of the plinth, which would give a total width of 19 feet 6 inches to the chancel. Due west from this plinth or, if I may say so, altar, at a distance of 21 feet, a cross foundation has been unearthed, on which a screen may have stood, giving us the length of chancel. In this screen was probably the choir door spoken of by Leland, in front of which Sir Mathew de Gournay was buried. Here we find the original floor fell about 2 feet, probably indicating the lower level of the nave.

Imbedded in the rubbish immediately above the tiles were found fragments of carved stone, the most worthy of notice being:—

1. A slab of Purbeck marble, 26 inches by 13 inches, which originally bore eight very well carved heads on front and two ends. Two on the left hand, with closed eyes, and one, the corner head entirely gone. Of the two in front, one is in good preservation, the other partially destroyed. The right corner head is hideously grotesque; and of those on the right end, one is entire and the other broken. The upper surface is roughly tooled, the back smoothly worked, with the lower angle chamfered.

2. Fragments of a recumbent female figure, with naked feet on a dog, or some other animal.

3. A capital, with moulding not unlike dog-tooth; probably 13th century.

4. Two fragments of what may have been a 13th century piscina.

5. Fragment of a 14th century bracket, or perhaps canopy.

Also various other pieces of worked stone; but every bit of ornamental work seems to have been, with great trouble, beaten to pieces. This, and the destruction of the pavement, I cannot think to have been the work of the dispoilers in the time of Edward VI, who may have taken the four foder of lead from the roof, and the three cwt. of bells from the tower, to

turn them into money; but should rather regard it as that of those infected by the iconoclastic mania of the Cromwellian Puritans. A possible indication of the time of this ruthless destruction may be the finding of numerous early tobacco pipes, three or four feet under ground, lying with the fragments of tiles, evidently Jacobean, possibly Cromwellian.

I hope to make further explorations, and should anything of sufficient interest come to light, I shall be pleased to bring it under the notice of this Society at a future time.

