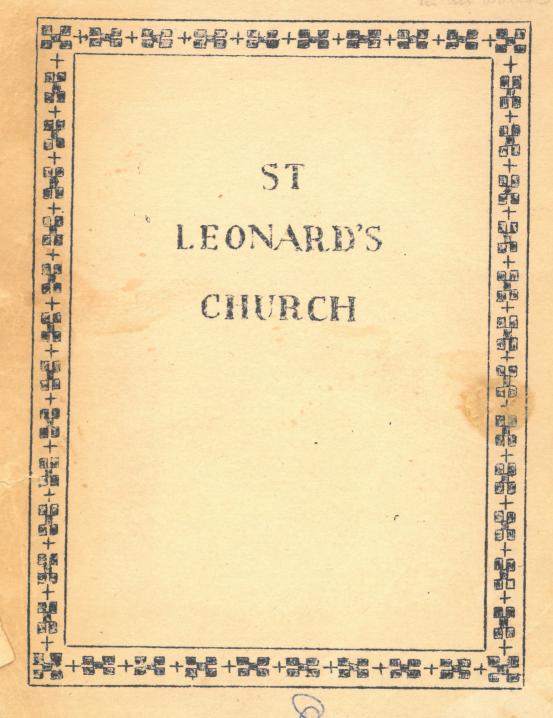
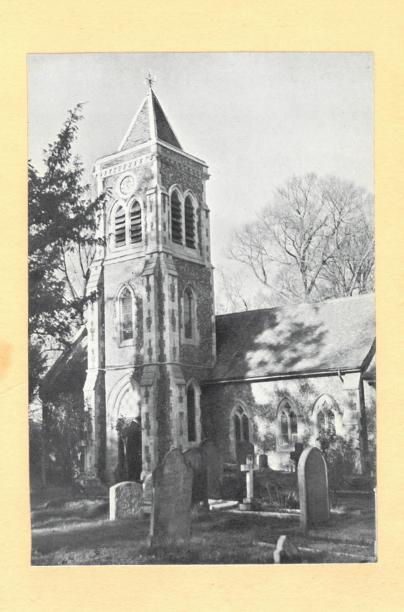
The human voice is till the lookless metro





ST. LEONARD'S CHURCH, CHESHAM BOIS

St. Leonard's stands among the trees on the hill rising from Bois Moor. The Parish it serves is of about 900 acres. It is in the Deanery of Amersham in Buckinghamshire.

The present Bois House is situated near the site of the old Manor of the de Bois family, of which St. Leonard's Church was originally a private chapel. William de Bois became the first patron in about 1216. The Cheynes made the Manor their home about 1430 after it had passed through the Chesham and Winslow families. The original Chapel was built about 1200 and was appurtenant to that half of Chesham Church appropriated to the Abbey of St. Mary Pre, Leicester. After a disagreement with the Abbot of Leicester in 1213 an arrangement was made which deprived him of all real authority, William de Bois and his successors obtaining the right to nominate the Chaplain, subject to the Abbot's approval. There was no further trouble, and the advowson was exercised by the Lords of Chesham Bois Manor until between 1877 and 1888, when it was passed over to the Peache Trustees, and is now in their gift. The Chapel, assessed at 106 shillings and eightpence in 1535, was endowed by tithes by the Abbot of Leicester, and was always regarded as a donative of peculiar jurisdiction, that is, the incumbent was not subject to the authority of the Bishop or other Ecclesiastics, and the patron not only had the right of presentation but also that of induction to the living. In 1728 Dr. Clagett, Archdeacon of Bucks, sent a summons demanding a complete account of the books, vestments, vessels, etc. belonging to the Church. A protest was drawn up and signed by the incumbent and churchwardens, but on receipt of a letter from Lady Cheyne the Archdeacon consented to come as a visitor, and not to encroach upon their rights. The protest was not delivered, therefore, and he was shown the Chapel (this is recorded in the register beginning 1720).

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Chapel acquired the right of burial and became almost independent of the mother church of St. Mary's Chesham. It was first referred to as the parish church of Chesham Bois in 1470. The Cheynes as patrons provided incumbents and kept the Church in repair. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the last vestige of dependence on St. Mary's Chesham had vanished. The original church was very small, and was built of flint with dressings of clunch. The roof is now tiled. The chancel is 20' by 142'. East window of three pointed lights is much restored. original glass, some of which dated from the fourteenth century was damaged by the air-raids on October 13th and 27th 1940. The present window, restored to the design of the late Martin Travers A.R.C.A., is made up of some of the glass from the original window, floral and other designs probably fourteenth century, and shields etc. fifteenth century, and some other ancient glass of the fifteenth century. There is also incorporated some new glass in this 1946 restoration. The panel representing the Crucifixion, believed to be of Flemish origin, and some fragments of the late fifteenth century were given by members of the Salmond family. Martin Travers also designed the present West window, which was given in memory of A.W. Rich by his sister in 1947. It is of three cinquefoil lights under a four centred head, and now contains very little of the original fifteenth century tracery. This window was blocked up and concealed for many years, and was restored in 1881.

The three small windows in the chancel retain their early English arches. One on the south side portrays Ruth and the Sower in modern glass. The other two are filled with modern glass except for the four shields of the Cheyne

family, two in each window, which were originally in the East window. Closer observation shows that these shields are suspended from a cord held by a hand. The initials and dates that appear are those of the Cheyne family. quatrefoils of these two windows contain (south) the initials XC and (north) IC, the Greek and Latin formulae respectively for Jesus Christ. The glass in these two windows is part of the 1948 restoration. There are five windows in the south wall of the nave, three of which are similar to those in the chancel; that nearest the pulpit, however, is different from the others in that the tracery is more splayed; it portrays St. Birinus and St. Frideswide with the Oxford coat of arms above. This was given by H. Carpenter in 1945. The centre window portrays St. Cecilia and St. George and was given in memory of Miss Porter in 1946. The other is of Mary and Phebe given by A. Evans in memory of his wife in 1908. The westernmost windows were added in 1911. In the north wall there are four fourteenth century windows similar to, but smaller than those in the south. These were removed from the original north wall and reset when the church was enlarged, and the north aisle added. The roof of the chancel and nave has curved wind braces and moulded arched trusses supported by stone corbels dating from the fifteenth century. The present roof boarding of deal replaces the original of oak. The stone corbels in the chancel, which are painted, were probably a memorial to Elizabeth, wife of Robert Cheyne, who died in 1516, as their shields (supported by angels) are seen on each side of the chancel. Of the others, those at the south-east and south-west corners are heads of bishops; that in the north-east corner is the head of a monk, and that in the north-west corner, a bearded head, which may be that of the chaplain or rector, or may even be intended to represent St. Leonard, to whom the church is dedicated, but a similar head, covered, is represented again on the first corbel on the north side of the nave, looking south-west. The other old corbels in the nave show angels carrying shields; those west of the tower are modern. The north

aisle arcade has now seven arches, four dating from 1881 and the other three from 1911. The west window of the north aisle has been filled with modern glass representing St. Leonard and St. Hugh of Lincoln, with the Lincoln coat of arms. The two westernmost nave windows were filled at the same time, in 1949, with figures of the four Evangelists, with the coats of arms of Oxford and Buckingham, and were the gift of Ernest H. Blankley Esq., of Chesham Bois. These three lights are known as the Lincoln gift. At about the same time the quatrefoils of the north wall windows were filled with the Implements of the Crucifixion. At the east end of the north aisle is the organ chamber, formerly the old vestry, and from outside the church can be seen another fourteenth century window belonging thereto, and also the north-east chancel window, now blocked up.

The old seventeenth century western tower, partly of wood, was demolished in 1844, and the present tower, with south porch under, erected. This is surmounted by ringers' chamber, belfry and clock. There are three bells. The old tenor bell, early fifteenth century, bears the inscription "Sancte Andrea Ora Pro Nobis". It is now cracked beyond repair, and has been brought down and stands in the porch. Of the other two, one is ancient, and dated 1705, and the new tenor bell about 1946, which was given by Col. Hanbury-Sparrow, has the names of two children killed during the war, one in Germany and the other in Chesham Bois, inscribed on it. The new vestry to the north of the organ chamber was added in 1911.

There is an Incumbents' board on the south wall of the nave, and the first parish priest was one William de Risenberega (probably a monk from Monks Risborough). The list is fairly complete, and mention should be made of Mr Whitby who functioned during the Civil War, instead of John Howe, the rightful rector. It is thought that Mr Whitby was probably a Presbyterian or Baptist minister that Cromwell placed in charge of the parish.

Before 1845 St. Leonard's was in the diocese of Lincoln (hence the window at the west end in honour of St. Hugh). It is now in the diocese of Oxford. The four boards bearing the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer which originally hung on the east wall, have been removed to the west end. The present chancel arch replaces a very much smaller one, the stones of which have been rebuilt into the arch at the entrance to the churchyard.

The font is entirely modern, a memorial gift, and replaces an old damaged marble one said to have come from St. Mary's Amersham. The oak eagle lectern is also modern. In the chancel are two fifteenth century oak sedilia seats, which have moulded standards, the heads of which were mutilated by the iconoclasts, and were later fitted with modern caps. The early Jacobean oak pulpit was removed to its present position from the north side in 1884, when the church was reseated. It now stands on its canopy; it is hexagonal, and is ornamented with strap and openwork. carved oak back panel originally connecting the pulpit with canopy now serves as a back for the priest's stall, which is made of fifteenth century oak from the old pews. Set in the wall behind the pulpit is the old iron hourglass holder, used in Puritan times to govern the length of the sermon. The communion rails are Jacobean, and have twisted balusters, and poppette head ends. These were formerly in the old west gallery. The beautiful Holy Table of oak is late seventeenth century, and has five supports twisted in clusters of four, and apparently carved out of the solid. Before the altar are several ancient tiles reset in the floor.

The Communion Vessels include an Elizabethan silver chalice, 1562, a silver patten, 1689, and a silver chalice and patten about 1745-7, given by a parishioner in 1913. There is also a pewter alms dish, engraved 'the parish of Chesham Bois, John Batchelor, Churchwarden 1737.' The

present alms dish, of bronze, is a memorial to the late rector, the Rev. George Henry Lawrence, and to his son, Christopher, who was lost in action in North Africa. It bears the figure of St. George and the Dragon.

Above the windows in the south wall are two hatchments of the Fuller family, local landowners. The one is of Benjamin Fuller, D.L., who died in 1882, and the other of his son, John Stratton Fuller, died in 1892. It was customary for these arms of a deceased person to be placed in front of his house and subsequently taken into his church at his funeral.

On the floor of the chancel are some memorial brasses in very good condition. The most interesting is that to Benedict Lee, a 'chrysom child', that is, a child who died soon after baptism, and before the churching of its mother. The cloth (chrysom), wherein the child had been annointed with chrysom (ointment) at baptism, then served as a shroud. The brass depicts the cloth as made up of folds of linen stamped with crosses, the effigy being $9\frac{1}{2}$ " in length, and the inscription runs:-

"Of Rog" Lee gentilmā here lyeth the son Benedict Lee crysom who soule ihu pdō." (whose soul Jesu pardon)

The date of his burial is given as 1542 by his family, but the date is not recorded in the Register, although he is mentioned. There are a number of brasses in England representing chrysom children, but this one is believed to be unique in having the term chrysom named on the tablet. The other brass is that of Elizabeth and Robert Cheyne. Elizabeth died first, and before the Reformation; her husband, Robert, died after the Reformation, and it is interesting to note the difference between their two inscriptions, namely, the pre- and post-Reformation formula. These are as follows:-

"Of yor Charite pray for the soule of Elizabeth Cheyne late the wyf of Robert Cheyne, gentilman, the which Elizabeth decessed the xx day of decembre the yer of or lord MVCXVI on whose soule ihu have mercy. ame."

and:-

"All Christian people gyue thanks for the godly depture of Robert Cheyne, Esquier, who Decessed the nyntheday of December in the yere of or Lorde God a Thousand fyeve hundreth fyfte too. Whose soule we comend to Gods infinite marcy."

Elizabeth wears a gown with girdle, and lilies, also a pedimented headdress. At the four corners are shields of the Cheyne, and Cheyne impaled with Webbe, arms, respectively. When the brasses were removed from their former position under the choir-stalls it was found that the obverse of three of these shields, when fitted together, formed part of the lilies and girdle pattern of another figure. These shields may, therefore, have been made from faulty brass work (but such would usually have been scrapped), but it is possible that the original brass may have been removed from some other church and reworked on the reverse. The effigy of Robert Cheyne, clad in full armour, has been set beside that of his wife and is of inferior metal, and the symmetry of the original monument destroyed.

Some time before 1847 there was another effigy in brass in memory of Winifred Cheyne; the inscription alone now remains.

On the north side of the Holy Table is an altar-tomb in memory of Winifred Cheyne's husband, John Cheyne. The tomb has a plain top of Verona marble, the sides are of clunch richly panelled and ornamented with three coats of arms on the front and one on the west side, including those of John Cheyne and his two wives, Winifred, previously mentioned, and Joice, daughter of Sir Anthony Lee,

the latter within the insignia of the Order of the Garter, of which the founder of the family was a Knight. On the mural tablet above are the arms of John Cheyne with crest, and a Latin inscription, the translation of which follows:

To me to live is Christ and to die is gain.
Buried here lies John Cheyne
Esquire, who, in testimony of his zeal
for the gospel of God, in the church of Tring
founded a pious preacher of the gospel
at his own expense at a yearly stipend
of £40 for a term of 99 years and in brotherly
love towards the most pious poor of the same Faith
gave to the parishes of Aylesbury, Wendover,
Beaconsfield, Gt. Missenden, Burnham and Denham
40/- yearly during the said term and similarly,
gave in perpetuity to the parishes of Chesham,
Amersham, Tring and Drayton Beauchamp, and to this
little parish 20/-, and to Choldesbury 20/- as an
example and honour to his descendants.

He did not die but departed on November 1st in the year of our Lord 1585.

There are also several other tombstones, now set in the Sanctuary floor, and wall tablets to members of the Cheyne family and others.

It is of interest to note at this point that the original nave wall as far west as the south door and both chancel walls are 'battered'. That is, on the outside the walls are perpendicular; inside, however, they are wider at the base than at the top, so avoiding the need for buttresses. This early type of wall construction could, of course, only be used in small buildings.

The first Register begins in 1598; the earliest records were beautifully written in Old English characters, but the writing deteriorated very much in later years. The Parish Account Books date from 1778. The

absence of older accounts records is probably due to the fact that the Cheynes paid all church expenses.

John Cheyne, previously mentioned, founded a charity consisting of annual rent charges of 40/- issuing from land in Chesham, part of which was for the poor of Chesham Bois, and the remainder for those of Cholesbury. He also left certain sums of money to other parishes as mentioned above. The present Duke of Bedford's Charity consists of rents amounting to £30 per annum from gardens and allotments on Chesham Bois Moor. Half was formerly paid to the Overseers for relief of the rates, and the other half to the Rector for the relief of the parish poor, but later to the Charity Commission Trustees.

The parish has been closely connected with three great evangelical movements in the Church of England.

The first:-

Sir Thomas Cheyne, Lord of the Manor, and Patron of the Living (1445), was a Lollard; because of this he was imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1446. The incumbent about 1462 was also suspected of Lollardry. The name 'Lollard' was given to the followers of Wycliffe (1324 to 1384) Master of Balliol, Chaplain to the King, and a most famous Oxford lecturer. Wycliffe taught that ecclesiastics as well as laymen should follow the meek and poor and charitable living of Christ'; they appealed to the Bible for every doctrine and rule of life, and denied Transsubstantiation; objected to celibacy among those in religious orders, to image worship, and the necessity of auricular confession. They also believed in the strict observance of Sunday as the Sabbath. 1382 part of Wycliffe's writings were condemned as heretical by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and their teaching was prohibited. Many of Wycliffe's followers were persecuted for their beliefs by imprisonment; some were executed or burnt at the stake. Wycliffe has been called 'the Morning Star of the Reformation.'

The second:-

John Cheyne (died 1585) whose altar tomb in the chancel has already been mentioned, was one of the Reformers. In 1559 he was appointed a Commissioner to bear certain injunctions for the reformation of religion into various parishes in the Province of Canterbury. It was probably one of his daughters who married the Rev. Richard Grafton, son of Richard Grafton the Chronicler, and printer of the 'Great Bible', one of the most zealous of the Reformers.

Third:-

The Revd. Thomas Clarke, Rector 1766 to 1793 (whose memorial tablet is on the south wall of the chancel) trained many of the younger leaders of that Revival for Holy Orders at the old parsonage which formerly stood near the present rectory. To this movement, which appealed for a closer following of the teaching of the gospel is due the vigorous revival of religious worship with regular services, preaching etc. and the foundation of a Church Missionary Society and other similar organisations. Chesham Bois church has for many years past been a loyal supporter of missionary work overseas and at St. Luke'stide in 1950 and 1951 a Medical Day was observed, when a collection of medical supplies was made and dedicated for the use of the C.M.S. and sent direct to the mission field.

The organ, a moderate two manual instrument believed to have been originally built for the late Sir Henry Oakley by Messrs Gray and Davidson as a chamber organ in the early 1860's, was erected in 1911 and was later enlarged and modernised by the original builders. The majority of the pipe work is now about 80 to 90 years old and the tone is warm and unforced and typical of this firm's work at that period. In 1931 the choir was affiliated to the Royal School of Church Music (then the S.E.C.M.). Each year it takes part in a Festival Service with the combined choirs

of the Deanery. These services take place at a different church each year and take the form of Festal Evensong with several anthems.

In 1872 John Birch, the Clerk and Sexton from 1869 to 1917, in his 'lines' on the church, wrote:-

All her walls are very thick And yet decaying fast. Oh, may she ere long be restored That so she long may last.

In 1881, soon after this was written, extensive alterations and repairs were in fact undertaken. The original chancel arch as previously mentioned was reconstructed to form a gateway to the churchyard. Two years later the present rectory was also built by the Duke of Bedford, and is situated half a mile from the church, on the Common, a little further west of the old parsonage. In Jan. 1950 new oak doors leading from the nave to the tower were given by the parishioners in memory of the Revd. George Henry Lawrence, who was Rector from 1923 to 1945.

On account of the soft nature of the original stone extensive restoration became necessary in 1951, and refacing was carried out, at the same time the interior being thoroughly cleaned.

On November 11th 1951 the Book of Remembrance, containing the names of parishioners who fell in both world wars was dedicated at the Remembrance Day service. The Book lies open in a glass-topped case made from wood removed from the choir stalls. The leaves are turned every Sunday in an Act of Remembrance.

This brief account has been an attempt to place on record the most interesting details of a remotely situated country church whose history spans a period of no less than 700 years, and acknowledgment is herein made to the various sources which have been consulted for reliable information.

Marian Atkinson

Shirley Knight
1952

The following works have been consulted:-

'Chesham Bois Church' William Lemprière 1923

'Tyson's "Magna Britania" '

1806

'The Victoria History of Bucks'

'Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (Bucks, South)'

1912

and various encyclopaedias.

(The information taken from William Lemprière's little book is very reliable as he gathered his facts together from the church registers, vestry books, local records, and other books consulted at libraries.)

We also wish to acknowledge here the kind co-operation of the Rector, Rev. A. Birkett, and Mr S. Chappell (Organist and Choirmaster) without whose generous assistance this small history could not have been completed.

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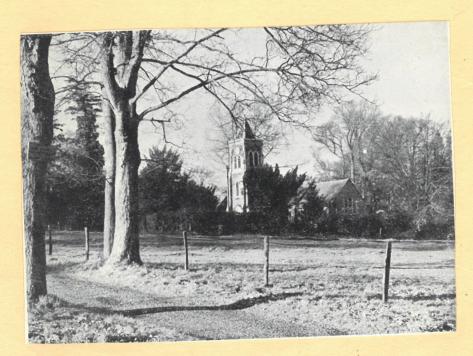
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