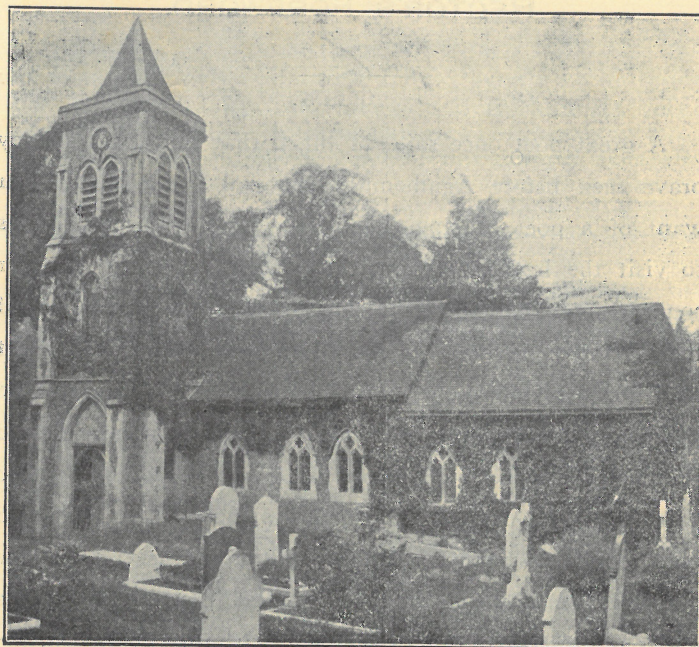


Chesham Bois Church



RECTOR: REV. T. H. FITZPATRICK, M.A.

Whosoever thou art that enterest this Church, wilt thou not offer before thou leavest it, a prayer for thyself, for those who worship, and for those who minister here.

The proceeds of the sale of this booklet will be devoted to the upkeep of the Fabric.

PRICE - SIXPENCE.

1923.

RECTOR'S FOREWORD.

A great poet once said, in effect, that there were many brave men before Agamemnon, but all are forgotten for want of a poet to sing their praises. Anyone who cares to visit the beautiful churches scattered up and down our country finds something of interest everywhere, but few of them have a layman saturated in archæological lore at hand to describe them. To Mr. William Lempriere, who has compiled this delightful account of our interesting old church, it has been a labour of love; he has spared no pains on it, as the list of authorities shows. We are much indebted to him and I am sure that, if we would show ourselves grateful, nothing will please him better than a wider interest in Chesham Bois Church, not only, or chiefly, for its historic treasures, but as a place sacred to the worship of the Father in heaven who seeks for men to worship him in spirit and truth.

NOTE.—Since the above was written the Rev. T. H. Fitzpatrick has exchanged livings with the Rev. G. H. Lawrence, M.A., Vicar of High Littleton, nr. Bristol. Mr. Lawrence was inducted to the living of Chesham Bois on October 4th, 1923.

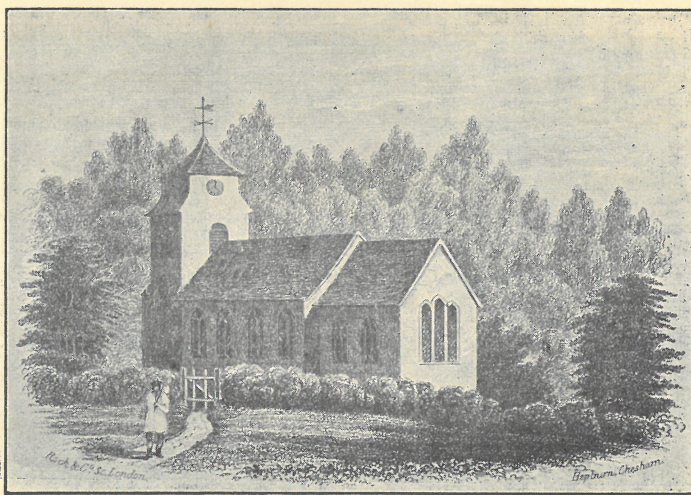
August, 1923.

The Parish Church of Chesham Bois, Bucks.

This little church, dedicated to Saint Leonard (*) the patron saint of prisoners and hospitals, stands on the brow of a steep hill rising from Chesham Bois Moor (†). The parish it serves is 905 acres in extent.

The church consists of chancel, nave, north aisle and tower and contains several features of more than passing interest. It was built in 1216, close to the house of William de Bois, Lord of the Manor at that time, with which it was possibly connected by a subterranean passage.

The chancel (20ft. by 14½ft.), which constituted the original church, is of the Early English style of architecture. In the 14th century, a nave of the same breadth but 37ft. in length was added with a door at the West end. In the 17th century a tower, 46ft. in height, was built at the West end, and a gallery was erected in the nave. In 1823 the latter was enlarged and covered half the nave. The walls and buttresses are built of flint with clunch (lower cretaceous limestone) dressings.



Exterior of Church prior to 1881.

(*)—ST. LEONARD of Limoges, Confessor, died about A.D. 559. His day is the 6th of November; his symbol broken fetters. He obtained the right to liberate any prisoner he visited, and became patron saint of prisoners.

(†)—CHESHAM BOIS or Cestreham Bois may mean the castle (or camp) community in the wood, derived from castra (Latin), a castle; ham (Saxon) a community, and bois (French) a wood; or the community in the wood on the river Chess, as more popularly supposed.

The present organ chamber was originally built for a vestry at the cost of Mr. James Stevens, father of the then Rector.

Mr. John Birch, the devoted clerk and sexton from 1869 to 1917, in his 'lines' on the Church published 1872, 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 extensive alterations and repairs were undertaken by the Rector, the Rev. Joseph Matthews, and completed in 1884. The tower, then in a dangerous condition, was demolished and the present south porch (surmounted by ringers' chamber, belfry and spire) erected. The wall between the chancel and nave was taken down and the present arch substituted; the gallery was removed and pitch pine seats took the place of the former oak pews. The church was enlarged by adding the north aisle, and buttresses strengthened the existing walls. The archway at the entrance to the churchyard was built of stones originally used in the ancient chancel arch. The total cost of these works was £2,045 11s. 5d., and the general appearance of the Church at that time is shown on the cover of the Parish Magazine.



Church after restoration, looking East.

In 1911, the Rector, the Rev. T. H. Fitzpatrick, further enlarged the church by lengthening the north aisle and the nave, thus providing 97 additional seats, making a total of 217; the roof and buttresses were strengthened; the old vestry was opened out into the present organ chamber, and

a new vestry, the gift of the Rector's mother, was added. Internally, oak choir stalls were provided, and the positions of the pulpit and reading desk transposed. Gas for illumination took the place of oil and the heating arrangements were considerably improved. The cost of these alterations and additions was £1,152 5s. od.; a parishioner, Mr. W. M. How, F.R.I.B.A., was the honorary architect.

Owing to the soft nature of the stone originally used, much of the window tracery decayed and was restored from time to time, notably the Early English arch and detail of the east window.

During these operations, the beautiful 14th Century stained glass, which includes specimens of the Cheyne and other arms, and shows the lily of the Lee family, was collected and inserted in the east window; some of the quarries are perfect originals. None of the other stained glass is old.

At the base of this window is the text:—"He saith Yea: I come quickly. Amen, come, Lord Jesus." This was inserted in 1881, from the Revised Version of that date.

The west triplet window in the nave contains very little of the 15th century tracery. It was for many years blocked up and concealed by plaster, and was only brought to light and restored when the western tower was demolished. Of the other windows in the nave six are ancient and five modern. The three small windows in the chancel retain their Early English arches but the tracery was altered to Late Decorated to match those in the nave. A beautiful coloured representation of a window in this church is to be found in Lyson's "Magna Britannia," vol. 1. (Plate at page 488), but which window this is cannot now be determined.

The roof of the chancel and of the older part of the nave is 15th century work, though the oak has been in part replaced by deal. The painted stone corbels in the chancel (renovated in 1839) were probably a memorial to Elizabeth (née Webbe) wife of Robert Cheyne, who died 1516, for shields (supported by angels) bearing their arms appear on each side of the chancel. Of the others, two on the South side are the heads of bishops; one on the north is the head of a monk, and the other, looking south east, with beard, whiskers and moustache, may be that of the chaplain or rector. The same head, covered, is represented again on the first corbel on the north side of the nave looking southwest. The other old examples in the nave show angels carrying shields, whilst modern ones on the south side represent the Agnus Dei (Lamb with flag) and a pelican feeding its young from its breast, a symbol of the Church; and on the north the head and bust of Robert Cheyne (copied

from his brass in the Chancel), clad in armour and with hands raised in prayer, and a shield with fish and the legend "Ichthus."—(Greek "fish")*

The arcading originally erected in 1881 to substitute the north wall now consists of seven arches with round stone moulded pillars.

The church plate includes an Elizabethan silver chalice with hall mark engraved "Chesham Bois 6 oun 15 pen"; a more modern silver paten engraved "Chesham Bois 6 oun 6 pen"; a silver chalice and paten with Dublin plate mark about 1745/7 presented by a Parishioner in 1913; and a pewter alms dish engraved "The Parish of Chesham Bois, John Batchelor, Churchwarden, 1737."

The Jacobean Communion rails with twisted balusters are of oak, as is the beautiful Holy Table (late 17th century) which has five supports, twisted work in clusters of four, apparently carved out of the solid.

The two seats for clergy within the rails with 15th century moulded standards and the reading desk were made from old oak bench heads and wood available after the re-seating of the church.

The handsome Early Jacobean oak pulpit is hexagonal and ornamented with strap and open work. It stands on the old sounding board, and the carved oak panel which connected it with the pulpit, now serves as the back of the reading desk chair, which has two carved heads and busts on the arm rests taken from the old gallery.

The oak eagle lectern is modern, and the small circular marble font was transferred from Amersham Church to replace a broken one.

Set in the wall behind the pulpit is the old iron holder for the hour glass used in Puritan times.

On the south wall of the nave are two hatchments† of the Fuller family, who are local landowners: (a) Benjamin Fuller, D.L., died in 1882; (b) John Stratton Fuller, his son, died 1892.

In 1835 a seraphine (consisting of keyboard, wood chest and bellows) was presented by surviving pupils of the Rev. Thomas Clarke (Rector 1766—93) and, as appears by the Register, "a dumb organist with three barrels was added," thus becoming virtually a large barrel organ.

*Fisherman was used by our Lord for a worker. The letters of the Greek word are symbolic "Jesus Christ Son of God Saviour," so that the word implied much to an early believer and was safer than the cross as a Christian symbol.

†A hatchment is a shield of arms of a person placed at his decease in front of his house and subsequently, in certain cases, in his church.

There are three bells; one (ancient) without date or inscription; one by John Kebyll, early 15th century, inscribed "Sancte Andrea Ora Pro Nobis" (St. Andrew pray for us), and one inscribed "Chandler made me 1705."

On the chancel floor are some memorial brasses in excellent condition. The most interesting is that of Benedict Lee, a "chrysom child" *i.e.* a child who died before the cloth (chrysom), wherein he had been anointed with chrysm (ointment) at or after baptism, had been handed to the priest, as was customary. This served as a shroud if the child died before the churching of the mother. The cloth in this case is made up of folds of linen stamped with crosses and folded to a similar pattern. The effigy is $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length and the inscription runs:—

"Of Rog^r Lee gentilmā here
lyeth the son Benedict Lee
chrysom who^s soule ihu pdo." (whose soul Jesu pardon)



Roger Lee married Isabel, daughter of Robert and Elizabeth Cheyne. In the earliest register is the note:—"Benedicte Lee, the son of Roger Lee, died in his cresome, but there is sett downe neyther day nor yeare when he was buried." In a pedigree of the family the date is given as 1542. Although there are a number of brasses in England representing Chrysom children, this is believed to be unique in having the term applied to the child.

Another beautiful brass is that of Elizabeth and Robert Cheyne. The effigy of Elizabeth is $28\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length and the inscription:—

"Of yo^r 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 o^r lord M^cXVI on whose soule ihu haue mercy. ame."

The effigy of Robert is now $30\frac{1}{2}$ inches long and the inscription is:—

"All Christian people gyue thank^s for the godly deptime of Robert Cheyne, Esquier, who Decessed the nynthe day of December in the yere of o^r Lorde God a Thousand fyve hundreth fyfte too. Whose soule we comend to God^s infinite marcy."

These inscriptions show the difference between the pre- and the post-Reformation formula.

Robert Cheyne is clad in full armour, but the upper part of the helmet is missing. His wife wears a gown with girdle, and a pedimental head-dress. At the corners are shields with the Cheyne, and the Cheyne impaled with Webbe arms respectively. There was also an effigy in brass but it disappeared before 1847, and the inscription, as under, alone remains:—

"All Cheristian people geve Thanks to the lorde for the Godly deptime of Wenefride Doughter to the late lorde Mordant and Wyfe to John Cheyne Esquier who decessed the VIIIth day of July in the yere of o^r Lorde MCCCCCLXII Whose soule We comende to Gods Infinite mercy."

The handsome altar tomb on the north side of the Holy Table, with a mural tablet above, is in memory of Winifred's husband, John Cheyne. On the tablet are his arms and crest and a Latin inscription of which the following is a translation:—

"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, Great Missenden, Burn-
ham and Denham 40/- yearly during
the said term; and similarly, gave in
perpetuity to the Parishes of Chesham, Amers-
ham, Tring and Drayton Beauchamp,
and to this little parish 20/-, and to Chol-
desbury 20/- as an example and honour
to his descendants.

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

The tomb has a massive Verona marble top quite plain; the sides are of clunch richly panelled and ornamented with three coats of arms in front and one on the west side, including those of John Cheyne and of his two wives, Winifred above-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. Within the rails are also some early encaustic tiles found buried in the Church under a large uninscribed stone.

In the chancel are four tombstones in black marble. Three are of members of the Cheyne family (a) Anne, daughter of Sir William Fleetwood, and wife of Francis Cheney, who died 1630, (b) Francis Cheyne, who died 1644 "in about the tenth climacteric (*) of his age" as expressed in Latin on the stone; (c) Dame Lucy Tyrrell, daughter of Sir John Barrington, wife of William Cheney and then of Sir Toby Tyrrell, died 1691. (Sir Toby was a descendant of Sir Walter Tyrrell who accidentally caused the death of William Rufus in the New Forest.) The fourth is that of Anne Gilmore, wife of Will. Gilmore, of Amersham, who died 1682.

William Cheyne (son of Francis) was also buried in the Chancel as shown by the following entry in the Register, but there is no trace of his tombstone:—

(*)—"climacteric" or "critical" period supposed in human life to be every seven years.

"Mr. William Cheyne, Sone of Fran. Cheyney, Esq., dyed at London the 20th day of Aprill 1641, and was buryed in ye chancell of Boys Church 22nd day of the same month 1641."

On the south wall of the chancel is a white marble tablet in memory of the Rev. Thomas Clarke, B.A., Rector 1766 to 1793, when he died. He is described as "perhaps the most learned of all the Evangelicals." The tablet has a very long inscription and was put up in 1831 by a few of his surviving pupils of whom he trained many for the Ministry. There are also tablets to the Rev. James Stevens, M.A., Rector 1839 to 1843; and to Henry Garrett Key of Blackwell Hall, died 1853, and Mary, his widow, died 1861.

The title of the first register is as under:—

"The booke of Register ffor all Christennings, Mariages and buriales ffor Chesham Boies. Made the VIII. day of June, Anno dni. 1598. Anno Regni Regine Eli. 40."

It records the burials from 1542, the marriages from 1561, and the baptisms from 1562 in each case to 1719—20. Other volumes complete the records to date.

In 1538, Thomas Cromwell ordered registers to be kept, but apparently the records were not in a suitable form for preservation and the neglect became so serious that Convocation in Elizabeth's reign (1597) issued a stringent order for all existing records to be transcribed into parchment books. Apparently at Chesham Bois a register was commenced soon after Thomas Cromwell's original command and the book ordered in 1597 was opened the following year.

All the records to that date were transcribed and beautifully written in old English characters which compare favourably with subsequent entries.

A Parish Account Book 1778—1792, an Overseers' Book 1819—1836/7, and Vestry Order Books from 1791 to date have also been preserved, and in two of these are entered a few matters of parochial interest in modern times. The absence of ancient records is probably due to the fact that the Cheynes used to pay all the Church expenses.

The benefice was a donative of peculiar and exempt from jurisdiction, *i.e.*, the Patron not only had the right of presentation but also that of induction to the living, and the incumbent was not subject to the Bishop's or other ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

In 1728, Dr. Clagett, Archdeacon of Bucks, sent a summons in the following terms to the minister and churchwardens of the parish: "The Archdeacon intending to be personally at your Parish Church on Saturday being the one

and twentieth Day of September 1728 Expects your Meeting him there and having in readiness a Paper signed by the Incumbent and Churchwardens containing an account of the several Books Vestments and Vessels belonging to your Parish Church and of the several Benefactions towards the Repairs, Utensils and Ornaments of the Same. James Garland, Apparitor."

To this the Viscountess Cheyne replied:—

"Revd Sr.—I have recd. Information of yr. Intention of Coming to Chesham Bois Church on Saturday next and of your requiring the Minister of that Place and Churchwardens to meet you there with an account" etc.—

"In regard of that Respect which I bear personally to you and with Intent to do that Honour to my decd Lord which he abundantly deserved on account of that Decent and Ample-Provision which he always made and of the great Care which he always took out of his own Munificence to repare and Ornament the Church and Provide all things necessary for the Celebration of devine Service there I have desired Mr. Jones, the present Minister, to meet you there and show you the severall particulars in which his Lordship has been a Benefactor to Such his Church.

And I att the same time require Mr. Jones with all Decency and respect to you Mr. ArchDeacon to enter my own and his Protestation to prevent any prejudice that may by his appearance arise to that just Priviledge and Exemption from all Visitation Archi-Diaconal and Episcopal and Jurisdiction thereto relating which my late Lord and his Ancestors for time immemorial always laid Claim to and Enjoyed, and from which I shall never Consent to depart.

I am, Sr etc."

A protest was also drawn up and signed by the incumbent and the churchwardens. But "upon the Archdeacon's receiving my Lady's Letter he declared he did not come to invade the Right of my Lady Cheyne and did not insist to have an account in Writing, as in the Summons required and further said he had often heard of the Decency and Prettiness of the Chappell and therefore only desired to see it, upon which the Protest was not delivered and he was shewn the Chappell." (Extracted from Chesham Bois Register beginning 1720).

The first patron of the living was William de Bois 1216. With the Manor it passed to Sir John Chesham and his decendants, then in 1392 to John Winslow; and in 1445 to the Cheyne family with whom it remained until bequeathed by the widow of William Cheyne. Viscount Newhaven (who died without heirs in 1728) to Lady Gower who sold it to the Duke of Bedford in 1738. Successive Dukes presented to the

benefice until 1880 when the advowson (*i.e.* right of presentation) was purchased by the Peache Trustees, the present patrons. The purchase money was given by the Duke for the augmentation of the stipend.

The list of incumbents of the parish dates from 1216, and in 1845 the parish, till then in the Diocese of Lincoln, was transferred to Oxford.

The present rectory was built by the Duke of Bedford in 1833. It is delightfully situated on the Common and stands a little further west than the old house.

The Bois Manor House was situated to the south west of the Church, near to the house inhabited by the Misses Carver.

In 1806 the population was only 135; in 1871—258; in 1881—351; in 1901—767. There were no deaths in the parish from 1st April 1883 to 16th March 1885—almost two years—and there was no funeral service in the church in 1884. In the decade 1911—1921 the population increased from 1,253 to 1,791.

This little parish has been closely associated with each of the three great Evangelical movements in the Church of England:—

(1). Sir Thomas Cheyne, Lord of the Manor and Patron of the Living (1445) was a Lollard, and, as such, was imprisoned in the Tower in 1446. The parson about 1462 was also suspected of Lollardry, the term applied to the followers of Wycliffe (1324 to 1384) Master of Balliol, Chaplain to the King and a most famous lecturer at Oxford, who has been called "The Morning Star of the Reformation."

Their chief policy was an appeal to the Bible for every doctrine and rule of life. They denied transubstantiation, objected to celibacy among the clergy and religious orders, to image worship, and to the necessity of auricular confession, and believed in a strict observance of Sunday as the Sabbath.

(2). John Cheyne (died 1585) whose Altar Tomb is in the chancel 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.

(3). The Rev. Thomas Clarke, Rector 1766—93, whose memorial tablet is in the Chancel, trained at the old Rectory for Holy Orders many of the younger leaders of that Revival.

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 the Church Missionary Society and other similar organizations.

Thanks are due to those who kindly assisted in the production of this little work, and to Mr. H. K. Scott who defrayed the cost of its publication.

WM. LEMPRIERE,

Hon. Member of the London and Middlesex
Archæological Society.

Hon. Sec., Chesham Bois Parochial Church Council.

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