

The History of the Church of St Leonard's, Chesham Bois

While Amersham and Chesham both appear in the Domesday Book of 1086, the earliest references to Chesham Bois are c. 1200. By that time Chesham had been divided into three manors, one of which was Chesham Bois, held by William de Bosco, or Bois. William's surname probably derived from the great woods which then crowned the hillside.

A chapel had been established on this site in Chesham Bois by 1213 and in 1215, the year of Magna Carta, the Lord of the Manor, William de Bosco presented William de Risemberghe, or Riseborough, to the Vicarage of the 'Chapel of St Leonard of Chesham' - the church of Chesham Bois. (St Leonard of Limoges died c 559 and is the patron saint of prisoners and pregnant women)

Legally the church belonged to that part of Chesham Parish Church appropriated to the Abbot of St Mary Pre, Leicester, who endowed it with tithes so that it was financially independent.

Following a disagreement in 1213, William de Bosco and his successors obtained the right to nominate the chaplain, subject to the Abbot's formal approval. As a 'donative of peculiar jurisdiction', the incumbent was not subject to the local bishop (Bishop of Lincoln), and the patron had the right of both presentation and induction (actual possession) to the living. With modifications over the years, this right was thereafter exercised by the Lords of the Manor of Chesham Bois until sold in 1880 by the Duke of Bedford to the Peache Trustees, the present patrons. The church is now part of the Diocese of Oxford under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Oxford and his suffragan, the Bishop of Buckingham.

The chapel acquired the right of burial in the 14th and 15th centuries, being first referred to as the Parish Church of Chesham Bois in 1470.

The first registers date from 1562, twenty four years after Thomas Cromwell's decree. They are now deposited, like all the old church records, in the local Diocesan (County) Archives, in this case, in Aylesbury,

The first marriage entry is John Cheyne to his second wife Joice. The Cheyne family became Lords of the Manor in 1445. Sir Thomas Cheyne became a noted Lollard (follower of the Reformer, John Wycliffe) and was imprisoned in the Tower of London earlier that century because of his beliefs. The Cheynes remained Lords of the Manor until the family line ceased in 1728, and as such paid all church expenses!