

SOME NOTES ON THE PARISH CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS', MALBOROUGH.

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The early history of this Church cannot be separated from West Alvington, as in former times Malborough was a chapelry in that parish, and it was not until late in the 19th Century that it attained the dignity of an independent ecclesiastical parish. Before the Conquest the Canons of Sarum (Salisbury) had the tithes of Alwintona (West Alvington), and were patrons of the church; the Manor belonged to the Crown. In the 13th Century King John bestowed the Manor on Alice de Rivers, but could not let her have the advowson of the Church because "the Canons of the Old Sarum had held it from old times." Mention occurs in 1288 of "The Church of Alvington with its chapels"; these were Myddelton, Malberga and Hywysch (South Milton, Malborough and South Huish). The tithes endowed a "prebend" or provision in the Cathedral Church of Salisbury, and the Dean and Chapter there are still patrons of the benefices.

The dedication of Malborough has been ascribed to All Saints without any authority. No early mention of the dedication occurs in the Bishops' Registers, and this one was probably borrowed at some later period from West Alvington; it is not likely that the Parish Church and the Chapel of ease had the same dedication.

But the Chapel must always have surpassed the Church in size and dignity, though the reason for this cannot be explained. There is no record to verify the suggestion that Malborough was the older mother Church; indeed all the old accounts point the other way. Possibly the dwellers in this part of the parish may have been wealthier or more energetic; the fact remains that Malborough is one of the finest churches in the Deanery of Woodleigh.

Like all our Devon churches various periods of building are blended in the fabric. The material used is stone from Soar Cove, some of the blocks being as much as 8 feet in length. It is not a satisfactory material, having a tendency to become porous with lapse of time. The western tower is of three stages surmounted by a fine spire. The north wall is embattled, and on this side the windows have the plain debased tracery without cusps characteristic of this district. The nave and aisles are of the same height and width, and the three even gables give the east end of the Church a very flat effect. On the south side of the Chancel is a graceful priest's doorway of the 15th century, with carvings in the spandrils of the arch. Beyond is a bold octagonal turret containing the rood loft stair. The south porch, surmounted by a chamber, is very fine, having a stone groined roof, the groins meeting at a central boss, carved with four faces which may represent the four Evangelists. There is an image niche over the door, and a stoup ornamented with the Burchier knot.

The interior of the Church comprises nave and north and south aisles, the clustered columns being of granite with small ornate capitals. The loss of the screen is regrettable; parts of it remain, serving as parclose between the chancel and chancel aisles. The oldest feature of the Church is the font which dates from about 1170. It is square with a central shaft and four columns at the corners. One of the most interesting details inside the Church is the holy water stoup by the north door, surmounted by a canopied arch, with vine and grapes carved on the front.

On the north and south aisles of the chancel the holes may still be seen where the rood beam was erected. The rood loft doorways are on the south side, a curious blocked arch in the window near them suggesting that here the stairs had a window to light them. The east window retains good tracery of the 15th Century. A plain piscina remains in the sanctuary; there is the recess of another piscina at the south east, and another in the north Chancel aisle, showing that the Church had two side altars. These chapels have been restored to their sacred use. The beautiful window representing the Raising of Lazarus, by Laver and Baraud, in the south chapel is one of the finest modern stained windows in Devon.

One of the best known Vicars was the Rev. Alfred Earle, D.D., who held West Alvington and Malborough from 1865 to 1887. He was Archdeacon of Totnes, Canon of Exeter, 1887, and soon afterwards Suffragan Bishop for the West of London. He took the title "Bishop of Marlborough" from Marlborough, Wilts. In 1900 he became Dean of Exeter.

