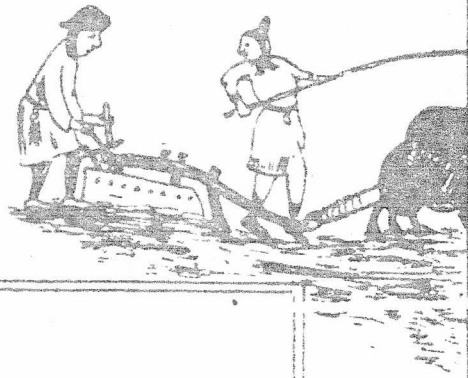
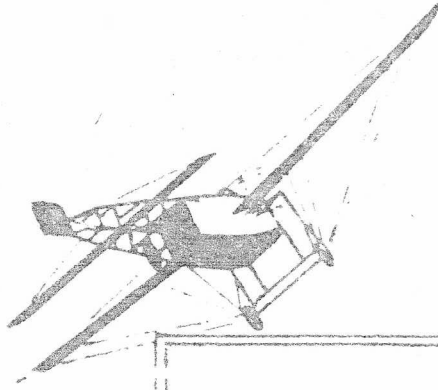


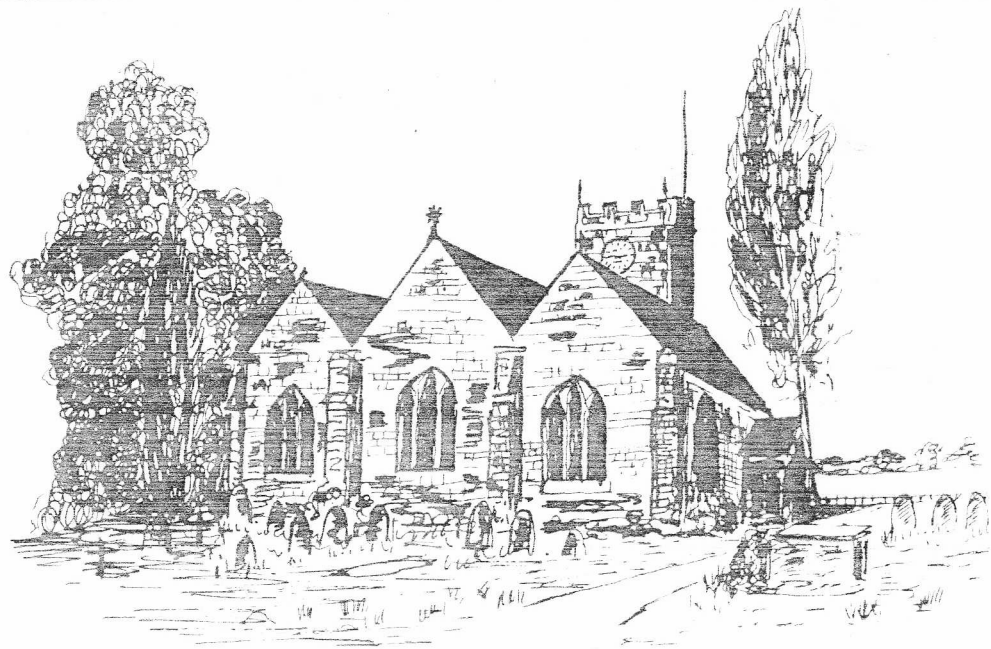
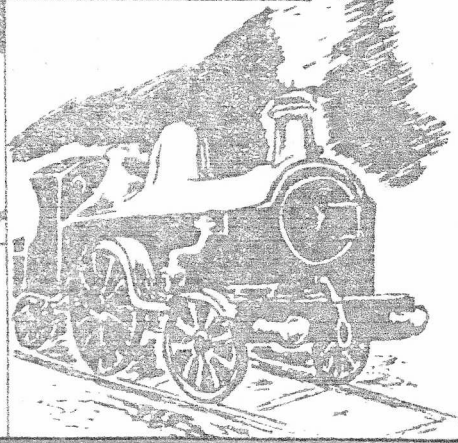
St. Nicolas church, N. Stoneham.



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OCCASIONAL PAPER No. 6

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NORTH STONEHAM CHURCH



ST. NICOLAS CHURCH, NORTH STONEHAM.

When the town of Eastleigh extended its boundaries in 1932, prior to being created a Municipal Borough in August 1936, it took under its authority the old church of St. Nicolas. But lest it be thought that the church does not really belong to the Borough, it must be understood that St. Nicolas is sited in the ancient Parish of North Stoneham which covered most of Eastleigh as well as a good part of Chandlers Ford and Boyatt. Until recent times, these hamlets consisted of a few farms and less than 100 inhabitants. The Church of St. Boniface in Chandlers Ford, the Church of St. Michael and All Angels in Bassett and the Mission Church of All Saints in Pointout were all built about the turn of the last century in developing parts of the Ecclesiastical Parish of North Stoneham.

Situated in what has been regarded as a 'green belt' separating Southampton and Eastleigh, St. Nicolas now lies cheek by jowl with the multiplicity of road-works constructed in 1983 associated with the M27 motorway. At one time the Church lay in open country with a few dwellings close by, but now the road outside the lych gate carries a heavy flow of traffic; set in pleasant surroundings, now somewhat marred by the proximity of the motorway, amid ancient trees and with the Churchyard raised above the level of the fields, the edifice cannot fail to impress the visitor with that special sense of the past which ancient ecclesiastical foundations best convey.

The exterior of the Church and graveyard are attractive, and in the 1950s it seemed that the Church would remain, as it had for centuries, free from new building development. At that time, the policies of the Eastleigh Borough Council were such that building was only permitted in the 'green belt' area lying between the two boroughs after the most careful consideration. Since then, however, buildings linked to outdoor sport have been permitted in the vicinity and, of course, the ancillary works of the M27 have approached fairly close to the Church.

The mild climate of the district may have contributed to the good state of preservation of the tombstones in the Churchyard, some of which bear interesting inscriptions. On one a violin and bow are portrayed, together with the note attributable to the deceased musician. Another indicates that the memorial has been erected over a deceased village butcher by reason of the tools of his trade shown thereon. (See special paper no. 6)

It has been claimed that the Church of St. Nicolas is the mother of Churches in this area. However, Domesday Book records that:

“The Bishop himself holds in Mansbridge Hundred (South) Stoneham. It is for the clothing of the monks, before 1066 it answered for 5 hides, now for 3 hides. Land for 9 ploughs. In lordship 1 plough; 1 villagers and 9 smallholders with 8 ploughs. 1 slave; meadow, 23 acres; 2 fisheries at 39d; woodland at 20 pigs. Value before 1066 £1; later £4; now £8. Richere the Clerk holds this manor’s church with 2 other churches near Southampton which belong to this mother church. 1 hide of land is attached there and all the tithes of this village and also of the King’s land. Value of what he holds from the King 20s; what he holds from the Bishop 20s.”

It seems probable that a Church existed either on the site of St. Nicolas or thereabouts before the building of the present Winchester Cathedral because in A.D. 925 Athelstan granted 6 hides of land at Stoneham with the Chapel pertaining to it to the new Minster of Winchester. During a conversation I had with the Rev. George Parsons of St. Nicolas Church in March 1984, he voiced the opinion that a Church had been in existence in Stoneham before the present Churches of St. Mary’s, South Stoneham and St. Nicolas, North Stoneham, were built. The site of this Church is unknown, but it is thought to have been known as ‘All Saints’. If this is true, then it may be that ‘All Saints’ served the area now divided between the two Stoneham Churches. All the evidence appears to indicate that the Church of St. Mary’s or the supposed Church of ‘All Saints’ was the mother of Churches in ancient Stoneham.

In A.D. 667, it is recorded that two persons were sentenced to death, but, wishing to die as Christians, they were sent to ‘Stanham’ for baptismal instruction. Stanham encompasses a large area of land. Bede, in his ‘Ecclesiastical History’ says: *“two sons of Aliwald, King of the isle of Wight were martyred at Ad Lapidem, near the mouth of the Itchen”*. However, a question remains as to which Church the two unfortunates were sent, the record being far from specific in this regard. (See special paper no. 1)

The existing building carries parts of former edifices within its fabric although no trace of the old Saxon Church can be seen. That this must have been one of the earliest Ecclesiastical foundations is evidenced by the fact that in A.D. 861 Ethelred granted 10 hides of land at Hinton Ampner for the support of the Church at Stoneham.

The windows of the Church were blown in by the blast from a German bomb which fell in 1941. Some of the windows were of great historical value as they carried armorial bearings of the patron of the Church from the year A.D. 1102 to A.D. 1829. Unfortunately, these were shattered. Fragments of glass were recovered and a fine attempt has been made to restore some of these armorial bearings. Sadly, only one or two are in any way complete. The restoration of the other windows has been completed and all of them are beautiful. The one under the tower is most attractive although the east window is not considered particularly noteworthy.

Most of the present building dates from its re-erection in the reign of Elizabeth I. The ancient Purbeck stone font is probably earlier than the fifteenth century and it was at this font that the famous Canon Henry Parry Lidden of St. Paul's Cathedral was baptised in 1829. He was born at Woodside, Eastleigh. The peel of 10 light bells is regarded as one of the finest in England. The registers date from 1640; they contain recording affidavits that bodies were buried in woollen in pursuance of an Act of Parliament of 1678 whereby burial in woollen only was made compulsory in order to encourage the woollen trade of the time and to prevent money going out of the country for the purchase of linen and its importation.

Communion Vessels of silver gilt bear the date 1702. A very fine set in 'Britannia Silver' was presented by B.A. Wightman in 1935 to mark the Silver Jubilee of George V.

In the sixteenth century, old St. Mary's, Southampton, was pulled down by the townspeople to remove from the sight of French warships the landmark of its lofty spire. It is thought that some of the material found its way to St. Nicolas Church, where there are some awkward architectural features, particularly to be seen in the east window which was clearly fitted after the Church was built. In the Court Leet book (1550), it is ordered that: "*so much of the rubbish of St. Mary's Church should be carried away as would serve to make the highway from Bar Gate, and all East Street, down to the chantry*".

The patronage of the Living has, for many centuries, been in the hands of the Fleming family and the most notable memorial, superimposed over a tomb, is that of Sir Thomas Fleming, who was Lord Chief Justice of England when Guy Fawkes was sentenced to death. His effigy is strikingly portrayed in his ceremonial dress of a Lord Chief Justice and wearing the famous golden collar 'S.S.' Inscribed on stone panels is the following:

“In most assured hope of a blessed resurrection. Here lyeth ye bodie of Sir Thomas Fleming, Knights to Chief Justice of England, great was his learning, many were his virtues. He always feared God and God still blessed him. He was in especial grace and favour with two most worthie and virtuous Princes Q: Elizabeth and King James, many offices and dignities conferred upon him. He was first Sargent at Lawe, then Recorder of London, then Solicitor General to both ye said Princes, then to Chief Baron of ye Exchequer and after to Chief Justice of England, all of which places he did execute with so great integrity justice and discretion yt his life was of all good men desired his death lamented of all. He was born at Newporte in ye Isle of Wight, brought up in learning and ye studie of ye lawe. In ye twenty six years of his age he was coupled in ye blessed state of matrimony to his virtuous wife ye Ja: Mary Fleming with whom he lived and continued in ye blessed estate by ye space of forty three years having by her in ye time fifteen children eight sonnes and seven daughters of whom two sonnes and five daughters died in his time and afterwards in ripe-ness of age and full-ness of happie years, yt is to sayye seventh day of August 1613 in ye sixty ninth years of his life for a better leaving also behinde him livinge together with his virtuous wife six sonnes and two daughters.”

It has been stated, although I have been unable to verify it, that for centuries this link with the Guy Fawkes plot was celebrated in the Church every fifth of November; whether true or not, the custom has now lapsed.

Around 200 years earlier when the Church had been re-constructed, the ashlar tower was built. In the nave, there are two early English pillars.

To see the most ancient and most interesting memorial of all, the visitor must draw aside a mat at the foot of the altar steps and so reveal a large stone of a bluish grey colour measuring 6' 8" x 3' 8" and lying east and west. At the four corners are the signs of the Evangelists and in its centre a two headed eagle set in a floriated shield; round the edges, within lines, are the words “SEPULTRA de la SCHOLA de SCLAVONI” Ano Dmi. MCCCCLXXXI (1491). There has been much speculation about this memorial. As far as I am aware, no known writer has ventured to suggest a reason for the use of the sign of the Holy Roman Empire on this stone, but it may have some reference to the patronage of Richard II, one of whose predecessors, Richard of Cornwall (1209-72) the second son of King John, was elected titular King of the Romans in 1257 and was crowned at Aix-la-Chapelle. It is recorded that Richard II endeavoured by “*expensive efforts to get himself elected King of the Romans*”.

In the last century when Mr Duffy wrote his 'Sketches of Hampshire', the stone was lying in the north aisle, probably its original position as it is doubtful whether persons and strangers of little importance would be interred before the high altar; the side aisle would be more appropriate for the burial of foreign seamen. Mr. Duthy suggests that it may indicate the "*burial place of a Slavonian named De la Schole who was perhaps either a Venetian merchant, a captain or officer of a trading galley*" or simply a Slav who wished to visit England and took advantage of the Venetian trading ships to do so.

There are those who claim that this was the memorial stone to Slavonian oarsmen who manned the Venetian trading vessels which visited Southampton over a period of about one hundred and twenty years. From Rymer's 'Foedera' we learn that the 'Flanders galleys', a merchant fleet organised by the Venetian State, Venice being a huge centre for eastern merchandise, used to sail to various Mediterranean ports, through the straits of Gibraltar and up the English Channel, some vessels going on to Flanders ports and the larger portion to Southampton.

The galleys were manned by Slavonian Oarsmen. Each vessel had thirty archers aboard, all under the direction of a Commodore. In 1323, a quarrel broke out between the captains of five of the galleys and the town of Southampton. On the 16th of April in that year, King Edward II pardoned the misconduct of five Venetian galleys lying at Southampton.

Voyages of the 'Venetian Fleet' were often attended with danger other than perils of the sea. Their rich cargoes exposed them to piratical violence. In 1488, galleys for the port of Southampton were attacked off St. Helen's, Isle of Wight, and were ordered to strike sail. The galleys hove to, but finding mischief meant, the master blew his whistle and beat to quarter. After killing eighteen of the English, he made his way into Southampton Water, pursued by the three ships. A few years later, in 1495, we read that the captains of galleys and other Venetian subjects were seized in harbour at Southampton by French or Breton adventurers. Again, in Gibbons 'Ind. History of England' (p. 93) "*the Venetian fleet came to our shores for the last time in 1532*", whilst Davies in his 'History of Southampton' (p. 251) states: "*some few Venetian ships continued to visit Southampton and one is recorded as being there in 1569*".

In 1456-7, Venice had transferred all its commercial business from London to Winchester because of "*insults by artificers and shopkeepers*". Southampton was used as the port for Winchester as Piraeus is the port for Athens. "*Traffic then passed along the old Roman street which stood four miles from Southampton and eight from Winchester. Up and down this street passed the foreign seamen with merchandise, the Slavonians being employed regularly as in navigating the Venetian galleys*".

They even ventured into country districts with goods as hawkers and traders on their own account. (See 'The Guild of Salavonia', Georgina Dawson.)

It should be borne in mind that in the fifteenth century, the River Itchen was navigable from Northam (the old Southampton) as far as Alresford. Owing to the foresight and enterprise of Bishop de Lucy, a canal had been built and the waters of a large marshy area impounded into a reservoir which supplied the navigation. This reservoir is known as Alresford Pond.

(See Milner's Winchester I, p.229)

It is stated that Richard II (1377-1399) granted the Venetians the right to anchor in Southampton Water for a period of 60 days each year without payment. There would naturally be deaths aboard from time to time and it may well have been that the Church of St. Nicolas, the patron saint of sailors, was chosen as their burial place, hence the stone of A.D. 1491. No doubt, a good deal of the prosperity enjoyed by Southampton in medieval times ceased when the Venetians finally withdrew their fleet.

One other imposing memorial in the Church is that to the first Lord Hawke, whose defeats of the French in naval engagements in the eighteenth century are well known. The battle of Quiberon Bay in 1759 was England's greatest sea victory since the defeat of the Spanish Armada. Hawke had already taken part in the battle of Toulon, but was ignored by the incompetent administration then at the Admiralty. However, George II, who had taken a keen interest in discussions concerning the battle of Toulon, intervened and Hawke was promoted rear-admiral.

The circumstances of the action of the Toulon engagement - the short November days, the gales, the rocks, the "*hawk-like swoop*" of the English fleet, the destruction of the French, the relief from the tension of what appeared to be an imminent invasion - all combined to raise popular enthusiasm in England to an unwonted pitch. Hawke had married Catherine, daughter of Walter Brook of Burton Hall, Yorkshire, she being 17 and he 34 years of age. They were buried side by side in St. Nicolas Church. Inscribed on his memorial are the words "*wherever he sailed victory attended him*". His wife, who bore him several children, died in 1755 at the age of 36. Her husband's farewell is inscribed on her tomb, "*the best mother, the best friend the delight of all who knew her*".

Amongst the list of Rectors, mention must be made of Frederick Beadon who died on the 10th of June 1879, at the age of 103. He and his father held the Living for a total of 123 years.

Another interesting feature of St. Nicolas Church is the one hand clock. When I was a child and Eastleigh was much smaller and more compact, the Church was rarely referred to as St. Nicolas; as I recall, it was known locally as “the one hand clock Church”.

Legend has it that the Church was connected to the Rectory by tunnel; although this story has been around for a long time, I have been unable to find any evidence to prove it.

The setting of this ancient Church in the former beautiful Stoneham Park makes it a typical example of an English Parish Church.

Norman F. Norris, M.B.E.

March 1984.

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