

**THE PARISH CHURCH OF
ASTON-JUXTA-BIRMINGHAM:
ITS ANCIENT HISTORY, AND ITS
MODERN RESTORATION**

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The Parish Church of Aston-juxta-Birmingham: Its Ancient History, and Its Modern Restoration by W. Eliot

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W. ELIOT

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AND

ITS MODERN RESTORATION.



ASTON CHURCH, THE NEW EXTERIOR.

THE
PARISH CHURCH
—OF—
ASTON-JUXTA-BIRMINGHAM:

ITS ANCIENT HISTORY,
—AND—
ITS MODERN RESTORATION,



—BY—
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ASTON PARISH CHURCH.

CHAPTER I.

ITS ANCIENT HISTORY.



Remains of Old Cross in the Erdington Chapel.

THE Spire of *Aston Church has pointed many generations to the home above. When it was first erected there is no record to inform us; and the date even of the Tower on which it rests is only a matter of architectural conjecture. But if history is silent on these points it records very distinctly the antiquity of the parish of which the Church has formed the centre of Christian light from before the days of the Norman Conquest. A local antiquary has surmised that the Church cannot claim an earlier date than some year after that event, which opinion he thinks is strengthened by the fact that

*Aston, originally Estone, *i.e.* the town East from Wordsbury (Wednesbury) a town of some note in Saxon times.—DUGDALE.

the Church is not dedicated to a local or English saint but to S.S. Peter and Paul. But against this suggestion must be quoted the statement by Dugdale, to the effect that at the time of the Domesday Survey, A.D. 1086, a Church existed here, and, if so, it undoubtedly stood on the same site as the present building occupies.

However this may have been the first authentic fact connected with the parish is the statement in the Domesday Survey that Aston was then held by †Godmund, a Saxon, under William Fitz Ausculf, who was Lord of Dudley. He was succeeded by Gervase Paganel, who owned land in Buckinghamshire as well, and gave his name to Newport Paganel in that county, where there was then a Monastery known as Tykeford Priory. This Priory had been founded in the reign of William II, by Fulk Paganel, and Gervase, when he succeeded to the property at Aston, gave to the Priory the Living of the Church at Aston; and the monks of Tykeford retained their right in it for fully three and a half centuries. For some reason which is not stated, the monks in 1231 obtained a ratification of Gervase Paganel's grant from Giles de Erdington, to whom in return for his compliance with their request, they granted the benefit of their prayers and offices for himself and his heirs for ever. Thus the living was retained by the Priory down to the reign of Henry VIII.

During these three hundred years very little authentic history is recorded. That little however is interesting. In the first place we learn that in 1346 a license was granted for a chaplain to officiate at the hamlet of Overton (Water Orton), at the cost of the inhabitants of that place. Incidentally the account of this license bears testimony to the early existence of the Chapelry of Castle Bromwich, out of which the Chapelry of Water Orton was taken.

†The Godmunds are said to have possessed a hall or house near the Church, which was inhabited by the Lords of the Manor until about 1367, when it fell into decay. But as no trace whatever of this house has ever been discovered it is a matter of considerable doubt whether it ever really existed.

Thirty years later (1381), at the urgent request of the men of Deritend and Bordesley a "proper Chapel," as it was termed, was erected at Deritend. It was picturesquely situated by the high road which then ran between an avenue of trees. The reason given for its erection in the deed under which the original chapel was built is clearly and distinctly stated to have been the distance of the hamlets of Deritend and Bordesley from the Parish Church of Aston, and the inconvenience, especially in winter time, of repairing to Aston for religious purposes. Another reason has been given by Mr. Toulmin Smith. He states that the men of Deritend and Bordesley were imbued with the spirit of Wickliff, and desired a chapel and chaplain of their own on account of their religious views. But for this interesting statement there does not appear to be sufficient foundation, and "the first chapel of the Reformation" is in reality nothing more than a pleasing fiction. It was for physical convenience and not from religious antipathy to the views and doctrines of the Vicar of Aston that this third chapel was erected within the confines of the extensive parish.

In the next century, about 1449, Sir Thomas de Erdington founded a chantry in Aston Church for one priest to celebrate divine service daily at the altar of the Blessed virgin Mary for ever for the good estate of King Henry VI., and of himself and Joyce, his wife, during their lives in this world, and for the health of their souls hereafter. The original Piscina remains in the old wall of the south aisle and marks the position eastward of the old Chantry. After the dissolution of Chantries the endowment of Sir T. de Erdington was given to Richard Pallady and Francis Foxall, citizens of London, by letters patent, dated 9 Sept. 2 Ed. VI., and in the next year another patent gave it to Thomas Hawkins, *alias* Fisher of Warwick, who had married a daughter of William Holte of Duddeston. The tomb of Sir Thomas de Erdington, after several changes, has found what we may believe will prove its last position in the restored chapel which bears his name.