

**CHURCHES OF WEST
CORNWALL; WITH
NOTES OF ANTIQUITIES
OF THE DISTRICT**

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OF
WEST CORNWALL;
WITH NOTES OF
ANTIQUITIES OF THE DISTRICT.

BY

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WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS.

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PREFACE.

IN presenting these papers in a collected form, little more need be said than that they were originally published in successive numbers of the "Gentleman's Magazine," during the years 1862—1864. They are reprinted without alteration, with the exception of the concluding remarks of the ninth chapter, which have been re-written; and several notes and woodcuts have been added.

There is still a wide field for investigation among the pre-historic antiquities of the county; but hitherto attention has been directed almost entirely to these, to the exclusion of the ecclesiastical buildings of the Middle Ages. When the county histories were written nothing was known of Church architecture, and it is needless to say that the occasional descriptions of churches which they contain are wholly untrustworthy, and, indeed, quite valueless. Late Norman work is called "Saxon;" late Perpendicular figures as "Early English;" and one writer of eminence assumes the present church at St. German's to be the ancient "cathedral of Cornwall" itself, before Leofric, dilating on the great antiquity of certain windows with geometrical tracery in particular.

Of the thirty-five churches noticed in the following

pages, nearly all are of early date, as a careful investigation will prove; but in most of them the early character of the work has been greatly obscured by extensive alterations and additions during the Perpendicular period. And yet, as the illustrations will shew, the Cornish churches are by no means so devoid of interest as is commonly supposed.

The last chapter is occupied by an illustrated narrative of two days' pleasant wandering among the old stones of West Cornwall, in company with the members of the Cambrian Archæological Association.

J. T. B.

PENZANCE,
March, 1865.



From the Rood-Screen, St. Burian.

CORNISH CHURCHES.

By J. T. BLIGHT.

Illustrations by the Author.

I. THE DEANERY OF ST. BURIAN.

In the latter part of the fifth and beginning of the sixth century, a numerous company of Irish saints—bishops, abbots, and sons and daughters of kings and noblemen—"came into Cornewaul and landed at Penđinas, a peninsula and stony rok, wher now the toun of St. Iës (St. Ives) standeth*." Hence they diffused themselves over the western part of the county, and at their several stations erected chapels and hermitages. Their object was to advance the Christian faith. In this they were successful, and so greatly were they revered, that whilst the memory of their holy lives still lingered in the minds of the people, churches were built on or near the sites of their chapels and oratories, and dedicated to Almighty God in their honour. Thus have their names been handed down to us. Few of them are mentioned in the calendars, or in the collections of the lives of saints, and what little is known of them has been chiefly derived from tradition. Dr. Whitaker believed that St. Burian, a king's daughter, was among those who landed at St. Ives, and that she took up her abode at the spot which now bears her name. Leland says,—

"St. Buriana, an holy woman of Ireland, sumtyme dwellid in this place, and there made an oratory. King Ethelstan, founder of St. Burian's Colledge, and giver of the privileges and sanctuarie to it. King Ethelstan goyng hens, as it is said, on to Sylley, and returning, made, *ex voto*, a colledge where the oratorie was."

Whitaker gives full credit to the truth of this tradition:—

"Athelstan advanced towards the Land's End, in order to embark his army for the Sylley Isles. About four miles from it, but directly in the present road to it, as he was equally pious and brave, he went into an oratory, which had been erected there by an holy woman of the name of Burien, that came from Ireland, and was buried in her own chapel. Here he knelt down in prayer to God, full of his coming expedition against the Sylley Isles, and supplicating for success to it; then in a strain of devoutness that is little thought of now, but was very natural to a mind like his, at once munificent and religious, he vowed, if God blessed his expedition with success, to erect

* Leland.

a college of clergy where the oratory stood, and to endow it with a large income. So, at least, says the tradition of St. Burien's itself no less than two centuries and a-half ago."

Having subdued the Scilly Isles, Athelstan on his return founded and endowed a collegiate church in honour of St. Buriana, on the spot called after her, Eglos-Berrie, about five miles eastward of the Land's End. "He gave lands and tithe of a considerable value for ever, himself becoming the first patron thereof, as his successors the Kings of England have been ever since." Athelstan also gave to the church the privileges of a sanctuary. The date of foundation is supposed to have been about the year 930. In Domesday Book reference is made to a college of canons here. The establishment consisted of a dean and three prebendaries, who are said to have held it from the king by the service of saying a hundred masses and a hundred psalters for the souls of the king and his ancestors. Dr. Whitaker alludes to a rector for the ruling church. Dr. Oliver says the clergy who first served the church were probably seven in number. Hals states that—

"The church or college consisted of Canons Augustines, or regular priests, and three prebendaries, who enjoyed the revenues thereof in common." He says that "about the time of Edward III., one of the popes obtruded upon this church, the canons and prebendaries thereof, a dean to be an inspector over them. This encroachment of the pope being observed by Edward, this usurpation was taken away."

From this statement it would be understood that the dean to whom reference is here made was the first who presided over the establishment, whereas we find it elsewhere recorded that this was the third dean, one John de Maunte, that he was objected to by the king on account of his being a foreigner, and that on this pretence Edward seized the establishment and kept it entirely in his own hands. It is also stated that, according to the foundation of Athelstan, the establishment was exempt from all inferior jurisdiction, there was no appeal from the local authorities but to the king himself. But Dr. Oliver, the highest authority on the subject, says "the foundation did not purport to confer any exemption from the jurisdiction of the ordinary, and, as far as documentary evidence can be traced, it is manifest that the diocesan exercised here the right of visitation as fully as in any other portion of the diocese." In his *Monasticon* will be found a *Vidimus* of the

original endowment of this collegiate church by King Athelstan, on the 6th of October, 943,—“a date,” says the Doctor, “evidently incorrect.”

It appears that the establishment was well maintained for some time after the Conquest, but was subsequently much neglected from the non-residence of the deans. Leland wrote, “Their longeth to St. Buryens a deane and a few prebendarys, that almost be nether ther.”

Much unpleasant feeling seems to have existed between the bishops of the diocese and the Crown respecting the control of this peculiar. Dr. Oliver tells us, that—

“On the death of Edmund, Earl of Cornwall, King Edward I. claiming St. Burian as a royal free chapel, gave Sir William de Hameldon, his chancellor, dean of York, and a great pluralist, this deanery of St. Burian. But the neglect of residence was properly objected to by Bishop Thomas Bitton, and a suit in the king's court was the consequence, which was not decided at the death of that prelate in 1307. His successor, Bishop Stapeldon, offered equal opposition when Queen Isabella appointed her chaplain, John Maunte, a foreigner, to this deanery.”

Bishop Grandisson afterwards excommunicated this dean for “neglect of duty” and “disregard of his monitions.” The dean's supporters within the parish of St. Burian were excommunicated with him :—

“On the 4th of November (1328), being at St. Michael's Mount, he (Bishop Grandisson) excommunicated with all form the principal delinquents, especially Richard Vivian, the most obnoxious of all. At his public visitation, on July 12, 1336, the bishop found the parishioners returned to a sense of duty, and truly repentant for their contumacy; and at their earnest supplication he absolved them from their censures, and preached to them from the text, 1 Peter ii. 25, ‘Ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the shepherd and bishop of your souls.’ To add to the bishop's satisfaction, the dean, John de Maunte, on Aug. 16, 1338, waited upon him at Bishop's Court, Clyst, promised amendment in future, and took the oath of obedience to him and his successors in the see of Exeter.

“But the contest did not end here; within fifteen years King Edward III. revived the claim of exemption. But eventually the contest was terminated in favour of the stronger party, and to this day the dean receives institution from the Prince of Wales and Duke of Cornwall as his ordinary, though the patronage has often been exercised by the sovereign, *vacante diocatu*.”

The “church-town” of St. Burian stands on a high position, and the lofty tower is a very conspicuous object from the surrounding district. The spot commands extensive views, terminated on the south and west by the distant horizon of the Atlantic.

^b Oliver's *Monasticon*.