

The Parish and Manor of Alresford.

THE history of Alresford goes back for a thousand years. By 982, it was a manor of some importance, and at the time of the Norman Conquest, in the re-distribution of lands which was then made, it was singled out for special consideration, for it is recorded that one of the three Saxon landowners was allowed to retain his lands as tenant of the new Norman overlord, in this case Eustace Count of Boulogne. The account given of the manor in Domesday Book (1086) shews it to have been not only rich but well-stocked, and careful reckonings were kept of the yearly value of the lands, and of the dues which had to be paid monthly at the Court of Boulogne. About the year 1200 the assessed value of the lands was 20s. 9d.; a century later it had come down to 17s. 2d., a "race" (i.e. root) of ginger, and a stalk of clove gillyflower. This is an interesting and picturesque type of feudal tenure, akin to "petty serjeanty," and it is worthy of mention that the clove-gillyflower is still one of the most favoured flowers in local gardens.

The first seigneurial family resident on the land of which there is record was that of the de Stauntons, and it was by Sir Anfrey de Staunton, who died about 1300, that the present Church of St. Peter was built. An inscription to his memory is said to survive on a stone over his vault, on the north side of the chancel, but is now covered by the chancel stalls. A Norman church had previously existed on the present site, and remains of Roman brickwork are to be seen on the west exterior wall, but though fragments of Norman work also are believed to have been incorporated in the present building, they have been either obscured or defaced. The south chancel window and the piscina are certainly parts of the original fabric, and the font stands in its original place, as is proved by the discovery of the ancient drain from the font.

Many changes occur in the names of the Lords of the Manor, from the de Stauntons to the Coggeshalls, Thunderleys, Dorewards, Beauprés and Thursbies, but the descent from the de Stauntons is clear so far. It was not an unusual thing for inheritance to take place through the distaff side, at a time when so many of the sons were falling on active service in the wars with France. During the Hundred Years War alone, three changes of name are to be found, but the old knightly strain continued, and the seigneurial families maintained their record of service in Church and State.

The Rectory was always appendant to the Manor, until it was purchased by the Trustees of William Hulme, Esq., or Kearsley, Lancashire, in 1838, of which presently. The first rector known by name was Thomas Parker, and he was succeeded in 1332 by Stephen de Berle, on the presentation of Sir Humphrey de Staunton. From his time there is an unbroken list of rectors, from which it would appear that the present incumbent is not less than the fiftieth in order.

After the Hundred Years War, the Black Death and the Peasants' Revolt (1381), the records of the parish are more obscure. Those of the Church are complete, if scanty; the parish was then in the Diocese of London, and it says much for the efficiency of the Archdeacons of that time that so small and remote a living received due attention. The manorial records seem to be almost non-existent; doubtless Essex shared in the agricultural depression which overspread England, not for the last time It is therefore less easy to trace the manorial families; the name of Beaupré persists until about 1545, but as an ancient chronicler says, "As to the several patrons that succeeded, whether by descent, Purchase, or how otherwise, I know not." It would seem that the old chivalrous families had now died out. It may be added that a second manor, that of Cokayne, was held in free socage by Sir John de Sutton of Wivenhoe, in 1279, but this manor was of secondary importance; its assessed value was 19d. a year, and it was eventually held with, though kept separate from that of Alresford, until the two were actually joined by the Martin family, in the eighteenth century.

As to the stormy periods of the reformation and the Civil War, history is reticent. But there is no record of sudden evictions, so that it seems justifiable, as it is pleasant, to believe that a reasonable amount of tact on the part of the clergy, and of loyalty on the part of the people, left the little peninsula a haven of peace on the shores of a troubled sea.

In 1720, the estate was bought by one Captain Martin, a fine old sea-dog of the East India Company's service, who had acquitted himself valiantly in his command. In the hands of this admirable family, the lands and advowson happily remained for over a century, and a witness to their interest in the church remains in the seven hatchments, which form so attractive and archaic a feature of the interior.

In other ways, however, the church must have presented a somewhat grim appearance, and in the time of the Rev. J. H. Swainson, the third of the Hulme appointments, drastic changes were made. At this time (1843) the Hawkins family, who then occupied the Hall, added the south aisle, at their own expense. It is regrettable that

the restoration of the church should have been made at the very worst possible period, but it is almost entirely due to the activity and expert knowledge of Mr. Swainson that things are as good as they are, and that the church still preserves so much of its ancient atmosphere and dignity. At one time there were two bells; it is not known what became of one of them. A more serious loss, which seems to have occurred about this period, is that of the ancient silver chalice and paten; these would almost certainly be pre-Reformation, as the flagon which accompanied them was of pewter, doubtless a post-Reformation addition, made after the cup was extended to the laity, to supplement the already existing communion set. The present communion plate is of silver gilt, a substantial gift of the Hawkins family in 1854, and is characteristic of its epoch.

The Rectory house was built, or rebuilt, by the Hulme Trustees about 1838. The Hulme Trust, it should be mentioned, is in no sense a party trust, as is, e.g., the Simeon Trust. In terms of the Bequests of Mr. Hulme, the living should be offered by the Hulme Trustees, first to a Brasenose man who has been a member of the Hulme Foundation at the College, and then to any other Brasenose man. There is thus a strong connection between living and College, as is not infrequent in this neighbourhood. The "brazen nose" is to be seen on the corbels by the front door of the present rectory.

Mr. Swainson, whose incumbency lasted for over 40 years, was succeeded by the Rev. W. C. Bache, whose name is still affectionately remembered, and who remained at Alresford for 32 years, dying at the age of 86. On his death, the Trustees appointed the Rev. C. C. Prichard, of Brasenose, who infused new vitality into the parish. He was loyally supported in all his work by Mrs. Prichard and other members of their family, and it is to his incumbency that the parishioners look fondly back as the halcyon days of the parish. The Cabin was built by him for the use of the parishioners, and on his death it was given by Mrs. Prichard to the rector for the time being, in whom its possession is now vested. If it is given to the donors to know how greatly their gift is appreciated, and how many useful ends it serves as the centre of the social and musical life of the parish, they cannot but feel that it has not been made in vain.

Further benefactions of the Prichard family are the East Window, a beautiful work of the well-known Morris firm, in memory of the three sons who gave their lives during the War. And two of those sons left a bequest to the church, which is named after them the Prichard Bequest; the interest accruing is paid half-yearly to the churchwardens, and is for application to church purposes. One other bequest the parish possesses, in the Milk-Pightle field, which was left in 1534 by Edmund Porter, for the sick and needy; its value then, 12/8, was a considerable sum, but the value now is very small. At an earlier stage still, there existed two almshouses, but without endowment.

The organ and choir remain in the west gallery, their proper position in an English parish church. The rails of the west gallery are those originally erected about the altar by command of Archbishop Laud (c. 1637). The small but beautiful organ is the gift of the Rev. Dr. Bussell, Rector of North Tuddenham, Norfolk, and formerly Vice-Principal of Brasenose, and is his personal memorial to the sons of Mr. Prichard, who like their father were Brasenose men. The music is a feature of the services, and the standard of the choral singing is unusually high.

The Hall has changed hands more than once since the days of the Hawkins family. Recent rectors have been, The Rev. W. Aldworth Ferguson, Rector of St. Nicholas with All Saints, Colchester, and Rural Dean of Colchester; the Rev. H. M. Viret, Rector of Badlesmere, Kent; and the present scribe, who takes this opportunity of wishing all readers of the Alresford Calendar and Book of Friendship a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.