

Leaflet in St Stephens Chapel was photographed and then OCR software used to extract text from jpg file. Please allow for formatting and other errors

St Stephen's Chapel

The Chapel was built in the second decade of the 13thc by one Gilbert de Tawny a local landowner.

We know that the chapel was abandoned at the Reformation but mercifully it was found useful so rather than being allowed to completely dilapidate it was used variously as a barn, hence the local name Chapel Barn, & in 1734 as a hospital during a local plague.

Thereafter the interior was split to provide farmworker cottages & then back to the barn that we see in a Victorian etching.

Finally in about 1918 the place was bought with the surrounding land & house by **Isobel Badcock** (See reference later) who was the spinster sister in law of my great grandfather Colonel William Probert.

She then set about laying plans to restore the place & on December 5th 1940, the year after her death- her dream was realized when restoration was completed & St Stephens re-consecrated by the Rt. Rev WG Whittingham, Bishop of St Edmundsbury .

So far in a sense so unremarkable, except as I said for two things.

The first is that tradition has it that Edmund was crowned on the very spot where St Stephens Chapel now stand on a hill above Bures St Mary on the Stour Valley in the southernmost Suffolk on Christmas Day 855AD

Like all good ancient tradition the story is somewhat shrouded in mystery & has its sceptics.

We know that Edmund was crowned in 855AD by Bishop Humbert of Elmham because his contemporary the Welsh Monk Chronicler Asser, later Bishop of Sherborne- recorded the fact.

And we hear much later from the chronicler Geoffrey of Wells writing in c1150 that Edmund was consecrated & anointed King at 'Borum, an ancient royal hill, the known bound between east Essex & Suffolk situated on the River Stour which Borum we can assume was a variation of the name Bures.

The story is repeated by 'Mathew Paris writing in c1230 in St Albans perhaps copying Geoffrey of Wells although he does name it correctly as Bures not Borum.

Or quite probably both Geoffrey & Mathew drew from an earlier source as Geoffrey admitted his material was compiled from that he had heard & read elsewhere.

It also appears in the c1120 Annals of St Neots as at Burna. And they all in turn took much from Abbot of Fleury's Passion of St Edmund written in c987 AD who learned it from Bishop Dunstan who heard it from Edmund's swordbearer in 870- but unfortunately Abbot is silent on the coronation.

We presume that the early 3thc stone chapel was the successor to an earlier wooden structure perhaps like the 9thc wood a chapel at Greensted near Chipping Ongar in Essex.

And we know that this stone chapel was consecrated by none other than the Archbishop of Canterbury & Cardinal of Rome,

Stephen Langton on St Stephens Day 1218 .
Which again lends credence to the veracity of the tradition
that this is the spot where Edmund was crowned.

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And throughout the Centuries the oral tradition passed on that
'the chapel in the corn" -as it was known in the 19ct stood
"the site of St Edmund's coronation.

Inevitably the story has its doubters who point out that Sir
Gilbert de Tani who built the current structure as a donative or
manorial chapel outside
episcopal jurisdiction was only allowed to build having sworn
an oath before the Prior of Stoke never to attempt anything to
the prejudice of the mother Church of Bures by the reason of the
said chapel' & this cash says nothing about St Edmund.
And that the Archbishops presence can be explained by the fact there
were Langton's presumably cousins of the great man living in
the village in the 13th century.

But I think these sceptics has its doubters had their own explaining to
do

These mediaeval hagiographics of saints were indeed famously fanciful
but why sitting in Wells would the chronicler Geoffrey be so very
precise about a hill on the Essex Suffolk border on the river Stour 'a
river flowing rapid in both summer & winter.

Well the river Stour today is quite slow but the river became an
important artery of commerce in the 17th to 19th centuries and was
much altered from that of the 13thc by the banks, weirs & locks made

famous in John Constable's paintings.

I find it interesting that the Assington Brook below the chapel of St Stephens indeed to this day still flows rapidly in both summer and winter

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And would the Archbishop of Canterbury really travel all this way just for the consecration of a chapel built by a friend of his relative? And he wasn't just there by coincidence as we have Gilbert de Tani's plea for him to come. In 1218 Langton would only just have returned from a two year exile from England for refusing to excommunicate the Barons in his long running war with King John.

And it`s not here where do the sceptics it's argue where he was Crowned' Some say Burum a corruption of Burgh in Lincolnshire but us Suffolk people can hardly allow that improbability!

St Gregory's in Sudbury I understand, now lays like to claim the honour, but of course they are not on a hill

Then even to Bury St Edmunds itself, but that is miles from the Essex Suffolk border.

So you will doubtless hear challenges to the tradition, but I like to think that the tradition is fare and true and that you will find the Chapel a most Holy Place

The second thing that lifts Chapel out of the ordinary, is the presence of the three tombs of the Earls of Oxford which Simon

Jenkins observed in his Best 1000 Churches in England are more suited to Westminster Abbey or Warwick rather than a lonely Chapel in rural Suffolk. Well of course St Stephens is not where they started- the de-Veres who I am sure you know were one of the premier dynasties in the Land, had chosen the small priory at Earls Colne Essex- five miles west of here- as the inner sanctum of their empire & as their burial ground .

It is believed that by the time of the Reformation there were 22 tombs in their mausoleum & following the premature death of the 16th Earl in 1563 his relict the Countess struggled on for a while hut according to Sir George Buc the Master of Revels writing in 1619.

In a digression on John de Vere the 13th Earl of Oxford tells us that the Priory was demolished and all the sepulchres & noble monuments of John's ancestors razed to the ground & the bones of the ancient Earls left under the open air, within six score years of John's death' which dates the destruction of the Priory to c1570.

All this being foretold by the 13th Earl's hermit who hearing that his patron had presided over the judicial murder of the Earl of Warwick in 1499 prophesied that the Earl's inheritance would be destroyed & his bones & those of his ancestors scattered.

Fortunately the three tombs that survive the 5th Earl, 8th Earl & the 11th Earl & his Countess, had been moved for safekeeping to the Parish Church of Earls Colne either before or soon after the despoliation, certainly they were there by 1594.

It is even possible that the 16th Earl or his widow were responsible for moving them & were moving other tombs from mausoleum when they died.

At his father's death in 1563, Edward the twelve year old 17th Earl was bundled of to London as a Ward of Court of William

Cecil & by the time he was in his 30's, he had run through all his money & had sold most

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his inheritance including the sale in 1583 and 1592 of Earls Colne itself to his stewards the Harlakendens

Either because he was a spendthrift or because of sharp practice on the Harlekendens side - or in all probability an injudicious mixture of the twain.

In 1693, the antiquary Robert Cotton was in discussion with Richard Harlackenden about the ten surviving effigies & engraved slabs still on site being taken from the lumber room in the remnants of the Priory & carted bywater presumably to London.

Harlackenden agreed subject to the 18th Earl's say so.

Unfortunately the plan fell through & they were left in the decaying remnants of the Priory until 1736,

When they were I am sorry to say were Chopped up by another Ancestor of mine John Wale to make fireplaces for a rebuild of his Earls Colne house

As to the three that survive they were not allowed to rest either. In 1825 the then descendant of Wales at Earls Colne Priory, the Rev Henry Carwardine was rebuilding the house and erected a gallery outside the house into which the tombs were moved & re-erected higgeldy piggedly-'

A family tradition being that he did so because the then Vicar was 'improving the church & had threatened to bury the tombs. There they

remained for 100 years -

my grandfather told me they used to rest tennis rackets on them - until 1935 when they were moved to St Stephens by my great grandfather Colonel William Probert

On the floor in the corner we also have the slab of Alberic de- Vere father of the First Earl of Oxford & the first to be in line to bear the title of Lord Great Chamberlain.

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It was found in a rock garden in Earls Colne. The sarcophagus by the font was similarly thrown in a wood at Colne Park. The glass in the east window is Isabell Badcock`s faux mediaeval design. Some of the fragments of glass have somehow survived from the original Priory at Earls Colne.

The End

References:

BADCOCK Isobel Baynes 1863-1939

Little-known painter of miniature portraits and the daughter of the Dean of Ripon, born in Sharrow, Sheffield. She is known to have travelled to Trinidad & Tobago and later lived at Bures, Suffolk.

In 1914 Isabel went to live at Bures St Mary, Suffolk to be near her sister Mrs Carwardine Probert and in 1922 she was living at Fysh House, Bures, Suffolk when she set sail on the 'Intaba' for Trinidad & Tobago and from that address on 28 December 1933, patented (426,283) an 'Artists Colour Box'. A painter of portraits, buildings and interiors and exhibited at the Royal Society of British Artists in 1886 and at the Royal Academy 1905-1914 including 'Captain G. W. Probert' and 'In the Church's Quiet Heart'. Her sister Kate Stanhope Badcock (1864-1910) was also an artist and her elder sister Mary Hilton Badcock married William Geoffry Carwardine Probert of Bevills, Bures, Suffolk. Isabel died at Fysh House, Bures, Sudbury, Suffolk on 27 August 1939 and cremated at Ipswich. A memorial glass window was raised in Waldegrave Chapel, Bures to the memory of her Probert brother-in-law (died 1938) and his wife, sister Mary (died 1949) and to Isabel.

Miss Badcock, of Fysh House, Bures,' dedicated herself in the 1920s to restoring *the little* chapel to its former glory. Miss Hadcock's sister, Mary Probert, was the original model for 'Alice' who Sir John Tenniel drew to illustrate Lewis Carroll's immortal book. With the help of her brother-in-law Colonel W. (1. Carwardine Probert, of Bevills, Bures, the work was eventually completed and the chapel rededicated. Both Colonel and Mrs. Probert and Miss Badcock chose the chapel as their final resting place.

Probert family

Colne Priory passed to W. R. Probert, son of Henry Holgate and J. Carwardine's sister Anne and her husband Thomas Probert.

W. R. Probert was succeeded at Colne Priory by his son W. G. Carwardine Probert who sold the manor 1935.

The 18th c descendants of the Harlackendens' at Earls Colne were Carwardines who twice married the Proberts & Col Richard Probert (dec) inherited both family names Geoffrey Probert his son Jake , still carry the Carwardine (or Harlekenden ?) middle name

Probert Family line

Thomas Probert 1729-1802, Reverend and Rebecca Probert 1740-1810

Son

Thomas Probert 1776-1849

Son

William Richard Probert 1815-1903, Sea Captain

Son

William Geoffrey Carwardine Geoffrey Carwardine Probert 1864-1938, Colonel

Son

Geoffrey Oliver Carwardine Probert 1892-1986, Colonel

Son

Richard Harlackenden Carwardine Probert 1922-2010, Lt Col

Lt.-Col. Richard Harlachenden Carwardine Probert married Elizabeth Margaret Sinclair on 25 April 1945 at St. Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh, Midlothian, Scotland.² He died on 31 August 2010

He lived at Little Bevills, Bures, Suffolk, England and later in Chapel Barn House
He held the office of Deputy Lieutenant He was appointed Officer, Order of the British Empire

THREE children

Geoffrey Thomas Carwardine Probert

Caroline Anne Kitchener Probert³

Camilla Probert⁺² b. 1946

Son

Geoffrey Thomas Carwardine Probert and Elizabeth Margaret Sinclair. He married Penelope Anne Bevan, daughter of Michael Guy Molesworth Bevan and Mary Brocklebank, in 1982.

Current living at Gt Bevills

Current children

Thomas Henry Carwardine Probert b. 1985

Rebecca Mary Probert b. 1988

Isobel Loveday Probert b. 1991

Jack Michael Harlackenden Probert b. 1993