The History of Kingsland.

Kingsland Church.

The most precious of these memories has been left till last, for the history of our Church not only lies in the past, but it is also here with us to-day. For 650 years it has been the most important influence in the lives of Kingsland people, and will be so in years to come for generation upon genaration still unborn.

Our Church, dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel, waserected by Edmund Lord Mortimer about 1290, doubtless replacing a Saxon edifice. It certainly replaced an earlier and probably smaller building, for the two windows facing east, long single-light early English lancets still exist. These belonged to what were evidently narrow nave aisles, but are now blocked up on the inside by the responds of the present nave arcade.

The north porch and Volca Chamber were erected a few years after the main building had been completed, asthe masonry is different to that of the north wall, and is not properly bonded in with it. Probably these were added when the tower was being finished, the tracery in both being similar and exceptional.

The Walls are of local sandstone rubble.

The chnacel wasbuilt first, but the nav north and south aisles, and the north vestry we completed between 1290 and 1300.

The south porch was added, together with the upper part of the tower, in the 15th century.

In the vestry an upper storey was added in the 16th century, and tradition states that this was used as a school.

The chancel wasrestored and its ceiling decorated in 1864, and the remainder of the church rather later.

The organ chamber was added in 1882, replacing the use of a harmonium

The bells were re-tuned in 1890, and the tower restored in 1924.

On the gable of the 14th century chancel-arch is a sanctus bell-cote with a gable-cross.

On the south of the church is mutilated churchyard cross, and on the west jamb of the south doorway of the chancel is a scratch-dial.

The Parish Registers date from 1548.

The two special features of the church are the Volca Chamber and the Glass. The former is dealt with separately, and it is interesting to record that during the 2nd world war the east window was taken out and stowed away for safety, only being replaced after the cessation of hostilities.

The description of this 14th century glass is as follows:-

In tracery lights (a) seated figure of Christ on rainbow and holding cross.

In two lights (b) coronation of the Virgin.

In main lights of window (a) shield-of-arms, probably Bruce or Braose of Brecon; (b) panel with Tobias and Raphael, Tobias holds the fish; (c) panel of the Annunciation with Gabriel; (d) panel of Michael and the dragon; (e) arms of the see of Hereford; (f) panel with Esdras, holding a scroll with his name, and Uriel. The panels represent the four great Archangels. In north window, trefoil with leopard's face and foliage. In south-east window fragments of foliage etc., incorporated in modern glass. In middle south window, figure of archbishop with cross-staff and pall, roundel with head, perhaps of St. Helena.

The subjects portrayed are in reference to the dedication of the church to St. Michael the Archangel, with the other Archangels round him. This isthe only instance known of the Archangels subjectively depicted together in ancient glass or tempera paintings.

The Volca Chamber.

This subject is being treated separately, for as far back as Thomas Blount's MS. in 1660 nothing definite is known about the Volca Chamber, and that was the earliest reference to it, as far as is known at present.

In 1826 articles appeared in a London magazine to attempt to clear the matter up, But it is at once assumed that it was a Sepulchre Chamber, and there is a long argument to try to prove the point. Unfortunately it is mentioned that although there are the remains of a Holy Sepulchre in at least 50 different parish churches, these are in every case in the north wall, and in the chancel, but in one only outside the church, as at Kingsland. This rather destroys the remainder of the lengthy argument, but it is interesting to know that our church is the only one in England to possess such a curious feature.

A further reason why it could not have been used as an Altar of Repose or as a Sepulchre Chapel at the Easter celebrations, as the Host is never carried outside the Church, and any Altar of Repose would be inside the sacred edifice. In Roman use and also in the pre-Reformation use of Hereford, the Host was never carried outside the Church, except on the festival of Corpus Christi, and for the Viaticum and Communion of the Sick.

It could not have been a place for penitents, as it was shut off from the interior of the church, and a sight of the altar could not have been obtained; and it could not have been the cell of a recluse, as in that case the orientation was always such that the rays of the rising sun on the morning of St. Michael's Day were the guide in fixing the alter.

Having destroyed all the previous theories as to the use of this chamber, perhaps tradition will be helpful in an attempt to explain what it really is.

Special Notes.

The Manor of Kingsland.

Kingsland is said to have been the chief residence of the ruler of the Saxon tribe of Hecanas, who held the greater part of Herefordshire, and to have been named Kingslene by him, afterwards changed as it appears now. A similar word-ending appeared at the same time with regard to Monklene and Hardislene, and at the latter place there is still a property known as The Leen.

The manor of Kingsland, (valued then in the King's books at £31:3:6½,) was granted in 1271 by Henry III to his son, Edmund Earl of Lancaster, and regranted in 1281 either to Edmund de Mortimer, or more probably to his father, Sir Roger de Mortimer (who died in 1282), as the manor was one of those which was held in dower by Sir Roger's widow, Matilda. It is almost certain that it is due to her that the Church was rebuilt in 1290, and that accounts for her coat of arms, (she was a de Braose of Hay), which occupies a premier place in the east window.

.....

Street Court.

It has already been explained that this house stands upon Roman foundations, but the late owner once related that the vaults in one place lead to a large underground passage, which ran in the direction of Brook Bridge. This was penetrated for about 200 yards, but then a fall of earth and rubble formed a complete blockage, and the aperture leading to the tunnel was eventually bricked up.

.....

Going back to the year 1290, Kingsland Church was erected on the site of a former Saxon edifice by Edmund, Lord Mortimer, who placed his brother Walter, who was a priest, in charge. It is known that he, the first Rector, died about 20 years later, and archaeologists all state that the north porch was built about the same time, and that it is of a little later date than the main body.

This falls into line with the theory that Walter de Mortimer was buried in the stone coffin, that the little altar on the east end was used for saying Masses, and that on all four sides the privileged public could witness the ceremony.

Colour is given to this by the fact that in 1826 the air-tight lid of the coffin was removed, and inside were the remains of a man and a small child. On exposure to the air this immediately crumbled to dust, and the Rector incurred much resentment because he had the dust swept out and thrown into the churchyard.

The founder of the church was buried in Wigmore Abbey, and it is very likely indeed that his wife Matilda, who was largely responsible for the re-building of the church, should decide not to bury the first Rector in the chancel, as was usual, but to build a special chapel for him as a perpetual tomb.

The fact that the remains of a child were also in the coffin, possibly those of the Rector's own son, does not in any way interfere with the theory, as secular clergy were allowed to marry as late as the 14th century. Many such instances were recorded even in Italy.

A final proof seems to be that the Walter Chapel could be very easily corrupted to the Velca Chapel. There is a distinct similarity in the spoken words, and many names that have come down to us through the ages, show far greater differences that this.

Burial of a Suicide.

We read in the article on the Volca Chamber how the Rector incurred the resentment of the parishioners by throwing out from the stone coffin what had for a matter of centuries been considered as sacred dust.

About 150 years later village feeling again ran high, when an unfortunate suicide was buried in unconsecrated ground without any rites at all. There was a back-ground to this, which it is not necessary to go into here, but it was considered that very harsh treatment had helped to bring about the disaster, and one bold old lady decided to shew her feeling in the matter anyhow. She was very crippled with rheumatism, but painfully climbed the stone stairs up into the belfry, and there hammered out the usual message to the village with the head of her crutch. When hertime came to be carried to the church yard popular feeling was able to express at last sympathy withher kindly action.

.....

The Organ Chamber.

Before this was added a harmonium had replaced either a note given from a tuning fork, or more probably the use of a few stringed instruments.

Whether mechanical music is better than the old-time little orchestra is a matter of taste, but in a village anyhow, it must have been an added encouragement to friends and relations to hear and see people, whom they were in contact with every day, trying to express their religious feeling in church in terms of music.

.....

Local Words and Expressions.

The etymology of local dialect is an absorbing subject, much too long and difficu to discuss at length here, but well worth just a glance at some of its leading featur

An apt description of the very large drops of rain, often accompanying the sudde storms we sometimes get in summer was 'thun berries', a thunderstorm on the other hand always being spoken of as 'tempest'.

Equally appropriate too were 'dumb-sauc for a sulky person; a 'gallus' lad for some one who had misbehaved, andthereforeripe fo the gallows; and 'big-sorted' for the perso who aimed at what used to be styled social climbing.

In adifferent category we get someone rather useless called a 'nisgel', a corruption of 'nest gull', or the weakest and most difficult to rear, in nest or litter.

To 'poon' or pound a person was commonl used for the word 'beat', as also was the expression 'tansilooning', the root word being in thelatter case 'tang', another local word used when pots and pans were beaten in the mistaken idea that a swarm of bees was thereby induced to settle quickly.

A 'pankin-pole' was evidently a 'spank ing pole', and to 'dowt' the light, was the country request to put it out, otherwise to 'do-out' the light.

Two words in use were particularly interesting, as they are of foreign origin, in the one case Dutch, and in the other Norman-French. The latter gave the Saxons the word 'patten', the wooden shoe raised by supports upon an iron ring, to keep the wear from the mud. The other local word is 'sklem' a thievish animal or person. The Dutch word 'schelm' has practically the same meaning,and undoubtedly both spring from the same root.

And finally 'doglogarum' expressing 'nonsense'. How could one better invent a nonsensical word than this.

.....