

SUTTON COLDFIELD CHURCHYARD: THE OLD BOUNDARIES

By NORMAN G. EVANS

The Churchyard has not always been as large as it is to-day. On the North were Georgian houses fronting Coleshill Street, Mill Street and Church Hill, these were removed in 1939 when the area was opened up to construct the Vesey Gardens and give a better view of the Church.

Blind Lane (now as Trinity Hill) formed the Southern boundary, and until 1832 an old brick wall, about 22 yards from the corner of the Tower at its nearest point, extended along the South West of the Churchyard and separated it from a long piece of land on the crest of the hill overlooking the present Parade. This was land provided by Bishop Vesey on which in 1541 at its Southern end he built, in stone, his original Grammar School. This old brick wall, dividing the school grounds from the churchyard, followed a straight line from the East corner of the present Sons of Rest building to near the lone sycamore tree now growing in the churchyard.

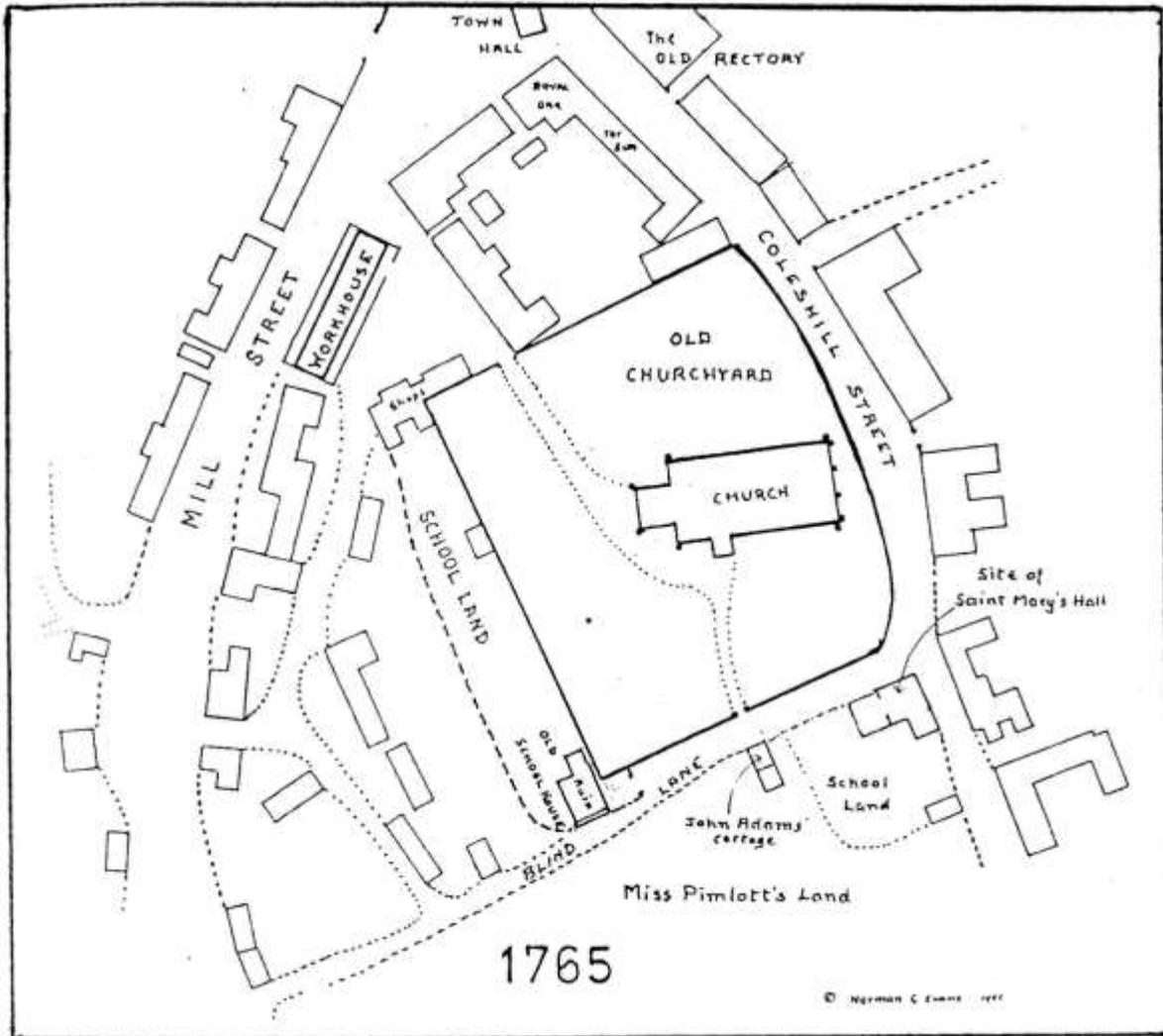
In the early part of the 19th century the population of Sutton was increasing, and it was realised that the old churchyard would have to be enlarged. The situation was recognised officially in May 1817 when the Archdeacon of Lichfield on his inspection of Holy Trinity reported to his Bishop that " a new burial ground is wanted ", noting at the same time that he was not satisfied with the way the churchyard was being maintained. " Pigs, horses and cows are to be kept out of the churchyard " he ordered, " and it is to be grazed only by sheep ".

The enlargement of the Burial Ground.

The only direction in which the churchyard could be extended was to the South West on to the old Grammar School land which was then used only as a garden, the Old School House having been left to become a ruin after the present Grammar School in Lichfield Road had been built in 1727. In 1817, Mr. Charles Barker had become head of the Grammar School, but did not seem disposed to permit any extension of the churchyard on to the Old School land. As has been mentioned when considering his memorial tablet in the base of the Tower, he was at variance with the Corporation, but eventually decided that he could dispose of this land to his advantage if he negotiated with that Body rather than with the Churchwardens. He (and the School Trustees) therefore agreed to give the Old School land on Trinity Hill to the Corporation in exchange for the freehold of the Lichfield Road property, thus relieving him from the conditions of a former lease by which the overall management of the School was under the control of the Warden and Society. This agreement suited the latter who were then able to release themselves from the many problems associated with Mr. Barker's educational activities.

HOLY TRINITY, SUTTON COLDFIELD.

Based on a Survey by John Snape, 1765.



CHURCHYARD BOUNDARIES .

- Before the acquisition of the Old School lands in 1832.
- Before the widening & straightening of the Blind Lane, 1836.
- Before the removal of the remains of St. Mary's Hall, 1959.

The Churchwardens immediately entered into negotiations with the Warden and Society as the new owners of the Old School House and its garden, but instead of buying the land, the Churchwardens agreed an Exchange with the Corporation by which the churchyard was enlarged and the Warden and Society received an equivalent value of Church land in the Whitehouse Common and Riland Road areas.

The churchyard extension, however, was not the only land involved in these exchanges, for the area of land obtained by Bishop Vesey for the purpose of establishing his School on Trinity Hill had also included a plot of land at the top of and on the South Side of Blind Lane. This, by a similar series of exchanges passed, in 1832, from the School via the Warden and Society into the possession of the Churchwardens who gave for it, a piece of land of similar value near the foot of Reddicap Hill.

Saint Mary's Hall.

On this plot of land, facing the South East corner of the churchyard, a building with stone foundations (and probably half-timbered) known as Saint Mary's Hall. It was built there at least a century before Bishop Vesey acquired the land for founding his School, for the Record of the Estates of the Duke of Clarence shows that as Earl of Warwick he, in 1480, owned Saint Mary's Hall in Great Sutton. This Record, in Latin, refers to an extension of that building over a piece of land adjoining it, 21 feet long and 2 feet wide, for which an additional rent of one penny was to be paid to the Duke.

The building was referred to as " his tenement Saint Mary's Hall " -- "tenemento suo vocato Sayntmaryhull ", and also as being " of the Blessed Mary " - " tenementi Beate Marie " , implying that it could have had connections with the church, especially when it is remembered that that name had been given to it before the Reformation, during the period when services in Holy Trinity would have followed the tenets of the Church of Rome, and also when it is recalled that the owners of Saint Mary's Hall, the Earls of Warwick, had control over the affairs of Holy Trinity in Sutton as its patrons who exercised their rights of presentation to the Church by nominating clergymen to the Rectory.

The old building in Coleshill Street, whose South wall with its stone mullioned window can be seen in the archway facing the Vesey Gardens, is believed to have been the Rectory when Bishop Vesey acquired Saint Mary's Hall to make use of the latter as one of his School buildings. Could it have been used as a Rectory before that time ?

When Saint Mary's Hall became delapidated in the 1720s , it was partly taken down and a Georgian house was erected upon its stone foundations. remained thus until 1959 when it was completely demolished to widen the corner of Trinity Hill and Coleshill Street. Photographs taken before its demolition show the stone foundations

of the original Plantagenet building rising some 3 or 4 feet above the present ground level.

Saint Mary's Hall is mentioned here not only because of any church connections in pre-Reformation times and its close proximity to the Church, but because it and the adjoining dwelling in the Blind Lane came into the possession of the Church in 1832 and have remained church property ever since – except for a short period when the Borough Corporation bought, the site for the 1959 road widening.

Earlier widening of the Blind Lane.

A study of plans of the churchyard and land its vicinity the late 18th and early 19th centuries reveal that the position of the churchyard wall adjoining Trinity Hill has been altered. John Snape's surveys of this part of Sutton in 1765 (see plan) show the Old Grammar School House in an elevated position on the " cliff " immediately overlooking the site of the present new Baptist Church, its entrance from the North side of the Blind Lane being through double gates – probably up steps – facing up the Lane towards Coleshill Street. This location is confirmed by an old etching in the Aylesford Collection which Shows the position of the School relative to the church tower.

The Old School House projected half-way across and partly obstructed the view down Trinity Hill, so, had the extension of the burial ground followed the outline of this school land precisely, it would have resulted in an irregular shape of the churchyard boundary along its Southern edge. To avoid this, it was decided to straighten the upper part of the Lane on the Church side by extending the churchyard over a narrow strip of the roadway and, at the same time, widen the Lane by taking in land on the opposite side.

Miss Mary Pimlott owned the land on the present Rectory side of the hill, and two small cottages (owned by the Corporation and tenanted by Mr John Adams and Mr Robinson) jutted slightly into the Lane on that same side at a point just up the hill from the Old Grammar School House. These two cottages at their rear encroached into Miss Pimlott's land, so it was decided to demolish the cottages and widen and straighten the South boundary of the Lane by taking a strip of frontage from Miss Pimlott at the side of the cottages, and give her in exchange on completion of their demolition, most of the land on which they had stood.

At a Vestry Meeting held in January 1834 it was resolved " that steps now be taken to carry into effect the proposed exchange between the Parish and Miss Pimlott for the purpose of widening the Blind Lane '. As it was agreed, however, that the demolition of the cottages should be deferred during the lifetime of the tenants, it was not until John Adams' widow died in 1836 that a resolution was passed that " immediate proceedings be taken to recover possession of the houses and premises ". As a result of this, in 1836, Trinity Hill took on its present shape, the former very

steep gradient being reduced at the same time by cutting the road more deeply into the hill.

The South West corner of the Churchyard Wall.

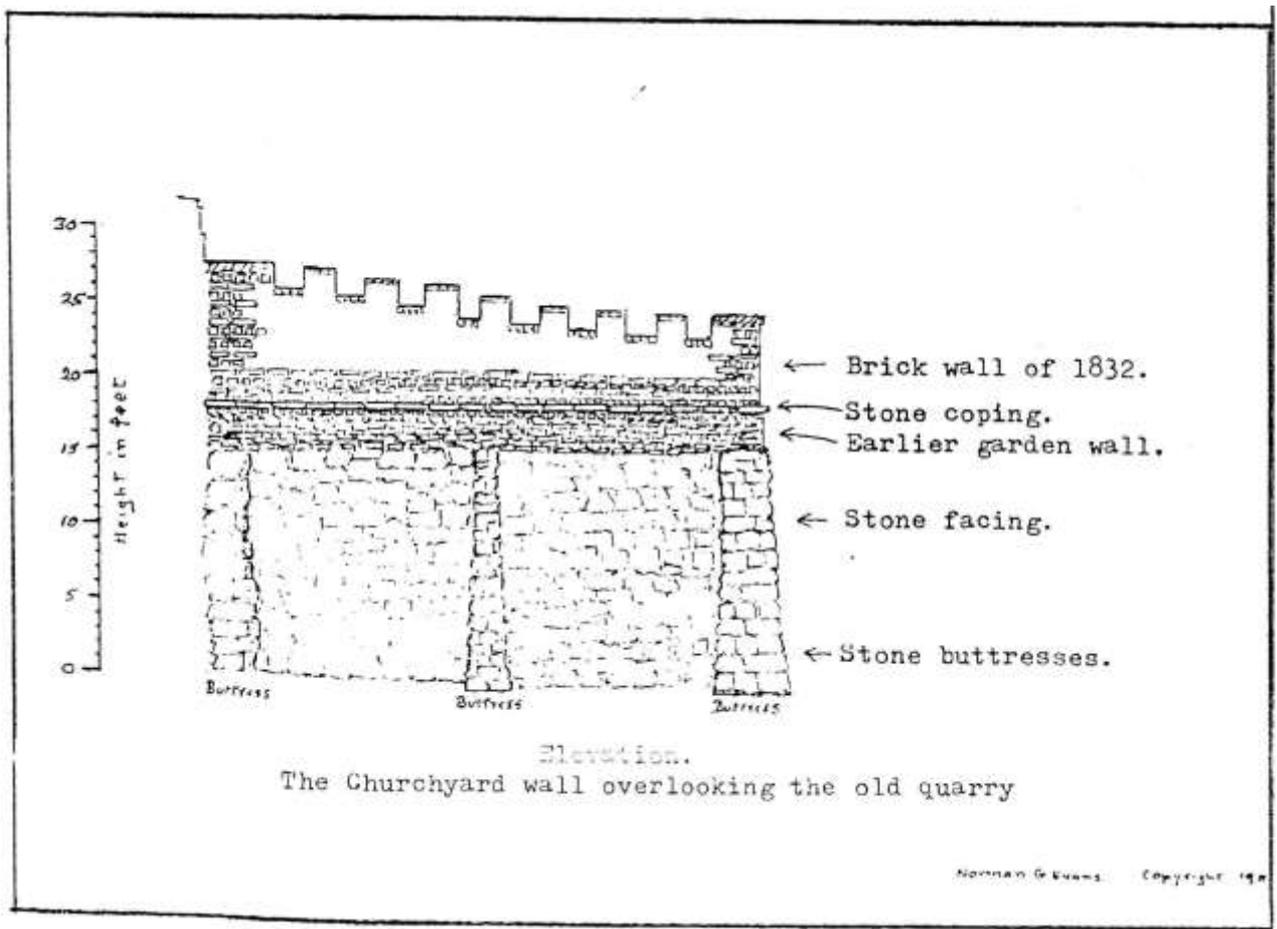
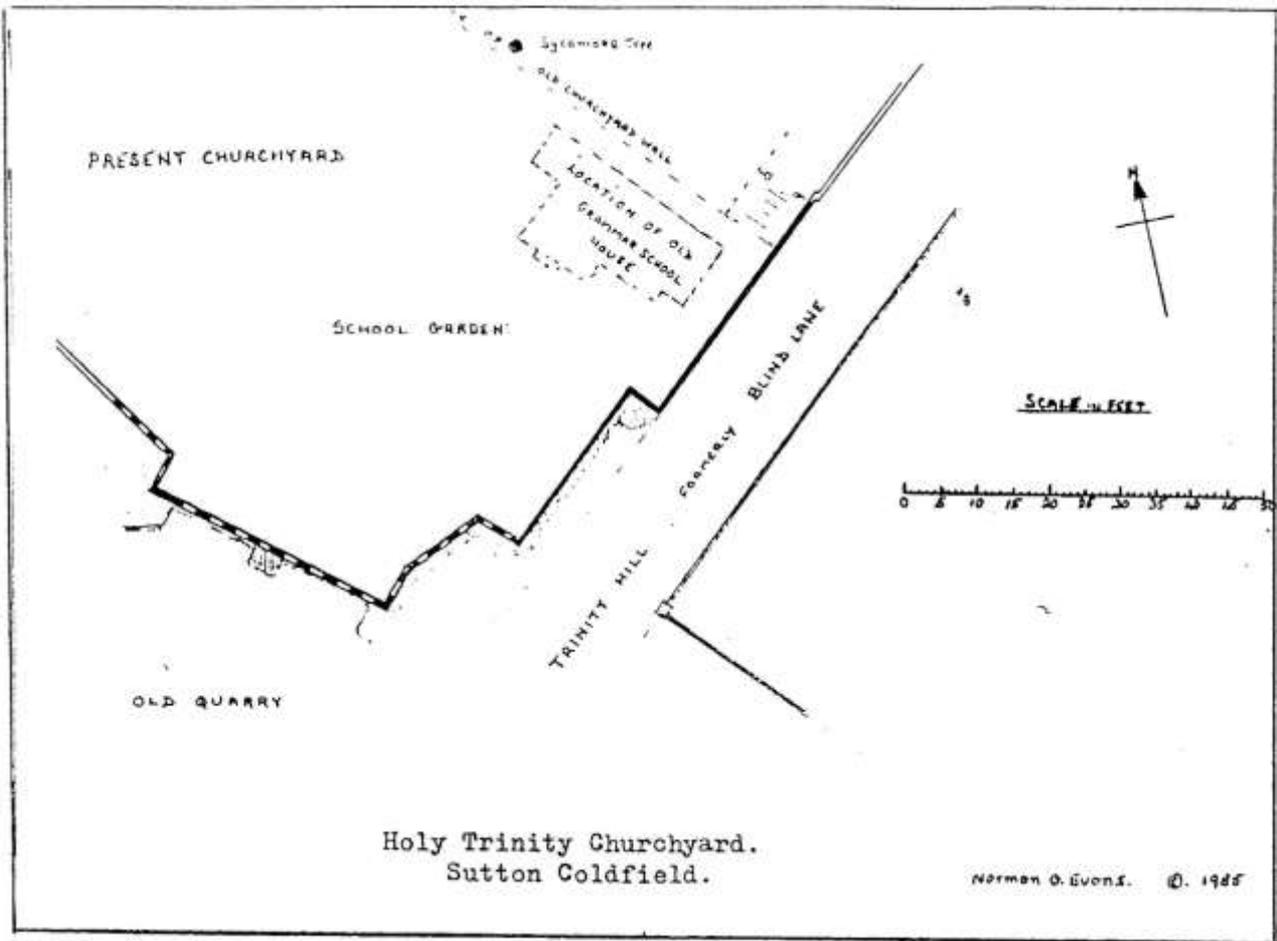
Not only was the road level changed in the period following the incorporation of the Old School House land into the churchyard, but the natural very steep slope of the South West corner of the Old School garden was altered considerably by filling it in to make the ground more level and suitable for burials.

These changes in ground levels can be appreciated best studying this part of the churchyard wall from the present Baptist Church upper car park which was originally a sandstone quarry. A considerable amount of stone been excavated and an examination of the old quarry face (which is still visible in its Northern part) will show that the churchyard hill consists of a soft type of sandstone – known as Lower Keuper – which would present the gravediggers with little difficulty where it extends under the burial ground, but would not be a strong enough stone to be used in the building of the Church.

It is most likely that the quarry was commenced originally in the 12th century to provide the main mass of material used in making the dam across the valley for the Mill Pool (which was situated in the present Gracechurch area) for it will be noticed that the pools in Sutton Park also have a quarry near the end of their dams.

The proximity of the quarry to the School building erected by Bishop Vesey, and the crumbling nature of the stone, necessitated the erection of a reliable lateral support to protect the garden, so a stronger stone – Upper Keuper sandstone was carried from quarries about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile away to the East, and used to make the base of the wall which, with its stone buttresses, now hides the soft sandstone cliff. This stone facing rises to a height of some 16 feet from the old quarry floor, and on the top of it, it will be seen that a brick wall averaging 3 feet in height has been built to support a stone coping which continues, almost level, in an unbroken line round the corner to face the Blind Lane. This coping was once the top of the garden wall, which indicates that the ground level of this corner of the School garden must have been only about 16 feet higher than the quarry floor.

It will be noticed that this old garden wall consists of handmade bricks laid in English Bond with 5 courses of stringers carrying a course of headers which support the stone coping blocks. All these bricks are of a small size in use in the 17th and 18th centuries, but rising directly on the top of this stone coping a later wall has been erected, thereby raising the total height of the churchyard wall to 27 feet from the quarry floor at the North end. The summit descends in the form of seven brick battlements to a height of 24 feet at the Trinity Hill end. The bricks in this upper part of the wall are larger than the earlier ones below, and are of a size which would have been used in the 1832–36 alterations.



As the ground level of the churchyard is now only some 1½ feet below the lower sections of the brick battlements the burial ground in this area must have filled in to a depth of between 3 and 6 feet when the enlargement of the graveyard took place and the Blind Lane was widened. This accounts for the unusual differences in the ground level of the churchyard adjoining the battlemented wall and Trinity Hill.

The Old Garden Wall.

The brick battlemented wall of 1832, 14 inches in thickness, extends almost the whole length of the West boundary of the burial ground as far as the new wooden fence, but the actual North West corner is formed by a much older wall which can be examined closely. Studying it from the ground upwards on the graveyard side where it is about 6 feet high, it consists of some 5 courses of brick laid as " stretchers " surmounted by one course laid as " headers " carrying a carved stone coping which is still in its original position. The bricks measure 2¼ inches x 4¼ inches x 9 inches, a size made compulsory by a law of 1571, and are laid in the same English Bond as has already been seen in the garden wall overlooking the old quarry. This is, therefore, the North end of the Old School garden wall; it is 9 inches in thickness but has been strengthened on the Mill Street side by another 9 inch thickness of brickwork making it an 18 inch wall, the upper courses of which are built directly on top of the old garden wall coping as has been done at the Southern end above the quarry. It carries an additional stone coping. Both ends of the wall of the school garden are thus still visible and now form part of the churchyard boundary.

The Earlier South Approach to the Church.

The plan of 1765 shows that the path from the South Porch did not meet Trinity Hill at the corner with Coleshill Street as it does to-day, but joined the old Blind Lane (before it was widened) at a point about 210 feet down the hill from the present entrance. This is confirmed by an entry in the Vestry Minute Book dated 20th May 1817 following the inspection by the Archdeacon who ordered " That the road (path) from the Blind Lane, the entrance facing John Adams' cottage, be stop'd up, the gate taken away and the place built up ". The reason for this alteration is not given, but the present entrance and pathway to the South East corner of the churchyard must therefore have been constructed at that time.

Soil against the Church Walls.

In the same Minutes, it is reported that the Archdeacon complained that the soil of the churchyard was heaped against the walls of the Church to a height of 6 to 8 feet above the level of the floor of the aisles. He ordered that it should be removed and iron drainage troughs laid in trenches along the North and the South walls. Soil was similarly to be removed from the North and South walls of the Tower. This has resulted in a shallow covering of the vault in the churchyard at the South side of the Tower, a few of the 18th century bricks in the arch of its roof being exposed.

The names of the occupants of the vault are not known, but were no doubt recorded on the now completely eroded sandstone memorial tablet on the outside of the Tower wall above it.

It will be recalled that when the base of the Tower was made into a Vestry in 1828 the interior entrance to the stone spiral staircase was closed and a new opening was made giving access to the stairs from the churchyard. The position of this external doorway can be seen in the South wall of the Tower. It was in use until 1885 when it was closed with ashlar, the old slit window which gave light to the stairway was replaced, and the ancient internal doorway was restored.

The Graveyard.

Mary Ashford' s Grave.

Near the South Porch, on the bank across the pathway, is the burial place of Mary Ashford. The slab which is at present covering her grave was originally its vertical headstone, and recalls Mary's untimely death. She was murdered in Penns Lane, Walmley, following a dance at Tyburn House, and Abraham Thornton who had accompanied her was accused. At the trial at Warwick insufficient evidence was produced and he was acquitted. Mary's brother William, however, was not satisfied and, as was possible in those days as the direct heir of Mary, he " appealed " Thornton, and a re-trial was commenced in the Court of Appeal before the Lord Chief Justice. Here Thornton threw down a gauntlet on the floor of the Court and challenged William to a trial by duel -- by which the dispute could be settled under a long-forgotten mediaeval law but still then in force. William refused the challenge and Thornton was again acquitted, but the case made legal history, and in consequence the old law of " Wager by Battel " was revoked.

Many felt certain that Thornton was guilty, no more so than the Rev. Luke Booker who erected the " Warning on her Tomb ", and composed the verse on the lower half of her gravestone, calling himself " The Muse who wept over her Doom ".

The stone is badly eroded and only a part of the verse is still legible, but originally the whole of the wording read as follows

As a warning to female virtue
and humble Monument to female Chastity
this Stone marks the Grave
of
MARY ASHFORD
Who in the 20th year of her age
having incautiously repaired
to a Scene of Amusement

without proper Protection
was brutally violated and murdered
on the 27th of May 1817

Lovely and chaste as the Primrose pale
Rifled of virgin sweetness by the gale
Mary! The Wretch who thee remorseless slew
Avenging Wrath which sleeps not will persue
For though the Deed of Blood be veil'd in night
Will not the Judge of all the Earth do right?
Fair blighted Flow'r! The Muse that weeps thy Doom
Rears o'er thy murder'd Form, this warning Tomb.

L. B.

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The Webster Vault.

A little further from the South Porch, and nearer to the yew tree, stands the memorial surrounded by an iron fence, covering the vault in which Joseph Webster, his wife and some of their 12 children are buried.

The Websters had in 1752 acquired Mr Penn's watermill on the Ebrook at Walmley and there they manufactured bars and rods from the iron which they forged in Mr. Plant's old mill downstream, near the bottom of Eachelhurst Road. The Ebrook between this latter mill and the River Tame became known as Mr. Plant's Brook, and the lane nearby is still called the Forge lane. The Websters lived in the house overlooking the mill pool at Penns Mill, which has been enlarged and altered to become the present Penns Hall Hotel.

They were pioneers in producing a steel suitable for drawing into wire, particularly piano wire for which they became famous. In another of their mills (Hay Mills, on the River Cole near Yardley) they produced the wire for the first Transatlantic Telephone Cable which was laid in 1858.

Joseph Webster who is buried here in this vault with his wife Maria Mary, was the third Joseph to have owned the Mills, for his father and grandfather before him had also been christened Joseph. He was active in local affairs, a justice of the Peace and Warden (Mayor) in 1809 and 1810. He was the principal founder of Saint John's Church in Walmley in 1845, where the chancel windows are inscribed to his memory with the words:-

"To the Honoared Memory of Joseph Webster, ESQ. of Penns who died 7th July 1856 also of his Eldest Son the Rev. Joseph Webster, M.A., Rector of Hindlip, Worcestershire, who died on 4th March 1848 aged 56."

On its East side. the memorial recalls Capt. Peter Charles Gillies Webster, the youngest son of Joseph and Maria Mary Webster, born May 29th 1830, died April 28th 1877, and his wife Frances who lived to the age of 94 years and died on May 8th 1926. He was formerly of the 8th Hussars and Adjutant of the Staffordshire Yeomanry, and, as already mentioned, is named on the tablet on the West wall of the North aisle.

The iron railings surrounding the memorial in the churchyard in Sutton are supported by a cast-iron replica of a wire rope, in allusion to the Naval wire rope produced at the Webster's mills.

The Sun Dial.

Near the crown of the hill by the South West of the Tower will be seen the Stone base of the old sun dial. It has stood here for more than three centuries marking the time long before a clock was placed in the Tower, for its presence is noted in the Sutton Burials Register of 1671 where it is mentioned as a means of locating the burial place of Mr. Thomas Dawney.

The entry for the 9th of September that year sites the grave of that gentleman. " There was Buryed the ixth Day of September Mr. Thomas Dawney in the Church Yard in a grave on the North syde the Dyall Post about ix feet deep. Att th time the Towne Hall floore fell downe by the presse of people there ". This refers to the old Moot Hall which stood at the top of Mill Street on the site now occupied by the traffic island opposite the Midland Bank, the crowd having assembled for the purpose of receiving a dole which was being distributed in accordance. with Mr. Dawney's will.

Thomas Dawney, who had married a Sutton lady, was of Yorkshire descent and lived in a house which had been built upon the ruins of the old Manor House on Manor Hill. His grave in the churchyard was marked in a very distinguished manner by a massive; roughly cut, stone slab forming a solid gabled roof supported along each side by equally massive vertical stone slabs. This stood in the churchyard for some 300 years until it was removed along with most of the tombstones to enable the graveyard to be kept tidy by regular mowing.

Some of the headstones are now placed against the battlemented brick wall West boundary. One, about 30 feet up the hill from the lower end of the higher wall where it overlooks the old quarry, is of interest in the study of the history of the old (1827) Town School in Trinity Hill, for its inscription recalls one of the former headmasters, Mr. George Preston, and reads as follows :-

In Memory of George Bamford Preston
for 33 years Head Master of
The Sutton Coldfield Town Boys School.
Died 3rd June 1891. Aged 63 years.

This stone was erected by his old scholars and inhabitants of the Town, as a token of respect and esteem, and in recognition of the kindly interest he took in his Scholars, and of his zeal and ability as a teacher.

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Overlooking Coleshill Street.

At the East end of the churchyard, the two low stone archways of the doors leading to the former school children's galleries can be seen in the church wall. Both have been blocked up since 1868, and although the entrance for the Boys into the South chapel is hidden on the inside by the recent oak bookcase built on to the wall, the stone steps by which they used to gain access from the churchyard remains unchanged. On the other hand, the old entrance for the Girls is easily discovered in the Vesey chapel but is less conspicuous on the outside.

The plinth below the East window of the Chancel and the low clasping buttresses being a method of construction favoured in the middle of the 12th century, this is believed by archaeologists to be the earliest part of the church.

The Lych Gate

The Lych Gate covering the entrance to the churchyard from Coleshill Street, was built in recognition of the unceasing Interest and participation by the Rev. W. K. Riland Bedford in all aspects of the Town and Parish during his incumbency. It was erected during his lifetime, the tablet on the North side of the gate recalling that it was " Erected by the Parishoners and friends of the Rev. W. K. R. Bedford as a memorial of his 42 years occupation of the Rectory of Sutton Coldfield. Easter 1898.
"

On the opposite wall of the Lych Gate are six small diamond shaped tablets referring to four generations of the Riland Bedford family :-

William Riland Bedford = Grace Campbell

W. K. Riland Bedford = Maria Amy Houston

W. C. Riland Bedford = Elanor Phoebe Chance

Eleonor Campbell Riland Bedford.

The tablets recall that :-

William Riland Bedford died July 6th 1843

W. K. Riland Bedford, for 42 years Rector; born July 12th 1826. d. Jan 23. 1905
Any, wife of W. K. R. Bedford, died November 29th 1890.

W. C. Riland Bedford, Rector of this Parish 1892-1908. b 29 May 1852, d 15.8.192

Elanor Phoebe, wife of W.C.R. Bedford. Born Jan 3rd 1852, died Sept 15 1928.

Eleonor Campbell, Eldest daughter of the Rev. W. C. R Bedford, 1881 - 1963.

At the North side of the church, part of the burial ground has been encroached upon by extensions of the building; firstly by Bishop Vesey building a Chapel and aisle, secondly by the construction of a Vestry in 1874 adjoining the Vesey Chapel, and thirdly in 1879 when the church was widened by about 18 feet to form the present North aisle.

This Vestry was built over Sir William Wilson's grave, thus bringing him within the church walls, but the grave of the Rev. James Packwood who died 10 years before the alterations remains outside.

The Rev. James Packwood.

His gravestone -- just North of the 1874 Vestry -- informs that he was curate here for 40 years until his death on 14th March 1869 at the age of 75 years. His wife, Alice, had died on 8th September 1851, aged 51.

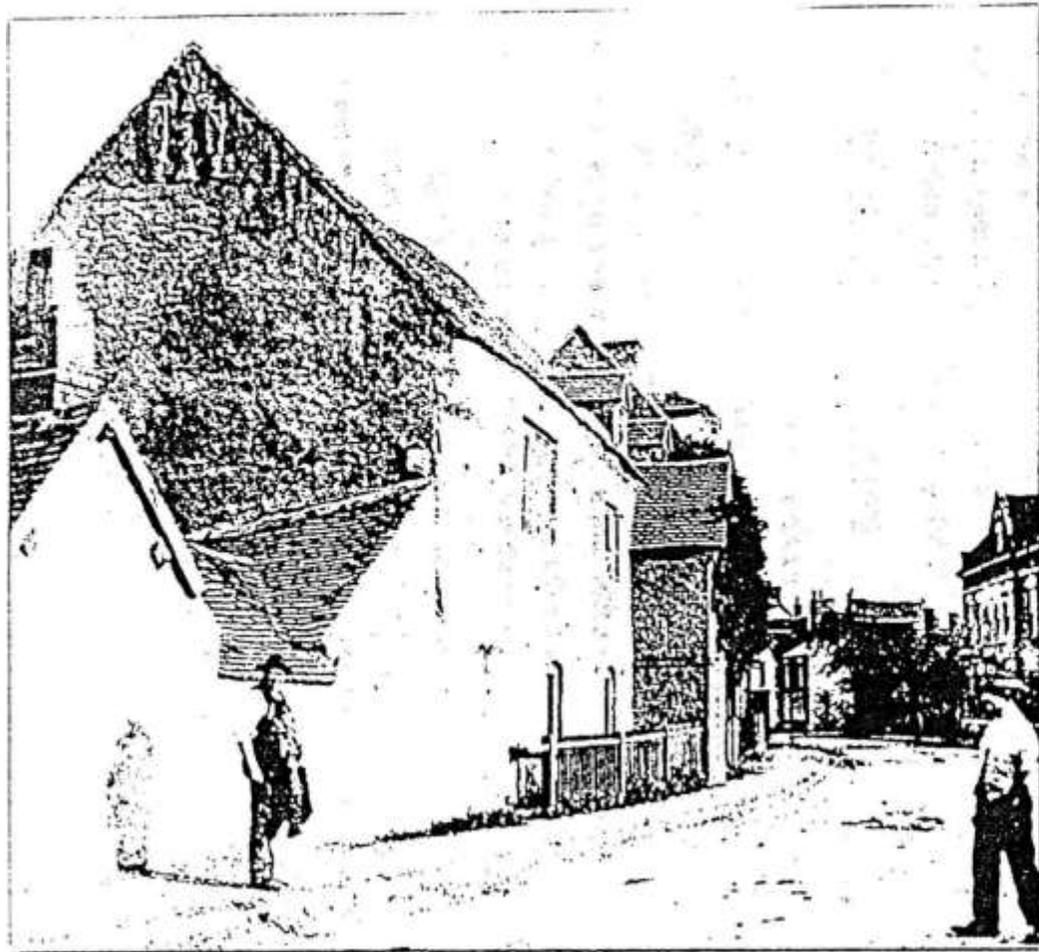
It will be recalled that the Bishop Vesey section of the Chapel East window was placed there in memory of James Packwood by his friends, for he, like the Rev. W. K. Riland Bedford, under whom he officiated, had devoted much of his time to the benefit of the Parish and the Town. He was a Member of the Society and was elected Warden for the years 1829 and 1830. He was called upon to assist in translating the Latin of King Henry VII's Charter for the Royal Town in 1849, and when in that year the office of Capital Burgess became vacant -- the two holders of that office, Sir. William Cradock Hartopp and John Oughton, Esq., both having died he became a Capital Burgess, an office created under King Charles II's Charter by which two senior burgesses were appointed to be the two magistrates for Sutton, a position which they held for life.

The Ancient Carved Stones .

Near the Sons of Rest building in Church Hill, and inserted into the outside of the churchyard wall are three carved stones. The centre one was brought from the House of Commons which had become damaged by enemy action during the Second World War, and was presented to the Town by the Member of Parliament for Sutton at that time, Sir John Mellor, Bart.

The other two stones take the form of carved faces and are even older than Holy Trinity Church itself, for they were originally in the Chapel of Saint Blaise which formed of the Manor House erected on Manor Hill as a hunting lodge in Norman days.

The old Manor became neglected following the Wars of the Roses, and its ruins were sold. Bishop Vesey, however, retrieved some of the carved stones from its Chapel and, to preserve them, had them inserted in the walls of structures which were being built as part of his development of Sutton.



The Malt House, High Street, Sutton Coldfield. 1855.
(Formerly the Tythe Barn with sculptures from the
Chapel of Saint Blaise in the North gable).



Details of the sculptures in the Tythe Barn.
The lower two heads are now in the
churchyard wall.

Three of the stones he placed as gargoyles in the stone bridge which he constructed over the River Tame at Water Orton, but two more (one representing an angel and the other a carved stone bowl) have now been taken from their position in the bridge and are kept, loose, in Curdworth Church to save them from a swollen river and the elements.

When Bishop Vesey built his tythe barn in Sutton High Street, (it was later used as a malt house which was demolished in 1878 to build the Midland Railway bridge on its site, near the College of Further Education), he had four of the largest carved stones from Saint Blaise inserted in the North facing gable at the end of the building.

A photograph taken in 1855 by Mr. Grundy shows the carvings clearly. They are high up in the gable, the upper one being the figure of a man supported by a stag's head. This figure is believed to represent Saint Hubert, the patron Saint of hunters; hence the association with the old hunting lodge on Manor Hill. (See herewith an enlarged part of Mr Grundy's photograph)

All these, carvings from the tythe barn were lying loose in Holy Trinity churchyard near the Tower in 1939, but, except for the two lower heads which are now inserted in the churchyard wall facing Church Hill, have not been seen since.

On the wall facing the entrance to the Sons of Rest building is a tablet in memory of those Volunteers from the Royal Town and Local Company who served in the South Africa War, 1900 - 01 - 02.

Burials in the Churchyard.

T. Bonell, Esq., a Sutton solicitor, writing in the year 1762 a " History of Sutton Coldfield by an impartial Hand " states that the churchyard is " taken notice of for consuming the bodies deposited therein very quickly: In two vaults lately opened, the corpses have been found to have been reduced to mere dust together with the coffins of wood which enclosed them, the interment of which has been within the memory of man. " This phenomenon was considered to be due to the nature of the sandstone.

In the time of King Charles II, to help the wool trade of the Cotswolds and other areas, legislation was introduced in 1667 and further implemented in 1678 ordering that " No corpse of any person (except those who shall die of the plague) shall be buried in any garment other than what is made of sheep's wool only " the penalty for being £5.

This is reflected in the Holy Trinity Sutton Coldfield, Parish Registers, where an entry dated 31 August 1678 under " Burials " reads :- " Thomas Bennian. in woollen, according to the Act of Parliament, being the first soe buried Here ".

A burial dated 14th March 1684 is recorded as being of " Ann Lynes, wife of Thomas Lynes, the last that was buried in wolen ".

Among the records of burials in 1668, the entry against the name Oldbury reads :- " There was Buryed the xxth Day of June Elienor Oldbury. Alsoe William Oldbury sonn of the sd Elienor was buryed the same Day of June, both brought to their graves together (who were both of ym Drowned in a pol in going into a pytt to fetch out a Gosling, as it was credibely reported. ".

Sutton Coldfield Cemetery.

In spite of the enlargement of the burial ground in 1832, and even though graveyards for each District had been consecrated when the churches were built at Hill, Walmley and Boldmere, the number of remaining spaces for graves in Holy Trinity churchyard was steadily diminishing. A Burial Board for Holy Trinity (approved by the Secretary of State in October 1876) took the in hand and considered locations in Sutton for a new burial ground.

Sites were inspected on Maney Hill, Tudor Hill, on the Four Oaks Estate, on Tamworth lane, in the present Royal Road / Ebrook Road area, and land to the East of Coleshill Street.

The price asked by the various owners was around £400 per acre which was considered to be too high, so the Rev. W. K. Riland Bedford, the Rector, offered the Burial Board a part of his Glebe land known as the Barn field, near the lowest part of Rectory Road, for £250 per acre, but specified certain conditions.

He had already paid the Corporation £450 towards the commencement of building the present Rectory Road as a wide well-surfaced road from the Rectory (by the Boot Inn) to the Church. This was to replace a narrow tortuous lane winding from the Boot Hill to the King's Arms in Coleshill Street, and which was so muddy in its lower part (now Riland Road) through the " Blabbs ", that it was known as Slash (slush) lane. The Rector's intention was to by-pass the Slash lane by cutting his new road (now Rectory Road) up the hill to join Coleshill Street opposite Trinity Hill as it does to-day, but to save himself the expense, he came to an agreement with the Burial Board by which he would allow the Board to have 6 acres of the Barn field for £1,500 providing the Board paid half the cost of completing the Rectory Road, the other half being paid by the Corporation's Highway Board.

This was agreed but only 4 acres were purchased; the barn in the field was demolished, and the burial ground was laid out adjoining Rectory Road to form what is now the oldest part of the cemetery. The present approach road is over land formerly owned by Mr. Vincent Holbeche, solicitor, whose trustees sold it to the Burial Board for £100, a further £126 being spent on the construction of the private road.

Contemporary correspondence (October 1880) with the Secretary of the Bishop of Worcester shows that the churchyards at Hill, Walmley and Boldmere were thought to be adequate for burials in those Districts, and that the new Rectory Road burial ground was to be considered an extension of the Holy Trinity churchyard for the use of Holy Trinity parishioners only.

The Bishop of Worcester consecrated the new burial ground on Wednesday the 4th of May 1880 " for the use of Members of the Established Church ", but a section of the 4 acres was left un-consecrated for the burial of nonconformists. To distinguish the two areas, the Bishop ordered that four boundary posts must be erected, two displaying the letter " C " to indicate consecrated ground, and two the letter " U " to mark the un-consecrated area.

The cemetery was opened for interments on Monday the first of November 1880, only the Lych Gate and the Sexton's house adjoining it having been completed at that time. There was some delay in building the adjacent Chapel, mainly on account of expense and obtaining the approval of the plans by the Aston Union Sanitary Authority, but it was eventually completed in 1884 for "the reduced sum of £350 ".

The growth of Sutton has subsequently necessitated the expansion of the burial ground in a Northerly direction in. two stages, the most recent being in 1934.

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Norman J. Stone
1985