



**THE PARISH
AND PARISH CHURCH
OF PILTON**

by

Clifford Davies



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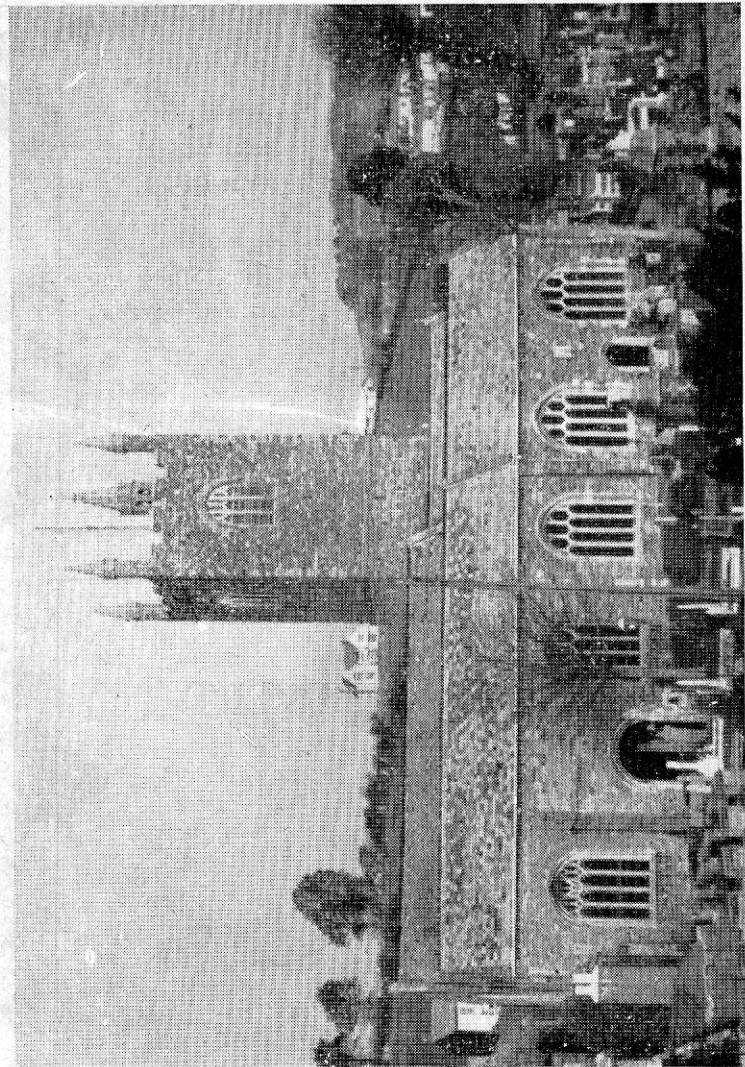
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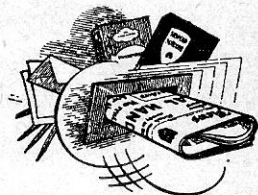
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AN ACCOUNT OF
 THE PARISH
 AND PARISH CHURCH
 OF PILTON

BY

CLIFFORD DAVIES



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EARLY HISTORY

THE earliest history of North Devon is scanty and much of that obscure; early writers seldom referred to the remote parts of Devon and when they did, spoke of the people there as being "Aborigines" and "pagans." This was natural, the North Devonians were quite different in character and race from their neighbours, being Celtic and kin to the Scots in the extreme north, the Welsh tribes just over the Severn Seas, the Irish and the Cornish. Richard, Monk of Cirencester, wrote an Itinerary about 1350 which was founded on older manuscripts (the authenticity of this has been questioned but it rings true) and he states, "In this arm was the region of the Cimbri, their chief cities were Termolus (Molland) and Artavia (Barnstaple). Beyond the Cimbri the Cornabii inhabited the extreme angle of the island. Near the above-named people on the coast and bordering the Belgae lived the Danmonii, the most powerful people of these parts, on which account Ptolemy assigned them all the country now included in Devon and Cornwall." A later historian, Whitaker, says the Danmonii were the Belgic invaders and that the original inhabitants were the Cimbri or Cwmri as the Welsh still call themselves (he refers to the natives as "Aborigines"). North Devon did not form part of England until Athelstan — "Coming with a mighty army, after sundry conflicts, at length drives the Britains over the Tamar into Cornwall" (Princes Worthies of Devon).

Much of the early story has had to be deduced from the numberless earthworks, forts, camps, tumuli, dolmens and other remains. Today the majority have been lost to the plough — particularly as a result of the Enclosure Acts — but enough remains to confirm the reports of earlier historians. It is believed that the Phoenicians traded in the Taw estuary for minerals from the many ancient mine workings in the area. Ptolemy mentions Hercelea (Lundy Island) and the Promontory of Hercules (Hartland Point). Townsend M. Hall, a churchwarden at Pilton from 1872 to 1892, unearthed a large deposit of worked flints at Baggy Point, where flints do not occur naturally; in various states of being worked they suggest a "Flint Factory" more familiar on the chalk lands to the

east. With the flints Mr. Hall also found parts of an Incinerary Urn of Celtic origin, described by some authorities of parts of the oldest known pottery, and a rude "Celt" or stone axe. He also dug out worked flints from the petrified forest which lies under the sea at Westward Ho! parts of which can still be seen at the lowest of Spring tides. There is a legend that once there was a city where the sea now rolls but no evidence other than the flints has ever been found.

ROBOROUGH CAMP

Evidence can still be found of the forms of religion practised by these early peoples. At Hartland stone rings and an avenue (now fallen into the sea); at Lynton, in the Valley of Rocks, stone circles and avenues; and at Pilton, below the large camp at the top of Roborough Hill, stones, some of which still stand in the grounds of Broadgate, a large house near the church. The largest of these has recently been described by an archaeologist as a good specimen of "Fertility Stone."

The Roman legions occupied England but again the Celtic tribes were left in comparative peace! Signal stations were established by the Romans, notably at Clovelly Dykes, built on the remains of a large British camp. From this station a Roman road ran eastwards to join the main network of roads in north Somerset, crossing the River Taw where Barnstaple now stands. To guard this crossing a Roman fort was built on Roborough, partly on the remains of the earlier British earthworks — parts of the square walls still stand there. Little has been found of the Romans — one or two coins and a short sword at Pilton.

With the end of the Roman occupation began a confused and turbulent period. At this time there was no Barnstaple, though Pilton was in existence standing on the only road through to the coast. Early peoples used the sides of hills and kept away from the bottom lands; where Barnstaple now stands was a marshy waste dominated by Roborough Hill and the camps and forts that had been established there. Pilton, standing on a spur of rock overlooking the ford over the River Taw and causeway over the River Yeo, controlled the only useful way to the coast at Croyde. During the incessant minor wars and raids of the Danes on the coast of Devon it is believed that the Danes settled for a time at the river junction and, as was their practice, built a typical mound as a defensive work. Round this fort houses were built, in the shadow of its protection, and there grew Barnstaple. (One speculation on the origin of the name Barnstaple is that originally it was Bearda's Staple — the place where Bearda, a Dane, planted his staff as a mark that he had taken possession of the land

there). This mound can be seen today having outlasted the later fortifications that were built round it. It is worthy of note that although Barnstaple grew fast and outstripped Pilton — becoming the “Earliest Borough” — Alfred, after the Treaty of Wedmore in 876, not trusting the Danes, built four great “Burghs” in Devon as defensive forts; these were at Exeter, Halwell, Lydford and Pilton (N.B.—Not Barnstaple).

It was during these troubled times that Christianity came to North Devon. Joseph of Arimathea, who had met Christ, “Planted the thorn” at Glastonbury, one of the earliest Christian foundations. The Celts, imaginative, emotional, quick witted and susceptible to mystical qualities were early converts and sent missionaries into other parts of England. Many journeyed into North Devon and probably the best known of these was St. Brannock. Westcote described him as the son of the King of Calabria, in the Province of Naples, landing here in the time of King Malgo, Conana’s son, in 581; Baring Gould suggested that he had voyaged from America but I think Wainwright had the true story. He thought him to have been from Wales; after converting the chief Brecon, who gave his name to Breconshire, and teaching in Pembroke-shire, he crossed from Wales and taught in North Devon establishing a number of churches. A correspondent in the local paper recently tells of Christian missionaries, Celtic Saints, who came from Wales; the family was that of Brychan (Brannock) and they made Lundy their “Holy Isle” journeying into North Devon in the 6th century. There is also a legend that St. Patrick came from North Devon, being captured by pirates when sailing in the Severn Sea. (Scotland also claims Patrick).

KING ATHELSTAN

It was King Athelstan who finally conquered North Devon and brought the area into the monarchy of England; he seems to have been pleased with this part and had a palace at Umberleigh — eight miles south of Barnstaple. He also had the defences of Barnstaple “Rebuilt,” which suggests that this was a fortified town before that. This is also suggested by the fact that Danegeld coins were minted in Barnstaple and specimens have been found on the continent minted in the time of Ethelred.

PILTON PRIORY

As well as granting a charter to Barnstaple, Athelstan founded the Benedictine Priory, to St. Mary the Virgin, at Pilton, and churches at Atherington and High Bickington. The priory at Pilton was a cell of Malmesbury Abbey and supplied at least two abbots to that foundation. The great seal of Pilton Priory is a remarkable example of this type

of work; made in 1412 to 1421 the original matrix is in the British Museum but a copy impression can be seen, on request, in the church vestry. It shows a figure of Athelstan on one side and on the other an inscription “HOC-ATHELSTANUS-AGO-QUOD-PROESENS-SIGNAT-IMAGO.” The first recorded dedication of the church at Pilton was by Bishop Bronescombe of Exeter, in 1259; today the church still stands “On the Rock,” parts of the ancient fabric now more than a thousand years old.

The first See in Devon was established by Plugmundus, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 905 a.d. under instructions from King Edward. He had built three cathedral churches, one at Wells for Somerset; another at Bodmin for Cornwall and the third at Tawton for Devon. Tawton, now Bishops Tawton, is now part of Barnstaple. The first Bishop was Westanus. In July, 1347, Theobald de Grenville (an ancestor of the famous Sir Richard) raided Tawton with a band of 500 and despoiled part of the church. The bishop ordered the Priors of Pilton and St. Margarets, Barnstaple, to proceed to the church and, at a solemn mass publish a sentence of excommunication against the offender — bells ringing, Cross erect, candles first lit and then extinguished, every priest assisting in stole and surplice. It proved effective as Grenville made due submission to the bishop and obtained absolution.

THE LEPER HOSPITAL

It was in these days that a leper hospital was founded in Pilton — St. Margaret’s — well before 1191, which continued its work for centuries; it still exists in name and the charity is still extant (“To a prior, brother and sister. 5s. a week each”, having escaped confiscation during the reformation. A number of original documents exist dealing with the Hospital, or Leper House of St. Margaret of Pilton. One of the earliest is a record of the award made by Bishop Henry Marshal, of Exeter (consecrated in 1194, died 1206), in 1199 on a dispute between the Prior and Monks of Pilton Priory and the Lepers of St. Margaret’s Hospital.

1199. “To all the faithful of Christ to whom the present writing shall come, H, by the grace of God bishop of Exeter, greeting in the Lord. Know all of you that this is the settlement made before us in the 6th year of our consecration in the octave of St. Lawrence between the church of Pilton by the consent of Ralph, then prior of the said place, and the monks there serving God, and the lepers of Pilton, all actions at law, and demands being henceforth stayed, namely that the said lepers shall pay annually to the church of Pilton on St. Margarets day two pounds of wax, and if two pounds of wax are worth more than sixpence, they shall pay sixpence instead of two pounds of wax; they shall also pay annually on Easter

Day to the said church of Pilton twelvecence, but all oblations to St. Margarets chapel shall remain for ever entirely to the lepers. Whoever shall be prior of Pilton shall demand nothing of the said lepers, either on entering the house or in the article of death, except what they offer of their own accord to the said church of Pilton although parishioners . . .” Many grants were made in benefaction to the Leper House of which the following are typical examples:—

“Know all men present and future that I, Philip Puleyne, of Barnstaple, by the admonition of divine charity with the assent and goodwill of my wife and heirs, have granted and given for the souls of my father, my mother, and my ancestors, and for the safety of my soul to the prior of St. Margarets, Pilton, and to the lepers serving God there in pure and perpetual alms sixpence from the rent of a certain garden within the north gate of Barnastopia, which Popa and Langbodi, his brother, held, that is to say, from that garden which lies between the gardens of Pidekwille and the garden of Matilda of Northgate . . .” signed and then witnessed by “Sir William of Raleigh and many others.”

1318. “Stephen le Haywurd of Pilton grants a tenement with curtilage in Pilton to John de la Wode subject to a charge of eighteen pence per year payable to the wardens of Pilton Leper House.” (Witnessed by Peter de Raleigh and others) (N.B.—A tenement was a house or cottage, the curtilage was usually a gardens and other grounds about the house).

1319. “John de la Wode grants to John Mayhon a house in Pilton subject to a rent charge of eighteen pence per year payable to the wardens of Pilton Leper House.” (Also witnessed by Peter de Raleigh).

After a number of similar bequests there is an entry in the Register of Bishop Brantyngham granting an indulgence of forty days to all sincere penitents who should contribute to the better support of the inmates of St. Margarets Hospital for Lepers at Pilton.

At the dissolution it was disposed of as an appendage of the Priory at Pilton and became part of the poor lands of the parish and was still used for its original purpose. It was held that as the nave of the parish is dated about 14th century the recess in the west wall was a leper squint; it is said that there was another in the north wall where the monument to Sir Robert Chichester now stands. It is to be doubted, however, whether there were ever any leper squints. Lepers were denied the precincts of the church and would not be allowed to approach a church to use such an opening. A more probable use was that they were apertures through which an acolyte could reach the Sanctus Bell for week-day masses and their proper name should be “Low side windows.”

THE RALEIGH FAMILY

The name of Raleigh is given above as witness to various deeds; this is the first great family to be associated with Pilton church. The reverend W. H. M. Bagley, a former incumbent of this living, in a most interesting book on the history of the church, states that the family took their name from the estate of Ralega, or Raleigh, which is mentioned in Domesday Book and is near the church. In fact the family came from North Cornwall and settled in four places in Devon; the famous Sir Walter Releigh, favourite for a while of Elizabeth the First, explorer, fighter, seaman, poet and historian and the introducer of tobacco to England, descended from the branch that settled at Hayes Barton in east Devon

The Raleighs of Raleigh, Pilton, established a chapel in the parish church. In Bishop Stapleton's Register, dated 13/1/1319-20, the entry reads: “A perpetual Chantry to be celebrated in the Parish Church of Pilton for the soul of Sir William de Raleigh, his progenitors and successors and the souls of all the faithful dead.” The chantry was removed to Raleigh House, near the church, by 1354, but the South Chancel Aisle of the Church still bears the name of Raleigh Chapel; on the Parclose screen will be found a carved letter “R” for Raleigh — the only monument to the family left in the church. In 1365 the sole heiress of the Raleighs married one John Chichester and they and their descendants held Raleigh for many years.

PILTON

It would seem that Pilton at this time, 13th, 14th and 15th centuries, was a thriving town with a mayor, fair and market. Leland, the old historian, says “Pilton stands by the making of cloth. One Stawford, a merchant of London, made the causeway and a bridge at each end of it, betwixt Bestaple Priory and Pilton. The side on the left hand of Pilton Street longid to Berstple priory. The side on the right hand for the most part to Clif Abbey. Ethelstane gave lordship of Pilton to Malmesbyrie.” Westcote, quoting Prince, gave Stowford as the builder of the causeway. He was a well known judge in London who had a house at Westdown. On a visit to Barnstaple he had to cross the ford at Pilton and there saw a woman and her small daughter caught by the tide and drowned. This affected him a great deal and he had the two bridges and linking causeway built. He is also reputed to have initiated the building of the Long Bridge over the Taw. A fair was granted by Edward III to be held at the feast of St. Martin, lasting two days; there was also a market held each Tuesday. I have found no record of the names of Pilton's mayors except that a deed of Edward's time, dated 1375, was witnessed by one Walter Peke, Mayor Elect of Pilton.

Gribble, well-known local historian, in his notes on the origin of the corporation of Barnstaple, writes:—"1477. In this years account, there is a charge of vld. paid for wine to the burgesses of Pilton to 'Hear the new charter read'." In a footnote Gribble says he is at a loss to know what is meant by the Burgesses of Pilton though a charter was granted that year. I would suggest that there is ample evidence to show that Pilton, a separate town at that time, had its burgesses, mayor, fair and market. Several notes of interest occur: "Paid 1d. for carrying planks from Pilton to the Butchers' Market, and vld. for mending trestles and 11d. for repairing stalls before the feast of St. Michael"; and others which give a picture of the work-a-day life and values of the time.

A RECLUSE'S CELL.

Chanter records that within living memory (about 1800) a small chamber existed at the east end of the church, about 14 feet by 11 feet which communicated with the chancel by what is now the vestry door. This chamber was for many years occupied by a recluse; adjoining it was the chapel of St. Agnes. From Bishop Grandison's Register we learn that he licensed a female penitent to retire 4th November 1329 and 24 May 1332, "In quodam cubilico olim erecto at capelle sancte agnetis in cemeterio eccle Parochialis de Pilton"—"In a certain chamber once built near the chapel of St. Agnes in the burial ground adjoining the Parish Church of Pilton".

In 1435 there was much dissension between William Worcester, then prior at Pilton and Hugh Lyton, prior of St. Mary Magdalene, Barnstaple, regarding the limits of their respective parishes. Bishop Lacy, who loved peace, mediated and examined some 16 of the oldest parishioners, relying on their memory to place the boundary truly. As a result, Bishop Lacy finally found in favour of Pilton and established and confirmed the ancient boundaries (October, 1535) in his generosity presenting ten marks to each of the Pories to keep them in good humour with each other. This seems to have been successful. In 1490 the then prior of St. Mary Magdalene died and in the itemised accounts of the expenses of his funeral is "140. Item. Mure wee have payede toe the pryoye of Pyltone, and to the munckes there to pray for his sole. yse vld" (The sum of £5).

From Bishop Stapledon's Register—1311—the Lord Bishop admonished Sir William, Prior of Pilton, under pain of excommunication, sent in writing to him personally, that he should not retire from office of Prior without obtaining licence or consent of the Lord Bishop.

The list of priors, given at the end of this book, has some 23 names and covers a period of 327 years from John to Henry VIII; unfortunately this leaves some 250 years before John with no record.

With the Dissolution Pilton was one of the first religious houses to be annexed, in 1536, and its land confiscated. These holdings had been accumulated over the centuries and comprised a wide range of interests from great pre-Norman lordships to small manors. The actual properties held by Pilton in some part is virtually impossible to establish now and in any case would take too great a part of this text. Henry VIII had the properties valued and sold or let them. One or two examples of the rentals of individual properties in Pilton might prove of interest.

From 3 small cottages held by William Yeard in Ratton Row — 2/-.

Land or close known as Bromehyll, held by Thomasine Taylor, widow — 8/6.

Clodyfen and Bolhyll, held by Thomasine Byrt—18/6d.

There was some profiteering: Rolle and Adams bought many of the properties offered and re-sold the majority at a handsome gain; 7 tenements bought by them for £23 10s. 0d. were sold to John Zelly for £56. These were in Pilton and occupied by Norris, Goord, Rise, Holms and Zelly himself.

The right of Presentation to the Incumbency of Pilton was also sold and passed through several hands until it came into the possession of the former churchwarden of Pilton, Townsend M. Hall, who, in 1891, gave it up to the Dean and Chapter of Exeter, who then became Patrons of the Living.

THE CHURCH TOWER

The tower is the oldest part of the church; and the vestry, which is the ground floor of the tower, seems the only part of the church that is as the original builders left it. The priory buildings are thought to have lain to the north of the tower. The church of the priory consisting of the present North Aisle, the tower and an extension eastward of the tower where the High Altar stood. A deed of 1279 mentions that the tower was repaired and rebuilt then, which suggests that it must have been erected much earlier. The tower suffered later, during the Civil Wars; over the South Porch is a tablet with the following inscription: "The Tower of this Parish being by force of Arms pul'd down in ye late unhappy Civil Wars Anno Dom. 1646, was rebuilt 1696. Wm. Downe, Esq. Christopher Lethbridge, Gent. John Avery. John Rogers. Wm. Lanfdon. George Lee. Churchwardens: Robert Nutting. Master Builder."

Many think that the tower was battered down by gunfire as the Roundheads under Fairfax occupied the great fort that had been built at the top of Bear Street and the church tower was a most conspicuous landmark at a range of 1,500 yards. Gribble, in particular, holding the view that the Parliamentarians battered it in sheer wantonness. Hussell disagrees (and

I agree with him), saying that the walls of the tower were too solid, being over five feet thick, to have suffered unduly from shot fired at that range using the cannon of the day. Further, some damage must have been caused to the fabric of the church proper under such a bombardment but no trace can be found of such damage. (Some bullets and cannon balls were found embedded in the doors and fronts of Alms houses much lower in Pilton Street.) A letter exists from Sir Allen Apsley, who defended the town on behalf of the king, to Sir Edward Hyde, dated 20th December, 1644, in which he writes "... but that I am forced to pull down the steeple . . ." and this to prevent his enemies using the steeple as an elevated platform for their guns.

THE PLAGUE

At this time tragedy of another sort struck, and struck hard. In 1646 four brothers, sons of Joseph and Agnes Ley, who lived at Pill, were fishing on the banks of the Taw. They drew in a bundle of clothing, rags and bedding belonging to some sailor. This was infected with the plague, which they caught and from which they died. In an effort to prevent it spreading the bodies were taken over the river and buried at high water mark; over them seven elm trees were planted as a memorial and the place has ever since been known as the Seven Brethren Bank. This precaution proved ineffectual and the plague took hold. Richard Wood, vicar of Fremington, records that he left his house because of the plague and that in Pilton alone 269 died of the plague; a dreadful toll of a small town. There are many notes of the time which mention precautions taken to keep the plague from the town—usually in the form of watchmen who were to stop any suspicious person entering. Many of these notes are in the personal journal of Philip Wyot, appointed Town Clerk to Barnstaple in 1558. One or two excerpts should be of interest as showing something of the day-to-day events of that time.

FROM THE JOURNAL OF THE TOWN CLERK OF BARNSTAPLE

7.10.1586. Thomas Hinson and Lewis Darke, gentlemen, were elected and chosen for burgesses of this town for the parliament next coming

"On St. Lukes day this year there was a trental of sermons at Pylton, so that divers as well men as women rode and went thither, they called it an exercise or Holy Faste and there was some offered as they did when they went on pilgrimage" (I am not certain what a "Trental of Sermons" is.)

1588. 5 ships went over the bar to join Sir F.D. at Plymouth."

"Two hundred trayned soldiers of Braunton and Fremington Hds (Hundreds) viewed in the castle green by Mr. H. Fortescue, their captain."

"Much afraid of a Spanish invasion."

"North Peere (called Maiden Arches) of the great bridge built of wood taken down and rebuilt in three weeks on an arch cost xxvi pounds."

"The gibbet was sat up on the castle green and xviii prisoners hanged, whereof iiij of Plymouth for murder."

1591. The last of June the weif of Ambrose Wilkey, of Pilton, tanner, leapt over Barnstaple bridge, was seen by William Davy, who swam to her, the tide being half out, and saved her, and delivered her to her husband."

"The same day report came that Her Majesty's ship at sea, Richard Grenville capt: was taken by the Spaniards after encountering the whole Spanish fleet for two days."

"Because of the long drieth this yere people from Hartland came to Rayleigh and Brodeford Mills with Grists." (N.B. a journey of some 25 miles each way, Raleigh and Bradford being in Pilton.)

"Clemente Burton dyed—sometime secretaire to Sir John Chechester Kt.—accounted a wise man—buried in the juyled at Pilton."

1569—16th June—Ann Kemyns, Nich^s. Gays daughter and one Davy were all carted about the town for their filthy and lascivious behaviour and the next day being friday they sat all three at the high cross in the stocks."

"This yere at the request of Sir Robert Bassett, one Sharland, a musician was retained by Mr. maior and his brethren, to go about the town about iiiv o'clock in the morning with his waites, and is promised viijj¹ began on All Saints day and to continue until Candlemas."

"Order in town that the maister and other of the common council sh^d hang out candles and lanterns at their doors in dark nights in the wynter till ix o'clock."

Mr. Richard Smyth, the hired preacher of this town and Jo Smyth, preacher of Pylton, were inhibited to preach in this dioces by reason they would not wear the surplice." This Jo Smyth was the first incumbent of Pilton Parish Church. In the following year Wynot notes that Mr. Smyth was then permitted to preach but does not indicate which Smyth.

INDUSTRIES

A lace factory was established in Raleigh in the latter part of the 19th century. One of the founders was from Derby. A disastrous fire destroyed their building and the factory was rebuilt on the other side of the Yeo. That district is still known as Derby.

Also at Raleigh (where there was water power) a carpentry and cabinet works was established by Shapland and Petters. Mr. Shapland had had experience in America and

equipped this workshop with what was then the most up-to-date machinery. This factory was also destroyed by fire. The new one was built across the Taw and the name "Raleigh Works" is still retained.

Fellmongering is often mentioned, and there were several small tanneries in the parish. There are references to boat-building on Pilton Quay.

Today Dent's have one of their glove factories just below the church and there are three modern factories on the Braunton Road.

THE CHURCH

The old craftsmen and master builders of earlier times had many beliefs and superstitions, particularly those responsible for the creation of the fabric of a church. The head of Christ was believed to have inclined to the north when He lay on the cross—so many churches are so sloped; nave piers were often slanted to the North and South to give an appearance, in part, of the hull of a ship (The Ark); another very general idea was that if the lines of a church building were "Widderskins" then the devil would find it hard to penetrate, being confused. Pilton church must be well guarded indeed as no two lines run true and nothing is straight and nothing upright. The whole of the pulpit and pillars on the south side are leaning and the chancel roof is out of line with the arch. The screen leans to the right and the nave and chancel are by no means straight.

As mentioned earlier the tower and North Aisle are the oldest parts of the fabric, of Early English period (Henry III). Evidence implies that the tower was originally outside the church itself, entry being made through the pointed arch, then the tower and then on into the priory. The groining and acute pointing of the arch here are acclaimed by Hussell as "Very valuable relics and rare for this part of Devon." The tower is now part of the church itself and the ground floor is the vestry. At one time this was vaulted and the pillars can still be seen with their caps and bases, standing some 8ft. 8in. one in each corner. Just above the belfry floor the interior of the tower is octagonal, carried on squint arches, and continuing thus until it reaches the bottom of the bell windows, when it becomes square. It seems that the original tower was similar in type to those at Barnstaple and Braunton churches with octagonal broached spire, but when the spire was demolished during the Civil Wars it was rebuilt in its present form. A note in the parish registers says that when the tower was rebuilt the parishioners immediately began to provide bells. In 1845 the parapet was taken down and battlements substituted, a large turret erected in the north east corner for the clock bell and in 1850 the three smaller turrets. The Harding family of Upcott paid for these and a

few years later they joined with the families of Inledon, Whyte and Marshall to pay for four new perpendicular windows. A small quotation from an old account book:—"1696, paid at Mary Bowdens when the agreemt was made for building up the tower £2/5/6d." Bowdens was a beer house.

The clock is unusual in that it has no face. It was made by Richard Webber in 1718.

THE BELLS

The bells are accounted the finest in North Devon and several eminent writers claim they form the finest peal in the South West after Exeter Cathedral. It is thought that some of the old bells were sent into Cornwall to be cast into guns during the Civil Wars, but some must have remained as there is a note "5/- was paid for ringing, when King James was proclaimed" and later the same year 4/- at his coronation. In 1712 six new bells were cast; from the Parish register:—

"The six bells of Pilton were cast by Mr. Abraham Rudhall, bell-founder in the county of Gloucester, in the year of our Lord 1712" together with details of their weights and sizes. In 1853 numbers two and four, having been cracked for some years, were recast, together with the old treble which was not in tune with the others. Two new bells were added, at the expense of Robert Chichester, Esq.; of Hall. The following are the inscriptions on the bells:—

Tenor:—A. R. Philip Rogers, gent., Stephen Berry, gent., 1712. Churchwardens.

7th:—Peace and good neighbourhood Abraham Rudhall, Bellfounder, 1712.

6th (old 4th recast):—Our principal benefactor the Rev. Wm. C. Hall. Incumbent of Pilton 1853. John Taylor & Son, Loughborough, late of Buckland Brewer, Bell Founder. (N.B., Buckland Brewer lies nearby).

6th:—Abraham Rudhall 1712. Prosperity to our benefactors.

4th (old 2nd recast):—This bell was cast by John Taylor & Son. Who the best prize for church bells won. In the Great Ex-hi-bi-ti-on of 1-8-5 and 1. Loughborough 1853.

3rd:—(old 1st recast):—R. Chichester, Esq: of Hall, caused me the 4th and 6th to be recast and made us to be 8. M. W. Mathews, Esq Mr. T. Baily Churchwardens. John Taylor & Sons, Loughborough.

2nd:—This present peal augmented to 8 by the addition of us two in 1853. John Taylor and Sons, Founders, Loughborough.

1st:—Robert Chichester, Esq., of Hall, caused me to be made out of goodwill to the Borough of Barnstaple.

The tower is 77 feet to the battlements and the bell turret rises another 15 feet; the bells can be heard from a distance. Hamilton Rogers in his "Memorials of The West" becomes poetic in his description of "The musical throb of its matchless tone".

The cloisters of the old priory were along the north wall of present north aisle and the three-light, square-headed windows now in this wall were originally in the cloisters. On the north wall of the tower are some very old projecting stones—the original weathering stones over the roof of the priory building at this spot; as they are of considerable height the buildings must have been extensive.

NAVE AND CHANCEL

The present nave and chancel are of Early English Decorated Period—about 1330 (Edward II/III), the arcading of the north aisle is equilateral arches, piers and arches left quite plain, a style common to Devon churches of that period. The chancel roof, too, is an old decorated one; open timbers left plain without ribs or carving. The south aisles of the nave and chancel seem to be of 16th century work, the arches being of a depressed form, the mouldings and carvings coarse in detail, probably late Tudor. The roof of the north aisle bears the date 1639 and, with the exception of the chancel, the remaining roofs are similar; it would seem they were re-roofed at that time. The South Porch is contemporary with the south aisle and has a late Tudor two-light window in the east wall and a well proportioned and moulded inner archway in freestone, with grotesquely carved figures as stops to the label mould.

THE FONT COVER

The font cover is worthy of particular note. Of oak, it is of charming outline and detail. In an article in the *British Architect* (28 March, 1902) Henry Hems of Exeter says ". . . by far and away the most beautiful cover in line and detail in this fair country . . . I remember long ago, it was in 1886, going on a special pilgrimage there in company with the late Sir Gilbert Scott, R.A., to see it, and that eminent authority unhesitatingly dubbed it the best sample, of any date, in the West Country, although not the most curious, and certainly the chastest in conception and the cleverest carved". A little flowery, after the style of the time, but a very fine tribute. Made about 1580 (Elizabethan), judging from the mixture of Gothic and Italian detail, the main and diagonal ribs are spiral, bordered with cresting, with bosses at the intercessions. The pediments over the hood are much cruder and seem to be of a later date. The panels are of much better work and finer carving which is detached from the backing. The two lowest panels are "Linen" patterned, which is very rare in Devon.

THE PULPIT

The pulpit is of stone and roughly the same date as the font. It bears a Tudor rose carving above the pedestal. An unusual and curious feature is the iron hand and arm holding an hour-glass. There is a record that in 1616 one Garrett, a joiner, was paid 18 pence for a new case for an hour glass. There is also a note than in 1648 eighteenpence was paid for a Half-Hour glass, which would seem sufficient comment on the sermons then preached. "Surely a change was even then beginning to manifest itself when the length of a discourse must be curtailed by one half. Had the people already itching ears or were the preacher dry?"

THE SCREENS

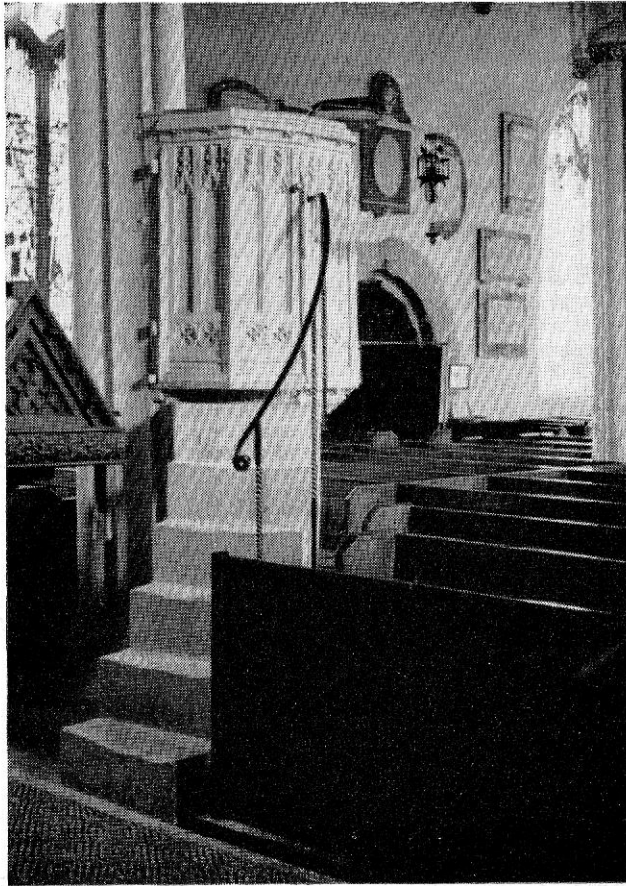
The old oak screen, a very fine one in parts, is 40 feet 10 inches long and twelve feet six inches high. At one time it held a rood loft; with the removal of these lofts in the 16th century the screen was left, for some time, with the upper part in a ruined condition. Later it was built up again with a queer mixture of old pieces of traceried panelling, vignette cornice and cresting of ogee shaped crocketing pieces. It is in ten bays with the usual four reticulated divisions to each bay. At one time this screen, in common with other parts of the church, was painted in bright colours; the Puritans, as would be expected, painted over the whole with white and later an oak stain was painted over that.

The Parclose screen is a most excellent example and has been more carefully preserved. It is 12 feet long and 10 feet 2 inches high and stands in what is known as the Raleigh Chapel—where the Chantry used to be. The Reverend W. H. M. Bagley suggests that at one time it was part of the confessional, and later the alms and bread, once distributed from the church, were issued from this screen.

Across the full width of the chancel is the altar rail, Elizabethan in character with the top forming a book-rest; it is another fine piece of work.

THE MONUMENTS

There are many monuments, stones and tablets in the church but space does not permit mention of more than one or two. The oldest memorial is a stone beneath the monument to Sir John Chichester; it is to the memory of Richard Chechester, who died in 1492. In the chancel aisle, embedded in the stone of George Hume, are two small brasses, next oldest memorials in the church, to Robert Bret and Alexander Bret, in 1534 and 1540. The supposition is that Robert Byrt, chief seneschal or steward of the priory at the time of dissolution, was Robert Bret (names were notoriously mis-spelt) who received a pension of £2/13/4d. a year



The Pulpit

“ In Perpetuum ” (for ever). He owned a number of houses locally—Upcott, Pilland, Cladovin and Bull Hill House (probably today the oldest house in Pilton) which he left to Welton, Bishop of Exeter, excepting a rent issuing out of Bull House, which he left to the trustees of the charities. This 12/6d. a year is still received by them.

The monument to Sir John Chichester and his wife (1569 and 1566) is a superb example of Elizabethan Renaissance work. In Beer stone, with panelled strapwork, fluted and reeded pillars with carved caps, pediment and numerous coats of arms—some of which are hidden behind. Another Chichester, Sir Robert, has a large monument standing against the north wall. In the classic style it has large figures to represent him, his two wives, a grown daughter and two smaller children, a boy and girl. Sir Robert is said to have died after a fall from his horse on Pilton Bridge. One of the spurs of the figure is of stone, the other is a real spur.

In the south aisle is a most elaborate monument, to Christopher Lethbridge, designed and built under his own supervision. The body is in the shape of a large turtle, on whose back is the latin inscription; at the foot a death's head and crossed bones; at the top his coat of arms, the arms of the Bouchier family, into which he married, quartered and at the head the coat of arms of the Lethbridge family. He lived at Westaway near the church, and left 10/- a year to the churchwardens; 5/- to keep his monument in repair, and 5/- to keep the roof over it in repair. He gave the church a handsome silver-gilt chalice and a paten of the same material.

Other tablets of interest exist — two to members of the Inledon family, noted lawyers, churchwardens and benefactors to the church. Robert Inledon built Pilton House, today an old people's home. Another is to the Rogers, members of which family were churchwardens from 1674 till after 1779, more than a hundred years.

In the vestry is an old pitch pipe, used for over 150 years to start the music. Before there was an organ singing was led by a band, and often the congregation sang unaccompanied. In 1843 a barrel organ was purchased. It did not prove too successful, but it performed for some 55 years until replaced by the present organ in 1898. It is now in East Buckland church.

A tablet in the boundary wall of the churchyard, on the south side, reads “ This piece of ground alienated from the church by Henry VIII was purchased by the Parish A.D. 1867 ” and at this time the present arch and room above it were built by the Feoffees of the Charities. The churchyard had been left very open after the Dissolution and many complaints were made of people trespassing and walking over the graves. In 1897 Mr. Townsend Hall bought land to the west of the church and had the tannery which stood there

taken down, building in its place a substantial gate with mortuary and sexton's tool house. Near this is Ladywell (Our Lady's Well) which probably was formerly in the precincts of the priory; it now lies outside the church yard.

In conclusion I feel I cannot do better than quote once again from words written by the Reverend W. H. M. Bagley:—

“We can see how those who have worshipped in this church, or on this spot, for nearly a thousand years, have planned and built; how they beautified and embellished and loved the House of God. We know that they have left us a goodly heritage, a church wherein we may worship the same God and Saviour whom they worshipped; a church whose very stones cry out and tell us of the love of God, of the hope of Eternity, which stirred and encouraged their hearts during their short day, often full of trial and sorrow, here on earth. Of many of them it could be said, and it may be said again in this generation, “Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house and the Place wherein Thine honour dwelleth.”



PRIORS OF PILTON

| | |
|------|------------------------------|
| 1200 | Ralph |
| 1261 | Adam de Betesleghe |
| 1282 | Richard de Iweleghe |
| 1283 | John de Stanleghe |
| 1311 | William Wrockesh ale |
| 1316 | Henry de Peckyngehull |
| 1336 | John de Lockynham |
| 1349 | Simon de Aveneye |
| 1362 | Thomas Brockenborwe |
| 1397 | John |
| 1398 | William Charleton |
| 1412 | Richard Kengeswood |
| 1421 | Thomas Evesham |
| 1434 | William Worcester |
| 1446 | John Andover |
| 1457 | Robert Upton |
| 1472 | Thomas Oldstone |
| ? | William Kyngswood |
| 1502 | John Bewmont |
| 1513 | William Adday |
| 1517 | Simon Rumsey |
| 1527 | John Rosse |
| | Last prior; Dissolution 1536 |

INCUMBENTS OF PILTON

| | |
|------|-----------------------------------|
| 1600 | Joseph Smyth |
| 1605 | Morgan Davies |
| 1613 | Francis Shaxton |
| 1614 | Nicholas Shuckstone |
| 1616 | Roger Bowcher |
| 1651 | Joseph Evers |
| 1681 | James Elimestone |
| 1695 | John Harder |
| 1715 | Christopher Lantrow |
| 1726 | John Whitlock, B.A. |
| 1767 | John Spurway, B.A. |
| 1772 | William Spurway, M.A. |
| 1837 | William Craddock Hall, M.A. |
| 1843 | Richard Haynes, B.D. |
| 1850 | William Craddock Hall, M.A. |
| 1889 | William Ewer Ryan, M.A. |
| 1892 | William Henry Morris Bagley, M.A. |
| 1928 | John Harrison |
| 1946 | Lewis Heber Dukessel |
| 1953 | Reginald John Hearne |
| 1956 | James West, B.A., B.D. |

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