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Notes on Mediaeval Dursley

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NOTES ON MEDIÆVAL DURSLEY.

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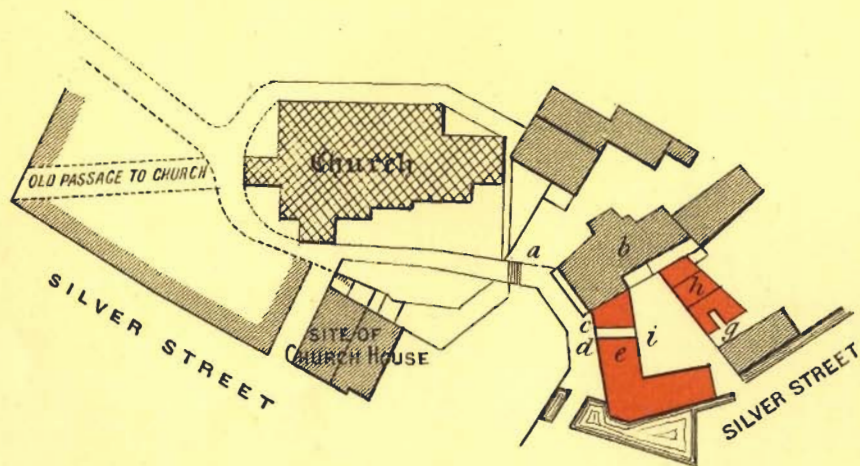
THE history of Dursley is still buried in a good deal of obscurity, and the following notes are written to clear up somewhat the history of two of its buildings. These are the Broadwell House, by the springs, and the Church House.

I. THE BROADWELL HOUSE.

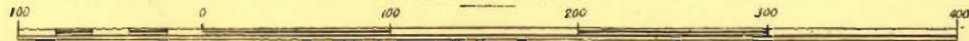
Several deeds have been found in the church chest relating to the sale, lease, &c., of one part of this house. The earliest deed is dated Sept. 28th, 1610, by which Richard Hale, of Badminton, Gloucester, yeoman, son and heir of Robert Hale, sells the tenement and garden, commonly called Saint Mary's House, to Tobyas Cadle, of Dursley, for £32. The later deeds have no particular interest, but they go on from 1610 to 1805. In them all the title "St. Mary's House" is dropped. It must be remembered that these deeds only deal with a part of the house, for we learn from the Charity Commissioners' Report of 1827 that one Hugh Smith in 1637 left part of the Broadwell House, *i.e.* three tenements, to the parish, the rents thereof to be spent by the churchwardens on the poor. This property having fallen into decay, it was let to Charles Vizard, who, in 1821, erected on the site a substantial building. Thus part of the Religious Building has returned to the benefit of the parish. Smythe, 1639, says: "heere (in Dursley) also is a place which to this day is called the Nunnery." He does not say exactly where, but, probably, he means the Broadwell House, for there is no other building in Dursley at all likely to have been a nunnery. We know the site of the old almshouses, the church house and the chantry buildings. Annexed is a plan of the houses near the Broadwell, now called Bowers' Court.

At (*a*) *Plate II.* are the steps leading up to the church; (*b*) is a modern schoolmaster's house, but I have been told by an old man

SITE OF ECCLESIASTICAL BUILDINGS,
DURSLEY.



— Scale of Feet —



that the old house which stood there had windows of the same style as those in the wall of (*e*); (*c*) is the modern entry, or covered way; (*d*) the ancient entry into the court, now bricked up. Old people have told me that, originally, there were two cottages where (*c*) now is, and that their doors opened into (*d*), the ancient entrance, or covered way. Might not these have been once the doorkeeper's lodge and (*d*) the doorway into the building; (*i*) is the well inside the court, which seems unnecessary unless the occupants of St. Mary's House were cut off from the world, for the Broadwell was close by; (*e*) is the oldest part of the building now standing, mentioned in the deeds of 1610, &c., and now the Broadwell Tavern; (*f*) is an entrance to Silver Street; (*g*) an alley to a back part of the court where there is also a covered passage; (*h*) is the site of the cottages bequeathed by Hugh Smith to the parish.

It will strike anyone that the houses are built round a court, and it is very likely that all the present houses in Bowers' Court are built on the site of the ancient religious building.

I will now give a short description of (*e*), as it now is, adding a few reminiscences from old people of the town. Passing through the entrance (*c*), and on the other side of (*i*), we come to a modern doorway into the building. The first room is simply a place for lumber; it had, originally, a story above it, and I have been told that there were four stone pillars running from east to west to support the story above. In the corners, and on the walls, I have been also told that there once were figures of angels' heads. Both above and below there are small fireplaces. Passing through the narrow passage (marked in the plan), which also had a fireplace, we come to two low rooms, perhaps cellars, with old oak beams, and above them were two stories, now quite unsafe. In one of these an old woman has told me that she remembers there was once a figure of the Virgin and her child, and just beneath it a stone ledge with two holes in it, each hole being, as she described it, of the size of the circle of a wine-glass. She is strongly of the opinion that this was a receptacle for water. Could this have been an unusual form of a holy water stoup, and the room itself the oratory of the building?

II. THE CHURCH HOUSE.

This building stood in Silver Street, a little west of the Broadwell House about opposite the south porch of the church. It was a substantial building, and had over its doorway a figure of the donor. According to the description of an old man who lived in it many years, the date of the building was in the oval on either side of the figure. From deeds in Mr. Vizard's possession it appears that a charter of the 10th year of Hen. VII. made Richard Yate and Thomas Whitbyford feofees of the Church House. Bigland, 1786, says that tradition reports it to have been the gift of Thomas Tanner. Now in Fuller's "Worthies" a Thome Tanner de Dursleye (Dursley) appears among the names of gentry returned by the Commissioners in 1432, 12th Henry VI. for the better preservation of the Peace. Tanner, therefore, may have given the building to the parish. In 1535 other trustees were appointed. In 1580 trustees were appointed to hold the Church House for the sole benefit of the parishioners of Dursley, yielding 12 pence in silver to the Lord of the Fee, the Tolcestres, called Tolle-ale, and Church ale being also reserved. In 1654 the Pack (Porch Acre) is mentioned with the Church House, the rent of the acre is to go to the repair of the house and the residue to the repair of the church. However, from the Churchwardens' accounts from 1566 to 1840 the rent of the house and acre did not go solely to the repair of the church, but was applied to the general purposes of a church-rate. The Charity Commissioners' Report of 1827 is not quite accurate with regard to the Church House. Up to 1779 it appears from the Churchwardens' book that the Overseers of the parish paid £4 a year for the building. On October 27th, 1779, at a vestry meeting, it was decided to use the building for a workhouse. In 1836 the greater part of it was pulled down, the present broad pathway to the south porch made, and besides two new houses in Silver Street built on its site. However, part of the back of the building still exists. It is a great pity that the name of the donor and the date are lost, the latter, at all events, must have been well known fifty years ago. We must hope that it may yet be traced.