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Notes on Eastleach Martin and Eastleach Turville

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NOTES ON THE PARISHES AND CHURCHES OF EASTLEACH MARTIN AND EASTLEACH TURVILLE.

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ON the edge of a spur of the Cotswold Hills lie the twin villages of Eastleach Martin, or Burthorpe, and Eastleach Turville. The former, a collection of scattered houses and cottages, finding a home for most of its people in the little hamlet of Fyfield; the latter, as described in the Society's programme, a picturesque village. Perhaps in all Gloucestershire there is scarcely a less known spot—a spot which should attract the artist and lover of the beautiful in Nature, and at the same time furnish matter of interest to a learned Society. What I am endeavouring to put before you should be called a few notes on the Parishes of Eastleach Martin and Turville, rather than Eastleach Martin and its connection with the Priory of Great Malvern.

According to Fosbrooke, both parishes take date from about the same period, between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. According to Domesday, Drogo Fitzpons held the Manor of Eastleach Martin, being one of five brothers of that name who came over with the Conqueror. Of these brothers, Richard Fitzpons, or son of Puncius, was a great benefactor to the parish. In the latter part of the eleventh or beginning of the twelfth century the Church was built, the founder being the said Richard, and the deed of gift on his part of the Church of Lech to the Priory of Malvern is attested by his two brothers, Simon and Osborn, among others. The original of this deed may be seen in the British Museum. In a small volume entitled *The Church and Monastery of Moches Malvern*, by Mr. Jas. Nott, will be found a photographic representation of the original deed, together with a translation. The deed sets forth that

Richard, son of Puncius, for the good of his own soul, of that of his wife Mathildis, and the souls of other members of his family, gave the Church of Lech with five virgates of land, free and quit and absolved from all service, and with the whole tithing of his demesne and of the court of the same vill, and with all things appertaining to the said Church of Lech: to God, and to St. Mary, and to St. Michael of Malvern, and to the monks there serving God: and further grants to the aforesaid monks and to their clerks for the service of their Church of Lech full common of the whole of his vill and land.

Taken in connection with this, the Charter of the Dedication of the Church granted by Simon, Bishop of Worcester, shows again the influence of Malvern in the parish. To this charter is affixed the seal of Thomas, Prior of Malvern, thought by Mr. Nott to be perhaps that of Thomas de Wick, who was Prior in 1217: this date, however, seems too late, as Simon was consecrated Bishop of Worcester in 1125. The Prior Thomas in question may possibly have succeeded Walcher in that office in 1135. This date would of course coincide with the period of Bishop Simon's episcopate. Since Gilbert Foliot, Abbot of Gloucester, appears one of the witnesses, we know that the dedication must have taken place between June 11th, 1139, the date of his benediction as Abbot, and September 5th, 1148, when he was consecrated to the See of Hereford. As Bishop of London, he became one of the chief opponents of St. Thomas of Canterbury. The seal is a pointed oval in a niche under an early form of canopy, the Virgin seated holding the Infant Saviour, between St. Michael the Archangel on the right, and a Saint on the left. Now the Priory Church of Great Malvern is dedicated to St. Mary and St. Michael, and until Mr. Nott's book came into my hands it was supposed that the dedication of the Church of Eastleach Martin was also to St. Mary: such has been the title always used, and appearing in the Ordnance Survey Map; it will be altered in the new issue of the map, as the facts of the

case were brought before the officers engaged in surveying the district last year. There must have been some reason for the dedication being assigned to the Blessed Virgin: possibly at some early date the niche in the eastern gable of the chancel may have been filled with a group similar to that on the Malvern Seal, representing St. Mary, SS. Michael and Martin; and from the prominence of the central figure, the dedication may have been assigned to St. Mary—or perhaps the transept was dedicated to her, and the old names of the church gradually dropped out. The following extract refers to that portion of the charter dealing with the dedication of the Church at Eastleach Martin: “To all the sons of Holy Mother Church, Simon by the grace of God, Bishop of Worcester, greeting. By the anxious care of the office which has been committed to us we are bound to corroborate with the diligence of Episcopal authority those things which are delivered to Churches and divine places by the gift of the faithful, in order that they may obtain firm stability. Therefore let the whole body of those who now exist, and posterity which is about to succeed in future times, know that in the dedication of the Church of St. Michael and of the Blessed Martin of East Lech, which was celebrated by our ministration at God’s disposition and by the petition of our beloved children R——, the Prior and the brethren of Malvern . . . Therefore to the end that it may stand settled for ever and unassailed we fortify with the impression of our seal the text of this present document and commend it to public knowledge. These being witnesses: Gilbert, Abbot of Gloucester, Richard, Archdeacon of Gloucester, Patrick and Ralph, Monks of Gloucester, Ernisius and Hugh, Monks of Malvern, &c.”¹

The dedication, therefore, took place on the petition of the Prior and Monks of Malvern. The Abbot of Gloucester granted land in Fifhida. He also confirmed with the gift of the land the privileges accorded in the parish by Richard the son of Puncius. The Monks of Malvern also gave a

¹ British Museum, L.F.C. xviii. 2, A.D. 1139—1149.

hide of land which they held in Sudthrop (Southrop), with all the liberties and customs which they themselves held in the vill of Eastleach. The charter also notes the offering, on the part of the parishioners, of the parochial things which are due to a church. In 1144 Walter de Clifford, a descendant of Drogo Fitzpons, exchanged this manor with the Monks of Gloucester, and up till quite recently it was the property of the Dean and Chapter of Gloucester. In the minister's accounts (Great Malvern) for the years 1541—1543 there appear amongst other names,—Estleche Merton *alias* Brondruppe, Coteland, the latter being apparently the same as Prior's Cotes, the name still remaining in Cote Mill and Farm.

Tradition assigns to Cote Farm the site of a religious house; and beneath the road from Southrop to Eastleach was a large stone vault, traditionally called the Monk's Cellar (the slope is now called Cellar Hill), which was filled up, and an entry to that effect made in the *Parish Register*, 1748, October: "This month also was buried a large, strong, stone-built vault under an hill in this parish called Cruel Hill; and this memorial of it is made to the intent posterity may not be imposed upon." Some very good specimens of flint arrowheads have been found in the parish, and may be seen at Fyfield Manor.

The Church of SS. Michael and Martin consists of nave, chancel, north transept, with a low western tower, and south porch. The doorway and shafts and capitals of the chancel arch are Norman, the arch itself being of much later date; transept, fourteenth century. The windows in the church being of various dates. There are the remains of a bell cote on the chancel arch. In the nave, some ancient oak seats very roughly worked. In the churchyard, the ruins of the churchyard cross.

Separated from the Church of SS. Michael and Martin by the river Leach and the roadway, stands the sister Church of St. Andrew, Eastleach Turville, an interesting building. The south doorway is Norman. In the centre of

the tympanum, a representation of our Lord seated with the hand raised, on either side an angel adoring; the decoration above is zigzag.

The Church shows evidence of having been at some time a larger building, there being three arches on the north side of the nave and one on the north side of the chancel; of these, all except that opening into the north transept have been filled in. The original windows have disappeared, but there are two two-light windows, apparently of the Decorated period, in the cellar of Fyfield Manor, which are supposed to have been removed thither from this Church at some time. The chancel is of Early English work, and the three-light lancet window in the east end is very beautiful. It is to be hoped that the Society will give some information concerning this window. Mr. Prior, who accompanied the Society, pronounces it to be a very fine specimen of Early English architecture. There is a canopied tomb in the north transept, with floriated cross on the lid of the stone coffin; the ornamentation of this has been much damaged, and the shafts of the chancel arch have suffered much from being cut to accommodate the pews. The tower is saddleback. In the churchyard is the base only of the churchyard cross. The De Lacys held the manor for some time after the Conquest, and in the reign of King John, Almain, Earl of Gloucester, gave land here to the monks of Bruerne, near Chipping Norton.

Land was granted in the reign of Edward III. to Osbern d'Alitor, then parson, to enlarge his manse. The vicarage house has entirely disappeared, though it remained in the form of cottages until quite recently, some of the oak work being of considerable age. The parish of Eastleach Turville seems to have been joined with Eastleach Martin under the name of Long Turville when the abbeyes of Gloucester and Bruerne divided the parish.

The Blomer family bought the manor in Queen Elizabeth's time. The name Blomer yet remains in Blomer's Mead, a meadow on the bank of the Thames at Lechlade, which

is still a portion of the Eastleach estate. Through this family, by intermarriage, the manor passed on through the Webbs to the Ponsonbys. Both parishes were at times served by John Keble, whose signature appears often in the Register: and whether rightly or not, his beautiful Evening Hymn is claimed to have been composed in the Rectory garden of Eastleach Martin. He lived at Southrop from 1823, when he permanently left Oxford, until October, 1825, when he settled at Hursley as Curate. Among his pupils or visitors at Southrop during this period were Robert Wilberforce, Isaac Williams, and Hurrell Froude.

If by these few imperfect notes some members of the Society are encouraged to spend a short time in the viewing of our churches, the object of this paper will be accomplished, which is to create some interest in parishes so unusually situated as to have two ancient churches within one hundred yards of each other. The information with regard to Eastleach Martin and Great Malvern is entirely taken from Mr. Nott's book on *Great Malvern*.
