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## The Story of Marlin Chapel

Half-way between Berkhamsted and Hawridge, in the corner of a lonely field, stands the ruined chapel of St. Mary Magdalene, better known as Marlin Chapel.

Lacking knowledge of its history, imaginative folk have raised it to the status of a monastery. A pond in the middle of the field becomes the monks' fishpool. The ancient fieldpath which links Berkhamsted with Hawridge and runs beside the chapel is known as a pilgrims' way. And because every ruined building has a slightly sinister appearance, Marlin Chapel is said to be haunted.

### SEVEN HUNDRED YEARS OLD

But there never was a monastery in this remote corner of the parish of Northchurch. The ruins we see today are undoubtedly those of the domestic chapel of the lord of the manor of Marlin, Marlen, Merlin, Maudlin or Maudeleyns, to give some of the ancient spellings derived from the name Magdalene. No less interesting than the ruined chapel is the centuries-old moat which encloses Marlin Chapel Farm, the modern successor of the ancient manor house.

Today Marlin Chapel is in a sorry state. At the east end an enormous ash tree soars high above the ivy-clad masonry, and holly and nettles grow in the nave.

If the site were cleared of vegetation, if we could see the four corners from one viewpoint, we would need no figures to prove that Marlin Chapel was a building of generous proportions. Nearly 60-ft. long and about 19-ft. wide, it was only slightly smaller than the ancient nave of St. Mary's, Northchurch, the parent church of the parish.

### ISOLATED COMMUNITY

Was Marlin Chapel adorned by a tower? We do not know. We cannot even date the building, but it was almost certainly standing in the second half of the 13th century, and it may be as old as St. Peter's, Berkhamsted (1222). From a deed of late 13th century date we find that Sir Hugh de Broc, lord of the manor, augmented the endowment of his chapel of Magdalene, and Sir Richard de Berchamsted was the chaplain.

Sir Hugh and his family, servants and neighbours were spared a long

tramp along muddy footpaths to either of the two parish churches in the Bulbourne valley, two miles away, or an equally long walk to Hawridge Church, across the Buckinghamshire border. It is surprising that this isolated community, with its own place of worship, did not develop into a village.

The walls of flint rubble and worked Totternhoe stone, nearly 3-ft. thick, have been crumbling for generations. At the east end the two corners rise to a height of nearly 12-ft., but the wall below the east window has vanished. At the west end the walls are higher, with buttresses at each corner. We find a few tiles among the masonry, and in one corner a 6-in. square hole, lined with worked stones, is well preserved. The long north wall has completely disappeared, but on the south side we find the 4-ft. high remains of a buttress.

A deep excavation in the middle of the chapel excites curiosity. Does it indicate the existence of a crypt? To the best of my knowledge archaeologists have never examined the site, though many years ago a large, ancient key was found within the walls. It is preserved at Berkhamsted School. No churchyard or burial ground can be traced.

### THE MANOR OF MAUDELEYNs

According to the *Victoria History of Hertfordshire*, the manor of Maudeleyns was held of the manor of Berkhamsted by the service of a twentieth part of a knight's fee. Our earliest information is that it was in the possession of Sir Lawrence de Broc (father of Sir Hugh) at the end of the reign of Henry III.

The history of the manor is not of great interest. Maudeleyns descended through various owners until the 17th century and was then "dismembered and sold in small parcels to divers men, who now pay rent and perform their services for the same at every Court held for the Honour and Manor of Berkhamsted." (Chauncy, 1700).

In later years, if not in early times, the manor was small, containing but 110 acres of land in 1616. Among the lands belonging to the manor were a croft called Marlynge, worth 6s. 8d. per annum, and two meadows called Chapelcrofts, also worth 6s. 8d. Clutterbuck (1815) included "a close called Marlins containing eight acres" in a list

of properties belonging to Berkhamsted School, and Cobb (1855) stated: "In Dean Incent's rental book, rent for certain property is paid to the 'Lord of Magdalene,' 7s. 2d. per year altered to 5s. 4d."

Salmon (1728) wrote: "There has been a chapel at Maudelyn's, which now is a malthouse, dedicated probably to St. Mary of that name, whence the estate might be denominated." A writer of some sixty years ago said he thought that several holes in the walls may have been made for the joists of a floor when the chapel was turned into a malthouse.

Cobb, finding no mention of Marlin in the King's books, said he did not think he would be wrong in regarding it not as a religious foundation but as an ancient residence with a domestic chapel attached. It had often been regarded as a ruined chapel of ease to Northchurch, a supposition which may have arisen from the fact that Chauncy (1700) said there were formerly many chapels of ease in Northchurch parish, which in his time were demolished or converted into barns.

Cobb quoted those words over 100 years ago, when the chapel was already "going fast to decay." The moat round the house, he added, indicated "the importance of the place in former time."

This moat, 190-ft. square, aroused the interest of "W.F.A.," who contributed the following to a county newspaper some 60 years ago:

"Marlin's Farm, adjoining the field in which are the ruins of the old chapel, comprises a dwelling-house built in 1897, in front of which are the farm

buildings. The whole of the premises are surrounded by a moat, of which the greater portion is dry, and alongside it, in the front, was built the old house, which was partly pulled down in 1896.

"A view taken of it some years ago shows it to have been timber and plaster, built and covered with tiles, very plainly constructed, one portion considerably overhanging, with high pitched roof and a gateway under to the farmyard. Some of the farm buildings adjoined the house. In the back portion of the old house there is an old wall and fireplace, with a recess about 12-in. square at the side of brick, with angular stone top and stone bottom, resembling an ambry [a niche in the wall of ancient churches near the altar in which the sacred utensils were deposited]. There are also some old stones inscribed roughly 1712, 1748, etc., and the bricks and woodwork of the old house have been re-used.

"On one side of the farmyard alongside the moat are the remains of a building of flint, with walls about 2-ft. thick, which might have been the malthouse mentioned by Salmon. On one side the wall is about 23-ft. long, and an end wall 14-ft. long, of irregular height from 4-ft. to 6-ft.; the ends are broken, and the building appears to have formerly extended considerably further than at present.

"It appears to be tolerably clear that the manor house originally stood on the site of the farm buildings, and was a place of some importance to be surrounded on all sides by a moat."

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