

CONSTABLE OF THE CASTLE

By 'BEORCHAM'

IT IS AN interesting thought that some of the young men who helped to build Berkhamsted Castle were probably among the veteran craftsmen who, aided perhaps by their sons and grandsons, built the oldest part of St. Peter's Church, the chancel.

The earliest stonework of the castle dates from about 1155; the earliest part of the church, now the Lady Chapel, dates from about 1200. In the intervening period, less than half a century, much was learnt about the use of flint and stone for building great castles and churches. It seems that the builders made a much better job of the church, which looks as if it will endure for ever, than of the castle, which was often out of repair. When only half the age of the church, it was abandoned.

The castle, in fact, was uninhabited and used as a quarry before the final addition was made to the church. I have a hunch that the flints which raised the tower to new heights in Henry VIII's reign were taken from the castle. Another interesting point is that the tower was finished just in time for the sexton to survey, from new, high battlements, the erection of Berkhamsted's first large brick building, Dean Incent's school.

LINKS WITH ROYALTY

If I seem to be going all round the aisles and moats and getting nowhere, it is because I like to consider one historic building in relation to another—a particularly useful exercise when dealing with an early period when there were only two important buildings in the town. As the castle has so much history but so little to show, I am thankful that in our church we have a few memorials to people who played minor if not major roles in the history of the castle.

Whatever the Royal Family thought of the little thatched cottages which lined the street to the castle, we can be

sure that they were impressed by the bold site and great size of St. Peter's Church. We can also be sure that they were familiar with the interior as well as the exterior of the church. Though they had their own chapels and their own chaplain at the castle, there must have been special occasions when kings, queens and great magnates attended church with their soldiers and servants and townsfolk and their many visitors; perhaps it was for such special occasions that a small town was given such an astonishingly large church.

Of the many famous people who stayed at the castle for long or short periods, it seems that few died here. We look in vain for church monuments and memorials to truly great personages. There are memorials to two of the Black Prince's henchmen, but none to the great soldier who loved our castle and did not leave it until he was near death. His great tomb, almost as famous as the man himself, is in Canterbury Cathedral. We also have a memorial to Robert Incent, secretary to the last tenant of the castle, but Cicely, Duchess of York, who died here, has no monument in 'the parishe church of Much Barkhamstead,' to which she gave a blue cope.

LOST MEMORIALS

How many memorials, ancient and modern, have been destroyed or stolen, we do not know. In 1820, at the time of the Wyatt restoration, the churchwardens and overseers were seen 'tearing down from the walls the memorials of the past.' In the course of laying new floors, many grave slabs, some of exceptional local interest, were removed, and lost for ever. Then there was the shocking affair of 1784, when Ann Brockwell, the sexton's daughter, disgraced herself and cost her father his job by stealing brass from some church monuments.

To historians and antiquarians few

sins are less pardonable than the loss of an inscription. Not to know the name of a doughty knight or a charming lady is to start researchers hunting for clues that will probably never supply a completely acceptable answer. We have a famous example in St. Peter's Church, near the vestry door. The guide book, playing for safety, describes it as 'the richly arcaded tomb of a 14th century knight and his lady, believed to be Richard and Margaret Torrington. The knight is in armour, and his lady wears a netted headdress.'

LATEST RESEARCH

Though lacking the rich reds and blues and gold of early times, this is still a fascinating altar tomb, by far the best in the church. But oh, the uncertainty there has been about the identity of the knight and his lady! Many writers, some rather half-heartedly, have associated the tomb with the Torringtons, of whom we know very little indeed. Certainly there are Torrington shields on the side, but the knight himself bears the arms of Incent on his jupon; other shields bear the Burghersh family crest.

The Torrington association could have arisen at a time when the tomb stood near the large brass to Richard and Margaret Torrington, now mounted on an oak panel in the gallery. Our Victorian rector and historian, Cobb, in a footnote, quoted Cussan's view that the altar tomb is in memory of an Incent who married a Torrington.

Our latest researcher, Col. Alan Wilson, stated at a meeting over a year ago that the so-called Torrington tomb was almost certainly that of Henry de Berkhamsted, adding that evidence also pointed to the fact that through one of his daughters Henry was the ancestor of Dean Incent and probably the source of the Incent family fortunes.

THE PRINCE'S MARSHAL

Here, then, we have a very interesting link with the castle—not with one of its great lords, but with a brave soldier and trusted servant. Henry of Berkhamsted started his career as butler to Sir Bartholomew de Burghersh, the Black Prince's tutor. In 1346, on returning from the Crécy campaign, Henry was promoted to the prince's staff at Berkhamsted and became porter at the castle, receiving 'a robe yearly of the livery of the prince's craftsmen' and twopence a day, an ordinary labourer's wage.

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In 1356 Henry was appointed constable of Berkhamsted castle, with a wage of 4d. a day, and in the following year he received from the Black Prince many grants of property in the district 'for good service rendered by him in Gascony and especially at the battle of Poitiers.' It was in the Poitiers campaign that Henry distinguished himself by saving the Black Prince's baggage. In 1366, when the Mayor of Southampton was ordered to provide ships to convey him to Gascony, Henry was described as 'Marshal of the Prince of Wales.'

CASTLE AND SCHOOL

Next time we see the tomb (it is worth a special visit and very close inspection) we must forget what we have heard about the Torringtons and think of the Henry who bore the name Berkhamsted. He died in 1398, having outlived by 13 years another of the Black Prince's henchmen, John Raven, who is represented as a knight in armour on a brass in the outer south aisle. This brass is on the plain stone pillar, and above it is a brass inscription to Robert Incent, who died in 1509. On the reverse side of the pillar, Robert's wife Katherine is represented in a shroud, with inscription.

It is fitting that the Incents (descendants of Henry of Berkhamsted) should be in this part of the church; for three centuries it was known as St. John's Chantry and used by the masters and boys of the school that was founded by John Incent, son of Robert and Katherine. The chantry was separated from the south aisle by a screen which adjoined the fine octagonal 14th century oak column, one of the most interesting features of the church.