

St Margaret is shown in heraldry wearing a crown and holding a double-crossed staff, and is usually treading the dragon under her feet.

With St Catharine of Alexandria she appeared to Joan of Arc and advised her in her undertakings.

VICARS OF STRATTON ST MARGARET

The first mention of anyone in Holy orders having charge 'of the cure of souls' in Stratton St Margaret, is that Robert de Merton was Rector in the early fourteenth century. He gave his rectorial rights to his college at Oxford, who appointed the first vicar in 1308. Merton eventually became Bishop of Rochester.

There appears to be a hiatus in the Diocesan Registers for various periods and it has not been found possible to date some incumbents. At the time of compilation of this list (October 1949) it seems that the name of the 6th vicar is unobtainable.

- 1308 Reginald de Altaworth (Altaworth is the early
14th century name for Highworth)
- 1317 Thomas de Ocham
- 1338 Laurentius
(said to be a native of Stratton St Margaret)
- 1353 William Agge
- 1361 Thomas de Foxton
— [6th vicar unknown]
- 1429 Robert Berkesdale
- 1450 John Bemptbowe
— William Sampson
- 1467 Nicholaus Perysson
— Sampson Aleyn
- 1488 Gilbert Lancaster
- 1498 Richard Haliday
- 1507 Roger Typton
- 1545 Edmund Cooles
- 1555 Gulielmus Meyer
— William Fowler
- 1625 Samuel Fowler

- 1633 Walter Attwood
- 1634 Christopher Jole (who was ejected at the time
of the Commonwealth and a certain Weekes, a
Secular Registrar, was appointed. Christopher
Jole came back at the Restoration, and is bur-
ied in Stratton churchyard)
- 1671 Godfrey Jenkinson
- 1680 Nathaniel Massey
- 1703 Gulielmus Palmer (appointed by Queen Anne)
- 1733 Joshua Harrison
- 1737 Henry Godwin
- 1742 Wallinger Goodinge
- 1787 James Hare
- 1808 John Salter
- 1833 Charles Nesfield
- 1864 Humphrey Chesshire
- 1879 Septimus Crawhall
- 1895 Alexander N. Scott
- 1898 Cecil Foster Burgess
- 1912 Sydney Denton
- 1926 Eric Vivian Rees
- 1933 Charles Louis Malaher
- 1935 Charles Donald Reynolds Sharpe
- 1941 Eric Santer
- 1948 George Richard Fooks

'ENDUE THY MINISTERS WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS...'

When the Rev. G. R. Fooks was instituted as Vicar of Stratton St Margaret in February 1948, he became the 39th vicar. It is 640 years since the first vicar was instituted and records exist of the names of all the vicars except the 6th, who was instituted between 1361 and 1429. Each vicar has been presented to the living by the Warden and Scholars of Merton College, Oxford, with the exception of Gulielmus Palmer, presented by Queen Anne because Merton College had not exercised their right in the appointed time.

Wallinger Goodinge, 1741, seems to have remained in office the longest with a vicariate of 46 years. Eight vicars have stayed for more than twenty years, of whom three exceeded thirty years. The shortest tenure was two years. Three vicars died in office before the early seventeenth century, when William Hedges left a fund for the widows of Stratton's vicars. Since then five have died in office, but none seem to have left a widow to benefit from the charity.

On two occasions vicars have exchanged Stratton for another parish; the last time being when William Sampson exchanged with Nicholaus Perysson, of Chippenham. The 3rd vicar of Stratton, Laurentius, who was instituted in 1338, is said to have been a native of the village. The first vicar was a native of Highworth. William Agge was the vicar who saw Stratton through the period of the Black Death; William Sampson probably prayed for those engaged in the Wars of the Roses; Roger Typton cared for the parish during the many changes made by Henry VIII; Edmund Cooles must have used the Prayer Books introduced by Edward VI and Archbishop Cranmer; William Fowler saw the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth's reign; Christopher Jole was vicar through the troubled period of history known as the 'Glorious Revolution'; and James Hare was the last vicar to farm glebe-land.

Perhaps the most interesting man was Christopher Jole, who was appointed in 1634, deprived of the living by Parliament in 1650, came back in 1662 at the Restoration of Charles II, and remained till his death in 1671. His tombstone here in Stratton contains interesting verse '... Search here beneath this stone, and you shall find the relique of a Christ cross-bearing mind, a pattern, to all Christians left behind. Poor, pious, blind yet patient; harried with troubles still content ...'

STRATTON 'WORTHIES'

A quick glance at our church records shows us many interesting people who were connected with the village of Stratton.

Robert de Merton, the founder of Merton College, Oxford, and later Bishop of Rochester, had 'the cure of souls' of Stratton in the thirteenth century.

In 1305, Adam of Stratton lost his lands by an attainder act of Henry III, and in 1338 another native of Stratton, one Laurentius, was appointed vicar.

At the time of the Commonwealth, a certain Weekes boasted that he was neither priest nor layman, but both—he was the Registrar appointed by Oliver Cromwell to record births, deaths, and marriages when the vicar had been turned out.

William Barrett gave the church the old almshouses near the 'Jacob's Ladder' inn and some land near Churchway, the income to form a small fund by which the churchwardens might keep the church fabric in repair.

William Hedges left monies for the benefit of vicars' widows, but few vicars have left a widow. Of the Hedges (or de Lacey) family of Kingsdown, one Robert was a President of the East India Company in 1814. A grandson, another Robert Hedges, was made governor of the old castle of Borris-in-Ossory, Ireland, as protector of the Protestants in that district. After many skirmishes he was killed whilst hunting.

In 1725 John Herring gave lands to provide an income to educate six poor children, and to assist four poor widows at Christmas.

Nearer our own time, Frederick Day, a native of the village, became a priest and missionary and was killed in the Boxer Rising in China in 1912.

The heritage of our parish is something for us to treasure, and then to pass on to the generations to come.

STRATTON'S GROWTH

Although England was divided into parishes much earlier than Norman times, there are no reliable extant records until the *Domesday Book* which was compiled in 1086. At that time Stratton consisted of all the land that now forms the parishes of Stratton St Margaret, Upper Stratton, and St Barnabas (Gorse Hill). The population was about forty! The manor of Stratton was at that time in the possession of Nigel, the physician of William the Conqueror. The parish remained in its original outline until as late as 1891, when the Gorse Hill part of Stratton became part of Swindon. In 1932, the parish was divided into

the two ecclesiastical parishes of Stratton St Margaret and Stratton St Philip, but still remains one civic parish. The present ecclesiastical parish is bounded by no less than eight other parishes, one in the neighbouring diocese of Salisbury.

(The parish in the Salisbury diocese is, of course, Chiseldon, which adjoins Stratton St Margaret at Stratton Nythe.)

What happened to the population? Although no records exist, it must have grown by 1280, when our present parish church was built, and there were enough people by 1447 to warrant King Henry VI granting a Charter for a Fair.

(This fair evolved into Stratton Feast, the Sunday nearest St Margaret's Day, which, reckoned by the Old Calendar then in use, would be the Sunday nearest 2nd August.)

The Church Registers indicate a constantly growing population all through Stuart and Hanoverian times. According to an old gazetteer, in 1800 the total number of inhabitants was 745, which meant that Stratton's population was smaller than that of Wanborough, which at that time boasted 903! According to the population census of 1801, however, the number of inhabitants in Stratton St Margaret (including Upper Stratton) was only 580. With the rapid industrialization of the Swindon area, by 1871 there were 2527 in Stratton. The figures have increased between the wars, and although there are no official figures for the present time, the population of Stratton St Margaret must be quite large—about eight thousand.

Strangely enough, the development of the village has been lop-sided; the church is situated right on the edge of the built-up area, and there is on two sides of the church only one farm between it and the next parish boundary.

(One of these farms has now been demolished to make room for the aerodrome and demolition of the other has begun.)

'WHAT'S IN A NAME?'

Have you ever thought about the wealth of old names that still exist in Stratton?

The name of the village itself—Stratton (derived from the Latin *strata* [a paved way] and the old Norse *ton* signifying a place surrounded by a hedge or fortified)—probably dates from

Roman times. In the Domesday survey of 1086, it is spelt Stratone; in some ancient documents preserved in France (dated 1150) it is recorded as Strattuna; whilst the Assise Roll for 1253 tells us of Straton. The affix St Margaret does not appear until about 1294, at a time when churches were being dedicated to St Margaret of Antioch, whose story was being told to Crusaders. It was also around this date that Margaret, the French Queen of Edward I, held Stratton in her dowry. In order that there shall be no mistake the documents say 'Straton See Margarete, *juxton Altam Swyndon*' [in close proximity to high Swindon]. Various other documents speak of Overe Stratton, Nether Stratton, Stratton Superior, these being the two familiar villages Upper and Lower Stratton; Upper Stratton because it stands on the higher ground.

Of districts, the place we know as Dockle was known in 1278 as the 'home of Henry de Dochull' [the hill where the dock grows]. Pen Hill is quoted as early as 1093 as 'aettam penn' [the hill with a sheep pen or farm upon it]. The Breach is recorded as the Esturbreache in 1261 and means new land taken into cultivation. Kingsdown speaks for itself, and the King held the manor in 1227.

Field names, too, have survived—The Moors, on the Highworth side of the village derives from Mora (1277) meaning marshland. Slade Keys on the Oxford Road, now wrongly quoted Slade Hayes, is mentioned in 1277 and indicates 'a shallow valley or depression.' The Cossicles, near South Marston (1261), is the old 'cotsetla' [land of the cottagers]. Harnells in Oxford Road (the old name of the road until about 1910) comes from Harnhull (1278) meaning 'hareshill or boundary hill'.

A field near Kingsdown cross-roads, called 'Old Berries,' is a corruption of Olebury (1412) meaning 'old camp or earthworks'. Long Gore (14th century) on the Wanborough side of the village signifies, as it still is, a triangular piece of ground.

The fact that we once had a Priory in Stratton (standing opposite the Vicarage) which was confiscated by Henry VI, is remembered by Priory Lodge, a modern house, and by the old name of Church Farm, shown on a map of 1887 as Priory Farm. Pigeon House Lane tells us of the great pigeon lofts which originally belonged to the Manor House, and in fact the old

medieval pigeon house still stands there against Pigeon House Farm. Hyde Road is so named because Ann Hyde, wife of James II, once stayed near there at the old nunnery of Blunsdon. Churchway was a raised and paved pathway to bring biers to the church from the tithings of The Green and Upper Stratton (the Cowleas pathway).

Brewery Farm reminds us of the Star Brewery which once existed in Lower Stratton Green, and Wharf Farm of the days when the old canal was not merely a name. Pond Farm is a grim reminder to old parishioners of the frequent winter floods which used to stretch from the old Tilly's Pond across the Ermin Street.

Of inns, most of the names tell their own story. The 'Plough Inn' was until the end of the last century known by the much more quaint name of 'Speed the Plough Inn'. The 'Jacob's Ladder' is the only inn so named in the whole of England.

The well-known landmark known as the 'Willow,' although it is really a lime tree, is the site of an old willow tree. The parish council planted the lime tree after a vain effort to get a fresh willow tree to grow.

'OUR SHELTER IN THE TIME OF STORM'

It was pointed out at the Annual Parochial Meeting (1947) that we should soon have to face the problem of extensive repairs to our church roof. Even the roof of the parish church has its own history. Originally when built in the late thirteenth century, the nave roof was of the same height as the north and south aisles. They were all lead covered, as were most church roofs at that time. There is a medieval lead foundry still working in Lincoln Cathedral. Our nave roof was made higher when the clerestory was added in the sixteenth century to give extra light to the centre of the church and is now the only part leaded, the other roofs are all stone tiled.

The south aisle was re-roofed in 1846 at cost of £170 10s. 9½d., whilst the sum of £90 18s. 7d. was spent in re-roofing the north aisle in December 1840, but in those days the lead from the north aisle alone was sold for £73! At some earlier period than these re-roofings, the church had already lost its



'The Street' and 'Willow' in 1896, showing the old original willow tree



An unusual view of the church from the north-east



A modern view of the church from the south-west

gable copings and whatever parapets it possessed. The wooden rafters of the south aisle were renewed in 1892 after the weather had almost ruined the woodwork.

The belfry roof and the roof of the chancel are dated late eighteenth century and the choir vestry 1896, but a smaller chancel existed before those dates. The repair charges for the chancel roof are payable by Merton College, Oxford, who have been Rectors of the parish of Stratton St Margaret since c. 1300. There exists no evidence of any provision for bells in the original church, but as two of the bells are older than the tower, it is not improbable that a bell-cote stood over the east wall of the nave, and has disappeared with the other external features.

The south porch, over which was originally a small room and of which the newel stairway remains, carries its original oak roof timbers, although built as an addition to the church as early as the 14th century.

Commonplace things like church roofs can be interesting.

'THE GOOD OLD DAYS?'

In these austere days, with ever rising prices, a peep into our church records recalls the 'good old days' that our grandparents remembered in their youth. We must, however, remember that wages too were low, the normal worker received less than a pound a week, and even those employed on the important task of teaching in the schools got precious little for their labours as the following extract shows:

1884, Paid Mr Povey for teaching, three-quarters of a year, 1*l.* 5*s.* 0*d.*; Paid Miss Barnes for quarter of a year, 8*s.* 4*d.*; Paid Mr Bisley for one year, 16*s.* 8*d.*

This was the old Church School adjoining the church, near the tower (now churchyard) and was presumably for part-time teaching. Other items:

1831, Beer for bellringers [frequent items under this heading], 1*s.*; 1849 Paid for 1½ cwt. of coal, 7*d.*; 1848, Carriage of new pulpit from Bath, 2*s.*; 1852, New door to pulpit, 6*d.*; 1875, Harmonium, 8*s.*; 1875, New window in Church [probably the middle window in the north aisle] 1*l.* 7*s.* 0*d.*

As late as 1891 a Sunday School teachers and choir outing,

‘AND OUR MOUTH SHALL SHOW
FORTH THY PRAISE’

Did our forefathers praise God with singing in the church which originally stood on the site of our present parish church? Probably the officiating priest would sing Gregorian plainsong, as he would be a monk from the great abbey at Malmesbury, for although Stratton was then in the Diocese of Ramsbury, the pastoral care was probably in the hands of Malmesbury's mitred abbot, and it was as early as 675 that Aldhelm had made the first organ and taught music at Malmesbury. In 1075 the village became part of Old Sarum Diocese and later (in 1194) of New Sarum (Salisbury). St Osmund, Bishop of Salisbury (and nephew of William the Conqueror) compiled a manual and missal, after the Use of Sarum, which would have been used at Stratton, and it was from these books that the greater part of our Prayer Book was translated in the sixteenth century. Whether our vicars, the first appointed in 1308, were musical, we do not know.

Congregational singing came with the Reformation and the Protestant Reformers who recognized its importance. At Stratton we might even have heard Merbecke's plainsong settings, written around this time. Singing and music were discountenanced by the Puritans—in 1643 choirs and organs were prohibited. Stratton would come under this ruling, since our vicar, Christopher Jole, was turned out by the Puritans at the time of the Commonwealth and a Secular Registrar appointed to keep our registers. When Christopher Jole came back in 1660 at the Restoration, it is fairly safe to surmise that music came back to Stratton church.

By 1830 Stratton possessed a church orchestra. They had a gallery or raised box pew at the back of the church, near the then new tower. The records show such items as: ‘Paid for bass viol strings, 3s.; Reeds for clarinet, 1s. 6d.’ The Clerk led the singing and his massive desk stood just outside the chancel where the present lectern stands (the marks are still visible on the stone floor), but was later removed and the panels thereof converted into the belfry screen.

In 1856 the church boasted a seraphim (a kind of harmonium) for which the churchwardens paid 2s. 6d. for tuning and 25s. for repairing. It was then claimed by a Mr Day, but the vicar, the

Rev. Charles Nesfield has annotated the records to show that Mr Day had only lent the seraphim to the church. By 1875 a harmonium was in use, the player receiving the salary of £1 for four Sundays.

In 1892 comes the first mention of a pipe organ; the Parish Magazine advertises practice on a two-manual organ, 20 stops, 2½ octaves of pedals, couplers—all for 8d. an hour, including blower! The organ then stood in the south aisle near the present war memorial, but was badly damaged by rain until the south aisle roof was repaired. In 1896 the organ was transferred to its present position when the vestry was added to the church. It was rebuilt and extra pipes and stops added in 1924.

HIGHWAYS AND BYEWAYS

Stratton derives its name from the fact that it stands upon the old Roman road, the Ermin Street, which runs from Gloucester to Newbury. This is our oldest highway, and was known until a hundred or so years ago as the Fosse Road.

The only turnpike road to run through Lower Stratton was that which entered Stratton at the old Turnpike House in Oxford Road and then followed the present Swindon Road and Highworth Road. Before the railway track and The Green bridge were built, the road from Swindon joined with the Stratton end of Gipsy Lane, and the district now known as ‘The Green’ is shown on old maps as ‘Stratton Marsh’.

The Oxford Road, with its present teeming traffic, is quoted in 1795 as ‘part of an ancient bridle-track leading from Shrivenham to Rodbourne Cheney’! This led from Shrivenham to The Green bridge, where it followed Gipsy Lane and the Green Lane to Upper Stratton and then on to Rodbourne Cheney. The Green Lane is an ancient one and was originally called Marsh Lane.

The Churchpath and the raised Cowleas footpath are old *churchways*, which enabled parishioners in the outlying districts to get to church. The small lanes in Stratton Green—those opposite the Baptist Church, Tilly's Lane, and the present West End road—were originally the boundary paths of the real ancient Stratton village green. Other ancient lanes are the present Ryall Lane,

and Nythe Road, originally an ancient lane known as Long Gore Lane. If this old lane is followed to Nythe Farm, near the Fox Covert is an old grass lane, all that remains of the old Park Lane.

Until 1795, Stratton had few enclosed fields—the agriculture was carried on in large open fields where each land-owner possessed a number of strips of land. In addition there were common pasture-lands (in the north-west of the village), meadow-lands by the streams, and other large open spaces. The question of footpaths would rarely arise—unless they crossed cultivated land; the great open spaces belonged to the village. Most tracks did, however, lead to or from such important places as the parish church or the village pump. When the open spaces of Stratton were fenced in by Act of Parliament in 1795, a certain amount of protection was given to footpaths which crossed hitherto unenclosed land. Thus we still have a four-feet right-of-way from the church to South Marston, another across the old Cleys Field to the old Long Gore Lane, from the end of West End Road to Upper Stratton, and from the Highworth Road to Kingsdown. The building of the canal lost us at least one footpath, the building of the railway lost us another; others are in dispute—precious rights we must protect and hand on to others.

(Since this article was written, due to the expansion of the aerodrome the footpath from Ermin Street to the Highworth Road has been shortened, whilst one to South Marston has been closed altogether. Another pathway to South Marston will be established, partly along the old disputed right-of-way and then by a new route to emerge somewhere near the railway bridge at South Marston.)