



A history of the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Rickmansworth

The church of St Mary the Virgin, Rickmansworth, is of medieval foundation but, except for the tower, the early building was rebuilt (1825-26); in turn, this was pulled down but retaining the aisle walls with their Gothic Revival windows and rebuilt in its present form (1889-90) to the design of Sir Arthur Blomfield FRIBA. So the only direct links remaining with earlier times are the tower and some of the memorials.

The tower, dated 1630, is of red brick inside, faced externally with knapped flints with stone dressings. The windows are contemporary except for the west window which replaced an old wooden one in 1933. The lead-covered spirelet is a typical Hertfordshire 'spike' and is probably as old as the tower. On the north face is the chiming clock, installed in 1904 in place of an earlier click. At St Mary's, Winkfield, Berkshire, the tower, dated one year earlier (1629) is almost identical in character – especially the buttresses – although of red brick entirely.

On entering the church through the north porch, a small window depicts St Christopher, patron saint of travellers, which was given in 1946 in thanksgiving for the ending of the 1939-45 war.

Just inside the north aisle is the library and mission display, added in 1970 as a memorial to Frank Bradbury, for many years a churchwarden and headmaster of the church primary school, and his wife, Winifred. The units were designed by Graham D Martin MSIAD.

The fine octagonal, carved stone font, which replaced a hexagonal 17th Century font, was given in memory of Lt Alfred Northey, son of a previous vicar, who was killed in action of 12th October 1914. The oak cover, designed by Sir Charles Nicholson FRIBA, was presented by Rev H Shepherd in 1945.

On the north and south aisle walls may be seen the Stations of the Cross, made by Sisters of

the Church and given anonymously following the ending of the 1939-45 war.

The good carved stone pulpit was installed during the 1889-90 rebuilding, the gift of Mr R W Henderson of Basing House (now the Council Offices). The oak choir stalls are also of that period and were given in memory of a former vicar, Rev A H Barker. The then Vicar, Rev A E Northey, presented the oak lectern which came from Penshurst Church, Kent. A carved oak chancel screen, erected in the early 1920s was taken down and put into store in 1977.

In 1951 the present pipe organ was installed by Messrs John Compton and is a memorial to those of the parish who served in the 1939-45 war. The earlier organ had been bought, reputedly, from the practice room of St Paul's Cathedral by the Hon Victoria Grosvenor.

The High Altar setting, dating from the early 1950s, replaced the Caen stone reredos, provided at the rebuilding. Above is a very fine five-light stained glass east window, made by Morris & Company, partly based on designs by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, and erected in 1896 in memory of Robert, 1st Baron Ebury, and Charlotte Arbuthnot, his wife, by their family. The symbols of the four Evangelists are especially good.

To the left of the High Altar is the most notable monument, in the form of a simple tomb chest of stone, with a black slate inscription panel, carved white marble coats-of-arms with animal supporters to each end and a black marble top.

Until 1803 it stood in the centre of the chancel but was then dismantled, the top slab being used as the High Altar top until the early years of this century when the tomb was restored. It commemorated the Rt Hon Henry Cary, Baron of Lepington and 2nd Earl of Monmouth who died in 1661 in possession of the Manor of the Moore (Moor Park). Of his ten children, eight were daughters: Philadelphia, Trevaniana,

A history of the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Rickmansworth

Theophila and Magdaline were buried here; the others were Anne, Elizabeth, Mary and Martha.

Also buried here were Henry Cary's father, Robert, the 1st Earl (d 1639) and his wife, Elizabeth; also James Lord Clanoboy and Lady Jane Hamilton, his sister, the children of Lady Anne Cary. Henry's two sons are recorded thus:

Lionell ye eldest (never married) was slaine
Ano Dni 1644 at Marston Moore fight in
his Maties Servise & Henry who dyed of ye
small Pox Ano Dni 1649 & lyes interred at
ye Savoye.

On the east wall of the north choir aisle is another monument of distinction in white marble. This was erected by John Fotherley, probably between 1691 and 1702, in memory of his father, Sir Thomas Fotherley (d 1649), who was a Privy Counsellor to Prince Charles, later Charles II; a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber to Charles I and Commissioner for estates in Londonderry. Sir Thomas purchased the lordship of the Manor of Rickmansworth in 1632. John's brother, also Thomas, and his son, another Sir Thomas, are also commemorated.

The monument was made by William Wood the Elder (c 1654-1731), a notable sculptor of the period. Sir Thomas' parents, Thomas and Tabitha, are simply recorded on a plain stone wall table set behind the archway to the rear of the Lady Altar.

Another simple and poignant memorial is to be found on the north aisle wall and reads:

John Robert Cunningham
Born May 7 1810
And died the next day

Compell'd to rest her flagging winds,
The unwilling lark is downward driven;
She does but touch the Earth and spring
On high to liberty and Heaven.

So our poor babe a lingering birth
Shewed him this world of sin and pain
For one short day he touched the Earth
And mounted to his God again.

There are several more wall plaques of the 18th and 19th Centuries of interest in the aisles and tower and many headstones, body stones and chest tombs of note in the churchyard.

Only one brass memorial has survived and this is now mounted on the south aisle wall. There are three figures: Thomas Day, died 10th July 1613, in the centre; Alice, his first wife, died 10th July 1585, on the left; and Joane, his second wife, died 6th August 1598, on the right. It would seem that the latter is a replacement, being recorded as missing in 1825, and that the others have been partly recut. The inscription adds:

The times here see you may
These three no doubt had faith in Christ
Their sines for to forgive
And they can tell that knew them well
Ye Poore they did releive.

In the north aisle is the Lady Chapel, moved westward from the choir aisle and refurnished in 1958. The Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the wall aumbry to the left of the altar. In the south aisle is the Requiem Chapel, added in 1959, for regular remembrance of the faithful departed.

The curtained oak screen provided a dignified entrance to the vestries. Both chapels were designed by Felix Lander FRIBA. In the Requiem Chapel is a Book of Remembrance, in memory of Frank Mullet, given in 1977 and housed in an oak wall case given in memory of Grace Wallington, and designed by Graham D Martin MSIAD.

The church plate is now comprised of modern silverware, the older items, dating between 1574 and 1692, having been sold at Christies in 1972 in order to establish a maintenance fund for the church building.

The registers of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials date from 1653 and these, together with other parish records, are deposited with the Diocesan Record Office at the County Record Office, Hertford.

A history of the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Rickmansworth

History

Rickmansworth has long been an inhabited area, probably for several thousand years before Christ's coming. It would have seen the ebb and flow of wandering or invading peoples and, under the Roman occupation, the bringing of the Gospel, albeit secretly because of the persecution of Christians.

This led to Alban's martyrdom in 209 AD (or traditionally, 301-305). His legacy has been a major influence on Rickmansworth's subsequent development through the monastic control of St Alban's Abbey. Today, the focus for the parish church of Rickmansworth is the cathedral of St Alban as the diocesan centre and seat of the bishop.

From an early date, there was a veneration of Alban, with pilgrimage to the site of his execution and the setting up of a monastic church there before 400 AD. This was greatly developed when, reputedly, Offa, King of Mercia (757-796), made a pilgrimage to Rome. There he made his kingdom subject to tribute (called Peter-pence) and procured the canonisation of Alban.

On his return he founded a Benedictine abbey and convent at Verlamacaester (St Alban's) in 793. The endowments included five manors within 'Pynesfeld' of which Rickmansworth was one. So, at the time of the Domesday survey (1086), the abbot is recorded as holding 'Prichemareworth'. Later spellings varied considerably but generally approximated to Rickmer(e)sworth until changed to the present form in the late 19th Century.

Domesday does not record any church here; the population then may well have been as few as two hundred persons. While tithes are recorded in 1119, when Geoffrey, 16th Abbot of St Alban's, directed that Rickmansworth should supply 48 hens and 1 pig at Christmas and 1,000 eggs and 1 pig at Easter towards maintenance of the Abbey, there is no indication at all of their being a church, or chapel, until the reference to one 'Adam' as being Chaplain to Rickmansworth at some time between 1191 and 1216.

Then, in 1219, Pope Honorius III confirmed the 'church' to the Abbot and, around 1270, Richard de Chelveston was Vicar, the earliest recorded. The church was valued at £16 per annum in the ecclesiastical taxation of 1291 ordered by Pope Nicholas IV.

Of the church building of that time, nothing remains. A west tower evidently existed before 1553 because Edward VI's Commissioners recorded in that year a ring of five bells and a sanctus bell in their inventory for 'Rygmansworthe'.

Illustrations of 1800 and 1815, together with a plan of 1825 by James Sharpe, churchwarden, show the church much as it probably remained from 1630 (when the tower was rebuilt) up to 1825. It was similar in size and layout to the present building comprising chancel, nave, aisles, south chapel (where the organ and clergy vestry are now), north porch and west tower.

Before the High Altar stood a gilded screen. Above this, in the Rood loft, was a solar, or room. Over this screen was an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom the church is dedicated, and a cross of silver gilt. In the loft was a pair of organs, in the chancel hung a pyx, also of silver gilt, containing the reserved Sacrament.

Two chapels were dedicated within the church, one to 'Our Blessed Lady de Insula', probably meaning 'in the aisle', but alternatively referring to the island site of the church which is surrounded by streams. The other chapel was dedicated to St Katharine, martyr and virgin.

A number of altars or lights dedicated to saints and martyrs were also within the church which was served by several Brotherhoods or Fraternities. These existed for religious purposes, maintaining altars and lights and providing endowments for the payment of a priest whose duty it was to say Mass daily on behalf of the brethren or sisters, living or departed. Such Fraternities were dissolved in the reign of Edward VI.

A history of the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Rickmansworth

Otherwise, the history of the church during the medieval period has been gleaned from the wills of a number of parishioners who left bequests for the repair of the fabric, sanctuary etc.

Protestantism was on the increase in Rickmansworth and, at a date between 1514 and 1529, some of the parishioners, angry at ecclesiastical malpractices, broke into the church and did much damage, as described in the indulgence granted by Cardinal Wolsey, then living at the Manor of the Moore (Moor Park). It was found pasted in an old book purchased at the Dr Cotton's sale in 1868 by the British Museum. It contains a woodcut showing an altar with two candles. Between them is a circle, possibly a paten or host, bearing the inscription 'HIS'. A translation in modern English is as follows:

Be it known to all Christ's people which knoweth in their hearts of the power of God showed by his own Precious Body in the form of bread in the church of Rickmansworth where wretched and accursed people cruelly and wilfully set fire upon all the images and on the canopy where the Blessed Sacrament was in and to make the fire more cruel they put tow on staves between the spars and brasses of the chancel through the which fire the chancel was burnt and the pyx has melted and the Blessed Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the form of bread was found upon the High Altar and nothing perished.

Also they break into the Vestry and put fire among all the ornaments and jewels and burnt the said Vestry and all that was therein. Also in the rood loft they wrapped tow about the Blessed Rood and about a pair of organs and melted all the wax in the loft containing in weight some 14 score lbs. Whereas the flaming fire was in the loft about the blessed image of Jesu Christ's Mother the image was nothing hurt through the might and power of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Also to maintain their cruel opinions they broke open the font and despoiled the water which was hallowed and cast it abroad on the church floor in despite of the Sacrament of Baptism.

And forasmuch as the substantial men of the said parish 'innewed' the King's Grace how God was honourably served in time

past and also that is pleased them to show His great might and power.

Wherefore my Lord Cardinal and Legate hath granted 100 days of pardon releasing of their penance in purgatory to all men who give 'ony' part of their goods to the restoring of the said Church.

Also my Lord of Lincoln hath granted 40 days.

The appeal for funds for the restoration of the church was successful for many wills of parishioners between 1530 and 1536 contain bequests for this purpose.

The years after the Reformation were full of difficulty and the following items from the churchwardens' reports in the Archdeacon's Court Rolls at St Albans show the confusion that existed at this time:

- 1579 March 4. Upon our diligent inquisition we do present that within our parish is no Minister, preacher or reader, but our Vicar and his curate administers the sacrament in his own person.
(Mr Downes, Vicar, Edward Fysher, Curate)
- 1582 April 2. The Churchwardens report that their minister weareth the surplice usually. Our minister doth his duty.
- 1583 Our minister hath not, since the time he hath served our cure the first Sunday of every month given warning openly in our church for the people to repair to their church according as is contained in the first Article. The Churchwardens do observe what they are that come not to the church accordingly, but forbear to come to the church and therefore no need of any such presentment with witnesses but the minister and we the Churchwardens and sworne men do quarterly make a bill of Presentment and deliver the same to Mr Archdeacon or his official.
- 1633 December 20. Rickmansworth is censured 'for not having a decent and comely font for baptism...'

A history of the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Rickmansworth

In 1640 further damage was done to the church. There is a report that Edmund Aylee and others 'did not come into the church and after the Sermon and Service ended in the forenoon did there wittingly and suddenly break down and deface part of the cover of the font.'

The church was 'beautified' in 1677 and again in 1803. By 1825 the interior had been fitted with galleries that to the north side containing 15 faculty pews and that to the south having free seats, and that at the west end where schoolchildren sat and sang to the accompaniment of fiddle, flute and bass-viol. A three-decker pulpit (with reading desk and clerk's seat) stood by the chancel arch on the south side with the font adjacent.

Throughout the 18th Century, repairs became more and more necessary and the dilapidation by 1824 caused the Vestry to resolve 'unanimously that... with Care and Economy a new Church may be built for the same or a little larger sum to accommodate at least 2,000 of which 500 or more would be free.' It should be realised that the population in 1821 was 3,940, an increase of about 1,000 from the 1801 census.

Plans were procured from one William Atkinson for the new church, in brick, attached to the old tower, and £6,000 was borrowed in 1825 from His Majesty's Honourable Commissioners for the Building of New Churches. This loan was intended to be for six years, free of interest, but it took eighteen years to repay.

During the rebuilding, which started in August 1825, the Town Hall was licensed for Divine Worship.

By September 1826 the new brick church, built by a Mr Walker, was ready; it was an austere building with a slight Gothic Revival character, as may be judged from the present aisle walls and windows. The interior was furnished much as before, with box pews, and galleries supported on iron columns to north, south and west, the latter containing the organ and choir. The pulpit was on the south side of the nave by the chancel arch, with a two-decker desk on the north side; presumably the old three-decker

was re-used but separated. Also retained were the 17th Century font and the altar table formed from the top of the Monmouth tomb.

Above the altar was reinstalled the three-light stained glass window which had been put into the old church in 1806 by Rev Edward Hodgson. This was a notable Crucifixion window, a fine specimen of French stained glass consisting of three lights 3.65m (12') high and 0.6m (2') wide. It had originally come from the church of St Jean of Rouen to which it had been given by a M Pierre de St Laurent who died in 1560.

During the French Revolution, the window had been removed from the church, which was later demolished, and was purchased by Rev Hodgson (Vicar 1805-53). This window was removed when St Mary's was rebuilt in 1889-90. After many years in storage, it was sold in 1952 to York Minster where it now forms a memorial to Bishop Philip Loyd of St Albans and his brother.

With the religious revival of the mid-19th Century – and great social and economic changes – came a new view of church buildings. Thus, by 1880 John Edwin Cussans, in his history of Hertfordshire, could write that St Mary's was '... a huge chamber of brick, with a small recess at the east end, which does duty for a chancel. Within is an enormous gallery extending round the sides and west end. The Tower, which is of flint, bears on its western face the date of its erection – 1630; but bad as that portion of the building is, architecturally, within has no one feature to redeem the staring ghastliness of the whitewashed walls and the flat plastered ceiling. Having said so much against the church, it only remains to add that it is large and afford ample accommodation for the parishioners.'

In 1888 the Vestry recorded that 'the present edifice was very unsuitable for Divine Worship, and the galleries especially were incommodious and unsightly' and agreed 'to procure a restoration of the church which would be, so far as might be, a reproduction of the Old Church,

A history of the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Rickmansworth

pulled down in 1825, and in harmony with the Tower.'

The rebuilding, to the design of Sir Arthur Blomfield FRIBA, was carried out by Daniel and William Goddard, of Farnham and Dorking, Surrey; the contract sum was £4,368 5s 0d, and the final cost was £5,675 6s 9d. On 26th June 1890 the service of re-opening was conducted by the Bishop of St Albans.

Besides the tower, the 1826 aisle walls and windows were retained in order to reduce the cost; for the same reason, the vestries were not built until a few years later. Designs were prepared in 1908 for the refurbishing of the aisle walls with new stone windows and stained glass, but were not proceeded with.

In 1932-33 the tower stonework had to be repaired and the aisle roofs reslated; also the stone west window was inserted in place of old wooden tracery. The main contractor was John Thompson Ltd of Peterborough and the architect was F C Eden FRIBA. Further tower stonework repairs were carried out by Stuarts Granolithic Co Ltd in 1968, and in 1974 when the east end was also repaired by J W Gray & Son Ltd, supervised by Graham D Martin MSIAD.

The Church Centre, a Joint project with the Methodist Church who now share the buildings, linked to the church on the south side, was opened on Sunday 30th May 1982 by the Bishop of St Albans and the Chairman of the London NW Methodist District. The Contractor was W S Try (Watford) Ltd, the architects were Melvin, Lansley & Mark (to a brief by Graham D Martin MSIAD).

Advowson

As already stated, the church of Rickmansworth belonged to the Abbey of St Albans and was confirmed to them in 1219. This ended in December 1539 when the Abbey and its possessions were surrendered to the Crown. In 1550 Edward VI granted the advowson to Nicholas Ridley, Bishop of London. On his displacement by Queen Mary, it was given in 1553-54 to Edmund Bonner and to his successors. It remained vested in the Bishops of London until 1852 when, by Order in Council, it was transferred to the Bishop of Rochester. In 1877, on the foundation of the Bishopric of St Albans, the advowson was transferred to the Bishop of the new Diocese.

The Manor also belonged to the Abbey until 1539 and passed to the Bishops of London likewise, but returned to the Crown on the accession of Elizabeth I. It was retained by the Crown until 1627 when it passed into private hands commencing with the Earl of Pembroke.

A history of the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Rickmansworth

The Parish

The original parish was large, extending over Croxley Green, Moor Park, Batchworth, West Hyde, Mill End and Chorleywood. At the 1851 census the population was 4,851, an increase of almost 1,000 from 1821. To meet the needs of the growing outlying communities, new parishes were formed:

- 1846 West Hyde
- 1854 Northwood
- 1868 Chorleywood
- 1872 Croxley Green
- 1875 Mill End

The Old Vicarage

This stands on the west side of Church Street. It is, in part, a medieval building consisting originally of a hall and two winds.

Because of many structural changes wrought by successive vicars, it is difficult to assign a date to the house but there is one feature in the construction which has now been destroyed: brick arcading exists under the principal window in the north wall. It is carved out of red bricks in precisely the same manner as the ornamentation on the parapet to the south side of Redbourn Church in Hertfordshire.

The date of this being not later than 1450-60, there is good reason to believe that this Vicarage is of similar date.

A history of the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Rickmansworth

Extracts from some of the wills of parishioners for the upkeep of the church

Joan Bowring of Rickmansworth, widow, 12th
November 1476

To the house called le Church House,
Parish of Rickmansworth, one towel, and
another towel I leave to the parish church
of Rickmansworth to wipe the hands of the
godfathers and godmothers on washing
after the baptisms of infants.

Rogers Berche, of Rickmansworth, 1st
December 1476, desired to be buried in the
churchyard and he leaves:

To the High Altar	12d
St Katherine light	8d
St Edward light	8d
Holy Trinity light	8d
St Clement's light	8d
To repair of the bells	12d

Nicholas Leventhorp, 1484, desires to be
buried in the Chapel of our Blessed Lady within
the Churchyard of Rickmansworth and
bequeaths:

To the Chapel	13s 4d
To the Parish Church	8d

To the Vicary of Rickmansworth my horse
called an hoby, to pray for my soul.