

St Michael's Church, Bray & Ockwells Manor

The Link



St Michael's Church, Bray



Ockwells Manor, Cox Green, Maidenhead



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Ockwells Manor house, referred to by Nicolas Pevsner as being “the most refined and the most sophisticated timber-framed manor house in England”, was built by John Norreys (Norys) Esq in the mid fifteenth century. It is also famous for the armorial glass, still in its original position in the Great Hall, that he put up to honour his King, Henry VI and Queen, Margaret of Anjou, and the people he was close to, including his wives (the coats of the first two are there), earls, abbots, bishops or more lowly esquires. The Norreys family had held Ockwells since the 13th century and just before the house was built, ca.1450, John Norreys Esq held the post of Keeper of Cookham & Bray.

He was connected with St Michael's Church, Bray, by 1446 until his death in 1466. This chronology details the connection.

1446 John Norys Esq with William Aiscough, Bishop of Salisbury, and Thomas Lude, vicar of Br, founded a chantry in honour of St Mary within the church with a chaplain to celebrate divine service daily at the altar of the said virgin, for the good estate of the King (Henry VI), the said founders and all others that endow the chantry (CPR 1446-52 p2). A brass for Thomas Lude can still be seen in St Michael's.



Brass for Thomas Lude, Vicar of Bray in 1446 now on the south wall of the nave

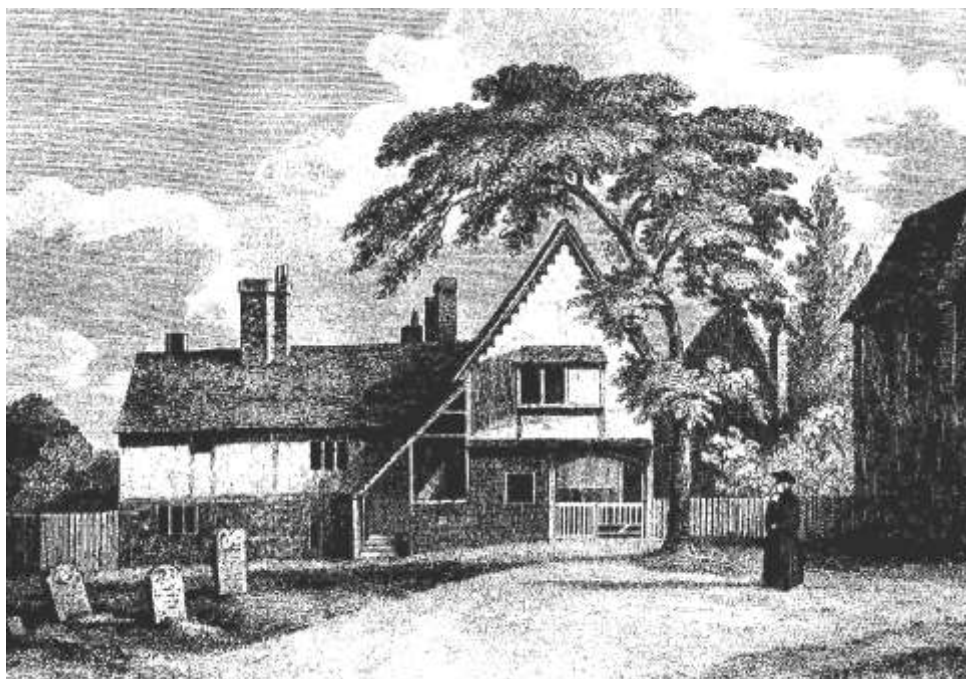
Note: For many years, what is now called St Michael's Hall has been thought to be the Chantry Chapel of the Blessed Virgin Mary but the building is considered to be at least as old as St Michael's Church and the chantry was only begun in 1446. It seems more likely that the chantry chapel was inside the church and evidence from John Norreys's will (see below) indicates that the chantry was within what is now the Norreys Chapel. In 1844 it was said that St Mary's Chantry was added to the east end of the north aisle of Bray church by Norreys (see *Gentleman's Magazine* 1844 pt 1, p 133-135).

1448 is the date carved in the oak beam on the west side of the lych gate, part of what is now called St Michael's Cottage or Bray Lychgate Cottage.



The wooden carved date of 1448, and plaque

The existing cottage part is later than the 15th century. However, it has been suggested that the original gatehouse was the home of the chantry priest (see *Gentleman's Magazine*, above). Such a gatehouse with a room over the gate can still be seen at Ockwells Manor house.



*The gatehouse at Bray, called the "Church House" in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1844.*



Photo of the same house in 2008

1465 John Norreys Esq writes his will (for his will see Kerry, C., 1861, *The History & Antiquities of the Hundred of Bray*, p 116-120). St Michael's, Bray, features prominently. Norreys, bequeathing his soul to almighty God and the Blessed Virgin Mary, continues "And my body to be buried in the church of St Michael of Bray in the north aisle of the said church". He leaves the church the following bequests:

"I bequeath to the High Altar in the church of Bray aforesaid for my tithes and offerings withdrawn and forgotten. And also that the Vicar of the same church devoutly pray for my soul 100 shillings".

Many further sums include payments for masses, placebos, dirges, including payments to the priests and clerks for carrying these out, and for ringing the bells, and to needy people in the church.

Of particular interest is the bequest for the "*new making and edifying of the north aisle of the church now called St Nicholas chapel, to the honour of almighty God, his mother St Mary, St Nicholas and St Katherine*" for the health of his soul. The chantry priest is requested to pray for his soul, the souls of his father and mother, his three wives and all who in time to come make bequests to the chantry.

This re-edification was presumably to facilitate his burial in the chapel, as further sums are left to pay for his tomb and for a marble stone to be laid there over his body, immediately after his decease. No trace of such a tomb remains; however, traces of the re-edification exist. The following photos show stone corbels in the Norreys chapel including the coats of his second and third wives. Almost certainly a similar corbel for his first wife Alice Merbrooke would once have been there, probably placed where now can be seen the coat of the Grenfell family who renovated/rebuilt the chapel in the 19th century (see below).



The Norreys Chapel at the east end of the north aisle of St Michael's Bray



One of two identical plaques on the east wall of the Norreys Chapel bearing the coat of Ravenscroft (for Norreys) with supporters - sea otters with fish in mouth



Armorial glass in the Great Hall at Ockwells for John Norreys Esq and second wife Eleanor Clitheroe, also with sea otter supporters



(i)



(ii)



(iii)

(i) Corbel of Ravenscroft (for Norreys) impaling Clitherow (quartered with Oldcastle) for the second marriage of John Norreys Esq to Eleanor Clitherow whose grandfather was the famous Sir John Oldcastle. (ii) Corbel of Ravenscroft (for Norreys) impaling Chedworth for his third marriage to Margaret Chedworth who after Norreys death in 1466 was promptly married to John Howard, Duke of Norfolk. (iii) Corbel for John Norreys Esquire.

Another 15th century link with Ockwells is the brass for William Laken JP (d.1475). It is suggested that one of the armorial achievements at Ockwells is for this man, though there is no documentary evidence in support. Laken's brass, now on the west wall of the nave, was originally, according to the *Gentleman's Magazine* 1891 (p 114), in the chapel at the east end of the south aisle, suggested to be the chantry chapel of his wife's family, the Syferwasts. The remaining coat on the armorial brass is, however, not the same as that found at Ockwells.



Armorial coat attributed to William Laken JP, now on the west wall of St Michael's, Bray



Armorial achievement said to be for William Laken JP d 1475 - quite different from his brass at St Michael's

The death of John Norreys Esq in 1466 seems to end the connection of that family with St Michael's. His eldest son Sir William moved to Yattendon and John's third wife, Margaret Chedworth, married to John Howard, Duke of Norfolk, by January 1467, lived in Bray, probably at Ockwells. One of the puzzles is how the Ockwells Norreys came to use the Ravenscroft armorial coat. The family tree shows descent from the Norreys (Norris) family of Speke, Lancashire, but an investigation of the original documents in the College of Arms suggest that the herald given the task of producing a pedigree for Sir Henry Norreys of Rycote (a descendent of John Norreys Esq of Ockwells), who was knighted by Elizabeth I in 1566, simply joined his known ancestors to a pedigree produced for the Norris family of Speke in 1567.

At some point the two families met, probably at the battle of Stoke in 1487 when representatives of both families were knighted and thereafter evidently believed they were related. Edmund Norreys of Speke, a younger brother, appears to have moved to Fifield near Bray. His descendent is the William Norreys Esq, of Fifield, in Bray, (d.1591), Usher of the Black Rod to the most noble Order of the Garter, who was buried in the Norreys Chapel under an elaborate monument originally located under the east window of the Norreys Chapel; this is still in the church, though now on the north wall.



Monument to William Norreys Esq of Fifield in Bray



The armorial coat of William Norreys Esq indicating descent from the Norreys of Speke, Lancashire

William thought he was being buried in the family chapel. The inscription includes the statement that he *is interred by his ancestors* and the Norreys of Ockwells motto *Feythfully Serve*, but it is unlikely that the Speke and Ockwells Norreys families were related (see Civic Society Newsletter, Issue 1/2005).

1583-1625 The Day family lived at Ockwells and several are buried in St Michael's Church. Their memorial slab is on the floor under the tower.



Members of the Day family who lives at Ockwells Manor house

1862 Around 1846, Charles Pascoe Grenfell purchased the Ockwells estate from Richard Powney. He did not live there, as by then Ockwells was “ruinous”. The armorial glass was removed due to fears that the roof was likely to collapse. Perhaps, as he owned Ockwells, he felt a particular link with the Norreys Chapel in St Michael's, choosing it to house memorials to his family. Certainly this Grenfell, grandfather of William Henry Grenfell, Lord Desborough, repaired the roof of the chapel. On two of the corbels that support it he placed the armorial coats of his father, Pascoe Grenfell, and second wife Georgina St Leger, and that of himself and his own wife, Georgiana, daughter of the Earl of Sefton. He also put up in the chapel memorial brasses bearing the same coats.



(i)



(ii)

(i) Corbel for Charles Pascoe Grenfell and his wife Georgiana, daughter of the Earl of Sefton; (ii) Corbel for Pascoe Grenfell Esq (his father) and his second wife Georgiana St Leger

The brass for his father and his two wives is under the east window of the chapel and that for his own wife and eldest son, Charles William who died in 1861, his death perhaps triggering the restoration of the chapel in 1862, is located under a north window in the chapel.

He died in 1867, and a memorial brass for Charles Pascoe Grenfell Esq was put up by his daughter on the south window of the chancel.

Conclusion

Of the many people that link Ockwells Manor house with St Michael's, Bray, probably the builder of the Manor house, John Norreys Esq, should be remembered as a major contributor to St Michael's church in the 15th century, followed by Charles Pascoe Grenfell Esq in the 19th century. It was Charles Pascoe's grandson, William Henry Grenfell, Lord Desborough, who began the restoration of Ockwells towards the end of the 19th century amid fears that it would be destroyed. The famous glass, stored at Taplow Court, was then put back.

Apart from the chauntries in honour of St Mary that he established at St Michael's, Bray, and at All Saints Church, Wokingham, Norreys helped found religious guilds at Maidenhead in 1451 and Abingdon in 1441. These guilds - an early form of civic authority - collected offerings/tolls to maintain the roads and bridges over the Thames in both places. The Long Alley almshouse at Abingdon that the guild also established is still functioning and both Maidenhead and Abingdon have processions from the town hall to the guild church (St Mary's in Maidenhead, and St Helen's in Abingdon) for a service when new mayors are created - a direct link with the past. The guild at Abingdon also has a link with St Michael's Church, whose vicar, William Dyer d 1440, was son of an Abingdon dyer. Both father and son belonged to the religious fraternity that preceded the formation of the guild there. William Dyer's brass can still be seen at St Michael's, Bray, on the south wall of the nave.

Ann Darracott, Ockwells Project, Maidenhead Civic Society - April 2008