Women in the history of St Mary's Church

Lytchett Matravers



Background Information

The church building dates back to about 1200 and it is from this time that women, usually through marriage, would have played a part in the life and development of the church and manor at Lytchett Matravers. Walter Maltravers, crusader, is deemed to have started building the church on return from the third crusade about 1192. Although there is no evidence of women from Dorset going on a crusade, it is well documented that English Queens did go, taking their female attendants and household with them, so women did participate. There is evidence that noble women fought alongside men. The only occupation or role approved by the Catholic church for them while they were there was that of 'washer woman'. It was also stipulated they had to be unattractive (it was not clear by whose criteria this was judged!). If the crusade failed women were often blamed and purged from the campaign but, of course, they were not mentioned in victory. Usually, it must be said, women were left at home while their husbands were away, with responsibility for administration within the manor or home.

It must be remembered that both men and women did not have easy lives during the Middle Ages. Most people in rural areas made their living from the land. Men, women and children worked together at busy times, such as harvest, to ensure domestic responsibilities were fulfilled. Although women of all social standing worked alongside their husbands, the place of women within society during the Middle Ages was, in the main, dictated by biblical texts.

The writings of the apostle Paul, in particular, emphasized men's authority over women. Man came first, woman was to take second place. Paul's teaching instructed that women should refrain from teaching and instructed them to remain silent. However, the Virgin Mary was a contrast to this negative image. As the mother of Christ, she was the channel through which Christians might be saved. Throughout the Middle Ages Mary was seen as the most powerful of all the saints as well as a strong, if contradictory, model of chastity and motherhood.

There were, however, some women who exercised power, providing a challenge to the stereotypical image of medieval women as being oppressed and subservient. Women within the church context show, in their way, that they had power and influence. Some of them influencing history through wealth and birth right or sheer determination. It is, however, dangerous to generalize about the status and experience of medieval women. Their lives were shaped by as many different considerations as they are today. Interpretations of women's place in medieval society has to strike a balance between exceptional women who, due mainly to wealth or status, could exercise political or creative power outside the domestic sphere, and the ordinary women who may have exercised the same power but within their community and household.

The Dorset Lay Subsidy Roll of 1312, which lists everyone in the County who owned enough property to pay tax, amounts to 7,621 people. Of that total 536 were women. It does not include all women. Dependent wives and daughters were excluded, as their property would be listed to either their father or husband to whom the wealth 'belonged'. Within the total number of women, many were ordinary women who were running their own lives. The names listed were

in Latin and this has, consequently, led to many interpretations of the actual spelling, with many having three or even four variations making it sometimes very difficult to identify individuals.

The information in this booklet concerns women who have dedications or memorials within St Mary's Church.

Agnes de Beresford (1300- 1375?)

(King Edward II- Richard II)

Baron John Maltravers' second wife Agnes, born de Beresford, must have been a strong minded and determined woman. She supported John and therefore had responsibility for the running and upkeep of the church and manor at Lytchett Matravers. When Agnes met John he was 'in his prime'. He was both popular and wealthy. Agnes was also a wealthy woman, being twice widowed. When they married, she was in her 30's and he in his 40's, so both knew how medieval marriage and its related issues worked.

The price of 1,000 marks on John's head (for his supposed role in the murder of Edward II) is well documented within church and local historic literature, but it was Agnes who was left to 'fight'. John Maltravers of Hook and Crowell was at hand to step in to save the family lands, but it was Agnes, through her determination and great reluctance to give up any documentation and it seems, her ability to be able to move around at the appropriate times, helped also to protect the family lands and wealth. She is thought to have built three chantry altars at St Mary's as she was troubled about John's welfare, reputation and misdeeds. Unfortunately, there is no definite evidence of these surviving. By 1351 John's position was restored, and it was John who included Agnes in the running of all the family affairs. When Agnes died in 1375, she was one of the wealthiest women in the lesser peerage.

Although there is no evidence, as such, of Agnes within the church, her resolve perhaps contributed to the history of the church as we now know it. She was buried at Greyfriars in London.

Eleanor Maltravers (1345? - 1405)

(King Edward III-Henry V)

It is well documented that it was through Eleanor Maltravers, granddaughter and eventual heiress of 1st Baron Maltravers, that the association through marriage, to John Arundel, meant that Lytchett

Maltravers became part of the Arundel estates and titles. Baron Lord Maltravers, a title still in use today. Within the Arundel archives Eleanor's name is spelt Alionor, which is just one of the variations found!

There is evidence of the (so called) *'Arundel Rudder'* and the Maltravers fret within church, but nothing of Eleanor herself.

Eleanor is buried at Lewes Priory. Due to the cutting of the 1845 railway, which runs through the ruins of the Priory, sadly many medieval graves were destroyed at this time.

Lewes Priory as it is today.

(*Caroleen McClure's book -'Baron John Maltravers' has a chapter on both Agnes and Eleanor)*

Perhaps the 'legacy' that Eleanor left, that has survived history over the centuries, is the Maltravers title.

It would appear, over the course of history, that the title Baron Lord Maltravers was respected and used, it seems, to keep a close association with the crown. The title is historically referenced 'styled'; this means it is a courtesy title, often bestowed on the first son. It is **The** Duke of Norfolk (also **The** Duke of Arundel and **The** Lord Maltravers) that has the substantive title, as it is the **'The'** that refers to a peer of the realm.

The seventh Earl of Arundel, the fourth Baron Maltravers, John (about 1408) was born at Lytchett Matravers. John was knighted with the four-year-old King Henry VI. During this ceremony he was referred to as 'Lord Maltravers'.

There were turbulent family times for the Arundels during the Tudor period, due to the religious significance of the Arundel family being staunch Catholics. Lands, power and wealth could be lost at the whim of the King. The period between Henry VIII and James I was particularly significant with reference to the Maltravers' title. During the reign of Henry VIII evidence shows that Henry Fitzalan (born 1512) was named after King Henry, who stood as his godfather at his baptism.

He was a page at King Henry's court and in 1533 was summoned to court as Lord Maltravers. He attended the trials of Anne Boleyn.

There is a saying 'keep your friends close, but your enemies closer'. This, it seems, was pertinent for Elizabeth I. It is documented that the Queen threatened to remove the then Lord Maltravers and place him where she would know his whereabouts, which was within the care of a Protestant tutor of her choosing (1593). Lord Maltravers' father was Philip, The Duke of Norfolk, who was in the Tower accused of treason.

During the reign of James I the chroniclers of the day were very impressed with the then young Lord Maltravers and his arrival in London was heralded with much enthusiasm. He was presented at the court. The king was quite taken with the young man, so favour was restored. In 1628 an Act of Parliament annexed the title Baron Lord Maltravers to that of The Earl of

Arundel, and it is thus that the title is still in use today. An example of a 'modern day' use of the title is noted, Henry Miles Fitzalan-Howard (1987- 2002 was styled Lord Maltravers from birth). He attended Bristol University and raced with the Formula Three Series.

The Fitzalan chapel can be viewed from the church of St Nicolas in the western grounds of Arundel Castle. It has been noted that St Nicolas church building is divided into two, one as Anglican with the other, the family chapel, being Catholic. The Fitzalan chapel is where The Duke met the town leaders to discuss strategy, but as the strength of the Town Council developed, so The Duke was losing his control, leading to too many arguments. In 1836 he built a new town hall, for council meetings, which is on Maltravers Street!



Maltravers Street Arundel

On visiting St Mary's church, the casual visitor can be forgiven for not knowing about the Maltravers Tomb and the significant history associated with it. The tomb is documented as being 'rediscovered' in the 1800s as it was under matting with pews placed on top. There are many authors of local history who make this same comment of the 'fine example of the tomb' being under matting. In the Arundel archives a letter dated 1932 was sent from a resident who wrote to The Duke of Norfolk to ask for monetary assistance in order to restore the Maltravers Tomb. The tomb still lies under matting, but with chairs on top rather than pews, and is still in need of great conservation, it would appear that the request did not have a positive outcome...

Christina Mohun (About 1450)

(King Henry VI – Edward IV – Edward V)

Trenchard is another medieval name associated with the history of the church. The name can be found in about 1100AD on the Isle of Wight and the Southampton area, where family lands were held.

Christina Mohun, heiress and daughter of Joanna Jordaine and John Mohun of Wolfeton, married (about 1476) Henry Egidius Trenchard of Hordhill, Hampshire which was the seat of the Trenchard – Stanton family. The marriage brought great wealth with both family estates joining together. The Trenchard and Ham Mohun estates were both very wealthy. Ham Mohun is a spur family line of the great Barons Mohun of Dunster.

Window in north isle, showing arms of Trenchard and Mohun.

Deemed to be originally Tudor, the painted glass window in the north isle of the church is testament to this marriage. These shields may have been part of a much larger display which was moved from Wolfeton to Lytchett. Having large displays of family arms was common place, particularly if the marriage had brought great wealth. The 'shields' are a mirror image of each other and experts believe this was purposeful, as the feel of the glass, in both roundels, are correctly inserted to protect the glass from the elements. If you look carefully at the west window in the north isle, a small piece of Mohun arms can be spotted.

It's one of many examples. In Montacute House in Somerset there is a manorial window showing many shields, some of which belong to families connected to St Mary's. On travels and visits to churches and medieval properties, keep a look out, as many connections with the local families can be spotted.

(Shirley Percival's booklet 'Lytchett Matravers A Dorset Village The Church and Manor' documents insights into this history)

Church Floor Brass

Brass dedicated to Margarita in the nave of St Mary's

Margarita Clements (Date on Brass 1505)

(King Henry VII)

The brass in the floor below the west arch is dedicated to Margarita. She is deemed to be a benefactor of the church and responsible for some of the rebuilding. This is unclear, as church literature states there is a thought that the Arundel family may have been responsible. The translation of the brass reads that she is sole benefactress of the rebuilding of the church 1505, so a mystery is there to be solved.

Margarita remains an elusive woman. Little is known of her family or life. Speculation can be made when reading her will. The original will is no longer available in Dorset Archives, (nor can it be found in The National Archives) but a modern transcribed copy can be viewed at Dorchester. Margarita could be seen as being a wealthy, generous and pious woman. She left various generous amounts of money to churches and priories, as well as to individuals. She left 6s 8d to the church at Lytchett, and this is where, it seems, the dilemma arises as to the interpretation of the re-building of St Mary's. If this amount 6s 8d, was for the church refurbishment, it would be too small. Refurbishment, most likely, would have occurred before her death. The seemingly small amount she did leave to the church in her will, compared to

other religious beneficiaries, is difficult to estimate in respect of its value by today's standard. A skilled man would have earned approximately 4p a day. The amount left to the church would have amounted to *approximately* 20 days work. But there needs to be great reserve about this, as coinage often had its value by weight during medieval to Tudor times, and this did seem to vary. There was, of course, rampant inflation too! The 'gold -noble' worth 6s 8p in 1465, later became the 'rose-noble' valued at 10s, although the weight did not change.

Margarita left her lands and tenements in Shropshire to her nephew, John Water. Unfortunately, with such little information, it is difficult to trace where the lands were, in connection to Margarita, in such a large county. Shropshire archives indicate that her name 'Clement' had no standing in the area, but the name 'Water' (her nephew) did…John Water was in 'office' but the dates are not in sync, if only more detail was known! The name of a John Clement appears in the Dorset Muster Rolls of 1539 (much later then the death of Margarita) but he was clearly a poor man. Clement was also featured on the 1525 Subsidy list, again a later date, as worth £1 in wages, the very poorest of taxed people. This information seems hard to relate and reconcile to Margarita who had lands and tenements and considerable money to leave to various persons and charities.

Margarita also bequeathed any residue from her estate to a Thomas Strangwaise Esq. (various spellings). This family name is linked with the family line of John Maltravers of Hook and Crowell. There is a mixed reference to Thomas Strangwaise. The Strangwaise family were residents of Dorset, and another reference gives the information that Lady Dorothy Arundel was 'married off' to him. Whilst this is speculation within this context, a story must surely be there for another time!

Church Floor Brass



Brass dedicated to Lettyse, under matting in the north aisle of St Mary's

Lettyse Irlond date on brass 1541

(King Henry VIII- Edward VI)

A brass memorial, in the north aisle of the church is dedicated to Lettyse. This was discovered in 1922 in the nave, under the floor boards of a pew, and was, at that time, removed and placed in the north aisle. Lettyse seems an even more 'elusive' medieval woman! Why she actually has a brass in the church is not clear. Her will includes the name of Willoughby. This name is mentioned in the Tudor chronicles and has great connections to the throne and various battles. The relationship to Lettyse, if there is one, is not clear. In her will, reference is also made to leaving monies to charities in remembrance of Lady Elizabeth 'some tyme Duches of Norfolke'. She also mentions leaving monies to all of her 'god childerne' born in the County of Dorset. 'Fyve markes distributive among young women of the parishes of Lychett Maultravers to help

towarde maryage'. So Lettyse appeared to have had quite a social conscience. The brass within church refers to her as a 'Gentlewoman'. This can mean she was either wealthy, of noble birth or attended a 'great lady'. As a 'some time Duches of Norfolke' is mentioned in her will, perhaps she had connections to the household. The wives of Henry VIII all had 'great', well known women attending them. Regrettably, such evidence has, to date, not been found. Lettyse left a house in London in her will, so she must have had wealth of her own.

There are known local names in her will, Turberville, Gaynesford and Willoughby, as previously mentioned. Perhaps both Margarita and Lettyse had connections with the Fitzalan family, and rented the property at some stage, but this is speculation. Records state that the Fitzalans were absentee landlords in Dorset.

An interesting note found that both the Willoughby and Strangeways names (as mentioned in the wills) have an historical connection. King Henry VIII judged that a hold in the north was needed. They were summoned to assist in 'calming the northern element'. This element was causing problems for the King, so it is recorded two Arundel women were 'married off' to men with these names. It is also recorded that there was surprise that Strangeways, who was an esquire, married a 'one-time Duchess of Norfolk'! A story to tell? Unfortunately for us, both of these women who have brasses within the church, at this moment, seem to be 'lost in the mists of time'.

Church Hatchment 18th to 19th Century

Lady Hester Amelia Trenchard neé de Burgh (1741 -1821)

(Georgian Period)

Hester was the daughter of John Smith Burke, Earl of Clanricarde, Galway, Ireland and Hester Amelia de Burgh neé Vincent. The Earl's name was changed by deed poll to de Burgh, in 1752.

It is believed that the Hatchment over the bell tower belongs to Lady Hester. Hester married William Trenchard.


Hatchment on arch entering the bell tower.

The marriage settlement between Hester and William Trenchard, who died in 1829, can be viewed at Dorset Records Office.

The settlement stated that William should have, and was entitled to, all lands, manors and titles that Hester brought to the marriage. As part of the deal Hester was given an annual payment. This money, £800, was to be paid quarterly. The money was for her own benefit, she did not have to make any reference to her husband as to how it was spent. It was for her own 'frivolities', clothes and any item she chose and to be spent as she wished. In part it was referred to in the document as her 'pin money'.

‘Pin money’ can be seen as dating back from about 1542, and there are various theories as to how the term came into being. It would seem that in the fourteenth to fifteenth century pins were very expensive and, by English law, could only be sold during two days of January. Husbands would give their wives ‘special’ money to purchase pins, which were essential items for the family. It seemed to be thought that women were not capable of controlling spending and were frivolous in their spending habits, hence the husband ’handing over’ the money! Over time the term changed, it became included in wealthy women’s agreed entitlement on marriage. The term ‘pin money’, in a more modern context, demonstrated the inequality in the earnings of men and women, and so the lesser earnings of women, which did not and could not provide for the family, was termed ‘pin money’. Gradually, it came to be realized that the earnings of women greatly added to the household expenditure and kept many families from poverty.

Hester’s settlement also stated she was entitled to a share in profits from manors and lands up to the value of £105 in quarterly payments. It would seem Hester was quite a wealthy woman. A ‘good catch’ for William!

This marriage settlement would have been of great importance to Hester as she had to maintain a standard befitting her status. Although the Sumptuary Laws (nicknamed the ‘scrumptious’ laws) were beginning to decline in Georgian England, they were still controlling expenditure and dictating what should be worn, and by whom. Government had a long history of trying to control and place restrictions on expenditure, with an emphasis on maintaining ‘*social class*’. The Sumptuary Laws, dating from Roman times, became very complicated during the Tudor times. This was particularly true during the rule of Henry VIII when there was raging inflation. By the time of Hester’s day, the Georgian period, they were less complicated and not so rigid.

These laws are still in existence today, but we are not so aware of them. A deep search of government expenditure, policy and ‘expenses’ reveals they can be found.

So, was Hester frivolous? Unable to be responsible for expenditure? That is open to speculation, but it was, (as speculated by local history writers of the mid 1850’s), Hester who, when the family moved from Wolfeton to Lytchett Matravers, wanted the manorial windows which she admired at Wolfeton to go with her. They were to be placed in the newly built dairy and milking parlour, built at her request. Whether this was on a temporary basis or for good, cannot be said, but it does beg the question as to whether the cattle and dairy maids would appreciate the painted Tudor glass! As it happened, the precarious way the glass was carried in a cart meant most of it was broken and damaged. In diaries of the time this tale caused much ridicule, and guesses as to where the glass could be found was open to much speculation. As we can see in church, some of the glasswork survived, so perhaps all was not totally lost…

It is recorded that Hester is buried at Lytchett Matravers.

Elizabeth Trenchard -alias Sargent (1748-1840) (various spellings – Serjeant/ Sargent/ Sergeant)

There is a fine commemorative marble memorial dedicated to Elizabeth on the north westerly wall of the north isle. Much of what is known of Elizabeth's life is written in diaries, or speculation can be made from her will. The diaries could be called the chronicles of the time or, what could in modern day, be termed as 'gossip'. These can all be viewed in Dorset Records Office.

Elizabeth's story is quite a sad tale to tell from this perspective, but there is another 'story' too!

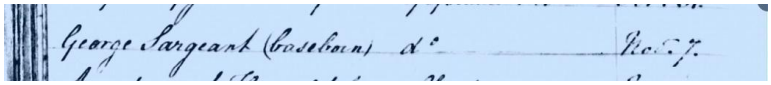
Elizabeth (known as Becky) was the illegitimate daughter of George Trenchard (1717-1768) and Mary Sargent, a housemaid at the Trenchard home.



Marble memorial to Elizabeth in the north isle.

Elizabeth's early life was spent with her maternal grandmother in a small cottage in Lytchett Matravers, and little is known of her young childhood. Eventually George married Mary, and so the family lived in the manor house. Three sons were born in wedlock. William, married to Hester, George, Rector at Lytchett Matravers, who died in 1808, and the third son Thomas who died in the year of his birth. All were legitimate heirs to the Trenchard estate. Due to the Bastardy law of the time, Elizabeth always remained illegitimate and in legal documents she is referred to as Elizabeth Trenchard alias Sargent.

Diaries written by Florence Carre, (the daughter of William Mortimer Heath Rector 1850 for 67 years) speculate that Elizabeth had a love affair with Robin. Researching this name, a person with the name Robin could not be found in any baptismal, funeral or wedding register of all local surrounding locations and churches. Sadly, it is stated, Robin eventually abandoned Elizabeth leaving George, so it is believed, as an illegitimate son.



Record from Lytchett Minster - not confirmed it relates to George William.

Details that were written, are scanty about George. Elizabeth, is said to have been 'broken hearted', and turned, as the gossips stated, 'queer'. Stories and gossip about her behaviour include kleptomania, visiting hostelries and taking items home, which servants returned when they were later discovered at the house, burying money and valuable objects in the garden and having a 'fierce' temper. This is speculation by the author, of diaries mentioned above.

Although this may be true, Elizabeth was generous in her will. Leaving money and items to various charities and churches, as well as to servants and 'the poor' in Lytchett Matravers.

Another view of Elizabeth's life is that the George William, as mentioned on her memorial, is indeed her nephew. George William being the illegitimate son of Elizabeth's brother George, this George being Rector of Lytchett Matravers about 1792. The evidence for this is found in London. George William Trenchard married Emma Sulsh in St Margaret's Church Westminster in 1813. Further records seem to point to the fact that George William, was the natural (illegitimate) son of Revd Dr George Trenchard Rector of Lytchett Matravers (b1755-1849). On a grave in Kensal Green Cemetery in London, the inscription describes George William as the only son of the Revd Dr Trenchard of Lytchett Matravers in the County of Dorset. Elizabeth's will of 1840 describes George William as being 'the natural son of my dear brother George Trenchard.' Further evidence indicates that on a lease, Elizabeth lived part of her life in London at Welbeck Street. From this evidence, bought to life by the Trenchard family, it is believed that George William, on the memorial, as indicated, is indeed Elizabeth's nephew. It is thought she actually bought him up as a child. It must be noted, however, that it was not usual for illegitimate children to have the name of their father, as George William did. There exists a mystery around who the mother of George William actually was, no name has been found to date. So her life and associated records still remain a puzzle.

Elizabeth was the first born, and last to survive, of the children of George and Mary Trenchard. William ensured she lived at the manor until her death, but as she was illegitimate, she was unable to inherit. The estate was left to Hester's relations Lady Margaret de Burgh and Luke Dillion.

Elizabeth is buried at Lytchett Matravers.



Church brass in the bell tower

Betty Jean Purrier-date on plaque 1975

(20th Century (1975) Queen Elizabeth II)

The fine brass plaque, situated within the bell tower reads…

'*The bells in this tower are maintained in perpetuity in the memory of*

Betty Jean Purrier

Died August 10th 1975'

Betty lived in Lytchett Matravers; she was a widow who worked at the Chequers Inn on the High Street. She married into the Purrier family. Local residents speak of the social aspects

associated with this local Inn. Many attended events and can remember they attracted many visitors from further afield too. The Inn was known for its musical evenings and the serving of fine wines!

Betty is spoken of with great affection by her family, '*a darling lady*' '*whose sense of humour and fun was evident even in the latter part of her illness'*.

Betty's great joy was '*just listening to the bells'* as they pealed within the 12th century tower. '*She was simply someone who just loved the ringing and listening to the bells'*.

As this was Betty's great joy, the family's fitting memorial to her was the generous trust fund donated to the church in her name.

Bell ringing, of course, goes back many years. The first metal bells were created in ancient China, they were passed on through to Hindu and Buddhist religions and rung during prayers. Bells were first used in Christian Churches in about 400 AD and about two hundred years later, 600 AD, monasteries across Britain and Europe had bells ringing. It seems the earliest English church bells appeared in the 11th century. In the Middle Ages many believed bells had 'supernatural powers' with stories surrounding aspects of either impending doom or ghostly visions. It must be remembered how loud and imposing the sound was.

Bells were then made of iron and were placed in church towers. People were paid to ring the bells and it could be expensive, so accounted for a considerable amount in the outgoings of the church. For example, ringers at the execution of Mary Queen of Scots were paid 1 shilling each, (*approximate* value today £800).

In the 17th century bell ringing was taken over by lay people from the clergy and was becoming a skilled occupation. The oldest surviving bell ringing association dates back to 1612. By the 1800s ringing, however, became associated with drunks and gamblers. The Cambridge Camden Society was established in 1839 to clean up the churches and bell towers. Tower captains were appointed, and women were allowed to take part to ensure respectability and good behaviour. The first woman to complete a full peal was in 1896 and in 1912 a Ladies Guild of Change Ringers was formed.

It is noted that bells are reputed to be the loudest of musical instruments as their sound can be heard from many miles away. It is also a unique instrument, in the fact that a bell can make a number of different notes at the same time! Quite an 'art form' and one perhaps that gives ringers many challenges!

St Mary's bells have been restored twice. Once in 1931 and again in 2019. Both aspects of restoration are well documented within church literature.

Women today play a great part in the bell ringing at St Mary's. As well as a female tower captain, 12 of the 16 ringers are women. These women ringers donated money to assist in the bell restoration in 2019. Some donated the cost of either headstock or a clapper. Their names were painted on these items, although few in the congregation would see this generosity!

Clappers from 2019 bell restoration


Printing of names of those donating

The ‘Purrier Fund’ was invaluable during the second (2019) bell restoration. It gave a ‘safety net’ to ensure the project could go ahead whilst waiting for grants to come to fruition.

How pleasing this would have been for Betty, to realise that the fund donated in her memory helped restoration in this way. The bells still ring loudly at St Mary’s on Sundays for morning and other services, as well as for weddings and funerals as requested and, of course, at times of national interest or national events. Long may this tradition continue!

Today at St Mary’s! (Queen Elizabeth II- Charles III)

Throughout the history of St Mary’s, women have played and contributed in a considerable way to the life of the church and community.
The church in modern times is no exception. There are women who partake in the service itself with readings or prayers. There are women church wardens, a tower captain and bell ringers as well as an organist and choir leader. There are women Lay Pastoral Assistants, female members of the PCC, as well as women who organize the more traditional roles of floral decoration, cleaning and the social aspects of the church. In recent refurbishment with the introduction of modern technology within church, yes…a woman operates the technology, and another woman is one of a couple of people who supporther.
What more can be said!

Further Information

The Mystery of the Arundel Rudder…


The carving on the font at St Mary’s

When looking at the legacy the women within the church have made, perhaps Eleanor could be attributed to contributing the carved ‘Arundel Rudder’, which can be seen on the font and some windows. Through marriage she created the links with this prolific and immensely important and famous family. It is through, however, investigating this aspect, that a ‘mystery’ has arisen regarding the so called ‘Arundel Rudder”.

Seeking to find the original reference regarding the rudder, various authors of church literature, societies and organisations who have written the church history, have been contacted. None

of them had a notion of where or why the rudder is so called. It appears that the original reference came from the well-respected Hutchins. Hutchins originally does not mention a 'rudder', but states that the carvings on the font possibly had the arms of Maltravers or Arundel. It is from this reference that all other writing has stemmed.

So, research began…

A personal search for Arundel emblems, badges and arms was made, no rudder was found. So, experts were contacted.

Arundel Castle archives' expert, as well as The College of Arms Maltravers Herald Extraordinary, were both adamant that there is no such reference in arms, emblems, heraldic badges or symbols of a rudder associated with any of the Arundels. Pictures of the font were sent, by request, but all notion of a rudder was verified as being non-existent. The Castle archives did say the badge was probably associated with the Maltravers family, but to date no findings have been discovered.

There is a rudder in The Arundel Museum, but this is 19th century and is as a reminder that Arundel was once a port.

An Ecclesiastical stone carving expert from English Heritage, was contacted. He states that shields/motifs/badges on fonts are customarily an acknowledgement of the family who paid for it. It was strictly controlled during the Middle Ages and would only have been used with the permission of the benefactor, and not as any type of decoration.

He continues, that perhaps the carving is associated with a local family with an interest in the church.

On looking at the carvings, the rudder is placed within a castle shape, this is called bouche, this castle shape is used as a background for heraldic badges. The rose, which is not the Tudor Rose, has many interpretations. It is most likely, in this case, referring to the Virgin Mary, and this would be a decoration, often found in the Middle Ages, within the centre of a quatrefoil. As the example is quite formalized, within a square, it is properly called a 'rose patera'. The rose could also represent the house of York or Lancaster, and therefore is probably dated before 1485 and represents a standard design of a font of the 15th century.

So, as suggested by experts…which local family?

Research continued.

Looking at the wills of both Margarita and Lettyse, was there any local family mentioned who had the 'rudder' as an emblem/badge/motif or as part of their arms? The name Willoughby, who was mentioned in the will of Lettyse has a rudder as part of his arms. Investigations into Willoughby began. It also needs noting that Hutchins in his history does not mention the brass dedicated to Lettyse, but he does include Margarita.

So, where does Willoughby 'fit in'? Reading an article within the Heraldic Society Magazine, manorial windows were described in the 16th century, by the historian Aubrey who visited Broke House, the home of the Willoughby family. He described one window where Maltravers was

quartered with the Syfrewast name. This name is, by marriage, associated with John Maltravers of Hooke and Crowell, not the Baron associated with the church.

The will of Lettyse mentions a Leonard Willoughby, his lands were at Turners Puddle, and he was MP for Wareham in the first Parliament of Queen Mary's reign (1547). His wife's brother was James Turberville and together Leonard and James were executors of the will of Lettyse. She also left them her 'great house' in London, 'to make sale therof to the moste advantage'. James, for a short period of time was appointed as Rector of Lytchett Matravers before moving on to become Bishop of Exeter. This was until Queen Elizabeth I came to the throne and he would not take the oath of supremacy, so was deprived of the bishopric in 1559.

The full history of the men mentioned in the wills of both Margarita and Lettyse are both long and intricate, too much within this context.

The Willoughby Rudder is well documented, with examples in churches in the south and west. It stems from a long history, associated with two other families, both with long histories, that have now come to an end.

So how involved were the Arundels in the church restoration? Again, the Arundel family has the most complicated early history, too much to explain within this context. There are branches of the family in the south and west, for example at Wardour (Wiltshire) and Hempston and Lanherne (Cornwall), but lands spread far and wide in all directions of the country. This made the Arundels, in the time of the Tudors, the most numerous, most powerful and wealthy family that was also connected, through marriage, to King Henry VIII.

Did they refurbish the church? This is open to debate, but the 'web' link to the history of St Mary's states 'In the 17th century the Arundel family, heirs by marriage to the Maltravers estate, funded the rebuilding of the north aisle'. At Dorset record office, under 'Dorset Families' there is a reference that the Arundels sold the Maltravers estate in 1587, (the 16th century), the sale was due to the family needing money. There is also an extremely delicate document which shows the sale of the estate. So again, a discrepancy with this information. Would a family 'needing money' refurbish the church? It must also be remembered that the primary source for the 'Arundel Rudder' (Hutchins as mentioned) appeared to have no knowledge of the brass and therefore 'will' of Lettyse...

So...was Willoughby, in some way, influential in the carvings on the font? Is the rudder part of his 'arms'? What do you think?

If only stones could talk!

There is quite a lot to read, if anyone is interested in finding out more! See references below.

Archives, societies and experts contacted and visited, and used within this article.

Arundel Castle Archives

Brass society

British History on line

Bude Heritage and Archive Centre

College of Arms

Dorset History Centre and Archives

Dunster Castle

English Heritage (Ecclesiastical Stonework - personal contact)

Lewes Archives and museum

Shropshire Archives

The Royal Commission (Dorset)

The National Archives

Tudor Glass (personal contact)

There are various on-line sites (*treat with caution!)*

Sites, such as Ancestry need membership (*thanks* to those willing to 'join in' and share!)

There are some books in the local library.

Local authors Shirley Percival and Caroleen McClure

The Dorset Village Book – Harry and Hugh Ashley

The Tudor Chronicles -Susan Daran (1485-1608)

Handbook for Travels (includes Dorset) -John Murray

Other books for reference

Dorset Brasses – Doris Sybil

Hutchins (reference to Dorset) Dorset History Centre

Tierney's- History of Arundel

Siddons -Badges

Boswell S.J. -14th Century England Vol 4

Cokayne (1932 -pages 581-586)

The British Library – Women in Medieval Society

The Luminarium (pages 336 onward)

Corkers Survey of Dorset 1622

Forgotten Books

Gerald Breanest – Thomas -Howard Duke of Norfolk

There are lots of well researched 'fiction' books by authors such as;

Tracy Borman

Elizabeth Chadwick

Hilary Mantel

Alison Weir

The Accursed Kings series, author Maurice Druon (also recorded for television) although French history, does cover the era of the first Baron John Maltravers!

Happy reading