

The Story of

CHIDDINGSTONE



CHURCH AND VILLAGE

by Rupert Gunnis

Price One Shilling

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"Chiddingstone," said the Victorian painter, Sir John Millais, who often stayed at the Castle, "is the most charming and untouched village in England and I know nothing else like it." Though this was said nearly eighty years ago, it is still very true. Little has altered here in those years and if Sir John could come back he would find indeed hardly anything had changed, except that he could no longer sit and sketch, as he used to do, in the village street, for the occasional cart of the last century has now been replaced by frequent motor cars and motor bicycles.

The parish of Chiddingstone was formerly divided into two manors, Chiddingstone Cobham and Chiddingstone Burgherst. The former manor was held in 1341 by Reginald de Cobham, descended from a younger branch of that famous Kentish family. The Cobhams lived at Sternborough Castle in Surrey. The manor remained in the family till the death of Sir Thomas Cobham in 1462, who left by his wife, Anne, daughter of Humphrey Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, an only daughter and heiress, also called Anne, who married firstly at the age of 8 Lord Mountjoy, and secondly, in 1477, Edward 2nd Lord Burgh of Gainsborough, Lincolnshire. He was in 1510 found a lunatic and, being "distracted of memorie", was never summoned to Parliament on his father's death.

He was succeeded by his son, Thomas, 3rd Lord Burgh, whose eldest son, Sir Edward, married Catherine Parr who, after Edward's death, when she was but 17, married Lord Latimer, only again to be left a widow in 1542. As she was a considerable heiress there were a number of suitors for her hand, but Henry VIII had made up his mind to make her his Queen Consort, and a few months after her husband's death she became the sixth, and last, wife of that much married monarch.

The 3rd Lord Burgh was followed by his third son, who in his turn was succeeded by Thomas, 5th Lord Burgh in 1584. Thomas was much the most distinguished member of his family, for he was a Knight of the Garter, Ambassador to Scotland and finally in

1597 Lord Deputy of Ireland. He was described as "A grave and steady man, skilled in most languages, observing everything, but affected with nothing; keeping a great distance between his looks and his heart, as between his words and his thoughts". He kept great state in Ireland and left his family in penury. At his death, he left a son and heir aged three, who five years later was dead and with this infant the peerage of Burgh became extinct.

The extravagance of the Lord Deputy forced the trustees of the last Lord Burgh to sell the manor and in 1598 it was purchased by Richard Streatfeild.

The other manor at Chiddingstone was that of Chiddingstone Burgherst. It seems to have been in the possession of the family of Burgherst from about the middle of the 13th century. The family came from Burwash in Sussex and the first owner of the Chiddingstone manor seems to have been one, Reynold Burgherst. He was succeeded by his son, Robert, who in 1299 was made Constable of Dover Castle and Warden of the Cinque Ports and in 1305 was summoned to Parliament, whereby he is held to have become Lord Burgherst. He died in the following year and was succeeded by his son, who died shortly afterwards when the Barony passed to the 1st Lord's third son Bartholomew, a distinguished soldier and the rebuilder of Chiddingstone Church. He was Constable of Dover Castle, was Chamberlain of the Household to Edward III and Constable of the Tower of London. He died in 1355 and was buried in the Grey Friars Church in London. He was followed by his eldest son, the 4th Baron, who as a boy fought at Crecy and was in 1348 nominated a Knight of the Garter, as one of the 25 Original Knights of that most noble order. He accompanied the Black Prince in most of his expeditions, was present at the battle of Poitiers and was, indeed, one of the greatest soldiers of the age. He also made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He seems, before his death, to have alienated the Manor to Sir Walter de Pavely, a fellow Knight of the Garter, and it remained in that family till about 1377 when it was sold to the family of Vaux, in whose possession it remained till about 1440 when it was sold to John Alpegh of Bore Place in this parish.

John died in 1489 and was buried in Chiddingstone Church and the manor passed to his younger daughter, Margaret, who had married Sir Robert Read. Sir Robert was descended from a Northumbrian family and in 1507 was made Chief Justice of the Common Pleas. He was so highly esteemed by Henry VII that he made him one of his executors. Sir Robert had one son, Edmund, who died in his father's lifetime and was buried in Chiddingstone Church. On Sir Robert's death, therefore, in 1519 his heirs were

his four daughters, of whom the eldest, Bridget, married Sir Thomas Willoughby, and it was to her that the Manor passed. This Sir Thomas was fifth and youngest son of Sir Christopher Willoughby and brother of the 1st Lord Willoughby of Parham, he was knighted by Henry VIII and, like his father-in-law, became Chief Justice of the Common Pleas. The family of Willoughby held the Manor till early in the 17th century when it was alienated to the family of Seyliard of Delaware in the Parish of Brasted, Kent. The Seyliards in their turn sold the Manor to Henry Streatfeild in about 1700, so that the two manors were joined in the ownership of that family, and indeed remained so till the present century.

The first Streatfeild to settle in Chiddingstone was Robert, who was born in 1514 and married a sister of Sir John Rivers, Lord Mayor of London. He was probably the builder of High Street House which was a small house of which the gateway, or rather doorway, remained in the Park till before the last war. Thus settled in Kent the Streatfeilds remained there for generations, looking after their property, which they managed to enlarge by care and by prudent marriages, so that in the Victorian age they owned nearly 8,000 acres in the county of Kent.

They are an admirable example of the county family which no other country can produce, who never reach great heights but are content to look after their property and tenants. They had no desire for office nor were they interested in politics; indeed in the four hundred years they owned Chiddingstone not one member of the family was returned to Parliament, nor would they even allow their names to be put forward. Occasionally the head of the family became a High Sheriff, but that was the limit of their ambitions. Their interests were bounded by their property and they were excellent and kindly landlords, popular and beloved in the villages round Chiddingstone.

One or two of them certainly had taste. Henry (1639-1719) went on the Grand Tour as a young man and became interested in architecture and, marrying an heiress, rebuilt High Street House on the site of the present Castle in 1683. A drawing of this house still exists and a delightful building it is too, with its formal gardens, its iron palisade and gates, with statues of warriors on the gate piers, the hood, in the form of a shell, over the front doorway, and most engaging of all a garden of box, the hedges trimmed to represent the fortification of some town Henry had seen abroad: there are the redoubts, the bastions, the glacis and all the octagonal and triangular walls and fortifications which still can be seen in one or two towns in Italy. The family were very fond of this work, and fifty years after Henry's death there were still instructions to

the gardeners that any box plant which died must be replaced, and the exact height to which each line of fortification must be clipped.

It was Henry, his son who built, in 1736 the Mausoleum which still exists in the churchyard, a square building with a great vault beneath to which a flight of steps lead. Opposite the top step is a bust of the builder, and beneath a charming epitaph which runs as follows:

HENRY STREATFEILD
A lover of lawful liberty,
Dependent on no man.
True to his trust,
Just in his dealings.
Often obliging,
Never ungrateful.
Charm'd with retirement.
Delighted in planting.
His passions always followed by
repentance.

The steps lead down to the long vault where, on shelves of slate lie the Streatfeilds in coffins of oak cut on the estate.

In 1752 his son, again a Henry Streatfeild, married the illegitimate daughter, but also heiress, of Jocelyn, 7th and last Earl of Leicester, owner of the neighbouring great house of Penshurst.

This at first must have seemed a very shrewd move, for under her father's will everything came to Anne, and thus to her husband. Henry first of all got a grant for his wife of the arms of Sidney, the famous "Broad Pheon", and then proceeded to build a road between High Street House and Penshurst, traces of which can still be seen, though the charming octagonal lodge gates were demolished a few years ago.

Not unnaturally the legitimate Sidneys were not going to stand for this, and the two neices of Jocelyn united in a law suit. This was not only a vastly expensive proceeding, but also a very long one. At length an arrangement was arrived at by which Penshurst and its lands went to the two ladies, while the Streatfeilds were given the property of Coity in Wales, which had come into the Sidney family by the marriage of Barbara Gamage, heiress of Coity, with Robert, later 1st Earl of Leicester, in 1584.

This land was unfortunately sold towards the end of the 18th century and the proceeds, about £13,000, were used to "Gothicise"

High Street House, which from then on was called Chiddingstone Castle. This was a mistake in every way, for it destroyed the charming Carolean House and was too big for the changing values of the 19th century. In 1803 the builder wrote to a friend about his plans and enclosed a water colour sketch of what he hoped the house, already half rebuilt, would finally look like. The sketch shows a castle twice as big as the present one, and even Mr. Streatfeild seemed a little uncertain, for he wrote: "The whole is so great a work that I may not think it prudent to pursue it, especially in such strange times as the present". Mr. Streatfeild seems to have been his own architect, and he proudly added that he thought it would add to the grandeur if the end of the coach house "should assume the appearance of a chapel". Major, later Colonel Sir Henry Streatfeild, succeeded in 1889, but the house was too large and expensive to run and from the closing years of the last century it was let to various tenants; on his death in 1938 the Castle was sold and the village was acquired by the National Trust.

THE CHURCH

We do not know what the original church looked like, but in 1287 it was valued at thirty marks. This church was largely rebuilt by Sir Bartholomew Burgherst about the middle of the 14th century and well before his death in 1380: according to one authority the rebuilding took place as early as 1320. The church has a notable perpendicular tower, which has a stair turret running up its full height, and is capped with four dumpy crocketed pinnacles. On its eastern wall can still be seen the weather course of the original roof which was lowered in Tudor times, though that of the South aisle was not touched. The North Chapel was built in 1516 by Sir Robert Read "in honour of God and St. Katherine" and in it he founded a chantry by his charter, dated October 10th in the following year. Read died in 1519 and was buried in the chapel, as was also his son-in-law, Sir Thomas Willoughby.

In 1624 the church was struck by lightning and a considerable amount of damage was done, though the church was not as completely destroyed as Withyham in Sussex which was practically burnt out from the same cause a few years later.

The repairs to the church took five years to complete and in 1629 the church was reconsecrated by the Bishop of Rochester. The South Porch dates from this period, for its sundial is dated 1626.

Inside the church little can be seen of the original building which

was so extensively altered in the fourteenth century. The only indication of the width of the Early English Chancel is seen on either side in a little bit of walling, to which the responds are attached, at the extreme east end.

In the interior of the church as one enters on the left is the font; this dates from after the fire of 1624 and was made in 1628 and cost £3 10s. 0d. The fine wooden cover is so weighted that it can be pulled up and down and dates from the same period. The altar rails probably date from the first quarter of the 17th century.

The magnificent "spider" brass chandelier was given to the church in 1726 by Edward Tenison (1673-1735) who was appointed to the rectory of Chiddingstone in 1698 which he held conjointly with the rectory of Sundridge, near Sevenoaks. It seems unlikely that Tenison passed much time at Chiddingstone, for doubtless owing to his relationship with Thomas Tenison, Archbishop of Canterbury, his rise in the church was remarkably rapid. In 1705 he was made a prebendary of Lichfield, three years later Archdeacon of Carmarthen and in 1709 a prebendary of Canterbury. In 1714 he inherited considerable estates from his uncle, Edward Tenison of Lambeth, but managed to lose most of his money in the South Sea Company. In 1730 he went to Ireland with the Lord Lieutenant, the Duke of Dorset, who a year later nominated him to the bishopric of Ossory. He died in Ireland and was buried in Dublin. He did not forget Chiddingstone, for in his will is mentioned a bequest of £20 for "the poor of the Parish". Besides the chandelier he gave to this church, he gave a similar one to Sundridge and a far grander one to Canterbury Cathedral.

The Bishop of Ossory is not the only Bishop connected with the church: in 1540 Richard Ingerth, Suffragan Bishop of Dover was appointed to the living by Archbishop Cranmer. Ingerth had a curious history: he was a Dominican monk and entered the Priory of King's Langley, Herts. in his youth and in 1529 became Prior. Some time after this he became one of the agents of Thomas Cromwell in the suppression of the smaller religious houses. Cromwell, son of a fuller at Putney, had been early in 1525 appointed one of the three persons appointed for the suppression of small monasteries, "incredible things" being spoken as to the way in which he acted. In 1535 he was appointed Visitor General of the Monasteries and a year later an act was passed dissolving all those monasteries which had not two hundred pounds a year of revenue, and granting their possessions to the King. In 1540 he had reached the apex of his career and having been instrumental in arranging the King's marriage with Anne of Cleve, he was appointed Lord Chancellor and created Earl of Essex. The disgust of the King

with his wife was the ruin of Cromwell, he was accused of treason and on 28th July of the same year was beheaded. Such was the rise and fall of one of whom it was said "Putney saw his cradle in a cottage, and England saw his coffin in a ditch, his original was mean, his end meaner".

Ingerth does not seem to have joined Cromwell in his work at the beginning, though it is said he visited in the course of his duties every house of Friars-Preachers in the Kingdom. He was consecrated in 1537 and in the following year was appointed Suffragan Bishop of Dover. Four years previously an Act of Parliament had created a large number of Suffragan Bishops, "for the more speedy administration of the sacraments and for other wholesome and devout things, and laudable ceremonies". The list of towns so honoured is interesting, for besides Dover others were Thetford, Colchester, Guildford, Taunton, Shaftesbury, Malton Marlborough, Shewsbury, Penrith, Bridgewater, etc.

Ingerth managed to hold both the Bishopric of Dover and the Priory of King's Langley, but in 1539 the latter was dissolved, though all its landed property was granted to the Bishop. In the same year he was given the Rectory of Chiddingstone, a post he held till his death in 1544. Like the Bishop of Ossory he did not forget his parish for in his will he left a small sum of money to "be dyspensd emongst the poore people there".

Among the furnishings of the church the pulpit should be especially noticed. The bill for it is in the Parish accounts for 1577-1579 and it cost £1 6s. 10d.

The monument on the south side of the altar is an altar tomb of free-stone with a top of black Belgian marble, or "touch" as it was called, which commemorates, Frances, daughter of John Reeve of London, and her two husbands, Thomas Streatfeild of Shoreham, who died in 1627 and John Seyliard of Brasted. Frances died in 1650, and her second husband may be the "Mr. John Seyliard" who was buried under "the Communion tabel" in 1669.

The Streatfeild tablets are not of great interest, though there are two pretty 18th century cartouche tablets in the south aisle. A small tablet commemorates Sophia Streatfeild, the friend of Dr. Johnson and Mr. and Mrs. Thrale. Sophia was a blue stocking and was a classical scholar. She had a large collection of Greek and Latin authors which she had bound in a special blue leather with "S.S." on the back. How genuine or deep her knowledge was it is now difficult to estimate. Dr. Johnson said: "Sophy is a sweet

creature and I love her very much, but my little Burney writes a better letter", and later he added, "Take away her Greek and she is ignorant as a butterfly". Dr. Johnson thought she looked her best with tears running down her cheeks. Fanny Burney gave this description of this rather extraordinary performance in her diary in 1779 "Two crystal tears came into the eyes of S.S. and rolled gently down her soft cheeks. Such a sight I never saw before, nor could I have believed. She offered not to conceal or dissipate them; on the contrary she contrived to have them seen by everybody. She looked, indeed, uncommonly handsome . . . neither her features nor complexion were at all ruffled; nay indeed, she was smiling the whole time". Mrs. Thrale did not care for her and acidly remarked that "She was everybody's admiration and nobody's choice". She left London towards the end of the 18th century and settled in a little house in Tunbridge Wells, where in 1835 she died.

On the church floor are various ironstone slabs, one of which is inscribed "Loe here lies the copes of Richard Streatfeild, Greene in yeres, but ripe in faith and fruits yet eene God hath his Sovle, this town his fame, the poor a portion large of all his wordly stooore". Richard died in 1601, aged forty. In the North Chapel, now used as a vestry, are a number of monuments of the Streatfeilds of Chart's Edge a younger branch of the Chiddingstone family. The monuments are of little interest, although the one to Richard Champion Streatfeild has three beautifully carved angel heads, and it is fairly certainly by an Italian, and not an English artist.

The stained glass in the church is nearly all modern. The east window being a memorial to Mrs. Streatfeild, who died in 1898 and is the work of Charles Kempe (1837-1907) one of the most prolific artists in stained glass of the Victorian period.

The window in the North aisle is to Gerald Milburn, killed at Ypres in 1916. His parents rented for many years Stonewall in the parish; it is the work of Powell of Whitefriars, who also designed the window in the South aisle to Geoffrey Gunnis, who died of wounds in 1916 and was a nephew of Sir Henry Streatfeild.

On the marriage of Henry Streatfeild and Anne Sidney, the former brought from Penshurst a very fine collection of 17th century armorial glass which, probably towards the end of the 18th century, was placed in the East window (a water colour showing this window at that period hangs on the pillar near the entrance, or South porch). When the Henry Streatfeild of the time died in 1852 the armorial glass was returned to the then owner of Penshurst, Lord De L'Isle and Dudley and remained in the house till after the 1939-45 war when it was placed in the West window of Penshurst

Church by the present Viscount De L'Isle, V.C.; though during the move much of the glass seems to have been damaged and destroyed.

During the last war a bomb destroyed the window at the end of the south aisle of Chiddingstone Church, but it was no artistic loss, as it was probably one of the worst pieces of stained glass in Kent, the colours being angry browns, crimson lake and vivid greens, and the whole being copied, it would seem, from a design in Berlin wool.

The collection of Hatchments in the church is one of the most complete in Kent and a key will be found to them on the pillar near the South door. Hatchments are now never, nor indeed have for a long time been, used. On the death of the head of the family, or his wife, the undertaker arranged for his "Herald Painter" to provide one showing the quartering of the deceased person. This was hung over the front door of the dead person's house and after a year and a day was taken down and placed in the church.

The tower contains a peal of eight bells. These are of different periods and date from 1753-1867. It is interesting to note that the curfew was rung at 8 p.m. from November to March till after the first world war.

THE VILLAGE

Of the beautiful old houses in the Village street, the most Easterly one was occupied by a Roger Attwood in 1453. In 1450 he had taken part in Jack Cade's rebellion, but was pardoned and presumably ended his days peaceably at Chiddingstone. The shop and post-office is first mentioned in a deed of 1453, when it is referred to as the "Longhouse" and is granted by Ann Chaloner to William Hunt (another pardoned rebel). Thereafter the house was known as "Hunt's" and remained in the family for over sixty years until it was bought by Sir Thomas Boleyn of Hever, father of Anne Boleyn, in 1517. From the Boleyns it passed to the Seyliards in 1537, and in 1700 became the property of the Streatfeilds. At the time the house was in two parts, called "Hunt's" and "Burghesh Court" respectively, and there can be little doubt that the former was pulled down when the brick cottages were built and that it is "Burghesh Court" which is now the shop and post-office.

The house with the timbered porch was built about 1550 and came into the Beecher family in 1575 during the later years of

Queen Elizabeth. The front room is panelled and has carved over the fireplace the initials "G.I.B." and the date 1638, commemorating the marriage of George Beecher and Jane Elye which took place in the Parish Church on May 6th of that year. The Beechers, who were small farmers owning about twenty acres round what is now the new Churchyard, sold the house to Henry Streatfeild in 1699.

The next house has "A 1645 W" in the pargeting over the entrance, this being the year in which Ann Woodgate bought it from Benjamin Wakelyn the butcher for £150. The house itself was built long before that date and was originally the Manor House of Chiddingstone Cobham, where the manorial courts were held, In 1572 it had been owned by another Henry Streatfeild and was bought back by the family in 1739.

The earliest reference to what is now the Castle Inn occurs in the year 1666, when "John Ashdown of Hever conveys to Thos. Wakelyn of Chiddingstone, Butcher, for £180 messuage with barn, etc., called the 'Rock House'." In 1712 it was bought by Thomas Weller, a tailor, for a dwelling-house and in 1730 was turned into an inn, originally known as the "Five Bells".

The Village stocks stood at the West end of the churchyard, but at a public meeting held in 1752, it was resolved that Mr. Henry Streatfeild, then Lord of the Manor, might take down the old stock-house, on condition that he left the tiles for the use of the Church and built a stone wall in its place as a fence for the Churchyard; he was also required to supply a new pair of stocks to replace the old ones.