

Restoration Wall Plaque above South Door

Article 2 for Church News October 2011 by John Read

During the past few months we have seen scaffolding and plastic sheeting erected in the north and south aisles to enable much needed redecoration to take place. Now that the scaffolding and plastic sheeting has at last come down, it is possible to see the wall plaque above the south door which commemorates an earlier period of renovation work on the church which went on from October 1790 to May 1793 – a period of more than two and a half years.

The inscription in Latin reads as follows:

DEO OPTIMO MAXIMO AUSPICE TEMPLUM HOC SACRO-SANCTUM
VETUSTATE PENE PROLAPSUM RESTITUERUNT IOANNES GRIFFIN
DOMINUS HOWARD DE WALDEN ET DOMINUS BRAYBROOKE DE
BRAYBROOKE PATRONUS ET PAROECIANI AD 1791 1792 1793

which can be translated as:

WITH THE HELP OF GOD OUR BEST AND GREATEST PROTECTOR,
THIS HOLY BUILDING WHICH HAD ALMOST COLLAPSED THROUGH
OLD AGE, WAS RESTORED BY JOHN GRIFFIN, LORD HOWARD DE
WALDEN AND LORD BRAYBROOKE OF BRAYBROOKE, PATRON, AND
BY THE PARISHIONERS AD 1791 1792 1793.

The Vicar of Walden at this time was Revd William Gretton, who was also Lord Howard de Walden's private chaplain at Audley End. St Mary's burial register contains several pages of notes written by Gretton as the work progressed. He tells us that the builder commissioned to carry out the work was Richard Dyche of West Ham, and that scaffolding was erected in October 1790, but that before long the committee overseeing the work had cause to be most dissatisfied with the progress made on the project and with Dyche's business practices. Even so, Dyche is mentioned later in Gretton's notes for the early part of 1793, and it appears that his services were retained to complete the project. Until January 1792 while work took place on the nave, the congregation were using the chancel for services, although the term "chancel" probably included the north and south chapels, and from then until December 1792, they used the north aisle. We are told that the new paving of the nave including the north and south aisles cost £400.

The main contributor to the funds needed to carry out the work was Lord Howard de Walden who contributed £1000 according to Gretton. Authority was obtained from Parliament for a further £4000 to be raised in the form of bonds, and although Gretton does not mention whether enough subscribers were found, it is clear from the wording of the wall plaque that the parishioners had contributed towards the costs. Lord Howard de Walden and his wife also paid for a new east window in the north chapel (superseded by the present

one in 1904 and at that time removed to its present position above the north porch), a copy of Correggio's painting of the Holy Family to hang behind the high altar (now in the north chapel), and two stained glass figures for the west windows of the north and south aisles, together with various cushions, carpets, kneelers, silver, and prayer books.

The two tombs of John Leche and Thomas Lord Audley which were situated in the main chancel, were moved at this time to the north and south chapels respectively. According to Gretton, nothing was found inside the tombs.

The full text of Gretton's notes (transcribed by Beryl Meehan) can be found on the church website, and the church history by Kenneth Dixon also on the website contains further information about the restoration of 1790-93.

John Read