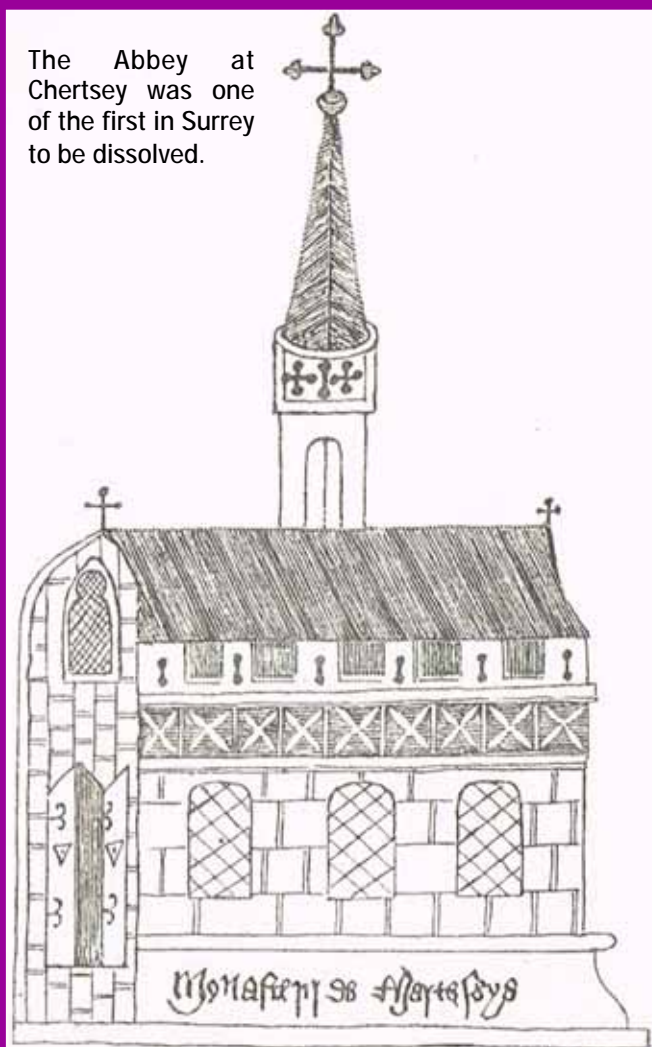


DISSOLUTION & DESTRUCTION

Iain Wakeford 2014

The background to the Dissolution of the monasteries is not as simple as some would have you believe. Whilst Henry VIII and his cronies Wolsey and Cromwell brought about the downfall of several abbeys, priories and friaries, that they found to be poorly run or corrupt, there were many monasteries where the monks chose to surrender and take the generous

The Abbey at Chertsey was one of the first in Surrey to be dissolved.



was used in the building of the new Palace of Oatlands. A large amount of monastic material was discovered in the foundations of the palace at when it was excavated in the last century, although exactly how much of the Abbey was taken there is uncertain.

Not all of the buildings at Chertsey were destroyed, however, as in 1548 a group of Bishops met at Chertsey to write the first English Book of Common Prayer, and it has been suggested that stables may have been created within the Abbey Precinct for the king's horses at Weybridge. The Library at Chertsey was almost certainly removed to the new Palace.

Newark Priory suffered the same fate at Chertsey soon after, with the Prior, Richard Lipescomb 'retiring' on a pension of £40 p.a., to become the Rector of Eversley in Hampshire. Five of the seven other monks

Anthony used the material taken from the priory at Newark for the rebuilding of his house downstream at Byfleet!

By this time he had accumulated a 'collection' of former monastic properties, including Battle Abbey in Sussex and upon the death of his half-brother - William Fitzwilliam, The Earl of Southampton, he inherited the ruined abbeys at Waverley (near Farnham), and Bayham, Calceto and Easebourne all in Sussex as well as Cowdrey House at Midhurst.

In 1546 Henry VIII himself visited Byfleet,



When the monks at Newark were pensioned off, the buildings were given to Sir Anthony Browne, who used some of the material to rebuild his manor house at Byfleet.

In 1535, Dr Leigh (one of Cromwell's agents) visited Chertsey and made allegations of 'corrupt and dissolute living' against the Abbot and his monks. Chertsey Abbey was one of the first monasteries in Surrey to be dissolved. A further inspection on the 6th July 1537 had described the brothers to be 'the foulest set of monks in the kingdom', but whether this was true is of some doubt. Abbot John Cordrey signed their surrender but with Jane Seymour's death a few months later (after giving birth to Edward VI) the Abbot and his monks found that they were not 'pensioned off', but moved to Bisham Abbey in Berkshire where they were to offer prayers 'in perpetuity' for her soul. So the 'foulest set of monks' moved out of Chertsey on the 18th December 1537 only to discover that 'in perpetuity' to Henry VIII apparently only lasted about six months, as Bisham itself was dissolved in June 1538!

Chertsey Abbey was valued at almost £660, a bargain for a monastery that at its height had controlled over 50,000 acres of land, with houses in London and South Wales as well as much of Surrey. By comparison the Benedictine Abbey at Abingdon was valued at £1,876 and St Albans at £2,102.

It soon became clear however that its real value to Henry was as building material. The steeple was apparently immediately demolished and the lead from the church roof stripped to raise cash. Henry VIII was adding to Hampton Court, where the Chapel was floored with Chertsey Abbey tiles, and later much of the stonework was taken downstream to Weybridge where it

from Newark went to other, more local, churches, including Ripley, West Molesey, Chobham, Frimley and Pyrford.

The church plate was apparently taken off to the Tower of London, the corn to Send Barns, and one of the bells went to Woking Church. The large Chancel window in Ockham Church is also claimed to come from Newark.

The person in charge of dismantling Newark was a gentleman called Sir Anthony Browne. In 1539 Sir Anthony was made master of the Kings Horse with the Manor of Byfleet as one of his homes, presumably so that he could arrange good hunting for the King when he was in this area.

In 1544 Catherine Parr stayed at Byfleet as amongst the queen's payments for that year there is an item for 'preparing for the queen's coming to Byflete, 29 Aug., 7s.4d.'

Was part of that preparation the expansion of the manor house, as it is often stated that Sir

although it is doubtful that he actually stayed at the Manor. A letter written in September that year by Sir Phillip Draycot to the Earl of Shrewsbury states that 'on Thursday last the King hunted in Byfleet. From Oatlands he goes to Chobham or Woking, and thence to Guildford and to Windsor, staying at each place about four days.'

According to the Dictionary of National Biography... 'During the last illness of Henry VIII, Browne with Good courage and conscience undertook to tell the king of his approaching end.'

He was appointed a guardian to Prince Edward and Princess Elizabeth, and was left £300 in the king's will.

Upon Henry's death in 1547 Sir Anthony rode to Hertford to tell Edward that he was King, and rode next to him on his journey to London

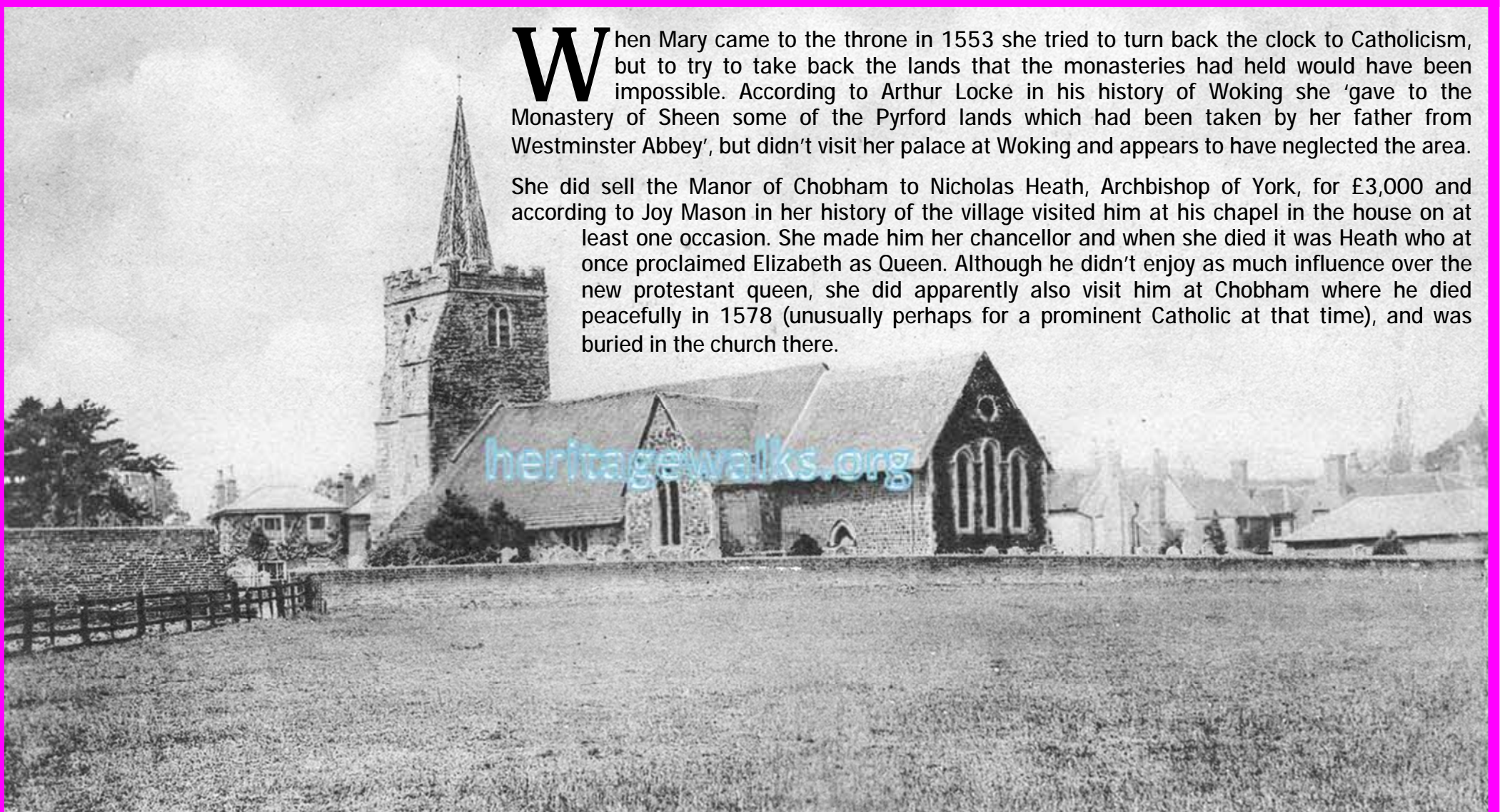
The following year Sir Anthony died at his house in Byfleet. He was buried in Battle Church.

THE NOT SO MONASTIC MARTYR'S OF MARTYRS LANE



The 'legend' that the monks fleeing from Newark to Chertsey Abbey were killed by Cromwell and his troops is just a story. As we have seen Chertsey Abbey was dissolved before Newark (so if anything the martyrs should have come from Chertsey), and the monks from both houses were happily pensioned off. Sadly, perhaps, the origin of the name Martyrs Lane comes not from the monumental events of the dissolution of the monasteries, but from the more mundane fact that in the 19th century the farmland and house in the lane (seen towards the left hand base of this aerial view) was farmed by members of the Martyr family.

WHEN CHOBHAM'S HEATH ENTERTAINED QUEENS



When Mary came to the throne in 1553 she tried to turn back the clock to Catholicism, but to try to take back the lands that the monasteries had held would have been impossible. According to Arthur Locke in his history of Woking she 'gave to the Monastery of Sheen some of the Pyrford lands which had been taken by her father from Westminster Abbey', but didn't visit her palace at Woking and appears to have neglected the area.

She did sell the Manor of Chobham to Nicholas Heath, Archbishop of York, for £3,000 and according to Joy Mason in her history of the village visited him at his chapel in the house on at least one occasion. She made him her chancellor and when she died it was Heath who at once proclaimed Elizabeth as Queen. Although he didn't enjoy as much influence over the new protestant queen, she did apparently also visit him at Chobham where he died peacefully in 1578 (unusually perhaps for a prominent Catholic at that time), and was buried in the church there.