

History of Linton

Linton, anciently written as "Lyllyngton" and in Latin, "Lillituna", took its name from old English words, "lyltlan" signifying small, and "stane", a stone, as the upper part of this parish abounded with quarry stone. It is not mentioned in the Domesday Book, as it was probably included in the parish of East Farleigh.

Patronage of St Nicholas church was in the Crown, until it was given to a hospital for poor travellers in the west borough of Maidstone by Archbishop Walter Reynolds in 1314, for the use and support of that refuge.

Records of the owners of the patronage by the west door show its acquisition in 1728, by Robert Mann Esq (1679-1752). Around 1730 he began to build the core of Linton Place



on an existing site previously owned by the Mayne family. (See under "Monuments" below.)

During 1825-30 Linton Place was further expanded by the 5th Earl Cornwallis to form the present Linton Park with its associated estate cottages on Linton Hill. Mann, whose granddaughter married the 4th Earl, acquired substantial wealth through business connections, of a type then customary, with his distant cousin, Sir Robert Walpole, the first "Prime Minister" of England.

The Building

The Church, dedicated to St Nicholas, was originally a Norman structure of ragstone and was a single cell, consisting of Sanctuary, Chancel and Nave. The manor was, in the 13th century, one of many held by East Farleigh, in whose

accounts it is recorded that the church had been rebuilt and extended between the 13th and 14th centuries. It is believed that a private chapel and the south aisle of the nave were added in the reign of Edward III.

According to a record of Archbishop Parker's visitations in 1573, the church had been substantially rebuilt between 1560 and 1565. The record contains a stern reprimand to the Church-warden for neglecting his duties, and to John Weldysh for persistently absenting himself from communion.



The engraving shows the church as it was in 1809 before its last reconstruction in 1860 under the architect R C Hussey.

The chancel and nave were extended with planned seating for 102 children, the north aisle added and the old spire completely replaced by a massive new bell tower in the north west corner.

The whole cost was borne by the Ladies Louisa and Elizabeth Cornwallis, grand-daughters of the distinguished soldier, diplomat, twice Governor of India (where he is buried) and aristocrat, the 1st Marquess Cornwallis. His enforced surrender of British forces to George Washington at Yorktown in 1781 led to the end of the American War of Independence. The sisters were living at the adjacent Linton Park which had become the Cornwallis seat in 1824.

The reopening of the church in 1861 by the Archbishop of Canterbury is commemorated by a plaque above the font near the west door. The Walker organ was also the Ladies' gift; it

has recently been restored. The 150th anniversary of this munificence was celebrated in 2011 with a special service and an historical exhibition. Although the two benefactors are buried in the Cornwallis vault at Culford, near Bury St Edmunds, they are commemorated here by the south chancel window erected by their nephews and nieces.

The Church Today

From the nave it can be seen that the columns to the arches differ, two in the south aisle being early English, the third modern. The pillars to the north aisle copy those of the south.

The coved roof is 19th century, but the king posts and tie beams are medieval. The chancel roof is elegantly panelled in the same style as the nave roof and the beams are supported by gilded shields bearing symbols of the Crucifixion.

The 15th century moulded chancel arch is tall and wide, springing from slight shafts. There are two arches leading to the south chapel, now known as the Organ Vestry, one from the chancel and one from the south aisle.



The arch between the chancel and the Cornwallis Chapel is 15th or early 16th century, but that between the Chapel and north aisle, and for reasons unknown bearing the Royal Arms, was opened as part of the 1860 reconstruction.



Traces of the old Sanctuary remain in

the south wall of the chancel where there is a plain pointed piscina with a strange recess in one corner. Nearby is a niche, ornamented with a cinquefoiled head.

Traces too still exist of the gallery that led by a narrow stair to the top of the old rood screen, before which a certain John Broghard intended that candles should burn, in perpetuity. In his will he left the price of one cow to ensure this, the cost at the time, (1485) being 8 shillings (40p)!



The existing intricately-carved wooden rood, or chancel, screen was the gift of Col R Olaf Hambro of the banking family, then owner of Linton Park, and, as inscribed on the chancel side, is "*in thankfulness for those who fought in defence of their country in the 1939-1945 war and were spared to carry on His work on earth*". He was churchwarden for 22 years and is commemorated by a marble plaque close to the font.



Beneath the early English arch leading to the Organ Vestry are the remains of the original rood screen. It has been cleverly restored, and the elegant pattern retained – lowest panel plain, middle panels with open cinquefoiled arches and the topmost panels with smaller trefoiled arches. Above all is an embattled cornice.

The other wooden screens are equally interesting. The screen through which a doorway leads to the Cornwallis Chapel is comparatively modern, but on the opposite side of the chancel is some delicate Jacobean screen work, housing the present organ.

All Souls Chapel

Situated in the north aisle, this chapel was devised by Rev J L Yeo, Vicar of St Nicholas from 1946 until his death in 1963. The font was moved here from its position just inside the west door, (to where it has now been removed again), and the Victorian cover, which needed a pulley to move it, was replaced by the present one in memory of the Vicar. The Baptistry was completed in 1966.

Church Monuments and Cornwallis Chapel

The church houses two alabaster family monuments of the 17th century. One hangs on the wall of the north aisle in memory of Sir Anthony Mayne, Knight, d.1627, and his two wives.



The upper part was once richly coloured, and is supported by Corinthian columns. Above is a smaller figure, known as the Faithful Gardener. There is a story that when his master died he was so stricken with grief that he died immediately afterwards!

The other family monument is of Sir Anthony's father, another Sir Anthony, d.1615, and his wife and is in the



Cornwallis Chapel itself. This, too, was once richly coloured, but has been roughly used and possibly even exposed to the weather. There are signs of deliberate damage. As the younger Sir Anthony Mayne's son, John, led the Royalists in the fierce Maidstone Battle in the Civil War against the Parliamentarians

and lost, their soldiers are reputed to be responsible. It has been recently restored.

The Cornwallis Chapel on the north side of the chancel is of considerable historical importance and artistic distinction. Further reference may therefore be made to the more detailed Guide to its 21 monuments and hatchment which is placed within the Chapel. Some of these are the work of EH Baily RA who sculpted Nelson for the top of his column in Trafalgar Square, London.

Renowned is his effigy of Charles, Viscount Brome who died at Linton Park aged 22.



As well as several members of the Mann family, well-known in Kent, many later members of the

Cornwallis family have memorial plaques here. These include the 5th Earl Cornwallis who inherited Linton Park in 1824 and, with the famous Cubitt brothers of London, created the present building. He died in 1852 without male heirs, Viscount Brome having predeceased him in 1835. His daughter, Julia, who inherited Linton Park and married Viscount Holmesdale, heir to 2nd Earl Amherst, died in 1883. The east window and the brass plaque on the north chancel wall are memorials to her.

The Cornwallis line was indirectly revived by the creation in 1927 of a leading Kent figure, a great grandson of the 5th Earl, as the 1st Baron Cornwallis of Linton. He is also commemorated with members of his family, by monuments in the Chapel and churchyard and by the stone benches in the porch.



This Chapel houses a large chest tomb and white marble urn as monument to Galfridas Mann, (d 1756) a twin son of Robert Mann, referred to earlier. It was paid for by his very great friend and correspondent Horace Walpole, an important social and political commentator of the period, who built Strawberry Hill, Twickenham in Gothick style.

Silver

The church owns some historic silver. Most noted is a Jacobean Standing Cup and Cover, bearing the London hall-mark of 1619.



The cover has an open-work spire surmounted by a male figure, with shield and spear. This was originally a high quality domestic drinking vessel. It weighs 32ozs.

There are also two patens, dated 1683 and 1698. One was the gift of Sir Francis Wythens who bought Linton Place from the Mayne family after the Civil War. The other was given by Robert Mann who acquired Linton Place in 1730.

In April 2007 the silver was featured on the BBC's Antiques Roadshow at Rochester Cathedral.

It is always housed in a bank's safe deposit facility.

Bells



There are eight bells in the tower, the oldest being three made by John Waylett in 1717. The newest were cast by Alfred Bowler in 1920 and were acquired as a memorial to the dead of the 1914-1918 war. The peal was restored in 1981 and is still in use. The belfry is not open to visitors.

The Clock

The turret clock in the tower dates from 1700 and was refurbished in 1986, when the manual wind was converted to electric wind, and in 2012 when some broken parts were replaced.

Stained Glass Windows

There are 5 windows attributed to Clayton & Bell, one of the most prolific and proficient firms of English stained glass manufacturers during the latter half of the 19th century.

East Window (1884)

3 lights. 3 Marys at the Sepulchre. *Memorial to Lady Holmesdale*

South Chancel (1872)

2 lights. Deposition; Resurrection

Memorial to the Ladies Louisa and Elizabeth Cornwallis

South Aisle West

(1862) 3 lights.

Raising of Lazarus *Alchin memorial window*

North Aisle (1911)

(in what is now the Kitchen) Single light. Good Shepherd

Memorial to Ellen Edwards, Linton School

Mistress at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries

West Window (1858)

4 lights. Nativity *Jane Alchin memorial window.*

April 2012