A history compiled in 1963 by Revd John Greaves Vicar of Ashendon from 1961 to 1974 and with the Master Copy dated 1966.

St. Mary's Church, Ashendon

The parish of Ashendon is in the Diocese of Oxford, the Archdeaconry of Buckingham, and the Rural Deanery of Waddesdon.

The first question many people ask about the Church is "When was it built"? Styles of architecture tell us the answer.

Early English: 1220 to 1250

Decorated: 1315 to 1349

Perpendicular: 1350 to 1400

These dates are approximate, except for that of 1349, when all building came to a standstill on the outbreak of the Black Death. Some parts of the early building have vanished, as the following notes will show, and the Chancel has been altered.

The Tower is a low one, built in somewhere about 1450 to support a spire. The spire is known to have been standing on 14th July 1638, but when it fell down is not known. The tower houses three bells and a sanctus bell, but access is difficult because the steps are dangerously worn. It is not safe to ring the bells, although they may be tolled, but this is of no great consequence, for a method rung on only three bells would be of very limited scope! The treble is of 25 3/4 inches in diameter, and bears the inscription "R.A. 1633". It must be one of the last bells cast in Robert Atton's Buckingham foundry, the site of which has vanished without trace. The second bell has a diameter of 27 ¼ inches and is inscribed "Henry Bagley made me "1658". Bagley's foundry was at Chalcombe in Northamptonshire. The tenor, also cast by Bagley, measures 31 ½ inches across, and moulded on it are the words: "1658 By my voice the people may know to come to heare the word of God". Henry Bagley also cast the sanctus bell in the same year. It has a diameter of 14 ½ inches appears in the old records as "the saunce bell".

The Nave contains a Norman font. Before it was moved to its present position, it is mentioned in 1861 as being partly let into a wall. From the cut-away pews, and an area of cement in the floor, it seems clear that it stood against the pillar of a South Aisle arch. The removal from the walls

of much green plaster during restoration work in 1923 brought to light the XIII-century arch which formerly opened into a North Aisle The fragments of XV century masonry now set in this blanked-off arch are remains from the aisle, which is said to have contained splendid monuments to the Falconer family, which has now vanished away, leaving very little trace of its existence in Ashendon. Why this aisle was permitted to fall into such decay that it collapsed is not known; perhaps the Falconers left no provision for its upkeep after their demise, or departure from the village, whilst if it was for the most part filled with monuments to this one family, the parish may not have felt prepared to pay for its upkeep. when repairs became necessary. The removal of the green plaster also revealed a stair leading to the top of the Rood Screen. The Reverend F. G. Lee, writing in XIX-century, noted that: "The steps of the ancient Rood Loft have been closed up very lately, and the loft itself existed within the memory of an inhabitant still living". In 1851, there were many monumental brasses in the church, but now, alas, all are gone It is sad to have to record that the church has clearly suffered from long years of gross neglect during which sundry parts of it, including the spire, the north aisle, the chantry and the monumental brasses have vanished. This neglect has done irredeemable harm to the historical interest of the church, and much parish history is lost. The reason that the southern wall of the Nave has three clerestory windows whilst the northern wall has but two is that a chantry formerly stood outside the Nave, at the eastern end of the north wall, where the third window would have been. John de Adyngrave was licensed to found and endow a chantry between the years 1320 and 1340. This was in order that masses might be said for his soul. If Parish Registers had then been kept, it might well be that the name de Adyngrave" would be added to those listed later in these notes. Surnames came into use an XIV century as an examination of the lists of parish priests displayed in many Churches shows. In the year 1300 many people had either their trade, or their birthplace, preceded by 'de', tacked onto their Christian names to distinguish them, or else the Christian name of their father. Later in the century they had a surname which was used by all the family.

The Aisle contains little of note except the stone corbels carved as heads on the south wall, and memorial tablets, some of which are notable for beautiful lettering. At some time the aisle has been a chapel, for the eastern end contains a piscina, which is of later construction than

that in the Chancel so clearly an altar once stood here. In 1910, the eastern end of the aisle was used as a vestry.

The Chancel has a waggon roof, which is not usually found except in thew West Country Churches There is a carved stone memorial of interest; the recumbent figure of a warrior in XIV-century chain mail. The hauberk reaches to the knees and is covered by a surcoat. The right hand grasps the sword-hilt and the other holds the scabbard, the left arm carrying a heater-shaped shield - that is, a shield shaped like a flat-iron. The shield is charged with a single chevron. The crossed legs imply that the figure represents a crusader. At some time before 1861 the head, which had been broken off, was replaced on the present abnormally long neck. The two wooden shields hanging above the arch, are believed to have hung on the Rood Screen, and to have been put in their present positions when the screen was taken down. Several names have been suggested as that of the crusader represented, but when all known factors are considered it seems probable that he was a member of the Stafford family, who were lords of the manor of Great Pollicott. during the crusades. They bore inter alia the arms "Or a chevron gules", that is to say a red chevron on a golden shield, and at will be seen that the effigy's shield is charged with a single chevron. Incidentally another badge of the Staffords was a swan, and this swan is now charged on the arms of the County of Buckingham. To continue the description of the Chancel, this was rebuilt in about 1805, presumably at the expense of George Grenville, first marquis of Buckingham, who was in receipt of the great tithes of the parish of Ashendon and was the lay rector, with the consequent responsibility for keeping the Chancel in repair. The Chancel was last repaired in 1910 by earl Temple. The wooden lectern was made by the late Mr. H. Boughton, whose descendants still farm in the parish.

Some History of the Parish of Ashendon

Ashendon was a place of importance in Saxon days, as was shewn by the Hundred being called after "the town" of Ashendon. It is mentioned in the writings of the Venerable Bede (675 – 735), and here was sealed in the treaty by which Cenwealh, king of Wessex from 643 to 672, granted his nephew Cuthred all that part of Wessex lying north of the River Thames as his principality. At that time, Mercia was the most powerful kingdom in what is now England, and Cenwealh was brother-in-law to Penda, king of Mercia. But the two quarrelled and Conwealh was driven

out of his kingdom. He took asylum with the king of East Anglia, who was a Christian, and during his exile, he embraced the Christian faith, being Baptized in the year 648. In 655 Penda died, and Conwealh was able to return to Wessex. Two very fine Anglo-Saxon jewelled brooches were found in Ashendon, and are now in a museum. They are saucer-shaped, and measure 3 1/2 inches across.

Several English villages have names similar to Ashendon's, which makes for confusion when delving back into days when spelling was more arbitrary. However it is clear that this village is the "Essedune" of Domesday Book, but elsewhere the name was variously found written "Essedone" and "Escedune". The first half of the name is a comment on the ash trees which abounded here, whilst "don" implies a high place. The parish includes the hamlets of Upper and Lower Pollicott, the former variously known in bygone days as Great Pollicott or Pollicott Major, and the latter as Little Pollicott, Pollicott Minor, or Pollicott Bucktot. Pollicott comes from a Saxon word meaning "a dwelling on a hill". The Hundred of Ashendon covering 66,670 acres, lies on the edge of what was Bernwood Forest, a Saxon royal forest hunted from the hunting lodge at Brill. Brill was one of "the three forest towns", the other two being Oakley and Boarstall.

Some people hold that Ashendon is the Assendune where, in 871, Ethelred of Wessex and his younger brother Alfred defeated the Danes. Alfred was later Alfred the Great, king of Wessex, and Ethelred of Wessex should not be confused with Ethelred. the Unredey. However, it is generally accepted that the Assendune battlefield lies near Ashdown, some three miles north-west of Lamborne, close by Wayland Smith's Forge, and the site marked on the l" Ordnance map "Alfred's Castle However, our Ashendon is probably the site of the battlefield where, in 1016, Eadnoth, bishop of Dorchester (Oxon), was slain.

Soon after the Norman Conquest a manor in Ashendon was held by Mile Crispin, probably as a tenant-in-chief of the Conquerer.

Mile held 28 lordships in Buckinghamshire and others in different counties. For Domesday Book the two Pollicotts were surveyed and recorded separately from Ashendon, but by 1391 the lordship of Ashendon included Great & Little Pollicott. It was then held by Richard Talbot, heir to John de Hastings, earl of Pembroke. In 1438, the head of the Stafford family, Humphrey earl of Buckingham, Northampton and Stafford and superior lord of Buckingham, held the Manor of Great

Pollicott. His father, also Humphrey and grandson to king EDWARD III, had been murdered in Calais in 1398, presumably at the time of the murder of the duke of Gloucester, uncle to RICHARD II. The Humphrey Stafford who held Great Pollicott was created duke of Buckingham by HENRY VI in 1445, and was slain in the battle of Northampton. He was succeeded in the title by his grandson Henry, whom king RICHARD III beheaded for high treason in Salisbury on 2nd Novemher 1483.The king removed the attainder, so eabling his son, Edward, to succeed to the title. This Edward, the third duke, founded Buckingham College, Cambridge - now called Magdalen College but he also was beheaded for high treason by HENRY VIII in 1521. HENRY did not remove the attainder, and so the lands and rank were forfeit, thus ending the first creation of dukes of Buckingham.

This dukedom seems to have brought misfortune upon its holders; as already shewn, all three dukes of the first creation died a violent death, two of them on the block. The second creation the Villiers family, were scarcely more fortunate CHARLES I created George Villiers, son to sir George Villiers of Brooksby, county Leicester, duke of Buckingham in 1623. Five years later he was murdered in Portsmouth by a disgruntled officer, lieutenant Felton. The dukes heir, another George, served in the Royalist army throughout the Civil War, and at the Restoration recovered part of his estates, for which favour he was indebted to his father-in-law, lord Fairfax the Roundhead general, who played a part in the Restoration. However, he died in penury at Kirkby Moorside in the North Riding, leaving no heir to carry on the title. For the third creation of the duke-dom, queen ANNE made John Sheffield, who was already duke of Normanby, duke of Buckingham and Normandy The family had a seat where Buckingham Palace now stands, which gave the palace its name. Thirty-two years later the second duke, Edmund, died leaving no heirs and so the title again lapsed.

Finally, in 1822 Richard Grenville, marquis of Buckingham, who owned land in this parish, was created duke of Buckingham and Chandos. The second duke, also Richard, bought up much land, which was then a sound investment. Unfortunately, he borrowed money to buy land, and on the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, land lost its value, and he became bankrupt. His son, yet another Richard, died in 1889 leaving no heir male, and so for the fourth time, the title died out. Thus it happens that the first and last of the families to furnish dukes of Buckingham owned land in the parish

After the execution of Edward Stafford, the third duke of Buckingham, in 1521, Ashendon came into the hands of Thoma's Palmer, by the gift of EDWARD VI who also knighted him. But in the very next year the rash sir Thomas supported the duke of Northumberland's rebellion against queen MARY, in favour of lady Jane Grey, or "Jane the Quene" as her signature on a state document has it. Sir Thomas was beheaded for his pains, but MARY allowed his descendants to succeed to the title, and the Palmers evidently learned their lesson, for they continued to hold the manor until 1714, when it was conveyed to Richard Grenville of Wotton.

At some time in the past, the Cowdray family held Lower Pollicott, with sir John Bucktot as their tenant. For some thirty years, he was rector of Shalstone, near Buckingham, but later he must have owned the manor, which became known as Pollicott Bucktot. He presented it to Lincoln College, Oxford, in whose possession it remained until the middle of this century.

During XVI and XVTI centuries, when neglect had allowed many English churches to become dilapidated, an inspection of all churches was introduced by an Order in Council with a view to ensuring that they were restored, In those days the rector of a parish, who received the great tithes – that is, had the right to one tenth of all corn, hay and wood produced in the parish -was held responsible for paying the cost ofall repairs to the Chancel. This applied whether or no he was in Holy Orders, but if he was a layman (lay rector), he must perform the priestly duties vicariously; that is to say he must employ a priest to take care of the parish. This priest, who received the lesser tithes – a tenth of all wool, pigs, milk etc., - thus came to be called a vicar. The repair of the chancel remains the responsibility of the lay rector, where there is one, and the repair of the remainder of the church, and the general care of the churchyard, is the responsibility of the Churchwardens & parochial church council. This was formerly paid for out of the church rate, which rate was fixed annually at the Easter vestry meeting, and was levied on all ratepayers in the parish. Now that payment of the church rate is no longer compulsory the raising of money to pay for repairs is a matter of considerable difficulty.

The report on this church, made in accordance with the aforementioned Order in Council recorded that: "The chancel and church wants paving, but especially the chancel, and also it is but partly ceiled Mr Grenfields’s seat is to be taken down a foot lower; the minister and curate is not

licensed to preach, and also there is not monthly sermons". The remark on Mr. Greenfield's seat is a reminder that a XVII century status symbol was to have a raised seat in church, from which one could see and be seen. Those who had a particular seat reserved for their use paid a pew-rent for it, hence the rubric in the Prayer Book calling upon parishioners "yearly at Easter to reckon with the Parson, Vicar or Curate, and pay to them all "ecclesiastical duties accustomably due then and at that time to be paid".

Before the Dissolution of the Monasteries, Notley Abbey, Long Crendon, held the rectory of Ashendon. The abbey would receive the greater and lesser tithes, and would provide a priest to take the church services and perform the pastoral duties. During Henry VII reign the abbot of Notley made some twenty Ashendon homeless by enclosing sixty acres of land. At the Dissolution of the Monasteries the living of Ashendon became a vicarage, the patronage passing to HENRY VIII, who granted it to the Dean and Chapter of his new cathedral of Christ Church, Oxford. The Diocese of Oxford was formed in 1542, being carved out of the vast diocese of Lincoln, and is unique in that its cathedral is also the chapel of acollege in the University, Christ Church College.

Ashendon was the first place in England to refuse to obey CHARLES I's order to raise a levy of troops at the start of the Civil War. Oxfordshire supported the king during the war; Buckinghamshire backed the "rebel Parliamentiers".

In 1664, John Hart of Cottesford in Oxfordshire left by his will certain rent-charges on land in Easington, near Chalgrove, to pay for the binding apprentice of a poor boy of Ashendon, and similarly for boys of eight other Buckinghamshire parishes.

The annual income to Ashendon is £l. 12. 6d., and the charity is still administered by the Trustees in these parishes. Now that few are bound apprentice in village trades, the Commissioners for Charity have broadened the terms of the trust to include the making of grants to help boys and girls who are first starting work.

In 1738, under the Act of Enclosures, 1700 acres of Ashendon land were enclosed, which no doubt furthered the cause of good husbandry, but one wonders how many of the poorer folk lost the little bit of land they had held for their own cultivating. It must have been a sad day for some

folk, and no doubt contributed towards the drift of people from the countryside to the towns.

On 30th October, 1847, an Order in Council united the parish of Ashendon to that of Dorton, and the united benefice continued until January, 1929, when the Order was replaced by one uniting Ashendon with Wotton Underwood, Dorton being joined to Chilton.

The oldest Parish Register was started in 1732. Here is a list of the surnames which recur in the history of the parish

The two names underlined

are the only ones which still continue in the

parish.

Bampton.
Bucktot
Cherry
Cowdray
Crauford
Cressy
Crispin
Eagleton
Ewers
Falconer
Garret
Giffard
Greenfield
Humphreys
Lucas
Palmer
Rice
Rose
Stafford
Talbot
Webb

Compiled in 1963 by Reverend John Greaves.

The following are notes which are said to be for his own interest, not be included in the Master Copy reproduced above.

Other names suggested for the crusader

A member of the Cheyne, Cheyndutt or Cheynduit family, who ewere lords of the manor of Iselhampton or Isenhampsted Cheyne, nowb known as the Chenies. I can discover no connection between Wotton

and this family, so why should a member be buried here? One of the coats of arms on a wooden shield hanging over the tomb, which shield is believed to have come fromn the Rood Screen is vaguely like the Cheyne arms.

Sir John Bucktot, who held the manor of Pollicott Bucktot or Little Pollicott as a tenant of the Cowdrays, during the XV cent. But he was rector of Shalstone from 1418 to 1450, and these dates are long after the last crusade. Query, some earlier sir John Bucktot?

One of the Cressy family, quondam lords of Great Pollicott. Is there any evidence to support this?

John de Adyngrave, who was licensed to found a chantry in Ashendon between 1320 and 1340, which chantry stood at the East end of the North side of the aisle, for which reason a clerestory window is wanting in this position

Evidence in favour of Stafford The effigy's shield bears the sole charge "Or a chevron gules", or rather no tinctures are given. Or a chevron gules were the arms of Stafford. The only families who wore a chevron bas were : de Clare, de Crombe, St Quintin, Peyvre and de Hemenhale. The Staffords were genuine, not phoney, dukes; that is to say they were of royal blood, they were lords of Great Pollicoit, (and gave their badge of a swan to the county) and so it seems quite reasonable that this tomb commemorates a Stafford.

Also of note in manuscript is the comment " In 1524 the pop of the Ashendon Hundred was half as big again as that of the Buckingham Hundred.