

THE WESTON CHAPEL

Until 2005, the Weston chapel represented an historical anomaly; a privately owned, Roman Catholic chapel, two hundred years older than the Anglican church to which it is attached.

From the late thirteenth century, lay people were founding chantries: endowing masses to be said in their parish church to reduce the time their souls would remain in Purgatory. Richer individuals might build a chapel for family burials with an altar for such masses.



Figure 1 The Weston chapel

Sir Richard Weston, Treasurer to Henry VIII, had an estate at Sutton Place near Guildford. He founded a chantry in 1540; establishing it in a new chapel he had built at the south west corner of Holy Trinity church.

In his will made on 15 May 1541, he directed that his body should be "buried in the Pyshe Church of the Holy Trinity with in the Town of Guldforde in a Chapell which I have caused to be made for the same iyntent..." It is not known exactly where, under the chapel floor, his body is buried.

"Westons Chauntrey" was detailed in The Survey of Chantry Lands Surrey undertaken between 1546 and 1548 as being "for the mayneteyninge of one priest and one yerely obite for the terme of xxii (20) yeares begynninge the xxth day of June in the xxxij yere (1541) of the reigne of our late sovereign lorde Kinge Henry the eight. The incumbent whereof is Anthony Cawsey clerke of the age of l (50) yeres...which said chauntrey and obite are worth lands and tenements by the yere xli whereof to the pore xxvij s iiij d. and so remayneth clere viij li iiij d. plate parcel gilt viij oz di. Qrt. Xlij s. liij d. Ornamentes x li."

The chapel is built largely of flint in a chequer-board design. It can be entered directly from the churchyard or through the church. The two traceried windows on the south side may well have been brought from the Dominican friary which stood near the river. Its buildings had probably been empty since the dissolution of the friary in 1536. The interior of the chapel now has no altar or other original fittings.



Figure 2 East front of chapel

Anthony Cawsey, who had been Sir Richard's chaplain only officiated as chantry priest for a short time. Between 1545 and 1547, chantries were dissolved by Edward VI's government with endowments reverting to the crown. Anthony Cawsey was to be paid a pension of 5 shillings a year. He was presented as rector of Compton late in 1547 by Sir Christopher More of Loseley, who was an executor for Richard Weston.

The Weston family remained Roman Catholic and continued to own the chapel, using it for family burials. There are two memorials still on the walls; one commemorating the last direct descendant of Richard Weston, Lady Melior Mary Weston who died in 1782.

The other monument is for Elizabeth Webbe Weston who died in 1791. A chest tomb used to stand in the middle of the chapel. The effigy of a recumbent woman with a ruff, probably sixteenth century, resting on a tomb with stone skulls displayed behind a grill, are now in the west porch of the

main church. These are said to have come from the chapel. However, it is not clear that chest and figure belong together.



Figure 3 Memorial to Melior Mary Weston d.1782

When the spire of the old church fell in 1740, destroying most of the building, the Weston chapel still stood. It was used for vestry and other meetings. After the opening of the new Holy Trinity church in 1763, there is little information about the use of the chapel during "the quiet years long before." No burials are recorded after that of Catherine Weston in 1793. In *The Parish the Church and its Ministers*, a booklet published locally in 1878 but written earlier, there is a paragraph stating that.

"This chapel is in a very discreditable state, and appears to be entirely neglected. It is now little better than a lumber room, and on the morning of my visit it was littered with broken figures and gas appendages. It is partially unpaved and the damp which in consequence arises, makes the atmosphere of the place almost unbearable. It sadly needs a little attention."

This it seems to have received when the whole church was refurbished in 1869. A formal agreement was reached with the Witham family (collateral descendants of the Westons), that the chapel could be used as a vestry for the new, robed choir at an annual rent of 1s. Right of sepulture, return of Lady Weston's tomb to the centre of the chapel and by implication, the Roman Catholic status of the space were firmly retained. Parish use also included holding a lending library in the chapel, offering "tales, histories, travels and religious books" for a subscription of a penny a month.

In 1927 the diocese of Guildford was established, separated out from the large diocese of Winchester. Holy Trinity church was to be the pro-cathedral. The modest Weston chapel was the setting for a significant step in the process. In June 1927, a "conge d'elire" took place in the chapel; there the archdeacon, the rector and canon Norman Pares received the King's writ for confirmation of the bishop's appointment. Possibly in the light of Holy Trinity's new status, a solicitor's letter was sent to the parish by the family in 1928 with a memorandum. This underlined that "The Witham family have always had in mind the desirability of cutting off the Chapel from the Church in the same way as the More Chapel is cut off from St Nicholas church in Guildford" with the tomb of Lady Weston reinstated in the middle of the chapel.



Figure 4 Interior of the chapel, looking east

In a very different spirit, in 2005, the Trustees of the Weston Estate and the Churchwardens and Parochial Church Council of Holy Trinity and St Mary's entered into an agreement whereby the freehold of the chapel passed to the parish. The present rector and PCC approved the holding of an annual mass there, to be arranged by the family. This transfer has made possible a fuller use of the chapel to meet parish needs. It has brought to an end an interesting anomaly in the implementation of reformation statutes. At the same time the goodwill shown by everyone involved in the new

arrangement represents the respect and generosity which can be shown between different, sometimes conflicted groups