

Stradling Panels a Unique Record of Family History

Relics Might be Scattered by Chapel Alterations

BY RODERICK G. WILLIAMS

The Stradling Chapel at St. Donat's, which has come into such prominence, is situated on and attached to the north side of St. Donat's chancel. The building is of sixteenth century date, and in it repose the bodies of a number of the Stradling family, so prominent for a long period in the life of Glamorgan.

The Stradlings were patrons of the Cistercian Abbey of Neath and stood high in the esteem of that religious community. In 1341 the Church of St. Donat's was granted to the abbey by Sir Edward Stradling, who married Elinor Strongbow, and it remained in its possession till the Reformation.

The property passed into the hands of Richard Williams, alias Cromwell, from whom it was acquired in 1542 by Sir Thomas Stradling.

RECORDED IN WILL

There is no doubt that the chapel was built by Sir Thomas Stradling, for the fact is recorded in the will of Sir Edward Stradling, who died in 1609. Sir Edward desired "to be buried in the Chapel of St. Mary built by his father adjoining to the parish church of St. Donat's, betwixt his great-grandfather and grandmother, on the north side, and his father on the south side."

His grandfather was Sir Edward Stradling (died 1535), whose wife was Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Thomas Arundel of Cornwall. His brother, Thomas Stradling, Esq., had been buried at the monastery of the Preaching Friars at Cardiff, and after the dissolution of that house his bones were translated to the chancel at St. Donat's in 1537 and afterwards transferred to the Stradling mortuary chapel.

The chapel has two Tudor doors, one on the north side and the other on the south. In the east wall is a window of the "Decorated" period, the tracery of which resembles that of the windows of the Becerolles Chapel at St. Athan.

It is possible that this window was brought from elsewhere, for there are indications that it was inserted at a later date than the building of the chapel walls.

In addition to this interesting window the contents of the chapel consist of:—

- A niche near the north door.
- The three Stradling panels.
- A funeral helmet and bracket.
- A sixteenth century monument on the east wall.
- Sir Edward Stradling's memorial on the north wall.
- A memorial to the Stradling children.
- The tomb of the last of the Stradlings of St. Donat's.
- A list of the incumbents of the parish.

RESTORATION OF PANELS

The Stradling panels are unique in Wales and both the late Dr. Carne and the late Mr. Morgan S. Williams took great care to have them restored and

Sir Edward Stradling's memorial is probably the finest in the chapel. It resembles the tomb at Llantrithyd, which is believed to be the work of Richard Twrch, of Bridgend, builder of the Beaupre Porch, who may have also been the maker of this memorial. The design is in the English Renaissance style, and is adorned with the arms of Stradling and Gage.

Against an arcadia background are the kneeling figures of Sir Edward and his lady.

The inscriptions are in Latin, and the whole work was once beautifully picked out in colour. The Corinthian columns are blue, with gilded bases and capitals. The figures, too, show traces of colour, as do other details, and the coats of arms complete a wonderful piece of work. One of the Latin inscriptions shows that the monument was erected by Sir John Stradling.

ALTAR TOMB

Possibly the most interesting tomb is that in the centre of the chapel. It is a magnificent rectangular altar tomb, 7ft. long by 3ft. wide, standing 3ft. 9in. high. It is of polished white marble with a black base. At the sides are oval panels and at the ends the Stradling arms appear in colour.

Laurel leaves, trumpets, crossed bones, skulls, and other funereal emblems figure in the design.

The inscriptions are to Edward Stradling and his brother, Sir Thomas Stradling, the last of the Stradlings of St. Donat's. Sir Thomas's epitaph reads:—

Here lies Sr. Thomas Stradling, the 2d. Bart. of England and the last of the Name, he was second son to Sr. Edwd. Stradling Bart. by Elizabeth Daughter of Sr. Edward Mansel of Margam Bart. and younger brother of Edwd. Stradling Esqr. deposited

within this Tomb, he died at Mompellier the 27th of September 1738 N.S. and was buried here the 19th of March. Following: by his death the Title and Family after its Continuance here near 700 years Becomes Extinct. Aetatis Suae 28.

It is mortifying to realise that anyone should desire to disturb the hallowed atmosphere of the Stradling Chapel and to scatter its historic memorials, and we look to the Church-authorities to prevent any interference with this interesting building.

MUSEUM DIRECTOR CONSULTED

Hope for Compromise in Vicar's Plan

Sir Cyril Fox, Director of the National Museum of Wales and an eminent authority on archaeological and artistic matters, has been called into consultation to give an opinion on the alterations which it is proposed to make at the Parish Church of St. Donat's.

Sir Cyril, in company with Mr. Arthur G. Howell, diocesan registrar, visited the church and made a thorough inspection of the Stradling Mausoleum.

Judging from a communication made by the vicar (the Rev. D. W. Rees) to a descendant of the Stradlings there is some prospect of a compromise being negotiated. The vicar now describes his project as "a minor change," which would appear to preclude the possibility of the altar-tomb being dismantled. Influential parishioners, as well as descendants of the family, have given their consent to a change of site.

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RESTORATION OF PANELS

The Stradling panels are unique in Wales and both the late Dr. Carne and the late Mr. Morgan S. Williams took great care to have them restored and preserved. The panels were executed at the order of Sir Edward Stradling in 1590, and contain much important information concerning the Stradling family.

One of the boards depicts Thomas Stradling, who died in 1480. His widow, Jenet Mathew, of Radyr, afterwards married the famous Sir Rhys Ap Thomas, K.G.

The figures of Sir Thomas and his wife and their children, two boys and a girl, are shown, and the armorial achievements of the Stradling and Mathew families appear above them, and there is an appropriate inscription.

The next board depicts Sir Edward Stradling, who died in 1535, and his wife Elizabeth, who died at Merthyr-mawr in 1513, and their 10 children, with the family arms and an inscription.

The third panel is that of Sir Edward Stradling, who died in 1609, and his wife, Agnes Gage, with appropriate arms and inscription. On this board the words are painted: "Vertue's hole praise consisteth in doing, 1590."

IMPRISONED IN TOWER

On the east wall is a battered tomb, which may prove to be that of Sir Thomas Stradling, who died in 1571, and his wife (Katherine d. of Sir Thomas Gamage, of Coity). Though defaced the inscription might be recovered by careful attention.

Sir Thomas was M.P. for East Grinstead in 1553 and for Arundel in 1554.

He was Muster Master to Queen Mary's Army and a Commissioner for the Marches. He also served on the Commission for the Suppression of Heretics, and later came into much prominence through the accidental crash of an ash tree in St. Donat's Park.

This tree was split by a storm, and in the wood was found the impression of a cross. Sir Thomas had some pictures made of this cross, and for such an innocent offence he spent several years in the Tower of London. It was he who built the Stradling Chapel.

STRADLING MONUMENT MAY BE SAVED BY FARMERS

A house-to-house canvass amongst the tenant farmers of the parish of St. Donat's, conducted by a prominent parishioner, is reported to have revealed an almost 100 per cent. opposition to the proposed dismantling of the Stradling mausoleum and its conversion into a lady chapel at the parish church.

At the meeting, where the vicar (the Rev. D. W. Rees) made his first announcement concerning the project, the farmers were not represented and consequently were unable to give any expression of opinion.

During the past fortnight, thanks to the publicity given to the scheme in the columns of the *Western Mail & South Wales News*, public opinion has been steadily mobilised against the vicar's plans, and the unofficial straw-vote recently conducted seems to prove conclusively the trend of public sympathy. It is anticipated that in the event of the vicar applying for a faculty on the lines of his original project a petition to the Consistory court will be organised by farmers in the parish.

PRECISE PLANS AWAITED

An influential resident of Llantwit Major has expressed his willingness to defray any expense that may be involved in the undertaking, and the farmers are now awaiting the Consistory notice, shortly to be posted on the door of the church, which will give precise details of the vicar's plans.

Should the vicar's application for a faculty imply a compromise such as the removal of the tomb bodily to a suitable position it is probable that the petition would not be proceeded with.

"INCONCEIVABLE"!

How Bearer of Ancient Name Views Proposal

To the Editor of the *Western Mail & South Wales News*.

Sir,—It is with increasing consternation that I view the determined efforts of the Vicar of St. Donat's to secure a

faculty for the removal of the Stradling tomb from the Lady Chapel of St. Donat's.

As one who bears that ancient name, I feel most keenly this contemplated act. The Stradlings for centuries served Glamorgan faithfully, and Sir Edward, perhaps the greatest of them all and renowned for his learning and literary ability, did much to forward the cause of Welsh culture. It seems inconceivable that this tomb, erected to the memory of Sir Thomas Stradling, the last of such a famous line, should now be the centre of such a distressing proposal. If only as a link with a great Glamorgan family the tomb deserves to stand.

It is my earnest hope that those in authority will not countenance this scheme, and so preserve the memory of a great man and noble family intact.—I am, Sir, yours,

JOHN LEWIS STRADLING.

Ffynonau, West-road, Bridgend.

Pride of the Renaissance

To the Editor of the *Western Mail & South Wales News*.

Sir,—I cannot but think, and indeed hope, that the proposed translation of the Stradling tomb in St. Donat's Church is a portent of a change in the public taste regarding the position that such relics should occupy in a church.

When the altar ceased to be the focus at the Reformation the chancel and side chapels were considered a fair field at the east end of the church for the Renaissance spirit with its pride, pomp, and worldliness to vaunt itself and monstrous tombs arose.

Let us consider the Mansel tombs in Margam Church. Are they not sadly out of place? One of them tramples on a humble sepulchral slab bearing an incised cross; a heartless gesture where the dead appears to affront the dead. I use the verb "affront" distinctly as Don Quixote defines it in a well-known passage.

Of our charity, however, let us remember that it was often a custom of those who bought the abbey "with vacant possession" to destroy the tombs of the former owners, and that it was considered as a laudable thing to do so.—I am, &c.,

W. HARTLAND.