

The Cult
of
Our Lady of Ulling

By Dr. Janet Cooper

A reprint from "The Essex Journal" Autumn 2003

At one house, to soften the blow, the owner's wife gave the editor half a dozen new-laid eggs.

From 1983 work was concentrated mainly on the *Supplement to the Essex Bibliography*. It had originally been planned as a separate publication, but was eventually adopted as part of the *V.C.H.* series. The first draft was compiled by Frank Sainsbury, in consultation with the librarians of the county, the E.R.O., and the London Boroughs formerly in Essex. The *V.C.H.* staff was responsible for the selection of periodical entries, and for the final editing. The *Bibliography* of 1959 had drawn upon three centuries of historical writing. The *Supplement*, concentrating on less than 30 years, is almost as long. Its new features include postgraduate theses and items on the Third London Airport, Dockland Redevelopment, Essex University, and the Mucking excavations. The volume has a comprehensive table of contents, and all entries are numbered. It was published in 1987.

All *V.C.H.* staff have to pay regular visits to the Institute of Historical Research (part of London University and located in the University Senate House) to consult the general editor and attend meetings with their colleagues from other counties. In the 1960s the Essex editor took the lead in forming a committee of all county editors, which he chaired until his retirement. He also represented these colleagues at meetings of the *V.C.H.* Conference along with representatives of the central *V.C.H.* and the Local Authorities supporting the *History*. Particularly memorable was a reception on 10 November 1970 to celebrate the publication of the 150th volume in the *V.C.H.* series. It was attended by Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, then Chancellor of London University. The present writer, with other county editors, was presented to Her Majesty, and was impressed by her instant recollection of a visit, some years earlier, to the Essex Record Office.

Networking and publicity are necessary features of the *V.C.H.* During this period the Essex staff gave frequent talks, advised other scholars, and assisted local societies. These activities had to be carefully managed so that they did not take up too much time. Publicity was

also provided by a series of travelling exhibitions, mounted first by the county librarian, K.J. Lace, and later by successive assistant secretaries of the *VC.H.*, Ivan Sparkes, Ken Sleat, and George Saddington, all from Havering libraries.

No less valuable was the publicity provided through the county committee of *V.C.H.* Essex which met every six months and later annually. At these meetings it became customary for the editor to follow up his formal report with a short talk on interesting subjects brought to light by recent research. Some committee members attended for many years, giving friendly advice and support. One of these was A.E. Reed, originally a council representative, and later an honorary personal member of the committee. He continued to attend right up to the age of 99. On his 100th birthday Sir William Addison, Geoffrey Clements and the editor visited him in hospital, bearing a bottle of whisky. During an amicable conversation Mr. Reed suddenly remarked 'Some people couldn't even run a whelk-stall!' If the visitors had taken this personally they could have replied that the whelk (*Buccinuni nudatum*) already figures in *V.C.H. Essex 11*, 439, and will receive fuller notice, in due course, in the histories of Leigh-on-Sea and other coastal parishes.

Note on Sources

The writer was editor of *V.C.H. Essex* from 1951 to 1986. His recollections have been supplemented by his working diaries. Each volume of *V.C.H. Essex* lists the committee members at the time of publication, while an editorial note gives details of changes in honorary officers and staff. There is a comprehensive index of persons and places in every volume, to which is added a small selection of subject entries. The *V.C.H. General Introduction*, ed. R.B. Pugh (1970) contains an article on the origin and progress of the *History* and details of all volumes published to date. A long and laudatory review of this volume appears in the *Times Literary Supplement* of 13 November 1970. A *Supplement to the General Introduction*, ed. C.R. Elrington (1990) lists the Corrigenda in the 1970 volume, including two concerning Essex.

The Cult of Our Lady of Ulting

by Janet Cooper

Saints' cults, official and unofficial, flourished in late medieval England, but few are known from Essex. This is probably not because such cults did not exist, but because the evidence of them has not survived, or has yet to be found. The recent work on the cult of Roger Niger, bishop of London (d. 1241)¹ has rediscovered one such cult, which was promoted by Beeleigh Abbey. A study of late medieval Essex wills provided the first evidence of another, that of Our Lady of Ulting. This article endeavours to put together a history of her shrine.

Ulting (1,162 a.), on the north bank of the Chelmer - between Chelmsford and Maldon, is still a quiet and isolated parish. No major roads run through it, and although the Chelmer has been navigable since the 18th century, there are now few boats on that stretch of river. In the Middle Ages Ulting was one of the smaller and certainly one of the poorest parishes in Essex.

Its assessment for the subsidy, or tax, levied on the whole country in 1334 was only 12s 8d, the fourth lowest in the county.² Only 44 people paid poll tax in 1377,³ suggesting a population of 60 - 70, a small one although by no means the smallest in Essex. The population was still only 136 in 1801.⁴ Indeed, the appearance of the parish probably changed little between the late Middle Ages and the 1770s when Chapman and Andre's map showed only half a dozen houses, including the manor house, Ulting Hall, and Hoe Mill on the Chelmer.⁵

The small parish church of All Saints,⁶ comprising an undivided nave and chancel, stands on its own beside the Chelmer, some distance from the surviving Ulting Hall whose lords founded it, probably in the 12th or 13th century.

The church as it is today owes much to its restoration in 1873 to designs by the Chelmsford architect Frederick Chancellor; the work

included rebuilding both the east and the west walls.⁷ The lords of Ulting manor controlled the church until 1299 when Robert FitzWalter, the powerful baron who then owned church and manor, gave it to the nearby Beeleigh Abbey.⁸ Other land in the parish was given to the neighbouring Hatfield Peverel Priory.

The first sign of particular devotion to the Virgin came in 1317 when Thomas of Ulting, the immediate lord of Ulting manor, founded a chantry of the Virgin Mary within Hatfield Peverel priory church, which was itself dedicated to the Virgin. He built a new aisle or chapel onto the church (now the parish church of St. Andrew) to house the chantry altar. The chantry was endowed with 13s 4d a year, presumably charged on Thomas's land in Ulting. By the late 14th century, however, the priory was unable to maintain the aisle, and in 1393 the prior reached an agreement with Sarah of Ulting, Thomas's cousin and heir, allowing the monks to abandon the chantry chapel and to celebrate mass for Thomas, his wife Maud, and his ancestors at any altar in the priory church. There is no later reference to the chantry, which probably ceased because the rent charge was lost or its value drastically reduced by inflation, although the priory retained some land in Ulting until the Dissolution in 1536.⁹ It had been very much a private chantry for the Ulting family.

The later chantry and guild of the Virgin Mary at Ulting itself had a wider appeal, and may have been founded by a group of parishioners. Its origins are obscure. Formal permission to found and endow a guild in Ulting was obtained in 1482 by a small group of nobility and gentry, but the terms of the grant make it clear that the chapel, and presumably a cult of Our Lady, were already in existence. Indeed, the guild itself had been established by 1477. In January that year John Garyngton of Southminster, a wealthy yeoman, bequeathed money to the churches of Southminster, Mundon, Layer Breton, Salcote, and Tolleshunt Darcy, all parishes in which he owned land, and to the fraternities or guilds in Burnham and Maldon as well as to the fraternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Ulting.¹⁰

Ulting was his last and smallest bequest, only 3s., but it is interesting that as early as 1477 the fraternity was attracting bequests from well outside Ulting parish. In 1482 Henry Bouchier, earl of Essex, lord of the manor of Ulting, and his wife Elizabeth who was the aunt of Edward IV, with John Dynham lord Dynham and Elizabeth FitzWalter his wife, Thomas Montgomery knight of the body to Edward IV, John Radcliff, Thomas Tyrell and Thomas Dacre obtained from the king a licence to found a fraternity or perpetual guild in the chapel of St. Mary the Virgin in Ulting churchyard. The guild was to have two wardens, elected by the brothers and sisters; its members were to be parishioners of Ulting and others who wished to join. They were to form a corporate body, to have a guild seal, and to be able to make ordinances or rules for the guild and its members. The foundation grant included license for the guild to acquire lands worth 10 marks a year (C6 13s 4d) to support a chaplain.¹¹

John Anable, vicar of Ulting, endowed the chantry chaplain's post by his will, which was written on 16 August 1485 but was not proved until May 1491. He left most of his lands and houses in Essex to the wardens of the guild and fraternity of Our Lady in the chapel of Our Lady in Ulting to pay an 'honest priest' who held no other benefice to pray in the chapel for the prosperity and welfare of King Edward IV and his queen, Elizabeth, in their lifetimes and for their souls after their deaths,¹² and for the prosperity and souls of the founders and of all the brothers and sisters of the fraternity. John did not say where his lands were, but they were probably in Ulting or the surrounding parishes; he excluded from his gift to the guild his lands in Woodham Mortimer and Purleigh, which he devised to a fraternity in Beeleigh Abbey.¹³ The lands left to Ulting may not have been very extensive, or perhaps the bequest did not take effect, for the chantry priest's income was only 100s. (L5) a year in 1535.¹⁴ Perhaps it is not surprising that when the chantries were dissolved in 1548 the priest, William



Stringer, had 'small learning' although he was of 'good usage and conversation' and held no other benefice. His net income was only £3 4s 8d, a reduction on that reported in 1535.¹⁵ The chantry's land in Ulting, Hatfield Peverel, Woodham Walter, and Little Baddow was sold by the Crown in the 1550s and 1560s.¹⁶

The guild attracted at least five other bequests between 1484 and 1529, all but one from residents in surrounding parishes not from Ulting itself. John Cole of Maldon in 1484 left only 12d, 12d. and 8d. to the guilds in the three parish churches in Maldon, but bequeathed the comparatively large sum of 6s. 8d. to the 'fraternity of Our Lady Guild founded in the chapel of Ulting'. In exchange he asked that he and his wife Alice be entered and received as a brother and sister of the fraternity, and thus obtain the guild's prayers.¹⁷ In 1485 Roger Hawys, presumably a parishioner of Little Baddow where he asked to be buried left 6s 8d each to the fraternity of St. John the Baptist at Danbury and the guild of St. Mary of Ulting.¹⁸ Robert Bachelor of Woodham Ferrers, who also had a house and land in Danbury, left small sums of money to lights in Woodham Ferrers church and 10 sheep to Our Lady guild at Ulting. He left 5 marks (£3 6s 8d) to the guild at Danbury, but that was not to be paid until his house there was sold after his wife's death.¹⁹ Miles Leeper, priest or chaplain of Witham, in 1519 bequeathed 12d each to the guilds of Our Lady of Ulting and Great Braxted.²⁰ One man devised land, although the bequest may not have taken effect. Reynold Hamond of Ramsden Bellhouse in 1513 left his land in Witham to the wardens of the fraternity of Our Blessed Lady of Ulting. The bequest does not necessarily imply that the fame of the cult extended as far as Ramsden Bellhouse; Hamond had close associations with Maldon, and was lord of manor of Stow Maries.²¹

At the centre of the cult was a statue of the Virgin, perhaps a miracle-working statue.²² John Lincoln, probably the man of that name who succeeded Anable as vicar of Ulting,²³ in 1495 left a silver gilt crucifix to be placed round the neck of the statue of the Virgin in the chapel of Ulting.²⁴ Elizabeth Brenwood of Great Baddow in 1509 left her best beads to Our Lady of Ulting, presumably to adorn the statue.²⁵ The chapel and its statue did more than attract money and ornaments; it was a place of pilgrimage, one of the few known shrines in Essex. Agnes Bound, a wealthy Colchester widow, in her will of 1508 arranged for the tenant of her house to go on pilgrimage to Master John Shorne, St. Thomas of Canterbury, Our Lady of Walsingham, the Rood of Dovercourt, Our Lady of Ipswich, and Our Lady of Ulting.²⁶ The following year Thomas Clerk of Rivenhall provided in his will for a neighbour to perform or cause to be performed pilgrimages to Our Lady of Walsingham, Our Lady of Ulting, Master John Shorne, and King Harry of Windsor.²⁷ The shrines of the Virgin Mary at Walsingham and of St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury were the most famous in England; the tombs of Master John Shorne and the murdered Henry VI were popular, although unofficial, places of pilgrimage in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. John Shorne (d. c.1315), rector of North Marston, Bucks., was credited with creating a holy well whose waters cured pilgrims of the ague, gout, toothache and blindness; he was also remarkable for having allegedly conjured the devil into a boot.²⁸ The Ipswich shrine of the Virgin was well enough known for the later Protestant martyr Hugh Latimer, when he was bishop of Worcester, to suggest burning its statue at Smithfield with other prominent Marian statues including that of Walsingham.²⁹ The rood, or large crucifix, of Dovercourt had its own chapel; its destruction in 1532 by early Protestants was recorded approvingly by John Foxe in his *Book of Martyrs*.³⁰ The Ulting shrine was

in good company.

The Ulting guild had 60s in money, presumably from members' dues, in 1524. The money was in the hands of its wardens, John Heron and Thomas Wiborough, neither of whom seems to have lived in Ulting.³¹ Wiborough in fact was one of the leading men of Maldon, a lawyer who had served as bailiff, or chief officer, of the town and who was one of the three wealthiest men there in 1524.³² Heron has not been identified, but he was not among those assessed for subsidy in Ulting. In 1548 the masters of the guild were Mr. Church of Maldon and Mr Blake of Danbury.³³ Mr. Church was presumably John Church, who was bailiff of Maldon eight times between 1533 and 1588, and was also the bailiff of Beeleigh Abbey's estates and the agent for the earl of Oxford. He was one of the leading men of 16th-century Maldon, and it is interesting that he was later a recusant.³⁴ Mr. Blake was probably the John Blake, gentleman, who acquired land in Hatfield Peverel, Boreham, Danbury and Little Baddow in 1541.³⁵ It is hardly surprising that the Ulting parishioners could not provide two wardens, but it is remarkable that one of the wardens in 1524 and 1548 should come from Maldon, a town which had three popular guilds, of St. Mary, St. George, and St. Katherine, in its own parish churches.³⁶

The wardens forestalled Edward VI's commissioners in 1548 by selling all the guild's jewels and goods for £18.³⁷ The only equipment the commissioners bothered to value individually was the two bells: the chapel bell, worth 12d and a brass bell worth 2d; various 'other implements' were valued together at 25s 6d The chapel building was the guild's most valuable asset. It stood on the west side of the 'steeple' or bellcote of Ulting church, and was probably attached to the west wall of the church, which was windowless and apparently much scarred in 1871.³⁸ Its lead worth £8 and its timber, tile, glass, iron and stone worth £2 6s 8d³⁹ were all sold by the Crown in 1549.⁴⁰

Apart, probably, from a new east window and one new window in the south wall,⁴¹ Ulting church itself appears to have been virtually untouched by 15th-century builders or repairers. With its rubble walls and lancet windows, it remains 'essentially 13th-century'.⁴² The energies of its late medieval parishioners clearly went into the chantry chapel, which was so completely demolished in 1549 that no trace of it or memory of its cult seems to have survived the 16th century.⁴³ How many other virtually unaltered 12th- and 13th-century churches have remained so because they once had later, independent, chantry chapels?

References

- 1 Stephen P. Nunn, *St. Roger of Beeleigh* (Maldon Archaeological and Historical Group, 2001).
- 2 *Lay Subsidy of 1334*, ed. R. E. Glasscock (British Academy 1975), 84.
- 3 *The Poll 'faxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381*, ed. Carolyn Fenwick (British Academy 1998), i. 180.
- 4 *Victoria County History of Essex* (hereafter *VC. H. Essex*), ii (1907), 353.
- 5 *Map of Essex, 1777*, sheet XIII.
- 6 So called in 1518: ERO, D/ACR 2, f. 83v.
- 7 ERO, D/F 8/131; *ibid.* D/DOp/B30; Nikolaus Pevsner, *Essex* (1965 edn.), 397.
- 8 *V.C.H. Essex*, ii. 173.
- 9 *Calendar of the Close Rolls 1409 - 13* (H.M.S.O.), 219 - 20; *V.C.H. Essex*, ii. 106.
- 10 Guildhall MS. 9531/7, f. 293v.
- 11 *Calendar of the Patent Rolls 1476 - 85* (H.M.S.O.), 255 - 6; P. Morant, *History and Antiquities of Essex* (1768), ii. 135.
- 12 This is the wording of the enrolled will. In fact on 16 August 1485 the king was Richard III whose wife Anne had died on 16 March that year; Henry VII assumed the crown after the battle of Bosworth on 22 August. Presumably the scribe accidentally or deliberately altered the will when he copied it into the register; either the true date was before Edward IV's death on 9 April 1483, or

- Edward's name was substituted for that of the defeated and attainted Richard.
- 13 P.R.O., PROB 11/8, f. 329.
- 14 *Valor Ecclesiasticus* (Record Commission), i. 445.
- 15 P.R.O., E 301/19, no. 28; *V.C.H. Essex*, ii. 22.
- 16 *Calendar of the Patent Rolls* 1560 - 3, 258; 1558 - 60, 314, 458; 1550 - 3, 116.
- 17 E.R.O., D/AER 1, ff. 59v. - 60.
- 18 Guildhall MS. 9531/7, f. 297v.
- 19 E.R.O., D/ABW 3/2.
- 20 E.R.O., D/ACR 2, f. 161.
- 21 E.R.O., D/DHt T1/24.
- 22 Cf. that set up at Foston-in-the-Wolds, Yorks. E.R. c.1313: Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (London 2000), 147 - 8.
- 23 R. Newcourt, *Repertorium Ecclesiasticum Parochiale Londinense* (1710), ii. 616.
- 24 P.R.O., PROB 11/10, f. 185v.
- 25 E.R.O., D/AEW 1/305.
- 26 P.R.O., PROB 11/16, f. 61.
- 27 E.R.O., D/ACR 1, f. 159v. - 60.
- 28 Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, 153; Andrew Brown, *Church and Society in England 1000 - 1500* (Basingstoke 2003), 79.

- 29 Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (Yale 1992), 404.
- 30 *V.C.H. Essex*, ii. 21.
- 31 E.R.O., T/A 427/1/7.
- 32 W. J. Petchey, *A Prospect of Maldon* (Essex Record Office 1991), 12, 126.
- 33 *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society*, new series xiii. 170.
- 34 Petchey, *Prospect of Maldon*, 137, 151, 161.
- 35 *Feet of Fines for Essex*, iv, ed. P. H. Reaney and Marc Fitch (Colchester 1964), 242, 244.
- 36 E.R.O., D/AEW 1/179; D/AER 1, f. 27v.; D/AER 4, f. 131; Guildhall MS. 9531/6, f. 186v.
- 37 *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society*, new series xiii. 170.
- 38 E.R.O., D/F 8/131.
- 39 P.R.O., E 301/19, no. 28.
- 40 *Calendar of the Patent Rolls* 1548 - 9, 284.
- 41 The existing east window is Victorian, but appears to have been based on one there before: E.R.O., D/F 8/131, Frederick Chancellor's plans and elevations of the church.
- 42 Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England), *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments of Essex*, ii. 236; N. Pevsner, *Essex*, 397.
- 43 There is no reference to a major cult in the early 18th-century antiquary Holman's notes, although he knew of the licence to found the chantry: E.R.O., T/P 195/10.

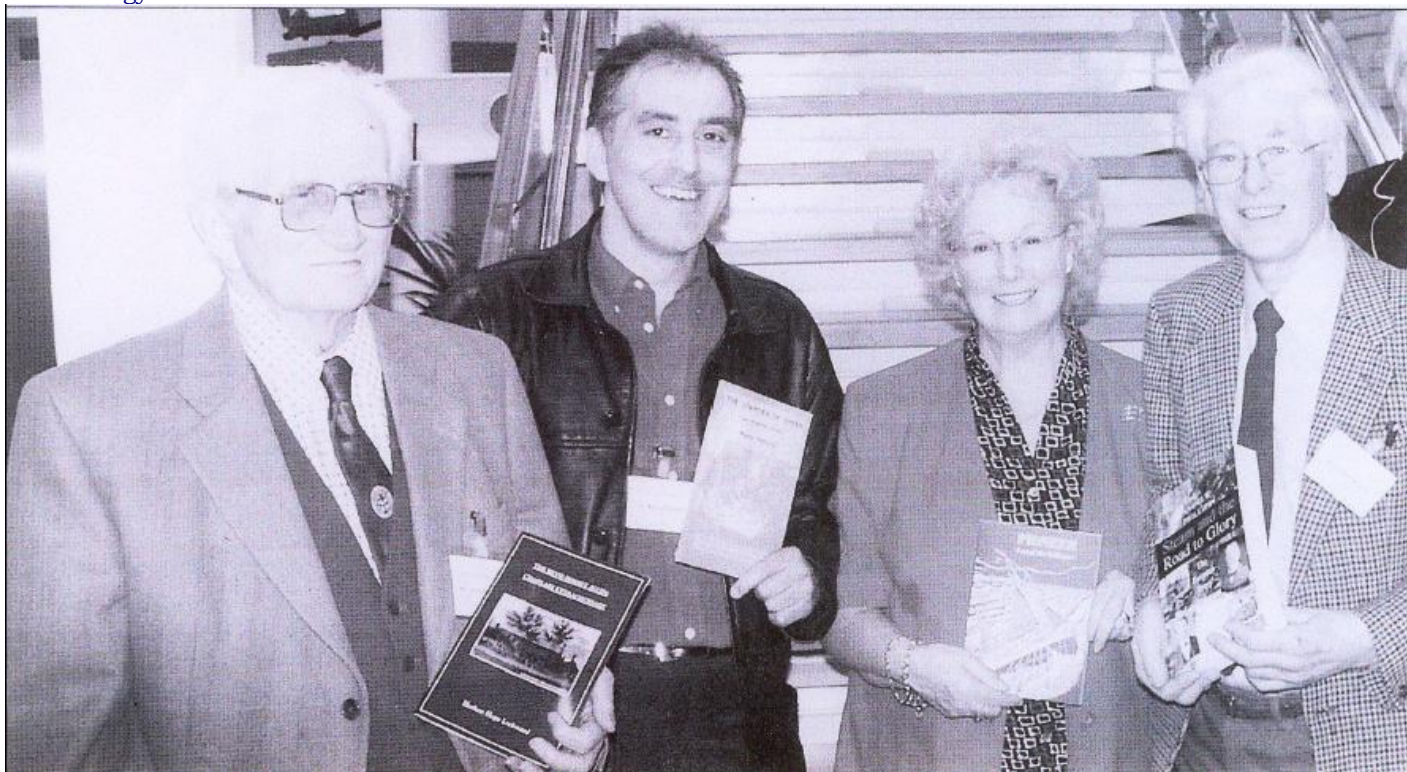
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In our last issue we included the list of Prizewinners in the 2003 Essex Book Awards, presented on 29 April 2003 at the Essex Record Office. Here is a photograph of them including Bert Lockwood and Andrew Phillips. Reproduced by courtesy of the E. C. C.

Church of St. Mary



Choir - class

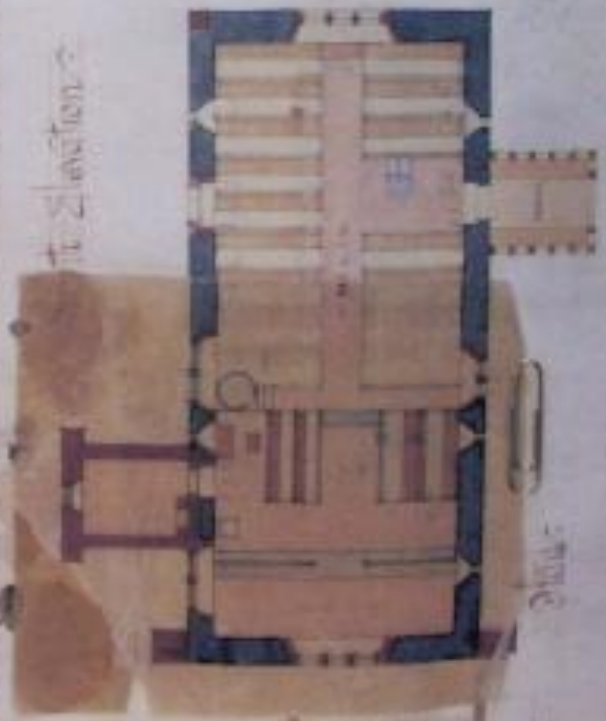


1840

Handwritten text in a rectangular box, possibly a description or list of items.



West Wall



the elevation



East elevation



Chancel and porch



Section from North looking West

From Chancel looking West April 1871