

St Alban the Martyr, Cheam

St Alban's Church is constructed out of the old barns and materials of Cheam Court Farm, which stood at the SW corner of the cross-roads at Cheam and was probably a farm in connection with Nonsuch Palace. It was a very picturesque group of buildings with the old house, farmyard and thirteen barns and cowhouses. The house must have been built not later than early Tudor times, as it was built as a "hall-place", having its fireplace in the middle of the room and open to the roof. Later on the inglenook was added and two floors were put in, making this part of the house three storeys high. In Georgian times, or earlier, some kitchens were added. These were of several levels, with two or three steps from one to the other.

In 1929 the house was up for sale for demolition. The Rector and Churchwardens of Cheam were at the time planning to build a church in Gander Green Lane. In the Parish Magazine appeared an article about a church at North Sheen that had been built out of some old barns that had been demolished at Oxted, Surrey.

The Rector and Churchwardens followed up the idea, bought the whole of the Cheam Court Farm buildings that were up for demolition and appointed Mr C J Marshall, FRIBA of Cheam and Mr Swan of Oxted (who had been the architects for the North Sheen church) as joint architects for the new church. They accordingly pulled down the old house and barns, built the new church of the materials and sold off those that were not wanted. They were able to build a church at low cost that had already a tradition attached to it, and much of the atmosphere and colouring of age. The nave of the church is constructed from two of the larger barns and the aisles from the cowsheds. The organ chamber is the front of one of the smaller barns with Tudor brick coigns from the inglenook of the old hall. A Jacobean floor that had been put into the hall now forms the ceiling of the vestry.

The demolition and building were carried out by Messrs Stevenson & Glyde of Cheam, who thoroughly entered into the spirit of the undertaking and did the building in the medieval manner, without scaffolding, using movable platform and derricks. The timbers of the barns were in very good condition. All the framing had been pinned together with oak pins and these were so tight that it was difficult to get them out. Sometimes they could be knocked out, but if this was impossible they had to be drilled out; but they were so hard that they broke the strongest drills that could be got.

In the west wall of the church a stone tablet has been placed, with the following inscription:-

"This church was build of materials of Cheam Court Farm, one of the farms attached to Nonsuch Palace. These old beams were parts of the barns when Queen Elizabeth was at Nonsuch. The glories of Nonsuch have passed away, but the beams of these humble buildings remain, and are now around you."

**From 'The Story of the Churches of Cheam' by Charles J Marshall FRIBA, author of A History of the Villages of Sutton and Cheam. Designed and published by The British Publishing Company Ltd, Gloucester, revised 1964.*