

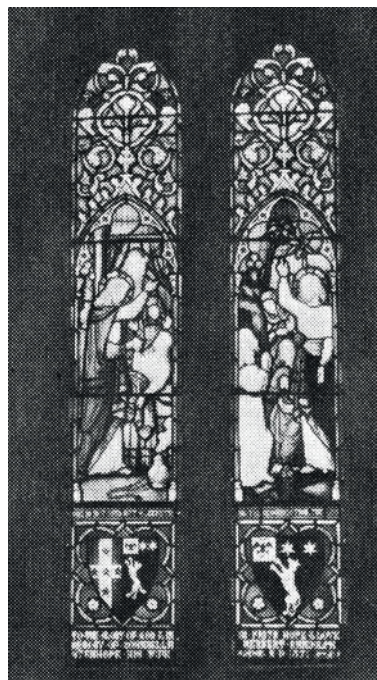
The Randolph Memorial Window at Letcombe Bassett

Margaret Adams

Light flooded into the chancel of the church at Letcombe Bassett when it underwent its first restoration: 13th century stone masons knocked holes in the walls to make large windows. Can these medieval craftsmen have imagined that, six centuries later, coloured glass would be put into their windows and that, in the 20th century, a Church Recorder would have tremendous fun in trying to solve the mystery of the donor of that coloured glass?

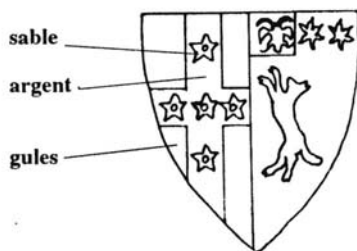
Church Recording is an activity of members of the National Association of Decorative and Fine Art societies. Each local group works in one church at a time, systematically recording all the interior furnishings, including stonework, floors and windows. Recording an item involves describing it and finding out as much as possible about its history. Wantage group have now completed the records of churches at Childrey and Letcombe Bassett and are currently working on Letcombe Regis. Across the whole country over 400 records have been completed.

Two of the five windows in the chancel of St. Michael and All Angels, Letcombe Bassett, contain Victorian coloured glass. In the East Window are six scenes from the life of Christ, each with an appropriate text beneath. In the south wall, near the western end of the chancel, is a two-light window of plain coupled lancets under a pointed head. The glazing is similar in style to that in the East Window. In the left hand light is a scene of the Wakening of Jairus' daughter; below is the text "*She is not dead but sleepeth*" (St. Luke VIII, 52). In the right hand light is the Raising of Lazarus with the text "*I am the resurrection and the life*" (St. John XI, 25).

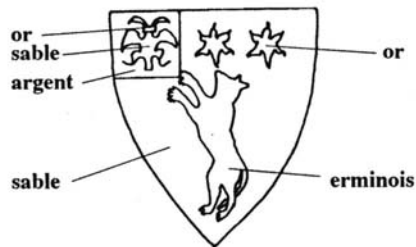




Below each text is a heraldic shield, a divided shield in the left hand light and an undivided shield in the right hand light. (See diagram) The memorial inscription is at the bottom of the window.



TO THE GLORY OF GOD & IN
MEMORY OF ROSABELLA
STANHOPE HIS WIFE



IN FAITH HOPE & LOVE
HERBERT RANDOLPH
AD 1871

Key to diagram:

Gules: Red
Sable: Black
Argent: Silver
Or: Gold
Ermineois: Black ermine
tails on gold

The inscription implies that, on Rosabella's death, Herbert Randolph had donated this window to Letcombe Bassett church in memory of his late wife. That Randolph was the donor was confirmed by the chance finding of a transcript of John Glass's Note Book.⁽¹⁾ (John Glass was Parish Clerk to Letcombe Bassett for many years in the 19th century.) He records: "The East Window given by Randolph 1871" and "South Window 1872".

But who were Herbert Randolph and Rosabella Stanhope? A search of the parish registers (2) and of the list of alumni of the University of Oxford (3) revealed that Herbert Randolph was born in 1808, the first son and second of ten children of the Rector of Letcombe Bassett (also Herbert Randolph) and his wife Jane. He matriculated at Balliol College, was awarded B.A. in 1830 and M.A. in 1842. He was incumbent of Holy Trinity Church, Melrose from 1849 until 1855.

The parish register (4) also gave the burial of Rosabella Stanhope Randolph at Letcombe Bassett in March 1871, but she had died at Ringmore in Devon.

I was intrigued - why did a Berkshire lad go far away to Melrose in the Scottish Borders? What were his later connections with Letcombe Bassett and why did he bring his wife back from Devon to bury her in the village? Was she a Bassett girl?

Perhaps it was time to try and unravel the heraldry. A search at Oxford Central Library (5) revealed that the Randolph arms were:

“Gules on a Cross Argent five Mulletts Pierced Sable”

This is represented on the dexter side of the shield in the left hand light. But I could not identify the arms in the right hand light. Help was needed. A letter to Mr. John Allen (an adviser on heraldry to Church Recorders) brought valuable information. Our unknown arms were those of the Wilson family:

“Sable a wolf Salient Erminois and in chief Two Estoiles Or, on a Canton Argent a Double Headed Eagle Displayed Sable gorged with a Coronet Gold.”

Mr. Allen hypothesized that Herbert Randolph had married Rosabella Stanhope Wilson, (the shield in the left hand bearing the arms of the marriage) but suggested that this could be confirmed only by finding a record of the marriage. He also found that the Rev. Francis Charles Hingeston, Rector of Ringmore, Devon, had married, in 1860, Martha Jane, only daughter and heir of the Rev. Herbert Randolph. (6) Perhaps Rosabella had been staying with her daughter at the time of her death. (Interestingly, the Rev. F C. Hingeston later took the name Hingeston-Randolph and quartered the Randolph arms with his own.)

How could I find a record of the Randolph - Wilson marriage? It must have taken place long before Randolph went to Melrose in 1849 if his daughter was old enough to marry in 1860. In the hope that the church at Melrose would have further information a visit there was fitted into a Spring holiday in the Borders. From the archives of Holy Trinity Church I found that Randolph had come from Abbotsley in Hunts to be its first Rector. *“He gave the church a good start and opened a mission in Galashiels under a curate in 1851. He began an Episcopal School in the Parsonage laundry. A disagreement with the Trustees on an unrecorded point of ‘ritual’ caused his resignation. Perhaps he wished to place a cross on the altar!”*

The Clergy list of 1844 revealed that Randolph had been Vicar of Abbotsley from 1839. He could have been married while at Abbotsley or before arriving there.

Copies of St. Catherine’s House Indexes of Births, Marriages and Deaths had now become available in Oxford. Civil registration started in 1837 when Herbert would be 29. If he had been married after that date it should be easy to find the record. I was lucky. In the September quarter of 1837 (the first quarter to be recorded) the marriage of Herbert

Randolph was registered at Hitchin. But I could not find a corresponding entry for Rosabella Stanhope Wilson. What had happened? Was Mr. Allen wrong?

Further searching yielded the birth of Martha Jane Randolph in 1839 and, in the same quarter, the death of Martha Randolph, both registered at St. George's, Hanover Square. Herbert's first wife had died in childbirth. A second marriage in 1846 was registered at Windsor; then Herbert Randolph married Rosabella Stanhope Wilson and so Mr. Allen's hypothesis was proved correct.

Questions remained. I still had not explained why the memorial window was at Letcombe Bassett. In an attempt to find out what happened to Herbert Randolph after he left Melrose I wrote to the Church of England Record Centre. The reply enabled me to piece together the rest of the story.

Randolph does not appear to have held another permanent post in the church and seems to have moved fairly frequently. He may have been living in the neighbourhood of Letcombe Bassett in 1857 when, during an interregnum, he officiated at the burial of the infant daughter of the curate, Edmund J Smith.(4) In 1860 he may have been near Wincanton in Somerset as the marriage of his daughter, Martha Jane, is registered there.(7) In the early 1860's Herbert Randolph was writing - he was the author of a book on the life of Nelson and editor of several volumes about the career of Sir Robert Wilson, Rosabella's father.(8)

Randolph was curate in charge of Pulham, Dorset from 1867 to 1870.(9) After Rosabella's death he was, for two years, curate of Ringmore in Devon, the parish where his son-in-law, Francis Charles Hingeston was Rector from 1860 until at least 1884.(6,10) When Randolph was admitted to the curacy of Ringmore he was granted use of the parsonage house. Was Hingeston taking a sabbatical while his father-in-law held the reigns? I have not been able to find when Herbert Randolph died but his final entry in Crockford's Clerical Directory appeared in 1881 when he was living in Hastings.

Rosabella was the granddaughter of Benjamin Wilson, an 18th century portrait painter and Fellow of the Royal Society with an interest in the problems of electricity.(11) Her father, Sir Robert Thomas Wilson (1777-1849) spent most of his life in the army at the time of the Napoleonic Wars taking part in many different campaigns throughout Europe and Africa. He served in Egypt, the Cape of Good Hope and Prussia, fought in the Peninsula with both the Spanish and the Portuguese armies and, in 1812, was attached to the Russian army. From 1818 until 1831 he sat as Liberal Member of Parliament for Southwark. He became a general in 1841 and ended his career as Governor of Gibraltar from 1842 until 1849. He was buried in Westminster Abbey and is commemorated by a brass in the north aisle.(8)

My curiosity has taken my research into the life of Herbert Randolph far beyond the needs of Church Recording. I think it likely that Herbert brought Rosabella back to Letcombe Bassett because there was no other place which he regarded as home. She was buried in the family vault with his father, Herbert, his mother, Jane, and his six year old sister, Elizabeth. To quote John Glass, "*in the Chancel is Randolphs four in One Grave*".(1) That grave is barely visible now but the window is there for all to see - a fitting memorial to Rosabella Stanhope, wife of Herbert Randolph.

I should like to extend my thanks to all those who have helped me: to the County Archives' staff of Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Devon, to the Archives Assistant of the Church of England Record Centre, to the Rector and to the lady and gentleman working in

the garden of Holy Trinity Church, Melrose and above all to Mr. John Allen without whose enthusiastic help with the heraldry I should have been unable to start this project.

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