



**The Quest for Christian Establishments
around Burgh Heath and Nork:
A Brief Historical Survey**

Introduction: The Quest for Christian Establishments around Burgh Heath

If you walk or drive around the Parish of Nork with Burgh Heath and its environs, you will not only discover the two parish churches of St Paul's, Nork and St Mary's, Burgh Heath, from which the parish gets its name, but a number of intriguing places and street names that appear to refer to the locality's historic Christian past: Canons Lane, Chapel Way and Preston Hawe, for example.

Through a combination of fieldwork and historical research, it is possible to trace the history of a number of places that have strong associations with the Church and Christian faith, even though the local area has been transformed by modern infill and linear development and the concomitant proliferation of residential estates, made possible by the advent of the train, motor car and more recent telephonic and digital communications.

This booklet is a brief summary of certain local places with Church or Christian associations. It is hoped that this summary, although concise, might encourage enquirers to trace the place names and to explore the sites for themselves, not only to discover these places in person, but to appreciate more fully the area's historic Christian past. We also trust it will act as a supplement to the book about the history of St Mary's, Burgh Heath published by the Banstead History Research Group to celebrate the church's centenary.¹

Whilst a short bibliography is given, this booklet is a write-up of a combination of historic sources found and shared by Doug Nurse, together with his reflections. I am grateful to Doug for sharing his sources with me and for generously giving of his time to the project, after we found that we shared a mutual interest in local history and English place names. *Vive la géographie historique!*

Revd David Packham
Burgh Heath
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1. Historical Associations with the Church of St Mary's, Burgh Heath

¹ Banstead History Research Group, *The Church of St Mary's, Burgh Heath: The First Hundred Years* (BHRG: Banstead, 2008).

When exploring Christian establishments around Burgh Heath, one obvious question is how St Mary's Church, Burgh Heath got its name. The area has ancient monastic connections and these were renewed at the beginning of the Twelfth Century. However, in 1135, the Advowson of Banstead granted to the Priory of St Mary, Overie at Southwark, a house of Augustinian canons, the land of 'Summerfield' (or 'Southmerfield') and a rectory was built near what is now Canons Farm in Canons Lane.

St Mary, Overie is a long-dissolved site at Southwark Cathedral. John Overs was a ferryman in the Tenth Century and made his fortune. When his wife, Mary, died, he provided a convent, hence 'St Mary Ove/rie' (or 'over the river'), now St Saviour Southwark with St Mary Overie, aka Southwark Cathedral. This is confirmed by Totman, who asserts: "The Church of St Mary, Burgh Heath, was named after the Priory Church of St Mary, Overie, Southwark, the Priory which held much land hereabouts."²

2. The Canons in Canons Lane

Historic maps show 'Cannons Lane' or 'Canhatch' as a building or gateway. Elsewhere this was called "The Rectory". There is a clear connection between the historic names aforementioned and present day Canons Farm and nearby Somerfield Close, so the Canons Regular of Southwark are preserved in memory through local place names, where the Priory held Summerfield and where a rectory once stood.

Sadly, the connection between St Mary Overie and Burgh Heath was lost. St Mary Overie was dissolved and even the rectory building ceased to exist once the canons no longer had their rights to the property, though this predated the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII. As Totman contends, "Centuries ago attendance at church, although almost obligatory, was not always easy. As far as is known, no church existed in Burgh Heath later than the Fifteenth Century; the parish church would be All Saints, Banstead."

3. The Manors of Banstead and of Burgh

² Sidney J. Totman, *A History of the Manor and Parish of Burgh, including Burgh Heath, Nork, Preston and Tattenham* (Sidney Totman: Beaconsfield, 1970).

The Manor of Banstead existed as long ago as the Eleventh Century and is mentioned in the Domesday Book c. 1087 (as is All Saints Church).³ It was held by Hubert de Burgh, the justiciar, soldier and admiral. His son covenanted the manor to King Edward I, who gave it to his queen, and Banstead became known as a Royal Manor. It was not unusual for the manor to be assigned to the reigning queen of England (including Katharine of Aragon, who retained it after her divorce from Henry VIII).

Adjacent to Banstead was the manor of “Burgh, or Great Burgh”, originally held jointly with Banstead by Odo, Bishop of Bayeaux, but coming into the possession of John de Bures by 1216. Some time later, the Manor Church of Burgh was granted. This, “the church of the Burgh”, was the first church built locally. This was a small church and St Mary’s, Overie continued to “present” clergy until 1414, though it was reported to be ruinous as early as 1379.

4. Burgh Church and Nork Park

The Manor Church was located off Church Lane behind the shops on Tattenham Way and was reached by Hollow Road (now The Drive), which ran from Smith’s Cross (formerly the junction with the A217). When Nork House was built, the line of the road changed, but it can still be picked out in the undergrowth.

Burgh Manor changed hands many times in the years following, including the Merland family (c. 1466-1614) and the Buckle family (c. 1614-1850). Christopher Buckle built Nork House, which was acquired by the third Earl of Egmont, whose heir passed it to Mr Frederick Colman (of the ‘mustard family’). Nork Park replaced Great Burgh Manor, which was pulled down in 1886, completing our brief history prior to the building of Nork House.

5. Nork House and St Paul’s Nork

³ Renée Willcox, *A History of the Parish of St Paul, Nork, Banstead, Surrey* (Renée Willcox: Nork, 1985. Reprint, 1987).

When the Colmans left Nork Park to go to Gatton Park in 1923, large areas of the Nork Estate became available for development, attracting larger building companies, who engaged in intensive building operations. Smaller companies followed, to create what we now call 'Nork'. It is worth noting, however, that investment at that time was just as precarious as it is today: the Halden Estates facsimile is an example of such and how money can become disastrous to both developer and investor alike if it becomes 'king'.⁴

Mrs Colman had previously offered land in Warren Road for a church and a hall, permissions were given in 1928 and these were completed in 1930. The church was dedicated by the Bishop of Guildford on 6 March 1930 and a new ecclesiastical district signed by the King on 17 December 1931. The parish with a vicar was created in 1959, while patronage alternated between Bishop and Crown until 14 March 1962, when an Order in Council placed the patronage wholly in the Crown's hands. This makes the patronage of Nork very unusual.

6. Preston Hawe

Preston (Tadworth) became associated with Great Burgh through its conveyance with the church or chapel of St Leonard to Thomas Morsted (in 1440) and Richard Merland (in 1466). The church remained until 1736 when it was demolished. However, archaeological research has discovered that Preston Farm was the site of the earlier Preston Manor House dating back to the Middle Ages (Preston Hawe, aka 'Priests' Farm', c. Twelfth Century), which prospered from the extensive wool trade that took place. Indeed, 'The Sheepshearers' public house stood on the Green at Burgh Heath until 1969.

The chapel of St Leonard is remembered by the street names Chapel Way, St Leonards Road and Chapel Grove. It stood where Chapel Grove is now, off Merland Rise near Tattenham Corner. It seems to have fallen into disuse (like the church of the Burgh) and been demolished, leaving no local church in the area accessible to the public until recent times. That is, the construction of the modern free church of Merland Rise and the Methodist Church off the corner of Chapel Way and Great Tattenhams (until it was recently demolished).

7. The Methodist Church on the Green and at Great Tattenhams

⁴ Banstead History Research Group, *Nork: Halden Estates Company Brochure* (BHRG: Banstead, n.d.: Facsimile Reproduction).

Before there was any place of worship for non-conformists, worshippers met in a private house. The Wesleyans built a school for about 130 children in 1800, then both a church and a school were built on the Green at Burgh Heath in 1880. Having amalgamated with the Methodists, this church became a place for Methodist worship, which continued until a more favourable site was developed at Great Tattenhams. The church was succeeded by a bigger building on the same site in 1966, but was replaced by flats at the turn of the century. When this church closed, St Mark's (built 1967) became a joint church for both Anglican and Methodist congregations.

8. Burgh Heath School

A Church of England school was endowed by Lady Arden of Nork in 1837 and a school opened on common land west of the Sutton to Reigate Road. It was occasionally used as a place of worship as Sunday evening services were held there from 1865, until it was rebuilt on the same site in 1885, being finally closed for educative purposes in 1967.

However, the wife of the Vicar of Banstead, Revd. E. V. Buckle, provided for a new school, St Mary's Church School, at Chips Folly, Burgh Heath. It was larger than the original school, as it was intended for use as a weekday school and for Sunday worship (at the end of schoolroom was a temporary altar and choir stall). This proved unsatisfactory for church purposes (the choir was very small) so Mrs Helen Colman allowed church services to be held in her private chapel at Nork House. Chips Folly remains but is now divided into apartments.

9. The Chapel at Nork House

We have already commented on the distance that Church of England parishioners living in Burgh Heath would have to walk to get to church, even as late in Victorian times; that is, either to Banstead or to Ewell. However, parishioners in Burgh Heath were permitted to worship in the chapel of Nork House by Mrs. Colman from 1905 as the school room in Burgh Heath was not considered suitable. The chapel was a well-designed structure with good proportions, as high as Nork House itself. This is confirmed by Totman, who says, “To meet the needs of Burgh Heath residents, services were held in the chapel at Nork House and in the village school, Brighton Road. The chapel in the ‘big house’ is described in the 1890 sale catalogue as a handsome structure ascending to the full height of the building, having stained glass windows and a fine plaster ceiling.”

10. There and back again: St Mary’s Church, Burgh Heath

In 1901, a plot of land was purchased and plans for a church put together with a generous contribution from Mrs. Colman, amongst others. The aforementioned centenary history book reveals that the church was built in a “restrained gothic style in stone and knapped flint”, being dedicated on 23 January 1909 and consecrated on 16 December 1911. According to Totman, Mrs Colman would arrive at the church in her carriage with a pair of footmen! The Colman family had their own family pew in the south aisle until the family left in 1923, where the current lady chapel, Saint Monica’s Chapel (built in 1928), now sits. St Mary’s, Burgh Heath became a parish in its own right in 1937 and the reader is referred to the centenary history for further information on the church’s historical development during the Twentieth Century, until after the turn of the century.

Conclusion

In tracing centuries of Christian history, which can be found by travelling around and about the locality of Burgh Heath and Nork, we are reminded of the beauty of the surrounding countryside, so aptly described in an extract from Daniel Defoe's *A Tour of the Whole Island of Great Britain in 1758*:
“Banstead Downs needs no description other than this, that being so near London and surrounded as they are with pleasant villages, the ground smooth, level and dry – even in but a few Hours after Rain – they conspire to make the most delightful spot of that kind of Britain.”⁵

Bibliography

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⁵ Banstead History Research Group, *Early Banstead* (BHRG: Banstead, 2001).