

ATHELHAMPTON HALL &



OUR MARTIN HERITAGE.



ATHELHAMPTON & THE MARTINS



THE MARTIN FAMILY

In 1207, the first William Martin paid a fine for the release of his lands and castle at *Piddle* (name of the river in southern Dorset). Records show a property known as *Athelhamston*. Before the Norman conquest in 1066, the manor had been held by *Aethelric*, but the old English name *Aethelhelm* did not appear as a place name until the thirteenth century. In 1086, the Domesday Book records that the manor, then called *Pidele*, was held by the Bishop of Salisbury, with *Odbold* as tenant.

Subsequent owners were the *de Loundres* family, then the *de Pydeles*, and Sir Richard *Martyn* of Waterston, who was married to a

de Pydele heiress. For the next two and a half centuries the Martins were the Lords of Athelhampton. The last few generations of Martins were: Sir William (1483), then Christopher (1503), Thomas, Robert (1524), Nicholas (1550), and his surviving daughters. The second daughter, Frances (our *Francesca Martin*), sold her portion of ownership in Athelhampton to her sister Elizabeth M. Brune (*Bruen* or *Brewen*) in 1645.

The Martins were of French descent, originally from Tours, and were related to St. Martin (Bishop of Tours in the fourth century); but once in England, their connection to Dorset was a long one.

Athelhampton House and Gardens

At the beginning of the Tudor era, Sir William Martin built Athelhampton Hall. He received permission from Henry VII to incorporate battlements and towers for greater protection, since the Black Death that had raged through England had reduced the neighboring population and created instability.



At the time it was built, the large, open Great Hall provided living space for nobles and servants alike. The lord of the manor and his family resided at one end of the hall, the servants at the opposite end, with a huge fire in the middle without a chimney. The smoke went out uncovered windows above. Much later, additions were made to the Great Hall for private quarters, a kitchen, glass panes in the windows, and other improvements.

Now described as one of the most beautiful medieval halls in all of England, Athelhampton is a remarkably well-preserved fifteenth century country house with magnificently furnished rooms and surrounded by superb gardens.

The oldest part of the mansion, the Great Hall, was built by Sir William Martin in 1485. In the Elizabethan west wing are the Great Chamber, Wine Cellar, and newly-opened Library. The east wing includes the Dining Room, Green Parlour, and State Bedroom.



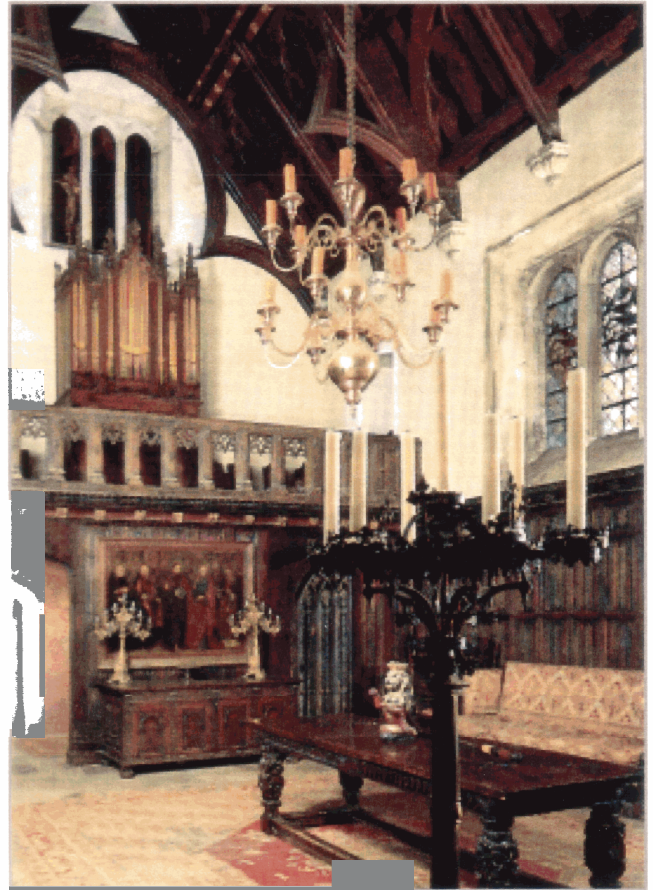
Approaching the house through the Great Gate, there is an oriel window to the left of the entrance court. The Great Hall to the left is the glory of the house and one of the finest in England. Its original open timber roof remains substantially as it was built. The *linenfold* paneling in the Great Hall is of a delicate design and marks the position of the original screen which, forming a passage, separated the medieval hall from the service wing.

Most of the windows are done in heraldic glass dating from the fifteenth-century (or reproducing the original panes). In the north window are the arms of *Faringdon* (*Farrington*), *Martyn, de Mohun*, and *de Pydele*. The south window has *de Loundres, de Clevedon, Kelway*, etc. The letters on the windows are derived from the Christian names of the marriages. The oriel window in the south wall of the hall contains some fine tracery and sixteenth-century heraldic glass. It depicts the marriage alliances of the families *Martyn, de Loundres, de Pydele, de Clevedon, Faringdon, Cheverell, Daubeny, Kelway, and Wadham*.

The crest in each case is the chained ape. The unusual family motto was: *He who looks at Martyn's ape, Martyn's ape shall look at him*. At the very top of the first window is a celestial monkey with angel's wings. He gazes birdlike into a gilded mirror that shows his reflection in its glass. Other puzzling inscriptions are found of fifteenth century origin in the house, such as: *Nothing is beautiful unless transitory*, and *Fortune is blind and makes us so*.

The Gothic brass chandelier of fifteenth-century design, incorporates a statue of the Virgin Mary and is identical to the one in the Athelhampton chantry at St. Mary's, Puddletown.

An impressive Great Chamber faces the extensive lawn below. Directly above is a



Long Gallery with a secret staircase leading to the floor below. Although the present furniture is not original, the furnishings of the house have been selected with great care to show the interior as it was centuries ago.

The lovely gardens of Athelhampton, dating from 1891, feature four well-landscaped formal courts enclosed by high clipped yews, and a fourteenth-century Dovecote. The walled gardens include the world-famous topiary pyramids and two garden pavilions designed by Inigo Thomas. Below the front lawn flows the little River Piddle.

Robert Martin, the grandson of Sir William, added a gatehouse to the south front. This was demolished in 1862, but the Tudor carving in ham stone of his coat of arms has survived and can be seen in the left archway.



The Tudor *ghost* of Athelhampton is that of an ape that belonged to one of the Martins in the sixteenth century. This was also the emblem of the Martins and it appears in stained glass windows and in the coats of arms in the Great Hall. Legend has it that when the patriarchal line of Martins ceased in 1595, the ape roamed the house searching for its master, but found only the four surviving daughters.

The *haunting* can be heard as scratching behind the panelling in the Great Chamber as the beast tries to escape from the secret staircase and cellar it is trapped in.





St. Mary's Church in Puddletown

From the Domesday Book, it appears that there was a church at Puddletown in Saxon times, which stood upon the site of the existing one. The oldest part of the present building, however, appears to be a portion of the Tower, probably not earlier than 1180. The greater part of the present church was erected some two centuries later, possibly about the year 1400; and a beautiful oak roof was added. Enlargements were made in 1505 and 1633. Internal restoration of the church dated from 1634–37.

Fraternity of the Holy Cross

Guilds or Fraternities were a dominant feature in the religious and social life of the people in England during the Middle Ages. They were voluntary associations, to which people of various ranks belonged, functioning to help members in times of poverty, sickness, old age, or when suffering from wrongful imprisonment, or from loss by fire or water. These guilds fostered common neighborship and brotherly kindness and ministered to the spiritual life of the members. The annual Festival was a great event, with an anniversary service in Church followed by a common meal in the Guild Hall.

In fifteenth-century Puddletown it was the Guild of the Holy Cross. On file in the Borough of Dorchester, is the will of Joan Almer of *Pudelton*, dated 24 December 1448, and proved 23 April 1449, in which she bequeaths her body to be buried in the “cemetery of the Church of Blessed Mary of Pudelton,” and a silver spoon to the Fraternity of the Holy Cross in the same church.

St. Mary's Church Today

The church as seen now is practically unchanged from three centuries ago. Sir Frederick Treves, in a book on Dorset, wrote: "No church can compare with this in human interest and nowhere can one come into closer touch with the Dorset of the past."

St. Mary's Church in Puddletown still has a beautiful paneled ceiling of Spanish chestnut, old oak pews of past days still in use, a Norman font, and interesting memorial brasses. A shield in the Gallery bears a Latin inscription that in translation means: *Hither you come, not to be looked at, but to hear, and to pray.*

Among the emblems featured in the stained glass window on the south of the **chantry are the arms of the Lords of the manor of Athelhampton: de la Pydel, Martin, Brune, Banks, Long, Earls of la Mornington, and de LaFontaine.**

The most picturesque corner of the church is the south chapel of St. Magdalene, popularly known as the *Athelhampton Chantry* or the *Athelhampton Aisle*, because it contains tombs and memorials to the Martin family, the ancient possessors of Athelhampton. Several of our Martin ancestors are entombed here.

The Athelhampton chantry is justifiably called "one of the glories of Dorset." Its effigies in alabaster and brass of the knights



St. Mary's Church, Puddletown, Dorset

and ladies of Athelhampton are among the finest in England. Buried here are the Martins of many generations — the first of the race in 1240, the last, in 1595. Those who rest together here are men of one family and from one house, who, succeeding each other as father and son, ruled for nearly 400 years as squires in their little village kingdom. **They lived through the reigns of sixteen English sovereigns — an impressive record** in any day and age — and then their effigies in the little chapel make an impressive Old World story in stone.

Not only is it the burial place of the Martins, but also of some predecessors and successors **as Lords of the manor of Athelhampton.** Some of the 13th century effigies could possibly be of the de Pydels. There is also a memorial to the Brune family (not our line), who held Athelhampton in the seventeenth century.

The Tomb of Nicholas Martin

Nicholas Martin, His tomb is in the Athelhampton Chantry in St. Mary's Church, Puddletown, along with several of his ancestors.

On the right of his tomb Nicholas is depicted bareheaded, in armor, kneeling before an altar on which is an open book. Behind him are his three sons, who all predeceased him. On the right is his wife, Margaret [daughter of John Wadham, and whose brother, Nicholas Wadham, founded Wadham College, Oxford in 1613]. Behind her are their seven daughters.

Above them are the arms of Martyn (Arg. two bars gules [red]) impaling Wadham (Gules á chevron between three roses arg.); and the Martyn crest (a Martyn ape — chained to a tree stump; or sitting, holding a mirror).

Below these brasses is an oblong one

died 23 March 1595. with an inscription in Roman type:

Here lyeth the body of Nicholas Martyn, Esquire, who departed this life and slept with his fathers the 23 day of March, 1595, and left behind to inherit his lands four daughters/coheirs: Elizabeth, Frances, Jane, and Anne; whose soul assuredly doth rest with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

Nicholas, the last of the Martins, dying without male issue, in 1595, his estate was divided among his four surviving daughters, of whom Elizabeth married Henry Brune, and their son, as heir to his mother, lived at Athelhampton Hall.

*Nicholas ye first, and Martin ye last
Good night Nicholas.*



The Tomb of Christopher Martin

A bareheaded, kneeling figure in complete armor, with a surcoat bearing his arms, represents Christopher Martin. At the left is a representation of the Almighty Father seated as a monarch with his right hand raised to bless. Issuing from the mouth is a scroll on which are the Latin words meaning: *Turn away Thy face from my sins and blot out all mine iniquities*. The Martin arms are repeated, and below is the inscription:

Here lyeth the body of Christopher Martin, Esquire, son and heir unto Sir William Martin, knight. Pray for their souls with hearty desire that they both may be heirs of eternal light, calling to remembrance that every Wight most needs die, and therefore let us pray, as other for us may do another day. Which same Christopher died on the 22nd of March, 1524.



The Tomb of Sir William Martin, Knight

The beautiful alabaster effigy of a knight resting upon an Altar tomb, beneath a canopy of Purbeck stone, dividing the chantry from the Church, is almost certainly that of Sir William Martin. He wears a collar of Suns and Roses, the Yorkist badge.

In his will, dated 1503, Sir William gave directions that his body should be buried "in the Chapel of S. Mary Magdalene at Pydelton in a place prepared for that end." This indicates that, in accordance with customs of that period, his tomb was prepared before his death; and, if the date 1471-1475, which is assigned to the effigy, is correct, it must have been made about 30 years before he died.



Other Martins & Relatives

In a corner of the chapel is another altar tomb, on which lie the mutilated effigies of a knight and his lady. They appear to be of the later part of the fifteenth century. The ape at the foot of the knight shows that he was a Martin. The tomb at one time stood apart from the wall, and at the sides and ends of the tomb were canopies, in which were angels bearing shields. Two ends have now been fixed to the walls, and the slabs from the south side and east end have been raised to form paneling above the tomb.

Under the large south window next to it is the effigy of a knight in a plate armor, with a basinet upon his head. He lies upon a low altar tomb, beneath a canopy, his hands being joined in prayer. As is the case with the last mentioned tomb, there are traces of color.

In front of the tomb are nine trefoil headed niches in which are figures — in the

central one is a representation of the Crucifixion, flanked on either side by the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene (to whom the Athelhampton Chantry is dedicated). One of these figures is a knight in armor of corresponding date to that of the effigy — thought to be slightly earlier than 1400.



In the southwest corner of the Chantry, on the floor, lie the effigies of a knight and a lady, carved in Ham Hill stone. Built over these ancient figures is an altar tomb, surmounted by a canopy supported by four pillars. The knight's legs are crossed, and he is clad in armor of chain mail, covered with a surcoat. The lady is in veil and wimple with

mantle, and her hands are joined in prayer. The effigies are of considerable antiquity — perhaps the thirteenth century; though probably not placed as they are now.

Literary Noises

The author, Thomas Hardy, often visited Athelhampton, and it is said he visited it on the day World War I was declared. Parts of his macabre short story, "The Waiting Supper," are set in the hall, gardens, and river. Athelhampton was also featured in two of his poems as *Athelhall* in "The Children and Sir Nameless" and "The Dame of Athelhall." The manor was included in his novel **A Pair of Blue Eyes**, and he even painted a watercolor of the south front including the gate house. The Hardy family history is intertwined with this area of Dorset. Birthplaces and grave sites are within a few miles of Athelhampton. Hardy's grandfather, who lived in Puddletown and played the violoncello in the parish church, also did structural renovation work at Athelhampton Hall.

The house and gardens were also the setting for the British film (1970s), **Sleuth**, starring Sir Laurence Olivier and Michael Caine.

In Thomas Hardy's **Far from the Madding Crowd**, Puddletown was the model town for Weatherbury, and St. Mary's Church was featured in the two films of the same name.



Information compiled and published in 1998, by Carla Cannon, using text and some photos from Dorset guidebooks and the following:

The Tudors at Athelhampton
Athelhampton House and Gardens
St. Mary's Church Puddletown

A History of Dorset by Cecil Cullingford, pp. 41, 52, 57.

A History of Dorset by Hutchins.

Wessex Worthies, by Joshua James Foster (mention of Dorset emigrants who went to Massachusetts under direction of Rev. John White).

A Survey of West Country Manors, 1525, Cornwall, Dorset, Devon; ed. T. L. Stoate.

Dorset Tudor Subsidies, 1523-93; p. 86 – *Athelhampton*.

Survey of Dorsetshire — Families & Arms, by John Coker; p. 109