

# THE CHURCHES OF KENT

## ASSOCIATED WITH THE EPES FAMILY

The descriptions which follow have been limited for the most part to the history and features of the churches dating from the period when the ancestors of Francis Epes I of Virginia were associated with them. The publications from which these data are extracted contain much additional information.

### ST. CLEMENT, OLD ROMNEY<sup>1</sup>

In early times what is now known as Romney Marsh, "the fifth quarter of the globe", was one vast bay of the sea, over the waters of which vessels sailed to the foot of the hills at Lympe. When Julius Caesar landed on the coast of Kent, he found a shallow estuary extending from the cliffs at Fairlight to the ragstone hills at Lympe. At low tide this estuary became a stretch of muddy flats with occasional ridges of shingle and sandy islands deposited by the prevailing tides.

Before the Romans left Britain, a small island had formed where Old Romney now stands, destined to be the nucleus of the flourishing port of later years. Saxon grants of land evidence beyond doubt that large tracts existed above high water level. To protect these lands from the sea skilful inking and ingenious embankments were carried out, massive earth walls were raised to resist the tide, so that gradually a drained and protected area came into existence. In time began the growth of that rich green grass which today makes Romney Marsh the envy of sheep graziers all over the world.

Old Romney's earliest written reference is in a Saxon grant by King Offa of Aghene or Old Romney Court to Christ Church, Canterbury, in 791. This may have led to the erection of a Saxon church here, and it is interesting to recall that the later lessees of Aghney Court, by their lease, were bound to repair the chancel of the church. Another reference which supports the idea of a Saxon church, is contained in one of the treasures of the Chapter Library at Canterbury, an old parchment book, known as the *Domesday Monachorum*, the Domesday book of the Monks, which records the steps taken by Lanfranc from 1070 onwards to restore order in ecclesiastical affairs. A list of the

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Roper, *The Church of Saint Clement Old Romney* (5th ed.; n.p., 1983).

Kent churches is headed "These are the customary fees of the Archbishop at Easter from the churches". The amount of the fees are those exacted for the consecrated chrisom oil, which was blessed annually on Maundy Thursday. The oil was used by the priest to anoint a child at baptism. There are two churches in the East Kent list named "Rumenea" - one paying 31d. and the other 32d.

The prefixes "old" and "new" had not yet been acquired as both places were more or less continuous on the shore of the estuary but the growing and prosperous town and port at the seaward end of the "Langport", the landing place, acquired the prefix "New", to distinguish it from the old haven, which gradually decayed as it became stranded further inland, and in time little was left save the church and a handful of shepherds' cottages. The first recorded differentiation is contained in a charter c.1220 referring to *Vetus Rumunellum*, Old Romney, another reference in 1230 records that one Wymund de Rya held a fee in *Veteri Rumenal* which had been seized by the Archbishop because Wymund was involved in the death of Augustin le Duc. The Fine Rolls of Henry III record a suit for rent including seven shillings and six hens in "Old Romenhale", and the Rector was cited for refusing to be present at the Celebration of Orders.

Not many years after the Norman Conquest, there are records of no less than five churches at the Cinque Port of Romney, which speaks of rapid development, completely overshadowing the original Romney.

In 1972 the most important manuscript in the history of Old Romney in the Middle Ages came to light. It is an interesting Cartulary of *L'Abbaye d'Arrouaise*, an Augustinian Abbey in the *Pas de Calais* and contains a grant of the Church of St. Clement to the Canons of the Abbey of St. Nicholas of Arrouaise. The document bears no date, but from the historical context, it points to c.1140. It provides too an even earlier record of the differentiation between Old and New Romney ... for it identifies the church of St. Clement "*de Veteri Romenel*".

The grant of Old Romney church to Arrouaise Abbey suggests the monastic influence of the Norman Archbishop Lanfranc. Possibly another factor was that the patronage of St. Clement's was in lay hands, the family of the Norman landowners, Robert de Romenal. This was at a time when there was an increasing interest in churches in Romney Marsh many built by the Lords of the Manors.

The manuscript has been acquired by the *Bibliotheque Municipale* at Amiens, MS 1077. Roughly translated, the grant reads:-

"Wimarch wife of Torgis of Abrincis Greeting to all the sons of the Holy Church, those of the present as much as those of the future. Let it be known that I have granted to the Canons of St. Nicholas of Arrouaise for the well-being of my soul and of my ancestors the church of St. Clement of Old Romney with its appurtances in perpetuity." The witnesses to this grant are Geoffrey de Bernulvilla and Adam his brother. Richard de Begevilla. Symon a clerk, Baldwin a clerk.

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St. Clement church stands in a most attractive setting, away from the busy main road that leads from New Romney to Appledore. Like all the churches in Romney Marsh, it was built on a mound to lift it above flood water. In the churchyard is a great spreading yew, which has room to grow for some hundreds of years. In spring, the rich green pastureland separating the churchyard from the main road, is dotted with young lambs.

Old Romney is one of four churches in Kent dedicated to St. Clement, a successor of St. Peter at Rome, who was martyred in A.D. 102 by being cast into the sea with an anchor fastened to his neck. His festival on November 23rd is observed here faithfully.

Sometime in the eleventh or twelfth century, the Saxon church was superseded by one of the early Norman type, an aisleless nave with a square-ended chancel. This was enlarged in the thirteenth century.

Today the church consists of nave and chancel, a chapel on the north leading from a small transeptal aisle, and a chapel on the south at the east end of the south aisle, a small tower built above the south west corner of this aisle, and a north porch. The nave roof is carried on moulded tie-beams with kingposts.

#### THE PORCH

The church is entered on the north side, an unusual deviation from the customary entrance on the sun-lit south. It was added in the fourteenth century and shelters a simple pointed door case of the thirteenth century, which has a recessed hood moulding with returned ends. This north entrance door is directly opposite the south or "procession" door. This was for the more convenient passing in and out of the Sunday processions of the Middle Ages. James Hoggelin who died in 1527 desired "to be buried in the middle space between Gilbart and the procession door". The south door is now blocked up.

The porch was a particularly coveted place for burial and many Old Romney parishioners requested in their wills "to be buried in the porch of St.

Clement", "on the right of the porch" or "without the porch door" and several left legacies for its repair. To be buried in or near the porch ensured they were near the path most frequented by the living. Porches played a far more important part in village life in mediaeval times than they do today.

#### THE NAVE

The solid stone walls of the nave are those built by the Norman masons in the late eleventh or early twelfth century. About 1200, a narrow south aisle was added by piercing the south wall and inserting a communicating arcade of three arches. The early English arches of this arcade are of plain workmanship and have flat soffits springing from bevelled imposts, while the massive plain piers are merely fragments of walling left after the insertion of the arches. It will be noticed there are now only two bays opening into this narrow aisle-but the west respond will be found to be part of the third arch of the arcade.

The north wall was pierced at the same time with an arch leading into the small transeptal aisle - this was extended eastwards later on to form the north chapel.

The nave roof is carried on moulded tie-beams with king-posts of rather unusual design. Roughly hewn wall uprights and curved braces rise from stone corbels to support the tie-beams. At the west end a massive beam has been severed for the insertion of a good decorated window of three trefoiled lights with a *quatrefoil* in the apex.

Below this window is the eighteenth century Minstrels' Gallery, carried on four slender fluted pillars, which have square *abaci* and square plinths. A cornice of alternative wedges and hollows decorates the length of the gallery. On either side of the west door is a freshly cut ragstone corbel, possibly re-used material, to support the back of the gallery. Old Romney is one of the few churches in Romney Marsh to retain its gallery.

#### THE CHANCEL

The arch leading from the nave into the chancel is an interesting Norman arch, low, plain, and of one order, without impost mouldings. The first three courses are original wrought-stone, but above, the arch has been rebuilt, retaining its original shape.

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In the chancel itself, pointed early English arches with roll stops and plainly moulded imposts lead into the north and south chapels. Both imposts have cut grooves, probably for the insertion of screens.

During the 1929 restoration, the Sanctuary was extended by moving the

altar rail two feet forward. The plaster ceiling of the chancel was removed revealing the fine old rafters. Otherwise the sanctuary is much as it was in the seventeenth century, with its small Jacobean communion table, and behind the table the painted wooden boards with the Lord's Prayer, the Creed and Commandments, still set in their seventeenth century panelling - a reminder of Puritan austerity, when the altar was shorn of cross, candlesticks and frontals. ...

The east window is of two trefoiled lights and was probably inserted in the fourteenth century. It is set beneath a larger, earlier arch which may have contained an Early English triple lancet window.

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#### THE NORTH CHAPEL

The Chapel is dedicated to Our Lady, and the Fraternity of Our Lady, a mediaeval guild, held its services here. Hamo Aldyn in his will dated 1430 left two sheep to the "Guild of Our Lady" at Old Romene.

Moulded rood screen corbels remain in their original position and there are also moulded wall plates.

On the north is an elegant wide splayed thirteenth century lancet and also a Decorated window of two lights. At the east end a Perpendicular window with typical fifteenth century tracery has three *cinque-foiled* lights, the top of the middle light is interesting and unusual. This window was inserted soon after 1511, when Archbishop Warham carried out a Visitation, and complaint was made at the lack of the new window for which William Brockhill had left a legacy. The Archbishop desired it should be "inserted above our Lady's altar at the east end". The testator's two sons, John and William Brockhill appeared and submitted they were ready to pay the bequest as soon as work was begun on the window. ...

Under the east window stands the original *mensa* or stone altar. This was discovered during the 1929 Restoration in use as a step to the north porch. After it had been cleaned it was mounted on a plain wooden framework. The five original consecration crosses are readily distinguished, and also one on the outer edge - the undersurface edges are hollow chamfered. When one recalls the stringent decrees made for the destruction of church ornaments and furniture, it is astonishing how such a reminder of pre-Reformation worship ever escaped the hands of destructive zealots. It was at a Council of Winchester in 1076 that Lanfranc ordered altars should be made of stone and in the twelfth century it was decreed they should be marked with five crosses to show they had been consecrated. During the Reformation, a letter of

November 24th, 1550, under Edward VI's signet ordered all stone altars to be removed and destroyed. Queen Elizabeth I issued a similar decree in 1559 "for the sake of uniformity". How fortunate that this Old Romney altar was secretly preserved, for the survival of such is rare indeed.

The other especially interesting feature of this small chapel is the stone coffin lid inserted in the floor. Nothing is known of its origin and it is an abiding puzzle to archaeologists. It is incised with an unusual cross, the upper part resembling a double cross-handed sword, and from the central stem are short projections, set diagonally on either side. It has been thought these may represent thorns, it has also been suggested they represent palms from the Holy Land and might indicate a Crusader's grave. Great stone boulders have been met with in Cyrenaica carved with a similar "tree" emblem, but without the cross end piece, and it appears also in floor tiles of some early Christian temples in Tripolitania - where it is described as an "early Christian symbol".

#### THE SOUTH AISLE

When the south wall was pierced for the addition of this aisle in the thirteenth century, Old Romney had but recently acquired its prefix. The patronage of the benefice was in the hands of Aubreda de Romenal, the heiress of the great Norman landowner, Robert de Romenal, and it is due no doubt to her vision and initiative that these structural alterations took place. The aisle is only nine feet broad and some twenty-six feet in length.

There is a good two-light window of the Decorated period which probably took the place of the Early English lancet inserted when the aisle was originally constructed. Glass was cheaper and more easily obtained in the fourteenth century so that more elaborate windows were in fashion.

Near the blocked-up south entrance or "procession" door are remains of some of the original stone wall seating adjacent to the walls as may be seen in the south aisle of Ivychurch. These stone benches were the only form of seating in early days and were reserved for the elderly and infirm. This gave rise to the expression "let the weakest go to the wall", an expression of courtesy, which today has become one of contempt. The rest of the congregation "knelt on the floor till their knees were sore". In contrast with the roof of the nave, the roof of this aisle is flat and divided into sections by old tie-beams.

#### THE SOUTH CHAPEL

From the south aisle, a good Early English arch with imposts leads into the south chapel. Below the arch, are the fragments of a fifteenth century

screen probably part of the original rood screen. The battlemented cornice is still well preserved but only the stumps of the delicately carved tracery remains. The chapel is dedicated to St. Catherine, the Virgin Martyr - celebrated in the third century for her piety and learning. Under Maximinus' persecution she was tortured between four wheels with short spikes and swords revolving in different directions. Fire and lightning appeared from Heaven and destroyed her torturers. Later she was beheaded outside the walls of Alexandria on November 25th, A.D. 307.

Until the Reformation, there was an image of St. Catherine in this chapel before which lights were constantly burning. The Brotherhood of St. Catherine held its guild services here in honour of its Patron.

At the east end is a fine Decorated window of three trefoiled lights with reticulated tracery, similar to the three east windows at New Romney church, of like date, which suggests they may all be the work of the same masons. The window here has a bold hood mould ending in well carved heads with luxuriant fourteenth century curls.

The north west wall, which has sunk conspicuously out of the perpendicular, is supported by an unattractive brick buttress. Marsh masons were obviously slow to adopt new methods, for although this buttress was added in the eighteenth century, it is built in English bonding, i.e. the bricks are laid in alternate rows of "headers" and "stretchers".

Part of the original stone wall seating remains adjacent to the south wall, and above is a late brick course. A brick outline here indicates a blocked-up doorway, but the restoration of 1929-1930 revealed this was only a nineteenth century insertion to facilitate the taking in of coal and coke, so it was blocked up to restore the chapel to its former dignity. The chapel is now used as a vestry.

A pointed late thirteenth century Early English arch with undercut imposts and a modification of the broach or dagger stop with slightly hollowed sides, leads into the chancel. The imposts of this arch, as the one leading from the north chapel into the chancel, has a groove made for the insertion of screens. For over a hundred years, this chapel had been a deplorable rubbish hole, with coke, wood, oil cans, tattered old service books and papers, faded decorations, and only when the lumber and clutter were cleared out in 1930, were the wooden chancel gates of unusual geometric design, found. They are considered to be of a Chinese Chippendale design, but the matching screens, which fitted the two arches leading from the north and south chapels into the chancel have somehow found their way to

Ivychurch where they have been fitted into the chancel arches there!

#### THE TOWER

At the south-west corner of the church a tower was built in the fourteenth century, but it was not an addition to the external walls, it occupies the site of the third or western bay of the south aisle, so that its west wall is flush with the west wall of the nave. The tower walls are of various stones, the interstices being filled with rubble.

There are three stages ending in a shingled low pointed turret and at the angles are two clasping buttresses, some pieces of re-used worked stone will be seen in one, and the other is noteworthy for a curious carved grinning face--even more grotesque now by reason of long exposure to the weather. This may have been inside the church formerly, local tradition declares it is a representation of St. Clement. This buttress impinges slightly upon the jamb of the new blocked up south door.

The uppermost stage of the tower contains three lancet windows and a long rectangular opening. Above the small sharply pointed west doorway, on the exterior western face of the tower remains the brick outline of a wide curved arch. It is understood a bell was removed for repair from the tower through this opening in the nineteenth century. A window may have been taken out and this later brick relieving arch inserted for extra support.

Inside the tower, the base area is extremely small, only nine feet by thirteen. A small rudely pointed arch opens into the south aisle, but the arch opening into the nave has been blocked up since 1886. This has a second pointed brick arch above - the outline of which indicates the original third bay of the nave arcade.

A strikingly primitive ladder stairway leads up to the bells. It is over three hundred years old and the steps are solid oak and triangular, simply hewn from tree trunks sawn in half diagonally.

#### THE BELLS

There are three bells, each inscribed, and each was made in a different century.

- I 30 inches in diameter. JOSEPH HATCH MADE ME, 1634. ...
- II 34 inches. SANCTA ANNA ORA PRO NOBIS.

This is the only pre-Reformation bell of the three and was made by a Canterbury founder, Richard Kerner, about the year 1500. His bells usually bore the impress of a shield with an initial cross, and a shield with a plain cross - the latter was the distinguishing mark of an earlier bell founder at Canterbury William Belytere, c. 1325. This



bell, alas, is now cracked.

III 36 inches. JO: DEFRAY: R. CHITTENDEN. CHURCH: WARDEN:  
MAT: BAGLEY : FECIT : 1709. ...

### THE FONT

Another remarkable feature of this church is the specially interesting font. It dates from *circa* 1300 and is an unusual example of a font of the Decorated period. The plain bowl of Purbeck marble is square and stands upon a central octagonal stem, with chamfered edges and small roll stops. Some adze work visible on the stem suggests it may be re-used Norman stone.

At each of the corners of the square bowl is an elegant round angle shaft, with a moulded base, and a curiously carved circular capital with square abacus. The bowl and the supporting shafts stand upon an original square plinth of Caen stone, the upper edges of which are chamfered.

The remarkable carved capitals are all different, one represents a dwarf fish looking creature sitting against and supporting the under part of the capital with his hands on his knees; another has knots of foliage and the head and shoulders of a human being, the fingers apparently being inserted in the mouth to hold it open; a third has some foliage and a monkey's face with long ears; the fourth a priest holding probably a chalice, the ends of his stole may be recognised. In time much of this carving will be difficult to identify

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### THE PULPIT

Until the restoration of 1930, there stood at the south-east corner of the nave, an oak Queen Anne three decker pulpit. This had replaced an earlier Jacobean one, provided in accordance with one of the Canons of 1603, and for which a new door was made at a cost of seven shillings in 1640, whereas £1. 10s "was payed for a pulpett clothe cushinge and makeinge and garnishing". A rich purple velvet cushion supported the Bible, and the pulpit was adorned with hangings. The Rector read the prayers and the lessons from the middle section, and preached from the topmost section, below, at the desk sat the clerk who led the responses, and if necessary prompted the Rector on any local matter. ...

### THE ROYAL ARMS

The possession of a coat with the Royal Arms in no way implies any connection with royalty, it is just that heraldry played a prominent part in the adornment of churches in the Middle Ages, in various mediums, carvings, paintings, stained glass and needlework. The Royal Arms were frequently

depicted by mediaeval craftsmen in windows, roof bosses, fonts, vestments and frontals. At the Reformation, when images and pictures of saints were taken down, a single carving or painting of the King's Arms "with texts of scripture set about" was set up to emphasise the sovereign's position as Supreme Head of the church. Cromwell ordered the Royal Arms to be removed and defaced and the State's Arms to be put up in their place. ...

#### MEMORIALS

In the middle of the floor of the nave was a small brass of Henry VIII's reign. This brass has now been mounted on an oak panel and is on the north wall. It bears the effigies of John Ips and his wife, and is inscribed, "Pray for the soules of John Ips and Margaret hys wyfe on whois Almighty ihu haue mercy. Amen". Although undated, this brass commemorates the son of the John Ips, who, in his will desired "to be buryed yn the myddle pace before the Roode" and left "to the reparacion of the church, and for the grownd brekyng of my grave XXs". To be buried before the Rood was a much sought privilege. The son of this John Ips, or Epse, desired in his will, dated 15 January 1526 "to be buryed in the church of Seynt Clement forsaied at the fote of my ffather ... and to the reparacions of the same cherch XXs. to the celyng of the rood lofte xiiis iiijd. to the byeng of a newe selver pyx xjli xiijs iiijd ... Item I will that there may be bought for me a stone to be layed uppon my grave of the p'c of XLs. to be impictorid wt. me my wyffe and all my children. I will that Xs. shal be delyv'ed and payde to the amendment of the chalys in Saynte Clement's cherch". The engraver of the brass seems not to have carried out his commission properly - for John's wife's name is given as Margaret whereas it should be Alys and the "chylidren" were omitted altogether. His wife Alys in her will, dated 11 February 1526-7, desired to be buried before Our Lady and amongst other bequests left "to my Mother Epse my best gowne".<sup>2</sup> Epps is still one of the best known surnames in Kent, especially in Romney Marsh - one of the descendants, John [*sic*] Epps, left Kent in 1625 and went to Virginia, where he obtained a large grant of land and held several prominent positions. He had three sons, John, Francis and Thomas, whose descendants are known to the present day. He himself died in 1655.

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<sup>2</sup> A more reasonable explanation of the family relationships is presented on pp. 8-9. The surviving monumental brass presumably is that of K1 John<sup>D</sup> Epes; the brass ordered by his son K11 John<sup>C</sup> Epes "to be impictorid wt. me my wyffe and all my children" apparently has not survived.

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One of the articles of Archbishop Laud's Visitation enquired "whether there was in the church a convenient and decent Communion Table, standing upon a frame, with a carpet of silk or some other decent stuff and a fair linen cloth to lay thereon a communion time". The expression "carpet" referred to a covering, not for the floor, but for the altar. Margaret Deffray made an altar cover of heavy dark green serge and embroidered it in wool and silks, with a wide border round three sides of *gros point* work. Inside the borders are appliqued flowers of silk and velvet, growing out of pots of *applique* red and blue velvet. The leaves and stems of the plants are embroidered on the dark material. In 1964 the cloth was repaired by Margaret Stuart Martin, the then Rector's wife. The Victoria and Albert Museum's Needlework Department stated "The date was late 16th or first half of the 17th century, i.e. 1610 to 1625. ..."

#### THE PARISH REGISTERS

It has been said that if all other records had been destroyed the leading facts of English history since 1538 could be gleaned from Parish Registers.

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The registers contain records of baptisms, marriages and burials, and the keeping of a book for this purpose was first made compulsory in Henry VIII's reign by an injunction of Thomas Cromwell, Vicar General, in 1538. "Item that you and every parson vicare or curate shall for every churche kepe one boke or register wherein ye shal write the day and yere of every weddyng christenyng and buryeng made within yore parishe and so every man succeeding you lykewise".

In 1559 the Convocation of Canterbury ordered parchment registers to be provided "for the more careful keeping of the records" and directed the old paper registers were to be copied on to parchment. This was faithfully done at Old Romney, for the earliest Register indicates this on the title page: - "This book conteyneth a trewe copie of the register of christninges mariages and burials from the xvjth daye of September Ao. Reg. Reg. et Reg. Phillipe et Marie the second and third 1555, kept by Mr. Wm. Jumpe then minister there. Here is recorded in paper a trew copie of all the former recordes even from the beginninge so much as maye be found rightly datyng the yeares in the margent neere as I can gesse yet truly setting down the substance as I find it, by Kenelm Digbie from the end of Wm Jumpe his recordes which was Januarie 4, 1567 untill August 1598."

The cover of the book bears a note "Payed to Mr Thomas Man in Paternoster Row bookbynder for this booke of lxxvij leaves of parchment iijjd - the thirde day of may Ao. 1598 Reg. Reg. Elizabeth 40. By Kenelm Digbie Parson of Olde Romney."

The book beings on the first of October, 1538 in Henry the Eighth's reign

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### THE CHURCHWARDENS' ACCOUNTS

Churchwardenship was a much greater responsibility in early times than it is today. Wardens were first appointed in 1127 and in addition to their care of the church, their duties were many and varied. These are recorded in the accounts and reflect the customs and social conditions of other days. ...

The first volume begins with "the accompts of Wm. Marshall this last year 1637 taken and examined by the minister and other inhabitauntes May 14th 1648". When the Wardens were confronted with heavy expenditure on the church fabric, they did not resort to jumble sales, whist drives or bazaars, but they imposed a land sess or tax "towards the repairing of the church, wherein all the land in the parish is sessed and the inhabitants are charged for their several abilities for the use aforesaid". Lists of Old Romney inhabitants with the amounts of their assessments are given in detail, and among the "extravagans", that is dwellers outside the parish, but who owned land here, it is interesting to note in 1672 such famous names as Norton Knatchbull, Knight, of Mersham Hatch, Thomas Godfrey, Knight, and Henry Hogben. ...

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### EXTRACTS FROM SOME UNPUBLISHED RECORDS OF THE PARISH

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Several Court Books have survived recording the proceedings of the Old Romney Hundred Courts held in Queen Elizabeth the First's reign. They contain fascinating accounts of the election of Jurats and Freemen, fines for resisting the Magistrates, breaking the Common Pound, debts, details of distraining, pleas of unjust detention, all of which were recorded by the Common Clerk John Forset.

At one Court, held on the 19th December, 1560, two Jurats, William Epps and Laurence Baker, presided when "the goodes of Thomas Swaynlande taken in distress and pryed by Abraham Dowlc, 2 fether bedes, 2 fether bowlsters, 4 li., 2 bras pottes, 2 stupnets, 1 mortar and pestell, on Lattyn chafyngdyshe, 4 latten candell stickes and on keatle, Xxs. and a graye nage or geldyng Bartholomew Faulkners in waye of distres for a town scot and pryed at 53s. iijd."

At a later Court in 1588, the year of the threatened invasion of the Spanish Armada, William Epps was the defendant! "We present certaine postes and rayles standing to high uppon the wall of Mr. William Epps his land from the lane ende to Doddes Barn to amend the said default before midsommer". ...

### ST. EANSWITH, BRENZETT<sup>3</sup>

Brenzett village clusters around the cross-roads situated on the busy road from Appledore to New Romney. In Roman times this road was a raised causeway known as the Rivi Vallum, or Rhee Wall. It was built to hold back the river Rother that flowed through Brenzett, for it was the Romans' earnest endeavour to reclaim the land east of the river as far as Portus Lemnis (where Lympne now stands.)

The change in the Rother's course, which now reaches the sea at Rye, is said to have followed a great storm during the reign of Edward I.

The name 'Brensete' is first mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 when land here was held by three monks of the community of Martin's Dover. ...

Three hundred years after, in 1381, Brenzett must have had some importance for it was chosen as a rallying place for the followers of Wat Tyler gathered from all parts of Romney Marsh. In an old record it states that they were armed with pitchforks!

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St. Eanswith was the grand-daughter of Ethelbert, the first Christian King of Kent. After serving her novitiate in Normandy she landed at Folkestone and there became founder-Abbess of the first Nunnery in England. Built in the year 630 on a projecting rock overlooking the sea, it was dedicated to SS. Peter and Paul.

St. Eanswith was perhaps one of the most remarkable Saints of her period, for the story goes that while the Nunnery was being built, a pagan prince sought the princess to be his wife. Among the beams brought for the work there was one three feet shorter than the rest. Eanswith refused to marry the prince unless he could, by praying to his Gods, lengthen the beam.

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<sup>3</sup> Robert S. Sharman, *Guide for the Parish and Church of Brenzett* (2nd ed.; n.p., 1972).

The prince agreed, but no matter how much he tried he could not lengthen the beam and finally he shamefully departed. Eanswith it is said, in sight of all present, approached the beam, prayed, and the part opposite her raised itself up and lengthened itself to equal the others.

She is also said to have given sight to a woman afflicted with blindness, and to have brought water from Cheriton to Folkstone, making it run uphill!

St. Eanswith is still remembered as Folkstone's patron Saint and appears on the ancient seal of the Corporation as an Abbess, crowned, and holding a pastoral staff, with a fish on either side of her. She died on 31st August, about 640.

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Brenzett is the only church in England solely dedicated to this Saxon Saint. Quite probably a Saxon church existed here, but no evidence remains to support this theory. There was certainly a Norman church here about 1180.

In the 13th century the church belonged to the Abbey of Gynes in Artois, Flanders. It was valued at £13 6s. 8d. about 1385. On the death of the Abbess, Catherine, it passed to the King's hands in the reign of Henry V. (c.1415) by escheat.

Today it consists of a nave, chancel, north aisle, part of a south aisle, a porch, and a spire-like bell turret over the west end of the nave. Considerable restoration in 1876 and 1902 has robbed the interior of much of its interest.

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Entering the church by way of a south porch, built in the 15th century, we turn westwards and begin our tour at the font. This present font is modern, having been installed in 1876 when the church was restored. It replaced an earlier 13th century one which was found in Canterbury Cathedral and brought here in fragments by William Somner in 1640.

The north arcade is of 13th century workmanship, the north aisle added about 1220 when the church was enlarged. In the centre of the arcade above the pillars is a marble tablet in memory of Thomas Fisher who was a Jurat of Romney Marsh for fifty years, and whose death occurred in 1813 at the age of 83 years. He was also eleven times Bailiff of Romney Marsh.

...

Also on the wall of the north arcade hangs the Royal Arms of George III dated 1780. They have been painted by hand in an Adam style frame, the date set with one numeral in each of the enlarged compartments at the angles.

... Originally these arms stood over the south door. They were restored in 1968.

When Henry VIII made himself head of the Church of England in 1536, Royal Arms were introduced into our churches. In Queen Mary's reign nearly all were destroyed, but in 1660 the display of them was made compulsory.

Scissor-beam trusses, in pine, support the nave roof and are recent additions, the only old timbers being two 16th century tie-beams. In 1876 the lovely old Georgian box pews were removed and replaced with new ones.

On the south side of the nave is part of the original 18th century three-decker pulpit which was dismantled in 1876. Above the pulpit would have been an inlaid sounding board of hexagonal shape. This board may be seen in the vestry in use as a table top.

The chancel arch, near the pulpit, has in its lower half the little Norman work that remains in the church. It is a roll and chevron mould of late 12th century date. ...

An interesting document preserved with the Church Records states that the pews were placed around the chancel in 1710.

During the restoration in 1902, most of the chancel was re-built, but fortunately the south-west angle was not touched. On the exterior wall may be seen a fine 13th century Priests' Door, only four feet six inches high. Although now bricked up, it still retains a medieval scratch dial on the eastern jamb which was used by the priest to show the times of services. Four radial lines project from a central hole where the priest placed a gnomon, or metal rod, so as to cast a shadow from the sun.

...

In the 15th century there would have been a rood-beam across the chancel, to which was fixed a life-size figure of Christ upon the Cross with SS. Mary and John on either side. Many parishioners bequeathed money in their wills to maintain candles to light these figures and other images of Saints in the church to whom they had looked for spiritual guidance during their life on earth.

In 1462, William Dod bequeathed 20d. to the light of the High Cross on the rood-beam, and 20d. to the light of St. Mary. Steven Ederike in 1499 bequeathed 12d. to St. Katherine's light, whilst Agnes Marleborough left 6s. 8d. to the Brotherhood of St. Anne in 1511. By will of Robert Whittisphauke, 1513, a pound of wax to the light of St. Nicholas, and 20d. and a cow to the maintenance of the lamp before the Rood. In 1523, John

Yaldishe left 2d. to St. Christopher's light. William Lewis in 1519, gave thirty ewes to the churchwardens, twenty to the Rood Light for ever as a stock, and ten to maintain the Holy Loft for ever. Other parishioners refer to the lights of Our Lady, St. Anthony, and St. Eanswith.

When Queen Elizabeth came to the throne in 1558, rood lofts were mainly destroyed, but in 1560 when the Archdeacon visited churches in Kent, he recorded that rood lofts still remained in Biddenden, Brenzett, Bishopbourne, Chartham, Ebony, Faversham, Goudhurst, and Sandhurst.

...

Turning away from the chancel, northwards through a pointed arch, we enter the Lady Chapel, built in the 14th century. ...

Facing the Altar, notice in the south wall a piscina, or bowl, of 14th century date where the chalice was rinsed after Communion. Behind the Altar are the original 18th century Creed boards inscribed with the Ten Commandments.

Leaving the Chapel through the western arch we are in the north aisle.

...

The west end of the aisle is flanked by two early 14th century dark narrow aisles one bay long. Six huge oak beams at ground level support the 15th century oak-shingled spire. Notice the ropes of the three bells ... The bells form the heaviest ringing peal of three in the county. ...

Concluding our tour of the church, we enter the vestry where the priest robes himself before services. ...

If we had been here on the 2nd December, 1551, we would have seen three men busily compiling an inventory of church goods. The following is what they found:-

First a chalice of silver weying iiij uncs.

Item one corsse with the staff of copper & gilt.

Item a vestment & j cope of red velvett.

Item another vestment of sattyn abrydgs.

Item ij albes, and a corporas with the clothe.

Item ij alter clothes & ij freges of lynnen.

Item iiij towles.

Item iiij candilstiks, a holy water stope, and a payr of sensars

Item a font cloth with a frence of lynen.

Thomas Chapman-vicar, John Wybard-churchwarden, and Symond Cobbe--inhabitant.

Brenzett did not seem quite so prosperous twenty-one years after, in



1573, when Archbishop Parker visited the church. In his report he wrote "theire vicar is not resident, neyther keepeth hospitalitie. Item they have had but iij sermons this yere paste".

...

Parish Registers were instituted by Thomas Cromwell, Vicar-General, in 1538. Brenzett Registers begin in that year with Baptisms, Burials, and Marriages. The first book is composite from 1538-1598. Inside the front cover is a leaf from a 13th century Psalter, whilst at the back of the book is a statement that John Levet, vicar, read thirty-nine Articles in 1577.

#### ST. MARY THE VIRGIN, ASHFORD<sup>4</sup>

For 500 years the tower of St. Mary's has stood sentinel over this town of Ashford. ... There had, however, been a church here for longer than 500 years. The first positive evidence is in the Domesday Book made 900 years ago in 1088, just after the Norman Conquest. Here we read the entry - "at Esshetisford" - the Saxon name for Ashford - "at Esshetisford, a church and a priest". That church mentioned in the Domesday Book was almost certainly of Saxon origin. ... the Normans did little building of parish churches until the middle of the twelfth century, before that they were mostly concerned with building cathedrals, abbeys and other large religious houses.

We know nothing about this first church but it would certainly have stood where our present church is, on the higher ground above the ford which gave the town its name and which was at the bottom of East Hill ... It was probably a wooden structure which eventually the Normans replaced with a stone one. Archaeologists tell us that some stones at the corner of the north transept show definite Norman tooling.

Again we know nothing of the size of the Norman church but the position of the stones at a corner suggests that even then the church was of cruciform construction.

...

There is, however, an interesting mention of the church in the 12th century when, in a Charter of King Stephen, possession of the living was

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<sup>4</sup> W. R. Burden. *The Story of St. Mary's, A Short History of the Parish Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Ashford, Kent* (n.p., 1984).

given by Norman of Ashford to the priory of Horton Kirby.

Whatever form the Norman church took it was largely swept away in the 13th or early 14th century, when the present church was built. ... The most visible remains of this period are the stonework of the west wall of the south transept and the blocked window in the same wall. But the bases of most walls and columns in the chancel and columns in the nave are of the same age. This indicates that even in those days the church was of considerable size, only the nave being much smaller than it is today. The roof, however, was much lower as can be judged by the quoins on which the roof timbers rested which are still visible at the angles of the chancel and both north and south transepts.

The church at this time had a low squat tower which must as well at some time have been surmounted by a short wooden spire. ...

There is some evidence that in the 14th century, about 1350, the height of the chancel and transepts was increased.

It was in the 15th century, however, that big changes took place ...

It was about 1470 that [Sir] John Fogge began to rebuild St. Mary's. He built the Perpendicular tower, raising it on the existing squat tower. This meant that the original four pillars supporting the squat tower had to remain in place although they were not strong enough to support the immense weight of the new tower. They were therefore encased in stone to give the extra strength necessary. The tower has remained almost unchanged until the present day. On the battlements can be seen the arms of the Fogge family.

At the same time he raised the height of the roofs of the existing chancel, transepts and nave to their present height but there is no evidence that he increased the floor plan of the church in any way. ...

Raising the height of the walls necessitated new window openings in order to preserve the proportions of the walls. They are higher from the ground than those they replaced and in some cases, at the east end, one can just distinguish the original height of the stonework. These windows were filled with rich stained glass mainly to the Fogge family but also containing portraits of the kings whom Sir John served. These have all been lost. ...

The work of Sir John Fogge was not confined to masonry, however, other renovations were undertaken at the same time. Other families probably joined in the work. This is certainly so in the case of the rood screen. We read in the will of one William Whyte of Ashford, who died in 1472, that he left 40s. for the new work on the rood loft over the two aisles, 20 s for each aisle. A positive indication that the rood ran across the whole width of the

church.

The choir stalls in the upper row that have misericord seats are also a legacy of the Fogge era. They were introduced in connection with another of John Fogge's undertakings - the founding of a College of Priests, for which he built the College, part of which survives today as the home of our vicars. They were Black Canons of the Order of St. Austin. These old stalls in the choir were for the master and his assistant (those facing east) and for the priests of the college. When turned up the undersides of the seats are beautifully carved, especially the two facing east which depict the pelican *in* [sic; in?] its piety and pigs feeding on acorns and apples. It was all short lived however, because when Sir John fell from favour with the King on the death of Henry VI, the royal consent for a college was withdrawn and never reinstated and the college of priests faded out.

... It was in 1616 that the first gallery was put in the nave. It was small and on the north side. It must be remembered that the church had no pews at this time and the gallery was probably put in by local gentry who sought some privacy. Then in 1637 another gallery was added, also on the north side, this time to accommodate the master and boys of the Grammar School which had been founded two years earlier, mainly through the generosity of the Knatchbull family. The school building still stands today in the churchyard, known as the Dr. Wilks Hall. This latter gallery bore a magnificent coat of arms of the Knatchbull family on the front.

Records tell us that the first bell was hung in the tower in 1620.

But troubled times were at hand. In 1642 the Civil War broke out and with it the Puritan purge on the Church. In 1643 the vicar, John Maccubey, was ejected and a Presbyterian, John Boden, put in his place. All the stained glass in the church was removed or smashed, monuments, especially those of the Fogge family were defaced and the altar pieces and tables taken out and burned in the market place. This fact was recorded by the churchwardens of the time, Joy Starr and William Worsley, on a stone set in the east wall of the chancel behind where the altar had stood.

Strangely, the wooden altar rails survived as also did the canopy over the Fogge tomb. ...

It was at the Restoration that our magnificent coat of arms of Charles II was placed in the church. ... This coat of arms once hung on the north wall of the tower facing the north transept. It is reckoned to be one of the finest arms of Charles II to be found in any parochial church.

In 1695 a new altarpiece was erected and this was paid for by public

subscription. ... The altar piece which was erected ... was a massive wooden one with carving and black panels on which the commandments and other texts were lettered in gold. It is believed that part at least came from a church in Italy. It stood twenty feet high and must have obscured much of the east window. ... It was at this time also that the rood was finally removed. Warren describes it as being of heavy wooden construction with folding doors and painted green and gold. All that remains of the rood today is the little staircase in the south transept which led to the loft. In that staircase is a small window containing the only stained glass to survive destruction in the Civil War.

#### ALL SAINTS, LYDD<sup>5</sup>

[This church was extensively damaged during World War II, 1939-45. The chancel was completely destroyed and the north and south chapels and the long massive roofs were extensively damaged.]

West Doors and Window. Notice the unusual feature of two pairs of doors set in the base of the one lofty continuous arch which also contains the gracefully proportioned West window of four trefoiled lights. There has never been a porch at this entrance to the Church. Then pause under the Tower and look upwards to the finely groined ceiling, then look towards the Chancel and notice the radiance of the three stained glass lancet windows over the High Altar, nearly 200 feet away. This fine Perpendicular Tower was raised to its present height of 132 feet during the period when Thomas Wolsey (later Cardinal Wolsey) was Rector of Lydd.

Saxon Corner and Baptistry. From the Tower, walk towards the North Aisle and notice the unplastered walls of the Baptistry. You are now standing in part of a Saxon Church built over a thousand years ago. The font is modern. Notice the openings in the Saxon arcading and the clerestory window which were filled in when the Early English Church was joined on to the Saxon Edifice in the fifteenth century.

North Aisle. On the North wall are the Royal Arms dated 1732 (George

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<sup>5</sup> C. Leslie Winkfield, *The Parish Church of All Saints, Lydd, A Short Guide to Visitors* (n.p., n.d.).

II). Moving along towards the North Chapel you will come to the North Door. This was originally a processional doorway in the days when the various Guilds had their separate altars in the Church.

On the first panel on the North wall are mounted some of the older brasses which during the course of the years have been removed from the floor. These are dated from 1557 to 1616.

On the second panel are mounted sections of the fifteenth century rood screen and one of the original jacobean altar rail supports.

North Chapel. For many years this was used as the Vestry. In it you will find in a niche in the North wall the effigy of a recumbent Defender of the Holy Land (Crusader). From the way his legs are crossed we learn that he took part in two Crusades. The effigy is believed to be that of Sir Walter de Menyl, Lord of the Manor of Jacques Court, Lydd.

Adjoining the window above the effigy may be seen the remains of a lancet window, probably one of three which preceded the present window.

The altar is mediaeval and bears the marks of consecration upon it. It is supported on a stone drum and four slender pillars, the latter being the gift of the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury.

...

On the South side of the Chapel is the Stuppeny Tomb, 1608, around which the Jurats and Commonalty of Lydd assembled yearly on St. Mary Magdalene's Day to elect the Bailiff and Jurats. This custom carried on until 1885, when the then Bailiff became the first Mayor of Lydd.

The Sanctuary (Chancel). As explained above, this is new.

Set in a niche in the North wall is a stone bust of Thomas Godfrey, 1623, which though damaged during the war has been carefully repaired and restored. The inscription under the bust is continued on the large black stone set in the floor nearby. Above the bust are the Arms of his three wives.

...

South Chapel. The altar stone in the Chapel was discovered when excavations were being carried out during the restoration works. The floor is new, but the East window, except, of course, for the glass, is original, having escaped serious damage during the war.

In the South wall is an unusual double piscina with fluted bowls and trefoiled arch.

...

Under a rubber mat, near the entrance to the Vestry is a brass in memory of John Thomas, circa 1429. This is one of the oldest and finest brasses in

the Church.

...

The four easternmost arches of the Nave arcading, with their columns, differ in materials and architecture from the three westernmost arches. The former are certainly Early English, but the latter belong to the later Perpendicular period. The bases of the Early English columns are relatively small and circular, whilst the other three pairs have massive square (one pair) or octagonal (two pairs) bases, and were doubtless used as seats.

Whilst the existence of a former Norman Church (within the present Church) is conjectural, it is believed that it would have occupied the space now taken up by the four easternmost arches.

There are a number of interesting corbel stones in the Nave, some with grotesque faces.

The opening in the North side of the Chancel Arch would originally have contained the door leading to the former Rood Screen.

On the Priests' and Choir Stalls are eight carved "poppy heads". These were originally fitted to the ends of the pews reserved for the Bailiff and Jurats.

### ST. NICHOLAS, NEW ROMNEY<sup>6</sup>

Romney is an ancient Cinque Port. ...

The prefix "New" is misleading. In the Domesday Survey A.D. 1081, it is called Romene, Romenal and Rumenale. Two centuries later, it had acquired the nickname Poutenay, due to Romney's association with the Cistercian Abbey of Pontigny.

The Norman invasion in A.D. 1066 was first attempted here, but Romney sailors repelled the invaders who landed at Pevensey.

Norman masons built this church on the sea shore, at the head of a large harbour which sheltered ships of the Cinque Ports Fleet. In the eighth century, Romney's harbour and port extended to a Saxon church of St. Martin. In the twelfth century, its limit was the present churchyard of St. Nicholas where ships used to tie up to the walls.

In A.D. 1287, a succession of floods changed the course of the River

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<sup>6</sup> *Saint Nicholas, New Romney, Kent* (n.p., n.d.). leaflet.

Limen (or Rother); by the reign of Queen Elizabeth the harbour had silted up. The ground level of the church is the former level of the surrounding land.

The Norman church (c. A.D. 1100) began where there is now an inner West door framed by an oak screen dated 1662. It extended to where the pulpit now stands. Its columns and arches are of Caen stone.

The tower is later Norman work. It once had a broach spire; beacons were lit on the tower. There are eight ringing bells in it.

The North and South enlargements and the three Chancels are all of the Early English and Decorated periods (13th and 14th century). Their columns are of Kentish rag stone. Each Chancel has aumbry, piscina and triple sedilia.

For many years, this church was the common meeting place for local government. The sessions of the Jurats, the Annual Cinque Ports Meetings, and the election of the Mayor took place in this church.