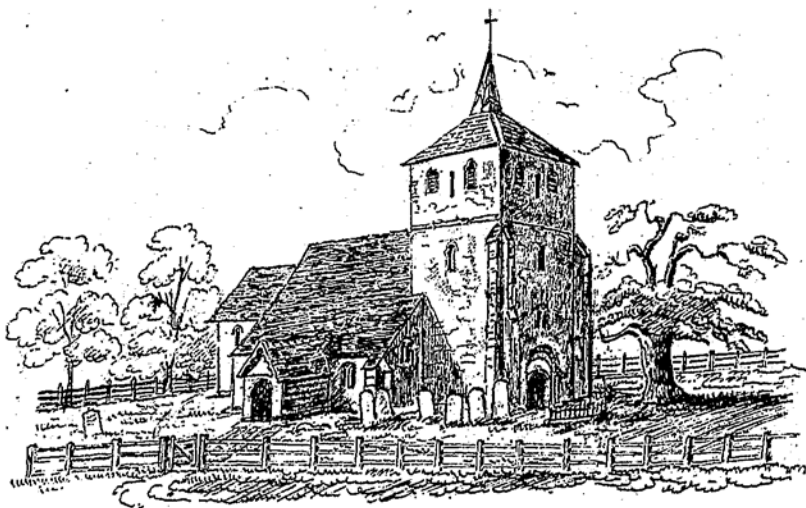




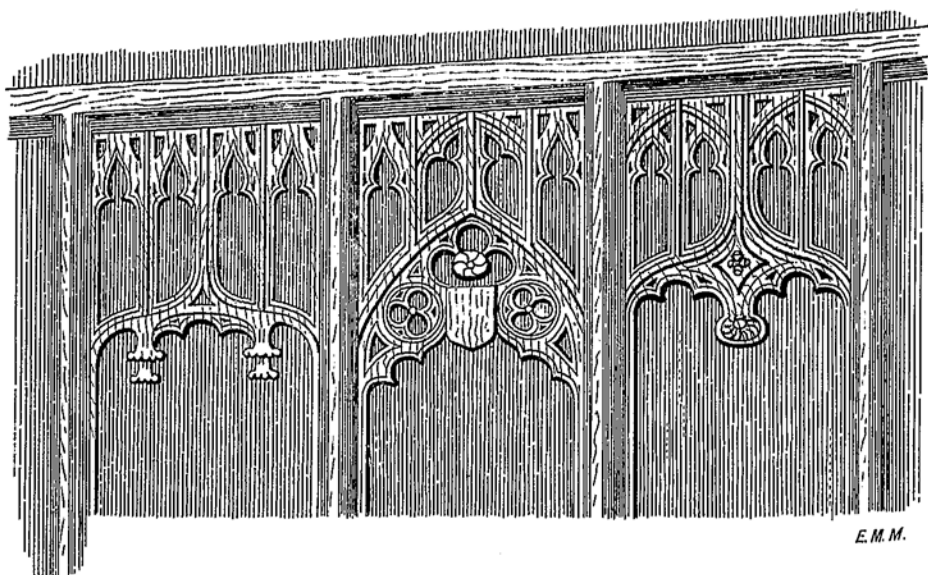
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RUCKINGE CHURCH.



E.M.M.

SCREEN, RUCKINGE CHURCH.

RUCKINGE CHURCH.

BY REV. E. M. MURIEL.

THIS church consists of nave with western tower, north porch, north and south aisles, chancel and south chantry. The nave is divided from each aisle by three pointed arches, springing from octagonal pillars with moulded capitals. There are three windows in the south aisle, and four in the north aisle, each of two lights with trefoil heads. That at the east end of the north aisle is of the Decorated period, with three lights, and contains some remains of ancient glass. In one of its quatrefoils, appears the mutilated figure of St. Michael vanquishing Satan. The doorway in this north aisle is Decorated, and has a porch with remains of a good carved barge board, of the fourteenth century.

In the south aisle is a fine Norman doorway; its outer side shews a chevroned moulding, the inner moulding is cylindrical; there is one order of shafts, having abaci and sculptured capitals; one abacus is billeted, the other foliated. The tympanum above this door has star ornaments.

The chancel arch is Decorated, but is supported on the south side by an octagonal Perpendicular pier. From the same pier spring two other arches, one between the chancel and chantry, the other at the east end of the south aisle. The chancel is lighted, on the north side, by two lancets with cinquefoil heads. The east windows, of both chancel and chantry, are Decorated, and of design resembling each other, though the latter, which has been more recently opened, is the most elegant. Each has three lights, with drip-stones, of the roll moulding, terminating in scrolls and heads. The chantry or chapel, which is wide and lofty, has Decorated windows of rather curious character, of two lights each; and its south wall contains a small trefoil-headed piscina, with stone shelf. Some good Perpendicular screen-work, of three

different designs, is still preserved; one portion was inserted by a late Rector in the front of a seat in the chancel, and another portion, bearing traces of blue and yellow colour, remains in its original position, between the south aisle and the chantry. On the other side of the chancel, is an ancient oak seat, which has at each end a standard terminating in a poppy-head. There is also a fine Elizabethan communion table, with bulge legs and a moveable top.

The tower is the most ancient part of the church. Its walls are very massive, being nearly six feet thick, and in its west wall is a very fine Norman doorway, with a late Perpendicular arch inserted to reduce its size. Sir Stephen Glynne, in his valuable *Notes on Churches in Kent*, says, "There are three orders of cylindrical mouldings and one chevroned." The belfry story is later, and has Perpendicular windows, of one light, inserted one on each side of a lancet, making three openings on each side of this story. The tower is covered with a square pyramidal roof, of shingle (repaired with tiles), which is again surmounted by a small octagonal spire covered with lead.

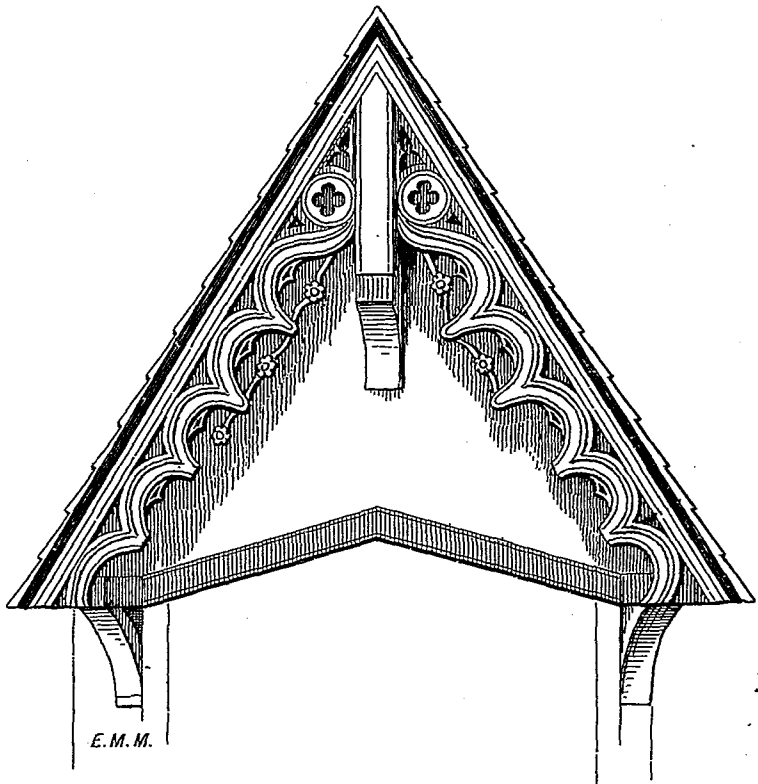
There are marks of fire on the stone-work, in various parts of the arches and tower; the roofs, which are late, were no doubt added after the fire. I conjecture that the church was set on fire by lightning, in the year 1559, as several churches in this neighbourhood were partially destroyed in that manner at that date; Kennardington and Ebony Chapel for example.

The earliest Registers of this parish, those of marriages and burials, commence at the same date, A.D. 1538; that of baptisms begins in 1549, but it is evident that a leaf or two at the beginning of the book is lost. From 1621 to 1638, and from 1678 to 1686 there are no baptisms recorded; no doubt the leaves are missing; they appear to have been torn out.

One or two entries may be mentioned:—

1566. July the xxvij Alice Panleye Servante with old father Wood was buried.

1597. Vicesimo quarto die Julii, Johanna Rofe puella quæ casula innunda fuit sepulta erat.



North Porch.



West Doorway.

1599. * Vicesimo quarto die februarii Joh'es filius Reginaldi Shakespeare bapt. fuit.

1690. Nicholas Chroucher after a Coroners inquest upon his body which was don to death by the fall of a tree in Bournwood was buried on ye 23 April.

The same year. William Fox an innocent boy was buried 9th May.

From a note made by the Rev. Thomas Brett, Rector in 1705, I extract the following:—

“The greatest mortality in the parish appears to have been in 1612, when there were 29 burials; it is certain that ye parish in those years was fuller of inhabitants than now (1705), for Richard May, being aged about 96 years, told me he could remember at least ten houses more in ye parish than were in now. He also told me that he had heard his mother say when she was a girl, which was probably in ye years 1637 or 1638, that the small pox was got into the parish and many died of it, but this year was no such infectious distemper.”

In 1401, John Notebem of Rokynge desired to be buried within the church there, next the grave of his wife. To the high altar he bequeathed one cow. To the fabric of the church he bequeathed two cows. To the church he left his toga of silk, in order that a vestment might be made therefrom. To Sir William Septvans he left two silver cups; and a bequest of “muttons” to five men in the house of Sir William Septvans.

In 1463, John Crekyng of Rokynge left money to pay for St. Gregory's trental of masses, to be sung for him in Rokynge Church, but he desired to be buried at Bilsington.

Mr. E. W. Oliver has ascertained from wills, made during the reign of Henry VIII, that the chancel in the north side of the church was dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and that in the south aisle there were images of St. Thomas of Canterbury and of the Holy Trinity. He likewise found mention made of two new windows; one in 1489, and another in 1513, the latter being on the south side. In 1529 a bequest was left for buying a treble bell. In 1464 a testator speaks of paving the church, from the south door to the stall of John Symons; and in 1515, another will provides for making

small seats, between the south door and the image of the Trinity. Mr. Oliver finds, in various wills, mention of lights in this church, dedicated in honour of our Lady on the north side, our Lady beside the Trinity, the Holy Trinity, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Michael, St. Christopher, St. Margaret, and St. Katherine. Mention occurs likewise of the rood-light, the torch-light, the herse-light,* and a wax taper of 4 lbs. weight before the sepulchre.

In 1640, a petition was presented to the House of Commons from the parish of Rockyngge, from which it appears that Mr. Richard Marsh was the Parson of Rockyngge in January, 1640, but, from being Curate of the parishes of Leeds and Broomfield at the same time, was unable to attend to the spiritual wants of the parish. No fault was found with him, but, it says, we have not that preaching amongst us that we could desire.

I will conclude with an anecdote, or rather narrative, of the Rev. Daniel Joanes, who was Rector of the parish for sixteen years, from 1807 to 1823. He lived, during that time, in a very penurious way, for the purpose of repurchasing his father's estate in Wales. In his old age, he was enabled to do so; but going there to take possession, and occupying on the night of his arrival the very bed in which he was born, he was found dead in it the next morning. The Rev. G. R. Gleig's novel, *The Country Curate*, is founded on this story.

* HERSE LIGHT.—A triangular candlestick made of bars, like a harrow with many branches or candlesticks without feet, varying from seven to thirty-two, and containing sometimes twenty-four white lights, or else fourteen yellow tapers at the side, representing the eleven Apostles and three Marys, and a white light, symbolical of our Saviour, at the top.—Walcott, *Sacred Archaeology*.