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SMARDEN CHURCH.

BY THE REV. FRANCIS HASLEWOOD.

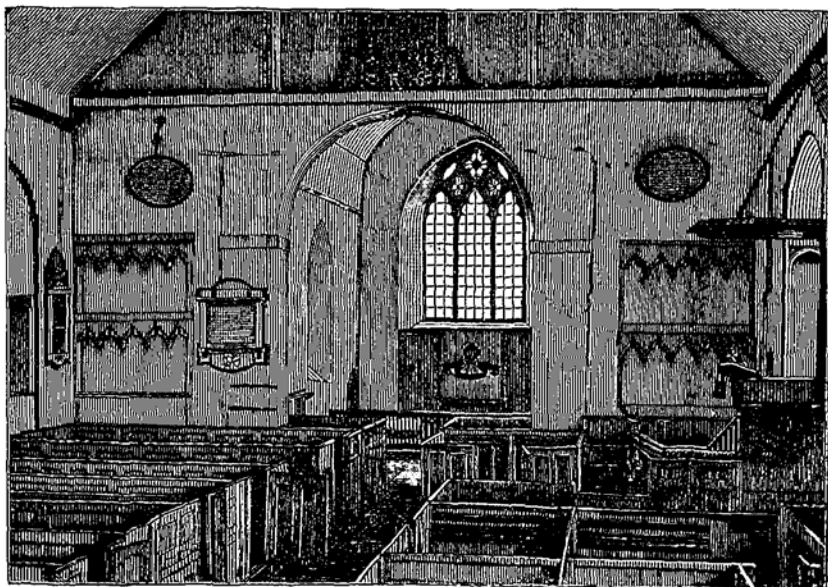


SMARDEN CHURCH : AFTER RESTORATION.

SMARDEN CHURCH consists only of a nave and chancel, with north and south porches, and a square embattled tower at the west end, of three stories divided by strings, having large buttresses, and an octagonal stair turret, at the N.E., rising above the parapet.

It is dedicated to St. Michael, and popularly known as "The Barn of Kent," on account of the singular construction of its roof; the nave being thirty-six feet wide, without any side-aisles, and with no tie-beams to support it. Perhaps there is no building, of equal size, like it in the county; with the exception of some remains of the ancient Abbey of Boxley, near Maidstone, now used as a barn. The roof, formerly covered

with shingles, was ceiled in about a hundred years ago, and remained concealed till the plaster was removed and the timbers again exposed to view in 1869, when the whole fabric underwent thorough restoration.



SMARDEN CHURCH : BEFORE RESTORATION.

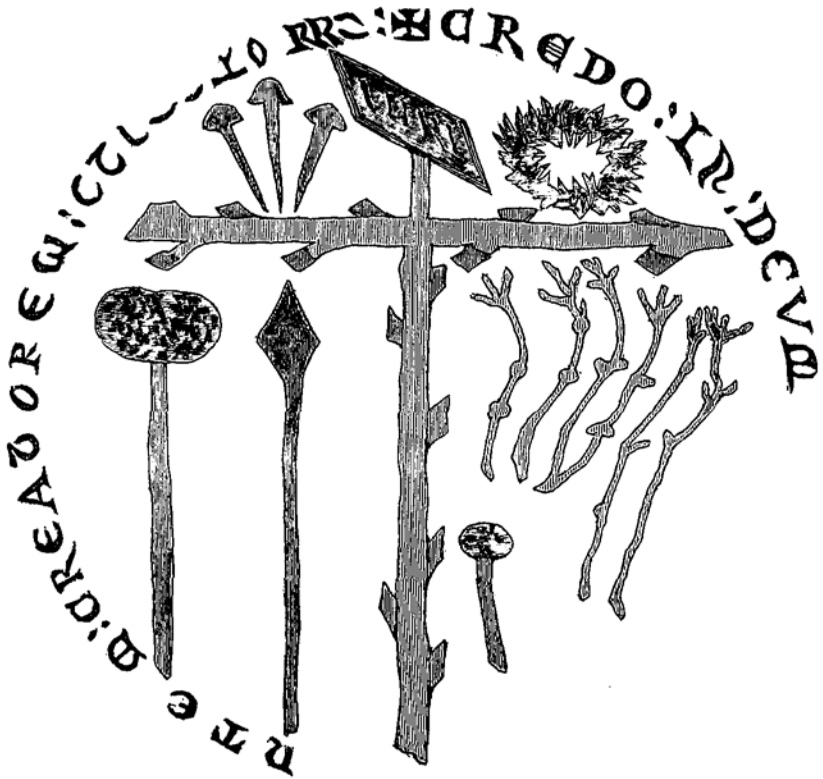
The style of architecture points to the Edwardian or Decorated period, and indicates thirteenth or fourteenth century work. Though traces of an earlier period do not appear, there must have been a church prior to that date, for though Smarden is not mentioned in Domesday, yet we find King John presented one Adam of Essex to the vacant benefice in 1205 ; and there is another early reference to the church, when a certain Allan de Radingate, having been guilty of theft, fled hither for sanctuary, in 1250.*

When noting the various objects of antiquarian interest, found within the sacred edifice, let us begin

* Furley, *Hist. of the Weald of Kent*, ii., 33.

with the chancel. Its windows are in the Decorated style, and of unusual design; the tracery of the east window being of the same character as that found in the south chancel of Ruckinge Church.

Whilst the church was undergoing restoration, several interesting mural frescoes were discovered; tracings of which are preserved.



ANCIENT FRESCO.

I. One was found to the left of the chancel window, at about eleven feet from the ground. The colours were still bright, but speedily peeled off when touched. The subjects depicted were the instruments of the Crucifixion. The cross measured two feet by one foot

ten inches, and was painted green; the board for the superscription was of a brownish colour. To the right of the transverse beam, and over it, was the "crown of thorns," sprinkled with blood, as were also the three nails on the opposite side. Below these, and beneath the left arm of the cross, were "the sponge on a reed," and also "the spear," the head of which was covered with blood spots. To correspond with these two instruments, on the other side were two scourges, besprinkled with blood. The inscription round this fresco was, "*Credo in Deum Patrem Omnipotentem, creatorem cœli et terræ:*" the first clause of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."

II. On the same wall, but on the other side of the window, was a repetition of the same group, but with no inscription visible.

III. On the north wall, between the windows, was the same subject, and a mutilated inscription: "*et vitam. . . Amen,*" being distinct; also three letters "*res;*" possibly the last part of the Creed abbreviated, "*Carnis resurrectionem, et vitam æternam. Amen;*" "I believe in the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

IV. The fourth was on the opposite wall, the painting was repeated, and the almost perfect inscription was, "*Qui conceptus est de Spiritu Sancto, natus ex Maria Virgine;*" "Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary."

EASTER SEPULCHRE.

The arched recess in the north wall was opened twenty years ago, when we discovered a framework of wood, which speedily fell to pieces; and also several

carved embattled stones with colouring upon them. There have been different opinions expressed as to what this recess was originally intended for; some affirm it was the tomb of the founder (which was frequently in this part of the church); but it was evidently the Easter Sepulchre.

This theory seems confirmed upon turning to the *Glossary of Architecture*, which says that the sepulchre was a representation of the entombment of our Saviour, set up in the Roman Catholic church at Easter, on the north side of the chancel, near the altar. In this country it was most commonly a wooden erection, and placed within a recess in the wall. The crucifix was placed in the sepulchre, with great solemnity, on Good Friday, and continually watched from that time till Easter-day, when it was taken out and replaced upon the altar.

Fosbroke, in his *Antiquities*, mentions a procession in Passion week, with a wooden tomb of Christ, and the Paschal candle. Our old church book of Smarden, which dates from 28 Henry VIII, 1536, throws additional light upon the subject, serving to prove the theory already advanced; thus:—

1547, leyde owte for ix li. of new waxe to renew the paskall.

1554, paid for makinge the pascall iiij d.

1556, paid to Christopher Mills ffor makinge the sepulere and other things against Ester, iij s. viij d.

1557, to Richard Ricard for makinge the pascall iiij d.

The LOW-SIDE-WINDOW, directly opposite the sepulchre, was opened at the same time. The *Glossary of Architecture* states that “these windows were never glazed, but closed by wooden shutters, and iron gratings.” Such was the case here; saddle bars were found, and also hinges for a shutter.

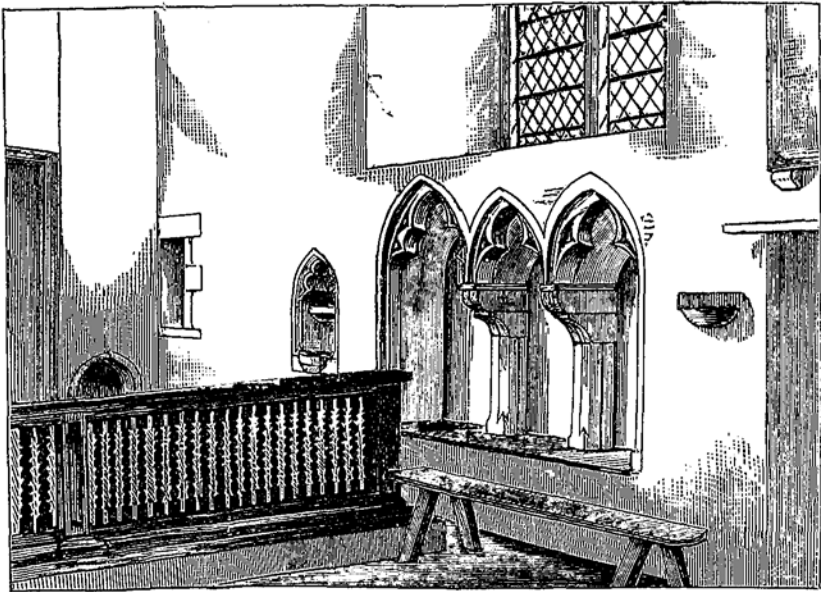
It is evident that this low-side-window served some purpose, connected with the service of the Church, which ceased at the Reformation. But what was the exact use of it is unknown; and at least twelve theories are advanced in the fourth volume of the *Archæological Journal*. A probable one is that it was used to administer the sacrament to lepers, and others afflicted with infectious disorders.

REMARKABLE DRAIN IN THE EAST WALL.

The latter theory seems to be confirmed by the position of a water-drain (also recently discovered), low down in the east wall, close to the pavement, shewn in a woodcut on the next page. This was probably the *Perfusorium*, connected with the ablutions necessary for the priest, after ministering to leprous or infected persons. A strong ironhook will be observed fixed in the arch of the vaulted recess of this water-drain.

The PISCINA is cinquefoil-headed. It was used by the priest for rinsing his hands and the sacred vessels during mass. The bowl slightly projects; but happily it has escaped the zeal of the Reformers, who, in too many instances, cut the stone flush with the wall. There is both a stone and wooden shelf, which served the purpose of a credence table, to receive certain of the sacred vessels, that were used during mass, previous to their being required at the altar: such, for example, as the "ij sylver cruytts" mentioned among the church goods here in the time of Henry VIII.

There are three *sedilia*, intended for the priest and his attendants, the deacon and sub-deacon. The seats are all on the same level; but the most eastern *sedile* is cinquefoiled, and rather higher than the other two, which are trefoil-headed.



SEDILIA, PISCINA, LOW-SIDE-WINDOW, AND PERFUSORIUM.

The masonry over the *sedilia* has an unfinished appearance, and as some embattled stones were discovered in the sepulchre when opened, possibly they originally formed part of the *sedilia*, which, if so, must have resembled those at Willesborough.

A little to the right of the *sedilia* is a circular stone bracket, and another on the opposite wall to correspond. They may have been intended for lamps or images.

THE DOG WHIPPER.

Perhaps the Altar Rails were made of their present height, and so enclosed, to exclude the canine race; which in olden time must have been very numerous (no dog tax being imposed till 1796), for in the church book are frequent references to an official known as a dog whipper; thus:—

- 1573, John Qusted for kepinge out of the dogges iiij d.
 1576, John Qusted for whipping dogges out of the church xij d.
 1619, To Sotherden for whipping the doges out of ye church iiij d.
 To Thomas Hopper for the whip iij d.

CHANCEL ARCH.

Many ancient churches have lost their chancel arch, but from what cause it is not always known. Here, however, there is no mystery; for the external walls evidently suffered from the outward thrust, in supporting the immense roof; and, when the walls gave way, of course the arch and gable fell. A low brick arch of mean character was at some period erected to support the original; this modern one partially shut in the chancel, and gave the whole building an unsightly appearance. This obstruction was removed in 1869, and also an ugly tie-beam, which was replaced by an iron rod. The new arch is an exact reproduction of the old, being built upon the original springings.

Dividing the chancel from the nave is the lower portion of the original Chancel Screen. It formed the backs of pews until the recent restoration.

The PULPIT came from Halden Church, having been purchased from that parish, and adapted to its present position. It stands upon a raised dais, which originally existed.

REREDOS IN THE NAVE.

Beneath the reredos, on the south side of the chancel arch, may be seen the remains of an altar stone, which had evidently been built into the wall, and not merely placed against it, as was usually the case. The churchwardens' books throw light upon the matter; thus:—

"1550, Received of John Woulton for a stone xij d. (doubtless this altar stone).

Paid John Harneden for takinge doune of the altare stone, and makinge up of the church wall iij s.

Paid to Thomas Hoppare for whyttinge where as the syde altares was iiij d."

"Pd. for drinke to y^m that had out the altare stones ij d."

Then, again, in Queen Mary's reign, when the Romish ceremonies were restored, we find this entry :

"1554, Pd. ffor makinge the aulter iij s.

Pd. ffor a load of sand viij d.

Pd. ffor carreinge the aulter stone and setting it up xvij d.

Pd. for havinge in the altare stone out of the strete viij d."

ROOD LOFT.

The church books supply several particulars respecting the rood loft; the original staircase to which still remains. It was erected in 1508, for in that year Stephen Frenche of Bidynden in his will says, "I bequeth to the making of the newe Roode loft of Smerden vj s. viij d." In 1546 we find this among the church accounts:—

Rec. of James Lake and John Pell for xix ells of whyte clothe of ye roode lofte viijs. viij d.

1548, leyd owt fore whytting over the roode lofte xs.

1549, Received for an olde dore sould to Edwarde Pellande v d.
(This was probably that leading to the rood loft.)

Upon Queen Mary's accession to the throne, when the Romish ritual was restored, we find:—

1555, Paid to the carvar of Asshefforthe ffor the rood Mary and John and for caringe of them home xxvijs. viij d.

paid to Pelland ffor iron to ffasten the crosse in the roode lofte iiij d.

Again, in Queen Elizabeth's reign, when Protestantism was restored, we observe the following entry :

1560, Received of Thomas Norton for part of the Rod loft xx s.

Fox relates, in his "*Book of Martyrs*":—

How one Drayner, bearing a grudge against Gregory Doddes, parson here, made on the roode lofte nine holes, that he might look about the church in mass time. In which place alway, at the sacring, he would stand to see who looked not, or held not up his hands thereto, which persons so not doing he would trouble and punish very sore. Whereby he purchased a name there, and is called to this day Justice Nine Holes. It so fell out, the said Drayner came to the Printer's house demanding, Is Fox here? To whom answer was given that Master Fox was not within. Is the printer within? quoth Drayner. It was answered Yea. Mary, saith he, you have printed me false in your book:—It is false, I made but five holes with a great auger, and the parson made the rest. It was answered, I have not read that a Justice should make him a place in the Roodlofte to see if the people held up their hands. He said, It is untrue, for I set as little by it, as the best of you all.

Indeed, saith the printer, so we understand now, for your being at a supper in Cheapside among certain honest company, and there burdened with the matter said then, that you did it rather to look upon fair wenches than otherwise. And so he parted in a rage.

The present door hangs upon the original iron staples found built into the wall.

The following entry informs us when the doorway was closed:—

1597, To Thomas Hopper for makinge up the dore which hath gone to rodelofte ijs.

The AUMBRY AND NICHES were no doubt used in connection with altars close by. There were formerly several side altars in different parts of the church, old records mentioning the image of St. Michael the patron Saint, the altar of the Blessed Virgin, John the Baptist, and others. The niche was, of course, for one of the images. A stone seat may also be observed occupying the recess of the window.

WINDOWS.

As to the windows of the nave, it would appear

that three Decorated windows, similar to those in the chancel, originally gave light on each side of the nave; but one on the north, nearest the east end, and two on the south, have been since enlarged to three and four-light Perpendicular windows to give additional light to this part of the church, possibly when the tower was built. The north wall had, at some time, been banded together by iron clamps; it was deemed necessary, therefore, when the church was under restoration, to fill in the two most western window-splays, which had been imprudently cut away in the olden time.

STOUPS for holy water were found near the two porch entrances, and restored after the original design.

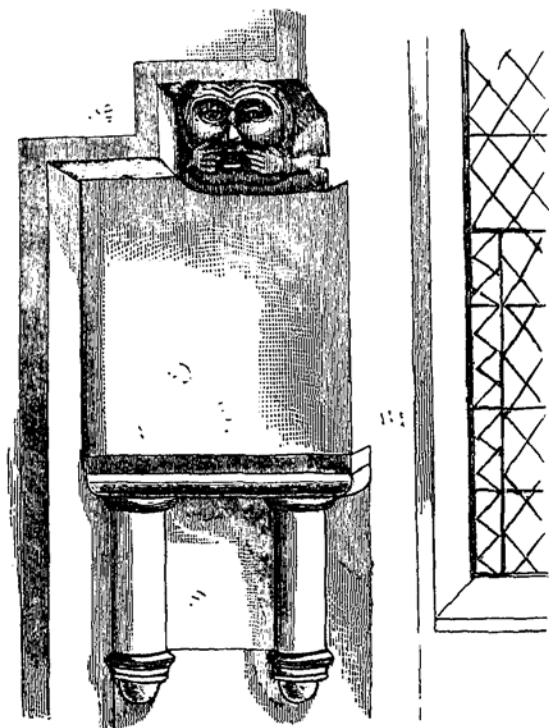
The FONT is octagonal, of Bethersden marble. It formerly was plastered over from top to base. Upon opening it the central shaft was found, and a portion of one of the original columns; eight new ones were therefore made after the old pattern.

The POOR BOX with its ENAMEL is of remarkable character, having three locks, and being fastened by strong iron clamps to a pedestal of solid oak. A box of this sort, called the Poor Men's box, was enjoined by Edward VI. It is first mentioned here in 1553, thus:—

“Mending a lock of the pore mans' box ij d.”

To the lid is attached a curious enamel upon copper. There are small holes which originally fastened it to its place. This plate once formed part of a series of subjects, relating to the life of a saint, fixed on a shrine. The enamel represents a baptism. The priest is about to take the infant from its mother, and the third person is evidently a sponsor. The

ornament round the font terminates in a trefoil, emblematic of the Trinity, which, with the space within the *nimbi* that surround the heads of the figures, is of a green colour. The rich blue and general workmanship lead us to suppose it was made at the celebrated works of Limoges. In the museum of Cluny, at Paris, are some elaborate shrines, of the thirteenth century, which were manufactured at Limoges. Some of the enamelled plates are similar to this at Smarden, even to the minute bordering; suggesting that they probably came from the same manufactory, and were, perhaps, the work of the same hands. The hole for money, which is by no means unusual in shrines, most likely suggested the idea of placing this plate upon the Alms Box here.



GROTESQUE HEAD, ON NORTH WALL OF NAVE.

GROTESQUE HEAD (*see preceding page*).

In the north wall of the nave near the eastern end, at about eight feet from the ground, is a curious panel supported by two corbels of early character; and, above it, a grotesque figure pulling its mouth open. On its arms are bracelets. The whole is carved in Bethersden marble. We could find nothing in the wall between the shafts. This curious head has puzzled several antiquaries, and no satisfactory explanation has yet been suggested. It may have had some reference to the Whitsun ales. There is a grotesque figure on the porch of Chalk Church, supposed to illustrate the humours of a church-ale: possibly this may have been also intended for the same purpose.

ALTAR FRESCO.

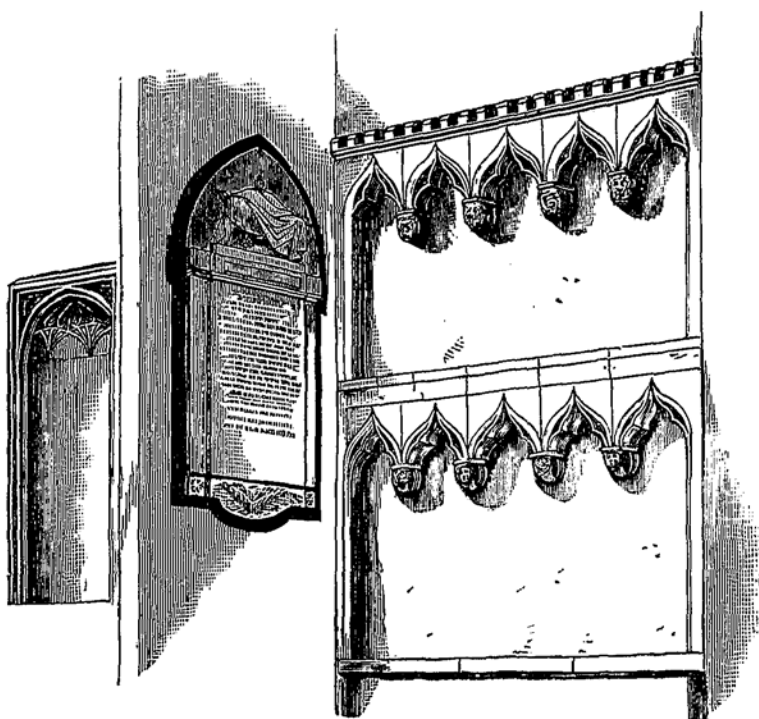
On the reredos in the nave, north of the chancel arch, we found traces of an altar fresco. Upon the removal of sundry coats of whitewash, several faces and figures were brought to light, representing the entombment of the Saviour. He was being borne by a female figure (evidently the Virgin), whose countenance and tears bespoke grief. Christ's head and robe were besprinkled with blood. There were one or two flowers in the foreground, apparently to indicate "the garden" where the burial took place. This *pietà* may have been intended to represent one of those festivals of Passion week which commemorate the participation of the Virgin in the sufferings of her Son: and perhaps several green flowers, found at regular intervals on the surrounding stone work, may have been intended for passion flowers.

Hasted, quoting from Weever, says that one of the



ALTAR FRESCO.

great family of the Guldefords founded a chapel here in this church in 1444, but his reference probably relates to Rolvenden (Rounden), not Smarden. However, some individual seems to have beautified the north-east, or Romden, corner of the nave, by carving heads and foliage upon the stone corbels, and painting this altar-piece. The reredos on the south side of the chancel arch was never finished, whilst that on the north must have been highly decorated.



NICHE AND REREDOS, AT NORTH-EAST CORNER OF NAVE.

TOWER.

The fine old embattled steeple consists of three stages, and is in the Perpendicular style; and of the same character and date as Egerton, and others in the neighbourhood.

We are able to fix the exact date of its erection from the following bequests :*—

- 1447, John Eytherst of Smarden left, ad opus ecclesiæ de Egerton xij s. iiij d., ad opus ecclesiæ de Smerden xx s., ad opus ecclesiæ de Charryng xij s. iiij d.
 1464, William Marlar de Smerden, left, ad novum campanile 13s. 4d. (for a new belfry), also money "ad novam campanam" (for a new bell).
 1477, Richard Borne, fabricæ ecclesiæ de Smerden, xl s., etc.

Two of our sovereigns have visited Smarden. Edward I, on the 18th June, 1299, was at the Archiepiscopal manor house at Charing, and the following day we trace his progress towards Sussex, through Smarden to Cranbrook; taking up his quarters, we may suppose, at Sissinghurst.

Queen Elizabeth also visited Smarden during her progress through Kent, in August, 1573, on her way from Sissinghurst to Boughton Malherb. To the truth of this fact our records testify, thus :—

"1573, laid out for the ringers when the queenes grace was here ijs. x d."

This was three years before she granted the charter for a market. The document is signed by the great queen herself, having been previously drawn up and presented to her by Martin James, Remembrancer of the Court of Exchequer, who then owned the estate of Romden in this parish.†

The charter referred to was a confirmation of a former one granted to Archbishop Mepham by Edward III, who has been called the "Father of English commerce," because he encouraged the Flemish cloth-workers, who settled in this neighbourhood about 1331, Cranbrook being their chief town. At Smarden also

* *Wills at Canterbury*, i., 38; A, i., 5; iii., 6.

† Haslewood's *Antiquities of Smarden*, p. 25.

the manufacture of broadcloth was carried on, and within the memory of living persons a picturesque house, still standing in the village, with carved gable, was used for the manufacture of linen.

We must now quit Smarden, which, according to Philipot, signifies "fat valley." Though low, the locality is healthy, the registers mention many who reached their threescore years and ten; whilst stones in the churchyard record lives of 91, 96, and even 104 years.

Hasted describes Smarden as very unpleasant and watery, and the road hardly passable through the parish, even for waggons. Old parishioners remember when they stuck fast in the middle of the town, and horses sank into the mud up to their knees. Goods were then conveyed by trains of packhorses, upon paved foot-paths, some of which still remain; and, as late as 1814, corn was thus carried to Maidstone market. To the badness of the roads in former times, we attribute the fact that Smarden has been so little explored by archæologists.

However, another remarkable event may now be added to our annals, for though Smarden has more than once been visited by royalty, yet it could never before boast of what future historians may now record, namely, that it was visited in July, 1880, by the members of the Kent Archæological Society.