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Photo]

HYTHE CHURCH:

F. J. Parsons, Ltd.

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VIEW FROM N.E.

NOTES ON HYTHE CHURCH.*

BY THE REV. HERBERT D. DALE, M.A.

IN mediæval times the Borough of Hythe was an appendage of the manor of Saltwood, which had been granted to Christ Church, Canterbury, in the reign of Cnut. At the division of the estates of the monastery between the archbishop and the monks, in the time of Archbishop Lanfranc, Saltwood was assigned to the archbishop. The church of St. Leonard at Hythe was a chapel appendant to the rectory of Saltwood, and held with that rectory, the advowson being in the hands of the archbishop, and so it remained until the year 1844, when Hythe became a separate vicarage.† As lord of the manor the archbishop appointed the Bailiff of Hythe the chief ruler of the town, who was assisted by councillors called Jurats. Some of the original appointments by the archbishops—as far back as the fifteenth century—still exist. The Bailiff was the chief officer of the borough, and he and the jurats held their meetings in the chapel of St. Edmund, which was the N. transept. A similar practice prevailed in some of the other Cinque Port towns, *e.g.*, the authorities met in St. James' Church, Dover (the old church). Early in the sixteenth century the townspeople complained to Archbishop Morton about their bailiff—probably they desired to have the appointment in their own hands. Archbishop Cranmer compromised the matter by granting the

* [Extracted from a report, kindly supplied by Mr. Dale, of his Address to the members of the K.A.S. on the occasion of their visit to the church in 1912.—Ed.]

† By order in Council dated 31 January 1844. Population of Saltwood (Census 1841) 520, and of Hythe 2265. Each then had its ascertained parochial boundaries, its own churchwardens, overseers, etc., and its own rates and assessments. For the endowment of the new Vicarage of Hythe tithe within that area commuted at £95 per annum, the Easter offerings at Hythe about £40, and surplice fees £20 were assigned, and a rent charge of £50 per annum on the tithes of Saltwood. Since then the endowment of Hythe has been greatly increased by private benefactions.

town a lease of the appointment for 99 years, but in 1541 he conveyed the manor of Saltwood with all its appurtenances to Henry VIII. in exchange for other lands. The lease was annulled or surrendered and the bailiffs appointed by the Crown. Finally in 1575 Queen Elizabeth granted the town a new charter with the right of electing their own Mayor, as the brass to John Bridgman, ob. 1581, records. Probably on this change the Corporation ceased to use St. Edmund's chapel, and were allowed to meet in the parvise, which they kept in repair. Their muniments are still preserved there. The size and importance of the chapel of St. Leonard was marked by the fact that the archbishops used to hold ordinations therein,* rather than in the church of Saltwood. The extent of Hythe in mediæval times was proved by the existence of several other chapels, the ruins of which with their churchyards remained in Leland's time (1540), viz., St. Nicholas, St. Mary, St. Michael, and Our Lady of Westhithe.† With the exception of the last-named they appear to have been no longer in use in 1366.‡ Nothing is known of St. Mary's. The site of the churchyard of St. Nicholas is marked in two seventeenth-century maps,§ and is well known, bones having recently been discovered there. A plot called St. Michael Ashe also is marked on the maps, which in a note mention a church of St. Bernard, which however is not marked.

We may now turn to the architectural history of the church, and glance at its chief features.|| The church was

* In the years 1282, 1288, 1456. Cf. *Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. XVIII., p. 419.

† See *The Itinerary of Leland*, Parts vii. and viii., edited by L. T. Smith, 1909, pp. 64, 65. [The sites of these churches are considered in a Paper in this Vol. on West Hythe Church.—ED.]

‡ Alan de Sleddale, appointed Rector of Saltwood 1365 (Reg. Islip, p. 307), on 21 June 1366 procured Royal Letters of Presentation which refer to "Ecclesiam de Saltwode cum capella de Hethe eidem ecclesie annexa." Apparently then only one church, St. Leonard's, was then in use at Hythe. See list of Rectors of Saltwood with Hythe annexed, by T. S. Frampton, F.S.A.

§ These maps, dated 1684 and 1685 are in the possession of the Trustees of St. Bartholomew, Hythe, and shew where the Hospital estates were situated. They are full of very interesting information. [The 1684 map is reproduced in this Vol.—see the Paper on West Hythe.]

|| Cf. *St. Leonard's Church, Hythe*, by Canon Scott Robertson, in *Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. VIII., p. 403. The Canon's Paper contains much interesting information, but his architectural history must be read with some reserve. Old theories die hard, and it cannot be repeated too often, just at present, that

probably an early-Norman foundation, though it is not mentioned in Domesday. The round heads of two of the windows of the original nave are visible, blocked up, between the spandrels of the existing N. arcade. The N. and S. transepts may be of the same date, but more probably they are a later addition. A fine late-Norman or transitional door remains on the W. exterior of the N. transept, and the remains of the base of an arch in the interior E. wall, with some marks on the exterior, which shews that a chapel once extended eastwards. The S. transept was rebuilt in 1751 by the Deedes family,* whose vault it contains, on the old foundation, which consists of great boulders of rocks, similar to those of the N. transept. The nave-aisles, covering the early-Norman windows, were added in late-Norman times, with low side-walls and sharply-sloping roofs: the mark of an early roof of the N. aisle being still visible on the interior, below the present roof at its E. end. In the S. aisle an indication of the original roof remains at the W. end. The original Norman chancel has been entirely swept away; it has been supposed to have been apsidal, but its position and extent are uncertain.

In the earlier half of the thirteenth century, when the Cinque Ports, and certainly Hythe, were very prosperous, the Norman chancel was pulled down and the present magnificent example of the Early English style at its best was erected, forming a splendid lofty choir with aisles. This new chancel

our Kentish *parish* churches and chapels built in Norman times were planned with rectangular and not with apsidal chancels: West Hythe and two churches visited during the Hythe meeting, Lyminge and Postling, are cases in point. Since Mr. Dale's Paper was set up in type the architectural history has been worked out with the help of plans and sections made by Mr. W. H. Elgar in a Paper which follows in this Volume.]

* The old map of 1684 belonging to St. Bartholomew's Hospital [which is reproduced in this volume] shews a large house bearing the name of "Captain Deedes" on the site of the present vicarage, and of "Old Manor House," which were originally one house. The Deedes family resided here from some time before 1684 until 1800, when they built the present mansion in Sandling Park. Since then the keep of Saltwood Castle has been restored by the late William Deedes, Esq., and with the addition of some modern dwelling rooms and domestic offices in keeping with the ancient architecture, the old castle makes an imposing and interesting mansion, where Mrs. W. Deedes still resides. Sandling Park is now in the occupation of the Right Hon. Laurence Hardy, Esq., M.P.

was extended to the furthest extremity of the consecrated ground. Its E. buttresses impinge on a public road. To enable processions to pass round the church without going off the consecrated ground, a fine ambulatory with groined vaulting, commonly but incorrectly called "the crypt," was constructed under the E. end of the chancel, having large doors opening N. and S. Another passage was also provided at the E. end of the chancel, and at a much higher level, by constructing archways through the external buttresses which support the gable-wall. These archways are narrow, and the N. one was provided with a door on hinges, but this was removed during one of the earlier restorations of the church: the place of its lock and bolt remains. The southernmost of these archways was blocked up, and the ground allowed to accumulate against it. I have lately had the earth removed, and the arches thrown open. It will be noticed also that two side-doors were cut through the S. porch (which extends to the road) to give facilities for processions round the church here also. Similar provisions occur in other well-known churches, *e.g.*, the arched passage through the tower of Wrotham Church, which abuts on to the road-side.

Though the choir of Hythe is fully half a century later than that of Canterbury, certain resemblances to the latter may be noticed in the choir of Hythe, *e.g.*, the flight of steps leading from the nave to the choir, and the lofty position of the altar, which is not common in English churches;* the two pointed arches under a circular arch in the triforium; and the broad single-light clerestory windows. Again, the carved panels below the eastern string-course are found in the Early English work on the N. side of the cloisters at Canterbury (*cir.* 1226) and at Minster-in-Thanel. All this leads us to suppose that the choir of Hythe was rebuilt under the auspices, and possibly at the expense of the then Archbishop, by men who were connected with, or knew Canterbury well. I am bound to say—not only because I

* The raised floor of the chancel is not owing to the contour of the site, as the ground slopes down some 3 or 4 feet towards the E.

am proud of the church which I am privileged to serve, but because a close inspection will prove the fact—that the carved panels at Hythe are much more deeply sunk and undercut, and far more elaborately carved than those of Canterbury* or Minster.

The groined vaulting of Hythe chancel and its aisles was not completed until the last restoration of the church in the time of my predecessor the Rev. T. J. Hall, now Rector of Dodington near Sittingbourne, under the superintendence of Mr. J. L. Pearson, R.A. The thirteenth-century builders had formed the springers for the vault, and given the easternmost rib of the chancel, as may be seen by the white colour of the older stone, but it was never completed until the nineteenth century. Mr. Livett suggests that there was at first a wooden vault, as in the somewhat later vaulting of the S. transept of Rochester Cathedral, where the springers are of stone and the rest of the ribs and the backing are of wood.† In the eighteenth century, as may be seen in an old print, it had a ceiling which sprang from just above the triforium stage and hid the clerestory windows. The massive buttresses to the choir shew, I think, that it was originally intended to vault the choir in stone, and certainly its completion vastly improves what Mr. Francis Bond has described as ‘the finest chancel of any parish church of its size in England, not to say Europe.’ The deeply-cut mouldings of the double piscina and the sedilia are very beautiful, while the three great eastern lancets with their detached shafts are most elegant. Some old prints of the church which I have collected and hung up at the W. end of the nave shew how the church looked in the first half of the nineteenth century: the clerestory windows of the choir were blocked up: those on the N. side with the triforium have been rebuilt, the S. side is all original work. The large aumbries in the E. wall on the N. side of the high

[* Pointing, perhaps, to a slightly later date. Canon Scott Robertson dates the Canterbury example at *circa* 1226 (*Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. XVIII., p. 409).]

[† Fuller investigation has led to the abandonment of this suggestion. —Ed.]

altar should be noticed. There is a fourteenth-century aumbry and piscina in the S. choir-aisle, which was formerly the Lady chapel: the boss on which the statue of the Virgin Mary stood still remains, with marks of light blue paint. Probably the N. choir-aisle, now used for the daily services, was the chapel of St. Katherine. There is a consecration cross, behind the altar, in its E. wall.

The exterior of the choir is plain and solid, but it has a certain dignity. Hythe, though a Cinque Port, never seems to have been a walled town like Folkestone and Dover. Possibly the massive chancel was used also as a place of refuge when the French made a raid. The turret on the N.W. side of the chancel contains the stairs giving access to the N. clerestory, and to a passage constructed in the wall over the chancel-arch (like Wrotham) leading to steps connecting with the triforium and clerestory on the S. of the choir. A lancet-shaped opening over the lofty chancel-arch gives light to this passage on each side. The door which gave access from the turret to the rood-loft is seen above the pulpit. This turret has been called 'the round tower'; and it has been stated that it may be an instance of an Irish round tower in England. It does certainly resemble one when viewed from the N.W., but it is always well to verify one's references, and to be quite accurate about facts before we proceed to draw conclusions: no part of the tower is round—certainly not the upper part, which resembles an ill-shaped D in plan. Its stones are bonded into those of the adjoining walls all the way up, and are evidently contemporary with them. The conical roof contains a groined vault, and the whole is merely a thirteenth-century turret, of very irregular shape, to fit in with the building for which it provided the staircase. This was built up with the turret, forming a rude vault as it turned.

Soon after the completion of the chancel, or possibly at the same time, the S. arcade of the nave was rebuilt. The pillars on this side still shew marks of being originally painted. The arches opening from the nave into the transept are of the same period; the N. arcade of the nave

varies. Both aisles were raised in the fourteenth century to their present height, and two-light Decorated windows inserted: one of those on the N. has the original stonework. A fourteenth-century flying arch now opens into the N. transept from the aisle. The N. transept contains a beautiful early thirteenth-century piscina with trefoiled head and good moulding. In its N. wall is a canopied recess with cusped arch, which once contained a tomb. The tilting helmet is thought to have belonged to a Captain John Ward who fought in the Battle of the Spurs.

The S. transept contains a fine old iron chest of a well-known type, painted with landscape and flowers, and dating from the earlier half of the sixteenth century. The concealed lock in the centre of the lid turns eleven bolts, and in addition there are two bars for padlocks outside. It is said to have come from the Spanish Armada, but this may be only conjecture, though it was probably constructed for a plate or treasure chest; the three keys of the lock and two padlocks might be entrusted to different men to ensure 'safety in numbers.' The chest at present contains the church registers, which commence in 1566 and contain references to the occurrence of plague in Hythe in 1597, and again in 1625.

The bones in the ambulatory Mr. A. G. Parsons will speak upon.* The evidence leads us to think it likely that they were stacked there in mediæval times, before the Reformation. It is certain that when the ambulatory was no longer used for processions the N. door was blocked up and the ground was allowed to accumulate outside to such an extent that the very existence of an exit there was forgotten and only discovered in 1887, when it was restored at the same time as the chancel. The main stack of bones (which is the original one) is under the high altar, leaving space for processions to pass through. The numerous skulls now seen on shelves were placed there from the main stack in 1851 and 1908. Quite recently the bones have been

[* Mr. Parsons' Paper is printed in this volume.—Ed.]

carefully restacked, leaving air-spaces underneath to preserve them from the decay which had begun to attack them at the bottom. When this was being done several pieces of fourteenth and fifteenth-century pottery were found.

The tower fell in 1739. The *General Evening Post* of June 2 in that year says: "We hear from Hythe that on Thursday morning May 31 about eleven o'clock the Steeple of their Church fell down, and they have been very busy since in digging out the Bells, being six in Number. About ten persons were present when it fell, waiting for the keys in the Church Porch, to go up in the Steeple for a view; but some delay being made in bringing them, they all happily saved their Lives, and had no other damage than being terribly frightened." The tower was entirely rebuilt, 1750—52, some 12 feet lower than its predecessor, and the tower-arch (which is known to have existed) was replaced by the present blank wall, which formerly had the W. gallery in front of it. Many of the old stones were used again, but the tower is rather a poor imitation of gothic architecture, and looks better at a distance. The gallery was removed in 1875.

In the vestry on the ground floor of the tower is an old monument dated 1619, and recording the fact that the Barons of the Cinque Ports bear 'the canopie over the Kinge at his cronation'. A list of Rectors (to 1844) and Vicars (from 1844) with copious notes, compiled by the Rev. T. S. Frampton, F.S.A., hangs in the S. aisle. The records of collations prior to 1207 are lost.

The parvise with the porch beneath was restored at the expense of the Rev. Tatton Brockman of Beachborough in 1863. The nave of the church was restored in 1875 under Mr. G. E. Street, R.A. At this period the windows of the S. aisle had plate tracery inserted. In the N. transept the architect unaccountably replaced a fourteenth-century E. window and a Tudor N. window by imitations of Early English work. A new roof was placed on the nave, at the original height, the eighteenth-century one it displaced being very low and mean. In 1887 the choir and ambu-

latory were very ably restored and completed under Mr. J. L. Pearson, R.A., as mentioned above, and excellent new glass inserted, under his superintendence, in the three great E. lancets. The modern pulpit and reredos are the works respectively of Dr. Salviati of Venice and of Mr. Armstead, R.A. All these later restorations, commencing with the nave, were effected through the indefatigable zeal and efforts of the Rev. T. Sarsfield Hall when he was Vicar of Hythe, and towards which he raised nearly £10,000.