

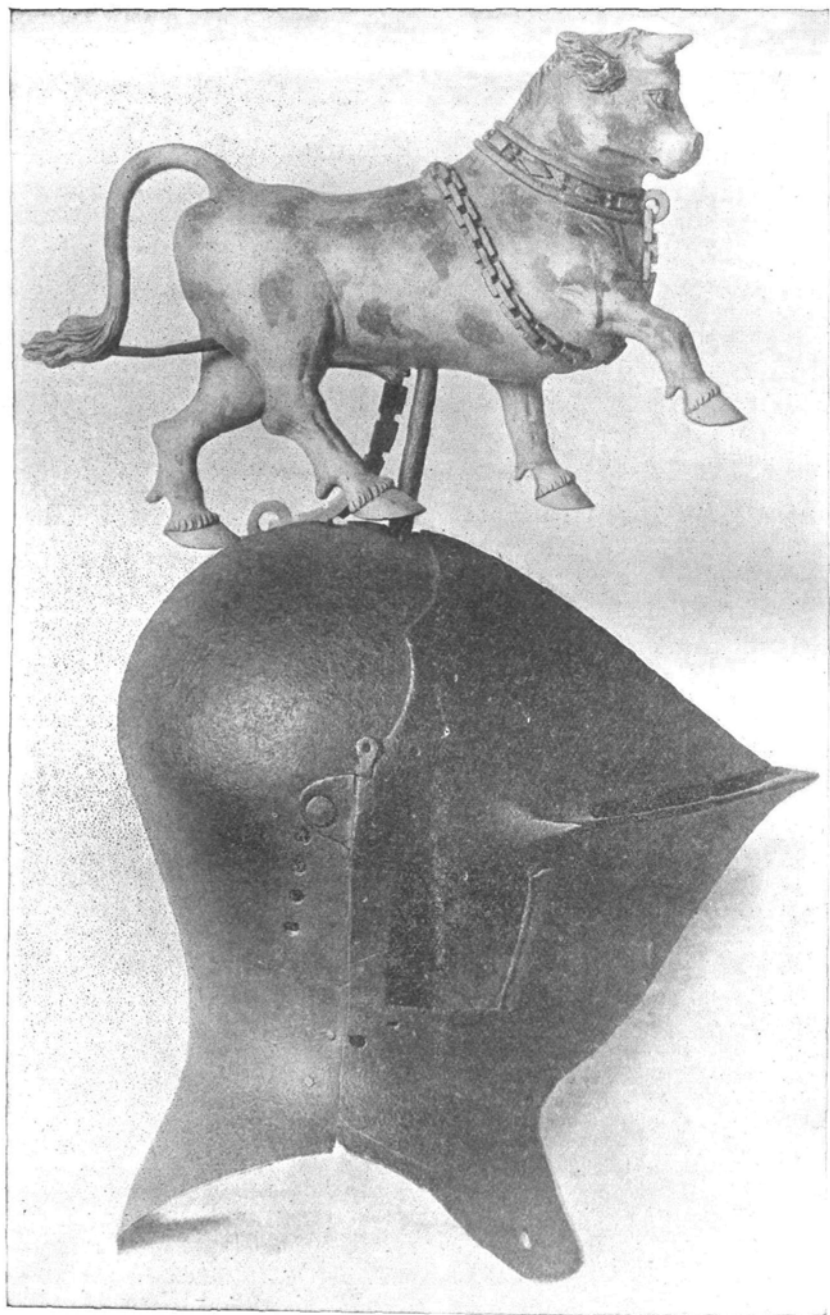


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BIRLING CHURCH.



THE NEVILL HELMET.  
Right Side.

BIRLING CHURCH.



THE NEVILL HELM.  
Back View.

## THE NEVILL HEAUME AT BIRLING.

BY F. H. CRIPPS-DAY.

Birling Church lies nestled under the chalk hills near the Pilgrims' Way, and near by, within the parish, is situated Comfort, a Georgian farm house, partly built of the stones of the ancient manor house. It was in the old house that in 1586-7 Henry, 4th Baron Bergavenny, died. He was buried, like his father, the 3rd Baron, in Birling Church. Birling Manor became vested, about the ninth year of Henry VI., in Elizabeth, only daughter and heiress of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Worcester. She had married Sir Edward Nevill, sixth son of Ralph, Earl of Westmorland, by Joan his second wife, the daughter of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. This Sir Edward Nevill did homage for the manor in 1435, and at the birth of a son, George, at Raby Castle, in 1440, he bore the title of Baron Bergavenny, but was not summoned to parliament until ten years later. He died in 1476 and was succeeded by his son the above-named George, 2nd Baron Bergavenny, who had been knighted at Tewkesbury in 1471, and summoned to parliament in 1482. He died in 1492, and was buried at Lewes, leaving issue. The elder son, George, afterwards 3rd Baron Bergavenny, was born about 1471 and was a distinguished soldier, fighting in Cornwall under Henry VII. and in France under Henry VIII. He died in 1535 and was buried (like his son the 4th Baron) in Birling Church, leaving a son, the 4th Baron Bergavenny, and a second son, Sir Edward Nevill, friend and companion of Henry VIII., a great juster; of him it is recorded that at a tournament held at Richmond in 1510 he "hurt Master Compton sore and he was like to die;" at Greenwich as "Joyeux Penser" in 1511 he was one of the challengers at the justs held in honour of the birth

of a prince to Henry VIII. and Katherine of Aragon—just described at length in Hall's *Chronicles* and illustrated in the Tournament Roll at the Herald's College. He was again one of the most noted of justers at the great fêtes held in Paris in 1515 and at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520. He lived near by, at Addington. He was beheaded in 1538 for his share in the well known political intrigues of the time. This short historical summary furnishes a possible clue to the first ownership of the fine tilting heaume, which is now preserved in Birling Church. This heaume is of wonderful workmanship and superb condition. It is of English make, and consists of two parts. The tilting visor is most beautifully forged, varying in thickness in order to give the greatest resistance where the blow of the lance would strike. It has on the right side a trap which has the edge turned outward to turn the lance head. There are four holes on either side, for air and hearing. The skull-piece has a fine keel and the whole heaume is in perfect condition. It was formerly decorated, and its weight is 15 lbs. 6 ozs. The wooden crest which it bears, the bull of the Nevills, is a fine specimen of Jacobean carving.

If the heaume was made about 1480, a date which some experts would assign to it, it could have been fashioned for the 2nd Baron Bergavenny, who, as already noted, was born c. 1440, and it may have come down to his eldest son, since bequests of armour were of frequent occurrence, especially in the Bergavenny family; and, as this 3rd Baron Bergavenny was buried in Birling Church in 1535, it might have been given to the church, a very common practice from the earliest times. On the other hand, as the younger son, Sir Edward Nevill, was such a mighty jester, it is not unreasonable to suppose that it once belonged to him, for he lived near by and it may, as soon as the scandal of his political execution had faded out of mind, have been placed in Birling Church to his memory. Some experts think that the form of the heaume points to its having been made later than 1480, perhaps about 1500—an opinion fortified by the fact that the heaume resembles the form of the tilting head-

pieces illustrated in the Tournament Roll at the Herald's College, which records the tournament of 1511.

Of all the tilting head-pieces in existence this specimen in Birling Church is unequalled in beauty of line, in workmanship and in condition. Its value to-day is probably £1500. A few years ago under this heaume hung a beautiful pair of spurs, which have been stolen. The student of armour will find one other, of somewhat later date, but of equal historical interest, in the vicarage at Framlingham, Suffolk, a heaume which formerly hung over the tomb of the 2nd Duke of Norfolk and is said to have been worn by him at Flodden Field in 1515, when he commanded the British army. It bears the carved wooden crest of the family :

“And Edmund Howard's lion bright,  
“Shall bear them bravely in the fight.”

A second helmet at Birling, with a similar Jacobean crest, is pure Elizabethan and also a very fine specimen. It was probably placed in the church at the death of George, 4th Baron Bergavenny. The bolt attached to the ocularium piece of the visor is missing, and the small attachments and springs which connected the chin-piece to the skull-piece, and the visor to the chin-piece, are also gone. The helmet is in superb condition, and its value to-day is not less than £80.

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## THE HELMET IN ADDINGTON CHURCH NEAR WROTHAM.

~~In Addington Church is a Jacobean helmet with the crest of the Watton family in wood. Armour, as is well known, rapidly declined in workmanship after the reign of Elizabeth. No member of the Watton family, which owned Addington Manor from 1441 to 1703, and for the most part resided there, seems to have been soldier, sailor, or statesman—and certainly during the times of trouble in the seventeenth century no Watton made himself conspicuous—~~