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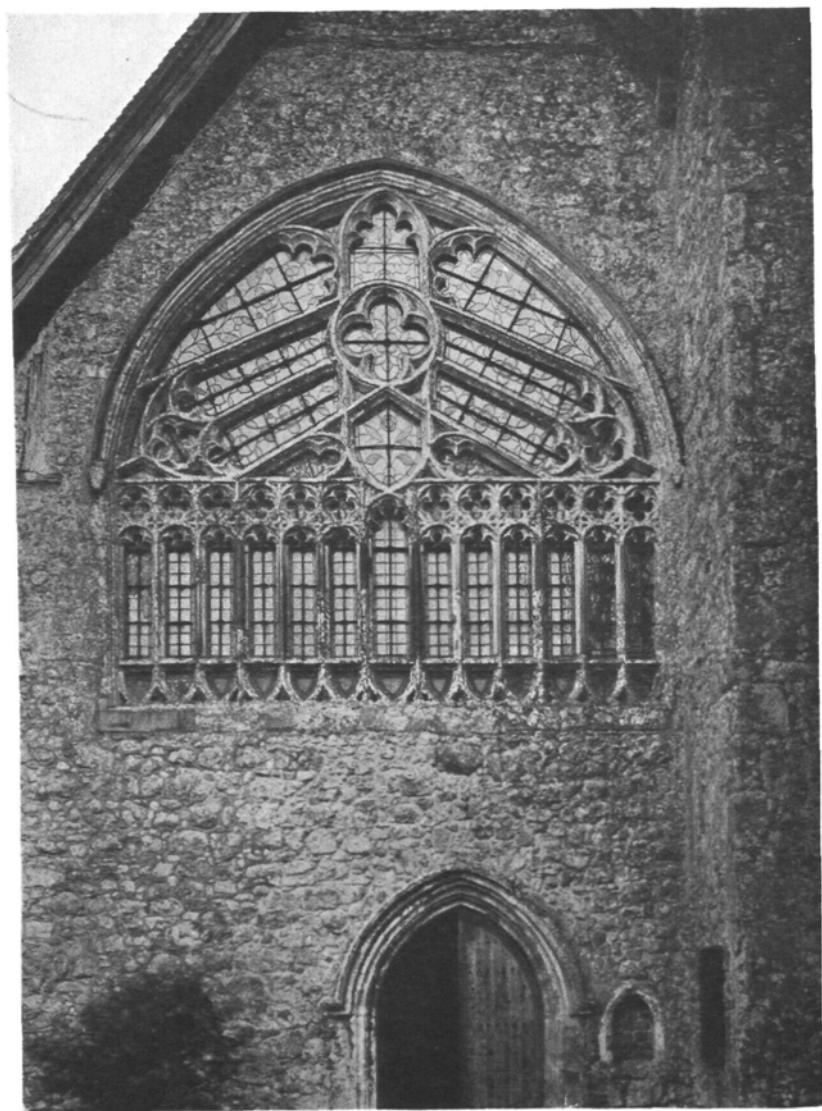


FIG. 1.
MERSHAM.
West Window, *circa* 1400.

THE MEDIEVAL PAINTED GLASS OF MERSHAM.

BY C. R. COUNCER.

It may be supposed that most Kentish antiquaries during the past fifty years have seen, and puzzled over, the strange west window of Mersham church. The problems presented by its unique tracery, and by the very fragmentary remains of painted glass which now exist in it, must have exercised many minds, and I may as well confess at the outset that the most diligent research has served only to convince me of the impossibility of offering at this stage a solution as complete as I had hoped for at the commencement of my enquiry.

The admirable photograph, hitherto unpublished, by Mr. Aymer Vallance, F.S.A., which by his courtesy I am able to reproduce here (Fig. 1), and my own diagram of the arrangement of the stonework, viewed from inside the church (Fig. 2), will enable the appearance and arrangement of this unique window to be appreciated. It will be observed that only a small proportion of the ancient painted glass remains *in situ*.

The lowest stage of the window (G—G in Fig. 2) consists of thirteen shield-shaped lights intended obviously to contain coats of arms. In these lights there remain :—

- G—(1) Azure three winnowing fans or, (for SEPTVANS), imperfect.
- (2) Pieces of ruby glass and remains of inscriptions, etc., from other parts of the window.
- (4) Part of an apostle and other fragments, to be described in detail later.
- (12) Gules crusilly argent, six boars' heads argent, (for SWINBORNE), imperfect.
- (13) Argent on a fesse between three annulets sable 3 molets argent, (for FOGGE).

Information respecting some of the lost shields is given in a MS., dating from about 1750-60, by the Kentish antiquary Brian Faussett.¹ In his time five coats of arms remained, and in addition to Septvans and Fogge he notes COURTENAY, with a label gules instead of the more usual azure ; ARUNDEL ; and, another shield, argent a fesse gules between six fleurs-de-lis sable, the arms of the BARRY family of the Moat in Sevington. The absence of the Swinborne shield from Brian Faussett's notes is explained when we discover from Hasted's *History of Kent* that in his time it was in a window in the chancel ; doubtless it was moved to its present position at the restoration of the church in 1878. The style and date of the shield leave me in no doubt that it was originally in the west window.

We are thus able to fill in imagination six of the thirteen lowest lights of the window ; and unless further MS. evidence should become available, there the matter is likely to remain.

The style of the remaining glass, taken in conjunction with that of the stonework, enables one to fix a date of about the year 1400 for the whole window ; nor is there anything in the shields themselves to cast any doubt on this suggestion ; rather do they support it. The arms of the Fogge family of Repton Manor on the outskirts of Ashford, who are well-known as benefactors to the Church, might be expected ; and the association of their shield with that of Septvans would be accounted for by the marriage of the Milton Septvans heiress to Sir Francis Fogge about the time when this window was under construction. The arms of the Archbishops Courtenay (1381-96) and Arundel (1396-1414) would be likely additions to a work of this character, since it seems to have been a frequent practice in Kent during the medieval period, at least in those churches which were associated, by appropriation or otherwise, with Christchurch, Canterbury, to place the Primate's arms upon ecclesiastical monuments of importance ; those of Arundel, for example,

¹ I am indebted to Mr. V. J. Torr for information regarding this MS., which is now in private hands in London.

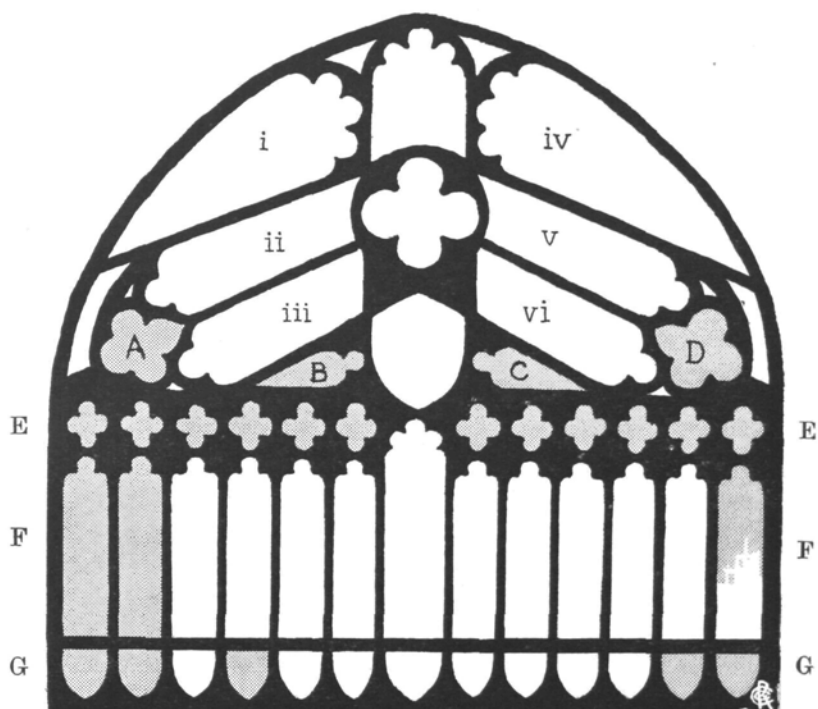


FIG. 2.
MERSHAM.

Diagram of West Window. "Tinted" portions represent old glass.

are carved upon the fonts in Herne and Sittingbourne churches.

Sir Thomas Swinborne was Sheriff of Kent in the sixth year of Henry IV, and kept his shrievalty at Thevegate Manor in Smeeth, now called Evegata, a house which yet retains traces of its ancient construction. This Sir Thomas, who died in 1412, seems to have been the only member of his family, which was of Essex, to come to Kent. He was probably only a tenant at Thevegate of the Passeley family, who had held the estate from the thirteenth century at least, and who continued in possession until in the reign of Edward IV their property passed by the marriage of a female heiress to the Pimpes of Nettlestead. The arms of Swinborne are usually shown with three instead of five boars' heads (cf. the shield in the cloister at Canterbury, No. 167) but Mr. Ralph Griffin tells me he has no doubt that these Mersham arms are merely a variant of the usual coat.

The Barry or Barrie family, whose magnificent brasses, only the matrices of which now remain, were in Sevington church and were copied in the seventeenth century by Sir Edward Dering, were settled at the Moat in Sevington from very early times. Sir Roger de Barry was engaged in the expedition to Ireland under Henry II, where he was the first, as Camden and Philipott record, "which manned and brought the hawk to hand; and grew up to that repute, that he was called by the Irish Barriemore, or the great Barrie."¹ His successor, William de Barry, was one of the *recognitores magnæ assisæ* in the reign of King John; and at the beginning of the fifteenth century the family were still in possession of their ancestral home, only the moat of which now remains, and were of considerable account in Kent. The arms in the Mersham window were probably those either of Sir William Barry, who was Sheriff of Kent 16 Ric. II, 1393, or of Edward Barry, Esq., who according to Mr. Herbert Smith (*Arch. Cant.*, Vol. IV) was, despite the pedigree by Philipott in the Heralds' College, Sir William's

¹ *Villare Cantianum*, 317.

son. In 1628, when Sir Edward Dering made his drawings of the Sevington brasses,¹ Sir William's memorial remained only in part, but there were brasses to his two wives, Isabella Dering and Johanna, and of the wife of Edward Barry, Margaret Oxenbridge (*d.* 1400), with their arms.

We have now to consider the series of Apostles which occupied twelve of the thirteen lights in row F, the thirteenth (F 7), larger than the others, having most probably contained a figure of our Lord or perhaps of the Virgin. By a tradition of the Church at least as old as the twelfth century the Apostles met together after Pentecost and composed the Creed which bears their name, each member of the company contributing a clause. In medieval art each Apostle, besides being distinguished by his attribute—the keys of Heaven for Peter, a lance for Thomas, a flaying-knife for Bartholomew, and so on—carries a scroll bearing his sentence, Peter always beginning the series with *Credo in deum Patrem Omnipotentem creatorem caeli et terrae*, and Matthias ending it with *Et vitam æternam. Amen.*

The extant remains of the Apostles at Mersham may be thus listed :—

- F—(1) St. Bartholomew, with knife, bearing a scroll lettered *Ascendit ad celos sedet ad dexterā dei*, etc. et. He is wrongly labelled at the bottom jacobus maior. The Apostle wears a kirtle of white ornamented with small figures in yellow stain, and over it a blue robe. The background, where it remains, is of ruby glass, and the fragments of canopy work are of white and yellow stain (Fig. 3).
- (2) St. Matthias (correctly labelled at foot), with part of scroll *in æternam Amen*, the dress similar to that of Bartholomew, the canopy-work slightly different in design.
- (13) Part of the figure of St. Thomas, with lance, in white and yellow stain, and a fragment of his scroll bearing the letters *edi*.

¹ These drawings are reproduced in Vol. IV of *Arch. Cant.*



FIG. 3.

MERSHAM.

St. Bartholomew, from light F6, now in light F1, West Window.

The word *et* at the foot of St. Bartholomew's scroll has been wrongly inserted, and from its shape probably belongs to St. Matthias, helping to complete the inscription on his scroll, which should read *et vitam æternam. Amen.*

One fragment of another Apostle, showing part of his robe, of white and yellow stain, and his left hand, grasping a scroll on which remain the letters *ritum sanctu*, has been inserted, upside-down, among other miscellaneous pieces in light G 4. The fragment of inscription will have formed part of the eighth clause of the Creed, *Credo in spiritum sanctum.*

We are now in a position to attempt some sort of reconstruction of the range of Apostles. Light F 1 must have contained Peter, who was invariably placed first in the series ; and since Andrew, James and John seem always, though not necessarily in the order given, to have followed Peter, we may assume that they occupied F 2, 3 and 4. Turning now to the fragment *ed̃i* inscribed upon St. Thomas's scroll, I conceive that this can only represent the last part either of the word *ascendit* or *descendit* (the stroke over the letters indicating that an abbreviation is being made), and it must be the latter, since [*Ascendit*] *ad celos, sedet ad dexteram [dei]*, etc. is the inscription still borne by St. Bartholomew. I therefore place St. Thomas in light F 5, and his inscription when complete would be *Descendit ad inferna*, etc., the fifth clause of the Creed. In light F 6 was St. Bartholomew, with the sixth clause, *Ascendit ad caelos*, etc.

Lights F 8—13 present more difficulty, as the order in which the remaining Apostles were placed does not follow any very definite rule. We have St. Matthias with the final clause of the Creed for F 13, and since Simon and Jude seem always to have been placed immediately before him I assign F 11 and 12 to them. The Apostle of whom so sorry a fragment remains in light G 4 will have occupied F 9, since he bears the eighth clause of the Creed, but to his identity we have no certain clue ; at a guess I should say he is St. Matthew, who seems usually to have borne the sentence expressing belief in the Holy Spirit. Philip and

James the Less must have occupied the remaining two lights.

All twelve Apostles remained, though mutilated, in Parsons' time (1794); Hasted speaks of eight figures "pretty entire" a year or two later; a photograph that I have seen, taken about 1877, shows them very much as they are now; and those who have thought that the restorers of 1878 were responsible for the destruction of much of the glass in this window would, therefore, seem to be in error. Dr. Francis Grayling (*Churches of Kent*, i, 28) mentions 1860 as a date at which much more glass than we can now see remained in place, and it would appear that the 'sixties and early 'seventies must have witnessed considerable losses, (how caused we do not know), of the ancient material.

Above the Apostles is a row of twelve quatrefoils (E—E) in which remain half-length representations of angels playing upon musical instruments. No. 1 has a viol, No. 2 a harp, Nos. 7 and 12 horns, No. 10 a regal, or small hand-organ, and No. 11 a trumpet. The others are much damaged, but No. 8 seems undoubtedly to be playing a psaltery, a curious instrument whose popularity in the Middle Ages is evidenced by its frequent appearance in medieval art. It figures in the minstrels' gallery at Exeter, but the finest representation of an angel playing it that I know of is that by Hans Memling on one of the panels of the shrine of St. Ursula in the Hospital of St. John at Bruges.

It is when we reach the tracery lights of our window that serious difficulties begin to appear. The lights numbered i—vi in Fig. 2, as well as the three compartments in the centre, were filled in 1878 with what is known as "Cathedral glass", the material, so beloved of our immediate ancestors, which the late Provost of Eton once said would deface the refreshment-room of the meanest of railway stations. The only tracery lights retaining their ancient glass are those lettered A, B, C and D; A and D have evangelists' symbols, the eagle of St. John, finely drawn, in yellow stain, on right, and the bull of St. Luke, lettered *lucas*, and of a rich ruby colour, on left. Lights B and C contain very finely executed

men-at-arms, carrying battle-axes, stretched at full length. It used to be thought that these figures were prostrate in adoration, an idea which gave rise to the conjecture that a representation of the Trinity once occupied the light between them; but a recent examination at close quarters has shown me that the men are represented as sleeping, a clear indication that the Resurrection was formerly located in the central light.

The subjects formerly occupying the other lights of the tracery are now unknown, and careful research has failed to suggest any clue to me. Some of the small pieces of glass collected into lights G 2 and G 4 must have come from this part of the window, e.g. the fragments of inscriptions, *fide*, *Ma*, and *liter*, which, with large pieces of ruby glass, apparently part of a garment, occupy G 2. The word *fide* is not found anywhere in the Creed, nor do the four letters which make up the word occur in the same order as part of any other word or words in that composition; this lettering at least, then, did not form part of one of the Apostle panels. The letters *Ma* appear to have formed the beginning of the descriptive scroll of one of the lost Evangelists' symbols, Matthew or Mark; while one is tempted to suggest that *liter* formed part of the word *qualiter*, and began an inscription describing an action taking place in some scene in the upper part of the window. The same word, though in French, *comment*, is used to begin the descriptions of the little scenes at the foot of the pages in Queen Mary's psalter (Brit. Mus. Royal MS. 2 B vii).

But these clues, if such they may be called, are too slender to enable any solid theory to be built upon them. The other two Evangelists' symbols must, of course, have appeared somewhere; and I myself incline to the belief that above the Resurrection appeared the Nativity and the Crucifixion,¹ thus demonstrating the three greatest festivals of the Church, while the Orders of Angels occupied the

¹ As in the great west window of York Minster, where these subjects, with the Annunciation, appear above a row of Apostles, surmounted by our Lord and the Blessed Virgin as King and Queen of Heaven. This work, however, is of the Decorated period.

flanking lights. I know well enough that I cannot advance a shred of evidence in support of this belief, which, indeed, is not very generally shared by several eminent authorities who at my invitation have favoured me with their own ideas on the subject. Their opinion seems in general to be that something simpler—perhaps censuring angels with a little heraldry—occupied the tracery lights. Another solution which seems to me plausible, and one that has long been held by the Rector of Mersham, is that the Trinity appeared in the central quatrefoil of the tracery. In this connection it is interesting to recall that at South Creke in Norfolk is a window having the Trinity in the tracery in conjunction with four figures of Apostles bearing Creed-scrolls, and two angels.

Most of the old Kentish topographical writers mention the window, but though they describe the Apostles and the coats of arms they fight shy of any description of the tracery. Brian Faussett, Parsons, Cozens, Philipott, are silent both in print and MS. on this point, and even Sir Edward Dering, who was especially active at Sevington, scarcely a stone's throw away, has nothing in his notes about Mersham. The hope remains that in some hitherto unnoticed MS. or notebook, something may yet survive.

Several other windows in Mersham church retain interesting remains of medieval glass. The second window from the west on the north side of the nave, which has a segmental head, contains border pieces of conventional fifteenth century type in the heads of its two cinquefoiled lights, with the sun and moon, the former with a round jovial face. Most of this is in white and yellow stain, but there are a few pieces of good blue.

The first window from the west on the north side of the chancel, square-headed, with two cinquefoiled lights and no tracery, has more considerable remains, also of the fifteenth century (Fig. 4). On left we see St. Christopher carrying the Christ-child, below him St. George killing the dragon, and in the right hand light St. Edmund Rich (Archbishop of Canterbury 1234-40). Both lights have

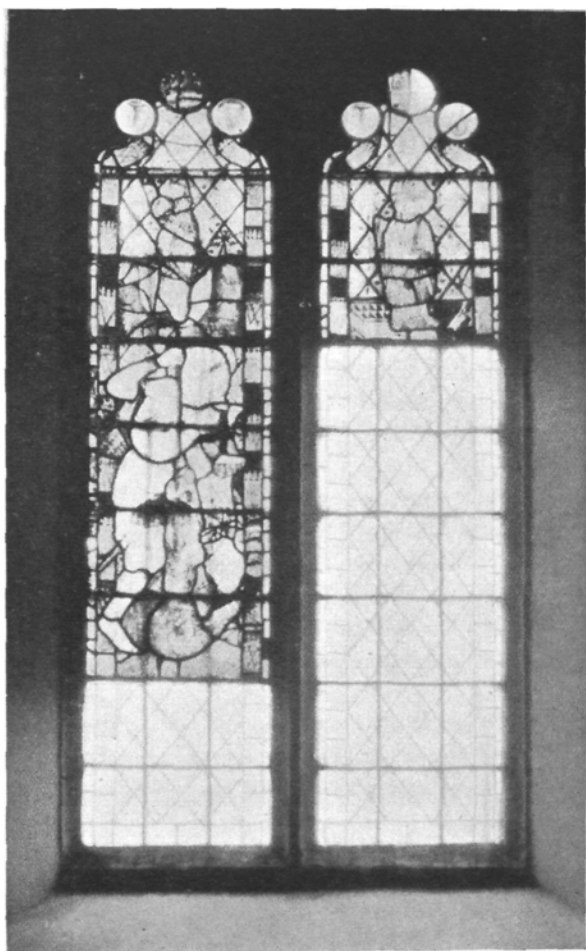


FIG. 4.

MERSHAM.

Window on North side of chancel: St. Christopher, St. George, St. Edmund Rich.
Fifteenth century.

borders of beautiful coloured pieces alternating with squares of white glass which in the left-hand light bear the initials H and W, crowned, and in the right-hand light I and T, several times repeated. An elaborately-executed crown (incomplete on right) occupies the central foil at the top of each light.

In the picture of St. Christopher, the background of which is of conventional quarries, the Child is carrying an orb (now partly broken and patched with an unrelated piece of glass) while the saint traverses a river filled with fish, flowing between banks on which grow plants and flowers. Below, the larger figure of St. George has lost its head, which has been replaced by a piece of glass from some other source, showing on right part of the robe of a figure and on left a lily (evidently part of an Annunciation scene); the well-known red cross banner of the saint is introduced on right.

This window is remarkable for its restrained and delicate execution, being almost entirely of white and yellow stain, as in the fifteenth century panels of St. Michael at Kingsnorth and St. Margaret at Fordwich; colour, except for the borders, being introduced only on the red cross banner.

The second window on the north side of the chancel retains in the heads of the main lights, and in all the tracery lights except that on the extreme left, a simple monochrome border. The remaining tracery light has pieces of ruby glass and a few letters of an inscription, not belonging here and from their style perhaps once in the west window.

The earliest glass in the church is in the east window of the south chancel, where in the heads of the main lights there remain the tops of two fourteenth century canopies with crockets and finials, having a background of ruby.

In conclusion, I am happy to express my best thanks to Mr. Bernard Rackham, F.S.A., of the Victoria and Albert Museum, and to Mr. G. McN. Rushforth, F.S.A., of Malvern, for kind replies to queries submitted to them. Mr. Ralph Griffin, F.S.A., has, as on innumerable other occasions, been my much appreciated helper in matters heraldic;

while to the Rector of Mersham, the Rev. Canon G. Brocklehurst, my especial thanks are due for much kindness and hospitality received on many visits to his church. Without the co-operation which Canon Brocklehurst has unstintingly accorded me at all times, this paper could never have been written.