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THE CHILHAM MAUSOLEA

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INTRODUCTION

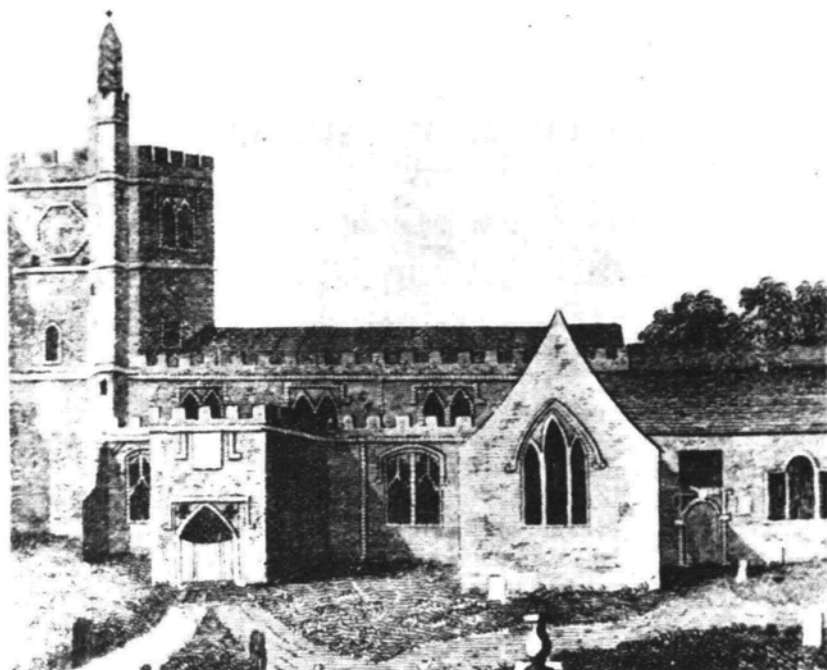
An early image of the church of Saint Mary the Virgin at Chilham, near Canterbury, is an engraving published in the 23rd number of *The Topographer*¹ of February 1791 and reproduced in Charles Hardy's *Chilham Castle*² of 1916 and 1935; this shows the church as it appeared from the south-east in the latter half of the eighteenth century (Plate I). It is supplemented by a precise list of the features and dimensions. Changes have been made since then, both external and internal; the low spire which supported the vane on the tower, being out of repair, 'and of the unsightly shape of an extinguisher',³ was taken down in 1784, and a new vane upon an upright piece of wood placed in its stead. The spire here represented is of a better proportion.

Important internal changes are also to be recorded in particular the Digges and Colebrooke mausolea. What is a mausoleum and what buildings qualify for this description? According to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, the first mausoleum was the magnificent tomb of Mausolus, King of Persia, erected in the middle of the fourth century B.C. at Halicarnassus by his queen Artemisia, and the term came to be used for a stately burial-place erected for or by a person of distinction; as will later be made clear the Colebrook building certainly, and the Digges probably, qualify for this description.

¹ *The Topographer*, 23rd number, February 1791.

² C. Hardy, *Chilham Castle*, privately printed 1916, revised 1935.

³ T. Heron, *Antiquities of Chilham*, manuscript 1791, 82.



The Church of St. Mary the Virgin at Chilham, near Canterbury in Kent. An engraving published in the 23rd number of *The Topographer* of February 1791, showing the church in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

THE DIGGES FAMILY ⁴

'The Digges family traced their descent from Roger de Mildenhall, dictus Digge, who lived in the reign of King John, whose son John Digge lived in the reign of King Henry III and Edward I, and having provided the house of the Friars Minors, (Grey Friars) in Canterbury (by giving them the island of Bynwyth), lies buried there, bearing for his arms, *Gules, on a cross argent, five eagles displayed, sable*. James Digges, his descendant, marrying two wives, his issue by his first, succeeded to the family possessions and seat of Digges Court, in Barham; by his second wife he had one son Leonard Digge, the

⁴ E. Hasted, *The History and topographical Survey of the County of Kent*, 2nd Edn., 1798, vii, 274 ff.

famous mathematician in the reign of King Edward VI and Queen Mary, whose grandson was Sir Dudley Digges above mentioned, . . . a man of eminent abilities and author of several political discourses, whose character is well drawn up in his life, printed among the Oxford writers in Wood's⁵ *Ath. Oxon.*, in which he says, after many encomiums on his public and private virtues, that the wisest men reckon his death among the public calamities of those times'.

'Sir Dudley Digges married Mary, one of the four daughters and co-heirs of Sir Thomas Kempe of Ollantigh (adjacent to Chilham) who had purchased Chilham Castle and Manor from Lord Cheney; Mary's three sisters conveyed their respective shares to Sir Dudley Digges and his lady who became possessed of the entire fee of it'.

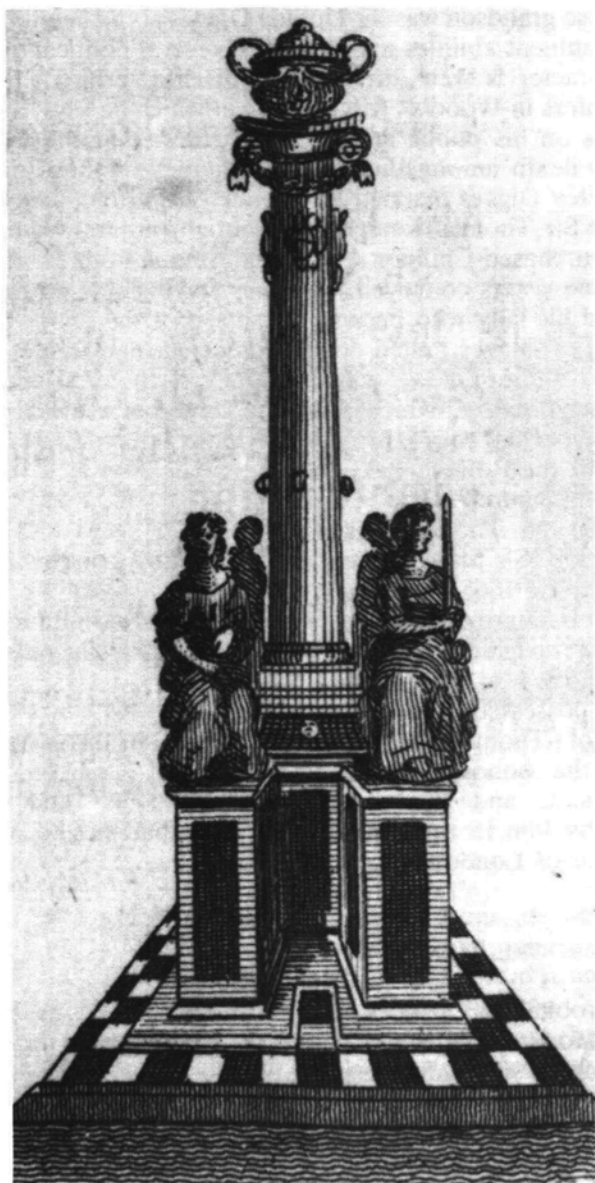
'Sir Dudley Digges pulled down the ancient mansion of Chilham and on an entirely new foundation began to erect the present magnificent structure, which seems to have been finished for his residence about the years 1616'. James I appointed him to the Office of Master of the Rolls in 1637; he died in Chilham in 1638 and was buried in the church.

The eldest son, Thomas Digges, succeeded him and died [in] 1687. His eldest son, Sir Maurice Digges, was created a baronet in 1665, who died s.p. in 1666, in his father's life-time, as did his other sons, s.p., all but Leonard the youngest, who remained at his father's death the only surviving son and heir, and afterwards resided at Chilham Castle, of which he died possessed in 1717. John Digges Esq., his eldest son, possessed the estate and dying s.p. in 1719, was succeeded in it by Col. Thomas Digges, his brother and heir, who in 1724 conveyed the honour, manor and castle of Chilham, with its appurtenances, and the several manors, lands, and premises possessed by him in this and the adjoining parishes to Mr James 'Colebrooke of London . . .'

THE COLEBROOKE FAMILY

The Colebrookes had no such genealogical advantages as the Digges nor any historical connection with Kent or Chilham; they may be looked upon as successful business people from London seeking a country 'place' in which to establish themselves. James Colebrooke (1682-1752), who purchased Chilham Castle from Colonel Thomas Digges, the great-grandson of Sir Dudley Digges, in 1724, was a

⁵ Anthony à Wood (1632-95), antiquarian and historian, in *Athenae Oxoniensis* (1691-92); biographical dictionary of Oxford writers and bishops.



The Digges Monument, 1620, from *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Sept. 1800., isolated from the Chapel, with the vaults below.

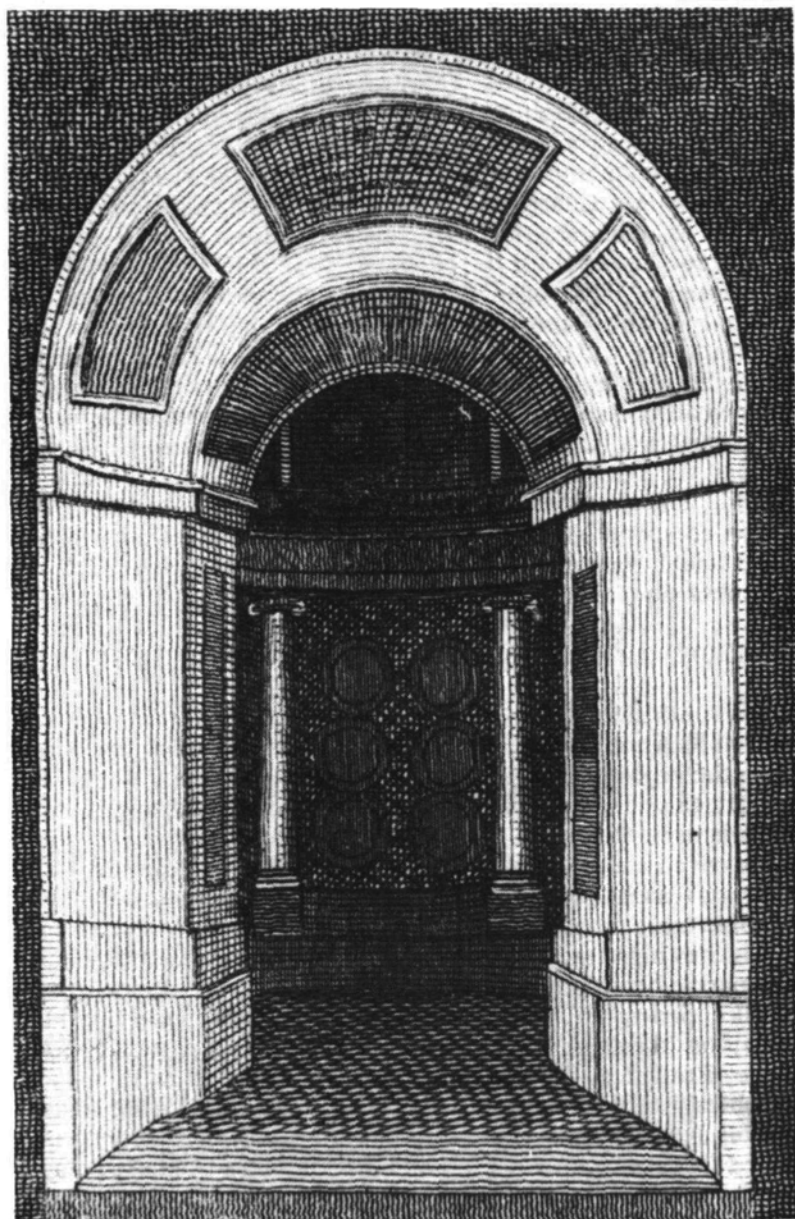
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wealthy citizen and mercer of London. He was born at Arundel in Sussex in 1680, married Miss Mary Hudson in 1706 and had three sons and seven daughters; he died in 1752. His eldest son Robert, who married first Henrietta, eldest daughter of Lord Harry Powlett (later to be Duke of Bolton) was sent on an embassy to Switzerland in 1762 as his Majesty's Minister to the Swiss Cantons; 'He exhibited to a frugal people an unprecedented mode of splendour and profusion', according to Mr Charles Seymour.⁶ This spectacular young man, however, is admitted by our author to have served in three Parliaments, 1740-61, for the borough of Malden. He died in France at Soissons in 1784, aged nearly 70 years and his remains were deposited in the family mausoleum which he himself had built (pursuant to the will of his father James Colebrooke) at an expense of over £2,000 and finished in 1755. The Colebrookes were generous as well as wealthy; James Colebrooke rebuilt the vicarage house in 1740 in collaboration with the then vicar, Dr Wadham Knatchbull, improved the amenities in the church school, purchased the land for, and built, a row of almshouses in Burgoyne Lane, and sent several children to school on a charity which was continued until his son Robert failed, reputedly involved in the Warren Hastings affair, and the benefaction ceased.

THE DIGGES CHAPEL

'On the south side of the chancel (probably where formerly was the chapel of St Anne) is a handsome chapel, built by Sir Dudley Digges, Knt, in the beginning of the last century, in remembrance of his lady [Plate II]; this chapel which is 15 feet square withinside, and 18 feet in height, is enlightened by four noble Venetian windows, and has a curious coved cieling, richly ornamented in plaister; from the center of the pavement, which is of black and white marble, rises a handsome table monument of alabaster (2 feet 3 inches square and 3 feet 9 inches high) the sides of which are ornamented with tablets of black marble bearing each an inscription, each corner is supported by a smaller pedestal (1 foot 6 inches square) with panels of black marble; on these pedestals are placed the four cardinal virtues (Justice, Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude) bearing in their hands the emblems of their particular graces; on the middle table stands a beautiful Ionic column of black and white marble which is much admired for its elegant polish; the shaft only of this column, being 15

⁶ Charles Seymour, teacher of Classics at Canterbury, author of a topical survey of Kent, 1776.



The Entrance to the Colebrooke Mausoleum, completed 1775. From *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Sept. 1800.

inches in diameter, is 9 feet high, and including its pedestal, base, and capital it is upwards of 11 feet in height; it is adorned near the summit with shields of the arms and bearings of the Digge's and Kempe's and is crowned with an urn of excellent statuary. Under this chapel is a vault which contains the ashes of its founder and several others of that hospitable family'. (*The Topographer*, February 1791).

On the four sides of the chapel in capitals are inscribed, usually in English, sometimes in Latin, encomiums or lengthy dedications to Mary Kempe, Lady Digges, Sir Dudley Digges himself, Dame Margaret Palmer who was Sir Dudley Digge's sister, and her husband Sir Anthony Palmer.

Thomas Heron⁷ has some additions to make. Sir Dudley Digges in his will left a sum 'for the yearly repair of the little burying place I there built . . . In the meantime I commend my sinful Body to the Earth, there to rest in Peace and Expectation of The coming of our Lord; to be buried decently, according to the Christian order of our Church, in the Parish Church of Chilham, in the Chapel where my dear Wife and Children were interred.' He started the construction of this family chapel or mausoleum in 1620, four years after he had taken possession of his new castle. According to Arthur T. Bolton, an architect by profession, in a note supplementary to p. 82 of *Antiquities of Chilham*,⁸ it was square with a coved ceiling in compartments with shields of arms, festoons of flowers, etc; the monument in the middle was 17 ft. high, with 4 large Venetian windows. Heron says, with some naïveté: 'It corresponds with the Style of the Church, except that the windows are of the Venetian fashion and those of the church pretty much of the Gothic order'. 'The church is built of flint and plastered over and the chapel is of brick stuccoed. It is 15 feet square within and 18 feet high to the Crown of the Cieling (*sic*). The Cieling is grained: and rises from the tops of the quarter columns (which have no capitals) in the Angles, whose Necks are ornamented with leaves. The Angles, or intersections of the arches rising to the crown of the cieling have borders and leaves and the centre is finished with a rose-like flower and depending acorn. There is a simple and modest neatness in the execution of this Chapel'.

The arch between the chapel and the church is fitted with iron gates and pallsades. In the centre of the chapel is a pillar of black marble, upon an alabaster pedestal with panels of black marble; the capital is composite of alabaster, the height about 17 ft. At each angle of the pedestal is an insulated one of the same materials and style, bearing a

⁷ Heron, *op. cit.*, 143

⁸ *Ibid.*, 82, 93.

sitting figure of alabaster 4 ft. high; the figures represent the four cardinal virtues, Justice, Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude.

Nothing is known of the architect or builder of this chapel.

THE COLEBROOKE MAUSOLEUM

The Colebrooke mausoleum⁹ was designed and executed by Sir Robert Taylor,¹⁰ one of the leading architects of his day. It lay on the north side of the chancel (where formerly stood an old chantry part of which still remains). This magnificent mausoleum (Plate III) built by Robert Colebrooke of Chilham Castle, Esq., (pursuant to the will of his father) at an expense of upward of £2,000 and finished in 1775, was a rotunda of 20½ ft. diameter within and containing 42 repositories for sepulchre; having an open arch to the church with two folding iron gates. It is stuccoed within and has eight three-quarter columns of the Ionic order. The roof is in the form of a dome and lighted by a small cupola, the glass painted of a yellow colour which gives an agreeable gloom. The outside is of brick and very plain.

At the top of the arch at the entrance of the mausoleum is inscribed

M.S.
Jacobi Colebrooke Armigeri
et Maria Conjugis B.M.
Pietatis ergo posuere
Tres Filii
et sibi et suis

• • •
Robertus Colebrooke
Jacobus Colebrooke
Georgius Colebrooke

⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁰ Sir Robert Taylor (1714–88), one of the leading architects of his day, was the son of a London stone-mason; his father made a considerable fortune and wasted it by living beyond his means in a villa in Essex. The son Robert was apprenticed to Sir Henry Cheese, sculptor, and sent to study in Rome. His father's death left him penniless, but he was supported by friends becoming a sculptor. Examples of his work in London are in Westminster Abbey, the Mansion House pediment, etc. After 1753, he gave up sculpture for architecture; he made his name with houses in London and in the country, and his work included the mausoleum at Chilham, 1775. He and James Paine the Elder divided the professional work between them and, by his huge output, he became very wealthy. He left his large estate of £180,000 to build the Taylorian Institute in Oxford for the teaching of modern European Languages (*DNB*, compact edition, 2054).

(and epitaphs of Robert Colebrooke's wife, Henrietta Powlett, James Colebrooke senior and his wife Mary Hudson, Sir James Colebrooke of Gatton and his wife Mary Skynner)

*The Topographer*¹¹ adds, 'It is built in the form of a circle, whose inward diameter is 23 feet 10 inches, above the pedestal or base, which is three feet high and projecting 18 inches is continued round the whole inside, except at the entrance, which occupies one of the eight compartments into which it is divided by nine beautiful Ionic columns, each 15 inches in diameter, and 13 feet in height, supporting a grand entablature and cornice, three feet in height, (enriched with the emblems of mortality), from whence rises a magnificent dome of 13 feet high, ornamented with stucco work, and crowned with a rich cupola of stained glass. The compartments between the columns are each divided into six circular ones, three feet six inches in diameter, which are the entrances to recesses for the coffins, being forty-two in number, eight of which only, (in the upper series) are occupied; the coffins are deposited length-ways in the wall, which in the shallowest part is eight feet four inches thick; the floor is of timber covered with a red plaister, the vacancy under which, together with the circuitry of the building, furnished a remarkably fine echo. The outward diameter is 42 feet 10 inches.'

THE DIGGES CHAPEL

In 1793, Zecharia Cozens produced *A Tour through the Isle of Thanet and some other parts of East Kent*. Plate IV, p. 222 of this work, is an engraving of the south-east view of the church. He reported the monument (i.e. the Digges Chapel) 'being considerably repaired, as well as in some measure wantonly defaced; the church-wardens have applied the revenue, which was appropriated for its preservation, in taking it down, repairing it in the most complete manner, and erecting it again strictly conformable to the original design, repairing the arms, re-gilding the proper members, and adding the emblems of the Graces, which were most of them defaced, if not destroyed'.

Cozens continues 'Having an opportunity to inspect the vault under the Digges Chapel, I was much surprised to find two of the corpses remaining in an uncommon entire state. They are those of Thomas Digges, Esq., and Mary, his wife. He was interred in 1687, and she in 1692. It is probable, from the appearance of the grave-clothes, that his body is not decayed, as the shroud, winding sheet, and cap on his head, are not much impaired, though changed to the

¹¹ *The Topographer*, note 1, 83.



South-east view of Chilham Church and Vicarage House from Zecharia Cozens's 'A Tour through the Isle of Thanet', 1793, from his *Ecclesiastical topographical History of Kent*, p. 222.

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colour of nankeen;¹² and the lace on the cap still retains its texture and figures exceedingly perfect. But as the whole of her vestments are decayed, except a ribbon which was bound round the wrists and ankles, it is manifest that her body remains almost entire, and the arms are full, plump, and flexible, with the nails on the fingers, and the skin in general whole; but the head and one of the feet are separated from the trunk . . . The head only of Sir Dudley Digges's coffin (who died "on the 18th day of March, the yeare from the Virgin Mother 1638") being decayed, I could observe nothing more than that the hair remained on the skull, and that it was in colour, i.e. a dark auburn, exactly similar to a ringlet which was taken from his head during his life and preserved in a locket at the seat of the late Thomas Knight Esq., at Godmersham, in Kent'.

The Digges vault was opened in 1739.

A.T. Bolton, in an addition to Heron's *Antiquities of Chilham*, p. 92, reports that the Digges chapel was 'done away with' in 1863 and the vaults were eventually filled in. Thus, of the three elements which made up the Digges Mausoleum, the monument, the chapel and the vaults, the chapel is destroyed, the vaults filled in, and only the monument remains; it is intact and imposing even to the present day.

THE COLEBROOKE MAUSOLEUM

About 1861, Emily Wildman, a daughter of James Beckford Wildman of Chilham Castle, and an enthusiastic, if not very highly trained watercolourist, was engaged in painting a series of sketches recording various aspects of Chilham Castle, village and church. In one of these, painted from a stance in the churchyard to the north-east of the church, the dome of the Colebrooke mausoleum is clearly seen, a cupola in a brilliant shade of egg-shell blue.

The Colebrooke mausoleum, completed in 1755, continued to serve the purpose for which it was intended for a hundred years or so, and many Colebrookes were laid to rest there between then and the middle of the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, the processes of nature began to assert themselves and the congregation was afflicted by the stench. An amendment to the Burial Act was required to prevent 'the occupants of the mausoleum from becoming or continuing dangerous or injurious to the public health . . .' A meeting of the Privy Council, Queen Victoria presiding, was held at

¹² A kind of cotton cloth from China, dyed yellow.

Osborne House, Isle of Wight¹³, on 1st November, 1862, and the churchwardens of Chilham, near Canterbury, were told that the opening or communication at present existing between the chancel and the mausoleum, adjoining the north side of the church, be closed by brickwork 2 ft. thick, well cemented, and that suitable gratings, opening into the churchyard, be made for the purpose of ventilation. Whether these structural alterations were ever carried out is not clear, for within a year or two the fate of the mausoleum was settled in another way.

Arthur Bolton, in a note appended to p. 108 of Heron's manuscript, says that the Colebrooke mausoleum, 'That ambitious classical rotunda', was destroyed in 1863 when the architect David Brandon was employed by Charles Hardy, the new owner of Chilham Castle, to rebuild the chancel of Chilham Church. The bodies were re-interred in a vault in the churchyard, near the north-west corner of the church, where they still remain; no trace is left of the mausoleum. The vault in the churchyard is still accessible. The nominal roll of those interred in the mausoleum is to be found partly on the east wall of the north transept and partly on the north wall of the chancel.

CONCLUSION

Zecharia Cozens's revelation of corpses deposited in the Digges vault as well as ashes is offered as good evidence that this chapel would not improperly be called a mausoleum (Plate IV).

In comparing these two structures it may be thought that the Colebrooke mausoleum is a work of ostentation, in keeping with Robert Colebrooke's florid character, the sum of money involved, the employment of one of England's most celebrated and expensive architects in Sir Robert Taylor. By contrast the Digges chapel or mausoleum has a deeply devotional atmosphere and, in Heron's opinion, 'a simple and modest neatness in the execution of this chapel'. Whatever one's judgment, it is certainly remarkable that a remote country church should contain two such rare monuments.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For access to Thomas Heron's *Antiquities of Chilham* and Arthur T. Bolton's monograph *Chilham Castle*, I gratefully acknowledge my

¹³ Report of H. M. Privy Council at the Court of Osborne House, Isle of Wight, 1st November, 1862.

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indebtedness to the late James Bolton, Emily Wildman's great-grandson. For Plates I-III, I acknowledge with thanks the services of the University of Kent Photographic Unit, and for Plate IV the assistance of the Royal Museum, Canterbury. I am most grateful for the help of the Canterbury Library Reference and Information Service. I am also most grateful to Miss Joan Reynolds for typing the manuscript.

