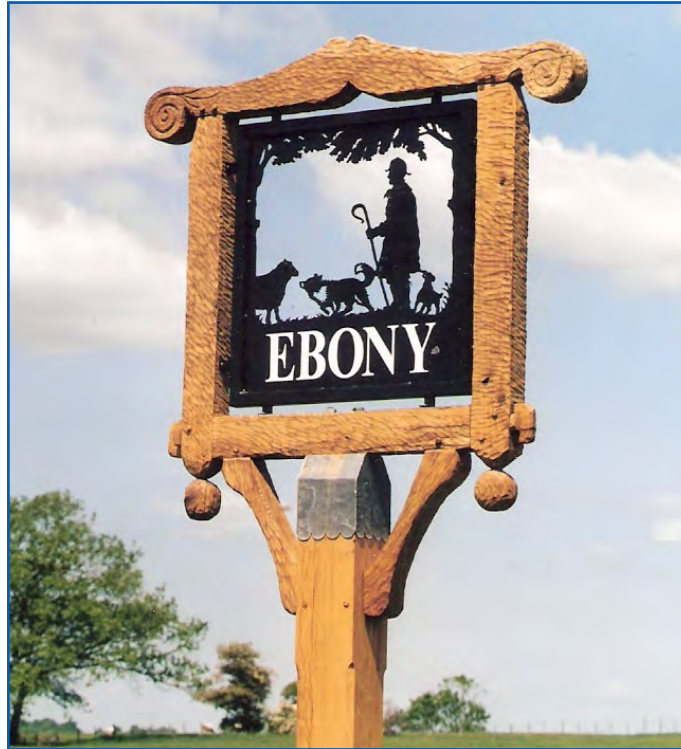
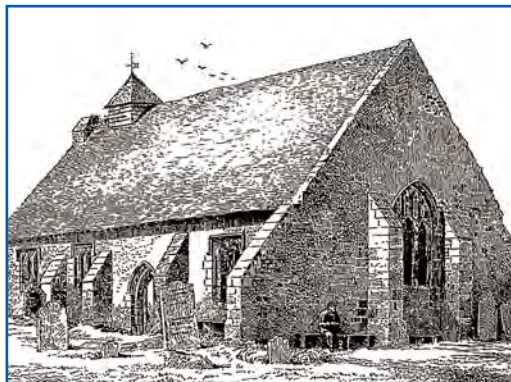


# Searching for Ebony



A long-lost village on an inland island



'REMEMBER THE FORMER THINGS OF OLD'



*Tithe Map of Ebony published in 1843. ©Tenterden and District Museum. Details of the map can be viewed on the interactive digital images display at Tenterden and District Museum ([www.tenterdenmuseum.co.uk](http://www.tenterdenmuseum.co.uk)). The Ebony Tithe Award Schedules are on-line at <http://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/Research/Maps/EBO/01.htm>*



*Chapel Bank, site of the lost village of Ebony*

Published by the Kent Archaeological Society 2018

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Design: Katie Grocott Murdoch.

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Grateful thanks for information and/or images received from Dr Nick Hudd and Dr Jack Gillett (Tenterden and District Local History Society), Tim and Marylyn Bacon, Ivor Body, Miriam Bowley ('Outlook on Oxney'), Debbie Greaves (Tenterden and District Museum), Dr Adrian Greaves, David Fletcher (Oxney Local History Society), Alan Anstee, Ted Connell, Gerald Cramp, Keith Parfitt, Victor Smith (Kent Archaeological Society), Mark Binns, Christopher Robinson, Emma Sivyver (Canterbury Diocese), Paul Evans (Army Museums' Ogilby Trust), Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Kasey Ball, James Corrin, Maurice Dalton, Richard Diedo, Donald Duffus, Homewood School, 'Kent Fallen' website, Brian Janes (The Colonel Stephens Railway Museum), Kent History and Library Centre, Colonel Anthony Kimber, Stuart Kirk, Jo Kirkham (Rye Museum), Barry Lane, Andrew Miles, National Army Museum, Derek J. Paine, Chris Pursglove, Emma Richardson, roll-of-honour.com, Royal Sussex Regimental Collection, Clive Sinclair, Lorna Turney, Robert Watsham, David Weller, Jamie Whittle, Gillian Whittle, Primrose Wyborn.



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## Introduction

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Nearly 50 years ago we explored Romney Marsh for the first time, looking for its dozen or so 'lost villages', sometimes finding only a group of crumbling ivy-clad flint walls on the sites of their parish churches. The locations of most of these sad and lonely places were well documented but our car trips across the marshes frequently took us within sight of a mysterious 'hog's-back' hill, named 'Chapel Bank' in Gothic lettering on our one-inch Ordnance Survey. The typeface indicated that this was a 'site of antiquity' and one day we followed a muddy footpath to the distant summit.

Along the way we found numerous oyster shells, brought to the surface during recent ploughing. Curious to know how they had come to light so far from the coast, we sent some of them to Jack Hargreaves, presenter of the popular Southern Television series *Out of Town* that featured country life in years gone by. Jack suggested the shells were from oyster beds cultivated on the bed of the shallow medieval sea that once ebbed and flowed hereabouts, lapping inshore islands such as Chapel Bank and Oxney that later became landlocked when Kent's 'Saxon Shore' receded.

At the top of the hill, stunted trees buffeted by south-westerly gales leaned eastwards at 45 degrees. In the brambles, clusters of gravestones, undermined by fox-holes and badger setts, tilted this way and that, and we could just make out a few epitaphs under a patina of mosses and lichens. Little did we know that we were standing on the site of a medieval parish church, seldom – if at all – mentioned in the chronicles of the lost churches of Romney Marsh.

Time moved on, and so did we. In 1984 Sir John Winnifrith of the Kent Archaeological Society published, in *Archaeologia Cantiana*, the first definitive history of the church of St Mary the Virgin, Ebony, whose existence in the centre of the graveyard we had explored 14 years earlier, was gradually being proven by a team of the society's archaeologists.



Winnifrith and his contemporaries were not the first KAS members on the Ebony scene. In the late 1890s and early years of the twentieth century, Leland Lewis Duncan had had the foresight to visit scores of Kent's churchyards and burial grounds, including the one on Chapel Bank, to record hundreds of memorial inscriptions on the headstones contained therein. He deposited his notebooks with the society and his transcriptions were later typed-up by KAS volunteers and posted on [www.kentarchaeology.org.uk](http://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk) for all to read. Most of the inscriptions he noted are now illegible due to erosion, so today his efforts are of immense value to local and family historians alike. Thanks to Duncan's work we have managed to trace our own family's Longley and Southerden ancestors to various parishes in Kent.

In a similar immense labour of love, another KAS member, Arthur Hussey, transcribed hundreds of medieval Wills made by testators in numerous Kent parishes. One of the most prolific amateur historians of his generation, Hussey was a member of our society for 50 years and a Vice-President from 1927 until he died in 1941. In 1907, in partnership with Leland Duncan, he published *Testamenta Cantiana*, a series of extracts from Tudor and Medieval Wills that provide fascinating insights into life in the county's parishes in that period. Hussey too donated all his notebooks – handwritten in impeccable script – to the KAS and it was while typing up abstracts of the Wills that Pat, a volunteer in the KAS Library, discovered that Ebony had much more to reveal than we could possibly have imagined.

Ebony and Chapel Bank had continued to fascinate us since we first went there in 1970, so starting with information gleaned from the memorial inscriptions and Will transcriptions, we decided to learn more. Eighty testators from Ebony remembered St Mary's Church in their Wills. Their testaments revealed an astonishingly large population and range of trades and occupations ... blacksmiths, fishermen, haberdashers and many others. Our research led us on a journey from early medieval times, to disasters that struck St Mary's Church ... the Napoleonic Wars ... a deadly plague ... the burial on Chapel Bank of nearly 40 soldiers from a nearby barracks ... to tragedies and heroism in two world wars and onwards into the twenty-first century.

This year marks the 160th anniversary of an incredible episode (one of many over the centuries) in Ebony's history – the massive task of dismantling St Mary's Church stone-by-stone and rebuilding it where it now stands in Reading Street. We hope you will derive as much enjoyment from reading *Searching for Ebony* as we had while finding it and researching and writing its history.

**Paul Tritton  
Pat Tritton  
Maidstone 2018**

## Chapter One – Along Kent’s ancient ‘ghost coast’

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Follow the Saxon Shore Way from Seabrook or Rye across the northern perimeter of Romney Marsh and each passing mile takes you further from today’s coastline until, at Appledore, it is up to eleven miles away and what were once busy shipping channels are now vast pastures, home to countless world-famous ‘Romney’ sheep.

A range of low, green hills delineates this ancient ‘ghost coast’. South-west of Appledore two prominences that were once islands rise above the Rother Valley: the Isle of Oxney, on which the parish churches of Wittersham and Stone-in-Oxney punctuate the horizon, and Chapel Bank, whose summit is barely one hundred feet above sea level.

The ‘chapel’ in question was the parish church of the lost village of Ebony\*, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin, which survived various vicissitudes until, after members of its congregation had abandoned their homes on Chapel Bank, it was dismantled and rebuilt a mile away at Reading Street on the ‘mainland’ south of Tenterden.



*Chapel Bank, Ebony.*

\*\*\*

The parish’s recorded history begins in 832AD when Aethelwulf, Saxon ‘sub-king’ of Kent and son of King Egbert, gave a manor of about 2,400 acres (3¾ square miles) at what became known as Ebony to Christ Church Priory, Canterbury. Its monks may have built a church there but if so it was probably destroyed by the Danes after they invaded south Kent in 892, when warriors from 250 warships captured King Alfred’s fortress at Appledore and occupied the district.

Domesday Monachorum and early lists of Kent parish churches confirm that by the 11th century there was a church at Ebony. The earliest archaeological evidence for its existence dates from the 12th century, when stone, timber, ironwork, lead, shingles, mortar and other heavy materials needed for the construction of the church had to be hauled with great difficulty across the marshes and up to the top of the island.

The task was much easier for later phases, carried out after the Knelle Dam on Wittersham Levels, near the Sussex border, was constructed in 1332. This diverted the Rother to the north of Oxney and Chapel Bank, taking it past Smallhythe and Reading



*Reading Street, viewed from the site of the medieval Rother shipping channel.*

Street and then on to Appledore and the sea. Previously, the river ran southwards into Rye Bay.

The dam created a navigable waterway, probably more than 20 feet deep at high tide. Ferryboats plied between Smallhythe and Oxney and between Reading Street and Chapel Bank. Barges delivered heavy goods from south coast ports and farther afield, and shipped wool, timber, charcoal and other commodities – including barley from Ebony for Canterbury monastery – down the channel.

The Rother was now open to the largest ships of the day. Vessels capable of carrying up to one thousand tons were built at shipyards at Smallhythe and Reading Street over a period of two hundred years. Reading Street's main claim to fame in naval history is *The Regent*, a 600-ton four-master built there in 1486 for Henry VII and inherited by Henry VIII in 1509. Its main mast was 114 feet tall and had a circumference of more than nine feet. In August 1512 *The Regent* fought with 25 ships of Henry's navy (including *The Mary Rose*) in the Battle of Saint-Mathieu; her powder magazine exploded while she was alongside the French man o' war *Cordelière*. More than 1,700 French and English sailors perished.

The *Regent's* replacement, the *Great Harry*, was built at Woolwich from timber felled in the Weald and shipped down the Rother to Rye Bay and thence to the Thames.

*\* The origin of the place-name 'Ebony' is uncertain. It may have been derived from the Old English personal name 'Ebba' and the Old English word 'ēg,' meaning 'an island, land in the midst of marshes'.*



*The courses of the River Rother before and after the Knelle Dam was built.*

© Laetitia Barnes 2015, first published in *From Ships to Sheep, the Story of Smallhythe*.



*A model of the galleasse Grand Mistress, displayed in St Mildred's Church, Tenterden, to commemorate ships built at the Rother shipyards in the 16th century.*



## Chapter Two – Ebony's first parish church

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Fascinating insights into the lives and fortunes of Ebony's inhabitants in the 16th century can be gleaned from ninety Wills in Probate records kept at Canterbury Cathedral and now accessible on-line on the Kent Archaeological Society's website, [www.kentarchaeology.org.uk](http://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk). They show that generous grants and legacies from many wealthy landowners kept St Mary's in good repair.

The parish's most generous benefactor was John Raynold of Reading Street, who died in 1522, leaving £40 to pay for a chapel, dedicated to St Anne, to be built on the south side of the church. He instructed that he and, when her time came, his wife Joan, should be buried in the churchyard, on the south side of the chancel. John also left funds to pay for the chapel's furnishings and ornaments, including candlesticks and wax tapers for use on feast days, and wax from which to make tapers for regular services and the celebration of the Feast of the Purification on 2 February. He left 8d to each of the four men who carried his body from his house to his grave; £3.6s.8d. to each of the ten priests who led his cortège; and treated his neighbours to a dinner in his honour, at which every poor person who attended was given 2d. Thanks to another of John's legacies a causeway, footbridge, paths and stile on the route to the church were repaired. He left £3 to cover all this, plus '6s.8d. more' in case that was not enough.

Joan was well provided for, inheriting his house, profits from his land and 'all my moveable goods and all my household spoons and other plate'. She died in 1525, instructing that she was to be 'buried in the new Chapel lately builded by the costs of my said husband, next unto the sepulture of my late husband'. Work on the chapel would not have started until after John was buried, so presumably it was built around his grave.

John also paid for a priest 'to sing for my soul' at St Mary's, stipulating that during 'fowle wether' this rite could be performed in a chapel at Reading Street which had been built in the early 1400s or maybe before then. Clearly, St Mary's position on a bleak, rain-swept hilltop was not always conducive to year-round churchgoing!

Many others, including Henry Northland and William Moseden (who joined Jack Cade's Rebellion in 1450 and were fortunate enough to be pardoned) and William Knott left money to pay for votive lights, so St Mary's was well stocked with candles to burn before its images of St Katherine, St Stephen, St Peter and St James, and in its shrines to its patron saint and St Thomas.

Thomas Harry's legacy paid for a new rood loft in 'the great priory church on the Isle of Ebony,' shingles for the roof, and provided an allowance of ten shillings for a priest to sing 'in the chapel at Reading' and also paid for the road between Reading Street and Tenterden to be repaired. Richard Lawles, a blacksmith, left two tons of timber with which to build new railings for the churchyard. He also assigned his tools and two tons of iron to his nephew, Peter.

Like many others, Lawles's Will shows how generous and considerate the testators were in various ways to their relations and friends; some testators helpfully revealed their trades and occupations.

Alice Cowper left 'my greatest brass pot' to John Weke; a velvet gown to John's wife Joan; a sheet, plate, pewter dish and sawser [sic] to John and Joan's two daughters; 'my best candlestick' to their son Robert; 'my old blue gown' to Richard Birchele – and a heifer and a bullock to Alice Burchele!

To his wife, Dionise, William Donny bequeathed his best bed and the 'best apparatus belonging to the bed, also my best girdle harnessed with silver, which she gave me at marriage, and a gold ring'. William's father, Henry, received William's fishing boat and nets.

Symond Kent left a ewe and a lamb to the wife of his friend William Foster and 'a red cow with a wredled face with one horn with a calf' to Edmund Lewkener.

John Pellonde's legacies to his wife, Agnes, included a heifer, 'my dun mare, and a black bay mare with a colt;' four castrated hogs; huge quantities of wheat, barley, oats, beans, cheese and butter; and two oxen, a yoke and a plough.

In 1518 Joane Taylour, a widow, evidently a haberdasher, consigned 'all the wares and stuff now in my shop and my best gown and best kirtill' to her mother, Joan Raynold, and six ells of canvas to Juliane Browne of Newenden. (An 'ell' was a unit of measurement, approximately the length of a man's arm.)

*Abstracts from these Wills and many others can be read at [www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/18/12/06.htm](http://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/18/12/06.htm)*

## 'A blaze of lights and colour'

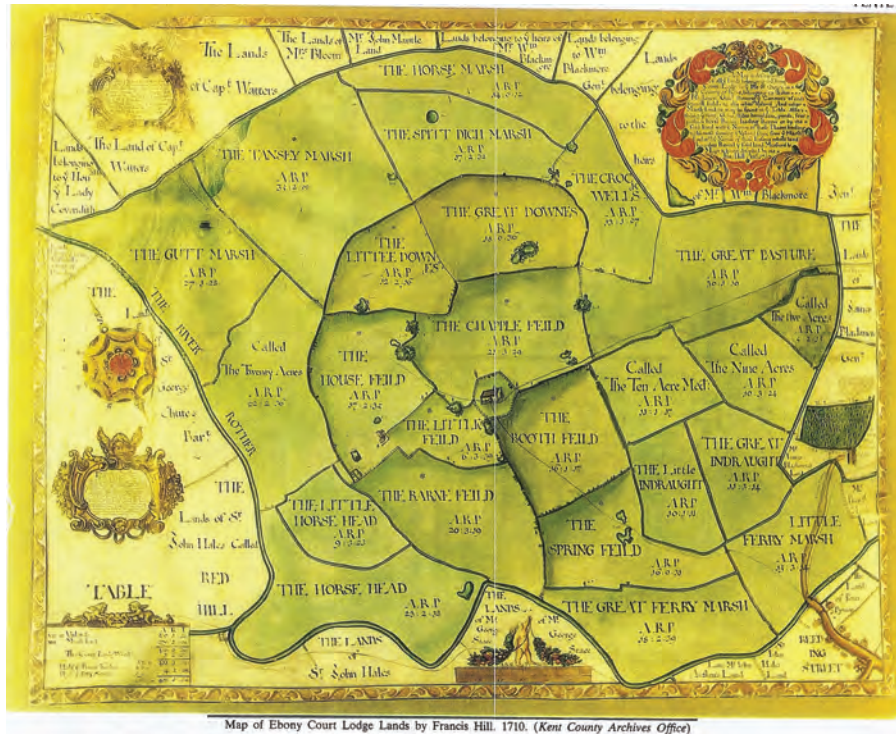
In his definitive history of St Mary's, published in the Kent Archaeological Society's journal, *Archaeologia Cantiana*, in 1984 (see Appendix 3) Sir John Winnifrith wrote: 'The church would have been a landmark visible from miles away to shipping coming up the sea creek. Its interior was also impressive. As the parishioners came into the church they saw a blaze of lights and colour. There was a shrine to the patron saint, St Mary the Virgin ... other saints had their images and lights burning before them, provided by bequests of the faithful'.

Four 'great bells' and a sanctus bell rang out across the meadows from the west tower, which was surmounted by a tall spire.

When it was at its most awe-inspiring and best state of repair, St Mary's may nevertheless have been prone to incipient weaknesses imposed on its foundations by subsidence of the unstable Wadhust Clay on which its foundations rested, or by the Great Kent Earthquake of 21 May 1382, which destroyed Canterbury Cathedral's bell tower, fractured other buildings all over the county, and was felt as far away as London.

Inevitably, St Mary's was plundered following the Dissolution of the Monasteries, when Henry VIII gave Ebony to Sir Walter Hendley of Cranbrook, who was an attorney at the Court of Augmentations and a Commissioner for the suppression of the monasteries. Hendley died in 1550, apparently bequeathing a life interest in the manor to his widow, Margery, who soon married Thomas Roberts of Ticehurst. Roberts assumed responsibility for St Mary's but stripped lead from the chancel roof and neglected to repair the broken north door. The church was left open to the elements – as was the vicar's house, which became a cattle shed. Sir John wrote: 'The congregation and priest must have endured considerable discomfort, huddling in what remained of the old house of prayer. Somehow they hung on'.

In about 1560 St Mary's was destroyed by fire, probably caused by a lightning strike – an ever-present danger before lightning conductors became familiar fixtures on church towers. The parishioners raised £200 to build a smaller St Mary's, more of a chapel than a church, into which the east window and parts of the walls that survived were incorporated. It was probably at this time that the knoll on which the church stood became known as 'Chapel Bank'.



*Ebony Court Lodge Lands, 1710. Reading Street is at bottom right.*

The nave and chancel, divided only by a communion rail, were a single buttressed structure with a small bell-cote at the west end. The church's furniture amounted to little more than a rudimentary altar, a reading desk and a pulpit.

No one knows exactly when the 'down-sized' St Mary's was built but it seems that the task took many years. The roof was not shingled until about 1574 and in 1590 the church was 'fented by extreme winds,' suggesting serious storm damage. It was probably completed in the last years of Queen Elizabeth I's reign and today's historians refer to it as 'the Elizabethan church,' to distinguish it from its predecessor, whose construction spanned several centuries.

In 1710 a map of Ebony Court Lodge Lands, owned by John Blackmore, showed the church in the centre of a complex of fields, many of whose owners are identified. The map is oriented with south at the top; Reading Street, situated north-west of Chapel Bank, is shown in the bottom right-corner. From here a path ran through a lych-gate and a wicket-gate and on to the church's north porch.

An unusual aspect of the site is that the church lies within a symmetrical hexagonal boundary. It may originally have been a ditch or bank and was once defined by railings or a fence, long since lost. Boundaries of this shape are extremely rare as churchyard features and the origins and significance of the Ebony enclosure remain obscure. It was certainly in existence by the start of the eighteenth century.

Another curiosity is that the hexagon, first marked on the 1710 map and, 113 years later, on the Ebony Tithe Map (and delineated to this day on large-scale Ordnance Survey maps and clearly visible on Google Earth satellite images) is about one hundred yards wide and appears to be too large to accommodate only a church and churchyard, suggesting that other buildings might at one time have stood within it.

Recommended further reading: Norman Churches in the Canterbury Diocese, The History Press, 2009, ISBN: 9780752447766.



*Chapel Bank from the air in 1979, showing the hexagonal boundary around the site of St Mary's Church. Chapel Bank Farm and Reading Street are at top left.*

## Chapter Three – The end of an estuary

Shipbuilding at Smallhythe and Reading Street, which helped Ebony and neighbouring parishes prosper for nearly three hundred years, finally ceased after the Knelle Dam was breached in 1635 to divert the Rother from its eastern estuary and back on to its previous course south of Oxney and thence to Rye. This enabled profitable sheep pastures, cornfields, orchards and hop-gardens – and wide open spaces for country sports – to be created on the reclaimed marshes along the old shipping channel, which became known as the Reading Sewer. Chapel Bank's families migrated down to Reading Street and other more hospitable places previously 'across the water'.



*Above: After the Rother was diverted back to its original course in 1635, barges plied between Rye and Smallhythe along the valley's still-navigable channels until 1924. Pictured here at Smallhythe Dock in 1905 is one of two vessels operated by two sons of William Body of Gibbet Farm, Ebony. William Body jnr is standing on the right; one of the other men is possibly his brother, Charles. ©Tenterden and District Museum*

*Above right: farmers Cecil Weller (left) and his father Frederick shearing sheep in a meadow behind Brockett Farmhouse, the Weller family home. ©David Weller.*

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Ebony has always been sparsely populated but in 1801 it had 351 inhabitants, most of whom were soldiers posted to the area after France declared war on Britain in 1793. They were part of a huge Army raised to defend the Kent and Sussex coast against invasion. St Mary's parish clerk noted that 'the great increase' in the number of baptisms and burials in his registers in 1805–1812 was 'due to the presence of a large camp and barracks at Reading Street.' Notable among the baptisms are twins Sarah and Ann, daughters of Private Joseph Spreadborough and his wife Sarah (see Appendix 1).

In Tenterden, the vicar of St Mildred's parish church officiated at four soldiers' burials and eight marriages of men from the barracks, and eighteen baptisms of their children.

Among the units based at Reading Street were the 2nd Battalion, 50th Regiment of Foot; the 2nd Battalion, 57th (West Middlesex) Regiment of Foot; the 2nd Royal Surrey Regiment; the 2nd West Yorkshire Militia; the 43rd (Monmouthshire) Regiment of Foot; the 54th (West Norfolk) Regiment of Foot; the 89th Regiment of Foot; the 95th Rifle Regiment; the Hertfordshire Regiment; the Nottinghamshire Militia; the Nottinghamshire Regiment, and the West Kent Militia.

The barracks were described as 'extensive' by James Dugdale in his book *The New British Traveller*, published in 1819, and it is possible that there was an observation station and an invasion warning beacon nearby. In favourable conditions, from the



Right top: Sheep crossing the bridge over the Reading Sewer at Reading Street on their way to their pastures on Chapel Bank c. 1916. The properties in the background are, from the left, Old Barrack Farmhouse, Skeers House, Wellbro and the 'White Hart and Lamb'.

Right bottom: The Linton Beagles, from Lord Cornwallis's estate near Maidstone, on the road from Reading Street to Appledore on 28 February 1921. ©David Weller.



farmyard at French Hay (aka Frenchay), three quarters of a mile north of Barrack Farm, the hills beyond Boulogne can be seen through field-glasses. With a powerful telescope the view is even clearer.

In his book *Tenterden, the First Thousand Years*, Hugh Roberts described the town's 'call to arms' in 1793 and the enthusiastic response it received, commenting: 'the attraction of the handsome and brightly coloured uniforms may have contributed to the general enthusiasm'. Between 25 June 1798 and 1 November 1802 a new military road was built between Tenterden and Ashford by a succession of regiments, including the 9th (East Norfolk) Regiment of Foot and the 2nd Battalion of the 52nd (Oxfordshire) Regiment of Foot.

'It is highly likely,' wrote Roberts, 'that companies of the above units would have been stationed for some of this period at Reading Street'.

Thirty-seven soldiers are known to have died while stationed at the barracks, as well as two wives and nine children of Army personnel. Most of them were probably victims of the 'ague' or marsh fever, later known as malaria, spread by mosquitoes. This caused high mortality across Romney Marsh until the construction of the Royal Military Canal, completed in 1806, enabled land drainage to be gradually improved, whereupon the mosquito population declined. Nevertheless, even 40 years later, Bagshaw's Guide called Ebony 'low and unhealthy. The vapours arising from the marsh subject it to continual fog'. Reading Sewer had become a fetid, stagnant creek, its outfall to the sea having been severed by the Royal Military Canal.

The death rate at Reading Street Barracks averaged four a year from 1804 until 1807, peaking at 16 in 1808. Obviously, every death was a family tragedy but none more so than those of 19-year-old Dorothy Sweeney, wife of Private John Sweeney, whose funeral was on 13 May 1806, and their daughter Mary, only two weeks old, who was buried two days later.

Four of the soldiers were buried in St Mildred's Churchyard, Tenterden. They were Major H W Parry of the Montgomery Militia (died 7 February 1798, aged 43); James Hott, a Light Infantryman with Captain Bullock's Company of the Third Norfolk Regiment of Militia (9 November 1798, 22); Joseph Smith, Derbyshire Militia (10 March 1800, 65), and Quartermaster John Titley, Dorset Militia (13 March 1800, 55). The headstones, now illegible, on the graves of James Hott and Joseph Smith are still standing, close

to the west path to the church porch. The graves of H W Parry (no longer marked) and John Titley (with a barely legible headstone) are between the north-east corner of the tower and the northern boundary of the churchyard.

The other 33 soldiers, the wives and the children were laid to rest in unmarked graves in St Mary's Churchyard on Chapel Bank; not even their approximate location is known.



*The grave of Joseph Smith*



*The grave of James Hott*



*The grave of John Titley*

Reading Street Barracks have left no mark on the landscape but two plots of land – ‘Barrack Field’ and ‘Barrack Yard’ – listed in the Ebony Tithe Award Schedules – may mark the site. Close to these plots, three-quarters of a mile north-west of Reading Street and just outside Ebony's parish boundary, lies Barrack Farm; 1871–1890 Ordnance Survey maps (next page, top picture) depict a group of buildings west of the farmhouse that could once have been Army huts. Nearby there was a firing range and, on Rother Levels to the south, a racecourse where the Tenterden Horse Races were held, patronised by the troops and local people alike.

Confusingly, there is an Old Barrack Farm within the nucleus of buildings that comprise Reading Street and only a few minutes' march from the site of a rifle range on the north-west flank of Chapel Bank (next page, bottom picture).

Reminiscing in 1868 about her childhood some 60 years earlier, Ann, granddaughter of Thomas Weston, four times Mayor of Tenterden between 1784 and 1814, and Elizabeth (née Lott), recalled garden parties at her grandparents' home, Oaks House, at which officers from Reading Street Barracks ‘mingled with the ladies who walked there and read Shakespeare to them’.

The soldiers were also entertained at Tenterden's New Theatre by the Jonas and Pedley Company and other itinerant groups that made their way from town to town in the days when travelling entertainers were generally regarded as little better than rogues and vagabonds.

After the licentious soldiery departed, Ebony's population declined to just 151 people in 1821 (89 males, 62 females) and for the rest of the 19th century averaged only 160.

Recommended further reading: *Tenterden – The First Thousand Years* by Hugh Roberts. ISBN10: 0947828346

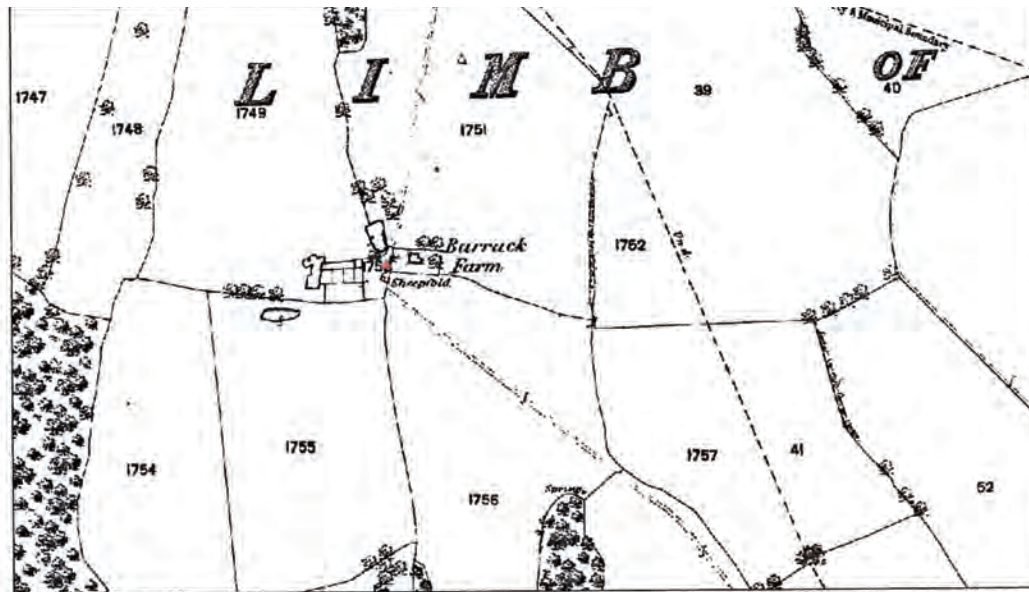
## ‘The Great Threat’

Colonel Anthony Kimber, a military historian who has researched the Napoleonic defences of Romney Marsh and the Kent and Sussex coast, writes: ‘Reading Street Barracks were established perhaps as early as the post-French revolutionary period in the late 18th century but certainly during the “Great Threat” from 1803 through to post-Trafalgar, 1805. The defence strategy during this period was to secure the Channel with Navy and sea fencibles; build Martello towers; install forts and gun positions on the beaches; prepare to flood parts of the Marsh, and dig the Royal Military Canal.

‘Behind the canal there were mostly regular forces (reinforced by militia), deployed in camps or “barracks,” ready to provide defence in depth. Near Ebony, troops were stationed along the canal, particularly in places such as Iden Lock and at bridge crossings. On the high ground to north of the marsh there were camps housing one or two battalions in places such as Fairlight,

Winchelsea, Rye Hill and at Shornecliffe Redoubt. Between these there would have been smaller detachments, perhaps of up to only 100 men. Reading Street would have been one of them. I imagine that there were brick buildings there, similar to those found today in Barrack Road, Winchelsea, to accommodate a detachment of a few officers, men and horses. Additional accommodation might have been tented.

'It would have been a key strategic site, designed to hold troops to block the approaches to Tenterden and beyond on one of the potential routes to London. Troops were drawn from all over England to defend the Marsh, which was seen to be the most likely landing ground for the Grande Armée stationed at Boulogne.'



Recommended further reading: *The impact of the Napoleonic Wars on the Romney Marsh* <http://ryeharbour.net/pdf/1'3.pdf>

## Chapter Four – The church that crossed the water

By the early 19th century St Mary's was in a poor state of repair and in 1858 the vicar (Rev. Walter William Kirby) and his churchwarden decided that it was too expensive to restore, and too isolated – the nearest house was now three-quarters of a mile away. Consequently, during the summer, while the roads were at their driest, the church was chiselled, pick-axed and sledge-hammered to pieces, and farm labourers carted its stones laboriously down the tracks (up which they had been hauled many centuries earlier) and across the former course of the Rother to more populous Reading Street. A bell, 22½ inches in diameter, cast by Thomas Mears and Son at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in London in 1805, was also removed. In August the parish clerk noted in his register: 'The chapel which stood in the centre of the churchyard of Ebony on the hill was during this month pulled down in consequence of its inaccessible position'.

St Mary's, known for a time as a 'chapel of ease,' was rebuilt at Reading Street, on a plot of land given to the parish by Virgin Pomfret, at a cost of £270, raised by public subscriptions and supplemented by a grant of £100 from the Incorporated Society for Building and Churches. The celebrated Gothic revivalist architect Samuel Sanders Teulon, whose Buxton Memorial is usually visible in the background when politicians are interviewed in Victoria Tower Gardens, near the Houses of Parliament, supervised the project and the contractors were Bourne and Chandler of Woodchurch. The foundation stone was laid on 24 August by the vicar and Mrs Kirby, J Boon (churchwarden) and local landowner Seaman Beale. According to the *Kentish Advertiser* of 31 August a time capsule was buried on the site (probably under the foundation stone, the position of which is not marked). The church was consecrated less than three months later, on 18 November, by John Sumner, Archbishop of Canterbury.



Left: Ebony and the Isle of Oxney, from the 1813 Ordnance Survey. ©Cassini Publishing Ltd [www.cassinimaps.com](http://www.cassinimaps.com)

Right: Plaque erected to mark the conditions of the grant given to St Mary's Church.

The *Kentish Express* reported that a 'continuous and merry peal of bells' greeted the archbishop when he arrived at Appledore station and continued all day. He was met by Mr Kirby, vicar of Appledore and Ebony, and clergymen from other local parishes, who all had lunch at Appledore vicarage before travelling on to Ebony for the ceremony, after which they returned to the vicarage 'in a long train of vehicles filled with influential personages'.

In the mid-19th century most of Ebony's workers were farm labourers and servants but there were also several 'lookers' (shepherds), a grocer (James Beken), a licensed victualler (George Thomas Paine, landlord of the 'Ewe and Lamb' (later renamed 'The White Hart and Lamb'), a tailor (William Adams) and a 'washing woman' (Anna Ring). In the east of the parish lived Jonathan Dorman, level crossing gate-keeper on the Ashford – Rye Railway, opened in 1851, whilst at Reading Street, Edwin Smith was tollgate-keeper at the junction of two turnpike roads from Tenterden. Built one hundred years before the railway, one road ran





*Resurfacing the junction of the two former turnpike roads at Reading Street c. 1925. 'The White Hart and Lamb' inn is in the background. Turn left here for Appledore and New Romney; straight ahead for Wittersham and Rye.*

south to Wittersham and from there to Rye, on what is now the B2082; the other (now the B2080) headed eastwards to Appledore and across Romney Marsh to New Romney.

After St Mary's was moved down the hill its churchyard continued to be used for a number of years. Its older gravestones gradually eroded and many of their memorial inscriptions ('MIs') would by now have been lost for all time, but for the efforts of Leland L Duncan of the Kent Archaeological Society. In 1919, using his well-thumbed copy of Bradshaw's railway timetable, he travelled from his home in Lewisham to Ashford or Tenterden station where the driver of a pony-and-trap, who that morning or the previous evening had received instructions on a postcard, was waiting to take him Chapel Bank, where he noted word-for-word all the 45 inscriptions that were still legible.

Twenty-six family names were recorded: Balcombe, Butler, Catt, Chacksfield, Cloake, Dixon, Douglas, Fowle, Fry, Hope, Lepper, Luckhurst, Lyle, Mitchell, Murray, Pain, Paine, Poile, Pike, Ramsden, Relf, Stretton, Turk, Virrell, Walker and Weller.

The 'MIs' span more than two hundred years, from Mary Fowle, who died in February 1699, to Philadelphia Catt, who passed away in 1913 and was the widow of William Catt, Ebony's parish clerk for 38 years and sub-postmaster at Reading Street for 27 years. Thirty-four of the memorials Duncan examined were erected before 1858, including that of eccentric Isaac Cloake, who died in 1820 aged 72. His last wish was that at his funeral, 72 old men (one for each year of his life?) wearing white frocks and stockings, each and every one the father of six children, were to follow his coffin to his grave. It is doubtful whether, even with the help of all the neighbouring parishes, Ebony met that wish!

Duncan also surveyed Tenterden churchyard, noting the four aforementioned Army 'MIs'. Over a period of 40 years he visited burial grounds throughout Kent and his thousands of transcriptions can be now be read on the KAS website.

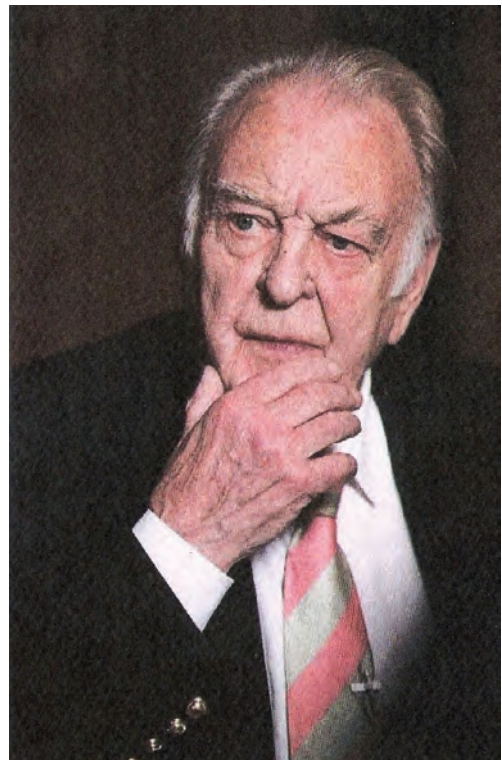
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Chapel Bank churchyard is still consecrated ground, owned by the incumbent of St Mary's, Ebony, and occasionally used for burials to this day. Among recent interments there, marked by memorial trees, are the ashes of three members of the Sinden theatrical family: Sir Donald, his wife Diana Mahony Sinden (1927-2004) and their son Jeremy (1950-1996).

The family, completed when Marc Sinden was born in 1954, lived at Rats Castle, on the road from Ebony to Wittersham, and worshipped at St Mary's, where Sir Donald often read the lesson, always from the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 9, verses 2-7: 'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwell in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone'. While living at Ebony, Sir Donald took time off between his acting engagements to pursue his interest in church architecture, presenting a documentary, *Discovering English Churches*, on BBC2 and writing a book, *The English Country Church*, to accompany the series. He also wrote his memoirs there, including amusing anecdotes about life at Rats Castle, which he bought in 1951 and where he died in 2014 at the age of 90.

Towards the end of his life, having lost his wife and eldest son, he drew comfort from being able to sit in his garden and admire the view of Chapel Bank, only a mile away. The ashes of Daniel Mahony, Diana's father, are interred at St Mary's.

The area has other cultural connections: Norman Forbes-Robertson (1858-1932), the distinguished Shakespearean actor, owned and restored Stocks Mill, Wittersham; his contemporary, Dame Ellen Terry (1847-1928), lived at Smallhythe Place for the last 28 years of her life; Jean Stirling Mackinlay (1892-1958), operatic singer and folk singer, lived at 'Ebony Cottage,' Reading Street; and David McKean, filmmaker, illustrator, photographer, comic book artist, graphic designer and musician, lives at Ebony Oast, Stone-Cum-Ebony.



Sir Donald Sinden. (©Oxney Local History Society)

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Chapel Bank today evokes secrecy and mystery, inaccessible by road and visible as a distant tree-clad knoll requiring a determined effort to climb to its summit. At most times of the year it is smothered with dense foliage and is best visited in late summer, soon after volunteers have carried out their annual clearance of invasive undergrowth around the gravestones. Several public footpaths lead to Chapel Bank, the most convenient being one from Chapel Bank Farm that ascends the hill's north-west flank, or the bridleway on its southern slope – probably once the road along which building materials for St Mary's were hauled. The paths pass a number of ponds and springs (valuable water sources for the island's inhabitants), one which may have been the Hogwell, or holy-well, known to have been somewhere hereabouts.



Above left: one of the paths to Chapel Bank. Above right: looking north-west from the summit towards Reading Street (centre of picture) and Smallhythe (left).



It was not until 1977, nearly 120 years after the 'new' St Mary's at Reading Street was consecrated, that the first of a series of scientific archaeological excavations to find what remained below the surface at the site of the old church was conducted by the Kent Archaeological Society and the Tenterden and District Museum Association, under the direction of Cecily Lebon and Alec Miles.

Back in 1659, Richard Kilburne of Hawkhurst had asserted in his *Topographie; or a Survey of Kent*, that the remains of a medieval church survived on Chapel Bank, close to the Elizabethan one that replaced it, but apparently no serious attempt to find them was made by some local historians who investigated the site in the early 1900s.

For their first excavation the archaeologists selected an area of the churchyard covered by trees and scrub but with no headstones, suggesting that this was the site of a large building. A trial trench, cut on a north-south axis, exposed the foundations of what later proved to be the north wall of a Norman nave, and the remains of its south wall which had been 'robbed' of its stones. Further excavations established that originally St Mary's was a typical 'two-celled' (nave and chancel) Norman church, slightly larger than the well-known Norman churches at Dode in north Kent (another 'lost village') and St Benedict's, Paddlesworth.

Discoveries made as the project progressed included a partially blocked north door into the chancel; quoins, jambs and other pieces of masonry shaped from Caen stone, and from ironstone probably dug from quarries on the south and south-east flanks of Chapel Bank; floor tiles, imported from the Low Countries and set in mortar on a bed of rammed chalk; pieces of painted window glass and medieval and Tudor pots; beads (possibly from a rosary), ten English medieval coins dating from the reigns of Edward I to Henry VI, and a Venetian soldino, minted by Michele Steno, Doge of Venice from 1400 until 1413.

Comparing what was found below ground with early descriptions of the church, the archaeologists calculated that the church had been high enough to accommodate a substantial arched window and a rood screen, which had supported effigies of the Crucifixion and the Virgin Mary. In medieval times, north and south aisles were added to the Norman nave followed, evidently in the late 15th century, by a bell tower with a ground plan similar to the one at St Mildred's, Tenterden.

By now, the church was more than one hundred feet long overall, comparable in size to St Peter and St Paul's Church, Appledore, four miles away.

The site of the final phase of construction at St Mary's, John Raynold's St Anne's Chapel, was found to have abutted the south side of the chancel on foundations consisting of stones likely to have been collected from the beach at Pett Level, Fairlight. Scattered around the chapel floor were pieces of Bethersden Marble (perhaps the remains of an altar slab) and burnt fragments of plain glass and painted glass, the latter possibly from a large window that was sucked inwards by a fierce draught during the 1560 fire.

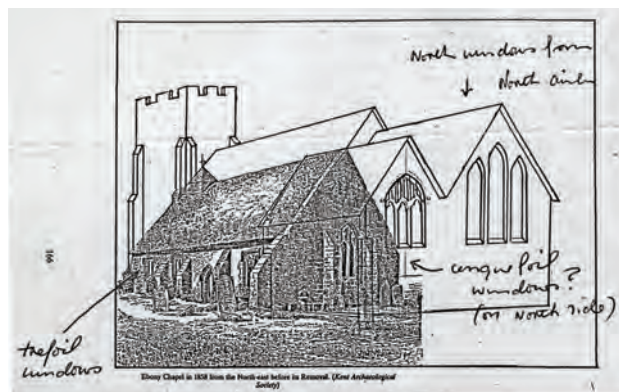
Some of the glass remnants bore esoteric geometric designs, possibly traders' or merchants' marks and unlike any found elsewhere.

Surprisingly, the graves of John and Joan Raynold were not found. He had left instructions that they were to be marked with 'two images of Latyn and our names graved in Latyn under the images' – an impressive monument that would surely have been found had it survived the four centuries that passed until the archaeologists embarked on their excavations.

## The Great Fire of Ebony

Asked to examine the results of the 'dig' and assess how the fire started and progressed, a senior Kent Fire Service officer surmised that lightning struck the tower, igniting its roof beams and causing an inferno in the bell chamber that destroyed the massive frame from which the bells, weighing several tons, were suspended. They then crashed through the floor of the ringing chamber, whose joists collapsed, prising stonework out of the tower walls. Weakened by the intense heat the tower collapsed, destroying the nave roof and most of the north aisle. What remained of the tower acted like a flue, expelling smoke and debris as a violent vortex of air was sucked into the building, shattering the plain glass and painted windows.

It must have been a terrifying and distressing sight, visible for miles across land and sea. All that the parishioners could do was watch helplessly and extinguish any sparks that settled on the thatched roofs of nearby buildings. The closest substantial source of water for fire-fighting was the Reading Sewer but it would have been impossible to carry enough buckets of water up the hill to quench the flames, and in any case there were not enough people living nearby to form a 'human chain' to do this. Most of the building was left beyond repair.



Above left: St Mary's Church, 1807. From a watercolour by H Petrie FSA. Above right: Archaeologists' impression of the Norman church and, superimposed, the Elizabethan church that replaced it.

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When they had completed and back-filled their excavations the archaeologists were able to form a mental picture of the Norman and Elizabethan churches they had discovered and, by referring to a watercolour of it, painted 51 years before the latter was rebuilt at Reading Street, create a composite image of the two buildings. This clearly confirms that the Elizabethan church was built adjacent to the south aisle.

Shortly before the church was relocated, Howard Gaye made two engravings which also guided the archaeologists as they surveyed the site and published their report of the project. On the north side there was a substantial buttressed porch, strengthened by an iron tie-bar inserted through the masonry and secured with an 'S'-shaped anchor plate to prevent the outer wall from bowing. Square-headed Perpendicular Gothic trefoil two-light windows were built into the north and south walls; there was an Early English three-light east window, flanked by massive buttresses, and a west window with three lights. Several gravestones are depicted close to the east and south walls.



Above: The church from the north-east, showing the substantial porch. Above right: The church from the south-east.

The archaeologists completed their work on the church site in 1986 and then explored a grass verge adjacent to the northern boundary of the churchyard, close to the area named The Booth Field on the aforementioned 1710 estate map. Over the years the field had yielded considerable quantities of pottery and coins during ploughing – evidence, it was concluded, that this was the site of the village of Ebony. It was not possible to excavate the field but an exploratory trench in the verge uncovered stonework that may have been the footings of a medieval timber-framed house.



*Archaeology in progress on Chapel Bank. Clockwise from top left: (1, 2) the site before the first 'dig' in 1977, a natural 'adventure playground' for small boys!; (3) revealing the church's medieval foundations; (4) a medieval coin, possibly a Richard II halfpenny, found within the church walls; (5) floor tiles from the Low Countries, pictured 'as found'.*

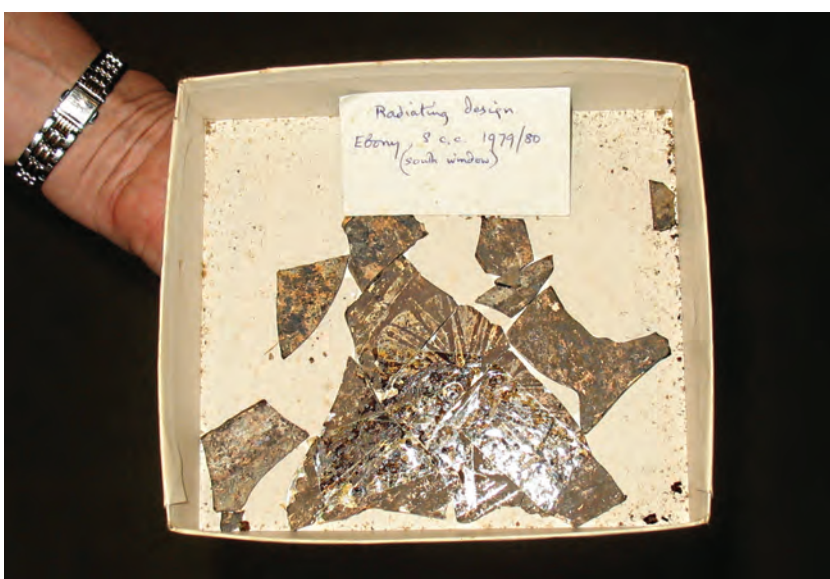
However, the most exciting discoveries came three years later when, in 1989 Neil Allen, a member of the Romney Marshland Metal Detecting Club, recovered more than one hundred English medieval coins, 60 of which were identifiable, on a narrow strip of land adjacent to the churchyard's northern perimeter. The oldest coins were minted in the 12th century, during the reign of Henry II; one was Elizabethan, but the majority were of 13th century or early 14th century origin. More coins were found than would be expected in such a small area, giving credence to a theory that commercial activities – fairs or markets, maybe – were conducted there. About 10 years earlier, oyster shells had been brought to the surface on Chapel Bank during ploughing – perhaps originally discarded around seafood stalls set up for the fairgoers, oysters being an affordable 'poor man's food' in those days.

Other metal objects detected by Neil Allen included buckles, thimbles, a 15th century lead token and two more Venetian soldinos, these last items suggesting that Ebony, like Rye and other English Channel ports, traded with merchants from Venice, notably the Corsini brothers of Florence, whose galleys anchored in Rye Bay. Soldinos, known as 'galley-halpens,' were unofficially used as halfpennies during a shortage of English coins of this denomination.

Examples of artefacts recovered during the excavations at Chapel Bank are kept at Tenterden and District Museum, including worked stone pieces; fragments of painted window glass; an iron object (possibly a crucifix); floor tiles; and pottery, including parts of a 13th century cooking vessel, a late 12th or early 13th century cooking pot and a 12th century cooking pot.

Ebony's only other significant archaeological finds, reported in *Archaeologia Cantiana* in 1882, were a Roman urn and coins and a quantity of ashes, found by Stephen Judge while draining a field near Reading Hill.

See Appendix 4 for a full account by Cecily Lebon and Alec Miles of the excavations, including a site plan.



Anti-clockwise from right: (1) a corroded iron artefact, possibly a crucifix from an altar; (2, 3) fragments of painted window glass with geometric designs, possibly traders' or merchants' marks; (4) Hand-shaped unidentified stonework.

## Chapter Five – In search of Ebony

Ebony is a lost village in more ways than one. It appears on only a few maps and signposts and only recently has a village sign been erected between Wittersham and Reading Street to inform visitors that they are crossing the parish boundary. The village sign depicts 'Ollie' Orpin of Hayes Farm, who frequently appeared at fêtes and other events dressed in his traditional shepherd's smock and felt hat. 'Ebony Cottages' at Stone Corner in the far south of the parish, and 'Ebony Cottage' in Reading Street, are among the few properties that bear the name 'Ebony'. (Photos © Oxney Local History Society)



Ebony is part of the civil parish of Stone-cum-Ebony, together with Stone-in-Oxney on the Isle of Oxney, and is one of the nine ecclesiastical parishes within the Tenterden, Rother and Oxney Benefice.

Most of the parish's residents live in the hamlet of Reading Street, distinguished by a group of Grade II Listed Buildings consisting of Ebony Cottage, Wellbro Cottage, Skeers House and Old Barrack Farmhouse. This was formerly the village post office and shop; one hundred years ago, letters from Tenterden Post Office, the nearest money order and telegraph office, were received here every day (except Sundays) at 7.10am and 7.40pm; outgoing mail was despatched at about 6.15pm.

### From the archives ...in and around Reading Street in times past



Clockwise from top left: (1) 'Ebony Cottage,' once the home of singer Jean Stirling Mackinlay; (2) a poultryman on his cart loaded with crates of chickens (Brockett Farmhouse on the left, Ebony Cottage on the right); (3) a solitary cyclist finds it easier to walk up the hill than ride, passing Old Barrack Farmhouse and heading towards Skeers House, Wellbro, the 'White Hart and Lamb' and Brockett Farmhouse; (4) the 'White Hart and Lamb,' Brockett Farmhouse, Ebony Cottage (behind the tree) and Tollgate House; (5) Frederick Weller (1870–1954) and his sheepdog at Brockett Farmhouse; (6) one of the first motor cars to be seen around Ebony; properties shown are, from the right, Brockett Farmhouse, the 'White Hart and Lamb,' Wellbro and Skeers House, with S'-shaped anchor plates to prevent its front wall from bowing. ©David Weller



Reading Street Post Office in 1913.

The local population of about 70 is sometimes outnumbered by visitors to Tenterden Garden Centre, formerly Tollgate Nurseries. Tollgate House, to the south, evokes the tollgate on the turnpike roads to Rye and New Romney.

Adjacent to the garden centre's car park is the former Ebony School, built in 1882 as a mixed elementary school on land sold to the parish by Herbert Paine for £15, and closed in 1922.

Ebony School's first teacher was Jane Catt, eldest daughter of William Catt, Ebony's parish clerk and sub-postmaster, and his wife Philadelphia. The 1881 census, taken while the school was still being built, records that she was living with her parents at Old Barrack Farm and teaching about 30 pupils in a temporary schoolroom in St Mary's Church. Her career was terminated by mental illness and by 1891 she was a patient in the East Kent Lunatic Asylum at St Augustine's Hospital, Chartham.

Jane Catt's successor was Mary Ann Scudamore, a schoolmistress from Islington, London, who in 1891 was lodging with John and Naomi Almond at Ramsden Farmhouse, Appledore Road (not to be confused with another Ramsden Farm, south of Reading Street) and in 1901 with David Standen, a road labourer, and his niece Ellen Holdstock, at Lane Cottage, Appledore Road. Ramsden Farmhouse (pictured right) has been improved beyond recognition since 1891. Now a Grade II listed property, it was on the market for £1.9million a few years ago.





In 1911, now aged 61, Mary Scudamore was still living in Reading Street, in an unnamed three-bedroom cottage or house. This may have been The School House which appears in later records as the home of the school's head (and probably only) teacher. It was demolished many years ago and evidently stood a few yards south of the school, alongside the B2080 and opposite what is now the garden centre's entrance porch.

Average daily attendance at the school when Mary Scudamore retired was 26. In early 1914 Ivy Rous (née Goodall), whose family home was in Norfolk, was appointed headmistress. She had only recently married Thomas Rous (whose story will be told in Chapter Seven), also a schoolteacher by profession, who was serving with the Essex Yeomanry. Their time together was very intermittent, due to Thomas's overseas postings. He survived most of the war, only to be killed in action eight months before the Armistice. While caring for their baby daughter, Ivy remained in charge of the school for another four years, until it closed. By this time, Ebony's elder children were attending schools in Tenterden and Appledore.

**EBONY** is a village, containing only a few houses, 4 miles west from Appledore station on the Ashford and Hastings line of the South Eastern and Chatham railway, 4 south-east from Tenterden and 62 from London, in the Southern division of the county, Alesbridge, Tenterden and Oxney hundreds, lathes of Serey and Shepway, Ashford petty sessional division, Tenterden union and county court district, and in the rural deanery of South Lymps and archdeaconry and diocese of Canterbury. Part of the district forms a hill, detached from the Isle of Oxney; the top of this hill, where formerly stood the chapel, is still used as a burial place. The village is surrounded by marsh drains, and part is included within the borough of Tenterden.

By an Order of the Local Government Board, dated Nov. 6, 1894, this parish was incorporated with Stone for civil purposes, and the parish is known as Stone-with-Ebony. The chapel of St. Mary, in Reading street, rebuilt in 1858, is of stone in the Early English style, and has a turret containing one bell: there are 130 sittings. The register dates from the year 1708. The living is a vicarage, annexed to that of Appledore, joint net yearly value £195, including 16 acres of glebe, with residence, in the gift of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and held since 1908 by the Rev. Arthur Octavius Scott M.A. of St.

Ashby William Ernest, farmer & hop grower, High House farm (letters through Ashford)  
Bates Bert, farmer

Body Arthur Judge, grazier, Barrack farm  
Bull William, farmer, Hayes farm (letters through Ashford)

John's College, Cambridge, who resides at Appledore. The trustees of the late Mrs. Billington, of Kennington, in this county, are the principal landowners. The soil is mixed and rich; subsoil, crowstone. The chief crops are wheat, beans, oats and roots; the principal part of the land is pasture. The area of Stone-cum-Ebony is 4,798 acres of land and 41 of water; the population in 1911 was 403; the population of Ebony in 1911 was 161.

A part of **READING STREET**, on the high road from Tenterden to Appledore, was in 1894, by Local Government Board Order 31,057, added to Stone, and the parish renamed Stone-cum-Ebony. By the same Order the remainder of Ebony civil parish was annexed to Tenterden. For names, see that town.

Sexton, Stephen Weller.

Letters received through Cranbrook (via Tenterden) at 7.10 a.m. & 7.40 p.m.; dispatched about 6.15 p.m.; no delivery on Sunday. Appledore, 2 1/2 miles distant, is the nearest money order & telegraph office. Tenterden-Ebony Public Elementary School (mixed), erected in 1882, for 32 children; average attendance, 26; Miss Mary Ann Scudamore, mistress; the elder children attend the schools at Tenterden & Appledore.

Orpin Walter, farmer, Reading Street  
Paine Herbert, grazier  
Rose Henry, grazier  
Weller Frederick, grazier

An entry from Kelly's Directory, 1913.



Left: Chris Pursglove at Ebony School; Centre: Pupils' coathangers in the school cloakroom, now Chris Pursglove's workshop; Right: The schoolroom from the south in 2017.

After the school closed it became a venue for church meetings and social events, was requisitioned by the War Office in 1940, and since 1948 has had various owners, including Colonel J F ('Charles') Armstrong who used it as a woodworking shop. It is now owned by Chris Pursglove. In March 2017 a 'change of use' planning application from workshop to retail was submitted to Ashford Borough Council.

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Opposite the site of the tollgate stands The Old Inn, rebuilt in 1900 on the site of previous inns dating back to 1659. Over the years it underwent confusing changes of name and was called 'The Ewe and Lamb' in the 1841 census and later 'The White Hart' and 'The White Hart and Lamb'. Its licensees included George Thomas Paine (who was also a shepherd and grazier) from c. 1841, William Farrance from 1881, Charles Catt from 1891, James Bates from 1901, Norman Dean in 1913-1922, Thomas H Boughton from 1930, George N Aitken and finally ex-Regimental Sergeant Major William ('Bill') Herridge, late of the 2nd Battalion, Royal Sussex Regiment.

A large and obviously well patronised establishment in its heyday, it had a bar, bar-parlour, parlour, kitchen, washhouse, scullery, dairy, cellar, two attics, seven bedrooms, a wool room, stables, two cow lodges, a cart lodge, an orchard, paddocks and a large garden.

When Bill Herridge died in 1969 it was closed, renamed, and sold for £5,000, becoming a 'B&B' before being put on the market for £109,000 in 1973. It has now been a private residence for many years.

In the words of those who knew him, Bill Herridge was 'quite a character'. Short, stocky and ramrod-straight, he would sometimes don his RSM uniform, complete with drill stick. During his 37-year tenancy 'The White Hart and Lamb' acquired a reputation for being 'the pub with no beer' because from time to time he omitted to replenish his cellar. Cigarettes were scarce too; he stocked only a few packets for his best customers.



Above: The 'White Hart and Lamb' in the 1960s; Centre: 'B&B' for £7.50 a night in 1980; Right: 'The Old Inn' in 2017.

Bill often closed the pub for the day without notice, pinning a notice to the door saying, 'Gone to the Races. Back at 8.30.' On other days he preferred watching television to serving his customers and left the lights out in the bar to deter anyone from entering. Those who ventured in were gruffly greeted with, 'Help yourself and leave the money on the bar'.

Refusing to install a telephone, he relied on a GPO kiosk outside the pub for his spasmodic orders to the brewery and his calls to his 'bookie' for his daily half-crown 'flutter' on the horses. Eventually the GPO decided to remove the kiosk because it cost £300 a year to maintain and was used for only £15-worth of calls – all, as far as they could tell, made by 'the Major'. His neighbour, Daisy Townsend, kept an eye on him in his old age, and promised that if his curtains were not drawn by 9am she would call in. That day came at Christmas 1968 when Daisy and her husband became concerned, and found that Bill had collapsed.

He died at the age of 85. His ashes were interred at St Mary's on 25 January 1969 following a memorial service conducted by the vicar, Lieutenant-Colonel the Rev. Bouverie-Brine, attended by family and friends, including detachments from local 'Old Comrades' associations and their standard bearers. Bill Herridge joined the 'Royal Sussex' in 1904, when he was 21, and served for 27 years before becoming landlord of 'The White Hart and Lamb'. During the First World War he was Mentioned-in-Despatches and awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.



Old Comrades pay their respects at the interment of RSM W G Herridge's ashes at St Mary's.

## Chapter Six – St Mary's today



*The church from the south, showing three of the windows salvaged from the Elizabethan St Mary's. ©Stuart Kirk*

St Mary's Church, opposite Tenterden Garden Centre, shows much evidence of its Elizabethan heritage in its ashlar and red-black stonework. Over the years the provenance of its windows has been queried but in a note in his church register the vicar left no doubt: 'All the windows except the Vestry and West Window are [from] the old [church]'. In his *Notes on old Tenterden*, published in 1902, John Ellis Mace wrote: 'the stones and tracery of the windows [were] replaced as nearly as possible in their old positions, three on the south side, two on the north [but] the positions of the south doorway and one window were reversed'.

This confirms that the Early English east window, and the Perpendicular windows from the chancel and nave, were retained. The west window is 'Victorian Gothic'. The Elizabethan church's north porch was not reinstated but it is likely that its external arch survives as the one that now graces the Victorian building's main, south-facing, entrance. A fragment of a medieval gargoyle is discernible on the dripstone of one of its corbels.

Whilst it is not possible to date the arch accurately it appears to be early Gothic and there is every reason to assume that it survived the 1560 fire more-or-less unscathed, and was incorporated into the Elizabethan church as depicted in Howard Gaye's drawing on page 16.

The most striking difference between the floor plans of the Elizabethan and Victorian churches is that the latter has a vestry, built on to the north-east corner under a 'cat-slide' roof.



*One of the first photographs taken after the church was consecrated.*

Its external door frame is also likely to have come from the Elizabethan church and may be a pre-1560 component, in this case having previously spanned the south doorway. There is a barely recognisable medieval 'mass-clock' or 'scratch-dial' (a form of sundial) incised into its right-hand jamb, serving no purpose now that it no longer faces the sun.

The timber-framed, tile-hung, louvered shingle-capped bell-turret above the west gable resembles its precursor and houses the 1805 Thomas Mears bell. Among those for whom it has been tolled are Maria Ann Sherwood, orchardist and cultivator of the Granny Smith apple, and Thomas Smith, a farm labourer from Beckley, who were married in August 1819. They lived at Beckley for the next 19 years, during which time Maria bore eight children, three of whom died in infancy.



*Left: The main doorway and its strap-hinged 19th century plank door. ©Stuart Kirk; Centre: The east window's pointed arch, hood mouldings and Perpendicular tracery; Right: The bell-turret above the west gable.*

Most of the church's furnishings and principal internal fixtures were made for the new church; one artefact from the Elizabethan St Mary's is a frieze, carved with oak leaves and acorns, on the reading desk. The building was listed Grade II in 1950 because it preserves much of the original character and masonry of the old church. Historic England's National Heritage List describes its principal features as follows: 'The fittings are mainly 19th century or later. At the east end there is a simple reredos with a shelf. The pulpit is a timber drum with plain sides and a carved cornice and base on a stone plinth: Newman [John Newman, author of *The Buildings of England: West Kent and the Weald*] suggests an 18th century date. The font is very small and has an octagonal bowl with a bratticed cornice on an octagonal stem on a raised step of encaustic tiles. In the nave the seating is made up of chairs while the choir stalls have chamfered ends and open-traceried, Perpendicular-style fronts. There is a fragment of an old oak frieze incorporated into the reading desk and a rustic sanctuary rail with wrought-iron uprights and a wooden



*Left: The two north windows and the doorway to the vestry; Centre: The Victorian west window, with Rev. Judy Darkins, Vicar of Ebony, in the foreground; Right: The crucifix on the east gable, a copy of an original salvaged from the Elizabethan church, only to be destroyed in an air raid 86 years later.*



Left: The nave and west window. ©Stuart Kirk; Right: The nave, chancel, east window and octagonal font. ©Stuart Kirk

handrail. The nave floor is of parquet while the chancel has red and black tiles. There is a good-quality painted Royal Arms of 1768 which was the work of J Marten of Tenterden'.

Marten also painted Royal Arms for Tenterden Town Hall and Hinxhill, Staplehurst, Upper Hardres and Udimore parish churches.

In the churchyard there are about one hundred graves, including those of members of the Armstrong, Bacon, Bashford, Bates, Beadle, Beeching, Betchley, Body, Broadbank, Brown, Burton, Clayton, Clark, Coley, Croucher, Giles, Gillett, Goldsmith, Herridge, Honeysett, Johnson, Law, Mahony, Millen, Newton, Packham, Pierce, Robins, Shaw, Stevenson, Stewart, Weller and Wheeler families.



Left: Victorian floor tiles in the sanctuary with Victorian motifs, possibly made by Minton's Limited; Right: The 'timber drum' pulpit.



Left: The chancel, showing the frieze on the reading desk. ©Stuart Kirk; Right: King George III Royal Arms.

## Chapter Seven – Wartime Ebony



A Flying Fortress bomber that crash-landed on Chapel Bank in 1943; St Mary's Church is in the background. ©Oxney Local History Society

There were troop movements and military camps in and around the parish in both world wars. From 1914, Ebony men joined the all-volunteer 'Kitchener's Army,' enlisting at Tenterden Drill Hall (now St Mildred's Church Hall), opened in 1911 for G Company, 5th Territorial Force Battalion East Kent Regiment and also used by D Squadron, Royal East Kent Mounted Rifles.

All of Ebony's First World War soldiers (those who died and those who survived) are named on a Roll of Honour in St Mary's Church.

In the Second World War, children in the school playground, mothers in their gardens, and men working in the fields, cheered and waved as they witnessed aerial combats during the Battle of Britain. Tragedy struck at the height of the conflict, on 24 August 1940, when Pilot Officer Noel John Victor Benson (aged 21) of 603 Squadron, RAF Hornchurch, was killed when his Spitfire crashed in flames at Great Hay Farm, Leigh Green, on Ebony's northern boundary, after being attacked by a Messerschmitt Bf 109.

A few years later, retribution was in the air as hundreds of Royal Air Force and US Army Air Force heavy bombers filled the skies over Romney Marsh by night and day, on their way to and from targets in occupied Europe, followed in 1944 by the airborne armadas of Operation Overlord (D-Day) and Operation Market Garden (Arnhem) and, in 1945, Operation Varsity (the Rhine Crossing).

On 6 September 1943 three 'stragglers' in a formation of USAAF B-17 Flying Fortresses approached from the south. One 'pancaked' on Pett Level marshes, another exploded on Pannel Marshes (between Winchelsea and Pett) and a third crash-landed at the foot of Chapel Bank. The crew escaped. The 'plane survived more or less intact and was repaired and fitted with replacement engines. After a few ditches had been filled in to provide a level runway across the fields it was flown back to base. Eye-witness Clifford Bloomfield, a teenager at the time, described the incident in his book *Wings Over Rye*, published in 1994. Many years later Peter Paine, another eye-witness, captured the scene in an evocative watercolour (above) for Oxney Local History Society.

Nothing so exciting had been seen there since July 1911 when pioneer airman Eugène Renaux, flying a Farman biplane, flew low over Reading Street before making an emergency landing on Romney Marsh while taking part in



the Circuit of Europe Air Race – an ambitious event, Louis Blériot having pioneered cross-Channel flight as recently as July 1909. Celebrated photographer Alex Ridley of Tenterden, whose portraits of Dame Ellen Terry and friends can be seen at Smallhythe Place, was on Chapel Bank to record Renaux's flypast.

Aviation progressed at such a rate that only a few short years after the Europe air race, primitive German aircraft were crossing the Channel and North Sea to bomb Kent coast towns and London.

In the Second World War, Ebony experienced no civilian fatalities or serious injuries on the 'home front'. Its first air raid occurred on 25 October 1940, when 11 high-explosive bombs fell harmlessly into a field near French Hay. Nearly four years passed uneventfully until the V1 'Doodlebug' flying bomb onslaught of 1944. On 27 June a V1, shot down by an RAF fighter aircraft over Reading Hill, demolished a bungalow on the Appledore road. The ARP (Air Raid Precautions) report of the incident noted that the building was rendered 'uninhabitable'. On 7 July another V1 crashed at Frenchay Farm, without causing any damage, followed by another on 19 July which, again the prey of a RAF fighter, caused extensive damage at Chapel Bank Farm, near where the Flying Fortress had crashed in September 1943.

Finally, on 26 July, the RAF had one more excuse for a celebratory victory roll over Ebony after claiming a V1 that damaged houses in Reading Street, slightly injuring one person. This was probably the bomb whose blast shook St Mary's Church and destroyed the ancient stone crucifix, salvaged from the rubble of 'old St Mary's,' that had been mounted as a finial on the east gable 86 years earlier.

Ebony's best-kept wartime secret was an underground bunker that was the hideout of Tenterden's Auxiliary Unit, part of the network of resistance volunteers trained to conduct sabotage and assassinations against the enemy in the event of a German invasion. Tenterden's six-man group was led by Louis Pugh, manager of a local chemical factory – just the man to concoct improvised plastic explosive devices!

The group's first lair was in a hollow oak near Frenchay Farm, where they tested their explosives by supplying some to a farmer who used them to blow-up some apple trees he wanted to remove. The exercise was too successful. The trees were blown sky-high. A police officer who investigated was told that the blast had been caused by an unexploded bomb. The group then constructed a more ingenious hiding place under a summerhouse at Gibbet Oak House, off Appledore Road. This was 20ft long and 12ft wide, with a headroom of 10ft, and was equipped with bunks, stores and lamps, and enough food and water to last at least 12 weeks.

During a later era of military secrecy, the Cold War, the Ministry of Defence operated a Rascal Hyperfix navigation system at Barrack Farm; its presence was obvious but its purpose was discreet.



*Members of the Army Veterinary Corps who visited a Baptist Sunday School run by Dorothy Body at 'The Gibbet,' Appledore Road, during the First World War. From a picture postcard donated to Tenterden and District Museum in 1983 by Richard Stephen Body of Hope Farm, Snargate. The Sergeant in the centre appears to be wearing three medal ribbons: the 1895 Indian General Service Medal, the 1908 India General Service Medal, and a Long Service and Good Conduct Medal. ©Tenterden and District Museum*

## Roll of Honour

Ebony's War Memorial honours eight men who were lost in the First World War, including one who died just a week before the Armistice; three brothers from one family and two from two other families; and a patriotic newly-married schoolteacher who enlisted within days of war being declared, fought through most of it, only to lose his life shortly before it ended.

The parish's only Second World War casualty was Aircraftman 1st Class Harold James Coley, son of Edgar and Alice Coley, who served with 2834 Squadron, RAF Regiment and died on 5 August 1943, aged 21. His grave is in St Mary's Churchyard.

\* \* \*

Six of the seven sons of William and Sarah (née Judge) Body served in the Army in the First World War. The family lived at Gibbet Farm, the heart of a farmstead also known as Gibbet Oak Farm and 'The Gibbet,' on Ebony's northern boundary.

\* \* \*

Sergeant Arthur Judge Body (William and Sarah's fourth son) of the Corps of Hussars, 1/1st Royal East Kent Yeomanry (Duke of Connaught's Own) Mounted Rifles, died on the night of 30 December 1915, aged 37, during the evacuation of Helles, Gallipoli. He is commemorated on Twelve Tree Copse Cemetery Memorial, Krithia, Turkey.

The cemetery was created after the Armistice: 3,360 First World War servicemen are buried or commemorated in the cemetery; 2,226 of the burials are unidentified but special memorials commemorate many casualties known or believed to be buried there. Sgt Body was one of only 30 Royal East Kent Yeomanry men to die at Gallipoli.

Before the war he served as a private in the 2nd Volunteer Weald of Kent Battalion of The Buffs (East Kent Regiment), probably in South Africa during the Second Boer War.

Major Edward Upton Body, MC (William and Sarah's fifth son) of the Royal Field Artillery, 130th Battery, 40th Brigade, husband of Hilda May Body of St. Leonards-on-Sea, died at Ruesnes, France, on 4 November 1918, aged 39. He was buried at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery, Ruesnes Communal Cemetery, Nord, France.

Before the war Edward joined the Indian Army Volunteer Corps Artillery Companies, serving from 1910 as a lieutenant in the Bengal Volunteer Corps and the Calcutta Port Defence Volunteer Corps.

During his time on the Western Front, Edward distinguished himself by his gallantry in action on several occasions. His Military Cross was presented to him at Aldershot by King George V on 25 June 1918. In his diary, Edward noted: 'Investiture by King. A very successful day. Lunch in RA Mess'.

\* \* \*

Plaques in St Mary's Church commemorate Sgt Body and Major Body; their sister Margery (William and Sarah's youngest daughter), who died of tuberculosis in Switzerland, on 15 October, 1909 aged 21, and Bertha Lansdell Barr (William and Sarah's fourth daughter), who died at Colborne, Canada, on 28 September 1980, aged 96. The church's Bible was presented by William and Sarah in memory of Margery.

Bertha was a Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse and worked at the VAD hospital at Clifton House, Ashford Road, Tenterden, which opened in October 1914 and initially treated wounded Belgian soldiers. There she met a Canadian soldier; James Barr, who had been injured in France. They were married in Tenterden and after the war Bertha joined many other war brides on a ship that took her to Canada to be reunited with James. After she inherited some family money they bought a fruit and vegetable farm in Southern Ontario.

Whereas most of William and Sarah's sons worked on the land before their military service, their eldest, Thomas, became a physician and surgeon. At the age of 23, while still a medical student, he interrupted his studies to enlist with the 11th Battalion of the 33rd (Royal East Kent) Company, Imperial



*Bertha Body (back row, third from left) and other nurses at Tenterden VAD Hospital. ©Ivor Body*



Yeomanry, serving in South Africa in the Second Boer War (1899–1902) and subsequently qualifying as a general practitioner with a practice in Ashford.

In 1914 he joined the Royal Army Medical Corps, serving as a temporary lieutenant in the British Expeditionary Force, subsequently transferring to V1 Corps, Royal Garrison Artillery, an arm of the Royal Artillery, as Captain Body.

Whilst serving on the Western Front, Thomas was allocated his own personal war-horse, an Army charger named 'Camouflage'. They rode on the Somme, where both of them were injured. Their story is told in Chapter Eight.

The other sons of William and Sarah Body who survived their military service were William Stephen, their eldest son; Harold James, their third son; and Geoffrey, their youngest son, who served in the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force as a corporal from September 1915 to April 1916, having enlisted in the Royal East Kent Mounted Rifles Territorial Force in January 1911.

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Private George Charles Paine, youngest child of Herbert Paine, shepherd and farm bailiff, of Reading Street and the late Caroline Paine (née Smeed), was a shepherd before enlisting as a driver in the Army Service Corps, 664th Company. He died on 20 April 1917, aged 28 and is buried at Puchevillers British Cemetery, Amiens.

After completing his basic army training, George was posted to France, arriving at Le Havre on 18 March 1917. A few weeks later he died suddenly after being taken ill with measles and bronchitis.



*Right: George Charles Paine and his grave at Puchevillers British Cemetery, Amiens.*

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Second Lieutenant Thomas Rous, husband of Ivy Rous (née Goodall) of The School House, Reading Street, served with the Royal Field Artillery, D Battery, 296th Brigade and died on 22 March 1918, aged 31. Until March 1917 he had fought with the Essex Yeomanry. His grave is in Etaples Military Cemetery.

Rous, a schoolteacher, was born in Charing. He married Ivy on 24 August 1914 – 20 days after war was declared and probably a few days before he joined the Essex Yeomanry. He fought in the Battle of Loos in September 1915, was invalided home after catching enteric fever, returned to France in July 1916 as a Bomber (First Class) and went back to England in March 1917 to join an officers' training course. In the following September he was commissioned into the RFA and in December, the month in which his and Ivy's only child, Olive, was born, he was posted to an artillery battery near Etaples. He died the day after being seriously wounded.

His Commanding Officer, Captain Raymond Godwin, wrote to his family, saying: 'He was such a cheery brother officer, both on duty and in the mess. His pluck and endurance were wonderful, so much so that I twice submitted his name to the Brigade Commander for some distinction or award for bravery; the first time for his bravery and devotion to duty, when he crawled up to

and into German barbed-wire entanglements to observe a destructive shot we had to fire on a new trench. Through his gallant action we were able to destroy the enemy trench. The second time, to the Colonel's notice, for his coolness and splendid example under the heavy bombardment of 21 March, when he went from gun-pit to gun-pit, helping his men and cheering them on. It was thus he received his wounds'.

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Shortly before the First World War, William Pierce, a farm bailiff, his wife Emily and their two daughters and six sons moved from Frenchurst Farm, Sandhurst, to Hayes Cottage, High House Farm, Ebony. Four of the sons volunteered or were called-up for military service; tragically, three of them were killed during the last two years of the war.

Private Percy Thomas Pierce of the Queen's Own (Royal West Kent Regiment), 8th Battalion, D Company, died on 3 February 1918, aged 27, and was buried at Hargicourt British Cemetery.

From November 1917 to mid-February 1918 the '8th West Kents' were fighting near Corbie and Vadencourt. The official Regimental History describes the probable circumstances of Percy's death: 'On the night of the 3rd February, D Company raided a German post known to the battalion as "Herbert's Post". Herbert was the nickname given to a succession of German sentries who had fallen prey to British snipers on sentry duty at this point. The raid was carried out by two parties, both of which got in close and engaged the enemy, inflicting a good many casualties. The right party was counter-attacked by the enemy. Second Lieutenant Carville and his men extracted his party, shooting two enemy himself. Second Lieutenant Crighton commanding the left party was hit and Sergeant Vanner took over'.

Percy appears to have been one of the few casualties of this engagement, having survived injuries in previous battles. He suffered wounds to his right hand and left foot in September 1916, was evacuated to England and Tipperary for hospital treatment and convalescence, and returned to France in July 1917.

Private James Percy Pierce, The Buffs (East Kent Regiment), 1st/5th Battalion, Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, died on 15 February 1917, aged 33 and was buried at Amara War Cemetery.

Private Daniel William Pierce, Wellington Infantry Regiment, 2nd Battalion, New Zealand Expeditionary Force, died on 7 June 1917, aged 38 and was buried at Wulverghem-Lindenhoek Road Military Cemetery, Flanders.

Daniel had emigrated to New Zealand before the war and was one of its 100,000 men who signed-up to fight for their King and Country; 18,000 of them lost their lives. At the time of the Armistice, Wulverghem-Linendenhoek Road Military Cemetery contained 162 graves but subsequently soldiers from nearby battlefields and small cemeteries, including Pierce and 11 other New Zealanders who died on 7 June 1917, were reburied there, bringing the total number of graves to more than one thousand.



Hayes Cottage, pictured in 2017. © Robert Watsham



Private Daniel Pierce's grave in Flanders.

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Private Arthur George Eggleton of The Buffs (East Kent Regiment), 6th (Service) Battalion, died on 7 October 1916, aged 19. His parents were Arthur and Elizabeth Eggleton of Willow Cottage, Reading Street. Posted to France on 27 April 1915, he was reported missing in action on 7 October 1916 during the Battle of Le Transloy, the BEF Fourth Army's last offensive in the Battle of the Somme.

Private Eggleton worked as a shop-boy and plumber's mate before the war and enlisted on 2 December 1914. On the day he died the '6th Buffs' were in action all day and at 13.45hrs came under heavy shell-fire from German long-range guns At 1400hrs

the battalion went over the top into 'no man's land' and was met with devastating machine-gun fire. The attack was held up when at least two companies were caught on open ground, and eventually ground to a halt. By the end of the day 347 men lay killed or wounded on the battlefield. Arthur was among the battalion's 121 'other ranks' who lost their lives. He has no known grave and is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing.

His medals were sent to his mother as his father was at that time serving as a sapper in Royal Engineers.

\* \* \*

Private Frank T Addy of the 1st/5th Battalion, The Buffs (East Kent Regiment), is also on the Ebony Roll of Honour (but not on the parish's war memorial) and on the war memorial in Tenterden High Street. He died on 7 May 1916, aged 22 years, and was buried in Amara War Cemetery, Iraq. Private Addy was the youngest son of Charles Addy, who died in 1909, and Lousia Addy (née Sinden), who died in 1913, of Frenchay Farm. He worked on the farm before he joined The Buffs.

Amara was occupied by the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force on 3 June 1915 and became a hospital centre. The cemetery contains more than 4,000 graves.

\* \* \*

Two brothers who were born in Ebony are named on War Memorial in Beckley, East Sussex, where they were living at the time they enlisted.

Private Albert John Bates of the 13th Battalion, Royal Sussex Regiment, was killed in action at Becourt on 3 September 1916, aged 23. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing.

Private Reginald Ernest Bates, his younger brother, was a private in the 13th Battalion, Essex Regiment, and died on 19 April 1917 after being wounded at the Battle of Arras. He was 20. His grave is in Aibigny Communal Cemetery Extension near Arras.

The Bates brothers' grandfather, Nathan, who was married to Frances, farmed 290 acres at High House, on Rye Road, Ebony, from about 1871, probably earlier, and employed eight men and two boys. By 1881 he had extended his farm to cover 868 acres, employing 16 men and six boys.

Nathan and Frances's son, Charles, became a farmer and lived with his wife Mary at Hayes Farm, adjacent to High House Farm, where they raised three children: Albert (born in 1893), Ethel (1895) and Reginald (1897).

By 1911 the family had moved to Lime Court, Beckley, where Charles worked as a farmer and grazier. The Lych Gate at Beckley parish church was erected by Charles and Mary Bates in memory of their sons.

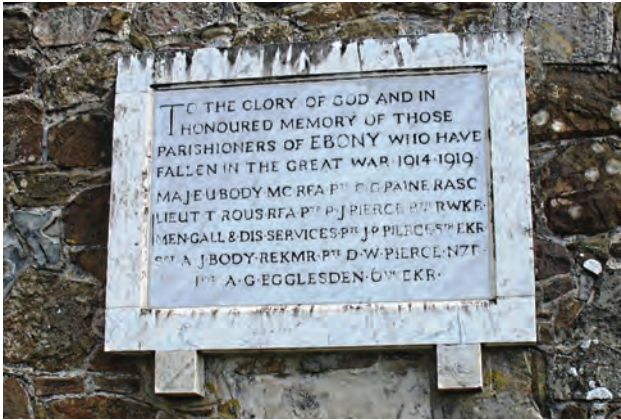
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Also in St Mary's Churchyard is the grave of Colonel Jack Francis ('Charles') Armstrong MBE of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, who served with distinction in Burma in the Second World War and became churchwarden and treasurer at St Mary's and patron of the Maidstone branch of the Burma Star Association. He died in 1987, aged 87, leaving a widow, Mabel ('May') and their children, Robin and Gillian. The family lived at Skeers House, Reading Street. His headstone, incised with his regiment's badge, records that he was a 'soldier and craftsman'. Mabel died in 2005, aged 102.

There is also a memorial to Colonel Armstrong in the church, close to a window endowed by Mabel in 1984 and inscribed 'In deep gratitude for my parents, my family - the safe return of my husband from war - and for our children and grandchildren, this window is offered to the praise of God and this loved place of worship. MGVA'



*Playing the Last Post after the unveiling of Ebony's War Memorial on 22 July 1922. ©Ebony Church Archive*



Top left: Ebony's First World War Memorial; Top right: In 1993 the memorial was restored and on Remembrance Sunday it was rededicated at a service conducted by the Archdeacon of Maidstone, Ven. Patrick Evans (second left) and the vicar of Ebony, Rev. Seymour Harris. Also in the picture are churchwardens Joyce Bates (left) and Elizabeth Orpin, and British Legion standard bearers Betty Sim and Jim Chesson. ©KM Group Centre left: The Roll of Honour for 38 men who served in the First World War. '+' denotes those who lost their lives.; Centre middle: Aircraftman Harold James Coley's headstone in St Mary's Churchyard; Centre right: the Armstrong memorial window. Bottom left: Colonel Jack Francis (Charles) Armstrong's memorial; Bottom right: Colonel Armstrong's headstone.

## Chapter Eight – Some Ebony families

'Body' is a recurring family name in Ebony's history. The aforementioned William Body, who lost two sons – Edward and Arthur – in the First World War, was one of the parish's most enterprising and, no doubt, wealthiest entrepreneurs.

He became a farmer, grazier, fruit grower and agricultural seed grower at Gibbet Farm (aka Gibbet Oak Farm and 'The Gibbet') and was a member of one of three Body families, all descendants of John and Sarah (née Pinyon) Body of Wittersham, that owned farms and mills in south-west Kent and East Sussex.

The farm is named after the gibbet that was a gruesome local landmark, 200 feet above sea level, overlooking Shirley Moor and visible from several miles away to the south and east. Here, the bodies of thieves and murders hanged at Gallows Green, Tenterden, were left to rot. There were many public hangings in Tenterden but in general Ebony's parishioners appear to have been a law-abiding lot; only two local murders are recorded in Mark Mullins's book *Old Ashford Borough Murders* (Plough and Circuit, 1999).

At an inquest held at Ebony on the 5 June 1622 on Richard Sharnoll, a local labourer, it was reported that George Groombridge, a blacksmith from Ebony, struck Sharnoll on the head with a hammer, inflicting fatal injuries. At Maidstone Assizes, Groombridge was found guilty of 'felonious killing' but his sentence is unknown. In October 1627, Nicholas Burrell, a husbandman from Ebony, was hanged for the murder of John French.

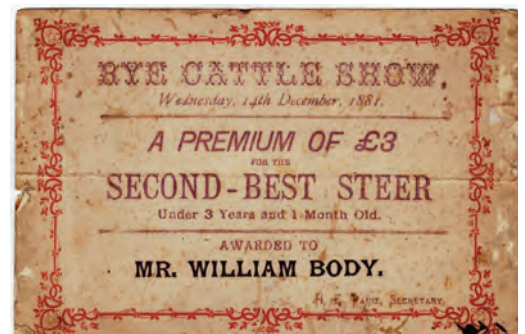
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Born in 1848, William Body inherited his father Thomas's farm at The Hall, Wittersham, in 1868 and in 1873 married Sarah Upton Judge of Benenden. Over a period of 14 years, William and Sarah had a total of 13 children (seven sons and six daughters); the eldest, William Stephen, was born in 1874, the youngest, Margery, in 1888. In 1884, when their family was almost complete, they all moved from Wittersham to Dunstall Farm, Shoreham, so that the sons could be educated at the Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, five miles away in Sevenoaks, to which they travelled daily by pony-and-trap.

In 1897 the family moved to Ebony, where William prospered, grazing hundreds of acres on and near Romney Marsh and travelling to New York, New Zealand and Switzerland to study agriculture. The family's first home after moving from Shoreham was a large old house at Gibbet Farm that eventually became too expensive to maintain, so in about 1921 William and Sarah moved into a flat-roofed bungalow built for them nearby. This was one of a several new buildings at 'The Gibbet' that included a large L-shaped block, built on the site of two oast-houses, that contained fruit and corn stores, bottling rooms and stables at ground level. On the top floor there was a flat for William and Sarah's second son Thomas, and a room in which their second daughter Dorothy ran the Sunday School mentioned in Chapter Seven.

Unmarried, Dorothy lived with her parents until they died and then moved in with her sister Edith and her husband Harry Robins, Town Clerk of Petersfield. When Harry died, Edith bought Petersgate in Appledore Road, Tenterden, where she and Dorothy made a home for Thomas, who died unmarried on 7 December 1961, aged 85. The sisters donated a plot of land at the bottom of the garden at Petersgate to build Shrubcote Hall, a community centre.

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Modest success for William Body at the Rye Cattle Show in 1881. ©Primrose Wyborn



Dorothy Body (left) and Edith Robins and visiting Shrubcote Hall shortly before it opened in 1956. ©Tenterden and District History Society

William and Sarah Body (fourth and fifth from left, centre row) with all their seven sons, six daughters and sundry spouses and grandchildren at 'The Gibbet' on 2 March 1907, in the shade of the gibbet oak. Back row, from the left: Arthur, Charles, Mildred, Edward, Hilda, Thomas, William Stephen and Geoffrey Body. Centre, seated: Edith ('Queenie') Body; Harold James Body with his wife Olive (née Hart); William and Sarah; and Maggie (aka Margaret, née Finn), wife of William Stephen Body. Front: Dorothy Body; Richard ('Dick') and Joyce ('Biddy'), children of Harold and Olive; Margery Body; Margaret, daughter of William Stephen and 'Maggie'; and Bertha Body. This was the last reunion of the entire family: Margery died of typhoid in 1909 during a visit to Switzerland. ©Primrose Wyborn



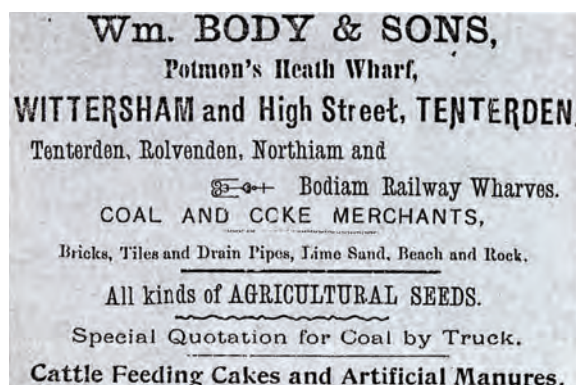
•Hilda, a keen photographer, died of tuberculosis in 1927. Bertha married a Canadian soldier (see Chapter Seven). Mildred married Trevor Perrott, an oil engineer, with whom she lived in the Russian oilfields until the 1917 Revolution, when she and their baby daughter Vera fled penniless to England on a coal boat; Trevor was unable to escape until 1922. In the Second World War, Mildred and Trevor, who now also had a son, Peter, were living in the Romanian oilfields at Ploiești during the German invasion of Romania. The family narrowly escaped to Egypt, Peter joined the Guards, and was killed during the Allied invasion of Italy.

William Body, who earned a place in the annals of agriculture for pioneering the cultivation of wild white clover, died in 1933. By then he had helped most of his five surviving sons succeed in various agricultural and related businesses.

After being discharged from the Army in April 1916, after five years' service, his youngest son Geoffrey married Frances Emma Stonham in 1920 and ran Barrack Farm, Reading Street and Wey Street Farm, Ruckinge.

William and Sarah's third son, Harold, who married Olive May Hart in 1901, ran several farms on and near Romney Marsh, including Goldenhurst, a 126-acre farm and farmhouse at Aldington. Noel Coward rented this property in 1926 and in 1927 bought it from Harold for £500, living there until 1956. Despite losing his left eye in a shooting accident while a schoolboy, Harold served in the East Kent Yeomanry.

William and Sarah's two eldest sons, William Stephen (who married Maggie Finn in 1902) and Charles (who married May Noakes in 1915), were partners with their father in a firm that traded in all manner of materials and commodities from wharfs and railway yards, as a 1904 advertisement (right) shows. At this time, barges (two of which belonged to the Body family) could still navigate along part of the Rother Valley, between Rye and Smallhythe (see Chapter Three). More opportunities for commerce were created when the Rother Valley Light Railway started operating between Tenterden and Robertsbridge in 1900 and, in 1905 (now renamed the Kent and East Sussex Railway), opened a line to Headcorn on the South Eastern Railway, connecting with services to the Channel ports and London, and the national railway network.



Members of the Body family and relations gather round a fire, billy-cans at the ready for a 'brew-up,' while enjoying a picnic at Dungeness in 1906. From the left: Sarah Body, ? Finn, Maggie Body with baby, Dorothy Jane Body, Bertha Lansdell Body and other Finn relatives. ©Edward Carpenter



Camouflage

I am 29 years old  
 My present kind owner first rode me in France in 1915  
 I was later attached to the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade of Heavy Artillery, Belle Chappelle  
 I was wounded on the Somme (1916) but otherwise was near sick nor  
 lame during my War Service.  
 I was "bought out" to be the happy pensioner of Captain T.H. Body, (M.C., D.F.C.)  
 I was paraded in great honour — with 23 other War Veterans  
 — at the International Horse Show, Olympia, 1934  
 My master hunts regularly. He describes me as "bold & fast".  
 Since the War I have won 11 Hunt Races.  
 Please send some money notes, cheques or coins — on my account for the R. Veterinary Hospital  
 250,000,000 Farthings Fund. Thank you.

22-9-58  
 Petergate  
 Appledore Rd  
 Lamberden

Dear Mrs Paterson

Here is Camouflage —  
 This photograph was taken at "The Paddock"  
 Hothfield just before he went to Olympia  
 for "The Parade of Veteran War Horses" in  
 June 1934. I think he was about 30 yrs old  
 then. I went to Olympia to see the Parade  
 I think he looked as well as any of them.  
 I hope you will soon get some news as  
 to when you go to Pembury. Kind regards  
 to you both.  
 Yours sincerely  
 T.H. Body

Clockwise from top left: (1) Captain Thomas Body riding 'Camouflage' at Hothfield in 1934. (2) Thomas and 'Camouflage' (farthest from camera) at a 'point-to-point'. (3) letter from Thomas to a friend. (4) an appeal for donations to the Royal Veterinary College Hospital.  
 ©Primrose Wyborn

## Captain Body and his faithful war-horse, 'Camouflage'

William Body bought a team of Russian ponies so that his sons could learn to ride; once they were proficient they enthusiastically 'followed the hunt' while living at Shoreham and later at Ebony.

Arthur, Charles, Geoffrey and Thomas had their own horses. During the summer Thomas took on 'locum' work to be able to afford to hunt with the Mid-Kent Staghounds and the Ashford Valley Hunt in the winter.

After serving as an Army doctor throughout the First World War (as related in Chapter Seven) he bought his charger, 'Camouflage,' for £25; together they went hunting around south Kent and also won 11 local point-to-point races.

In June 1934 Thomas took 'Camouflage,' who by now had been his faithful steed for nearly 20 years, to the first post-First World War International Horse Show at London's Olympia exhibition centre, to take part in a parade of 24 veteran war-horses. Later, at other events, he went on show to support the Royal Veterinary College Hospital's '250 Million Farthings Fund'.

## The Packhams

Gibbet Farm's longest-serving employee was Edward John Packham, who spent his entire working life as a farm-hand and stockman on William Body's farms.

Edward and his wife Harriet Esther (née Bean) lived at Little Gibbet, a cottage that stood beside the pond where Pinecove Nursery is today. Edward previously worked on William's farms at Wittersham and then, as a young married man, at Shoreham, where the first of his seven children – Elsie, Florence and Alfred – were born.



Above: Cyril Packham. Centre: 57th Bn, Machine Gun Corps. Right: Albert Packham. ©Richard Diedo

When, after 11 years at Shoreham, William Body moved to Gibbet Farm, Edward, now 35, went with him and soon afterwards, on 27 September 1898, Cyril was born. He was the first of the 'Ebony Packhams' and in the next six years three siblings followed – twins Albert and Irene, and Reginald.

Alfred, Cyril's elder brother, served with The Buffs (East Kent Regiment) in India and the Middle East in the First World War; Cyril followed him into the regiment, enlisting when he was under age. Albert joined the regiment after the war ended.

Packham family historian Richard Diedo (Cyril's great-grandson), writes: 'My photo (above) shows him with one "good conduct" stripe, indicating he had served two years with an unblemished record, and a brass "crossed flags" badge on his left forearm, signifying that he was a trained signaller.

'When old enough to serve overseas he was transferred to the newly-formed Machine Gun Corps. In my picture of the 57th Battalion and its commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel John Frederic Roundel Hope, Cyril is in the middle row, fourth from left. This is the only known photo of this battalion.

'My mother Christine (Cyril's grand-daughter) recalls that he always had a cough, caused when he was gassed in the trenches. After the war he married Mary ("Polly") Beach. They settled in Tenterden where they raised their family – Victor, Dennis, Patrick and Derek.

'Cyril worked on the Kent and East Sussex Railway all his life, latterly as a guard. He died in 1975 and is fondly remembered on the railway to this day. Photos of him are held in the K&ESR archives and he has been mentioned in several editions of the volunteers' magazine.

'He had a lucrative sideline cutting his fellow railway workers' hair (in company time!) and was renowned for walking along the running-board outside the carriages to lean in through the windows and collect tickets, rather than wait for the train to stop!

'He was a sergeant in the railway's Home Guard during the Second World War. Alfred served in India and the Middle East in the First World War.'



Above: Dennis Packham.  
©Richard Diedo



'Dennis, Cyril and Mary's son, was born in Tenterden and lived there all his life, leaving home only twice: the first time to serve in the Royal Navy during the Second World War, and lastly for a family holiday in Cornwall shortly before he died in 1968.

'Dennis served on the C-class destroyer HMS Cavalier's first commission, in operations off Norway and in the Indian Ocean and Middle East. He was posthumously awarded the Arctic Star, the campaign medal belatedly bestowed in 2012 on those who served on 'convoys north of the Arctic Circle. We are able to visit Cavalier in Chatham Historic Dockyard'.

## Memories of the Packhams of Ebony



*Clockwise from top left: (1) Cyril Packham (left) and his brother Alfred at Little Gibbet. (2) Cyril Packham at Little Gibbet. (3) The Packham family at Little Gibbet in the early 1920s; members identified are Harriet (front row, far right), her daughter Florence (back row, third from left) and Mary, Cyril Packham's wife (back row, far left). (4) Cyril Packham (fourth from left) with Kent and East Sussex Railway colleagues in April 1953; also in the group are, from the left, Bert Sharp, Douglas Vidler (guard), Arthur Harris (porter), Nelson Wood (driver), Jack Head (driver), Peter Vidler (fireman), Bob Blair (fireman) and Fred Hazel (driver); © Colonel Stephens Railway Museum. (5) Florence Packham, Cyril's sister, at Little Gibbet. (6) Edward John Packham (1862-1950).*



Above left: Leigh Green Football Club in the 1920s. Players identified are, from the left, back row: (1) Percy Weller, (2) Percy Holdstock, (3)? Hickmott, (4) Fred Goldsmith, (6) Reginald Packham, (7) Alfred Packham. Front row: (1) C (?) Homewood, (2) Jerry Mannering, (5) Cyril Packham, (6) Eli Homewood, (7) Bill Taylor. Foreground: Sam Brotherwood (team mascot). The team's ground was opposite Leigh Green Industrial Estate; its changing room was in Bill Pearson's cottage, seen in the background.

Above right: Albert Packham and Ella May Williams on their wedding day.



Left: Leigh Green Cricket Club in the 1950s. Back row, left to right: unidentified umpire, ? Gladish, David Packham, R Prior, J Jary (scorer), S Seager, E R Page. Front row: A Uden, W Maskell, S G Jary, Reg Packham (David's father), Dennis Packham, P Hall. The team's home ground was at Setts Wood Farm, owned by R Prior.



Above left: Alfred and Mabel (née Holdstock) Packham on their wedding day. Reginald, Alfred's youngest brother, on left. Centre: Cyril and Mary ('Polly') Packham with their eldest son Victor, at Little Gibbet, c. 1922. Above right: The last resting place, at St Mary's, Reading Street, of Edward John Packham and Harriet Esther Packham, forebears of the Packhams of Ebony.

## The Wellers

Many generations of the Weller family lived in Ebony, from the mid-18th century until about 1880; indeed, at one time there were so many Wellers living there that it was jokingly referred to as 'Wellertown.' Some of their graves can be found on Chapel Bank and at 'new' St Mary's. The Wellers are the only family with graves in both churchyards.

In 1861 Stephen Weller (32) and his wife Alice (29) and their sons George (5) and Stephen (3) were living in Reading Street; Stephen was working as a farm labourer. He and Alice had a son, Harry, in 1863, and a daughter, Alice, in 1867; both of these children predeceased their parents.

Stephen snr died in 1902, leaving £493 to Alice (about £55,000 in today's money).

By 1901, Stephen Weller jnr had married Susannah Mercer (36) and they were bringing up their two sons and six daughters at Barrack Farm. Their eldest child, Rhoda, was 13; Thomas, their youngest, was a year old. Rhoda was born on 3 October 1887 and when she was six weeks old she was one of more than 8,000 children in the Tenterden district who were vaccinated for smallpox between July 1871 and November 1899.

In April 1888 Rhoda's doctor, Jesse H Newington, reported that Rhoda's vaccination had been 'successful'.

In 1911 Stephen Weller, by now a widower and working as a shepherd, was raising daughters Lily (18), Laura (13) and Ada (9) and sons Harry (16), Tom (11) and Percy (7) at an address in Reading Street. Stephen, St Mary Church's sexton, died in 1924, leaving effects worth £249 (about £27,000 in today's money).

Ada died, unmarried, in 1975. She was buried in her parents' grave on Chapel Bank and was the last Weller to be interred there. The last Weller funeral at St Mary's was that of Phyllis Irene Weller in 2001.



*A delightful picture from the 1920s, showing a bride wearing a typical wedding dress of that period, and the wedding party in their 'Sunday bests'. The occasion was the marriage at Ebony on 16 September 1925 of Bertha Weller, aged 20, daughter of farmer Frederick Weller and Amy Weller (née Goodhew) of Brockett Farm, Reading Street, to George Millen. Frederick and Amy are standing on the left. ©David Weller*

## The Paines

The Paine family became well-known in Ebony when George Thomas Paine and his wife Ann (née King) took over the 'Ewe and Lamb' (later known as the 'White Hart and Lamb') in about 1841. The pub was the focal point of Reading Street's social life in an age when most of its menfolk laboured all day in fields and farmyards, working up raging thirsts that could be slaked only by pints of 'mild,' a mildly-hopped and malt-flavoured ale for which Kent's breweries were once famous.

George and Ann (pictured right) were married at 'old' St Mary's (described as 'the Chapel of Ebony' on their marriage certificate) on 20 April 1840. It was one of the last weddings to be held there.

They had six children (Mary, Henry, Ann, Herbert, Emily and George Thomas) and died in 1877 and 1879 respectively.



Above: George and Ann's second son, Herbert, a grazier, shepherd and later a farm bailiff, married Caroline Smeed at St Mary's in 1872 and lived in Reading Street. They are pictured with three of their seven children: Thomas, Emily and George Charles.

George and Ann's first daughter, Mary, married William Hearsfield at St Mary's in 1865. Their marriage was one of the most remarkable in the history of Ebony. William was 22 (three years younger than Mary) and had only recently returned to his family's farm at Fairfield on Romney Marsh, after serving as a soldier of fortune with Abraham Lincoln's Union Army in the American Civil War.

He sailed to America in 1861 on a windjammer, taking with him a chest containing all his belongings. He lost all of them when he was shipwrecked on the approaches to New York Harbour. After surviving the ordeal he was given shelter by a farmer whose sons belonged to 'The Wide Awakes,' supporters of the Republican Party during the 1860 presidential election.

William joined them, transferring to the Illinois Cavalry as a dispatch rider when the war began. He narrowly escaped captivity and death on several occasions. After three years he returned to Fairfield to work on the family farm and marry Mary. From 1884 until he died 1917 they ran a dairy business in Erith.

Several years after the Civil War, William learned that he could claim an American Army pension. His first payment was a 20 dollar piece, minted in 1860. When he died in 1917 his pension was transferred to Mary, who died in 1926.



Left: George Charles on his pony, Emily, Caroline, and a neighbour at the Paines's cottage. George Charles was the last member of the Paine family to be born in Ebony. He died while serving with the Army in the First World War (see Chapter Seven). ©Derek Paine

Right: Caroline, daughter of Herbert and Caroline (née Smeed) with her husband, Charles Fryer, a blacksmith. They were married at St Mary's in 1900. ©Derek Paine



*Left: Mary Hearsfield (née Paine); Centre: William Hearsfield; Right: Ann Mitchell with her baby son, Harry. All pictures © Derek Paine*

Ann, second daughter of George and Ann, married John Mitchell at St Mary's in 1871. Tragically, she died five years later at the age of 32, predeceasing her parents. She is pictured above with her baby son, Harry.

The children of George and Ann's sons comprised the last generation of the Paines of Ebony; the family gradually dispersed to other areas of Kent. Pictured below are three of George and Ann's grandsons – George Thomas Paine, William Paine and Arthur Henry Paine. They were all born in Reading Street to Henry Paine and Jane (née Hart) a few years before the family moved to Great Mongeham, near Deal.



*Above left: George Thomas Paine, born in 1871, delivering The People newspaper. Founded in 1881 it was, and is still, 'feisty, funny and truly independent' and was, along with the News of the World, one of the first Sunday newspapers to achieve mass circulation, from cottages to vicarages – although there were some avid readers who denied being among its followers! ©Derek Paine*

*Above centre: William Paine, born in 1873. An employee of Martin Mill Waterworks, he died of shock and gunshot wounds in 1942. His assailant was convicted of manslaughter. ©Derek Paine*

*Above right: Arthur Henry Paine, one of the last Paines to be born in Ebony. His family moved to Great Mongeham in about 1881, when he was seven. ©Derek Paine*

## Chapter Nine – Anniversaries, events and pilgrimages

On 13 July 1958 the one hundredth anniversary of the rebuilding of St Mary's in Reading Street was celebrated at the first confirmation service in the church's history, conducted by the Rt Rev. Lewis Evans, Bishop of Dover, and Rev. Bouverie Brine, vicar of Stone and Ebony. On 28 July 1968 the church held its first Gift Day Service, raising £138.



Above left: Rt Rev. Lewis Evans and Rev. Bouverie Brine with churchwardens Tom Weller and Bob Gillett (far right) and confirmation candidates Violet Bond, Christopher Brown, Jim Gillett, Ann Whitehead, William Bond, Audrey Curteis, David Horn, Brian Whitehead, Mary Wood, Charles Bridger, Jack Gillett, Alfred Tubb and Elizabeth Whitehead. ©Ebony Church Archive



Above right: pictured arriving for the Gift Day Service are Colonel Armstrong (centre) with the Ven. Tom Pritchard, Archdeacon of Maidstone (left) and Rev. John Bouverie-Brine (vicar of Stone and Ebony), accompanied by Tenterden Town Council officers and councillors and the Mayor (Councillor Reuben Collison). ©Ebony Church Archive

On 16 November 2008 the 150th anniversary of the consecration of the church was celebrated at a service led by the vicar, Rev. Stella Halmshaw and the Archdeacon of Maidstone, the Ven. Philip Down. Sir Donald Sinden read one of the lessons.

In 1981 Rev. Anthony Towse left Ebony to take up other appointments. He is pictured below left receiving a watercolour painting of a local landscape, a farewell present from his parishioners. With him are Mabel Armstrong, her daughter Gillian, John Doyle (who painted the picture) and Colonel Armstrong (©Ebony Church Archive).

In May 2015 Joyce Bates celebrated 40 years as a churchwarden at St Mary's. She is pictured below receiving a presentation from the vicar, Rev. Judy Darkins (©Ebony Church Archive)



## Annual pilgrimages

A pilgrimage to the site of old St Mary's Church on Chapel Bank took place in September 1958, one hundred years after it was removed to Reading Street. Now an annual event, the pilgrimages have been led by, among others, the Ven. Michael Nott, Archdeacon of Maidstone, in 1964; Rev. Raymond Heath, vicar of Rolvenden (1970); Sir Donald Sinden (1980 and 1996); Archbishop George Carey (1998) and Archbishop Rowan Williams (2008). The pilgrimages are usually held on the first Sunday in September, departing from St Mary's Church at 3pm.

The 1979 pilgrimage attracted an attendance of 170. This was the highest since 1961, probably because of the wide public interest that had only recently been created when the first archaeological excavations revealed the foundations of the medieval church. Cecily Lebon gave a talk on Ebony's history.

In 1980 Sir Donald read Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* to a congregation of 180; prayers were led by Rev. Anthony Towse, vicar of Appledore and Ebony.

In 1981 Anthony Towse led his thirteenth pilgrimage, shortly before taking over other local parishes and becoming Rural Dean for the South Lympe Deanery.

In 1989 Oxney Brass Band accompanied the hymns during the pilgrims' service for the first time.

In 1996 the pilgrimage was preceded by a service at St Mary's at which Sir Donald Sinden read the first lesson. Later Rev. David Blindon, vicar of Wittersham, led an open-air service on Chapel Bank, with organ music recorded at St Mildred's, Tenterden.

Among the congregation was a Devon family with six generations of Ebony ancestors. After the service the ashes of two local residents were interred in the churchyard.

The Ven. Joanne Kelly-Moore, Archdeacon of Canterbury, led the 2017 pilgrimage.



Above left: Rev. Raymond Heath officiating at the pilgrimage service in 1970. ©Ebony Church Archive; Centre: Sir Donald Sinden and Rev. Anthony Towse leading pilgrims to Chapel Bank in 1980; Above right: Rev. Anthony Towse conducting the pilgrimage service in 1981. ©Ebony Church Archive



Above left: a windswept Archbishop Carey prepares to conduct the pilgrims' service in 1998. Above right: report of the 2008 pilgrimage led by Archbishop Williams. ©KM Group



The 1973 pilgrimage was an even more special occasion than previous events. Attracting a then-record attendance of 130, it was led by Sir John Winnifrith, who planted a tree on the site of the old church and gave the following talk, entitled:

***'Remember the former things of old'***  
***Isaiah Chapter 46 Verse 6***

'This island of Ebony on which we are standing today has no house, no home on it, no-one lives here and only this desolate churchyard marks the site of its ancient church. Yet for over a thousand years men and women lived here, brought up their families here, and worshipped in their parish church, which we know stood here for at least 800 years, before it was removed to Reading Street in 1858.

'Our Saxon, more accurately Jutish, forebears settled on this island soon after they came to Kent and called it Ebbeny – in their language "Ebbe's isle". Some think that Ebbe was Saint Ebbe of Northumbria. This is possible, not proven. What, of course, is a fact, is that this was then a real island. If you had looked down from this spot you would have seen how the island was surrounded by a great sea creek. Down it, even at low tide, the Rother filled the channel. At high tide, the sea flooded in from Romney and Rye, and swirled all over the levels. The island stood out in the middle of a great inland sea.

'What is also a fact is that in 832 Aethelwulf, King of Kent, gave Ebbeny as an endowment to the monks of Canterbury Cathedral. They held it as their manor till Henry VIII broke up the monasteries. For all of this period of 700 years the whole life of the people of Ebony was regulated by the manor. They could have served worse masters. The monks would see that they did not starve, and it was the monks who most certainly built the first church on this spot, on the site of a holy well. This church, we know, was there before the Norman invasion. Life was hard. The perils and dangers of this night could include the arrival of Danish longships rowing up the creek. They did in King Alfred's reign. The people of Ebony needed, and got, all the comforts of the Christian faith. What a comfort the sound of the bells must have been, to the fog-bound mariner, or the marshman finding his way home over the levels.

'The Norman invasion made little difference to life on Ebony. The monks continued to farm the land, and spring-barley off the hill we have just climbed was finding its way, probably by water, to the monks' great granary, at Canterbury, in the early 14th century. The seaway indeed was part of life here throughout medieval and Tudor times. Ships came up it to Smallhythe and Newenden from the coastal ports and from France and you could watch their passage from this spot.

'In the 15th and 16th centuries one big change came to Ebony. The monks stopped farming the land themselves and let it out to tenants. So you got well-to-do yeomen in the parish as well as the labourers, and we know their names.

'We also know the names of three labourers of Ebony, who in 1450 joined the great rising against government: Northland, William Moseden and William Knott should be remembered today.

'The people of Ebony loved their church on the island. The old Saxon church had been replaced in the middle ages. It was quite a bit bigger than the church which was standing here in 1858 and was so faithfully rebuilt at Reading Street. You must picture it here with, however, a bell tower big enough to hold its four bells and its Sanctus bell, or tinkler as we call it at Appledore. The chancel had a lead roof, the rest of the roof was shingled. The Holy Well was still there and there was a noted stone crucifix, part of which survived until quite recently. And the graveyard then, as now, was surrounded by a wooden fence.

'Inside, the church was a blaze of colour. A light burned before the statue of St Mary, the patron saint. There was a shrine of St Thomas and statues of St Peter, St Stephen and St Catherine. All had lights burning before them as did the Holy Well. All these works were supported by gifts and legacies from parishioners. These people were prosperous at this time. Sea transport up and down the creek ensured a good market for the wood and coal and handicrafts of Ebony.

'By the 16th century people were living more and more on the mainland, particularly at Reading Street, and a chapel of the Holy Cross was established there at this time. It disappeared, almost certainly during the Reformation.



'The Reformation struck Ebony in Edward VI's reign and Cranmer's agents removed the stone altar, the shrines and the lights, and pillaged the bells and the great store of church ornaments and furniture which showed how well the church was cared for at this time.

'The elements struck at the same time, lightning and tempest. The chancel was open to the sky, the vicarage used for cattle, the one surviving bell was cracked. But the parishioners still loved their church. They did the essential work of reroofing and got leave to postpone the expenditure of getting in the new and less lovely paraphernalia of the Reformation, the Homilies, the Paraphrases of Erasmus, even the Book of Common Prayer. As late as 1610 they had not yet got the Ten Commandments or, even more essential to salvation, the Tables of Affinities, which forbid us to yield to the temptations of marrying our grandparents.

'By this time there was still a sizeable population - 24 houses and 45 communicants in 1569. But decay was setting in amongst the people. Deaths greatly exceeded births and by 1700 there were only 17 householders. But they stuck to their church and the big farmers, now holding their land from the new absentee Lord of the Manor, to whom Henry VIII had sold the Canterbury properties as churchwarden, had the main responsibility. The Ramsdens who arrived in the 1680s, and the Poiles about a hundred years later, deserve honourable mention.

'But the days of the old church here were now numbered. The Rother had altered its course during the 14th century and no longer scoured the channel that kept Ebony an island. But the tide still flowed in from Rye up to 1800. Then the threat of French invasion, when the population of Ebony was temporarily swollen by the troops housed at Barrack Farm, finally cut off the tide and only the sewer divided the island from Reading Street. The ill-drained land was unhealthy and by 1814 there were only four or five houses on this island and about ten at Reading Street. By 1858 the decision was taken and the task of removing the remains of the church from here to Reading Street had been accomplished.

'So much for the former things of old. The one outstanding thought that they impress on me is the continuing love of the parishioners for their church. Admittedly some of them were well-to-do men but most of them had a bare subsistence and in the 18th and 19th centuries starvation and poverty were their lot. And always there was disease. But they stuck to their church. They stuck to it long after the centre of the parish had moved to the mainland.

'The other thought which the records leave with me is the devotion and the dedication of the clergy. For most, especially in the 18th century, the vicars of Appledore rarely came to Appledore and still less to Ebony, but the curates who took the services were constant in their care for their parishioners - visited them in their sickness and themselves died of their diseases.

'And now to finish with two thoughts for the present clergy and parishioners. To them I think we should all give unstinted praise. And the highest praise is that they have not failed those who were here before them in the last thousand years. The church at Reading Street is beautifully cared for, the church dues are all paid, and the services are regularly held. They deserve not only our praise but all the help they can get, beyond the bounds of their small parish. And I hope that they and their successors will continue in this good work and find it a help to remember the former things of old which can be such an inspiration to them'.

- Sir Alfred John Digby Winnifrith CB KCB was born at Ightham and educated at Westminster School and Christ Church, Oxford. He joined the Board of Trade in 1932, the Treasury in 1934, and was Assistant Secretary to the War Cabinet Office and Civil Service Combined Operations HQ during the Second World War. In 1957 he was appointed Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. After retiring in 1967 he lived in Appledore and became an active member of the Kent Archaeological Society, for whom he wrote the aforementioned definitive history of St Mary's, Ebony. He was a Trustee of the British Museum from 1967 to 1972, Director General of the National Trust (1968-1970), a member of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (1970-1973), a member of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (1970-1973) and of the Hops Marketing Board (1970-1978).



Above: Sir John Winnifrith planting an oak tree on Chapel Bank in 1973. © Kentish Express

## Chapter Ten – Family histories on Chapel Bank

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The Poile and Ramsden families who deserved 'honourable mention' in Sir John Winnifrith's talk at the 1973 pilgrimage have graves on Chapel Bank. Some of their memorial inscriptions are now barely legible but thanks to Leland L Duncan's survey for the Kent Archaeological Society in 1919 we know that those for the Ramsdens read as follows:

*'Here lieth the Body of Stephen RAMSDEN of Ebony, Yeoman, married Jane daughter of Richard GILES of Pluckly, Clothier, by whom he had 5 children. He died October the 10th 1712, aged 54 years. Jane his daughter was buried September 12th 1712 aged 16 years. Catharine October 12th 1710 aged 12 years. Thos: his son was buried March 29th 1714 aged 2 years. Tho: March 1714 aged 4 months. 3 sons survived him viz John Stephen and Giles and one daughter, Elizabeth'*

and

*'John RAMSDEN Gentleman late of this Parish. Died 2 December 1762 aged 67 years and 4 months. He married Elizabeth daughter of William MURRAY of Tenterden by whom he had issue 4 children, John, Stephen, Elizabeth and William. Elizabeth died 18 November 1740 aged 6 years and 5 weeks and he is interred in the parish of St Alphage in Canterbury' [In the 19th century the Ramsden family owned a house and 26 plots of land in Ebony.]*



Above left: 'In memory of Jane, wife of Henry Poile of this parish who died 12 May 1789 aged 53 years. Left issue Henry, Jane, James, John-Seers, Elizabeth, Judith and Charles' [In the mid-19th century the Poile family owned and occupied High House Farm and 17 plots of farmland, including hop-gardens, in Ebony].

Centre: 'Harry, 3rd son of Stephen and Alice Weller of Tenterden, died 24 June 1887 aged 24 and Alice Weller, died 19 February 1890 aged 23' [Close to this grave is that of Stephen Weller, Harry and Alice's father, who died on 1 April 1902, aged 73.]

Above right: Memorial to Rhoda Selmes (née Weller), daughter of Stephen and Susannah Weller, erected by her children near other Weller family graves.



Above left: 'George Thomas Paine died 28 November 1877 aged 66. Left surviving Ann his wife and 5 children viz: Mary, Henry, Herbert, Emily and George Thomas. Also Ann his wife died 6 April 1879 aged 65' ©Emma Richardson [See pages 12 and 21]

Centre: The grave of William Catt, Ebony's parish clerk and sub-postmaster, and his wife Philadelphia Catt. ©Emma Richardson [See pages 13 and 20]

Above right: Headstone in memory of Robert Walker, who died on 19 June 1842 aged 44, his wife Sarah, who died on 22 March 1881, and their son William who died four months later, aged 41. Sarah outlived Robert by nearly 40 years and had to eke out an existence as a laundress to support her children, occasionally receiving help from the church. ©Emma Richardson

## Mysteries unsolved, questions unanswered

Thirty years after the archaeologists backfilled their excavations, Chapel Bank still conceals many mysteries.

- Why is the churchyard boundary hexagonal – much more difficult to set-out than a circle, square or rectangle?
- Where were the village's 24 houses, known to have been the homes of 45 of St Mary's communicants in 1569. The footings of one of them may have been found in 1986. Have the foundations of the others been destroyed by centuries of ploughing? Could they be revealed by a geophysical survey?
- Where, precisely, were Reading Street Barracks? At Barrack Farm or farther south, at Old Barrack Farm? Field walks, supported by metal detectorists, would probably result in the discovery of pieces of military hardware – badges, bullets, buttons, horseshoes, nails, utensils – that would establish which of these 'barrack' farms was the site.
- Where are the Army graves? No plan has survived to show the location of individual graves; only the ones marked by legible headstones bear witness today to who lies below. If the soldiers were allocated an exclusive plot in the graveyard their coffins should be detectable by depth-gauges or by a resistivity survey.

Regardless of this, it would be right and proper to erect a memorial, on Chapel Bank or at St Mary's, Reading Street, to honour these forgotten soldiers, wives and children, who succumbed to marsh fever while stationed in this remote corner of Kent when 'Old Boney' threatened to invade our shores.



*Somewhere here amidst the marked graves of Ebony's families are the remains of forgotten soldiers, wives and children of Reading Street Barracks.*

## Appendix 1

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### Transcriptions from parish registers of baptisms, marriages and burials at St Mary's Church, Chapel Bank, Ebony and St Mildred's Church, Tenterden, of Army personnel based at Reading Street Barracks.

#### Baptisms at St Mary's

##### 1807

April 12. Elizabeth, daughter of John and Ann Doyle, 54th Regiment of Foot. Born March 15 1807.

##### 1808

February 28. Leonard, son of Edward and Jane Inckley, 2nd Royal Surrey. Born February 8.

February 28. John Campin, son of John and Hannah Campin, 2nd Royal Surrey. Born February 8.

April 17. William, son of Samuel and Ann Evans, 2nd Royal Surrey. Born April 2.

July 31. Frances Harris, daughter of Peter and Sarah Dart, Serjeant of the 2nd Royal Surrey. Born July 17.

July 31. Margaret, daughter of William and Elizabeth Ward, Corporal of the 2nd Royal Surrey. Born July 17.

August 21. Charlotte, daughter of George Thomas and Mary Ann Gardiner, Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey. Born July 17.

September 4. Harris, daughter of Joseph and Mary Peyton, Serjeant Major of the 2nd Royal Surrey. Born August 19

##### 1809

February 12. William, son of William and Susanna Johnson, Serjeant of the 2nd Royal Surrey. Born January 22.

February 12. Sarah and Ann (twins), daughters of Joseph and Sarah Spreadborough, private of the 2nd Royal Surrey. Born February 5.

February 19. Harriet, daughter of Jonathan and Rebecca Holey, Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey. Born January 22.

March 19. Mary Ann, daughter of William and Harriet Crips, Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey.

April 30. Thomas, son of William and Martha Bustard, Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey. Born April 19

April 30. Elizabeth, daughter of William and Martha Bustard, Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey. Born December 15, 1906.

August 20. Hugh, son of Lewis and Jane Lewis, Private of the Montgomery Militia. Born August 7.

#### Baptisms at St Mildred's

##### 1797

November 17. Ann, daughter of Henry and Mary Humphries, Montgomeryshire Militia.

##### 1798

November 11. Martha, daughter of John and Mary Shreede, 3rd Norfolk Regiment, 1799

##### 1799

April 14. John, son of William and Martha Briggs, 3rd Norfolk Regiment. Born March 1.

April 14. Maria, daughter of Augustine and Elizabeth Beck, 3rd Norfolk Regiment. Born March 16.

April 14. Robert, son of Robert and Phillis Thompson, 3rd Norfolk Regiment. Born April 5.

##### 1800

March 2. Eliza Venn, daughter of James and Leah Bardsley, Derby Regiment.

##### 1802

10 January. Jemima, daughter of William and Elizabeth Thomas, Royal Waggon Corps.

16 April. Mary Ann, daughter of Robert and Mary Backhurst, 9th Regiment.  
15 May. Elizabeth, daughter of William and Jane Hart, Royal Waggon Corps. Born April 21.  
22 September. Elizabeth, daughter of James and Elizabeth Palmer, 52nd Regiment.

#### **1804**

March 23. Louisa, daughter of Joseph and Mary Peyton, 2nd Surrey Regiment.  
August 19. Charlotte, daughter of William and Jane Appleton, 57th Regiment.  
September 23. Eliza, daughter of Henry and Ann Box, 57th Regiment.

#### **1805**

January 6. George, son of William and Elizabeth Hurstwhite, Notts Regiment.  
February 17. George, son of John and Ann Wilson, Nottinghamshire Regiment.

#### **1806**

March 9. Margaret, daughter of James and Alice Cosgrove, 27th Regiment.  
March 23. John, son of James and Ann Down, 27th Regiment.

#### **1814**

November 6. James, son of Edward and Jane Murrell of Tenterden, soldier.

### **Marriage at St Mary's**

#### **1815**

September 1. John Little, Corporal, West Kent Militia, to Esther King, both of Ebony.

### **Marriages at St Mildred's**

#### **1800**

February 23. William Stringer, Herts Regiment, and Sarah Parsons.  
September 14. George Walter, West Kent Regiment, and Elizabeth Tombs.

#### **1801**

January 1. Edward Meades, West Kent Regiment, and Elizabeth Blunt.

#### **1802**

March 26. Joseph Hill, 9th Regiment of Foot, to Mary Pankhurst.  
December 3. Thomas GREEN, widower, 52nd Regiment, to Elizabeth Patterson, widow.

#### **1804**

April 29. William Watkins, 2nd Surrey Regiment, to Beck New.  
April 30. William Blainey, 2nd Surrey Regiment, to Rachel Mitchell.

#### **1805**

20 June. Edwin Townsend, 57th Regiment, to Rachel Munro.

## Burials at St Mary's

### 1804

September 8. John Duggan, a Serjeant in the 57th Regiment, 2nd Battalion, 37 years.

November 9. John Povey, a Private in the Notts Militia, 22 years.

November 25. John Wright, a Private in the Notts Militia, 22 years.

December 31. William Shintell, a Private in the Notts Militia, 24 years.

### 1805

February 17. Samuel Morley, a Private in the Notts Militia, 35 years.

March 20. Benjamin White, a Private in the 53rd Battalion, 19 years.

### 1806

May 13. Dorothy, wife of John Sweeney, 19 years.

May 15. Mary, daughter of Dorothy and John Sweeney, a Private of the 52nd Battalion of Foot, 14 days.

July 27. Catherine, daughter of Miles and Mary Rile, a Private of the 52nd Battalion of Foot, infant.

August 7, 1806. Hugh McBanaist (?), 52nd Regiment.

October 3. Thomas Culbertson, 2nd Battalion, 52nd Regiment.

### 1807

July 10. Thomas McVeay, son of Daniel and Mary McVeay, a Serjeant of the 52nd Regiment of Foot, 2 years.

August 10. William Gambal of the 43rd Regiment.

September 3. Andrew Daly of the 54th Regiment, 31 years.

September 30. Eleanor, daughter of William and Margaret Healey of the 89th Regiment, 3 years.

November 17. Sarah, daughter of Peter and Sarah Dart, Serjeant of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 18 months.

### 1808

February 24. Elizabeth, daughter of John and Margaret Wightman, a Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 3 years.

March 4. Thomas Wright, a Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 25 years.

March 10. James Faggoter, a Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 27 years.

March 14. William Hart, a Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 24 years.

March 21. John Holms, a Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 23 years.

April 11. John Farrow, a Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 44 years.

April 25. James Kelley, a Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 48 years.

April 26. John Collins, a Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 35 years.

April 26. John, son of Edward and Charlotte Macvitty of the 2nd Royal Surrey 18 months.

May 26. Charles Perry, a Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 16 years.

May 30. Edward Browne, a Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 27 years.

June 1. Hugh Owen, a Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 40 years.

June 5. John Pursonair, A Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 20 years.

June 12. Ann, wife of William Roberts, a Serjeant of the 2nd Royal, Surrey, 24 years.

June 16. Walter Andrews, a Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 32 years.

July 19. James Lavender, A Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 25 years.

## 1809

February 19. Richard Agent, a Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 21 years.

March 16. Richard Fletcher, a Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 27 years.

March 25. John White, a Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 38 years.

March 31. Jewel Adams, a Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 28 years.

April 3. Thomas Evans, a Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 24 years.

April 13. Edward Clarke, a Private of the 2nd Royal Surrey, 49 years.

May 8. John Brown, a Private of the 95th Rifle Regiment, 26 years.

June 16. Philip Hearn, a Private of the 50th Regiment, 2nd Battn, 31 years.

July 23. Nathaniel Whitmore, a Private of the 50th Regiment. 2nd Battn, 17 years.

October 2. John Greenwood, a Private of the 2nd West York militia, 20 years.

## Appendix 2 (compiled by Dr Jack Gillett)

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### Clergy of St Mary the Virgin, Ebony, since 1858

<b>1858</b>	William Walter Kirby
<b>1862</b>	Thomas Negus Bourke
<b>1868</b>	George Booth Perry
<b>1873</b>	William Alfred Hill
<b>1874</b>	Mark Dyer French
<b>1889</b>	Edward Bachelor Russell
<b>1895</b>	Thomas Harrison
<b>1900</b>	Clifford Berney Hall
<b>1908</b>	Arthur Octavius Scutt
<b>1928</b>	Herbert Newman
<b>1933</b>	Robert Charles Jessie White
<b>1938</b>	Ralph Davis
<b>1948</b>	John Cowell
<b>1952</b>	Walter Cole
<b>1955</b>	John Bouverie-Brine
<b>1969</b>	Anthony Norman Beresford Towse
<b>1982</b>	Christopher Robin Duncan
<b>1986</b>	Seymour David Harris
<b>1995</b>	David Bindon
<b>2000</b>	Malcolm Williams
<b>2001</b>	Stella Halmshaw
<b>2012</b>	Judy Darkins



## Appendix 3

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The Medieval Church of St Mary, Ebony, from *Archaeologia Cantiana* Vol. 100, 1984

Archaeologia Cantiana Vol. 100 1984

### THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH OF ST. MARY, EBONY, AND ITS SUCCESSORS

SIR JOHN WINNIFRITH

If you approach Ebony from Tenterden, you will go down the long hill which overlooks, and drops steadily into, the levels of the drained marshes. From the high ground you may pick out the small church which lies by the roadside further down. Beyond it, you will see rising from the marshes an isolated hill looking rather like a gigantic, stranded whale, except for a group of windswept trees on its crown. Today it goes by the name of Chapel Bank. No road now climbs its slopes; yet for centuries it was the spiritual and agricultural hub of the parish and was ruled by priories from east Kent. The graveyard, still there on its summit, is where the parish church once stood. It is reached through the hamlet of Reading Street and over the narrow, bridged dyke at the bottom of the Street where there used to be a wide tideway forming a barrier. In 1353, the Prior of Christ Church, Canterbury, made a grant of 'the use and charge of our ferry – *passagium nostrum* – at the river of Redyngg.'<sup>1</sup>

The first mention of Ebony in the records is in a charter of Aethelwulf of Wessex, then ruler of Kent. His charter, dated 832, gave the land of Ebony to the Priory of Christ Church, Canterbury. The priory could well have built the earliest church, but the first for which there is proof is that included in Domesday Monachorum. Although not completed until about 1100, this record partially discloses the pre-Norman organisation of minsters, each being a missionary centre sponsoring a group of tributary churches which were not yet fully fledged parish churches. The church at Ebony is listed among those centred at Charing. It could have been built well before that date by as much as two and a half centuries, but any

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Christ Church Canterbury*, II, 317 Transcript by Arthur Hussey in the National Trust's collection of Dr. William Cock's papers.

church built as a result of Aethelwulf's charter, if in existence before 892, would most probably have been destroyed in the Danish invasion in that year when the Danish fleet was based on Appledore. We surmise, but do not know for certain, that the original church was built on the same site as its immediate successors. Building materials, such as stone and timber, could easily be brought by water to the foot of the hill. The earliest stone church, whether Norman or pre-Conquest, may indeed have some remains among foundations of nave and chancel which have been exposed in excavation. Whatever the date of the first church at Ebony, its patronage was, by 1210, at the latest, transferred to Dover Priory which, in that year, appointed a priest to serve Appledore and the chapel (*cum capella*) of Ebony. The patronage of the two churches was to remain with Dover till its dissolution in November 1535. The monks of Canterbury kept the land given by Aethelwulf till they, in turn, were suppressed in 1540 and the manors passed to laymen.

For the later Middle Ages and beyond, records provide a wealth of evidence for the 'changes and chances' which struck Ebony's church fabric. Many facts are known about the structure of the church as it was in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: its contents, its despoliation in the reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth I, and its devastation by fire about 1560. We also know that out of its ruins was built a much smaller building which served the parish till 1858 when it was taken down, stone by stone, and re-built with minor alterations at Reading Street, a mile away. Here it still stands and continues the record of a place of worship at Ebony for some one thousand years.

Information about these events, though recorded in documents, has not up to now been set out in a narrative. Even the salient facts about the old church on the island had been forgotten and transmitted only in rare and out-of-print books. The tasks of assembling the written records and of excavating the foundations of the old church began only a few years ago. The excavation, under the leadership of Mr. A. Miles, was started in 1979 by a group of K.A.S. members and others, now allied to Tenterden Museum Association. I had already studied some of the ancient records collected and copied by the late Dr. William Cock of Appledore, and I have since made further searches. That there were in his time surviving remains of a medieval church had been clearly stated by Richard Kilburne of Hawkhurst (1605-78) whose *Topographie; or Survey of the County of Kent* was published in 1659. Some of these remains were removed in the Victorian demolition, and for this reason, or in consideration of the long lapse of time, Kilburne's testimony was ignored or discounted by those who investigated the site in the early 1900s. The recent excavations have proved how right he was and how much still remains

## THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH OF ST. MARY, EBONY

confirming his report. For it is becoming apparent that on top of the island there was an aisled church of dimensions and construction comparable with those of its sister church of Appledore and other neighbouring churches.

The most dramatic discovery has been the massive foundations. Although a tower has yet to be found, the main outlines of the old church are plain. Measurements must, till the excavations have been completed, be preliminary; but already enough has been done to suggest, however provisionally, that the outside length of the building was some 75 ft. It would be longer if the foundations of a tower at the west end are found. At the east end the chancel and its side chapel spanned some 49 ft. The breadth of the nave is wider, including north and south aisles already found and measuring some  $7\frac{1}{2}$  and, more tentatively, 10 ft. in width, respectively.

The dig uncovered some well-worked stone, including the base of a doorway and other shaped pieces of stone, besides numerous floor-tiles which had been set in mortar on a bed of rammed chalk. Other useful finds included coins dated from Edward I to Henry VI, medieval and Tudor potsherds, many fragments of painted window glass, beads, possibly from a rosary – and other artifacts. Specimens have been deposited in Tenterden Museum.

The written records fill in the picture of what the church looked like from the outside. Its height can only be deduced. It was high enough to take the arched window of Perpendicular style still preserved as the east window in the surviving chapel at Reading Street. It was high enough to hold the rood screen on which were mounted the figures of Christ crucified and of St. Mary the Virgin and St. John. There was room to mount the structure of a rood loft. It must have had a bell tower to hold the four 'grett' bells listed in the inventory taken in Edward VI's reign.<sup>2</sup> The records also confirm the existence of a side chapel standing in all probability on the foundations revealed in the dig at the south side of the east end. Archdeacon Harpsfield's visitation<sup>3</sup> in the penultimate year of Queen Mary's reign ordered the parish not only to provide an altar of stone (a High Altar is referred to in a will of 1469) but also to make up a side altar. Joan Reynold in her will<sup>4</sup> of 1528 asked that she should be buried 'in the new chapel lately builded by the cost of my husband'. This new

<sup>2</sup> *Arch. Cant.*, viii (1872), 145.

<sup>3</sup> Quotations from the archdeacon's visitations here and elsewhere in this article are mostly from transcripts made by Dr. Cock, Arthur Hussey and A.H. Taylor of Tenterden. It was possible to check only a few of these in the Cathedral Library. Some may have been lost in the bombing.

<sup>4</sup> Extracts from wills also taken from sources mentioned above.

chapel was not the Reading Street chapel (see pp. 162–3) which was in existence in 1466, and it is probable that it was in this chapel that the second altar stood. Wills of 1523 and 1533 make bequests to the rodelight and the rood. The rood loft had been recently erected when a benefaction was made to it in 1485. Finally, the records show that, in effect, was given to Richard Lawless' will of 1533, the churchyard was railed with two tons of timber he had bequeathed.

This church standing on a site 100 ft. above sea level would have been a landmark visible from miles away to the shipping coming up the sea creek. Its interior was also impressive. As the parishioners came into church they saw a blaze of lights and colour. There was a shrine to the patron saint, St. Mary the Virgin. Wills of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries refer to the shrine of St. Mary, to its light and its image. They mention the brotherhood of St. Mary which would have been charged with keeping the light burning. John Siller left a legacy in 1502 for the reparation of the Tabernacle of St. Mary. A tabernacle could be anything from a simple niche to an elaborate enclosure with a canopy carved in wood or stone. Other saints had their images and lights burning before them, provided by bequests of the faithful. St. Katherine, who also had a Brotherhood, St. Stephen, St. Peter, St. Thomas (who had a shrine) and St. James are mentioned in wills. One parishioner recorded his wish to be buried before the altar of St. Stephen, so that the side chapel mentioned above may have been dedicated to St. Stephen. There was an altar of St. Michael in the fifteenth century. Two legacies went to the 'Hogwell Light'. This is variously interpreted as a corruption of the Anglo-Saxon *halig* i.e. the holy well, or *hoch* i.e. the high or deep well. The fact that this light is included in a whole list of lights in honour of saints is some support for the former view. There are numerous springs on the island, but none has yet been identified with the Hogwell.

Following the Dissolution of the monasteries, Henry VIII had the land and the advowson of Ebony in his gift. Both went to Sir Walter Hendley, attorney of the Court of Augmentations, who feathered his nest by securing many monastic properties confiscated by his court.<sup>5</sup> He settled his property at Ebony on his daughter Anne's future husband, Richard Covert, a member of a baronet's family settled in Slaugham in Sussex. So Ebony now had a lay rector, who took the major tithes and was responsible for the upkeep of the chancel and

<sup>5</sup> The record of Sir Walter Hendley's activities is in the printed *Calendar of Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of Henry VIII – passim*, but see especially the volume for 1540–1541.

#### THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH OF ST. MARY, EBONY

churchyard, and was the owner of the two Ebony manors hitherto held by the Priory of Christ Church, Canterbury. Difficulties and, as it turned out, disasters were in store for the church.

Like all churches, it suffered the pain and confusion caused by the iconoclasm of Cranmer in Edward VI's reign, the attempts by Mary to restore the old rite, and then the Protestant backlash, when Elizabeth I succeeded her. An inventory taken in the last year of Edward VI shows, however, that there had been comparatively little spoliation of movable property. Vestments, silver vessels and the four 'grett bells' as well as the Sanctus bell were therefore probably in use throughout Mary's reign. Presumably, very few of the old ornaments survived when Queen Elizabeth and Archbishop Parker took over. In the long term, however, the worst misfortune of the church was the progressive decay of the fabric already suffering from neglect for many years before Elizabeth I came to the throne.

As early as 1511, long before the Reformation, Archbishop Warham found that 'the chancel was not sufficiently repaired, neither above nor below nor in the glass windows'. His decision was to require the vicar of Appledore and Ebony to repair the chancel and its windows under pain of sequestration. The repair of the chancel was the duty of the recipient of the major tithes, at this time Dover Priory or the priory's farmer of the Ebony tithes. Possibly William Marshall, then vicar of Appledore and Ebony, had agreed to farm the tithes for Dover Priory. He was a pluralist and a very rich man. In such custody country churches were all too apt to deteriorate.

In 1557, Archdeacon Harpsfield, trying to restore the stone altars and to make good the deficiencies in vestments, etc., found that Henry VIII's gift of Ebony to Sir Walter Hendley was resulting in serious damage. Sir Walter had died in 1550, leaving apparently a life interest in the Ebony manors to his widow, who promptly married one Thomas Roberts of Ticehurst, Sussex. The archdeacon made a note 'to speak to Mr. Roberts who had pulled away the lead of the chancel and covered it with shingles, to repair the same and the church and the house for the priest.' Although part of the church had been shingled by 1485, when Thomas Herry's left 20s. for shingling, shingles were a far greater fire risk and not so effective as lead. Mr. Roberts, as the sequel shows, played out time, and did nothing. In 1560, the parish reported 'the north door of the chancel is all to broke, the fault of Mr. Roberts who married my lady Hendley'.

Six years later, worse still had happened. The ruinous state of the fabric by then moved a parishioner to leave £20 towards rebuilding the church 'if it should be built again in the form and manner of a church.' A further report noted that the vicarage house was in decay and used as a cattle shed. In 1574, the vicarage was in ruins and the

parish was ordered to shingle the church – to no avail because in 1590 the church ‘was fentred with extreme winds’. Thereafter there is no recorded complaint.

What happened to the medieval building, and when, can only be a matter of conjecture. Yet one trustworthy account comes from Kilburne (*op. cit.*) who wrote that the church of St. Mary, Ebony, ‘was anciently far larger than it now is, the foundation whereof is yet discernible. But, about 100 years since, it was burned by Lightning, and instead thereof, a little church now standing was built upon part of the former foundations’. A fire spreading to the shingled roof would have caused extensive damage, especially if the tie-beams fell in dragging down walls and pillars. In neighbouring Kenardington the church was, according to Hasted, burnt by lightning in 1559 but was restored in part by Roger Horne, the Lord of the Manor. Although there was a presentment to the archdeacon by the churchwarden in 1560, there was no mention of the fire. In 1565, there was a happy report that ‘our church is in hand to be builded again.’ Both in Kenardington and Ebony the absence of any reference, at the time, to the lightning strikes is puzzling. The same storm could well have been responsible for the lightning at both churches. Evelyn Woodruff in his *Extracts from original documents illustrating the progress of the Reformation in Kent* gives a possible explanation of the lack of contemporary references. He says that there are considerable gaps in the Canterbury records for the opening year of Queen Elizabeth’s reign, caused in part by fire. So, records about Ebony and Kenardington may have been destroyed. It is also possible that as a result of the administrative confusion in the first years of the transition from a Catholic to a Protestant regime, no visitation took place.

During the next thirty years while the church, and particularly the chancel, remained in a decayed state, the congregation and the priest must have endured considerable discomfort, huddling in what shelter remained in the old house of prayer. Somehow they hung on. The transcripts of the parish register show that the sacraments of christening, marriage and burial continued throughout this period.

#### THE READING STREET CHAPEL

Before leaving the medieval church on the island, mention should be made of an appendage to it – the medieval Reading Street chapel. It is clear from the wills quoted below that not only was there the church on the island but, from at least the early fifteenth century, there was also a chapel at Reading Street. What size it was and where it stood has not been established nor has any trace of it been found.



Map of Ebony Court Lodge Lands by Francis Hill, 1710. (Kent County Archives Office)

#### THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH OF ST. MARY, EBONY

Wills referring to the Reading Street chapel span the period 1466 to 1533. John Blakebourne of Appledore, in 1466, left 20*d.* to the light of St. Anthony in the chapel of Redyng; Robert Golding of Ebony in 1502 gave 4*d.* to the Light of Redyng. Thomas Herryys of Ebbone in 1485 left 10*s.* a year for twenty years towards finding a priest to sing in the chapel of Reddyng. In two further wills in 1502 and 1533 the testators divide their bequests between the church on the island and the chapel standing in Reading Street. Joan Reynold, one of these testators, has already been mentioned as having asked for burial in the side chapel in the main church on the island. She also made other provision – for the repair of the common causeway on either side of the channel and for ‘an honest priest to celebrate divine service in the church of Ebbeny at all times convenient for two years. If foule weather or other occasions prevent, the same priest to sing in the Chapell of Redyng’.

After 1533 there are no further references to the Reading Street chapel. The experience of neighbouring Smallhythe<sup>6</sup> shows that there were many predators anxious to snap up any chapels condemned to be suppressed under Edward VI’s Act of 1547, for forfeiting to the Crown all free chapels and chantries. Even the presence of Sir Walter Hendley on the board of enquiry, under Sir John Baker of Sissinghurst, did not prevent the congregation at Smallhythe getting a verdict that their chapel was a chapel of ease and therefore outside the scope of the statute. At Reading Street this claim, despite the intention expressed in Joan Reynold’s will, was not made. In all probability the chapel was in consequence sold and pulled down, or else converted to a dwelling-house.

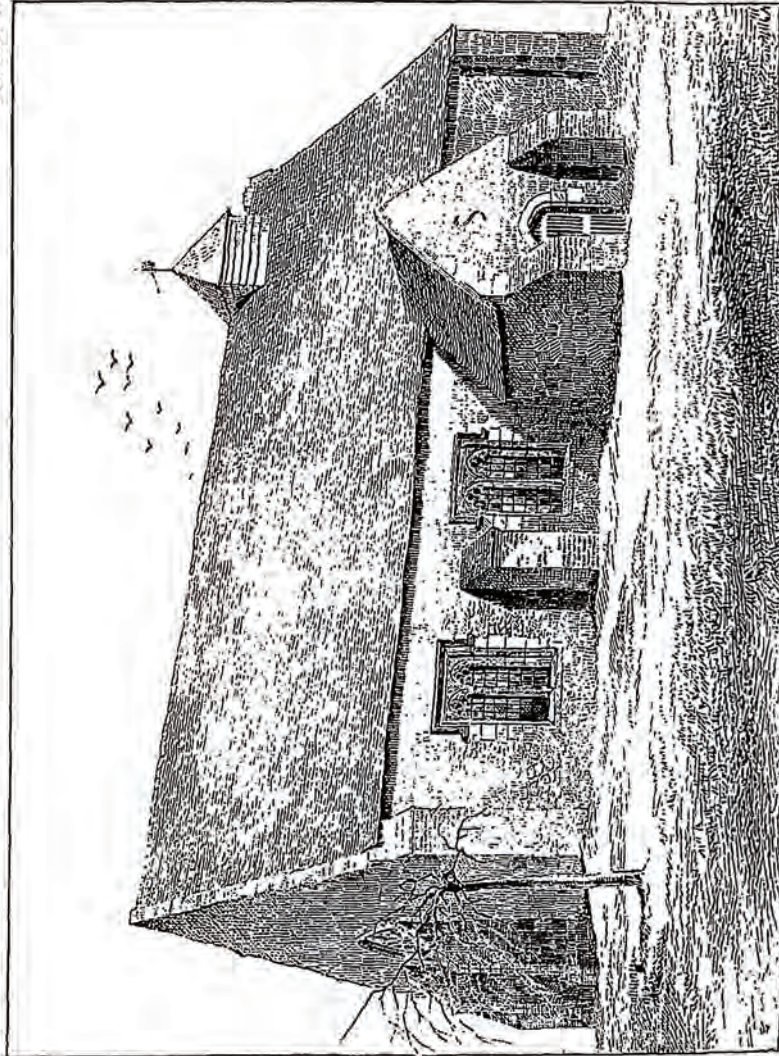
#### THE LITTLE CHAPEL ON THE ISLAND

The year when Kilburne’s ‘little chapel’ was built ‘on part of the foundations’ of the old church has not been found in records. However, it is clear that round about 1600 what seems likely to have been a process of cannibalising the surviving masonry took place. We know what the new building looked like from the sketch in the centre of Hill’s map of 1710 and from Gaye’s drawing in 1858. (Plates I, II and III). It stood in a well fenced churchyard, reached by footpaths from Stone, from High House Farm on the road to Wittersham, and from Reading Street. Hill shows a lychgate and a wicket, where the path from Reading Street reached the churchyard. He shows a large

<sup>6</sup> See A.H. Taylor’s monumental account in *Arch. Cant.*, xxx (1914) 133–91.



PLATE II



Ebony Chapel in 1858 from the South-east before its Removal. (*Kent Archaeological Society*)

#### THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH OF ST. MARY, EBONY

porch on the north wall. Hill's map is a lovely example of the surveyor's art and contains a mass of information about land ownership and field names. Two of the latter provoke enquiry. Was the Booth field the site of a fair and what were the Crock Wells?

Another example of cannibalising a much larger medieval church in order to build a far smaller chapel is to be found at Covehithe in Suffolk. There much of the outer wall and the tower of the vast church, mainly Perpendicular, still survive. Within its roofless walls is the chapel built in 1672. It is clear from the fabric that its builders used masonry taken from the massive buttresses and the main structure of the old church.

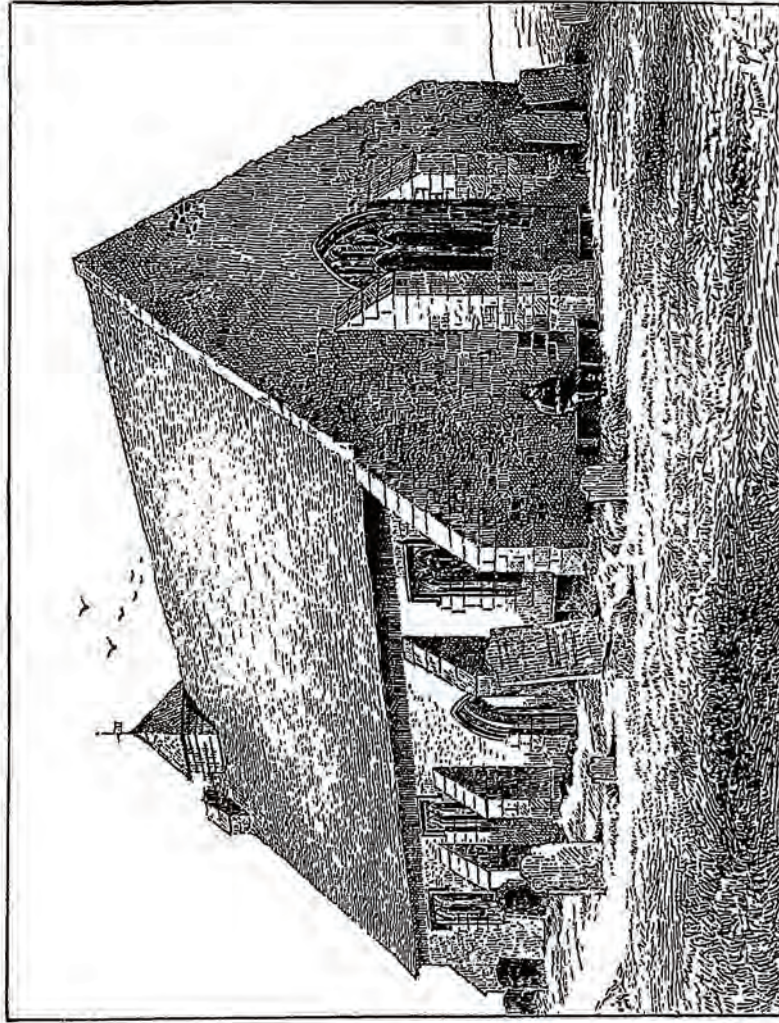
The little chapel on the hill at Ebony lacked the grace and splendour of the old church, but it served the parish well for over 250 years. It was during this period that most of the headstones still standing in the old churchyard were put up. Thirty-four still survive from before 1858, the earliest still legible is of 1699. Another is the tombstone of Stephen Ramsden buried in 1712, a notable churchwarden, his first term in 1684. Ten mark burials since the chapel was rebuilt at Reading Street. One of the headstones commemorates Isaac Cloke who died on 27th June, 1820. A local newspaper describes his eccentric funeral. His coffin was, it says, followed to the grave by 72 old men, all in white frocks and stockings and each was to be the father of six children. This may have been Isaac Cloke's wish. It seems doubtful whether it was fully carried out.

The position of the headstones gives some clue to the site of the chapel within the area covered by the medieval church. Several of the stones sketched in Plate II can be individually identified very close to the line of buttresses which supported the south wall, subsequently removed entirely. This wall, like the chapel's east end, appears to have had late medieval features in its three windows and doorway, suggesting re-use in the post-medieval chapel of a former south aisle wall. The east window, too, was probably a reconstruction and was again re-used in the present parish church at Reading Street.

#### THE MOVE TO READING STREET

The last phase in the history of the church began in 1858. In that year the vicar of Appledore cum Ebony, the Rev. W.W. Kirby, with the support of the churchwardens and parishioners, decided that it was no longer fair to ask the congregation to trudge the long, muddy footpaths to Chapel Bank. Bagshaw's *Guide* of 1847 describes the parish of Ebony, extending over some 2400 acres as 'low and unhealthy, the vapours rising from the swampy marshes subject it to

PLATE III



Ebony Chapel in 1858 from the North-east before its Removal. (*Kent Archaeological Society*)

#### THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH OF ST. MARY, EBONY

continual fog'. This was a fair description. The re-opening of the Rother channel south of Oxney in the seventeenth century left the Reading channel still, to some extent, draining water into the Appledore channel, although less forcefully. Its outfall was effectively severed in 1805 by the Royal Military Canal; and thereafter the old Reading channel became a noisome, blind gut through the marshes. The militia stationed at Reading Street, as part of the garrison stationed along the canal for defence against Napoleon's threatened invasion, suffered terribly from Ebony's unhealthy climate. Between 1804 and 1809, no less than 43 soldiers were buried in the old churchyard on Chapel Bank, as many as 18 in one year. No headstone, no memorial, commemorates their death on active service. In this unhappy period for the parish, its social activities were confined to what had long ago become the centre of population at Reading Street. Here there was a school, still standing but now otherwise used, a pub, The White Hart and Lamb, also recognisable though now converted to a private dwelling, and a group of houses. Opposite the school, the old chapel from Chapel Bank was re-erected. It was a great feat. Empty horse-drawn carts could just about get up the bank. Laden with stone, they could only make their way down in dry spells and with considerable difficulty. Farmers supplied the transport and the services of their labourers. This remarkable transfer of its fabric and the new era which opened for Ebony church were reported in his current church register by the Rev. W.W. Kirby. His entry in the back of the book is quoted in full:

'August 1858. The Chapel which stood in the centre of the Churchyard of Ebony on the hill was during this month pulled down in consequence of its inaccessible position - there being no path to the Chapel wh. was  $\frac{3}{4}$  [three quarters of a mile from the nearest building]. The exterior was also in a state of rapid decay - the interior was most rude - the Pulpit and desk being at the East window, between it and the Communion rails - The building pulled down could not have been ancient - but contained in its walls much good Caen stone - well worked and evidently the remains of an original handsome building - The stone cross now at the East end of the New Chapel was found in the walls and evidently very old - All the windows - except the Vestry and West Windows are [from] the old - The foundation stone of the New was laid on the 24th of August 1858 by the Vicar, Rev. W.W. Kirby - the Churchwarden, Mr. J. Boon - Seaman Beale Esq. Tenterden and Mrs. Kirby - the Consecration was performed by the Archbishop of Canterbury [Abp. Sumner] on the 18th November 1858 - when a large number of clergy and people assembled - his Grace preached from Ps. 122. v. 1 - The church was scarcely three months in building (old material used as far as possible) - cost £270 without fence, wall or Painted Window (presented by E.D. Saunders Esq.). Money raised by late subscriptions and £100 from the Church Building Society.

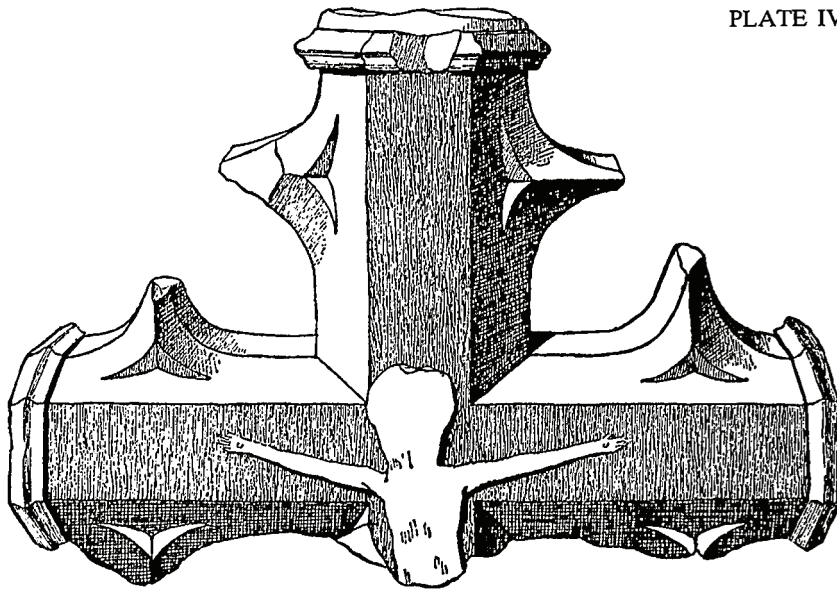
SIR J. WINNIFRITH

May God bless this effort of his servant – undertaken for the honor of His Name  
in the Furtherance of His Kingdom! Nov. 21. 1858 –

Wm. Walter Kirby  
Incumbent

Architect. S.S. Teulon, Esq. London<sup>7</sup>  
Builders. Messrs Bourne & Chambers, Woodchurch, Kent

PLATE IV



Ancient Crucifix discovered during Demolition of the Chapel in 1858. (Original engraving in K.A.S. Library).

The church on the new site differed in only a few points from its appearance in the sketches showing it in 1710 and 1858. (Plates I, II and III.) Similar in dimensions, apart from the sensible omission of the large porch which had stood on the north side, it has the addition of a vestry on the north side; and it lacks the many heavy buttresses of the old chapel on the bank. Otherwise the builders stuck to the old model. We are never likely to know whether they put the medieval scratch dial on the north side because that was where they found it. It would, of course, in the medieval church have been on the south. What is known is that in demolishing the old chapel the builders found an ancient stone crucifix (Plate IV) and mounted this on the

<sup>7</sup> S.S. Teulon was a well-known London architect.

#### THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH OF ST. MARY, EBONY

new east gable – alas, only for it to be destroyed by a German flying bomb brought down in a field nearby. The replacement cross follows the design of its ancient predecessor, though it does not reproduce the figure of Christ.

The rebuilding was a magnificent proof of the devotion of the parishioners to their parish church, lavished on it for so many centuries. Their successors faithfully maintain that tradition.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to record my thanks for all the help I have been given by Mrs. M.C. Lebon, a member of the Tenterden Museum group, and by Miss A.M. Oakley of Canterbury Cathedral Library, the Hon. Librarian of the Kent Archaeological Society, the staff of the Kent Archives Office, and the Rev. Christopher Duncan, the Vicar of Ebony.

#### APPENDIX

Hill's Estate Map of 1710 – a transcript of Hill's marginal notes, with comments in square brackets, by J.W.

*(Upper left, within a carved gilded frame)* Note the upland fences show from the Marsh land fence by a Green stroke a long by the Black line round each several feild, which green stroke signifies the hedge. And the Black line the dike so that on the side the Green stroke is of the Black line on that side the fence belongs. The Marsh land fence is distinguished from the Upland fence by a double line coloured blew which signifies the Dike etc. [Several words are obscured by the frame on the right side and the sense is not always clear. Some of the coloured strokes have also faded.]

*(Left, in a carved golden frame, between the compass and the Table)* The course of the River Rother riseth at Argos Hill, Sussex near to Waterdowne Forest and falleth to Hitchingham. And so to Roberts-bridge from whence it descendeth to Bodyam Castle Newenden [the next place is illegible] Appledore. And so far of Old Winchelsea where was the mouth of this River Into which the Danes in the time of King Alfred After they had spoiled England and France, Hasten who then commanded went away to his ships Laden with Rich Spoil, which came hither again entering into the river Rother (then Limen, as Leland saith, at the mouth whereon Old Winchelsea sometime

SIR J. WINNIFRITH

stood) And by sudden surprise took a small castle that was 4 or 5 miles within the land at Appledore, as some think, which because it was not of sufficient strength they levelled it with the ground and raised a new etc. etc. [The whole of this note is based on Lambarde's *Perambulation of Kent*, written in 1570, pp. 184-5 and 187. Much of it is copied *verbatim*. The missing place-name in the course of the Rother in Lambarde is Oxney. The last sentence in Hill's note ends with 'etc' because he was running out of space.]

*(Upper right, within a blue, red and gold wreath)* A map and description of all the lands belonging to Ebony Court Lodge, in the Isle of Oxney, in the County of Kent, belonging to John Blackmore, Gent, showing the contents of each several feild, as also what upland. And what Marsh land as may be found in the table. Also showing the trees, Gates, stiles, bare places, ponds, footpaths and horse Roads, leading thorow or by the said land and with the names of those Places leading to, likewise showing the Upland fence from the Marsh land, with the names of those Persons whose land bounders Round the said land. Measured and Mapped and herein described by me, Fra. Hill, An<sup>o</sup> 1710.

*(In the margin below the above)* (a) Footpath from Chapel to High House (b) Note The Court Lodge Wood lyes In the parish of Stone beyond Mr Stephen Ramsden's house which is better than half a mile from Little Ferry Marsh. The Map would not omit of lying it in its right situation. Therefore I give this Remark. [Half a mile from Little Ferry Marsh puts the true position of Court Lodge Wood just beyond the north-west boundary of Ebony Court Lodge lands.]

## Appendix 4

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The Excavations on the site of St Mary's Church, Chapel Bank, from *Archaeologia Cantiana*  
Vol. 110, 1992

Archaeologia Cantiana Vol. 110 1992

### THE EXCAVATIONS ON THE SITE OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH, CHAPEL BANK, TENTERDEN, WITH INDICATIONS OF THE DESERTED VILLAGE OF EBONY

CECILY LEBON and ALEC MILES

#### INTRODUCTION

Over ten years, from 1977 to 1987, excavations were undertaken on the old site of St. Mary's Church, Ebony, Tenterden (N.G.R. TQ 670639), by a small group of K.A.S. members; of these Mr and Mrs. M. Hill and Mr N. Aldridge gave consistent help throughout the excavations. Thanks are also due to the Rector, the Rev. S.D. Harris, Mrs. J.E.M. Bates and the late Col. J.F. Armstrong, of the Ebony Parochial Church Council, who kindly gave permission for the excavations and helped in many ways. The work was supported by a grant from the Kent Archaeological Society. The finds are deposited with the Tenterden and District Museum.

The medieval church of St. Mary has been the study of a paper by Sir John Winnifrith,<sup>1</sup> who collated and researched the notes and records of Dr W. Cocks, A. Hussey, A.H. Taylor and Canterbury Cathedral Library. A church at Ebbanea is first listed in the *Domesday Monachorum*, copied from the original returns over a period from 1100 to 1200. However, Douglas has grave objections to this identification with Ebony, as other places mentioned in this section are at the opposite end of Kent.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, lands at Ebony were granted to Christchurch, Canterbury, in a Saxon Charter of 832.<sup>3</sup> The patronage was transferred by 1210 at the latest, to

<sup>1</sup> *Arch. Cant.*, c (1984), 157-70.

<sup>2</sup> D.C. Douglas, *Domesday Monachorum*, 79, and see footnote.

<sup>3</sup> Walter de Gray Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum*, (1885-93), no. 408.

<sup>4</sup> *Victoria County History, Kent*, iii (1932), 133.



St. Martin's Priory, Dover, (charter granted to Archbishop Corbeil and Christchurch Priory, Canterbury, in 1131).<sup>4</sup> The church suffered many vicissitudes over the years, culminating in the great fire of c. 1560, from the ruins of which a small chapel was built; this was, in turn, demolished and rebuilt at Reading Street in 1858.

The site today, on Chapel Bank, is a wild overgrown graveyard, in a fenced hexagonal enclosure, isolated from the nearest road and approached by ill-defined foot-paths. Chapel Bank itself, rises to 30 m. above the surrounding marshlands, is composed of Wadhurst Clay largely of a clayey lithology. The Geological Survey,<sup>5</sup> records that the 'island' of Chapel Bank, has been extensively dug in the past, presumably for ironstone. There is very little evidence today for ironstone, although the remains of old quarry pits can be seen on the south and south-east sides of the bank from which the stone was probably dug for use in the construction of the church.

A series of faults lay within the valley, north of the Isle of Oxney; these are the apparent continuation of the Benenden Fault. The faults coalesce on Chapel Bank, just south of the church site (N.G.R. TQ 930295).<sup>6</sup> We can only speculate that these faults, leading to possible minor earth movements, combined with the effects of the earthquakes of 21st May, 1382, and 6th April, 1580, which caused widespread damage to churches throughout Kent,<sup>7</sup> may have weakened the medieval foundations of St. Mary's. Furthermore, the church was built on stiff Wadhurst Clay, which can cause serious building subsidence during long dry summers.

The west side of the 'island' shows a steep cliff profile, probably the result of landslips and sea erosion in the distant past when the sea lapped the inner edge of the marshes and Ebony was an island. However, by Norman times, Ebony was isolated by saltings and creeks from both the Isle of Oxney and the mainland. On the north side a channel of the Rother separated it from Reading Street, where there was a ferry in medieval times.<sup>8</sup> In the fourteenth century, the construction of the Knelle Dam in the Wittersham Levels had the effect of diverting the main course of the Rother, to north of the Isle of Oxney and around the north side of Ebony, bringing with it increasing trade and prosperity. By the seventeenth century acute drainage problems led to the Knelle Dam being breached and the

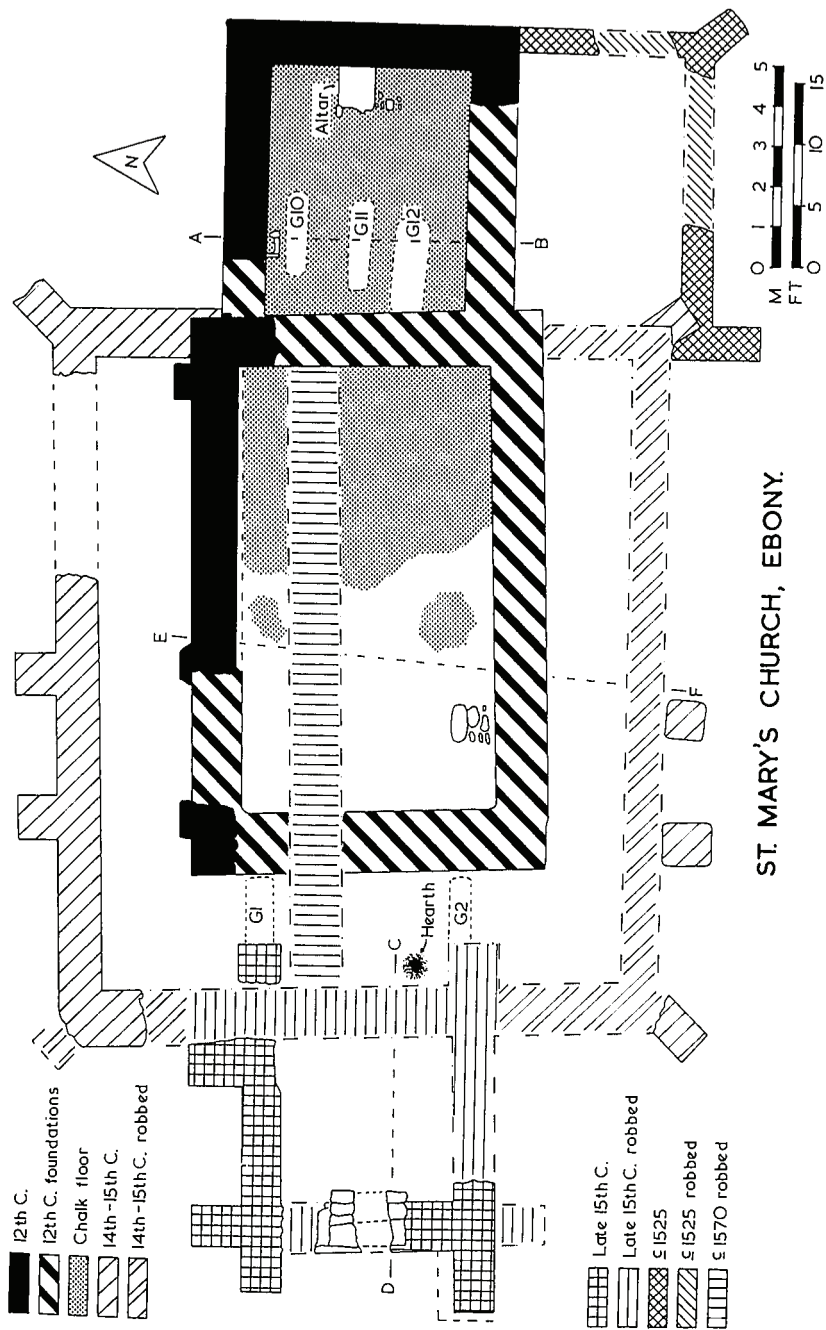
<sup>5</sup> *Geology of the Country around Tenterden* (1966), Memoirs of the Geological Survey of Great Britain, 63.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Muir Wood and Charles Melville, *New Scientist*, 20th October, 1983, 170-3.

<sup>8</sup> *Arch. Cant.* c (1984), 157.

EXCAVATIONS ON THE SITE OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH



ST. MARY'S CHURCH, EBONY.

Fig. 1. Excavation plan of St. Mary's Church, Chapel Bank, Ebony.

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Rother resumed its old channel once more to the south of Oxney.<sup>9</sup> This change in the course of the river must have affected Ebony, which began to decline as a settlement and finally was deserted by the early seventeen hundreds.

#### THE EXCAVATIONS

There were no standing remains of the medieval church or its successor in the graveyard. Presumably, the site had been levelled in 1858 after the demolition of the post-medieval or Elizabethan church and the remaining masonry carted off to rebuild the church at Reading Street. However, it was noted that there was a large area in the graveyard clear of gravestones and supporting a number of trees and scrub which did suggest the site of the former church. Although, no masonry remains were expected to be found, it was hoped that a trial trench would produce some evidence for early occupation of the site. A trench excavated running north and south through this area in 1977 showed substantial foundations (Fig. 2, Section E–F, 21 and 23), which later proved to be the north wall of a Norman nave and the robbed-out remains of its south wall.

#### THE NORMAN CHURCH

Further excavations proved the existence of the foundations of a Norman nave and straight-ended chancel, typical of a Norman two-celled church. The nave measures 11.10 m. long × 6.30 m. wide, internally. The chancel, which is not square with the nave, leans at a slight angle to the south, measures 6.20 m. long × 5 m. wide, approximately. The base of the north door into the chancel survived, although some attempt had been made to block it with shaly sandstone at some period. The foundations were well made (Fig. 2, Section A–B, 7 and 8), with a layer of mortar and rubble 23 cm. thick laid in a trench up to 1.50 m. wide. The vestigial remains of standing walls were around 1.50 m. wide, strongly built of sandstone from the Hastings Beds with Caen stone sparingly used in the chancel for the quoins and the north door jambs. The floor laid on stiff Wadhurst Clay, was of a loamy clay 25 cm. thick with a thin top layer of chalk. This latter feature was confined to the Norman nave and chancel, but

<sup>9</sup> Jill Eddison, 'Developments in the Lower Rother Valleys up to 1600', *Arch. Cant.*, cii (1985), 95–110.

EXCAVATIONS ON THE SITE OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH

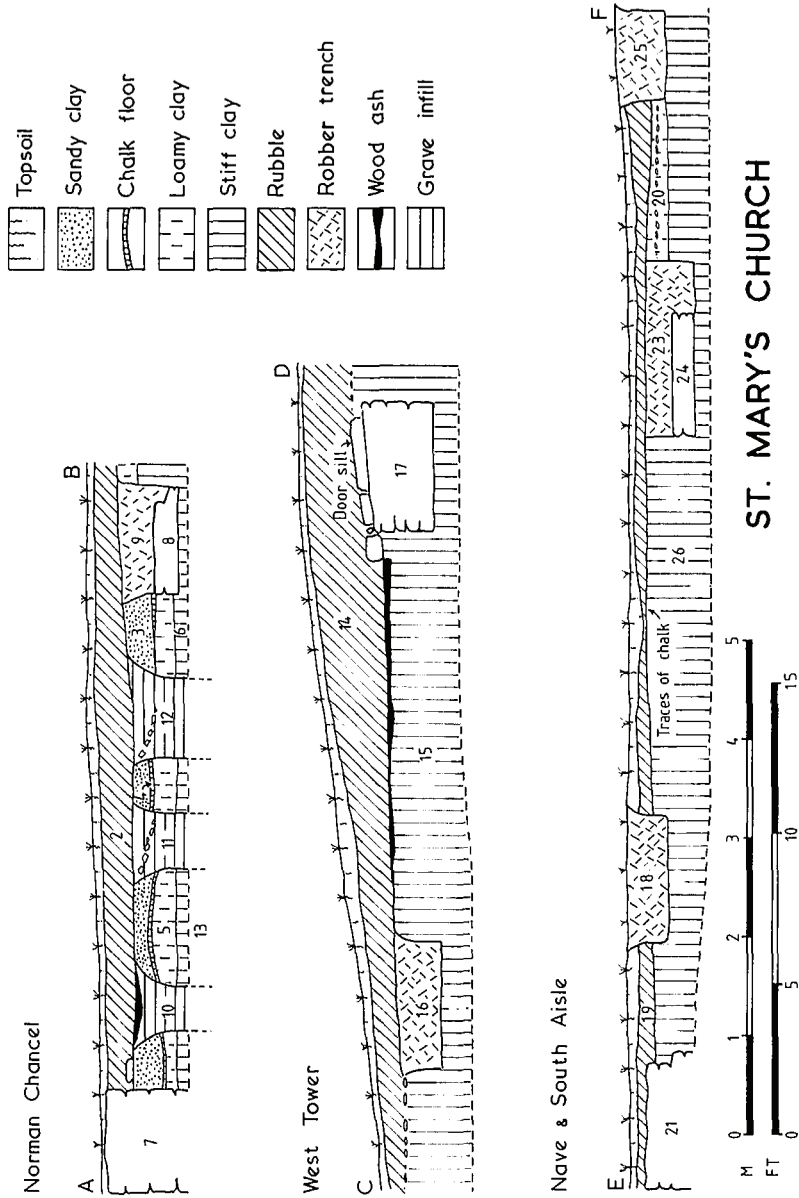


Fig. 2. Sections A-B, C-D, and E-F.

could be a medieval feature. Externally, traces of pilaster buttresses were found along the north wall of the nave; these were on average 90 cm. wide × 25 cm. thick. No signs of a chancel arch remain, the foundations carry across without a break; likewise no traces were found for an external doorway into the nave. A few pieces of worked Caen stone were recovered from the excavations, some fragments suggesting the remains of angle-shafts (Fig. 6, no. 3) from perhaps the chancel arch, while others may have come from wide-angled window splays.

This Norman church, of a simple type around which most of our parish churches have grown, can be compared with the Norman church of Dode, near Luddesdown, and with Paddlesworth church, near Snodland.<sup>10</sup> Although it is slightly larger than either of them, the ratio of length to breadth is much the same. The nave of Ebony's Norman church would seem to be of the middle twelfth century, but the absence of Caen stone quoins in the nave and the lack of matching pilaster buttresses for the chancel suggest a later date for the chancel. The nave with its pilaster buttresses compares with the refectory at Dover Priory, which is of similar construction, one of the first buildings erected after the Priory was refounded in 1139.<sup>11</sup> When later in the twelfth century, Dover Priory was granted the patronage and rectorial rights over Ebony church the monks may have sent their masons to build it in stone.

#### THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH

At sometime during the medieval period, north and south aisles were added to the Norman nave, and the church was extended to the west, the remains of diagonal corner buttresses would suggest a fourteenth/fifteenth-century date for this work. It is a matter of conjecture which aisle was built first, as only the foundations remain of the north aisle and the south was robbed out to build the church at Reading Street. The north wall foundations are 1.10 m. wide, of sound construction with good buttresses, while the south was of a flimsier build (Fig. 2, Section E–F, 25), the robbed out construction trench being only 90 cm. wide; the poorly constructed buttresses were added later, although the diagonal buttresses of the south-east and south-west corners may be integral with the construction.

Some dating evidence may be found in the engravings by Howard

<sup>10</sup> Rev. Greville M. Livett, 'Early Norman Churches in and near the Medway Valley', *Arch. Cant.*, xxi (1895), 260–72.

<sup>11</sup> John Newman, *The Buildings of England: North East and East Kent* (1969), 287.

#### EXCAVATIONS ON THE SITE OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH

Gaye,<sup>12</sup> of the north-east and south-east aspects of the Elizabethan chapel in 1858. The south wall can be seen to have square-headed two-light, Perpendicular windows with trefoil tracery, which could well be the original windows, as the south wall survived the fire and became part of the rebuilt chapel. Square-headed cinquefoil windows can be seen in the north-east aspect; these were possibly salvaged from the wrecked north aisle. Similar windows can be seen at St. Mary, Stone-in-Oxney, rebuilt after a fire of 1464,<sup>13</sup> although examples occur from the late fourteenth century and continue throughout the fifteenth, and into the sixteenth century, when they became somewhat debased. However, we cannot be sure that these windows were not replacements for an earlier style.

It is possible that the north and south walls of the Norman nave were demolished to floor level and used as foundations for the pillars of the two aisles; however, as no worked stone was found which could be ascribed to pillars, it is more than likely openings were pierced in the Norman walls to make arches. A good example of this arrangement can be seen in St. Eanswith, Brenzett, where arcades were inserted on the north side of the early twelfth-century nave. Unfortunately, the demolition works at Ebony, destroyed all traces of any evidence for this.

No traces of doorways were found in the north and south aisles during excavations. However, Howard Gaye shows a perpendicular doorway in his south-east aspect of 1858, and it is more than likely this is the original south door of the aisled medieval church and its successor the Elizabethan church.

The floor of the nave was tiled during the fourteenth or fifteenth century with imported tiles from the Low Countries, although they were not found *in situ*; they were possibly mortared onto the chalk floor (Fig. 2, Section A-B, 4), which is confined to the nave and chancel. Evidence from coins would suggest a date prior to 1412 for this floor, while above the chalk, a sandy-clay layer around 20 cm. thick has produced a range of coins lost between 1412 and the second half of the fifteenth century. The floor must have been successively raised and relaid at higher levels over the years, a small patch surviving on the north side of the nave, bedded into a dark layer just under the turf-line, probably representing the floor of the medieval church which lasted up to the time of the fire. A small hearth-pit was found inside the nave close to the west wall. This was some 40 cm. in diameter and 18 cm. deep with baked clay sides. Among the ash was

<sup>12</sup> From the J. Fremlyn Streatfeild Collection of Engravings, in K.A.S. Library.

<sup>13</sup> John Newman, *West Kent and the Weald* (1976), 550.

a mass of partially melted comes, and, although below the demolition layer, it was difficult to assign these finds to any one period; it is tempting to associate them with the glazing of the medieval church.

A similar hearth was found at Denny Abbey, Cambs., although no use was suggested.<sup>14</sup>

Stones representing the base of the altar were uncovered in the chancel, mortared onto the surface of the sandy-clay floor, above the chalk. This may well be the High Altar referred to in a will of 1469.<sup>15</sup> Three graves, G10, G11 and G12 (Fig. 2, Section A–B) were inserted through the sandy-clay floor before the altar and are possibly of fifteenth-century date, since they certainly pre-date the Elizabethan church, one buttress of which was built over a grave.

Two early medieval graves (Fig. 1, G1 and G2) were noted outside the Norman nave. One of these had suffered some disturbance when the west wall of the enlarged medieval nave was built, the skull being pushed forward onto the rib cage.

No documentary or archaeological evidence remains to suggest the style of roof construction, although we have some documentary evidence for the type of roof covering, as it is recorded in 1557 that Mr Roberts 'pulled away the lead of the chancel and covered it with shingles'<sup>16</sup> and also money had been left in a will of 1485 to shingle part of the church.<sup>17</sup> Many fragments of broken Kent peg-tiles were found in the excavations along with a fragment of a stone roof-tile.

#### THE TOWER

Only the foundations remain and, since these have suffered badly from the stone robbers' attentions, it is difficult to ascribe a date. However, the ground plan of the remains compares with the ground plans of Tenterden church tower, where bequests chart its leisurely progress of erection, from 1449 and 1461, bequests of timbers, to 1476 for a 'chyme',<sup>18</sup> to Wittersham, where money was left 'to the new steeple' in 1501<sup>19</sup> and Biddenden, where paired windows at the top look like early sixteenth-century at the earliest.<sup>20</sup> Although

<sup>14</sup> Patricia M. Christie and J.G. Coad, 'Excavations at Denny Abbey', *Arch. Journ.*, 137 (1980), 177.

<sup>15</sup> *Arch. Cant.*, c (1984), 159.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>18</sup> John Newman, *op. cit.*, 563.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 611.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

#### EXCAVATIONS ON THE SITE OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH

Ebony tower was not built on such a grand scale, a late fifteenth-century date would seem right for the start of its construction. The tower was in use by 1553 at the latest as an inventory by Thomas Haryden, churchwarden, and Peter Lawlam mentions 'iiij gret bells and saunce bell'.<sup>21</sup>

The south-west buttress is wider and longer than its companion on the north-west corner, perhaps reflecting problems with subsidence after the tower was built. Traces of a chamfered basement course can be seen on the north buttress. The foundations are on average 1.30 m. wide of a strong construction (Fig. 2, Section E-F), and it would seem the west wall of the nave was strengthened at this time. The remains of the foundations of the stair turret were seen in the north-east corner. Part of a Purbeck marble coffin slab (Fig. 6, no. 1), much mutilated by grave diggers after demolition of the tower, served as a sill to the west door, which led down via stone slabs to a clay floor inside the tower. Part of a poorly dressed door jamb (Fig. 6, no. 2) survived, but not *in situ*.

#### THE CHAPEL OF ST. ANNE

The small chapel, on the south side of the chancel was built from a bequest of £40 from John Raynold,<sup>22</sup> of Reading Street, who died in 1522. The chapel was completed by 1525, as the 1525 will of Joan Raynold asked that 'she should be buried in new chapel builded at the cost of my husband'.<sup>23</sup> This small chapel, measuring 7.30 m. × 4.80 m., externally, was built on a foundation of rolled stones, from the Fairlight Clay, probably collected from the beach at Pett Level, Fairlight, East Sussex. The foundations were rather poor, being only 60 cm. wide in places, and the floor was of rammed clay with a pebble surface, which survived in patches. Fragments of polished Bethersden Marble were found scattered throughout the chapel, perhaps the remains of an altar slab. A considerable quantity of burnt painted glass was recovered from the floor, possibly from a large window in the chapel, sucked in as a result of the draught caused by the fire of c. 1560.

The church reached its maximum development with the building of

<sup>21</sup> M.E.C. Walcott, R.P. Coates and W.A. Scott-Robinson, 'Inventories of Parish goods in Kent', *Arch. Cant.*, viii (1872), 145.

<sup>22</sup> KAO, A. C. C., vol. 15, folio 193, 1522.

<sup>23</sup> A. Hussey, *Testamenta Cantiana: A Series of Extracts from Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century Wills relating to Church Building and Topography*, London (1907), East Kent, 109.



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the chapel, as can be seen from the development plans (Fig. 3, 4). However, judging by the foundations the workmanship was of a poor quality.

THE GREAT FIRE

No documentary evidence survives for the fire that destroyed the church, sometime around 1560. Sir John Winnifrith<sup>24</sup> has concluded that the relevant records may be lost as a result of administrative confusion during the first years of transition from a Catholic to a Protestant regime or in part the results of a fire at Canterbury.

The archaeological evidence showed that the main source of the fire was in the tower, where a thick layer of wood ash was uncovered on the clay floor (Fig. 2, Section G–H, 4). The fire proved to be of such intensity that the tower was totally destroyed and the north aisle so severely damaged that it was never rebuilt again.

The conjectural sequence of events that destroyed the tower was probably started by lightning, which ignited the timbers of the roof, causing fire in the bell-chamber, destroying the massive wooden frame from which the bells were suspended, which led to the bells, possibly weighing several tons, crashing down on to the floor of the ringing chamber, whose joists in their turn gave way, prising masonry out of the tower walls. The heat from the fire caused the interior to expand and push outwards, which weakened the tower and brought about its ultimate destruction and collapse towards the body of the church, pulling down the roof timbers of the nave and destroying most of the north aisle. The tremendous inrush of air, with the tower acting as a chimney, must have sucked in the windows and destroyed the painted glass of the Chapel of St. Anne, as noted above.<sup>25</sup> Documentary evidence,<sup>26</sup> points to the roof being covered with wooden shingles and this must have contributed to the fire and led to the destruction of the roof timbers. The damage was so extensive that only the south wall and its windows survived the fire intact and were incorporated into the new Tudor church. However, as noted above, some of the north aisle windows may have been salvaged from the ruins.

<sup>24</sup> *Arch. Cant.*, c (1984), 162.

<sup>25</sup> We are grateful to Mr D. Cowley, a Senior Kent Fire Service Officer, of many years experience, for this fire damage assessment based on the archaeological evidence.

<sup>26</sup> *Arch. Cant.*, c (1984), 161.

EXCAVATIONS ON THE SITE OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH

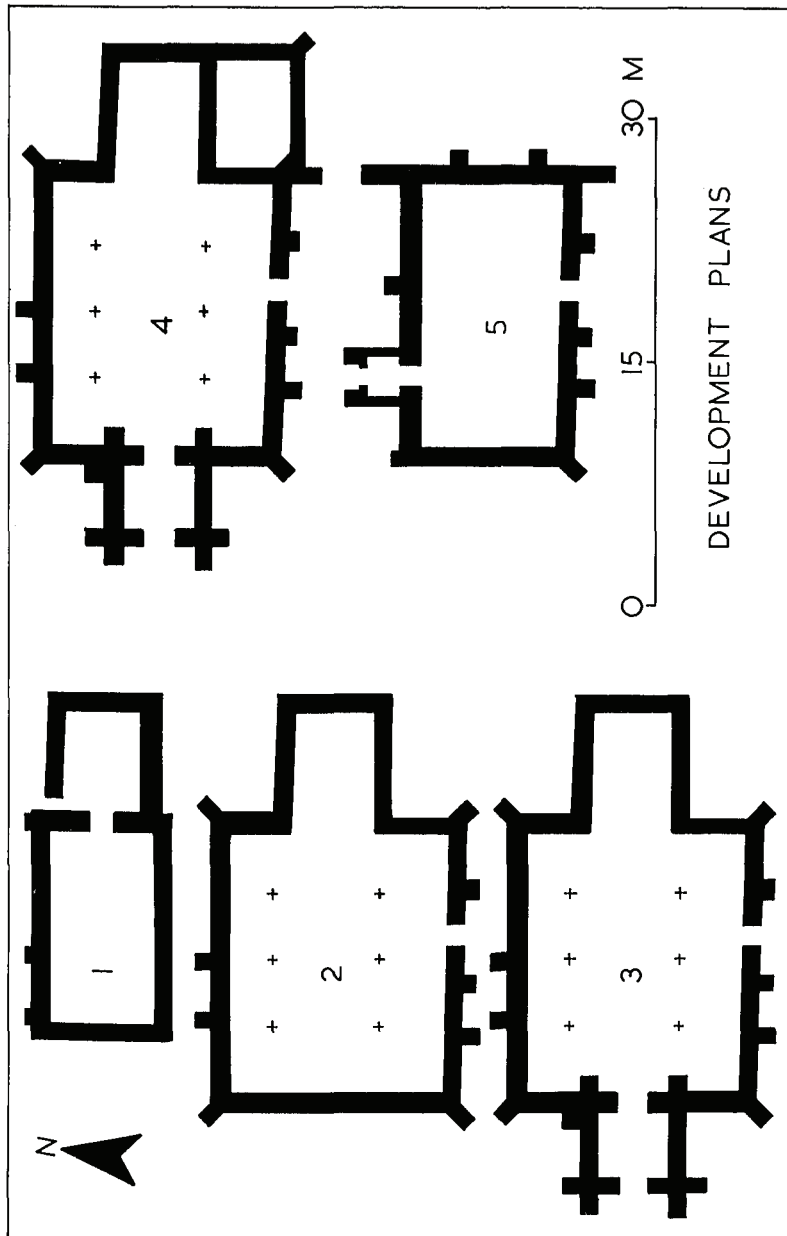


Fig. 3. Development plans of St. Mary's Church, Chapel Bank, Ebony.

THE POST-MEDIEVAL OR ELIZABETHAN CHURCH

We do not know when the shattered and burnt church was rebuilt. A will of 1569 records 'towards the building of Ebenie, if that church be built again'.<sup>27</sup> The earliest date of reconstruction would be around 1570. The parish was ordered to shingle the church in 1574<sup>28</sup> and, in 1590, it recorded that it 'was fentred by extreme winds'.<sup>29</sup> So, it is likely the rebuilding took place in a piecemeal way over many years and may not have been completed until the early years of the seventeenth century.

Richard Kilburne, mentions 'a little church, now standing, was built upon part of the former foundations' in his *Topographie; or Survey of the County of Kent* published in 1659. However, the earliest graphic evidence for the new Elizabethan chapel comes from the little sketch in Francis Hill's map of Ebony Court Lands, dated 1710,<sup>30</sup> followed by a water-colour of an unknown artist, dated 1810, still to be seen hanging in St. Mary's, Reading Street. These views, substantially similar to Howard Gaye's engravings, show a small rather ragged chapel, the crumbling remains of a tower at the west end, while the north porch can be seen in Gaye's north-west aspect held together with iron-work and shored up with buttresses each side of the doorway. Square-headed Perpendicular windows can be seen on the south and north sides, with a large Perpendicular window on the east.

We know from the archaeological evidence that the north aisle wall of the old medieval church was completely demolished and a new north wall built some 4.70 m. to the south in the Norman nave; this new wall (Fig. 2, Section E-F, 18) was of very shallow foundations, possibly leading to problems later on. The chancel and the Chapel of St. Anne were abandoned and a new east wall was built at the end of the Norman nave to join up with the still existing south wall. The west end was patched up out of the remains of the tower. The buttresses were of very poor construction, their foundations being only just below the contemporary turf-line. No traces of the north porch foundations were found; presumably, these were so slight they left no traces of their existence.

It was not possible to draw a plan of the Elizabethan church from the excavations alone as the demolition of the church in 1858 only left

<sup>27</sup> *Op. cit.*, Hussey, 388.

<sup>28</sup> *Arch. Cant.*, c (1984), 162.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>30</sup> Map of Ebony Court Lodge Lands by Francis Hill, KAO, U41 P2; this map was published in *Arch. Cant.*, c (1984), between pages 162 and 163.

#### EXCAVATIONS ON THE SITE OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH

the robbed out trenches of the former walls; however, it was possible to combine the features seen in Howard Gaye's two views with the excavation plan to produce a composite plan (Fig. 3, 5).

In 1858, as the vicar, the Rev. W.W. Kirby, records in the Parish Register, 'the exterior was in a state of rapid decay and the interior most rude'. The main problems of the church, as the excavations showed were the extremely shallow foundations on a subsoil which was liable to subsidence and this must have led to the fabric being in a poor state by 1858, influencing the decision to demolish and re-build at Reading Street.

#### THE BOOTH FIELD

There is no doubt that the origins of Ebony, on Chapel Bank, stem from a monastic grange of Canterbury Cathedral Priory,<sup>31</sup> although the later settlement dates from the Norman period, the coin and pottery evidence suggesting a mid-twelfth-century date. There is evidence for the hamlet or village of Ebony to be situated to the north of the church site, since considerable quantities of pottery and numbers of coins have been recovered from the ploughsoil in this area (N.G.R. TQ 928927), which is marked as the Booth Field in the 1710 map of Francis Hill. Sir John Winnifrith has suggested that this field may be the site of a fair, although there is no documentary evidence to support it.<sup>32</sup>

At the conclusion of the work in 1986, a small exploratory excavation was made on the narrow grass verge between the graveyard and the field, uncovering stonework which may have been the footings of a timber-framed medieval house, pre-dating the erection of the fenced enclosure. It was not possible to extend the excavations into the field and, in any event, it would not seem that any structures could have survived the heavy ploughing over the years. No further work was undertaken at this time.

In 1989, Mr Neil Allen, after consultation with Mr Michael Hill and with the consent of the landowner, visited the site and made a systematic search with a metal detector, of the land adjoining the graveyard. He recovered a surprising number of medieval coins. Later in the same year he returned to the site with Mr and Mrs. Hill, who made a field survey of the same area which extended for some 100 m. alongside the north perimeter of the graveyard and some

<sup>31</sup> R.A.L. Smith, *Canterbury Cathedral Priory*, Cambridge, 1943, 136-138.

<sup>32</sup> *Arch. Cant.*, c (1984), 165.

50 m. out to the north (N.G.R. TQ 928927). Pottery collected from the ploughsoil included fragments of large jugs, pots and lids, dating from early medieval to Tudor, with some later Stafford and Frechen ware. On this occasion the search was extended to another small area some 250 m. to the north-east (N.G.R. TQ 930298), described on the 1710 map as 'House Field' where more fragments of tile and similar pottery, but no coins were found.

In these surveys and searches, Mr Allen has recovered more than 100 medieval coins of which over 60 have been identified. The remainder were so cut and worn as to be not readily identifiable. The earliest coins were three of Henry II and the latest a solitary one of Elizabeth I, but most were of the thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries.<sup>33</sup> Mr Allen also found two Venetian *soldini*, a fifteenth-century lead token and sundry other metal objects – buckles, thimbles, etc. The number of coins found was far greater than would have been expected in such a small area and appears to confirm this as a place of commerce, a market or fair.

The 1710 map by Hill may show Ebony after the seventeenth-century enclosures, which swept away all signs of the medieval village; however, some traces still remain, although today very few of the eighteenth-century boundaries recorded by Hill survive, except the drainage channels which still seem substantially in the same positions. At the northern edge of the Booth Field a hollow way can be seen emerging from the Little Indraught marsh, heading along the boundary between the Booth Field and the Spring Field, then taking a sharp right turn along the line of the old boundary up the hill where it enters the graveyard by the old pond, its course being marked by a scattering of gravel in the ploughsoil. This may mark the old way up to Ebony from the Ferry.

Some evidence survives for early ploughing on the extreme edge of the steep slope to the west in the Booth Field, just beyond the wire fence, which marks the boundary of the present-day ploughfield; here, at a right angle to the fence, can be seen traces of ridges in the grassland. Mead and Kain have stated that there is a written body of evidence to suggest that ridge and furrow was used as a means of surface drainage in the first part of the nineteenth century;<sup>34</sup> however, these ridges follow the contours of the field rather than heading northwards down the slope to aid drainage. These might date to the eighteenth or nineteenth century, but are possibly the remains of

<sup>33</sup> Identified by the Department of Coins and Medals of the British Museum.

<sup>34</sup> W.R. Mead, and R.J.P. Kain, 'Ridge and Furrow in Kent', *Arch. Cant.*, xcii (1976), 171.

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medieval plough strips surrounding the village, common in the Midlands, but not a usual Kentish feature. Recently, however, medieval plough strips have been noted around Moatenden Priory, Headcorn.<sup>35</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

There is no doubt that Ebony, was at one time, a thriving community with contacts through to Rye, as the presence of early fifteenth-century Venetian coins shows. Rye, in the late thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, was trading with the merchants of Venice, who made Camber-before-Rye a place of anchorage, although the Venetian galleys were trading all along the South Coast, between Rye and Arundel (see Miss Archibald's report below).<sup>36</sup>

We can only speculate as to the reasons of the hamlet of Ebony's demise: disease cannot be ruled out, but, as mentioned above, the change in the course of the Rother and the rising sea-levels, which caused the silting up of the watercourses, may have brought possible economic decline. The subsequent inning of the remaining saltings possibly meant the way to Stone and the Isle of Oxney was no longer via the Reading Ferry (*passagium de Redynge*) to Ebony, but by a shorter route over the new bridge at Reading Street, bypassing Ebony. We know that by the beginning of the sixteenth century the ferry was no longer in use, as John Raynold in his will of 1522, mentions 'William the sometyme feryman' and also bequeaths money to the repair of the bridge as the following extract shows 'Iten I wull that the Cawsy ledying from my dore downe between the . . . and John Hammonds house unto the waterside shallbe newe made substantially and from the nether end of the said cawsy I wull that a brigge of tymber shalbe made substantially of a 4 foote brode and yn length as low down to the low water marke as shalbe thought necessary and I wull that the sayd planks of the waye that is by East shalbe provided with newe planks of the churche way ledyng from the planks on the other side of the water by East unto the first stile of the Badfeld be made new with stones'.<sup>37</sup> Presumably, sometime after this date the population started to drift down the hill to Reading Street, and by the beginning of the seventeenth century, as the 1710 map shows, apart from the church, the site was abandoned.

<sup>35</sup> We are indebted to Mr N.A. Aldridge for this information.

<sup>36</sup> *Sx. A. C.*, xx (1868), *Notes and Queries*, 224–225.

<sup>37</sup> *KAO, A. C. C.*, vol. 15, folio 193, 1522.

CECILY LEBON AND ALEC MILES

THE COINS

Marion M. Archibald

1. Chancel floor, (Fig. 2, A-B, base of layer 3).

Richard II, 1379-99

Penny, York Archiepiscopal mint, lis on breast, London dies, earlier flat-based letters

Wt.: 0.94 g. = 14.3 gr.

Ref.: North 1329

This coin is somewhat worn and has been clipped. Its weight and condition suggest that it was lost after the reduction in standard weight to 15 gr. in 1412, and it is very similar to coins of the same period from the Attenborough hoard deposited in 1422. It was therefore lost c. 1412-30.

2. Chancel floor, (layer 3).

Henry V, 1413-22

Penny, York archiepiscopal mint, Class C or D

Wt.: 0.63 g. = 9.7 gr.

Ref.: North 1400 or 1401

This coin was worn and clipped when deposited. It is in a similar condition to coins of this date which survived the reduction in standard weight to 12 gr. in 1464, but it is difficult to be very precise within a bracket of the second half of the fifteenth century.

3. Chancel floor, (layer 3).

Henry VI, 1st Reign, 1422-70

Halfpenny Calais mint, Rosette-Mascle Issue, 1427-30.

Wt.: 0.45 g. (uncleaned) = 6.9 gr.

Ref.: North 1454

The coin was struck on an irregularly-shaped flan and is not clipped. It was scarcely worn at the time it was lost and so was most probably lost within the bracket c. 1430-60 with an earlier rather than a later date within that bracket the more likely.

4. Chancel floor, (layer 3).

Henry VI, 1st Reign, 1422-70

Halfpenny, London Mint, Annulet Issue, 1422-27

Wt.: 0.37 g. (piece missing) = 5.7 gr.

Ref.: North 1435

Despite present condition, this coin was apparently hardly worn and unclipped when lost. Deposition date as for no. 3 above.

5. Chancel demolition layer, (Fig. 2, A-B, layer 4)

Richard II 1377-99

Halfpenny, London mint

Intermediate type, double pellet stops, on *obv.*; pellet between T and A of TAS on *rev.*

Wt.: 0.51 g. = 7.8 gr.

Ref.: F. Purvey, 'The pence, half pence and farthings of Richard II', *BNJ*, xxxi (1962), 101.

(This is a very pleasing little coin now that it has been cleaned up and unlike most excavation coins would be welcome in a collector's cabinet)

Unfortunately, the coin is somewhat double struck, which means that all the tiny details required for Mr Purvey's very minute classification are not visible. The style and the double pellet stops, however, place it in the intermediate group which he has dated

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to c. 1391–16. Sterling-type coins can survive for long periods without much sign of wear, but this coin really exhibits virtually none, so, the usual allowances being made for abnormal survivals in good condition, it was probably lost c. 1400 plus or minus 10, but see next coin.

6. Chancel demolition layer, (layer 4)  
Richard II 1377–99  
Halfpenny, London mint  
Intermediate type, stops on *obv.* wedge and saltires  
Wt.: 0.48 g. = 7.4 gr.  
Reference as above.

This coin appears to have seen a little more circulation than the previous one and so its deposition may be dated in the early years of the fifteenth century. If the two coins were found in the relative levels, it may be that the first coin had survived in abnormally good condition and that both could be dated c. 1400–25, most likely before the reform of 1414.

7. Chancel demolition layer, (layer 4)  
Edward III 1327–77  
Halfpenny, London mint  
Period 1335–44 Second Coinage  
Wt.: 0.54 g. = 8.3 gr.  
Ref.: J.J. North, *English Hammered Coinage*, vol. II, no. 1102.

This coin has seen some wear but has not been clipped. It was probably deposited in the 1370s or 1380s but, as wear is such an unreliable indicator of duration of isolated coins in circulation, an earlier or later date cannot be ruled out.

8. Chancel demolition layer, (layer 4)  
Edward III 1327–77  
Halfpenny, London mint  
Florin Coinage, 1344051, ? saltires before REX  
Wt.: 0.42 g. = 6.5 gr.  
Ref.: North no. 1131

This coin is somewhat worn and could well have been deposited at about the same time as the previous coin.

9. Chancel demolition layer (layer 4)  
Edward III 1327–77  
Farthing, London mint  
Period uncertain  
Wt.: 0.10 g. = 1.5 gr.

This coin has been badly affected by corrosion and, as there was very little actual metal left, it was considered best not to proceed further with the cleaning but to conserve at this stage. It is thus not possible to see all the details necessary for a full identification. Under the corrosion, however, it does not seem much worn. In the circumstances it is not easy to suggest a deposition date, but again sometime in the later fourteenth century seems most likely.

10. Chancel demolition layer (layer 4)  
A contemporary fifteenth-century forgery of York mint penny of (probably) either Edward IV or Henry VI, only weighs a third of the official penny.



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11. Chancel demolition layer (layer 4)  
*Soldino* of Michele Sten, Doge of Venice, 1400–13  
Wt.: 0.37 g. = 5.7 gr.

### Italy

One of the Papal dependencies

Wt.: 0.40 g. = 6.1 gr.

Foreign coins were forbidden to circulate in England officially, but an acute shortage of smaller denominations in the latter fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries led to the importation and use of baser foreign coins of about the right size to serve as halfpennies. The most numerous of these coins were the so-called 'galley-halfpens', the *soldini* of the Doges of Venice, which came in with the 'trading galleys'. This was unofficial, of course, and the authorities did their best to suppress them and succeeded just after 1420 partly by issuing larger numbers of halfpennies from the Royal mints (early halfpence of Henry VI, as at Ebony, are fairly common). As well as the issues of Venice one occasionally finds halfpenny-sized coins of other Italian states or cities such as this. It is interesting to note that this coin has been pierced with the point of a knife, showing that someone had recognised it as illegal currency, for people were obliged to strike a hole in any false or illegal currency offered to them and take it for recoinage.

## PAINTED GLASS

The bulk of fragments of painted window-glass were recovered from the excavations in the sixteenth-century Chapel of St. Anne on the south side of the chancel, where most of the material was found on the south-west corner of the chapel floor, sealed in by demolition debris since the mid-sixteenth century, when the fire which destroyed the church sucked in the window and destroyed it. A few fragments of thin clear plain glass and some decayed blackish glass were found in the nave, though these were from the demolition levels.

The glass is mainly from the early sixteenth century, the black letters being typical of the period. The interesting features are the esoteric geometric designs, which would seem unique to Ebony. A search through the Royal Commission on Historic Monument's large reference collection of painted glass slides for Kent has not produced any parallels. It has been suggested that they may be trade or merchants' marks, which sometimes may be found in chapels associated with guilds or patrons who do not have a coat-of-arms.<sup>38</sup> C.R. Cuncer illustrates a merchant's mark from the lost glass of the Knight family pew at St. Lawrence, Godmersham.<sup>39</sup> This is far from a parallel, but merchants' marks would seem to be rare. The chapel was 'buildd by the cost' of John Raynold of 'Redding Street', who died in 1522, and apart from being a wealthy man may have been a merchant, although a study of his will gives no indication of this other than that he was a landowner.

Fig. 4.

1. 2.5 mm. thick, with three grozed edges. The hatched area has only a thin wash of paint, it is just possible to see the brush marks. Part of a scroll with lettering.
2. 2 mm. thick, only one grozed edge. Black lettering which has flaked somewhat.

<sup>38</sup> We are grateful to the late L.R.A. Grove, for this suggestion.

<sup>39</sup> C.R. Cuncer, *Lost Glass from Kent Churches*, Kent Archaeological Society, Maidstone, 1980.

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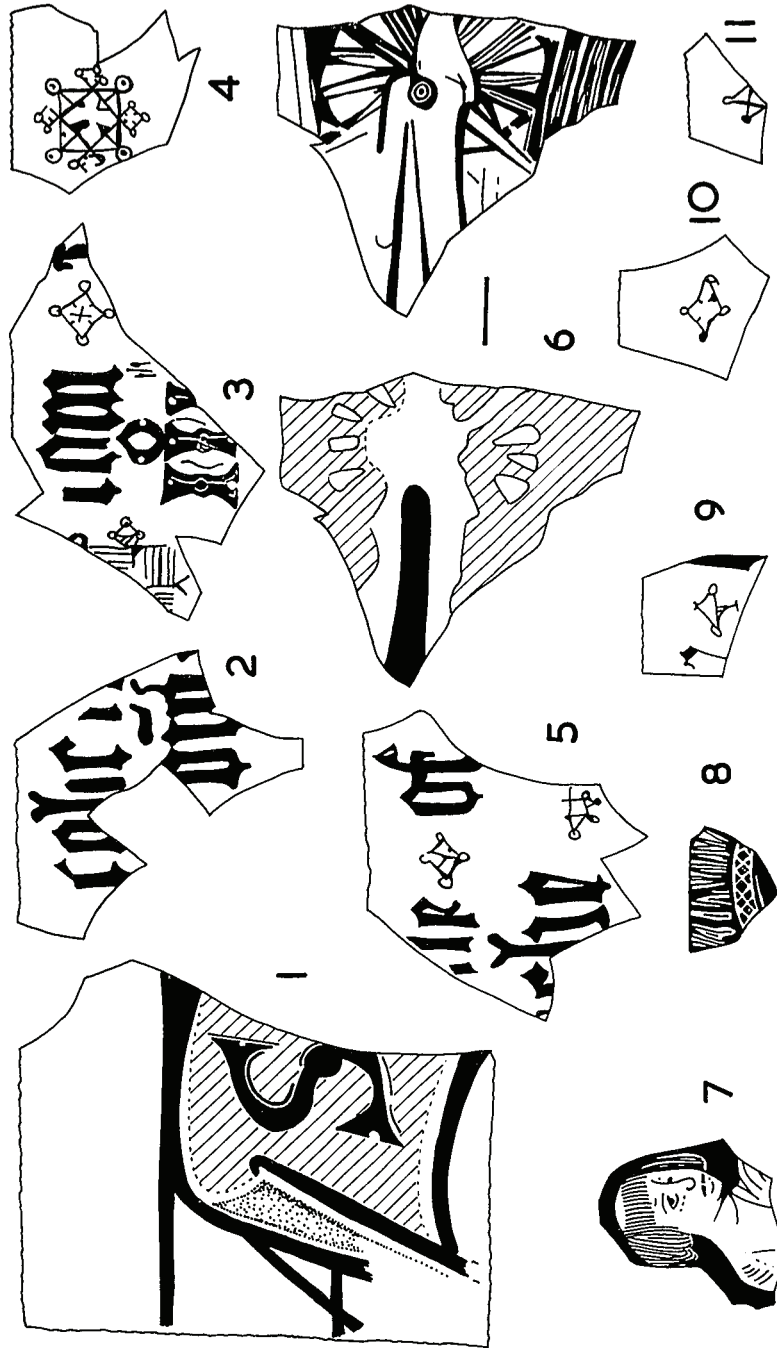


Fig. 4. Painted glass (Scale:  $\frac{1}{4}$ ).

## CECILY LEBON AND ALEC MILES

3. Again 2 mm. thick, one grozed edge. Black letters with some geometric designs.
4. 2 mm. thick, one grozed edge. A large geometric design, reminiscent of a key.
5. 2 mm. thick, one grozed edge. Black letters with small geometric designs.
6. 2 mm. thick, painted on both sides. The painting on the inside possibly showing an eagle with rays radiating out from the head with a halo. The reverse side has a yellow stain around the area of the halo, presumably stained with silver nitrate, which when fired in a furnace turns yellow, while the body of the eagle, would seem to have a cream strip running through it.
7. 2 mm. thick. Monk's head in a humanistic style of portraiture, finer details of hair scratched out of a thick layer of paint.
8. Detail of garment? Again fine detail scratched out.
- 9-11. Three similar examples of geometric designs, each have one grozed edge.

## THE POTTERY

Very few fragments of pottery were recovered from the excavations; this is not unexpected from a church site. However, some fragments of early medieval ware were found along with some later green glazed ware and the base of a Surrey jug.

Fig. 5.

Against blocked chancel door

1. Flat level-topped rim sherd of cooking-vessel tempered with shell and sub-angular quartz, soft pinky-grey fabric. Second half of thirteenth century.

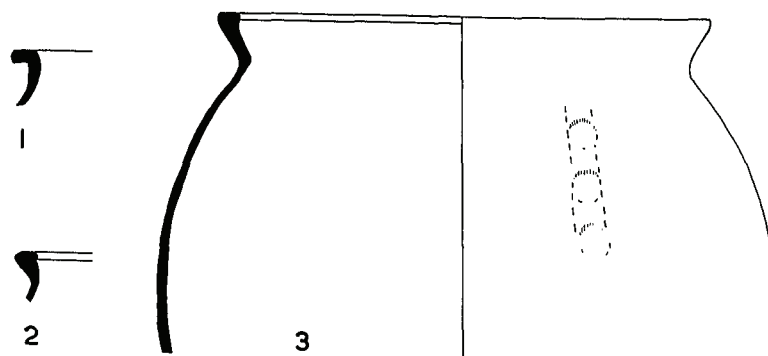


Fig. 5. Pottery from the church (Scale: 1:4).

<sup>40</sup> Sheppard Frere, 'Canterbury Excavations, Summer, 1946,' *Arch. Cant.*, lxxviii (1954), Fig. 17, 132.

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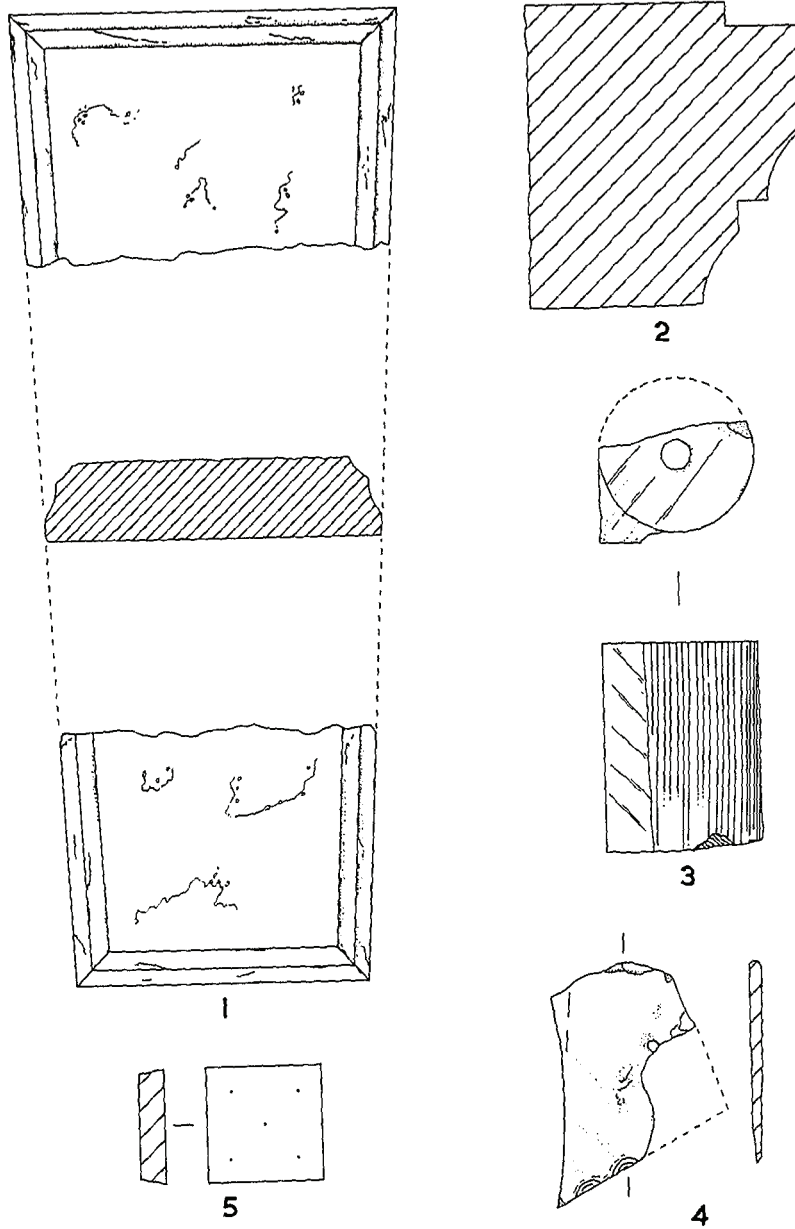


Fig. 6. Stone and tile objects. 1. Coffin slab (Scale: 1:16), 2. Door-jamb (Scale: 1:8), 3. Angle shaft (Scale: 1:8), 4. Stone tile (Scale: 1:8), 5. Floor-tile (Scale: 1:8).

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2. Fragment of cooking-pot rim with clubbed beaded rim, tempered with shell and sub-angular quartz, soft pinky-grey fabric, similar to no. 1. Not earlier than twelfth century, possibly late twelfth, or thirteenth.

Buried land surface outside south aisle.

3. Cooking-pot with everted flattened rim with low vertical ribs on body tempered with translucent subangular quartz, with hard grey fabric. First half twelfth century. Compare with Group 111, Rose Lane, Canterbury.<sup>40</sup>

STONE AND TILE OBJECTS

Fig. 6.

1. Fragment of a flat slightly tapering coffin slab of Purbeck Marble, 1.85 m. long × 56 cm. wide, with double hollow chamfer around its bevelled edge. No sign of pattern or design on the surface although badly eroded by exposure to the elements and use as a door sill in the west doorway of the tower, and after demolition of tower badly damaged by grave diggers. The slab is from the Purbeck school of carving, which was the leading English centre throughout the thirteenth century and during the first half of the following century. A good example can be seen from Great Horkesley, Essex, which is thought to be thirteenth century.<sup>41</sup>
2. Profile of a door jamb fragment from west doorway of tower, probably of Tilgate Stone from the Hastings Beds, possibly an unsympathetic medium for carving; this would explain the very poor craftsmanship.
3. Fragment of an angle shaft of Caen stone, 148 mm. in diameter; many other fragments were found, possibly they came from the chancel arch.
4. Part of a stone roof-tile found in the demolition debris, made from calcareous sandstone of the Hastings Beds. Stone roof-tiles are very uncommon in this part of Kent, although common in West Sussex where they are made of Horsham Stone.
5. Around 25 floor-tiles were recovered from the excavations, most of these were reasonably complete. They varied in colour from brown and yellow to a slight green glaze on the surface, the fabric being a dull red colour and slightly sandy. The tiles are approximately 110 mm. square and roughly 24 mm. thick with a slight bevel to the edge. Nail holes are present in all the tiles; they consist of five holes, one nail hole in the centre and one in each corner on the top surface. The presence of nail holes would suggest the tiles are imports from the Low Countries, and possibly of fourteenth- or fifteenth-century date. Similar tiles although with a larger bevel were recently found in the excavations at Appledore Church.<sup>42</sup>

A considerable quantity of roof-tile debris was found, but only one tile survived intact, measuring 242 mm. long × 145 mm. wide and 7 mm. thick, with small round peg-holes.

<sup>41</sup> Miller Christie, 'Some Essex Coffin Slabs', *Trans. Essex A.S.*, vol. vii (New Series 1899), 373, fig. 3.

<sup>42</sup> M.C. Horton, 'The Tiles', in M.C. Lebon, 'The North Chapel of Appledore Church', *Arch. Cant.*, cvi (1988), 94–101.

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*Springtime at Ebony in the 1960s, with St Mary's Church and Ebony School in the background. ©Kent Life*



# Searching for Ebony

An isolated tree-crowned hill overlooking remote marshland four miles south of Tenterden marks the site of the long-lost village of Ebony, whose parish church was a landmark visible from miles away to ships heading for harbours along what today is known as Kent's Saxon Shore.

This book, the first to be devoted to the history of the village and parish, tells the story of the early inhabitants... the desecration by man and destruction by nature of their first church... the one they built to replace it... and why hundreds of years later it had to be moved, stone-by-stone, down the hill to Reading Street.

Here too are stories of people from all walks of life who have lived and died in and around Reading Street, including... soldiers who succumbed to marsh fever during the Napoleonic Wars, and were buried in unmarked graves... family tragedies and forgotten heroes of WW1... Spitfires attacking and 'doodlebugs' exploding in WW2... the eccentric landlord of the 'pub with no beer'... and the star of stage and screen whose last resting place is among the trees on the hill where Ebony's history began.

Published by  
Kent Archaeological Society, Maidstone Museum, St Faith's Street, Maidstone, Kent ME14 1LH  
[www.kentarchaeology.org.uk](http://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk)  
Registered charity number 223382