



A Visitors Guide to
St Mary's Church
Patrixbourne
Kent

By Mary Berg

£1

WELCOME

to St Mary's Church, Patrixbourne

St Mary's, Patrixbourne has a number unusual architectural features and is one of the best-preserved monuments from the post-Conquest era in the villages of East Kent. People have been worshipping here for over 900 years and, possibly, in an earlier church on the site before that. We hope that this little book will answer some of your questions and help you to make the most of your visit.

Mary Berg, 2002

History

The first written mention of a church at Patrixbourne (then called simply Bourne) is in the **Domesday Book** (1084) but there were Anglo-Saxon burials nearby, some of which may have been Christian. Some pre-Norman stone has been used in the present church and that could indicate that, like other Saxon churches around Canterbury, the earlier church was built of stone.

The first known mention of Patrixbourne is in a charter dating from 1174-91 referring to a donation to Canterbury Cathedral by **Ingelram Patrick**, then lord of the manor. The Patrick family came to Kent from La Lande-Patry in southern Normandy after 1066. The architectural evidence taken together with the history of the family points to a date for the building – or re-building – of the church of 1170-80. It was completed by the end of the 12th century when the income from the church was given by Ingleram's son-in-law to a priory near Rouen in Normandy. **King Edward II** (1307-1327) stayed at Patrixbourne for at least two nights on his way from Canterbury to Dover in January 1308, but we do not know where he stayed.

The church remained under the patronage of Beaulieu Priory, with some administrative support from **Merton Priory** in Surrey, until the Hundred Years' War. It was bought in 1409 by Merton Priory and after it was dissolved in 1538 Patrixbourne was granted to Thomas Cheney, already a major landholder in the area. The chapel now called Bifrons was added in the 15th century and housed the Isaac family tomb.

The **Isaacs** held a number of manors in the area and in 1450 a John Isaac joined the Cade rebellion. He was, however, pardoned and became Sheriff of Kent and Keeper of Canterbury Castle. The large west window was added in the same period and it seems likely that the Isaacs paid for that and probably for other repairs etc. There are two heads – one male and one female – on either side of the west window. Could these be John and Cecilia Isaac who were buried in the chapel?

Changes and repairs were undertaken throughout the 19th century, in particular the north aisle was added in the mid-1820s. Work was carried out in 1849 by Mr Marshall of Canterbury and in 1857 Sir Giles Gilbert Scott restored/rebuilt the church at the expense of Elizabeth Marchioness Conyngham, then living at Bifrons. The Conynghams were generous 19th century benefactors (see below). Repairs continue to be necessary and some fairly major work was carried out on the tower in the 1930s. The church is kept in a good state of repair, but this is of course costly.

The architecture and decoration

The church is atypical of its size and period for two reasons: the position of the tower and the round window at the east end. As visitors walk through the gate they see the east end with its circular window above three lancets. This is highly unusual and there is only one other example in Kent dating from the same period and that is at Barfreston. Visitors enter the church through the south door under the tower halfway along south wall of the

nave, unique in surviving 12th century churches in England of this general form.

The portal is richly carved and also has sundials carved on the jambs so that parishioners would know when a mass was to be sung or said. The decoration is reminiscent of Rochester Cathedral, but the differences are significant enough to suggest that the work was carried out by a different team of craftsmen, possibly brought over from Normandy or elsewhere in France. The style is unlike that of the portal at Barfreston church, although the dates are possibly similar.

The tympanum above the portal is severely damaged and the central figures in particular are hard to decipher. The fact that the beasts and geometrical patterns have fared better implies deliberate defacing – possibly by Cromwell's followers – rather than weathering. Art historians agree that the central figure is Christ in Majesty flanked by at least two angels. Above the tympanum in the highly unusual triangular gable there is a defaced representation of the Lamb of God.

Other external features include the Priest's door in the south wall of the chancel and a small Norman window on the southern side of the west end. Above the Priest's door we can see the remains of a seated figure, probably the Virgin to whom the church is dedicated. The large perpendicular window mentioned above dominates the west end. The north aisle was added in 19th century and the door in the north wall is likely to have been moved from its original position in the old north wall. The windows in the north wall are medieval and may have been moved from the original wall or from another church altogether.

Entering through the south door, the visitor is immediately aware that the building is ancient, but has been cared for through the ages. A description by Edward Hasted in 1790 mentioned the round-headed arches, but that was before the north aisle was built and probably before the arches supporting the tower were reconstructed. The only obvious remaining round arch is between the nave and the chancel, but there is another now obscured by the organ. These round arches are contemporary with the 12th century church and the others are later. The chancel is pretty much unchanged since the 12th century, although the lancet windows under the circular one at the east end were closed at some stage and reopened during one of the nineteenth century restorations.

At the south-east end of the nave is the **Bifrons chapel**. This was most recently the family pew of the Conynghams and there was a fireplace where the east-facing window is now until well into the 20th century. The chapel has been much altered but luckily there are pre-restoration accounts of the existence of the tomb of John and Cecily Isaac. Sadly, only the part built into the south wall remains and there is no sign of the inscription dated 1443 asking us to pray for their souls. At the foot of steps leading to the chapel is a memorial tablet to the Bargrave family (1663), one of whom was Dean of Canterbury in the 18th century.

Other **memorials** inside the church include tablets commemorating the Hughes-Hallet family at the west end, the Conyngham and Denne families, both in the chancel. A list of the vicars of Patricbourne hangs near the south door. This was compiled by the Rev. T. S. Frampton with the then incumbent, the Rev H. Knight

The list is incomplete but nonetheless of interest.

The **clock** is by Bennett of Cheapside, London and was given by the Marquis of Conyngham in 1876, when the stone clock face was inserted above the south doorway, said to be a reproduction of an earlier design. There are three **bells** in the tower. One is undated but thought to predate the other two, which are dated 1674 and were cast at St Dunstan's in Canterbury.

The **Swiss glass windows** merit special attention. These were not made for Patricbourne church but were purchased by and presented to the church the first Marchioness Conyngham in 1837. The Swiss Glass is exquisitely delicate in design and colouring and is a typical example of enamel glass as distinct from stained glass. These windows were obviously *vitreaux d'alliance* or commemorations of alliances between noble families and cover the period from 1538 until well after the Thirty Years' War in 1670. They were often used in Germany and France as decorations in public and private buildings, and portray both sacred and secular themes.

The eight panels in the south window of the *Bifrons Chapel*, reading top to bottom depict: the Crucifixion; St John the Baptist; Pyramus and Thisbe (like the martyrs depicted by medieval artists, Pyramus, with a sword thrust through his body, is suffering no pain); the Adoration of the Shepherds; Peter Gisler of Burglen (a town in the original Swiss Canton of Uri); the Raising of Lazarus (or some think the raising of Jairus's daughter); a Standard Bearer (of the Leventina valley in the Canton of Tessin. The winding road of the man driving pack

mules is an original of the St Gothard Pass); the murder of St Meinrad. The ten panels in the Chancel reading from top to bottom are as follows:-

North Lancet - Christ's Agony 'in the Garden of Gethsemane (the towered city in the background is meant to be Lucerne and the three apostles are Peter, John and James); the Crucifixion (the inscription reads: "*Holy Angel and Messenger pray God for me, poor sinner, that he will forgive my sins and after this life grant me life eternal*"); Samson (holding in his hand the jaw bone with which he slew the Philistines).

Central Lancet - A knight, Jacob Wirtz 1579; a Roman soldier (an allegory of war); the Adoration of the Magi (there are also small pictures of the Adoration in the top left and right-hand corners); St John the Evangelist and Elizabeth of Hungary (this is the work of Martin Moser, the best 16th century glass painter in Lucerne).

South Lancet - A brilliantly coloured painting of a long-bearded knight in armour; Christ's Agony in Gethsemane; Samson slaying the lion (an exact copy, line for line, of the woodcut by Albrecht Durer. The hill in the background represents Nurenburg, Durer's native city).

Those who are interested in further examples of Swiss glass in the district should visit Temple Ewell church near Dover.

Other objects of interest

In the chancel there are two **aumbries** (or cupboards used to contain the sacraments) and a **piscina** in the chancel. These are medieval but seem to have been subject to some restoration.

There is a **hagioscope** or squint into the chancel from the south aisle. This is certainly pre-reformation and likely to be 14th or 15th century.

The **carved Dutch screen** now at the west end but formerly behind the altar is from the 16th century (it was probably the gift of a benefactor in 18th or 19th centuries). The **font** was given to the church by Marchioness Conyngham in the 19th century.

References: *Archaeologia Cantiana* XIV, XXVIII, XLIV and CXXII; a guide by the Rev. H. Knight dated 1930.



The Norman Doorway
The South Door of St Mary's Church

Published by Patricbourne with Bridge PCC
October 2003

Text © Mary Berg
Photos Front Cover © Andrea Nicholson
Back cover © Rosalie Stacey

