



The Church of
St Mary, Bishopsbourne
Kent

St Mary's Church



HISTORY: Bishopbourne is situated on the intermittent Nailbourne stream, which runs through the Elham Valley south of the A2 (a Roman road), along the top of the downs between Canterbury and Dover to the north of the village.

The first mention of Burnan, as it was then called, was in 708 AD, when Egbert sold the manor to Ealdhur who, in turn, gave it to the Community of Christ. In 811 they in turn exchanged it with Archbishop Wulfred for the manor of Eastry.

The manor of Hautbourne continued with the same family from Domesday until it came into the ownership of the second daughter of William Haut. She married William Culpepper, who exchanged his lands in Bekesbourne for the paramount manor of Bishopbourne. He then immediately conveyed both manors to Sir Anthony Aucher, of Otterden. The manor remained with the Auchers and their descendants, the Beckinghams, until it was sold to Matthew Bell in 1844. It was again sold to Sir John Prestige in 1927 and in modern times to Somerset and Lady Juliet de Chair.

There is no record of the building of the first church. But it is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086. The present building is an example of a parish church belonging to the Archbishop which was totally rebuilt on large scale in the 13th century.

THE NAVE: This was probably rebuilt in two stages during the second half of the 13th century. On the upper walls, above the arcade, can be seen the remains of some fine painted figures on an 'ashlar' background. These may have been painted after the 15th century rebuilding, possibly about 1462.

At the west end of the nave are some medieval floor tiles which may predate

the building of the tower. They indicate the original church floor level.

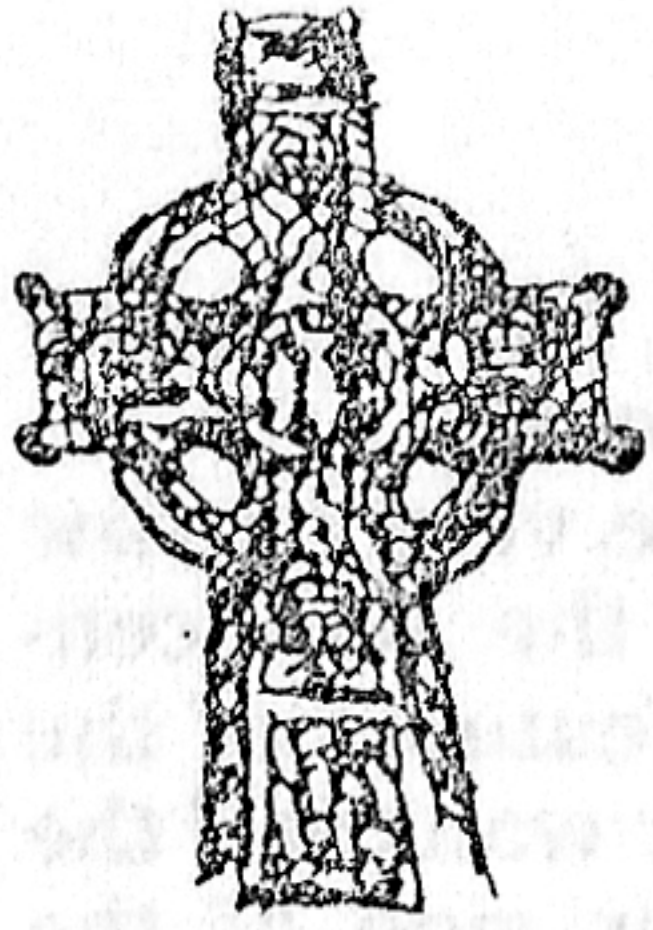
SIDE AISLES: These are very narrow and were remodelled in the 15th century. The only surviving features of the 13th century are the outer walls and the north doorway. On either side of the door are slightly projecting pilasters and on the wall to the east a niche (holy water stoup). The whole was covered with a porch until 1807. The north aisle, which now terminates with the vestry wall, may have been used as a side chapel to St Nicholas. The stone ledge at the east end was probably a retable.

The south aisle was possibly intended as a chapel, but there is no evidence of dedication. During the extensive renovations by Matthew Bell in the 19th century an entrance was made in the south wall and it was used as a family pew by owners of Bourne Park.

Sir John Prestige, when he lived at Bourne Park, also made further alterations and his family used it until 1987, when Richard Neame, then High Sheriff of Kent, converted it and furnished it as a chapel. It was designed by the architect David Martin and was dedicated to St Catherine by Archbishop Robert Runcie on December 6, 1987.

CHANCEL: The chancel was extensively renovated in 1871 by Matthew Bell. The floor was raised and paved with encaustic tiles. A massive arch was built into the north wall to house the new organ. The nave was fitted with new pitch pine pews replacing the old box pews. The two beautiful 15th century stalls, with their carved fronts and poppy heads, were added to with modern stalls to resemble them.

A statue of the Virgin Mary once stood above the priest's stall. William Haut left in his will "a piece of stone for her image to rest its feet on", which is said to have been part of the stone upon which the Archangel descended when he saluted the Virgin Mary.



ALTAR: The altar is modern and the present reredos was erected in 1877. There was once a beautiful alabaster reredos depicting the life of the Virgin Mary. This was left by Edmond Mynot, Town Clerk of Canterbury, in 1487.

He left directions to be buried in the nave before the altar of St Mary, near the grave of his mother Joan.

PISCINA: The piscina in the sanctuary is late 13th century with a 19th century backing on the east end of the south wall.

ROOD LOFT: During the reign of Elizabeth I nearly all rood lofts were destroyed. But there was still one here at the time of the Archdeacon's visitation in 1560. The stone corbel, or bracket, near the pulpit was probably for its support. The rood is mentioned in several old wills.

TOWER: The tower was built in the late 15th century when the entire west wall of the church was demolished. It was constructed of flint with buttresses at each corner. The two eastern buttresses were joined to the walls of the 13th century arcades and new west walls were built to each aisle. A stone staircase leads to the belfry in the south west corner.

BELLS: The bells were originally hung for change ringing but the fittings became worn with age and one bell was cracked. In 1974, the three sound bells were rehung for chiming only. In 1975, Canterbury City Council gave a bell, cast in 1597 by Robert Mot, which had been lying unused in Westgate Tower since its removal from the demolished St Mary Bredman Church in 1880. The

cracked bell was recast by the Whitechapel Foundry for another church.

Bell details: Treble, founder, Robert Mot, 1597, diameter 22³/₄in, weight 3cwt.

Second, founder, Christopher Hodson, 1685, diameter 26in, weight 3¹/₂cwt.

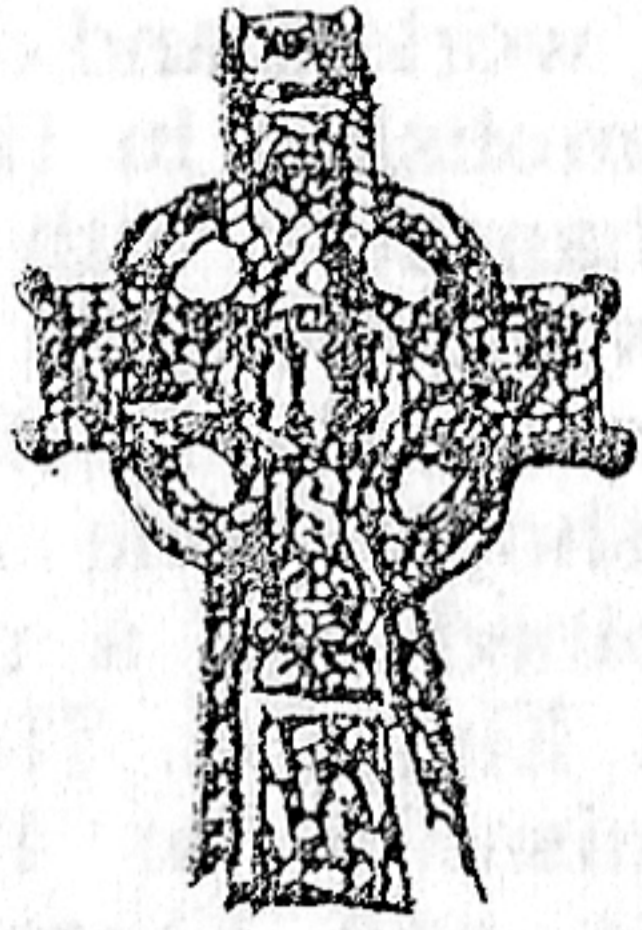
Third, founder, Joseph Hatch, 1618, diameter 30¹/₂in, weight 4¹/₂cwt. Tenor, founder, Joseph Hatch, 1618, diameter 34in, weight 6³/₄cwt.

WINDOWS: There are two pairs of windows on both sides of the chancel. There is medieval glass at the top of all of them, which probably survived destruction by Cromwell's men as they were too high to be easily reached. Another window of interest is on the lower part of a north window, including the cap and arms of Cardinal Morton (1420-1501), Archbishop of Canterbury and Cardinal to King Henry VIII.

A small window high up on the north wall of the chancel is constructed of small fragments of ancient glass. It depicts the head of the Virgin Mary, a castle and another head reputed to be that of St Barbara.

The large east window was put up in 1890 in memory of Richard Hooker by the people of England. There is also another interesting window in the east wall of St Catherine's Chapel. It was brought here by Stephen Beckingham from his home in Tolleshunt Darcy, Essex, when he married the niece of the last baronet Sir Hewitt Aucher. It consists of delicately executed Flemish and German glass depicting scriptural scenes and various coats of arms.

The window at the west end of the church contains 1874 glass by Morris & Co, with figures by the pre-Raphaelite artist Burne Jones and was in memory of Dr Sandford, Rector of Bishopsbourne in 1870 and later Bishop of Gibraltar.



PULPIT: The pulpit is the one for which Richard Hooker left £3. To quote his will: "Item, I give and bequeth three pounds of lawful English money towards the building and makeing of a newer and sufficient pulpitt in the p'sh of Bishopsbourne."

There was also a sounding board surmounted by a fine carved angel, which has disappeared.

FONT: The font dates from the 14th century. When a new font was installed in Victorian times, the original one was thought to have been given to the Rector, who had been curate of Barham before the separation of the two parishes in 1846. The original one was found in a garden in Barham and was returned to Bishopsbourne in 1931. It was repaired and installed in the nave in 1975, the new plinth being designed by architect Anthony Swaine, of Canterbury.

ORGAN: The organ was originally under the tower arch. The new organ, which Fanny C. Bell presented, was installed in the chancel under the new arch built into the north wall in 1865. This organ is of greater merit than is usually found in rural parishes. It was made by William Walker, of London, who started making organs in 1828. Their tonal style is firmly rooted in the English tradition, which gives them their charm and special musical interest. It was last overhauled in 1979 with funds raised through an appeal.

SCREEN: The screen at the west end of the nave was formerly part of the Drake-Brockman memorial chapel in St Martin's Church, Cheriton. Restored in 1936 and dedicated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, it became redundant on the reorganisation of the church and was given to this church. The frontal section was erected in 1977 under supervision of Anthony Swaine. The expense of erection was largely borne by members of the family living in Australia.

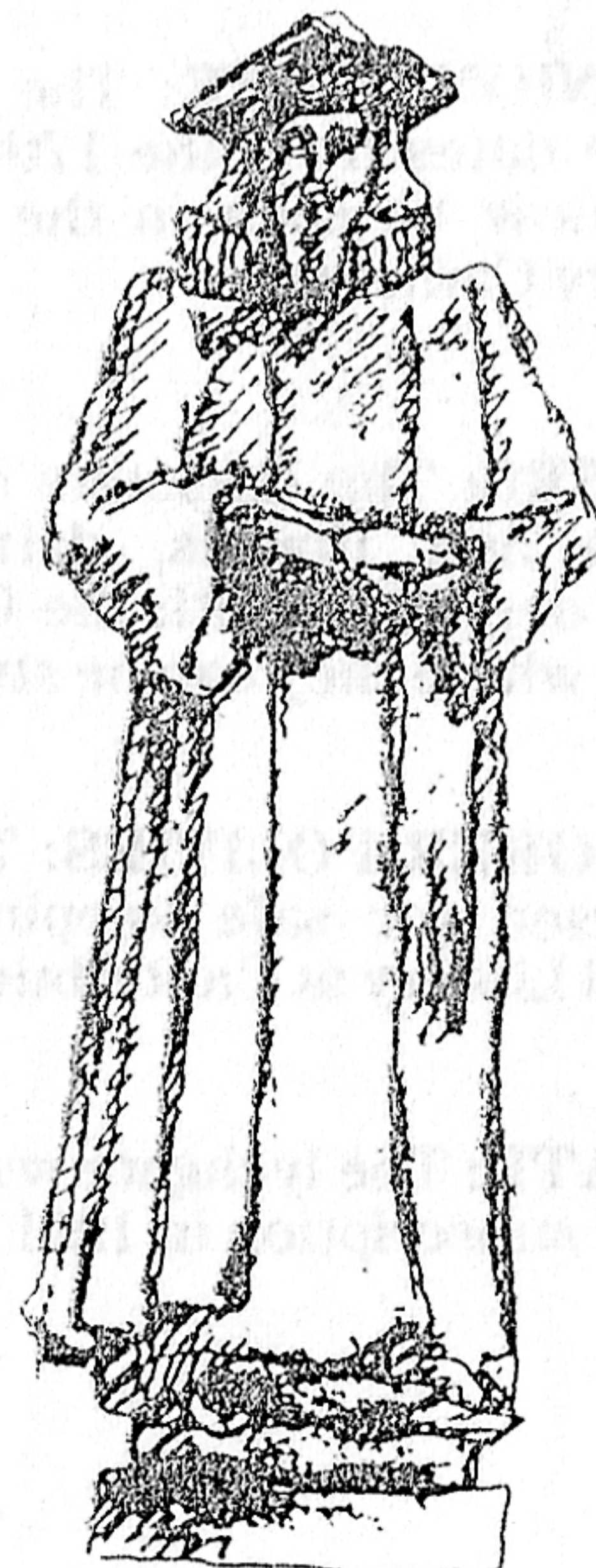
RICHARD HOOKER: Bishopsbourne's most famous Rector was born in Heavitree, Exeter. In 1595 he came to this parish because he wished for a country living "where he might see God's blessings spring out of the earth, and to be free of noise and to finish his work."

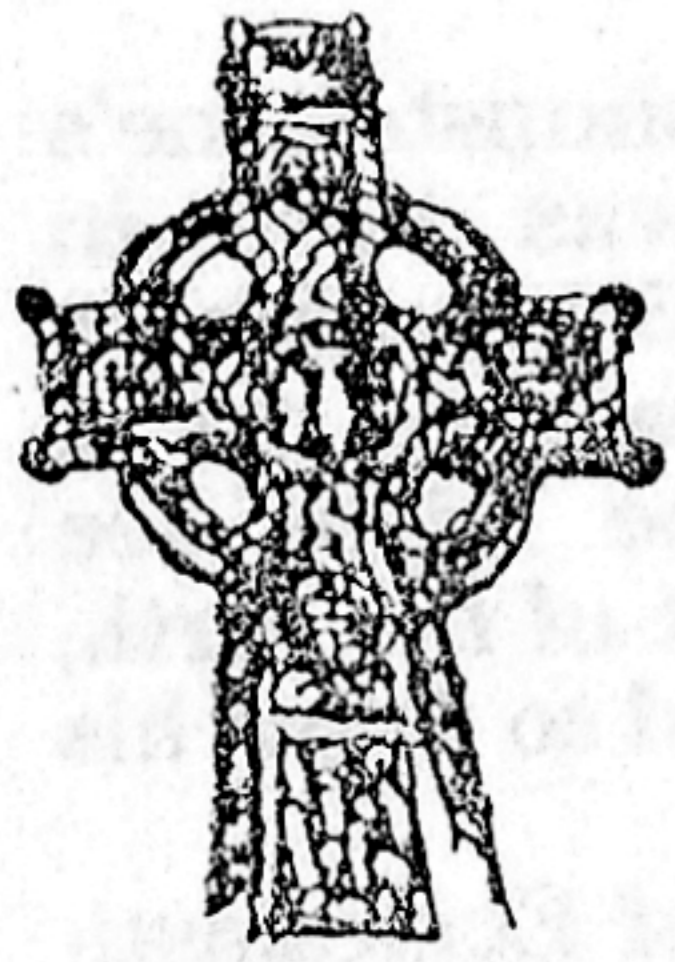
He wrote eight books of Ecclesiastical Polity, five of which were published in his lifetime. The treatise was started in 1585-6, so Book V was written Bishopsbourne.

It was the earliest important work of its kind in England and was written to supply logical and philosophical basis for the English church at the Reformation Settlement.

It is a masterpiece of logical argument and a classic in respect of the beauty of its English prose. He died on November 2, 1600, and is buried in the church. The monument to him was erected in 1632 by Sir William Cowper, who called Hooker his spiritual father.

This monument was originally on the north wall of the chancel, but on the installation of the new organ it was moved to the south wall. Beneath it is a large plain stone, about 12ft long, which is thought to be the original altar stone and to be over Hooker's remains.





MEMORIAL BRASS: There are only two brasses of interest. Unfortunately, one of them lies under the organ and the other under the choir stalls. The one under the organ reads:

“John Colwell and Elizabeth his wyfe
lyeth here
Grete friends to this church more than
XXX yere
Beyng servants to William Haut knight
On whose soules have mercy Chryst full
of myght.”

There is no date, but from the reference to William Haut it must be 15th century.

The other, under the choir stalls, translated from the Latin reads:

“Under the marble rests the body of
John Gibbon gentleman,
formerly a most beloved inhabitant of
this parish.”

He was the owner of Charlton Park in the 16th century and the brass is engraved with his arms, a lion rampant guardant between three escallops impaling Hamon of Acrise, quartering Cossington.

COMMUNION PLATE: The Communion plate dates from the 17th century and can now be seen in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral

REGISTERS: The Registers of Births, Marriages and Burials, dating from 1558, are deposited with the Cathedral Archives, where they can be studied.

THE HOOKER POLTTIES: These are now housed for safe keeping in the Cathedral Library at Canterbury.

LYCHGATE: The lychgate was erected by public subscription in 1911

THE RECTORY: The house where Richard Hooker lived, worked and died — in 1600 — was demolished in 1954. Sir John Prestige exchanged it with the house known as Oswalds next to the church. This then became the Rectory until 1970 when Bishopsbourne and Kingston were combined and a new Rectory was built in Kingston. There was further reorganisation in 1975 when Bishopsbourne and Kingston were amalgamated with Barham and the Rector took up residence there.

JOSEPH CONRAD lived at Oswalds and wrote several of his books there. A memorial porch in front of the village hall, which is named after him, was largely contributed to by his American admirers.

JOCELYN BROOKE lived the later years of his life in Bishopsbourne in Ivy Cottage, opposite the forge, and died in 1966. He was a poet, writer and a distinguished botanist whose book on wild orchids in Britain has become the sought after standard work.

THE REV JOSEPH BANCROFT READE, FRS, a former Rector, was a noted chemist, microscopist, photographer and discoverer. He was Rector from 1863 to 1870 and is buried in the churchyard.

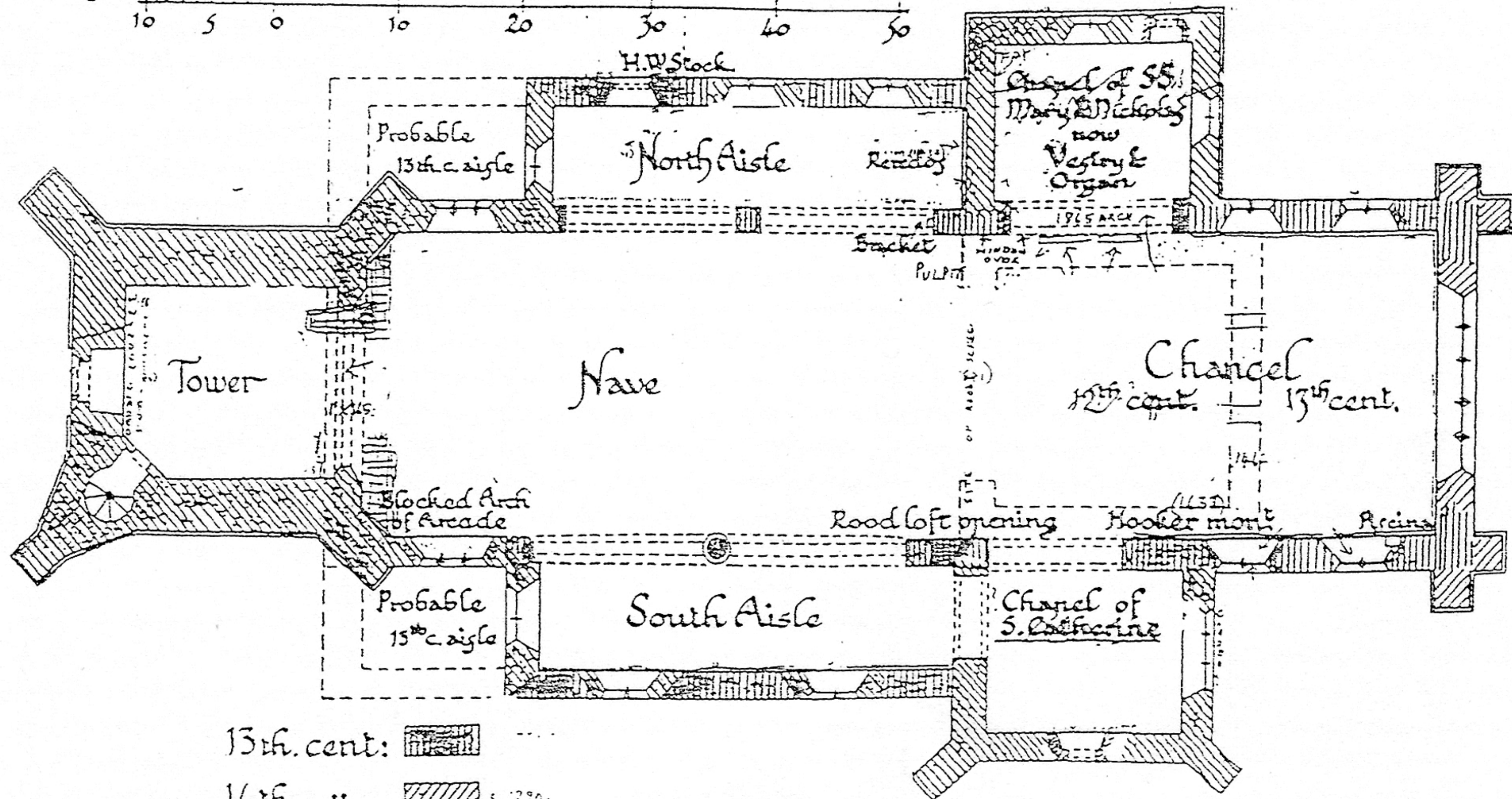
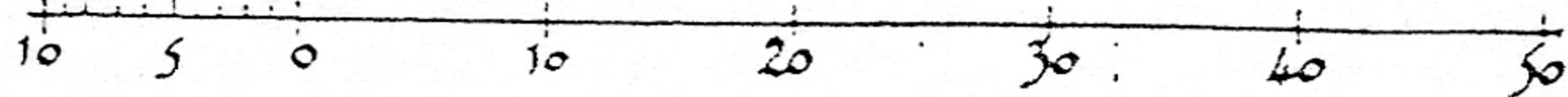
● These notes are based on those compiled by Miss Alice Castle and reviewed in 1961 and 1980, amended in 1992 by Rosemary Elliott, following a survey for the Canterbury Diocese by Tim Tatton-Brown of the Canterbury Archaeological Trust, and edited by Malcolm Mitchell.

The appeals and organisation of work on the bells, organ, screen and font between 1974 and 1978 were initiated by Col Geoffrey Elliott, then treasurer of the Parochial Church Council.

● The front cover illustration is by Bridget Eaves.

Bishopsbourne, Kent, S. Mary.

Scale of Feet



- 13th. cent:
- 14th. "
- 15th. "
- Recent

probable extent of the
cent. church tinted blue