
The Story of
**BEKESBOURNE
CHURCH**

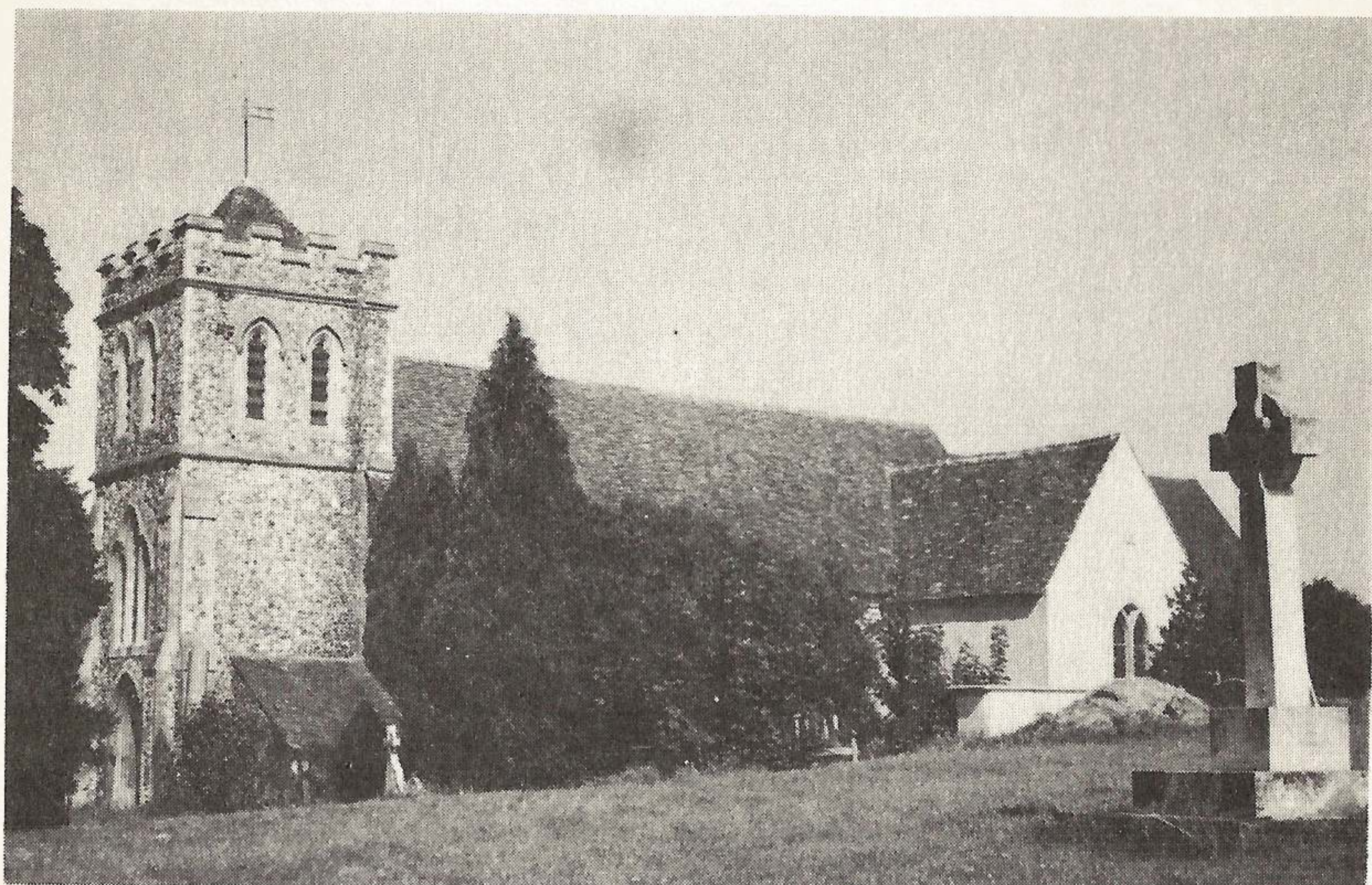
Richard B. Pyper, M.A.

have been cruciform. One transept is gone, the other is now used for organ and vestry, and has now a modern arch instead of the Norman one. "In the nave," Glynne goes on, "some windows are Norman, but most are Rectilinear."

By the sixth century the building appears to have fallen into a sad state of disrepair. An old woodcut in Seymour's Survey of Kent shows the Tower, which has been added to the original church, in a ruinous state and without a roof. It was not until after 1880 that it was rescued by the Rev. H. J. Wardell who was Vicar from 1881 to 1898. He set about restoring the Church with unbounded energy and loving care. Large sums of money were raised, the Gipps family being most generous donors. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners assisted with some £200 in restoring the Chancel. The altar was raised to the original level, the chancel arch constructed and the old whitewashed ceiling replaced by an oak roof. Choir seats were installed and new seating in the nave. The tower was raised about two feet to enable the new bells to be hung, and much other work was done. Altogether some £4,000 were spent and we owe the present completeness of the Church to the Rev. Wardell and his devoted little band.

The oak pulpit was a later addition being presented by members of the Ramsay family of Howletts.





it would be now if it had not been destroyed by dry-rot, when the Church was, later, allowed to fall into such bad repair. An oak altar took the place of the stone altar top, which, with its consecration crosses now lies in front of the Chancel step, an unworthy place to have put the Lord's Table, from which for hundreds of years His children had been fed.

One word more must be said about the patronage of the Living. At the Reformation this patronage passed from the Canons of St. Gregory to the Archbishops of Canterbury who have had it ever since. There are, however, two breaks in this patronage which are interesting as they throw a sidelight on the history of the whole country. When Philip of Spain and Mary were on the throne of England they had no liking for Reformation ways. Among other things they deposed Archbishop Cranmer and declared the See of Canterbury to be vacant. By a coincidence, at the same time, the living of Bekesbourne was vacant, and Philip and Mary appointed Marmaduke Smyth to the living—sede vacante—in 1554. The other break in the patronage came from the opposite extreme. In the Commonwealth period the Prayer Book was forbidden, and Services were of a Presbyterian type. Again there was a vacancy at Bekesbourne. The Archbishop could not present; but Thomas Heron, M.A. was appointed by "Robert Hales, Esq., Patron, 15th February, 1655." Sir Robert was a parishioner and lived at Howletts.

So the swing of the religious pendulum from one extreme to the other was illustrated in the appointment of Bekesbourne Vicars.

Turn again and take another look at the Church as it used to be. Glynne in his "Notes on the Churches of Kent," writes:—"There is a semi-circular arch in the north wall, which seems to have opened into a transept now destroyed. There is a similar arch opening to the south transept." So the Church would

It may be well here to try to realize what the worship in our Church was like in mediæval times from such notes as we have. We have seen the Chantry priest at his altar. Now we turn to the Parish Church services.

Picture someone coming to Church on a Festival. He comes in by the old Norman door, stops at the Holy Water stoup to cross himself, and then goes up the Church into a blaze of light—lights on the altar—lights on the screen before the Holy Cross—lights before St. Mary, St. Peter, and St. Nicholas. The Priest at the altar wears a costly and beautiful vestment, and the altar is furnished with treasures which are kept in the two aumbries, or cupboards, behind the altar, which are a marked feature of the Church. This is not an imaginary story. It is based on old wills—eight of which have been noted. Four of these wills provided for wax candles for the light of the Holy Cross—two for St. Mary—one for St. Peter, and two provide for the image of St. Nicholas. Plenty of such gifts of candles must also have come from the living, as well as from the wills of the deceased. As for the costly vestment, in 1532, Sir John Texton—a priest who lies buried in the Church before the Rood, provided in his will thus:—“To the Church for buying a Vestment £3.” Three pounds was then a lordly sum when money was worth so much more than now, and would probably mean £40—£50 nowadays.

Then came the Reformation, which changed this form of worship. The Prayer Book in English took the place of the Latin Service book. Worship in Parish Churches became simpler, but the beauty and dignity of worship were kept up, though in a different manner. The pre-reformation Chalice disappeared, but the beautiful Elizabethan Communion cup and paten-cover took its place. The gifts which filled the aumbries were removed, but Archbishop Parker gave equally generously when he furnished the chancel with fine wainscotting, and beautiful Choir-seats, priceless oak work

SOME NOTES ON THE STORY OF BEKESBOURNE CHURCH

In 1080 William the Conqueror had the Domesday Book compiled, which gives a description of all the Estates in the Kingdom, and in it is recorded that there was a Church in Bekesbourne, which clearly proves that there was a Saxon Church in the parish before the Normans came. Of that Church we have no details, nor do we know how long it had stood. It was most likely a wooden building, provided by the Lord of the Manor for himself and his people.

It was not many years, however, before the Normans, who were famous church builders, set to work to build a worthier House of God. Thus the present Church was built about the year 1100, and although there have, of course, been alterations and additions since, it is the same church still. To picture what the church was like when it was first built, stand outside and look at the chancel. The two little round-headed windows which have been built up were the windows on each side of the altar, showing how short was the chancel in Norman days. The Nave also has its bits of Norman work in the beautiful doorway by which worshippers still enter.

In the xiiith century there was again a desire to add dignity to the structure. The Chancel was lengthened to its present size, the little Norman windows built up and new windows inserted. At the East end two very fine lancet windows, with some elegant Early English moulding, were made, beautiful in their proportions, and far more uncommon than the three lancets seen in so many other churches.

As regards the rest of the church, the Nave was almost entirely rebuilt towards the end of the ninth century. Originally there was no chancel arch, as there is now. Instead, a beam ran across between the chancel and nave, on which was the Rood Cross.

One other thing is to be noticed. In front of the chancel step lies the old stone altar top, which was used till the Reformation, and then removed to make way for a new altar of wood.

To turn next to the history of the Church. In the year 1180, when the Church was still a small Norman building, the Lord of the Manor was Eustace de Bourne, and the Church was called St. Peter de Bourne, the Bourne of course, being the little river. The Church then belonged to Eustace, but he had a mind to hand it over to the Canons of St. Gregory in Canterbury (*a*). Before doing so, Eustace consulted his Rector. They were Rectors at that time. The Rector's name was Michael. He had no surname, only a few people had surnames in those days. "Michael the Parson," as he is called, gave his consent, and the Church passed into the hands of St. Gregory's, who became the Rectors and appointed a "Vicar" to care for the parish. This transfer was a great event because it put the patronage of the Church in the hands of St. Gregory's from that day to the Reformation, since when it has been in the Archbishop's gift. This story of Eustace de Bourne and Michael the Parson and St. Peter de Bourne comes from Mr. Frampton, a most careful and painstaking archæologist, who came across an old Assize Roll, giving an account of a dispute over the patronage of the Church at Bekesbourne. The date of the document is 1313. It was there proved in court, that Eustace de Bourne gave the Church to St. Gregory's, Michael the Parson

(*a*) St. Gregory's was a Priory instituted by Archbishop Lanfranc and situated in Northgate St., Canterbury, but has long since vanished.

consenting. So St. Gregory's were confirmed in their right, and we get the name of one Rector many years before the registered list of Vicars begins. Mr. Frampton most kindly gave a copy of this paper to the Church Chest.

A year after the date of the Assize roll—in 1314—another piece of local church history is recorded. In that year James de Bourne founded the "Bourne's Chantry." The Chantry provided a priest to pray for the souls of departed friends. This entailed a second and an independent priest using the Church in addition to the Vicar. Very likely the Chantry priest would have his own side altar in the body of the Church, where he would say his masses. There are records of the appointments to Bekesbourne of five such Chantry priests between 1314 and 1361. The stipend of these priests consisted of a house, 24 acres of land, and a yearly rent of 6/8d., granted by the Patron; and in return the priest had to provide the Patron with a pair of spurs, or sixpence for the same:—an odd proviso but, probably, in the nature of an acknowledgment. The total yearly value of the stipend, according to "Kent Chantries" was not quite £2 13s. 4d., which was so little that by 1362 no one could be found to take it. Bartholomew de Bourne, a descendant of the Patron, therefore, arranged to join the Chantry to that of Eastbridge Hospital, Canterbury, the priest of that Chapel undertaking to attend at Bekesbourne on the festivals of St. Michael and St. Peter, as well as on the six days after Christmas and the four days after Pentecost.

Chantry priests were very busy in Mediæval times, a great deal of money being given, or left by will, for prayers to be said for the souls of deceased relatives or friends. The Church must have been in frequent use when Chantry priests were officially admitted by the Archbishop, and were attached to it by right in addition to the incumbent.