

## **A Short History of Patrixbourne prepared for the Millennium plaque which is displayed in St Mary's churchyard**

By Ken Stacey 1999 with additions by Jill Thomas

The parish of Patrixbourne is large but, curiously, the village itself straddles the northern boundary of the parish with the adjoining parish of Bekesbourne. The dividing line runs down the middle of The Street along the line of what was once the Pilgrims Way and is now on the route of the North Downs Way from Canterbury to Dover.

The first people to have left traces of their residence here were the Jutes who came down the Little Stour (then navigable by small boats) early in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Over the next 100 years a cemetery of some 90 graves was made on Side Hill, marked now by a tumulus on the hill between the footpath and the arable field. Excavations revealed these Jutish folk to have been rich, aristocratic and tall. Many graves contained grave goods, jewellery, glass and swords, and some male skeletons suggested men six feet tall. Some of these remains can be seen in Maidstone museum together with related finds from other settlements on the Nailbourne.

By the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066, there was a thriving village here. It is described in the Domesday book, under the name Born, as having a church and four mills. The manor was held by Richard, son of William, almost certainly members of a rich Norman family called Patric from what is now La Lande-Patry (in northwestern France). It is known that a century later, Ingleram Patric signed a charter giving Canterbury Cathedral the rent of one mill (four shillings annually) for the upkeep of Thomas Becket's tomb. The Patric seal on the charter has survived and can be viewed in the Cathedral archives. It bears a man in armour on horseback brandishing a sword.

The Patric family would have been wealthy enough in the 1170's to replace the Saxon church with a two-aisled building with a rich exterior, in Kent second only to Barfreston church in its decoration. Look for the elaborate carving of the south doorway, the unusual wheel-window in the east gable and the chevrons of the priest's door. The damage to the heads in the tympanum was probably deliberate and may date from 1641 when a Parliamentary army battered the Archbishop's palace in Bekesbourne. The marks on both door-jambes may be the remains of primitive sun-dials used as mass-clocks.

Look particularly for the Flemish and Swiss enamelled glass panels in the three eastern lancet windows and in the south chapel. They were collected and given by the Marchioness of Conyngham who lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century at the large house known as Bifrons. Within the church there are several memorial plaques commemorating members of other families who resided at Bifrons.

For more than 300 years life in Patrixbourne would have been dominated by Bifrons house. There was probably a Tudor house on the site which was demolished to make way for a fine Jacobean mansion built by a John Bargar of Bridge in the early 1600s. In 1694 a John Taylor bought the house and established a particularly fine garden. His eldest son was Brook Taylor, FRS, an eminent mathematician and known to this day by those studying calculus: they all learn Taylor's theorem.

In 1824, the Taylors moved to nearby Bourne Park and Byron's estranged wife, Lady Byron and her daughter Augusta 'Ada' moved into Bifrons. Ada, later Lady Lovelace, was also

a talented mathematician and was one of the few to recognise the potential of Babbage's mechanical calculator, a forerunner of the computer. She is widely acknowledged as the first programmer; Babbage called her the 'Enchantress of Numbers'; and in 1980 the US Department of Defense Military Standard named a computer language after her.

In the 1770s the Jacobean house built by Bargar was replaced by a rather plain Georgian one and in 1830 this was sold to the 1<sup>st</sup> Marquess of Conyngham. He and particularly his wife, Elizabeth, a great beauty, were friends of George IV. The Marquess died in 1832 but the Marchioness lived until the age of 92 dying at Bifrons in 1861. She and her son, the second Marquess, are largely responsible for the present look of Patricbourne. They enlarged the church by adding the north aisle, remodelled Bifrons, and built a number of houses on the Bekesbourne side of The Street designed to look older than they really are. Look out for Elephant and Lion Cottage with its elaborately carved barge boards and also for the magnificent oast. The oast is now two dwellings, but when it was built, in 1859, it was the latest in hop-drying technology. At the gable ends of the oast's stowage, purlins and wall brackets support fine bargeboards which in turn support spear-shaped finials. These charming Victorian buildings complement the village Tudor buildings such as The Barton and Court House. Other buildings to look out for in the village include: Sondes House with its Dutch gable and Bifrons Cottage – where until recent years an internal yew hedge was tightly trimmed into fine topiary shapes. Yew is an important feature in the village and a yew avenue in St Mary's churchyard lines to the path from the church door to an old gate into Bifrons Park.

The Conyngham family moved away in 1874 but they have retained ownership of the Bifrons estate. The house was let until 1939 when it was requisitioned and used to house Canadian soldiers. After the war in 1945 the house was judged too damaged to be worth repair and was demolished leaving only a gardener's cottage and a stable block now used for rented residential accommodation. The parkland is grazed by sheep, but some fine trees remain and an elegant bridge which carries a bridleway over the Nailbourne.

The Nailbourne is an intermittent stream flowing only occasionally. However, in the winter 2000-2001 and in 2014 it lived up to its reputation as the 'river of woe' flowing strongly along its entire length and flooding many houses on its course. In Patricbourne, these included Waterfall Cottage and others close by. After 2001 a new channel was dug for the stream which aimed to remove some of the bends and so help the water pass through the village.

On the south-eastern limit of the parish at the top of Bridge Hill is the large house known as Higham Park. It can be reached from Patricbourne by walking up Side Hill and on along the North Downs Way beside the orchards of Highland Court farm. Tucked behind the big house are the two pitches of St Lawrence and Highland Court cricket ground.

Higham Park was owned at one time by Count Louis Zobrowski whose racing car, Chitty Bang-Bang, was the inspiration for Ian Fleming's story and film. Count Zobrowski was also one of the visionaries of the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch 15 inch gauge railway but did not live to see it come to fruition. The house served for a while as a part of Kent and Canterbury Hospital and some local ladies remember the maternity ward there. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was in the ownership of two ladies who worked hard to restore the house and the garden which was open to the public. These days it is once again a private home.