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ST MARY'S, HORTON KIRBY

On seeing our parish church, St Mary's, for the first time the main impression is of an ugly brick tower dominating an attractive flint building. The ugliness fades with familiarity but it is hard to forgive the bricklayer, Mr Smith, who in 1816 took down the steeple and replaced it with a tower using yellow sandstone bricks instead of original, or even sympathetic, materials. Though said to be rebuilt after storm damage, Parish records actually give no reasons for this drastic and expensive work. However, the amount paid is known - £1,135 2s 1¹/₂d; a very large sum in those days.



An early view of St Mary's Church from the south. From a postcard dated 12th September 1905 sent to Miss Ada Durling at Horton Kirby Post Office by her sister Fan (Mrs Neeves)

After the Second World War, the battlements to the tower had to be removed following war damage caused by a barrage balloon which broke free. Its cable dragged across the tower causing one corner to fall through the church roof. Not surprisingly the incident is well-remembered by Peter Flewin who was a server in the church at the time it happened. By coincidence it was another Mr Smith, Tom, who carried out the repair work and whose name is in the concrete up there to prove it. The writer leaves it to others to verify this statement!

The interior of the church however makes up for the disappointing exterior. The 13th Century arches, it has been suggested, could have been the work of the masons who were, at around that time, rebuilding the Choir of Rochester Cathedral. A convincing reason for this is that the mason's marks (the craftsman's "signature" which was used on each stone to know how much to pay him for his piece work) found on stones in both places are very similar and the styles are alike. St Mary's became known as "the Little Cathedral in the Darent Valley".

The nave is unusual because it is quite out of line with the crossing. The nave is constructed from the original materials and scholars are convinced that it was destroyed in the great Kentish Earthquake of 1382, immediately after which it was rebuilt in great haste - and not altogether carefully! - from the fallen rubble.

The nave roof is impressive and well worth inspecting. The St Mary's booklet written by the present vicar, the Rev Leo Laker, tells us that



*View towards the altar showing the fine high arches of the interior of St Mary's.
Postcard collection.*

it is a good example of tie beam, crown post and collar construction.

Both the porch and the chancel have been halved in length since the church was originally built in c1220. The three east windows in the chancel are stained glass depicting Mary, Joseph and the Christ Child. They were the gift of Mrs Bradford of Franks Hall in 1863. There was previously stained glass also in the windows in the nave, as Ann Parker English reminded us, because it was her family (the Parkers) that were involved in restoring

them before the Second World War. Unfortunately after severe War damage they were replaced by plain glass. In the chancel is the ancient door which gives access to the tower. It is probably in much the same condition as when it left the carpenter's bench and could well be the original door.

There are three bells in the tower dated 1733, 1817 and 1826. Unfortunately they are in a sad state of disrepair and only one can be tolled. A large amount of money is needed for them to be repaired but perhaps one day a benefactor will be found and they will peal again.

There are various interesting things to see in the church. The first on entering, in the porch, is an oak beam which, being from the original church, is over 770 years old. Just outside the porch are two ancient sundials. One, a scratch dial, is embedded in one of the cornerstones of the porch and appears to have been inserted upside down!

All but one of the wall tablets in the church are in memory of the Bathurst family of Franks Hall. The odd one out is a memorial to Frederick Power and his wife Mary who, it is variously said, were uncle and aunt, or great-uncle and great-aunt, to the Hollywood actor Tyrone Power. The church also possesses two good brasses. The one in the south transept, now the vestry, (c1461) is believed to be Alice Drayton, nee Kirby and the second, dated 1595, is of John Browne of Reynold's Place.

In the nineteenth century the comfort of churchgoers was catered for in the form of "Mitchell's Patent Reverberating Smoke Consuming Hypocaust for Warming Churches". One in the church which isn't now covered with carpet can be seen just beneath the front pew base in the Lady Chapel. Another can be seen in the Vestry in its entirety.

The screens behind the choir stalls were installed in 1921 in memory of the Rashleigh family who provided three vicars in succession between 1818 and 1927. The vicar's and the choir stalls, the pews in the Lady Chapel and the panelling at the east wall of the chancel were all designed and built by Mr Clinch, Head of the Carpentry Department, and the boys at the Homes for Little Boys. The artistry and craftsmanship are beautiful and bear witness to the high standard of training given in the Homes.

The lectern, as inscribed at the base, is in memory of Courtney C.S. Fooks for his long service to the parish. He had served on the Parish Council from 1907 until his death in 1938 and was also Churchwarden from 1906 and a School Manager. Mr Fooks lived in Reynold's Place.

Edward Fitness recalls how in the 1920s the church had an excellent choir. He was boy soloist during part of this time, having taken over from Richard Scott whose father, the No. 1 tenor, was head gardener at Franks Hall. Miss Rose Keddell was the choir's fine contralto and Mr Spoor of South Darenth was an excellent organist, a duty he performed for at least 30 years. The choir often put on very popular performances of choral works and on these occasions Lady Tallents (of St John's Jerusalem) a well-known contralto, joined the choir. In the 1920s and 30s Mr Scott (the elder) and Mr Spoor (who also sang alto) joined with Arthur Matthews (bass) and Tom

Hayward (baritone) to form the very popular Horton Quartet which was well-known for its performances in Church and in the district. Richard Scott's son, Malcolm, carried on the family's musical connection with the Church into the 1950s by taking over the organ playing from his teacher, Mr Spoor.

VICARS OF HORTON KIRBY DURING PAST 100 YEARS

1874 Henry Burvill Rashleigh
 1916 William Rashleigh
 1927 William Edward Spencer
 1935 Henry Victor Richard Bromley
 1941 Walter Henry Arthur Berry
 1945 William Alan Passmore
 1957 Cyril Roger Vallance
 1980 Leo Laker

Rev W H A Berry was Chaplain to the Forces in the Guards Armoured Division and sadly killed in action in Normandy in 1944. Phyllis Martin told us that her marriage to Roy on 14th February 1942 and Iris Wheeler's wedding on 21st February were the last marriage services conducted by Rev Berry before he went to the War.

After the Farningham Homes for Little Boys closed, a special Service was held in 1963 when the Homes War Memorial was presented to St Mary's Church in remembrance of the 50 men who spent their childhood in the Homes and died in World Wars I and II. A Book of Remembrance recorded their names and Mrs Cox, former Matron at the Homes whose son had been killed in 1945, placed flowers on the Memorial.

In 1970 the church celebrated its 750th Anniversary and an extensive programme of events was drawn up. Although 4th October was the actual date that the Bishop of Rochester visited the church for a commemorative service of re-dedication, social events including musical evenings and plays were held throughout the year. One benefit of this celebration, which is still enjoyed by the parish at Christmas time, is the floodlighting which was installed at that time. In June of that year the first ever flower festival was held. This was combined with an art exhibition and the neighbouring gardens of Court Lodge were opened for visitors to take tea. This is a tradition which still holds, as the grounds of Court Lodge are used for the Church Summer Fete to this day.

S. MARY'S, HORTON KIRBY PARISH MAGAZINE

Vicar: REV. W. A. PASSMORE, B.Sc., Hon. G.F., 1st Vicarage,
 Telephone: Farningham 220.

Parochial Lay Reader: Mr. F. TANNER, 1, Carleton Place.

Services

EVERY SUNDAY	Holy Communion	8 a.m.
	Morning Prayer, 1st, 3rd and 5th Sundays	11 a.m.
	Choral Eucharist, 2nd and 4th Sundays	11 a.m.
	Holy Communion, 1st Sunday	7 a.m.
	Holy Communion, 3rd Sunday	12 a.m.
	Children's Service	2.45 p.m.
	Evenings	8.30 p.m.
WEEKDAYS	Holy Communion Wednesdays	7.15 a.m.
	and Fridays	10.15 a.m.

Holy Baptisms: Sundays at 3.45, after due notice. For other Services see Calendar inside.

Churchwardens

Mr. C. M. Best,
 The Post Office, Horton Kirby.
 Mr. H. Parker,
 Harton View, Dartford Road
 Organist and Choirmaster:
 Mr. S. M. Spoor.
 Magazine Secretary: Mrs. H. Saunders, 32, New Road.

Parochial Church Council
 Hon. Secretary: Mr. R. Ovenden,
 9 Montgomery Road, South Darenth.
 Hon. Treasurer:
 Mr. E. C. Ovenden.
 F.W.O. Secretary

Miss W. M. Cooper, 8, New Road.

May, 1951.

Price—Twopence-halfpenny



*A modern view of St Mary's Church floodlit for Christmas
 Photograph courtesy of Anita Cockrill.*

The church and its festivals have not changed over the years. The following evocative article from the parish magazine of 1903 paints a picture of Harvest festival which is so vivid that we are almost there with the people whose names are mentioned in so many village activities in the early days of the century:

“Let us look into Horton Kirby Church, on Saturday, October 3: hour, 11.30 a.m.

“The Misses Hale are very effectively decorating the East End with Bracken, wild clematis, and white and yellow flowers, and the Church cases with similar coloured flowers and maiden-hair fern. The head gardener of Franks, with his assistants, is arranging beautiful pot flowers, and a magnificent large basket of vegetables in the Chancel. At the Choir Stalls are the four Misses Rashleigh, vainly endeavouring to make top-heavy bunches of pretty chrysanthemums remain upright. At the Lectern, Miss Allen Shuter is arranging a handsome group of mauve daisies and maiden-hair fern; while Miss Maddocks is busy at the Reading Desk with lovely yellow chrysanthemums, dark red leaves, and asparagus fern. The Pulpit is a real harvest decoration, inasmuch as Miss Muggerridge has mixed bunches of corn with the moss, flowers and ferns; and Miss Dorothy Spalding has very rightly placed corn with the other decorations in the upper north window of the nave. Miss Aldworth has provided a wealth of decoration for the large south window; and Miss Violet Earle a very successful arrangement for the lower north window. Mrs. Hale and Miss F. Pride are working steadily with moss, white dabbias and chrysanthemums on the font; the Misses Keddell very tastefully with creepers, flowers, and fruit over the west door; and Mr. Hale and Mr. Simmons here, there, and everywhere, with vegetables, fruit, ladders, string, and wire.

“Constantly are gifts arriving for the hospital, and over and over again do we hear, “thank you very much”, and we look up and see either a basket of flowers, or a collection of vegetables, or a magnificent loaf of bread, and we feel very glad.

“Sunday, October 4th: 7.00 a.m. 48 Communicants. 8.00 a.m. 52 Communicants. 11.00 a.m. Excellent Choral Service, helpful short sermon by the vicar, Holy Communion with 39 Communicants; 2.15 p.m., Litany and Holy Baptism; 3.15 p.m., Crowded Flower Service - possibly one of the prettiest sights connected with our children; 6.30 p.m., Choral Service with an especial fine rendering of a very pretty anthem; Tenor solo by

Mr. Simmons; Good sermon by Mr. Hale, from the text, “and Joseph opened all the store-houses;”. Church unable to accommodate all comers.

“Monday, October 5th - A busy company packing vegetables, fruit and flowers, and taking down decorations. Flowers so plentiful that besides the usual amount sent to King's College Hospital, a large hamper was taken to the Dartford Infirmary, with some of the marrow; and a huge parcel of flowers, etc., to the Livingstone Cottage Hospital, as well as the £1 1s 0d from the offertories.”

Vicarage

The original St Mary's Vicarage was the property, with its entrance at the bottom of Bull Hill, now called Rashleigh Lodge. Its grounds, as can be seen from the map on the inside back cover, were extensive and it was in these grounds that the present Vicarage was built in 1936. Mr Walter Millen bought the old Vicarage in the same year and called it Holmesdale. Mr Millen was not only a well-respected local businessman providing much local employment at Westminster Mill but he was also a parish, rural district and county councillor. It was he who had the four secluded “Lake District” houses built in 1947 in part of the grounds of Holmesdale on land always known as The Rookery. Walter Millen lived in the house until his death in 1961 and Sir Edward Bligh rented the house for a time after that.



Southdown Chapel as it looked before losing its spire in the storm of 1987. Photo courtesy of Trevor Manning.

SOUTHDOWNS CHAPEL

The chapel standing on high ground in Southdowns has been a local landmark for well over 100 years. Unfortunately its wooden spire which added to its distinctive shape on the skyline was lost in the storm of 1987 and not replaced. One of the metal clock faces from it has been saved and is now inside the Chapel as the only tangible reminder of the spire's existence.

The Chapel was of course built as an integral part of the Homes for Little Boys. As can be seen today on the outside wall its foundation stone was laid by Alexandra, Princess of Wales, on 7th July 1866.

During the early days, before the Gorringe Memorial School was built, the Chapel was used as a classroom. Today a corner of the Chapel is used as a memorial to the Homes. A wooden cabinet on the wall was made specially by one of the "old boys", Frank Bignold, who is the Secretary of the Old Boys Association, to house a brief printed history of the Homes. Many other documents and



The sad sight of the spire blown onto the ground during the early hours of 16th October 1987 Photograph courtesy of Nancy Durban

memorabilia are there including a ceremonial key from the official opening of one of the cottages.

During the period that the Homes complex was used by the Home Office as an approved school for 14 - 19 year old young offenders (North Downs School) the Chapel fell into disuse and disrepair so that by the time that Southdowns was developed the building had to be completely renovated. Mr Bignold says that it is hard to imagine that a chapel could be so desecrated. Mr Billings, the builder,

spent a great deal of time on improving the fabric of the building and some of the new residents, wanting to help, even joined in with the cleaning and painting of the walls. The Chapel is now fully returned to its former state and is so obviously cared for by the residents of Southdowns who appreciate its peaceful atmosphere. The deep blue carpet was provided by Mr Billings whilst the curtains, pew cushions and chairs were bought by the congregation.

The Chapel is consecrated and used for a service every other Sunday when visiting clergy of many denominations are invited to take the service. It has been used for one wedding already.

SOUTH DARENTH VILLAGE CHURCH (FORMERLY GOSPEL HALL)

Known as The Gospel Hall until 1993, this is the third main place of worship in the parish (St George's Roman Catholic Church being just outside the parish boundary.)

The building in New Road was first used on 7th December 1935. Ralph Wilkinson now of Fairhavens, Mussenden Lane, was present on the opening day and remembered the early days.

It all came about when Luther Morgan arrived in South Darenth early in 1935 with his gypsy caravan and a large tent which he pitched firstly on Holmesdale Field (where prefabs were built and Montgomery Road now stands) and then on a vacant stretch of grassland at the top of New Road almost opposite where the hall is now. Mr Wilkinson said on the occasion of the 50th anniversary celebrations in 1985 that "the tent was like a spiritual maternity ward" in those early days.

However the need for a more permanent building soon became apparent and the wooden part of the existing structure was built thanks to generous financial help from Eric Cox and Mr Hopkins, the builder, a larger-than-life character, who was affectionately known to all as Uncle Hoppy at that time. Eric Cox had lived at the Homes and was one of the sons of Mr and Mrs Cox, House Father and Mother there. Eric was a missionary in China and when he was visiting South Darenth in the 1970s he spoke at a special gathering about the early days. He said that there was "twice



*Young people from the village outside Luther Morgan's tent in 1935
Photograph courtesy of June Smith*

as much in the hall as we paid for because Uncle Hoppy kept adding this and adding that". Many other people gave things as well. His mother gave the rostrum in memory of her father and his father gave the gas lighting.

The original wooden building has stood up remarkably well to the past nearly 60 years thanks no doubt to the loving care and attention of members of the congregation.

Two further brick-built additions have been constructed. One, built in the winter of 1937/38 using volunteer labour, is an extension for kitchen and toilets and the other is a separate building which has been used by the Sunday School. At its height in the 1940s the Sunday School had 60 pupils. At the time of writing a large new porch is planned and should be built by the time this book is published and the building should have its new name - South Darenth Village Church.

The Village Church is interdenominational and is part of the wider body, the Fellowship for Evangelising Britain's Villages. Former leaders, including Luther Morgan, Norman Day, Cuthbert Ford, Ronald Reeve, Mr and Mrs Shepherd and Keith Smith, were associate members of this organisation but since 1992 the Gospel Hall has had a pastor, the Rev Len Schofield.

Today the hall is used not only for services but also for social and educational events for the congregation and has entertained many distinguished visitors including the Mayor of Dartford, and two British Presidents of Christian Endeavour.

It would be appropriate here to give mention to the building next to Fairhavens, Mussenden Lane which from about 1946 until recently was Fairhaven Mission and regularly used for services. The mission building known as the "Old Shooting Box", had previously been used to serve refreshments to those who had come down to Horton Woods to shoot pheasants for the day. The building is now being used to store gifts for Rumania and recently two 3-ton lorries left with much needed provisions for that country.



*South Darenth Gospel Hall, New Road
Photograph courtesy of Kentish Times Newspapers*