

ST. MARY'S, SANDWICH, IN LATER TIMES*

By Ivor Bulmer-Thomas

18TH CENTURY.

THE reign of Queen Anne was a period of zealous churchmanship, and Canterbury had a vigilant archdeacon in the person of Thomas Greene. Archdeacon Greene visited St. Mary's on 5th September, 1711, when the Rector, as he was then described, John Rutton, did not appear. The following orders were issued by the archdeacon: Repair chancel windows; rebind Bible and repair Book of Common Prayer; provide Homilies, table of degrees of marriage and a new bier; whitewash church walls; mend vestry pavement and supply one to west end of church; and certify that all these items have been carried out by about Easter, 1712. The report ends with the ominous note: "The Rector's house being very large and ruinous, Mr. Archdeacon will speak to him about it."⁸⁰

The frequent burials inside the church involved some disturbance of the paving, and the vestry had decided in 1704 to "present" to the archdeacon persons who refused to pave the church after a burial in a vault.

The people of St. Mary's parish were not allowed to continue indefinitely without a bell to summon them to worship. In 1718, according to the vestry minute books, "in obedience to an order from the Archdeacon of Canterbury for buying of a bell and erecting a cupola for that purpose it is agreed at this vestry to raise the sum of £64 at 4 quarterly cesses, that is to say £16 each cess". The present brick-and-timber bell-cote was built at this time over the existing south porch to house one bell, bought for £14 5s. 11d., which bore the inscription: "This bel was bought and steeple built A.D. 1718 I: Bradley R: Harvey Ch: Wardens R:P:F:" This remained in use till 1876, when a new one was bought. It was decided in 1729 that the clerk was to have "for every knell and for towling the bell for the funeral 3s. 4d., as hath been heretofore paid on that occasion".

In the meantime a big change took place in the interior. Leave was granted in 1723 to certain persons, 44 in number, to build

* Conclusion of the papers "St. Mary's, Sandwich, in the Middle Ages" in *Transactions*, vol. VII, 1959, pp. 33-56 and "St. Mary's, Sandwich, after the Reformation, in *Transactions*, vol. VIII, 1960, pp. 21-47.

⁸⁰ Greene's report may be consulted in the Chapter Library at Canterbury, M.S. Z3. 19, p. 21. I am grateful to Mr. V. J. Torr for drawing my attention to it.

a gallery at the west end of the church at their own charge so that they should enjoy the same and not be disinherited.

Money was always a problem in that unenthusiastic age. In 1736 the vestry decided to borrow £80, having taken into consideration "the debts owing by the parish to several workmen in a great measure caused by the late great storms and the great earnestness of the workmen for their money which cannot be raised in time by cesses to answer their demands".

A list for voluntary subscriptions was opened in 1749 "towards the repairs and clearing of debts of ye parish and parish church". It produced £124 10s. and the names of the 69 donors, headed by the Mayor, W. Hy. Solly are all extant. Mrs. Nelson was repaid £50 with a half-year's interest and the rest went on labour and materials.

In the same year notice of a church rate was given by the clerk "immediately after Divine Service and in the church".

John Head, the efficient Archdeacon of Canterbury at this time, made an official visitation of St. Mary's in 1750.⁸¹ He ordered a new font-cover, a table of degrees, and a new folio Book of Common Prayer and Bible, and further ordered that an inventory of goods should be made and sent into his court at Canterbury. He ordered a hood for the incumbent, against which there is the comment, "It will be done when Mr. Rutten comes home, so that it may be known of what degree it is to be." Against Head's requirement that there should be a new offertory basin, the churchwardens commented: "It will be done this year, the former church cess not enough for it." Head asked that the Ten Commandments should be "refreshed", and allowed until 1752 for this to be carried out. (There may have been further delay, for it looks as though the Commandments were completely renewed and not merely repaired in 1756.) Sentences of scripture were to be set upon the church walls, and a later note says this was duly done, also that the hood would be obtained during 1750 or 1751, and that the basin had now been procured. The churchwardens, Samuel Church and Henry Pilcher, appended their names to this note, and a copy of the inventory is attached. It shows that in 1750 St. Mary's possessed: Large silver flagon; silver paten; silver cup and cover (this would be the grace cup and later cover we have already met); two large and one small blewish purple woollen cloths with silk fringe (presumably for the Holy Table) and one large damask linen cloth and napkin for the Holy Communion service; a blewish purple cloth and velvet cushion for the pulpit, a blewish-

⁸¹ Cod. Lambeth 1134, No. 88.



A South View of ST. MARY'S CHURCH in Sandwich

Published as the Act directs Dec^r. 21. 1787 by W^m. Boys Esq^r.

FIG. 1. South aspect of St. Mary's, Sandwich, in 1787, reproduced from William Boys, *Collections for an History of Sandwich*, opposite p. 318.

purple fringed cloth for the reading desk, a small plain cloth for the clerk's seat, two surplices, and two silver offertory basins.⁸²

The churchwardens' accounts for 1756 furnish the evidence that the fine sanctuary fittings of St. Mary's, were provided in that year:

Cost of the Altar Piece	...	...	...	107	18	11½
Paid Wm Ratter for a Communion Table				2	10	0
Paid Roger Latham for carve work	...			12	14	0
Paid Dennett Pilcher for writing Belief						
Lords Pryr Commndts....	...	...	...	17	17	0

The "Altar Piece" is the reredos that still stands in St. Mary's. Wm. Ratter's "Communion Table" would probably not have been considered suitable in the restoration of 1872; at any rate it has not survived. The Creed, Lord's Prayer and Ten Commandments would at that time have formed part of the "Altar Piece", but in the next century they were removed to the north wall. As we can see from the style, and as is borne out by other evidence, altar rails were made at the same time.

An uncatalogued manuscript in Lambeth Palace Library, to which Mr. V. J. Torr has drawn my attention, entirely written in the hand of Thomas Secker, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1758-68, is interesting not only for his racy comments on the parochial clergy, but because he reproduces the information obtained by Archdeacon Head at his visitation of 1759. Head reported that St. Mary's was "large, handsome and in good repair"; and this applied also to its chancel, lately provided with "new Commandments and neat rails". We are told that the vicarage house was partly new, rebuilt by William Ruten "who promises to complete it".

How Ruten kept his promise we can see from Secker's Articles of Inquiry, 1758.⁸³ Ruten was Vicar (sometimes called Rector) of St. Mary's from 1706 to 1763, and was also for some time Master of the Grammar School. It was a matter of complaint that in his later years he resided out of his cure a great deal. His replies to Secker's inquiries were:

"The Extent of my Parish is about four Fields of near Twenty-five acres apiece without the town walls and about 100 houses within the Walls, almost all of them poor and small. No Families of Note.

"There is no Papist in my parish, nor anything like a Popish Priest or Bishop.

⁸² An inventory from 1772 also survives.

⁸³ Cod. Lambeth 1134,* vol. 4, p. 205.

"There are but Few, very Few, Presbyterians, Independents, or Anabaptists; no Methodists or Moravians that I know of: nor any meeting House in my Parish.

"I have no Quakers; nor They any meeting House in my Parish.

"I have no Such Persons [who profess to disregard religion] in my Parish as Your Grace's Query mentions.

"I have resided constantly upon my Cure Several years; and in ye House Belonging to it: which I have Built with strong Brick walls myself for that Purpose.

"Publick Service is Performed every Lord's Day in my Church & one Sermon Preached, but concerning This I understand Mr. Bunce [Vicar of St. Clement's and of St. Peter's] hath Layd before Your Grace ye manner how we make This most useful and serviceable to ye Town. I administer ye Sacrament of the Lord's Supper 5 or 6 times a-Year: and about 40 or 50 usually Receive each time.

"There is in my Parish a Free School Founded by Sr. Roger Manwood Lord Chief Baron to Queen Elizabeth. The Mayor & Jurats of this Town are ye Governors. Mr. Conant a young man nominated by Lincoln College in Oxford is come to this Town within these 12 days; & has Undertaken to sit down diligently to ye Business of a Schoolmaster. Who I suppose in a little time will be able to Give Your Grace a fuller account of This Foundation.

"There is not any Voluntary Charity-School in my Parish.

"There is a Charity Given in Bread to ye Poor of my Parish: 4 shillings every Sunday; and 12 shillings on Christmas Day; Eleven Pounds a-Year given by Soloman Hougham Esqr: and it is Well and Exactly Disposed of.

"The Offertory-Money is Disposed of by ye Churchwardens with the consent of ye Minister."

In 1789 the Local Commissioners for Paving having applied to widen Strand Street, the vestry granted them leave to take down the north aisle and eight feet of the church if necessary on condition of their bearing all the expense, and making good the breach, and also building a vestry room at the north-west corner, enclosing the ground not wanted with a brick wall and removing into the nave the tombs of the north aisle. All that the Commissioners actually did, it would appear, was to take some of the churchyard into Strand Street and build a new boundary wall. This they did without a faculty, as required by the Act under which they operated, and in 1794 they obtained a confirmatory faculty.

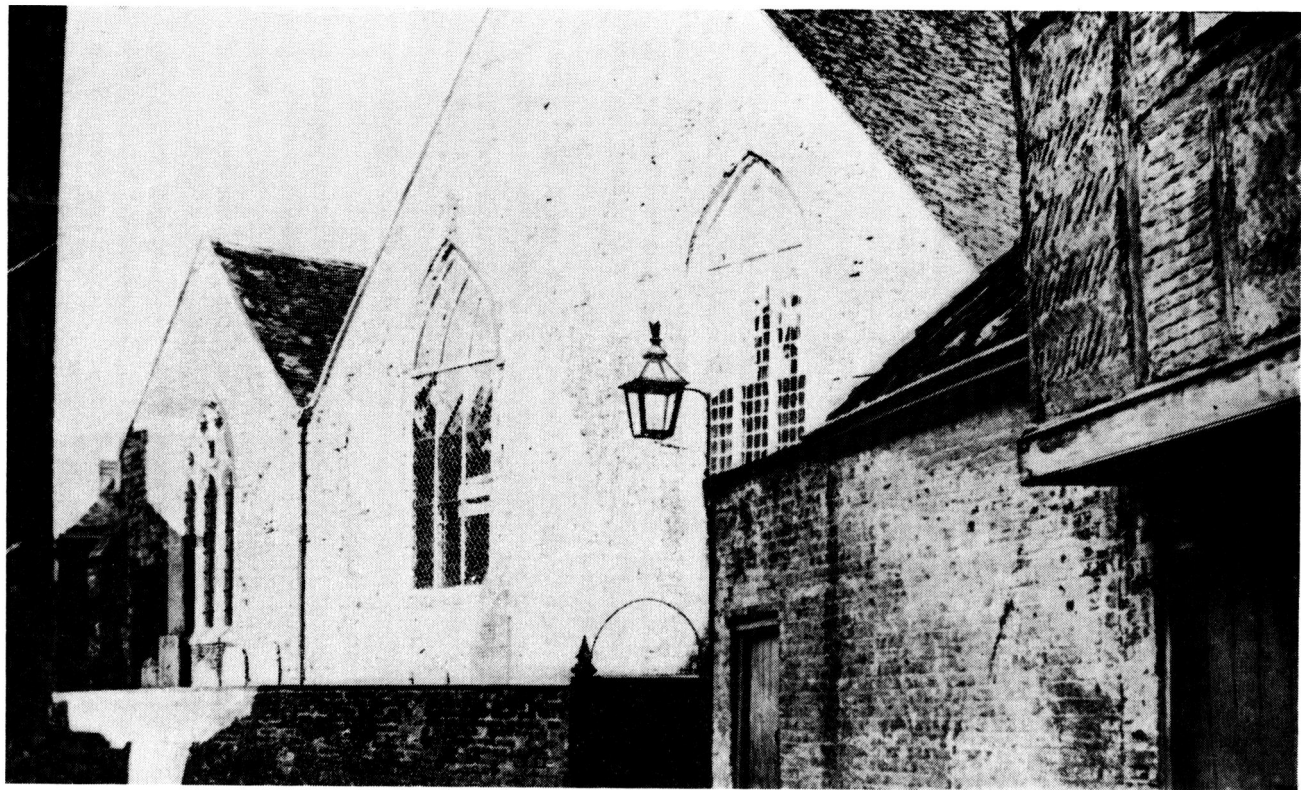


FIG. 2. West end of St. Mary's, Sandwich, in 1869. (Compare the photograph taken in 1954, and reproduced opposite p. 36 of *Transactions*, Vol. 8, 1959.)

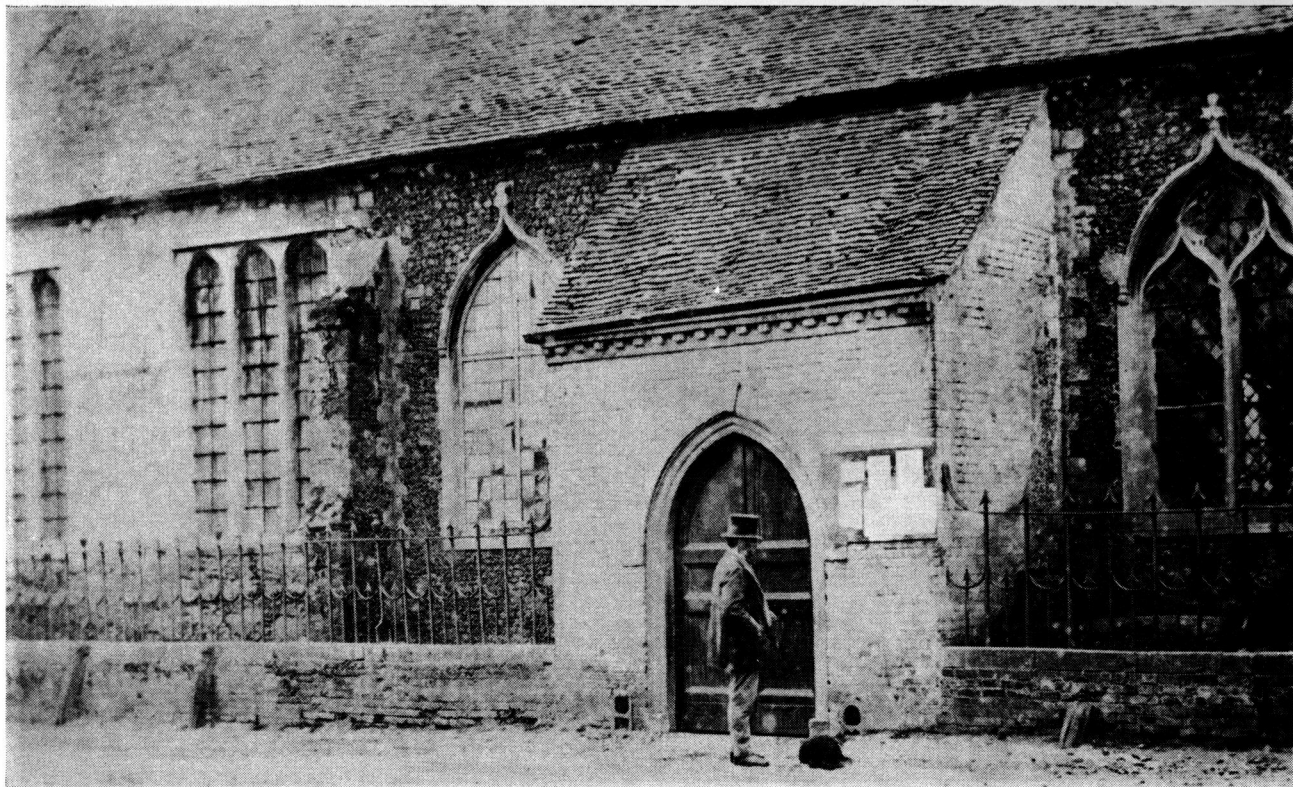


FIG. 3. North aspect of St. Mary's, Sandwich, in 1869, showing brick porch. (Compare FIG. 4.)

19TH CENTURY.

There is little to note for nearly three-quarters of the century. We have already seen that the tomb of Joseph Jordan, who died in 1747, had been placed before the cusped canopy over the tomb of Sir William Loveryk in the north aisle. In 1818 it was in a dangerous condition by reason of the decay of the plank by which it was covered, and it was opened and repaired by arching it with bricks at the expense of Miss Sarah Jordan. She and her sister asked to be buried there. In the same year repairs to the ceiling on "the south side or main aisle of the church" were carried out. The tenders accepted were £60 for carpenter's work and £46 for the ceiling. The three windows next the steeple were ordered to be made new. In the following year £400 was borrowed from Benjamin Donne to meet the debt incurred in the late repairs.

About this time the churchwardens began to raise their sights. Whereas they had hitherto been content with a cess of 6d. in the £ (which produced £22 in 1772), in 1819 they asked for 1s. 6d. in the £, which produced £100 5s. 6d., and 1s. 6d. was also demanded in 1820, 1821, 1822 and 1823. Even so, as late as 1833 we find Mr. Richard Harrison advancing £200 on a bond to pay off Mr. Donne.

It was decided in 1832 that St. Jacob's churchyard should be a burying place for non-parishioners and that it should be drained. Burials in St. Jacob's churchyard were discontinued from 1855 by Order of the Home Secretary and a piece of ground called Boatman's Hill was bought for a burial ground. St. Jacob's churchyard became a grazing ground for sheep.

The sexton (Towne) was suspended for a quarter in 1837 for an unspecified breach of a moral duty. Repairs to the steeple were carried out in 1843. In 1854 the vestry decided unanimously that the clerk and sexton should no longer be paid out of the church rate, and in 1856 it was voted that the income of the church in future be expended in repairing the substantial fabric and for no other purpose.

After the death of Nicholas Braddon in 1867 the vicarage of St. Mary and the rectory of St. Clement held in plurality by him were vacant for nearly six months, and both were then filled by the appointment of Arthur Manners Chichester, at the time only a deacon, a graduate of Exeter College and New Inn Hall, Exeter. Chichester carried through a restoration of the church in 1872-3, but it was mercifully less thorough than many restorations of that time. Photographs have fortunately survived showing the interior and exterior of the church as it was in 1869, and we can hardly blame the young and

energetic Chichester for desiring to make the interior more suitable for worship as it had then come to be understood. It was at this date that the present "Early English" lancets on the south side of the church were substituted for the round-headed windows of domestic style previously there; they matched the genuine medieval lancet in the same wall west of the tower. The photographs of 1869 show the two windows under the main west gable with wooden tracery. The windows were remade with stone tracery, and in the process the sills were somewhat raised. The north porch of brick was rebuilt in stone. The window adjoining it to the east was given stone instead of wooden tracery to match the Decorated Window on the other side. The date 1872 at the east end of the north aisle shows that some reconstruction was done there. The west gallery was taken down, the oak pews and draught screens made way for pine fittings, and presumably it was at this time that a new altar was provided and the Ox and the Ass removed from the altar piece. The foundations of the Norman piers and the stone reredos in the south aisle were exposed. Nothing essential was lost in the process, and we can thankfully say that St. Mary's came through the restoration virtually unspoilt.

A young Cambridge graduate, Arthur Clement Hilton, who became Chichester's curate the following year, thus described him in 1873:⁸⁴

"Chichester is a bachelor, about 30—quiet man, rather shy, but quite the gentleman, and very good-looking—a sort of saintly face. He is quite devoted to his work, and has done an immense deal in the town. I heard him preach yesterday—fifteen minutes plain, earnest sermon. He calls himself a moderate High Churchman, and has quite my own views on ritual, but is obliged to be very careful for fear of frightening his congregation. For this reason he preaches in a black gown (!) as he says he doesn't see the harm of it, and it has always been the custom in the church where he preaches. I told him it was a badge of party, and stipulated that I should wear a surplice myself. He wears a cassock in church, not in the streets. There is daily evensong at his churches and the other one in the town in turns. He is well known round about as a good Churchman and a model priest. I sincerely hope he may make up his mind to take me; I can hardly imagine any man whom I would rather choose as my vicar. Sandwich is not so very bad after all, and it is healthy."

Healthy or not, Hilton died there in 1877 at the age of 26 to the general regret.

⁸⁴ Letter to his mother, in *The Works of Arthur Clement Hilton together with his Life and Letters* (Cambridge 1904), pp. 103-4.



FIG. 4. North aspect of St. Mary's, Sandwich, in 1954, showing stone porch and rebuilt window to the left. (Compare FIG. 3.)

20TH CENTURY.

The holding of St. Mary's and St. Clement's in plurality by Braddon and Chichester was a portent. Chichester himself served both cures until 1912, and both his successors, Orlebar David Bruce Payne and Charles Herbert Hutt held the two incumbencies together. It was a natural sequel that in 1915 St. Mary's ancient vicarage was sold and the proceeds together with the dilapidation monies were appropriated to the benefice of St. Clement's by an Order in Council dated 23rd March. The house was sold for the sum of £198 4s.—trifling enough even in those days—and the dilapidation monies amounted to £143 13s. 8d.⁸⁵

A further step in the same direction was taken in 1948, when by an Order in Council dated 25th October the benefices and parishes of Sandwich St. Clement, Sandwich St. Mary, Sandwich St. Peter and Stonor were united to form one benefice and parish. (There had been no church at Stonor for centuries.) St. Clement's was made the parish church, and the Rev. Allan Righton Ferguson, who had been rector of St. Clement's and vicar of St. Mary's since 1946, became the first rector of the united parish. The patronage was vested in the Archdeacon of Canterbury. From that date the status of St. Mary's became that of a chapel of ease.

Provision was in due course made for St. Peter's to be used by the boys of the Roger Manwood School, but St. Mary's was allowed to fall into a bad state of disrepair, services were discontinued, and some of the fittings were removed to St. Peter's.

From 1952 requests began to be made for the demolition of St. Mary's. These alarmed local residents, who drew the attention of the writer of this sketch, then Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Historic Churches Preservation Trust, to the danger. The Executive Committee of the Trust offered a grant of £3,000—then considered sufficient for the repairs—but this was not accepted. A private offer to give the same sum was then made, with the same result. In December, 1954, a severe gale did much damage to the roof and roof timbers, and greatly increased the cost of the repairs needed. At length, in 1956, a formal decision was taken to seek a faculty for demolition. Immediately local residents under the leadership of the then Mayor, Alderman James Jeffrey Thomas, together with well-wishers throughout the country—for St. Mary's had now become the centre of a national controversy—formed the Association

⁸⁵ *London Gazette*, 23 March, 1915, pp. 2838-9.

of Friends of St. Mary's, Sandwich, to resist demolition and raise funds for the repair of the church. The application to demolish was the subject of a public hearing held in the church of St. Clement by the Commissary General for the diocese of Canterbury, the late Mr. Neville Gray. At the hearing the Commissary General indicated that he would not grant leave to repair unless a sufficient endowment for future maintenance was also provided. This was a novel demand, not mentioned in the preliminary negotiations, and probably made for the first time in any such case. It is quite possible that it could have been upset on appeal, but such proceedings are expensive and the cost of the repairs needed might also have grown alarmingly with the passage of time. Indeed, the roof might have collapsed before the appeal could be heard. The Friends decided to accept this additional obligation, onerous though it was. Even so, the Commissary General granted the faculty to demolish, but suspended its operation for a period of six months. There followed a complicated series of negotiations in chambers, but in the end a settlement was reached. It was agreed that the church should be repaired by G. H. Deane Ltd. of Deal to the specification of Mr. David Nye for the sum of £6,152. It was further agreed that the Friends would provide the money needed to purchase £4,000 2½ per cent Consols to be held on trust by the Diocesan Board of Finance for the future repair of the church. This was calculated to produce an annual income of £100. At the prices then ruling, this cost £2,030 8s. The Friends promptly paid over a banker's draft—the Commissary General would not accept a cheque—for £8,250.

From this point all was plain sailing. The work of repair was admirably carried out by the skilled craftsmen of G. H. Deane, Ltd. under Mr. Nye's supervision. The low plaster ceiling, which was falling down anyway, was not replaced, and for the first time in nearly 300 years the visitor to St. Mary's was able to see an open timber roof. A new altar was made and given a fine crucifix and pair of candlesticks of eighteenth-century North Italian workmanship. The pine pews were allowed to go, and some eighteenth-century pews made available by the destruction of Gopsal Hall in Leicestershire were introduced. Arrangements were made to bring back St. Mary's pulpit from St. Peter's. Mrs. Irene Boyle, who had led the original resistance to demolition, gave a grand piano and other furnishings. By this programme of work not only was St. Mary's put into a better state of repair than it had known for centuries, but it was given a spaciousness and sense of the numinous that had been killed by the

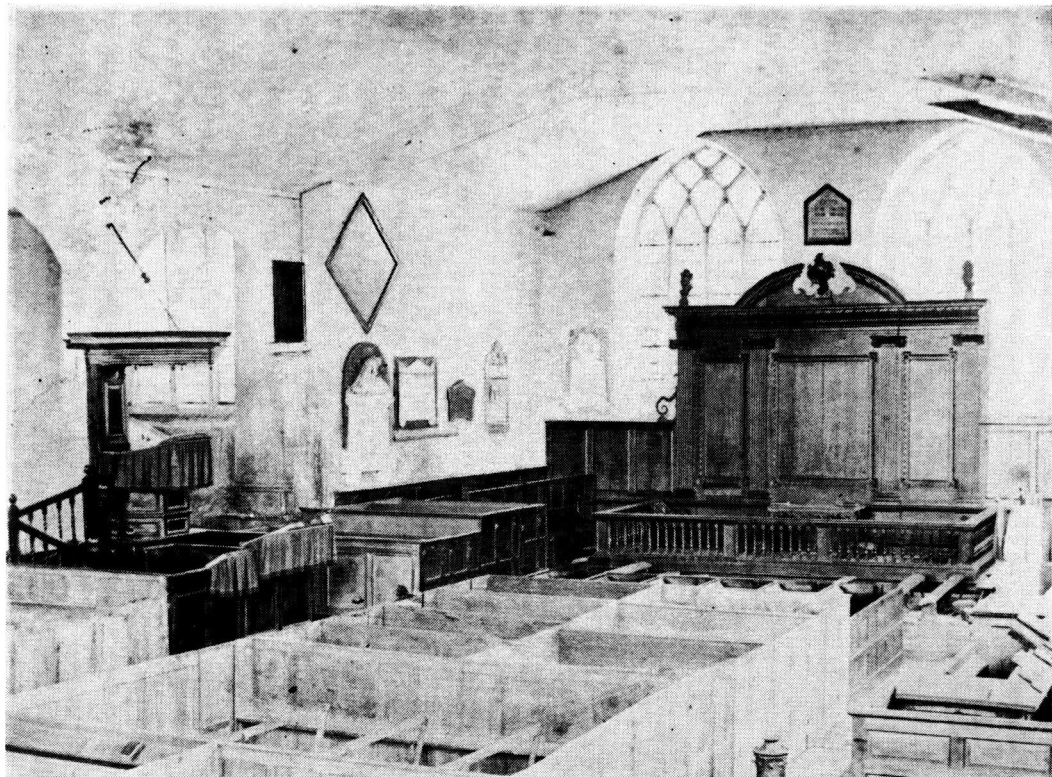


FIG. 5. Interior of St. Mary's, Sandwich, in 1869, taken from the west gallery.

old ceiling and clutter of pine furnishings. Its acoustic properties have turned out to be extremely good.

The Rev. Raymond O. Clark succeeded the Rev. A. R. Ferguson as rector in 1957 and has accepted the decision to keep St. Mary's wholeheartedly. He has regularly held a monthly service of Holy Communion there as well as an annual Festival of the Friends of St. Mary's on or about the Feast of the Visitation (July 2nd). The struggle to save St. Mary's was the fiercest that has ever had to be fought to save any English church from destruction, but this sketch will have failed in its purpose if it has not made clear that the struggle was justified and the result most satisfying.

APPENDIX

WILLIAM Bridges, Garter King of Armes⁸⁶ by his Will dated at London 26th February, 1449 or 1450 directs "my body to be brought and buried in the Church of Saynt George within Staunford there to be buried in the myddes of the quere of the said Church".

The following bequest occurs in the Will:

"Item I ordeyne and bequethe to the chapel of our Lady in Seynt Mary church at Sandewiche, an half long gown of purple velvett furred wyth martrons of that to be made a chesible wyth the parures, and wyth the furre to be bouzt and ordeyned the orfreyes, like to the orfreyes of the singel vestyment of blak satyn, lyned with red velvet. And yf the seyd furre of matrones wol not suffice to ordeyne the seyd orfreyes, myn executors to put to such mony as they may have of myne, to the percomplishing of the seyd orfreyes; and so endid to be delyvered to the seyd church. Item, I bequethe to the seyd chappel of our Lady in Seynt Mary church of Sandwich, the chalice of sylver and over-gilt that my wyf hath; and myn executors to make for the same chalice 11 small nets⁸⁷ of sylver and over-gilt of the price of xxs and than my wyfe to send yt to the seyd church. The residue of all my gooddes, after my dettes payd, I geve and bequethe to Anneys, my wyf, principal executrice, Thomas Haddon, hir broder co-executor to her, and Master Clement Denston, Clerk, overseer of the same my testament."

⁸⁶ Sir William Brugge, or Brugges, Knight, then Guienne King at Arms, was the first Garter so created by Henry V, and confirmed 24 Henry VI. He died before March 20, 1449, having married twice; first, Catherine, daughter of his successor, and Agnes, widow of William Aldenby, who survived him.

⁸⁷ cruets?