

## 800 YEARS OLD Birchington Church Record – 1940

### ARCHBISHOP'S VISIT

Eight hundred years ago the Archbishop of Canterbury dedicated All Saints Church, Birchington, and to mark the anniversary of the occasion the present Archbishop (Dr. Cosmo Gordon Lang) visited the church on Sunday, when the patronal festival was held.

Women members of the congregation tastefully decorated the church for the festival, which opened on Friday – All Saints Day – when a gift day was held. Clergy were in the church throughout the day to receive gifts, which amounted to £25. At a service in the evening, the Vicar (the Rev. N. M. Granville Sharp) preached in the absence through indisposition of the Rev. H. Watson, chaplain to the Forces.

The Archbishop first attended Sung Eucharist on Sunday morning, giving the Absolution and the Blessing. The Vicar was the celebrant, assisted by the Rev. I. H. White-Thomson (Archbishop's Chaplain), the Rev. H. Watson and the Rev. K. M. Finch (former rector of Nurstead with Ifield, Kent). The address was given by the Curate (the Rev. J. D. G. Reeve).

It had been hoped to have a procession outside the church at Matins, but weather conditions made it necessary for it to take place inside, to the singing of the hymn, "The Son of God goes forth to war."

A full choir led the procession, in which the banners of All Saints and the Mothers' Union were carried. Preceding the Primate were Mr. E. F. Cockburn (Vicar's Warden), Mr. R. Thurgood (acting people's warden), and the Verger (Mr. C. Gambrill), who has held the office for thirty-seven years.

For the first time, the Churchwardens carried wands, which had been given by Mr. Cockburn as a thank-offering for the safe return of his son from France.

The church was crowded, the congregation including soldiers and airmen, members of the Home Guard and of the various A.R.P. services in the parish.

On reaching the altar the Archbishop read the prayer of dedication used 800 years before. The service was conducted by the Curate, and the lessons were read by the Vicar and the Rev. Mr. Church, R.A.F. chaplain.

### Westgate's "Faithful Remnants"

After expressing his pleasure at visiting the church, the Primate made a brief reference to the closing of St. Saviour's, Westgate-on-Sea. "It may be," he said, "that there are some here present from the neighbouring parish of Westgate joining in this festival of All Saints. If so, I would like to tell them that no one regrets more than I do the necessity in these hard times of closing their church. But I am sure they will remember all that is said in the Bible about the blessing given to the faithful remnants."

"I am particularly glad to welcome here so many of the officers and men of the King's Forces – the Army and Air Force," went on the Archbishop. "You have just heard that this church was built 800 years ago. I think it ought to be very wonderful for you to meet from time to time in these days in these old churches in Kent, for I know no places which are more full of the history and the spirit of this old England which you are here to defend. For 800 years English folk have come here to worship the eternal God in the midst of all the changes of their national life. There are also here representatives of the Home Guard and various forms of national service."

Saying that they represented in that small and rather overcrowded space the whole nation united in one cause, one hope and one resolve, the Archbishop said he

would try to find a word which would be appropriate to the festival of All Saints and to the great and solemn times in which they were gathered.

## Hard Race to Run

The Primate then selected as his text the following from the first epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews. "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us".

"We have run this race with patience," proceeded his Grace. "It is a hard race – freedom and justice, truth and honour, against the great forces of evil. The goal is still a long way off, and none of us can foretell how hard we may be put to in running this race before we reach that goal.

"There is nothing we shall need more during this coming winter than patience – patience during those long winter nights with nothing particular to do; you young men of the Forces with nothing to do but your training, and as for the civil population, it may well be that assaults from the air will continue and perhaps develop and make demands upon you.

## High Form of Bravery

"Patience is a very high form of bravery, and it is here that we have most reason to be thankful that on the whole our people, especially those subject to a continued bombardment and terrible discomfort and bewilderment are showing so much patience and fortitude. Those of you who have not spent nights in London can scarcely imagine what it is like. You have had your share – not here in Birchington, perhaps, but in your neighbouring towns – but it is nothing compared with those in London night after night. Yet I can testify that their patience is inexhaustible".

The Archbishop described how every night 200 poor people 'sheltered in the crypt below his chapel at Lambeth and said, "If the object of the enemy is to instil panic and fear, I could take him into that crypt and he would see that with the patience and cheerfulness and humour of those people he is already defeated."

It was great encouragement, continued the Primate, to know that they were surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses – not only their fellow citizens of the rest of the world, but, what was far more important, the communion of saints. That did not mean those who had been conspicuous for their goodness, but those who had tried in their time to live according to God's will. It was good to sometimes turn away from the tumult, destruction, confusion and madness of this world and take themselves through the communion of saints – a world which was unseen. It was living a life far more rich and true than our own could possibly be and ought to fortify and tranquilise them.

## A Great Responsibility

*"Think of the 800 years that have passed," said the Archbishop. "Do you realise that no generation of British people has ever been called upon to meet so great a responsibility as ours? We are living, beyond all question, at the most fateful moment in the long history of our country. Let us try to be more worthy of that responsibility, and remember those who met their responsibility in their day. Think of the men, for example, rough indeed, yet full of that robust faith in God, who in the days of Queen Elizabeth waited for the coming of the Spanish Armada; think of the generation 136 years ago, who, on this very coast, stood ready to repel the invasion by the great Napoleon.*

*"I think most of all, and many of you will think of those who died in the last war and look down on us now to finish the work they began and were not able to complete. There was in the spirit of their service and in the sacrifices which they offered a good*

which God can never allow to be lost, and we can feel they are being trained for a higher form of service in the great city of God.”

### “Judgment Will Be Terrible”

Referring to the words “every weight” in the text, the Primate said they should lay aside the weight of apprehension, fear and doubtfulness which at times beset them. It was very difficult to know what legitimate purpose God had in the tremendous confusion brought about in the world, but one thing of which they could be certain was that part of the purpose was judgment. Misery on a monstrous scale had been brought on the world by the rulers of Germany and then Italy, and he could not doubt that the judgment would be a terrible one. But could we say we did not deserve some share in that judgment.

“Think of all the things we said at the end of the last war,” he said, “of the sort of people we were going to be. We were going to turn to God and change the whole structure of our lives. But we did nothing of the sort. We lapsed into our old ways. We excluded God and thought of our material prosperity profits, comforts and amusements, and paid little heed to the call of Christ in the stunted and frustrated lives of the great multitude of our fellow men. Because we had a great call once and turned our ears deafly to it, let us not do so again.”

In conclusion, the Archbishop said in his blessing to them he would be thinking of the unknown future which awaited them all.

“I don’t know,” he said, “where you will be, say, this time next year, or where our country will be. I don not know what trials and sacrifices we may be called upon to make, but I shall commit you to God’s gracious mercy and protection, and I bid you remember the cloud of witnesses, and run with patience, hope and confidence the race set before you.”

At the evening service, the choir, under the direction of the Organist (Mr. H. S. Nixey), rendered the anthem, “What are these?” (Stainer), which, by a coincidence, was chosen for the patronal festival exactly fifty years ago.

The Curate conducted the service, Mr. R. P. Shaul read the lessons and the Vicar gave the address. In referring to the history of the church he emphasised the importance of commemorating those who gave so much in the past by seeing that the work they started was carried on.

### Only Five Vicars of the Parish

The church has a deceptive appearance, and few visitors realise that parts of it date back to the Norman period. To the archaeologist the architecture shows that it was built in two portions. The earlier section consists of the three main chancels and belongs to the transition period in architecture. The chancels were dedicated about 1140 to St. Nicholas (in the centre), St. Mary (now Quex Chapel), and St. Margaret.