

**A GUIDE TO THE
PARISH CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS
BIRCHINGTON**

By

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A FOREWORD

You who visit this ancient church come to a building in which the People of God in this parish have joined together during the past 700 years to acknowledge the 'worth of God' to them and to all mankind. We take pleasure in welcoming you and we hope that you will carry away nothing but pleasant memories of your visit.

History written in stone is not for everyone to read unaided and so this little book has been compiled to help you to appreciate the story of this church. May we ask you not to leave without offering a prayer to God that everything done here may be for His honour. Will you remember those who in the past built this Holy place; all who have worshipped here down the centuries and the priests who now minister here. And may the Lord preserve your going out and your coming in for evermore.

FRANK V. FORDHAM
Vicar.

THE PARISH CHURCH OF BIRCHINGTON

The Parish Church of Birchington stands in the centre of the village on a slight eminence adjacent to the triangular Square, and like the other ancient churches of Thanet about three-quarters of a mile back from the sea.

It is at the crossing of two old roads, one which led from Minster Abbey to the sea at the little port of Gore-end, and the other to Canterbury crossing the Wantsum by the ferry at Sarre.

Its venerable tower with its tall, graceful spire forms a landmark on the approach to Thanet, and years ago ships passing by on the offing used it as such.

It is believed that a Church stood on this site many years before the present building was erected. It is possible that a Church stood here in Saxon times – the very name Birchington is of Saxon origin – and Birchington is an ancient settlement site. Stone Age remains, a Bronze Age village, and Roman remains have all been found in the immediate neighbourhood.

Birchington was a part of the Manor of Monkton which was conferred on the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury, in A.D. 961, by Queen Eadgiva, widow of Edward the Elder, son of Alfred the Great. In Canterbury Cathedral is an ancient panel painted in oils showing Queen Eadgiva, the Manor House of Monkton, a row of houses and a church with a spire. It is believed that the houses and church are those of Birchington.

Birchington is not mentioned in “Domesday Book”, but the Manor of Monkton is, with its two churches. One of these churches is our Mother Church of Monkton and the other is probably that of Woodchurch near Acol, and now no longer in existence.

The date of the building of the present church and the names of its founders are not known, but from the records and from the style of architecture we can tell that the oldest parts of the Church are the Chancel with its side chapels and the Tower. These belong to the Early English period of architecture and were probably built early in the 13th century.

The Nave with its five fine arcades of five bays and two narrow aisles is in the Perpendicular style and dates from the 14th century. It has been suggested that the Parkeres, the original owners of Quex, and whose name appears on Thanet’s earliest map, that of Thomas of Elmham’s map of 1414, may have built the original church, specially as the north or Quex Chapel is the private chapel and property of the owners of the Quex Estate.

The Walls of the Church are very thick and solid, built of rubble and faced with broken flints, the Kentish cobbles.

The South wall has some old stones incorporated in it which can be seen on either side of the south porch. These old stones which are of anterior date to the other stones used in the building have given rise to the tradition that they were brought

from an ancient church which stood at Gore-end and which was pulled down on the encroachment of the sea and used in the building, re-building, or enlargement of our present Church. It will be noted that the South wall of the Church is higher than the North wall. There is no documentary evidence to support this tradition.

The earliest recorded date of a priest at Birchington, at present discovered, is 1293, when Richard, parish chaplain of Birchington, was present at the enquiry concerning the vacancy of Monkton.

From a copy of a translation made in 1879, of an original contract made in 1343, three columns and four arches were to be erected on the south side of Birchington Church after the design of the pillars and arches on the north side the Church of St. Nicholas-at-Wade. Unfortunately this document of great rarity and interest has since been lost.

In 1367, Henry de Wootton, was appointed Vicar of Monkton with the Chapels of Birchington and Wode (Woodchurch) by Archbishop Simon Langham. He was required to provide a priest or chaplain for Birchington, to celebrate every day if conveniently he could, and to pay him £6 annually. Monkton remained the mother Church of Birchington for many centuries and it was only in 1871 that Birchington was separated from Monkton and became a separate parish.

The Chancel

The Chancel has on each side two Early English arcades rising from plain impost. The piers, of old Kent ragstone, are octagonal and have well moulded caps and bases. The arches are of two orders each being widely chamfered. The east window was rebuilt of Bath stone at the Victorian restoration of the Church in 1863 when the present tracery was inserted. Up to then the mullions were carried straight up to the arch.

The Dean and Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral having the Great Tithes and being the Rectors of the parish are responsible for the repair and maintenance of the Chancel.

The St. Margaret's Chapel and the Tower

The south chapel, or the St. Margaret's Chapel, is one of the oldest parts of the Church, and over the west end of this chapel is the Tower, occupying an unusual position at the south-east end of the Church. But when the small original church of the three chapels was built, before the Nave was added, the Tower was in the usual position – at the south-west end of the Church. The east window of this chapel was rebuilt at the restoration of 1863. The quoins and bonds of the arches in this chapel are of Caen stone. On the interior the Tower is open on three sides having three plain Early English arches rising from impost. The Tower, crowned with an ancient shingled spire is the only ancient shingled spire in Thanet. It is without buttresses, and is graceful in its proportions, notwithstanding its simplicity. Divided into four stages, it has in its second stage a small Perpendicular, square-headed window with label on the south side; in its third stage there are lancets, and in its fourth stage are four windows each of a single light. The spire has been re-shingled many times. It was last re-shingled in 1968 when Canadian Red Cedar Wood shingles were used. In the days of sailing ships the Spire was of great use to ships at sea to steer by on

their way from the Thames to the North Foreland. In 1864 Trinity House made a grant of £100 to repair the Tower and Spire. The Spire is surmounted by a vane in the shape of an arrow with the date 1699 cut out of the vane. This vane cost £1- 3s when it was first erected and £1 for painting and gold washing.

The Nave

It has been suggested that the original Nave of the Church was pulled down and that the present Nave with its five bays and two narrow aisles was built in the 14th century. The piers of the arcades, built of old Kent Ragstone, are octagonal and have well-moulded caps. On some of the stones of the piers can still be seen the masons' marks. The arches are of two orders each being widely chamfered. At the bases of some of the piers are the stone seats which until the end of the 14th century were in most churches the only seats in naves.

The western pier of the south arcade of the nave differs from the others. It is a massive pier of four engaged octagonal columns with shafts at the point of junction. The arch which it supports is of three orders instead of two, and on the south side of the pier is the springer of another similar arch which was intended to span the south aisle. The wall of the nave arcade above this arch of three orders is here thicker than the rest of the arcade wall. It would seem that there was a change of plan or an inability to fulfil the architect's intention. It is not possible to state with certainty what the architect's intentions were but in all probability he proposed to erect a tower at the west end of the south aisle similar, although inferior, to the tower of St. Nicholas-at-Wade. Barrett in his History of the Ville of Birchington suggests that this tower was not completed as probably the tower in existence at the opposite end of the Church was raised in height in order to hold the bells.

The South Door and Porch

The inner south doorway is modern but it has two Norman caps to the shafts inserted in its jambs.

The four painted windows bear the appropriate words,

1. This is the Gate of Heaven.
2. This is the House of God.
3. Watch and Pray.
4. Holy Ground.

The North Door

Just opposite the South door on the North wall may be seen the outline of an arch used formerly as another door and blocked up probably at the restoration of 1863. Years ago it was proposed to put a window here but the Archbishop, who is the Patron of the living, would not permit the outline of the ancient doorway to be effaced. This North door was used for the convenience of funerals of strangers and of unknown persons who in ancient times were buried in the north side of the Churchyard, the southern sunny side being reserved for parishioners. The blocked doorway formerly held the Vicar's board, but now holds the 1939-1945 War Memorial.

The West Door

The West Door of the Nave was blocked up for many years but was re-opened and restored at the 1863 restoration of the Church.

The Roof

For many centuries the Church has had a tiled roof which has been renewed on several occasions. Much of the woodwork of the roof was renewed at the 1863 restoration. The roof was last retiled in 1966. Before the 1863 restoration there was a gable window in the roof on the south side to the east of the south door. This must have given much light to the Nave of the Church.

The Sanctuary and Chancel

The Chancel is dedicated to All Saints. There are several references in the Churchwardens' Account Book and in the Wills of parishioners to "All Saints", to the Image of All Saints, and to the Lights (candles) of the Altar of the Church.

In 1402, Hammond de Westgate willed that he should be buried in the Churchyard of All Saints, Birchington. He also left 6d. to the Altar and 4d. to the Light of the said Church.

John Parkere, in 1412, willed to be buried in the Church of All Saints, Birchington; and Richard Feyrware in 1480 willed to be buried in the parish Chapel of Birchington, before the Image of All Saints, and to each Light in the Chapel he left one bushel of barley.

The Altar Table is a modern oak table. In pre-Reformation days there was a stone altar and in the Churchwardens' Book are items for payments to "Baullser ye builder for makyng up ye awltars" and for lime and sand.

Up to the Reformation, Birchington Church must have been a very colourful and even brightly-lit church specially at festival times. The walls were painted, the windows had stained glass and there were several images and numerous lights about the building. From Wills and the Churchwardens' Book we know that there were Images of St. Nicholas, the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. John, St. Margaret, and probably of St. Anne, the mother of Mary, and the Holy Trinity; and that there were numerous lights not only before the images and on the Rood, but that there were lights of St. Christopher, Corpus Christi, St. George, as well as the Cross Light, the Paschal Taper and the Hocktide Light.

To make all these Lights and Tapers Birchington had its own Wax House.

The Reredos

The beautiful reredos, completed in 1883, takes the form of a Triptych and was designed by a Mr. C. N. Beazley, and painted by Mr. N. H. J. Westlake, F.S.A., a well-known artist at that time. Its total cost was £257, raised chiefly by offertories.

The centre panel represents the Last Supper, the study for which was exhibited at the Royal Academy, where it was much admired. You will note the dignified pose of Our Saviour with outstretched hands in the act of giving thanks and blessing the

sacred elements, the devotional attitude of the Apostles each with a halo and name, and the distraught face of Judas with bag in hand and no halo.

The Chalice and Paten depicted on the Holy Table are exact copies of those in use in the Church today.

The small pictures in the Predella below represent from left to right,
The Gathering of the Manna by the Israelites,
The Sacrifice of Isaac,
The First Passover and the Paschal Lamb,
Melchizedek offering bread and wine to Abraham,
Moses striking the rock and the flowing water.

The wings of the Triptych contain portraits of Saints in some way connected with Thanet.

On the left wing in the upper row from left to right are,
King Ethelbert of Kent who was baptised by St. Augustine,
Domneva his great granddaughter and often known as the Abbess
Ermenburga of Minster Abbey,
Her daughter St. Mildred.

Below, from left to right, are,
Pope Gregory who sent St. Augustine to England,
St. Dunstan,
St. Alphege, Archbishop, who was killed by the Danes.

On the right wing in the upper row are, from left to right,
St. Milburga,
St. Milgitha, both daughters of Domneva,
Queen Bertha of Kent.

Below from left to right are,
St. Anselm of Canterbury,
St. Thomas a Becket,
St. Augustine.

On the reverse of the two wings are busts of the Twelve Apostles each with his symbol under.

Before the present beautiful reredos was erected there was a wooden reredos on which were painted the Ten Commandments and the Sentences. The Sentences consisted of the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and some Words of Scripture. There are references in the Churchwardens' Books to payments for "wrighting the sentences".

The panelling is a fine example of mason mitreing.

The Easter Sepulchre

On the north side of the Altar are two hinged doors opening into a recess in the wall. This was probably the Easter Sepulchre. The custom was to place the Crucifix and the Host in the Sepulchre with much ceremony on Maundy Thursday and there constantly watched until the dawn of Easter Day when the Pyx containing the Host

was taken out and replaced on the Altar. In the Churchwardens' Book from 1555 are many items for payments for "wochyng of ye sepulkyr".

The Altar Rails

The oak Altar Rails were installed in 1938 and were made by a local craftsman. The twelve figures attached to the supports were designed and carved at the Canterbury School of Art and Crafts and correspond to the twelve saints depicted on the wings of the triptych but not in the same order.

The Saints are:

		North	
	St. Milburga	St. Milgitha	
	St. Augustine	St. Anselm	
	King Ethelbert	St. Gregory	
West			East
	Queen Bertha	St. Dunstan	
	Thomas Becket	St. Mildred	
	St. Alphege	St. Ermenburga	
		South	

In pre-Reformation days there were no rails. Up to the Puritan times there were wooden rails, but these were removed at the time of the Civil War. Brass rails were installed at the 1863 restoration.

Sanctuary Chairs

There are two lovely chairs in the Sanctuary, an armchair in the style of the late 17th century with shaped cane panelled high back, loose tapestry covered seat and "C" scroll front stretcher; and a Charles II walnut chair with cane panelled back and seat. They were given by the late Mr. C. Coles and the late Mr. W. Studham.

The Chancel Brass

Attached to a pier on the South side of the Chancel is a brass of a priest wearing the vestments of the period and holding the Chalice with wafer. The brass was formerly on a ledger stone in the Sanctuary but at the restoration of the Church in 1863 the brass was removed from the stone and placed on the wall and the ledger stone placed in the centre aisle of the nave, where the indent can still be seen.

The inscription reads,

"Hic requisit magester Johes Heynys
clericus nuper vicarius de Monkton qui
obiit nono die Octobris anno dm M V XXIII."

Translation -

"Here rests Sir John Heynys
Priest sometime vicar of Monkton who
Died ninth October A.D. 1523."

The portion of the brass requesting prayers for the repose of his soul has been cut away.

John Heynys was appointed Vicar of Monkton with Birchington and Wode in 1505. By his will he bequeathed some land the money from which was to be used to pay for prayers for his soul on the anniversary of his death. This land was seized at the Reformation in 1549.

The Screen

The ancient oak panelling may have been the lower part of the mediaeval rood screen, or formed part of the old reredos. The panels show traces of colouring. This panelling had been preserved in the Quex Chapel and was restored to its present position by the Rev. H. A. Serres.

Birchington Church up to the time of the Reformation had a Rood, a Rood Screen, and a Rood Loft. This mediaeval rood screen was probably the most striking feature of our Church. The stone corbel which carried the rood can still be seen on the north side of the Chancel arch. It had a Crucifix in the centre with the Blessed Mary and St. John on either side.

There are several references in Wills and Churchwardens' Book to the Rood, the Rood Cloth, the Rood Lights, and for "payntyng of ye Rood Mary and John".

John Crisp of Thanet, Senior, left by his will in 1500 66s. 8d, "to the making of a new rood loft at Birchington".

The Rood was pulled down at the Reformation.

In 1863 the Chancel was restored by the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury. The old boxed-in pews of wood which extended into the Chancel were removed, the floor was raised and paved with Minton tiles, and oak stalls for the Clergy and choir were installed. The floor of the Chancel was raised above that of the Nave and the Sanctuary floor above that of the Chancel and steps of Portland stone made.

The East Window

The theme of the East Window is the Crucifixion. The cost, £180, was raised by public subscription. The window was dedicated on Whitsunday 1873.

The St. Margaret's Chapel

The Chapel is dedicated to St. Margaret, an Anglo-Saxon saint who was married to Malcolm III, King of Scotland (1069). From Wills we learn that money and corn were left to the Light of St. Margaret.

Formerly this Chapel was more or less a lumber room and contained the greater part of the mechanism of the old organ, the clock weights, the ringers' ladder up to the belfry, and the meagre space left was used as a vestry.

In 1910 when the new Vestries were built the St. Margaret Chapel was converted back to its original use. The ringers' ladder was removed and the belfry ladder made to rest on the wide sill of the south Tower window, access to which is obtained through the new Choir Vestry by piercing the wall of the Tower. The Chapel and the new Organ were re-dedicated in 1911.

Some of the furnishings of this Chapel came from Queen Bertha's School Chapel when that school was closed in 1959.

The window of the two lights with figures of St. Alban and St. George was given by the Old Boys of Woodford House School, which was situated in Station Road, in memory of Old Woodfordians who fell in the two World Wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945. It was dedicated in 1948 by the Rev. Cannon N. M. Granville-Sharp, Vicar of Birchington from 1935 to 1955.

The Aumbry in the south wall of the St. Margaret's Chapel was dedicated in 1950.

It was placed in its present position, let into the south wall on the suggestion of His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury when he visited the Church.

The New Vestries

The new Vestries and the Porch leading into them and also into the Church were built as a memorial to Bishop Ellicott of Gloucester who lived in Birchington for some years on his retirement and who is buried in the Churchyard. The Vestries are built of flint with white stone facings and are in keeping with the general architecture of the Church. They were dedicated by the Bishop of Dover in 1910.

The Nave

The Nave with aisles is 47 feet 3 inches wide and 94 feet in length.

Originally the Nave had an earth floor, when it was about 18 inches lower than now. The only seats were round the pillars and against the walls and to give the Church the appearance of cleanliness and warmth it was the custom to spread straw on the floor. It appears that the straw was changed once a year, at Easter time. The Churchwardens' Book has several references to straw,

"1532 ltm for biryng of stro to ye churche at Estr iid."

Seats were probably first introduced into the Church during the 16th century when entries appear in the Churchwardens' Book for payment to the carpenter for work "about the seats".

Box pews appeared during the 17th century and were not removed until the restoration of 1863, when the present seats were installed.

At the west end of the Nave was a Gallery, erected in 1752. Access to this was obtained by a wooden stairway in the south aisle on the east side of the large massive column. This Gallery was removed at the 1863 restoration.

There have been many burials in the Nave and there are several vaults, now filled in, containing the remains of Neames, Friends, Tomlins, and others.

The Ledger Stones were taken up at the 1863 restoration and placed down the centre aisle and the cross aisle.

An interesting stone is across the north aisle opposite the South door and marks the burial place of Thomas Underdown who died in 1709 and was Mayor of Fordwich three times. He was certified as being buried in woollen, according to the Burial in Woollen Act of 1678.

The Pulpit

The Pulpit is a 17th century oak hexagonal pulpit on a hexagonal shaft with a moulded base and capital. Each side has two panels with ogee cinquefoil arches and Perpendicular tracery. It appears from the Churchwardens' Book that during the 17th century the pulpit was draped and partly hidden in heavy hangings resembling the heavy hangings or hammer cloth with which the coachman's box was in former days always hung in the private carriages of the rich – but nowadays only seen in State coaches. The pulpit used to have an Hour Glass and a pair of jointed brass branches to hold candles for light.

Originally the Pulpit was against the first pillar in the south-east of the Nave.

The Lectern

The Brass Eagle Lectern in the unusual position on the north side, was presented in 1877 by Thomas Gray of Birchington Hall, now Spurgeon's Homes. The wooden lectern stand or platform was given in memory of Lt. Col. G. I. Phillips, C.B.E., the Churchwarden, who read the Lessons in this Church for many years.

The Font

The ancient Early English Font is a plain octagonal font of Kent Rag supported on one large central shaft and four smaller round shafts of Bath stone. The basin is original but the shafts have apparently been renewed. The interior and upper ledge are coated with lead and there are impressions on the ledge where a candle stick and a lectern stood. Traces of where the hinge and lock were can be seen, for in ancient times the font was locked to prevent the blessed water being removed for non-church or magical purpose.

There are several references to the Font Taper and to the Font Cloth in the Churchwardens' Book. The Font Taper was a large candle used at the solemn ceremony of the blessing of the font on the Eves of Easter and Whitsun and lighted at all times of baptism. The Font Cloth was a fair linen cloth used to cover the font after the locked cover had been raised or removed.

The original position of the Font was near the west door in the centre of the Nave. It was moved to its present position near the south door at the restoration of the Church in 1863.

The Windows of the Nave

There is no ancient glass in the Church but there are numerous entries in the Churchwardens' Book and in Wills to the windows, the glass and the leading. In 1449, John Quek bequeathed the sum of 10 marcs for making a window and glass thereto in the Chancel of St. Mary of Birchington.

The West window which represents Faith, Hope and Charity was dedicated in 1873 and was the gift of Mr. Thomas Gray, of Birchington Hall, now Spurgeon's, in memory of several members of his family.

The windows in the south and north walls were installed in Victorian times and are in memory of the Grays of Birchington Hall, Louisa Burroughes Bird, Tomlin of Northdown, Margate, and John Friend.

The Rossetti Window

The most interesting of the windows is the two-light window near to the Font erected to the memory of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the only Englishman who has obtained equal fame as a poet and painter. He took a large part in the revival of the art of stained glass painting.

The left light is a reproduction of Rossetti's own painting of the families of Joseph and Zacharias uniting to keep the Passover. Christina Rossetti, the sister of Dante Gabriel, in a letter to the Rev. Alcock, Vicar of Birchington, describes the window in detail. This letter is in the Church archives.

Rossetti lived in Birchington with his mother and sister for a short while before he died on Easter Day, 1882. This window was erected to his memory by his mother.

The Quex Chapel

The North or Quex Chapel, originally The Lady Chapel, is a private chapel belonging to the owners of the Quex Estate. It is one of the older parts of the Church belonging to the Early English period of architecture. Its most interesting architectural feature is the small lancet window high up on the West wall, an almost unique position. It originally lit the priest's room which occupied the upper portion of the chapel and to which access was gained by a wooden stairway. The priest made use of this room when he came from Monkton to conduct the services. The Chapel is dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin and often called the Lady Chapel, although it is frequently referred to in the Church records as the Quex or Crispe Chapel.

In this Chapel were an Altar, Image, and Lights maintained for the Blessed Virgin Mary, and to these money and corn were bequeathed in pre-Reformation days. There have been several changes in the Chapel during the ages. At the Reformation in 1550 the Lady Altar was taken down. Later on when box pews were installed the Quex owners had a raised pew somewhat like an opera box in the Chapel which blocked the whole of the first arch between the Chapel and the Chancel. It was approached by steps from the north aisle of the Nave which covered the entrance to the Quex vault. In 1863 at the restoration of the Church this raised pew was taken down and long seats facing the Chancel were installed. The screen between the Chapel and the Nave was erected in memory of Henry Horace Powell Cotton who died in 1894 and was buried at Quex. The figures in coloured glass represent Faith, Charity, Hope, Fortitude, Humility, and Justice.

In 1966 another restoration, a real one, took place through the generosity of Christopher Powell Cotton, Esq. The Chapel was rearranged and refurnished in memory of his parents. An Altar of Dove-bardiglio marble from Italy standing on blue

wood kirk sandstone piers was installed in front of the fireplace memorial to the Powell Cottons. The pews were renovated and moved to their present position.

From earliest times the owners of Quex and their relatives have been buried in the vaults beneath the Chapel now filled in, as the Wills in Canterbury Cathedral Library and the Monuments show.

The Chapel contains some remarkable and interesting monuments in brass, stone, alabaster and marble, commemorating the owners of Quex from the early 15th century to the present day.

Affixed to the North wall are six brasses. They are from East to West;

1. Richard Quek, son of John Quek, who died 18th March, 1459, and by his will gave 10 marks for making a window in St. Mary's Chancel.
2. John Quek, with his son Richard by his side, wearing the civilian dress of the period with an anelace or large hunting knife hanging from his girdle. The inscription is, "Hic jacet Johes Quek qui obit XXI die Octobr A Dni MCCCCXLIX -----".
Translated is "Here lies John Quek who died 21st October A.D. 1449". The rest of the inscription probably a request for the prayers of the faithful has been cut away.
3. Margaret Crispe and Chrysom brass under.
The inscription is, "----- Margarett Cryppys late the wyfe of John Cryppys the younger whiche Margaret decessed ye XII dai of May, in the yere of or lord god MVcXXXIII -----".
She was the third wife of John Crispe and apparently died soon after the birth and death of her first baby since the baby is represented on the brass in its baptismal robe and is known as a chrysome child. Unfortunately the head is missing. The chrysom was a square of white linen used for covering the child at its Baptism. A child dying before it was a month old was buried in its chrysom, and a child thus buried was called a chrysom child.
4. Margaret (Rotherham) Crispe.
She was the second wife of John Crispe the younger and died in 1528. Her pointed head-dress was the fashion from 1480 to 1550. The inscription is, "Here lyeth mistris Margaret Cryspe late the wyffe of master John Cryspe the younger dowter and Ayer unto Gorge Rotherham Esquyer whyche Margaret dyed the XVIII day of Maye ye yere of or lord god MVcXXVIII -----".
5. Alys Crispe
She was the first wife of John Crispe the Younger. Alys is in the dress of the period with her daughter on the lower part of the brass.
The inscription remaining is,
" ----- the wyfe of John
----- Alys decessyd the X
----- M VcXVIII on whos "
She died the 18th of February, A.D. 1518.
She was the mother of Sir Henry Crispe whose recumbent stone effigy is on the altar tomb nearby.

6. On the West wall,
 A mutilated brass of John and Agnes Crispe.
 Unfortunately their effigies have disappeared but the inscription remains and below are groups of their eight sons and seven daughters.
 Agnes Crispe was probably the daughter and heiress of John Quex the Younger and wife of John Crispe of Stanlake, Oxfordshire. On her marriage the Crispes succeeded the Quex as owners of the estate.
 Agnes died in 1533 and John probably in 1536.
 The Inscriptions,
 “ ----- of John Cryspe Esquyer and
 Agnes his wyffe the whyche John decessed the -----
 day of ----- in the yere of our lord god MVc -----
 and the seyde agnes decessed the VI day of
 June ye yere of or Lord MVcXXXIII. whos
 Souls Jhu have mcy.
 In the inscription the year of the death of John was never filled in. John assisted in the reckoning of the Church Lands in 1526 and his entry is one of the first in the Churchwardens Book of 1531.

The Altar Tomb

The recumbent stone figures represent Sir Henry Crispe and his first wife Lady Catherine Scott, a member of the great Kentish family of Scott of Scott's Hall, Smeeth, near Ashford. The base is probably older – an earlier tomb chest cut down to take the stone figures.

On the shields on the side of the tomb are the Crispe arms, five horseshoes on a chevron, and the Scott arms, three Catherine wheels. Catherine died in 1544. Sir Henry then married his second wife, Anne Haselhurst.

Sir Henry was the most notable of the Crispe family and was known as the King of the Island, or Regulus Insulae. He was Churchwarden in 1539, 1540, and 1541. He was Sheriff of Kent in 1546, beside holding other important public appointments.

He was buried in the Quex Chapel on 24th August, 1575.

The bearded head is probably 14th century.

The Six Bust Monument

The mural monument with six busts above Sir Henry's altar tomb is a remarkable work of art. It is by the celebrated sculptor Joshua Marshall who succeeded his father as Master Mason to Charles II. His monument in the Quex Chapel is unique as it is the only one in England with six busts. The busts are of Italian white marble and the black inscription panels of Purbeck marble.

The lower busts represent Sir John Crispe (1551-1583) and his two wives, Margaret Harlackenden and Elizabeth Roper, while the upper represent his son, Sir Henry Crispe (1576-1647) and his two wives, Maria Monins and Ann Nevinson.

The Alabaster Monument

On the east end of the south wall of the Chapel is a splendid alabaster monument to Marie, daughter of Sir Anthony Culepeper of Bedgbury, near Goudhurst, and her husband, Sir Henry Crispe, both of whom are wearing the Elizabethan ruff and kneeling on cushions. The smaller effigies represent their children, some holding skulls to denote that they pre-deceased their parents.

The authorship of this monument is uncertain but it has some features which indicate that it may have come from the celebrated Johnson studio at Southwark.

Lady Marie died 1618.

Her husband, Sir Henry Crispe, was known as “Bon jour” Crispe. He acquired this name through the following incident.

In 1657, 40 armed men landed at Gore-end, plundered Quex and forcibly took the old Sir Henry (he was then nearly 80), in his coach to Gore-end and carried him by ship to Flanders and held him prisoner at Bruges until a ransom of £3,000 had been paid. His eldest son, Sir Nicholas Crispe, the first figure kneeling behind him, petitioned Oliver Cromwell to allow the ransom to be paid and so free his father, but Cromwell would not allow it as he thought it was a plot to obtain money for the use of the exiled King Charles II. Unfortunately Sir Nicholas died before anything could be done so Lady Thomasina Crispe, widow of Sir Nicholas took up the case with Cromwell and in the end Bon Jour Crispe was released and after eight months absence returned to Quex. During those eight months absence the only words of French he learnt “Bon Jour” and tradition has it that after this event when meeting parishioners in Birchington he greeted them with the words “Bon Jour”, and so he was nicknamed “Bon Jour” Crispe. Henry Bonjour Crispe died in 1663 and was buried in the Quex Chapel. A ledger stone, now concealed by pews, marks the spot.

The Bust of Anna Gertruy Crispe

Next to the six bust monument is a marble monument by a brilliant sculptor, William Palmer. The bust represents Anna Gertruy Crispe, who with her three sisters were the joint owners of the Quex estate. They were the last of the Crispes to own the estate. They sold it in 1700 to a John Buller, merchant of the City of London, and of Morvall, Cornwall. On the monument is inscribed a portion of her will by which she left 47 acres of land on trust, the income from which was to be used for 5 widows of Birchington and Acol, and the rest for education. As a result of this legacy the first Charity School was founded in Birchington. The Crispe Farm is still owned by the parish.

The Marble Monument in the Classical Style

The marble monument in the classical style with fluted Ionic pillars and pilasters commemorates Sir Nicholas Crispe, the eldest son of “Bon jour” Crispe, his wife, Thomasina and their daughter, Ann Powle. It was erected in 1744. Lady Thomasina was one of the two persons in Birchington who were buried in linen after the passing of the Burial in Woollen Act in 1678, which required all persons to be buried in woollen. The other was Thomas Crispe who died in 1680, father of Anna Gertruy Crispe.

The columns are of Portland stone, and the black panels of Purbeck marble. The three decorative piers at the top were probably added later.

The other murals commemorate later owners of Quex and their relatives, the Bullers, the Roberts, the Pines, the Powells, and the Cottons. The Powell-Cotton Memorial below the East window is a late 18th century chimney piece put to a new use.

There are six ledger stones in the floor, but some are covered by pews. Two are early 18th century with finely carved armorial medallions.

The Organ

The present organ was installed in 1911 when the new Vestries were built, in memory of Bishop Ellicott of Gloucester, and the St. Margaret's Chapel re0furnished. It was built by Messrs. T. Hopkins and Son. The electric discus blower was fixed in 1935 when the organ was thoroughly repaired. It was last cleaned and overhauled in 1961.

The Bells

There are eight bells, inscribed as under:-

The Treble: "To the glory of God and in loving memory of my dear son, Charles, who died July 15th, 1897.

C. E. Matthews, Churchwarden

Mears & Stainbank, founders, London, 1901.

Recast 1956 in memory of the good neighbours of Park Avenue".

Approx weight 4 cwt.

No. 2: "To the glory of God and in loving memory of my dear wife, Sarah Anne, who died Feb. 11th, 1899.

C. E. Matthews.

Mears & Stainbank, founders, London, 1901.

Recast 1956 as the gift of Wilfred Hatch."

Approx weight 4 cwt.

No. 3: "Warner made me 1887" The Jubilee bell. S. Snelling hung us all 1887".

Cast by John Warner & Sons 1887.

Recast 1956 in loving memory of John Carr who died 21st Sept. 1957".

Approx weight 4¼ cwt.

No. 4: "Samuel Knight me fecit 1728"

Recast 1956 as the gift of Stanley Slade".

Approx weight 4½ cwt.

No. 5: "William Masterson CW SK me fecit 1728"

Recast 1956 as the gift of Lawrance Bull."

Approx weight 5¼ cwt.

No. 6: "William Jepp CW SK me fecit 1728"

Recast 1956".

Approx weight 5½ cwt

No. 7: "Joseph Hatch made me 1633"
Recast 1956 as the gift of Cyril A. G. Coles".

Approx weight 7 cwt.

No. 8: The Tenor: "Samuel Knight made me 1730"
Recast 1956. Mears & Stainbank, London".

Approx weight 9 cwt.

There are many references to the bells and to bell-ringing in the Churchwardens Books, the earliest being 1532 when there appears to have been two bells, a big and a small bell. Soon after a third bell was added. In 1662 the number was increased to five. A sixth bell was added to commemorate Queen Victoria's Jubilee of 1887, and in 1902 the octave was completed by Mr. C. E. Matthews, Churchwarden, who provided two new treble bells in memory of his wife.

The oldest bell extant was made in 1633 and is now the seventh in the peal. It was made by Joseph Hatch, a famous Kentish bell founder. The agreement for the casting of this bell is still in the church archives.

The Church bells were rung in former times not only to call people to church but on special occasions to mark historical events and at deaths. In Pre-Reformation times the bells were rung at time of storms, as there was a superstition that bells had the power of dispersing tempests. In Birchington payments were made for ringing "at ye tempes". The bells were rung when Royalty landed at or departed from Margate or when lodged at Quex, on all notable occasions such as births of Princes and Princesses, victories, and celebrations. They were always rung on November 5th to celebrate the failure of the Gunpowder Plot.

The Clock

The Church Clock, installed in 1887, a Memorial of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, was the gift of Major Bell, a benefactor of the Church and Parish. The iron gilt dial is five feet in diameter.

John Powell, Esq., of Quex, offered a clock for the Church in 1848, but after being accepted by the parishioners, the offer was respectfully declined as the parishioners having "taken into consideration the present high parochial rates chargeable upon this parish think it would be imprudent to accept any gift that would add to the present parochial burdens".

The Heating of the Church

The oil-fired heating system costing approximately £2,500 was installed in 1964. The Church in its time has had no heating, coke stoves, gas heaters, and a coke boiler with hot water pipes.

The Church Plate

The Church Plate includes,

- 1 A Chalice of Silver, 1678
It is 8½ inches high, with a bowl 5 inches deep. The London Hall Marks for 1678 on the Chalice are,
A T.C. with a fish above the initials
B Leopard's head crowned
C Lion passant.
D The London date letter for 1678-9.

Upon the foot is engraved,

“The Chalis of Birchington made in ye yeare of our Lord 1678

John Aylwin Minister

John Goar Churchwardens

John Creak “

The following entries in the Churchwardens Book relate to this Chalice,

1678	paid for the new Cup to the Goldsmith	£03 07 00
1679	Pd more for drink when we agreed about the cup	£00 02 03
1679	pd Mr Ayling for ye Cup (these from John Goar's account.)	£02 14 09
1679	more pd for my pt for ye Cup (this from John Creak's account.)	£02 14 09

- 2 A Paten Cover of Silver 1678 or 1585
This has a diameter of 5½ inches and weighs 4 ounces.
It is inscribed,
“Birchington Church Plate 1678”.
It has similar hall marks as the Chalice.
The Churchwarden's Book contain the following entry,
“1585 ffor iiiij ounces and somewhat more of a silver plate at Vs and Viid
the ounce XXiiis”.
The weight given is exactly that of the above paten cover and probably the
date 1678 was put on when the new cup was purchased.
- 3 A Paten of Silver with foot, 1678
This has a diameter of 6 inches and weighs 6½ ounces. The hall marks
on the top are the same as on the Chalice. In the centre is engraved the
sacred monogram I.H.S. en soleil, which also appears underneath the
foot. Also underneath the foot is the lion passant and the initials T.C. with
a fish above.
- 4 A Chalice of Silver, 1873
This Chalice is 8½ inches high, 4½ inches wide at the mouth, and 5¼
inches wide at the foot.
It weighs 15 ounces 5¾ dwts.
It has London Hall Marks for 1873.
The foot has jewels set in five of its compartments and I.H.S. on the sixth.

It was presented by a lady who also gave the Paten.

- 5 A Paten of Silver, 1873
This has a diameter of 6½ inches and weighs 4 ounces 2 dwts. It has the same Hall Marks as the Chalice. (No. 4).
The “Lamb and Flag” are engraved in the centre and six jewels are set in the rim.
- 6 A Flagon of Silver, 1904
This has an overall height of 10¾ inches and weighs 17 ounces 2 dwts. Inscribed beneath is,
“Presented by F. Honeyball together with two brass gas standards in memory of his mother
H. A. Serres Vicar
F. Honeyball Churchwarden 1904”
It has a 6 lobed foot and a hinged lid surmounted by a Maltese Cross.
- 7 A Silver Private Communion Set
Hall Marked 1904.
This set is in a case stamped “Bishop Ellicott 1905”.
Bishop Ellicott lived in Birchington after his retirement and is buried in the Churchyard.
- 8 A Silver Communion Set
Presented to the Church by the Principals of Queen Berth’s School, Birchington, when the School was closed in 1959. This set came from the school Chapel.
- 9 The Silver Icelandic Chalice and Paten
Given anonymously in memory of Miss Edith Greaves, 1879-1967. The Chalice is 5 inches high, diameter of bowl 3¾ inches, weight 7 oz. 14 dwts. It has London Hall Marks for 1960.
The Paten is 4¾ inches in diameter and weighs 3 oz. 13 dwts. It has London Hall Marks of 1967.
- 10 A Ciborium of Sterling Silver
Given anonymously in memory of the Rev. Arthur Bloore, 1963, who often officiated in the Church.
- 11 A Wafer Box of Sterling Silver
Given in memory of Mr. R. S. B. Merrett by his wife in 1963.
- 12 A Silver Viaticum
Given in memory of William Studham by his wife in 1963.

The Churchyard

The original Churchyard is probably as old as the Church. It has been enlarged at least four times and well over five thousand people have been buried in it. The original Churchyard was surrounded by a wall which extended as far as the sloping

bank. It contains a few old tombstones of the 17th century and these are near the Church at the east, south-east, and south parts of the Churchyard.

The Rossetti Memorial Cross

The stone of most general interest is that of Rossetti whose grave lies near the south porch. It takes the form of an ancient Irish cross, the arms and stem being connected by a circle. Within the lowest part of the stem is represented St. Luke, the patron saint of painters, and next above is the Ox, the emblem of the Evangelist. The epitaph is,

“Here sleeps
Gabriel Charles Dante Rossetti
honoured under the name of
DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI
among painters as a painter
and among poets as a poet
Born in London of parentage mainly Italian, 12th May, 1828
Died at Birchington 9th April 1882”

The cruciform monument was designed by Rossetti’s life-long friend and fellow-painter, Ford Madox Brown, and erected by his brother William and his sister, the gifted poetess, Christina Rossetti.

Other Memorial Stones

Near the south porch are a few stones to Officers of Excise and Riding Officers, a reminder of smuggling days.

Near the Quex Chapel are two interesting stones, one to Gilbert Stringer who died in 1832 and was for 33 years Master of the Charity School, for 37 years perpetual Parish Officer and for 30 years Treasurer of the Union Workhouse; and the other is to Richard Busbridge who died in 1845 and for 30 years was clerk of this parish. The verse on his stone is,

“Our life hangs by a single thread
Which soon is cut and we are dead
Then boast not reader of thy might
Alive at noon but dead at night”.

Near the Rossetti grave is the grave of Robert Brasier, who was Overseer of the Poor and Churchwarden for Acol many times. He died 1724.

There are many stones to the Neame family dating from the early 18th century.

The Lych Gate

The Lych Gate originally stood in the grounds of Woodford House School, Birchington, as a memorial to Henry Arthur Erlebach, the founder of the School who died in 1928. When the school and its grounds were sold in 1960 the Lych Gate was removed to its present position.

The Wax House

Birchington had its Wax House which stood on the north side of the Churchyard near the Powell Arms, where candles were made, old and new wax mixed, and where the wax "Chaundeler" worked at "Strekynge", that is, casting or moulding, the tapers. The house was pulled down at the end of the 17th century. In early days in Birchington the rent of some Church land was paid in wax to make the candles.

The Minister's House

From early times Birchington Church has owned property as well as land. In Pre-Reformation times on the receipts side of the Churchwarden's Accounts are entered rents received for the Church houses, rents for shops, rents for Church land, and profits from the Church flock of sheep and herd of cows. It appears that the Church owned at least one house and probably two, and at least two shops. One of these shops was a butcher's.

For many years one of the houses which stood at the north-east corner of the old Churchyard was occupied by the Minister at Birchington. Father Cuthbert, who was Minister at Birchington when the Churchwardens Accounts open in 1531 occupied the house for which he paid 8s. yearly. There are many items giving the rent paid and the name of the Minister and also payments for repairs.

In the 17th century the house was used for the poor. The houses were pulled down during the 18th century.

The Documents

Birchington has a wonderful collection of documents of considerable historical value. No other parish church in Thanet or even SouthEast England has such a collection. They are the oldest in Thanet.

The oldest document is a receipt, dated 1490, for 16s. 8d. Composition money which had to be paid yearly to the Cinque Port of Dover, of which Birchington was a Non-Corporate Limb. There are several such documents for Composition money in the archives.

The Registers of Births, Marriages and Burials, a total of 26 volumes, are the oldest in Thanet. They date from 1538 which is the year in which the keeping of Registers was first ordered. The Registers are complete except for the years 1553 to 1564. The omission is explained by a note which appears at the end of the first book written twice in English and once in Latin; "Here endeth the first booke of the Register of Birchington, the second booke called the black booke was spoiled by an ignorant woman 1553-1564.

The first entry written in Latin in the Register of Baptisms is that of Cecilia Cantis who was baptised on 22nd November, 1538/9 and hers is also the first name in the Register of Burials as she was buried on 15th March, 1538/9. Cantis is one of the oldest Birchington names.

All the Registers up to 1837 have been transcribed and indexed.

The Churchwardens Account Books are also the oldest in Thanet commencing in 1531 and these are complete up to the present day except for the years 1643-44 and 1650-51 when owing to the troubled times no accounts appear to have been kept for those years.

These accounts are specially valuable as they give us information about the period just before, during and after the Reformation. From these accounts it is possible to trace the slow progress of the Reformation in Birchington. They contain an enormous amount of information about the village, as it must be remembered that the Churchwardens were not only Church officials but were the chief parish officers as well.

These accounts have been transcribed.

Another document of considerable interest is The Armada Sess of 1588. It is a list of those men of the village who paid their sess or rate to help fit out the Dover ship to fight against the Spanish Armada. Birchington was rated to raise £5 16s. 8d. but the village responded well and raised over £7.

Birchington possesses two rare documents, The Vow and Covenant and The Solemn League and Covenant of 1643. They are rare because in 1661 at the Restoration of Charles II all copies were ordered to be burnt but Birchington preserved its copies. There are only five copies left in Kent.

The Vow and Covenant, in the handwriting of Mr. Stancombe, the Minister at the time, was read in the Church on two Sundays by him, after which it was signed by all the men of the village present. One-hundred and seventy-one men signed and of these 129 made marks as they were unable to write their names. All who signed promised to assist the forces raised by Parliament against the forces raised by King Charles I.

The Solemn League and Covenant was read and signed the following March 1643/4.

On this occasion 168 men raised their right hands in assent when Mr. Stancombe read it from the pulpit and then signed or made their marks.

Birchington also possesses a number of Poor Books, for the Ville of Wood or Acol, as well as Birchington. These date from 1611 and are the accounts of the Churchwardens and the Overseers of the Poor recording their receipts and disbursements in the relieving of the poor of the two parishes. These books also throw much light on the history of Birchington during nearly 300 years from 1611.

In the archives are a number of documents relating to Birchington as a Limb of the Cinque Port of Dover, including Settlement Certificates, Apprenticeship Indentures from 1607, documents relating to Birchington Workhouse, the Waywardens Book and many documents relating to the Church, the Church Lands, the Charities and many books, albums, photographs, etc.

The Vicars of Birchington

Although Birchington is so old it has only ever had, to date, seven Vicars, as up to 1871 the Church was a Chapelry of Monkton and the Vicar of Monkton was also the Vicar of Birchington. The Vicar of Monkton supplied a Curate to serve at Birchington up to this date.

The list of former Vicars and Curates can be seen on the Board near the Quex Chapel.

Vicars of Birchington Alone

1871 John Price Alcock, M.A.
1888 John Kirkham Fox, B.A.
1898 Henry Arthur Serres, M.A.
1930 A. O. Hayes, M.A.
1935 Nevill Maurice Granville Sharp, M.A.
1955 Christopher William Donaldson.
1963 Frank Vernon Fordham
1980 Arthur Collins, A.K.C.
1985 Frederick R. Smale, B.D. A.K.C.

The Daughter Churches

Birchington has two daughter churches,

- 1 St. Mildreds, Acol, built in 1876.
- 2 St. Thomas, Minnis Bay, built in 1932.

