

OLDEST DOCUMENTS OF ALL SAINTS' CHURCH, BIRCHINGTON

1350 Earliest Terrier (land holdings) – incorporated into the Churchwardens' Accounts of 1531.

1489 (16s 8d) –1660 (7 receipts in all) **Receipts of Composition Money**
As a Non-Corporate Limb of the Cinque Port of Dover, we were bound to supply our contribution of 16s 8d towards the total of £13 16s 8d, for the equipping of the Dover ship. The rest was supplied by places like St John's Margate, St Peter's and Gore End - hence the name 'composition'.

1531 – 1910 Churchwardens' Accounts – After the 1350 Terrier, there is a second one dated 1526, by which time the church had been given many more pieces of land, all of which generated income to help maintain the building and pay the priests stipend, as there was never enough money generated by the parishioners themselves. Once the funding from the monasteries was diverted to the Crown, this was a constant problem.

1538 – 1837 Registers for Baptisms, Marriages and Burials
The first book 1538-1676 contains all three services, followed by a second composite one 1676-1754, but after that the three registers were recorded separately. There is one short break in the sequence, when 'an ignorant woman' desecrated the book – possibly because it recorded a 'bastard' child? The first one is in Latin. Henry VIII ordered that every minister was to keep a record of these rites and a copy was to go to the cathedral officers, while the other copy was to remain in the church. Not all the ministers obeyed, so when Elizabeth came to the throne, she passed another act in 1558 enforcing the edict more firmly.

1588 Armada Sess – a tax raised to equip the Dover ship at the time of the Armada – we raised more than were we legally bound to do.

1607 – 1840 Apprentices Indentures (81 documents in all)

1620 – 1834 Poor Books - for both Birchington and Woodchurch, although the latter were responsible for raising the sess for their parishioners after their church was closed in about 1565. When Henry VIII closed the monasteries, he caused a huge problem with who was to fund the care of the poor. By the time his daughter Elizabeth came to the throne, there was a massive increase in 'vagabonds' – and no-one wanted to take on the responsibility for dealing with them. Towards the end of Elizabeth's reign she signed first of the Poor Laws, to raise the funds from local assessments in each parish. Further efforts were made in James I's reign and the laws passed around this time stood the country in good stead until the industrial revolution brought the country's problems to a head once more.

When the new Poor Law came into force in 1834, each parish was responsible for maintaining any parishioners who had to resort to the House, but generating this money was by then a totally secular activity, so the records were no longer held by the Church.

1633 12th February Agreement for the Bell Casting
The bell was cast by Joseph Hatch, a well-known bell founder

1636 **Book of Homilies** – cost the Churchwardens 6s 6d

1643 **Vow & Covenant + Solemn League & Covenant -**

This was a paper which all the men of the village had to sign to say they would support Parliament under Oliver Cromwell against King Charles I during the Civil War. Charles II ordered that these were all to be burnt when he returned to the throne in 1660 (they were evidence of treason – however unwillingly signed) so he was wiping the slate clean for all his subjects – a generous spirit. Why ours were not burnt, we don't know – laziness? Or maybe they could not locate them at that time?

1678, 1765 & an undated one (3) **Certificates for burial in Woollen -**

There are also many additional references in the registers while this act was in force. The act was passed to help the English wool trade. If a person wished to be buried in linen, they had to pay a hefty fine £5, which was enormous, remembering that a daily wage was only earned in pence. Act 1666, renewed 1678, still active 1775, only partially active from then till repealed in 1814 (but at Odell in beds an affidavit was signed in 1813).

1771 – 1843 **Waywardens' Accounts – or Surveyors of the Highways**

The maintenance of the highways was another of the casualties of Henry VIII and his closing of the monasteries. They had contributed generously to highway maintenance since many of the roads were on their lands – and their monks and friars were constantly travelling over them in the line of duty. Once this financial commitment ended the roads deteriorated badly and travel became more and more difficult. Parishes were supposed to look after the roads within their boundaries, but it was all rather hit-and-miss.

When the government needed to move troops around quickly, they realised that something had to be done so they imposed the law which said every parish was to appoint a Surveyor of the Highways. Their job was threefold - they were given authority to impose a tax (assessment or sess) on all those in the parish with an income of over a specific amount. They were then to use the money to organise men to load wagons or carts with stones and supply horses or oxen to transport the stones needed to fill the potholes and level the roads. Finally, they had to hire the labourers to spread the stones – so all three levels of society were engaged in keeping their highways in good order.

1898 – 1909 / 1930 – 2012 **Parish Magazines**

The earliest magazines were bound into annual volumes, but since then they have all remained unbound.

1940

All the above documents were placed in an iron box and lodged in Martin's Bank in Canterbury on **3rd June 1940**. A series of photos was taken both inside and outside the church, so that if it was damaged during the war, we would have a record of how it needed to be repaired. The box was returned to Birchington on **17th March 1945**.

There was also a grave dug in the churchyard on the north side, where the valuable silver chalices and patens, etc could be hidden, should the need arise.