



As promised, this is the second number of the newsletter; it is hoped to continue producing them over the coming years but only if they are considered to be of interest. So let's have your comments, please, good, bad or indifferent!

Alec Laurence  
Chairman

### THE VICARS OF ST MILDREDS, TENTERDEN

In July last year, the Local History Society entertained members of the Sevenoaks U3A for the day, and at the latter's request, we organized a visit to St Mildreds Church in the morning, followed by an afternoon tour of the town. David Trustram welcomed the party of some 30 members and during his introductory speech, he mentioned his being the 57th Vicar of Tenterden; my reaction to this was to wonder why there was a greater number shown in various sources. The difference would appear to result from the early incumbents, until the mid-14thC, being regarded as Rectors. There is no higher status gained by being a Rector; it is basically that the incumbent so rated obtained a higher proportion of tithes, either in "kind" or in monetary payment. The sources of information differ as to when the first incumbent of St Mildreds was ordained, whether it was Hugo Norman in 1180, Henry de Wingham in 1240 or the same man in 1255. Perhaps the first choice is substantiated by St Mildred's holding its 800th anniversary in 1980, plus the feelings of a church architect who visited the church in July at the request of Tunstall Bates. The former identified rough-hewn stonework of the 12thC in the oldest part of the church and he considered that as from the 13thC, the stonework would have been dressed.

There is little to recommend my detailing each incumbent by date, since the list is readily available in the South Aisle of St Mildreds, but it may be of interest to comment on several aspects of their lives. The early holders of the office were appointed by the Archbishop, usually on the recommendation of the Abbot of St Augustine's, Canterbury, except for a few who were direct appointees of the Pope of that time. This form of appointment applied until the Reformation when Richard Layton was Vicar. It is recorded that "it may have been this Vicar that Sir John Dudley, the owner of Kench Hill, wrote to Lord Cromwell in 1534 concerning the Vicar's papist doctrine". After a short spell as Vicar by Peter Baker, Richard Thorneden was appointed in 1546 and he apparently "held a prebendal stall at Canterbury, as a professed protestant. On the accession of Queen Mary, his Protestantism 'evaporated' and he became an active and relentless persecutor of his former colleagues. One of the principal victims was John Frankest, Vicar of Rolvenden, whom he condemned to be burnt". In 1558, John Spendelove was admitted by Cardinal Pole, being the first Vicar named in the Archiepiscopal Register as presented by the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury. This practice has continued until the present day except for the Commonwealth period during the 17thC. George Hawe was appointed by Oliver Cromwell but, upon the Restoration in 1662, he was ousted by Nathaniel Collington as a nominee by the Archbishop. Hawe subsequently founded the first nonconformist church in Tenterden, originally the Presbyterian, later to be called the Unitarian Church based eventually in the Old Meeting House in Ashford Road. An early practice in the 14th and 15th centuries of an exchange of parishes, mainly by Vicars coming from the West Country, was not continued thereafter. It is of interest that a similar situation was apparent in High Halden, as illustrated by Tunstall Bates in a recent Museum newsletter.

During the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, various Vicars acted as at least part-time teachers at the town's Grammar School located in the High Street in the building now owned by Viyella, emphasizing the influence exerted by the clergy on this educational establishment. Others during this period acted as Chaplains to prominent people, such as

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|-------------------------|--|
| - Nathaniel Collington  | Chaplain to the Earl Of Winchelsea               |
| - Theophilus De L'Angle | Chaplain to Elizabeth, Dowager Countess of Essex |
| - Thomas Coombe         | Chaplain in Ordinary to King George III          |



But perhaps more importantly, several incumbents during the life of St Mildreds have moved on to higher appointments, e.g.

- Henry de Wingham            Bishop of London and Lord Chancellor of England
- Richard Thornedden        Suffragan Bishop of Dover
- Issaac Bargrave            Dean of Canterbury
- John Luxmore                Dean of Gloucester, and then successively Bishop of Bristol, Hereford and St Asaph

and in more modern times

- Patrick Evans                Archdeacon of Canterbury

Of the more notable Vicars of Tenterden, these are some who stand out.

George Eley (1571-1615) He was the incumbent for 44 years, the longest recorded time for any Vicar of Tenterden, although for periods he was non-resident in the parish. In 1576, he was presented at the Archdeacon's Visitation for allowing "the clarke George Haffenden doth read in the Vicar's absence, not being licensed". Further presentments followed in later years when he was criticized for the poor condition of the churchyard; in his defence, he opined it was not his responsibility! From 1599 onwards, he was in dispute with several parishioners, mainly Dame Martha Whitfield, concerning their perceived right to use a small door leading into the North Aisle, for which he held the key.

John Gee (1633-1639) The son of a Protestant minister, he became a professed Roman Catholic when living in London, but eventually he was wooed back to his original Protestant roots by letters from his father, and the Archbishop. During his incumbency, 4 families emigrated from Tenterden to New England in 1635, John Gee having to certify their character and suitability to emigrate although they all had nonconformist leanings.

Humphrey Peake (1639-1645) By the general neglect of his duties, his harsh treatment of the poor (excessive charges for burials, etc), non-residence and failure to provide a curate to perform services in his place, he was summoned to attend Parliament to explain his actions.

Robert Turner (1709-1723) During his incumbency, six new bells were hung in the tower, the tenor being so inscribed until its recasting in 1884. The public house on the opposite side of the High Street had been called the Angel until the early 17thC when, in acknowledgement of the new bells, it was renamed The Six Bells. In 1770, when two new bells were added to the peal, the name was changed to the present day Eight Bells.

Philip Ward (1830-1859) Perhaps the most notable Vicar of all times, he was well-known both for his marriage to Lord Nelson's daughter, Horatia, by Emma Hamilton and for his 10 year fight to have his tithe payments increased from £200 to £450 p.a.

Henry Mereweather (1859-1884) He was responsible for the many alterations to the church interior, the galleries being removed and the seating re-arranged. A new vicarage was also erected in 1872 during his term of office, but this has since been rebuilt.

From the 17thC until the 20thC, most of the Vicars of Tenterden still in office at the time of their death were buried in St Mildred's Churchyard. However, only 4 of them were recorded in 1919 as having inscriptions to mark their burial, namely

- Robert Turner, in a vault in the north section of the churchyard.
- Matthew Wallace, on a plaque on the north wall of the chancel.
- Philip Ward, on a vault at the east end of the churchyard and a plaque on the south wall of the chancel.
- Samuel Lepard, on a plaque behind the pulpit.

Rev Lepard is also remembered on a gravestone at the eastern end of the Town Cemetery in the Cranbrook Road, together with John Babington in the middle section of the same cemetery.

Alec Laurence