



THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST

ST MARY'S CHURCH

Strand Street,
Sandwich, Kent



THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST

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Strand Street, Sandwich, Kent

ST MARY'S CHURCH

by Roy Tricker (Field Officer with The Churches Conservation Trust 1991–2002, church enthusiast, historian and lay canon)

HISTORY

St Mary's stands upon the oldest Christian site in Sandwich. About AD 664–73, when Egbert was King of Kent, his cousin Domneva founded a convent on this site. The convent was later destroyed by the Danes and was rebuilt by Emma, wife of King Canute.

The present St Mary's is a mixture of craftsmanship from many periods and its history has been long and eventful.

In the **early 1100s** the Normans built here a church of considerable size, which had broad and lofty aisles. The remains of the arcades survive, including the western responds and the bases of two of the northern columns. Parts of the south arcade are known to exist beneath the floor. Other Norman features are incorporated in the west wall outside.

Considerable reordering took place about **1200**. The internal splay of the lancet window west of the porch and the tall banner-stave recess in the north chancel wall remain from this period.

More reordering was done **c. 1300–40**, when new windows were made in the Decorated style of architecture. These include the three in the west wall, two in the east wall, the south chancel window and those flanking the porch.

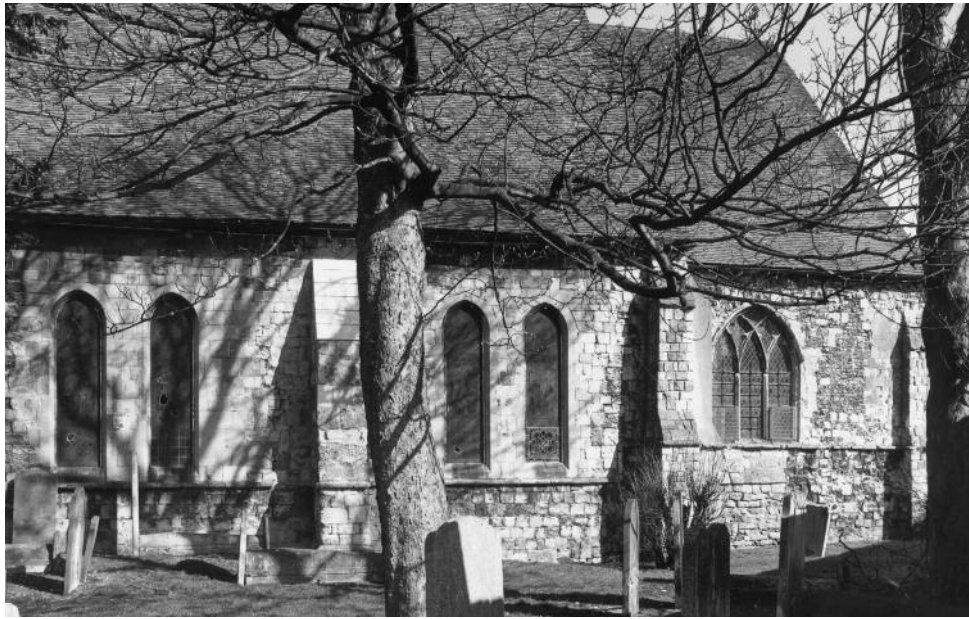
Some time **between 1377 and 1399** the French set fire to the church. It was repaired through the generosity of Sir William Leverick of Ash and Emma his wife. Their tomb recess is on the north side, near the entrance.

By the **1400s** the church had a nave with aisles, a chancel with flanking chapels and a central tower and spire. During the 15th century the font was made, and also probably the aumbry, the mediaeval tiles, the niche in the east wall and the Peter's Pence box.

Front cover: Detail from St Martin and the beggar with Dover Castle beneath (Boris Baggs)

Left: The north aisle, looking towards the altar and reredos from St Mildred's church, Canterbury (Boris Baggs)





Churchyard and south side of the church (Christopher Dalton)

In **1578–79** a great and terrible earthquake struck Sandwich which ‘did shake and cleave four arches in St Mary’s Church’ and, probably as a long-term result of this, on 25 April 1668 the central tower and spire collapsed, demolishing the roofs, the north and south arcades, part of the east wall, and destroying much else. In the rebuilding which followed the south arcade was demolished entirely and a vast new roof was constructed to embrace both nave and south aisle. The north arcade was replaced by sturdy wooden piers. The roofs throughout the church were hidden by low plaster ceilings. The south wall was lit by square-headed windows and two others were inserted in the north aisle wall – all in late-17th-century Gothic. The church was back in use again by 1675.

In **1718** a small brick and timber tower was erected over the south porch and a bell was purchased for £ 145 5s. 11d.

1723 saw the addition of a gallery at the west end of the church by 44 parishioners, who occupied it for services.

In **1756** the great altarpiece was erected at a cost of £107 18s. 11½d.; also a communion table was purchased, and the Lord’s Prayer, Creed and Commandments were inscribed upon boards fixed to the altarpiece by Daniel Pilcher for 17 guineas. The communion rails were also installed.

Due largely to the enthusiasm of Arthur Manners Chichester (incumbent of St Mary’s and St Clement’s from 1868–1912), the church underwent a thorough restoration, by stages **between 1869 and 1874**. In 1869 the west windows of the nave and north aisle were renewed with stone mullions and tracery by Mr Jones, a local mason, replacing the ‘unsightly woodwork’. Later the old brick north porch was replaced by the present flint-faced one. In 1873–74 the church was closed for ten months, when the set of commodious but irregular box pews which filled it were replaced by benches of pitch pine, the gallery was taken down, the plaster was stripped from the walls and new lancet windows were made to replace those inserted in the north and south walls some 200 years before. The two-light window to the east of the south porch was given tracery to match its



Graves in the quaint and secluded churchyard (Boris Baggs)

western counterpart. Other windows with wooden frames received stone ones and the old stone floors were carefully preserved. Several windows were filled with stained glass by Ward & Hughes. The contractors were Messrs Jones and J Newton of Sandwich and Mr H B Wilson of Canterbury. The architect was Mr Joseph Clarke, the diocesan architect, who restored many Kent churches, including St Clement’s in Sandwich.

In **1948** the three Sandwich parishes of St Mary, St Clement and St Peter officially became one parish, with St Clement’s as the parish church.

Services at St Mary’s were discontinued and some of its furnishings, including the pulpit, were taken for use at St Peter’s, which had become the chapel of Sir Roger Manwood’s School. The church fell into disrepair and in 1952 plans were made for its demolition. A severe gale in 1954 damaged the roof and its timbers and in 1956 a formal request for demolition was made.

The faculty was granted that year but its operation was suspended for six months. The Mayor, Alderman JJ Thomas, many local residents and a host of well-wishers throughout

England formed the Friends of St Mary’s Sandwich to fight the threatened demolition and to raise money to put the church into good repair. St Mary’s had an enthusiastic ally in Mr Ivor Bulmer-Thomas of the Friends of Friendless Churches, and it is largely thanks to his efforts that this church stands today.

Money was raised to finance a programme of repairs by G H Deane Ltd of Deal, under the supervision of Mr David Nye. The roof was repaired and the plaster ceilings were removed. The pine benches were taken out and a few 18th-century benches from the chapel of the demolished Gopsall Hall, Leicestershire, were installed. A handsome new altar was made and was furnished with a pair of candlesticks and a crucifix made in North Italy in the 17th century. This great church was vested in The Churches Conservation Trust (formerly the Redundant Churches Fund) in 1985, to be cared for by and for the Church and the Nation. Since vesting repairs have been carried out under the supervision of Ann Stocker and latterly Robert George. These have included a major repair and strengthening of the roof in 1987.

EXTERIOR

The north side of the church is right beside the pavement; indeed the eastern section of the north aisle wall has been chamfered off to accommodate the highway. The south side, by contrast, is set in a pleasant, tree-shaded churchyard. The north aisle has its own gabled roof; behind it is the vast expanse of roof which encompasses what was the nave and south aisle, and also that which covers what was the chancel and south chapel.

The **west front** demonstrates the great width of the church. The three west windows received new tracery in 1869, but the finial above the central window is 14th-century stonework. Here are the blocked west doorway, and also the remains of Norman work in the little semicircle containing a piece of carved stone high up in the centre of the nave, and in what is now a niche beside the north aisle window. The west wall is faced with a variety of building materials, including sections of stone and flint. Similar areas of contrasting masonry may be seen in the **north aisle** wall. Its western section, including the 19th-century porch, is faced with knapped (split) flints, and the wall is strengthened by buttresses. Flanking the porch are a pair of two-light 14th-century windows with ogee curves and carved finials at the tops of their arches, and the original carved corbel heads upon which their hood moulds rest. Further east are two pairs of single lancet windows of 1874, but in the 13th-century Early English style; a further pair pierce the



Left: Flint, brick and timber in the south porch tower (Boris Baggs)

Flints, dressed stones and a curious blocked arch in the external west wall (Boris Baggs)

east wall of the aisle. In this part there are no buttresses and the wall is faced mostly with reused dressed stone.

The north wall of the **chancel** has a blocked entrance. Its east wall is pierced by two four-light windows, with (renewed) intersecting tracery, which was in use c.1300. Near the northern corner is some vertical stonework in the masonry, which may indicate an earlier window. In the south wall is a three-light window with cusped intersecting tracery. Dating from the opening years of the 14th century, this is the one window in the church which preserves almost all of its original stonework. In this wall are a blocked priest's doorway, and also the stone abutment which once contained the tomb (inside) of William Lord Clinton, who died in 1354.

The east wall of the **nave** is partly tile-hung; lower down is the blocked arch of a former two-light window. The south wall, once the wall of the south aisle, has three pairs of 1870s

lancets and, west of the tower, a single lancet window which, although renewed externally, has its original internal splay and is work of the early 1200s.

The small **south porch tower**, which is totally invisible from the north side, has a quaint and rustic appearance. The lower stage is the 14th-century flint porch, with its stone entrance arch sheltering a continuously moulded south doorway; the rest was added in 1718. Above a stage of red brick is the weatherboarded belfry stage, crowned by a lead pyramid cap. The tower contains one bell, originally cast by Richard Phelps in 1718, but recast in 1876 by John Warner & Sons of London. The old central tower contained a ring of five bells, cast in 1639 by John Wilnar of Borden. After the tower collapsed in 1668 these bells were sold to Elham church and they have since been recast.



INTERIOR

The interior of St Mary's is vast and barn-like and the absence of many of its furnishings perhaps enhances its size and proportions. The width is 68 ft (20.7 m) – nave 45 ft (13.7 m), aisle 23 ft (7 m) – and the length 95 ft (28.9 m) – 72 ft (21.9 m) of nave and a further 23 ft (7 m) of chancel. The great nave, which embraces the former south aisle, is spanned by a 17th-century roof, which is an amazing piece of timber construction. So is the broad chancel which, it will be noted, is not central to the nave. The north aisle, which has a 19th-century boarded ceiling, is separated from the nave by four **wooden piers** dating from the 1670s rebuilding, which stand on the bases of the former stone arcade piers. A concave-sided 14th-century base supports the western pier and two piers stand on reused parts of 13th-century stone coffin lids. At the west end each side are the **responds of the original Norman arcades**. The north-west respond has a carved capital and its southern counterpart still supports the lower part of its Norman arch. Beneath the wooden hatches in the floor near the present piers are the remains of the bases of more Norman piers.

Near the entrance is a 15th-century iron-bound chest, believed to be a **Peter's Pence box**, in which was placed money for dispatch to the Pope in Rome. Many Norman and mediaeval **carved stones** are now loose in the church or reused in the walls, especially in the chancel.



Right: Medieval encaustic tiles in the floor

Below: The 15th-century font (Boris Baggs)

The octagonal 15th-century **font** has a bowl with carved quatrefoils, containing shields and flowers. The date 1662 on the stem may well indicate its re-erection and reuse after the Puritan period. The Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 is further celebrated in the **royal arms** of King Charles II over the north door.

Nearby are two lozenge-shaped **hatchments**, one bearing the Hayward arms; others hang in the chancel and on the south nave wall. These were hung outside the home of a deceased person and later transferred to the parish church. The **benches** are mostly 18th century and were brought here in 1956 from Gopsall Hall, Leicestershire. The **altar and reredos** in this aisle came from St Mildred's church, Canterbury.



The **pulpit** is 18th century, on a 19th-century stone base. It was originally part of a commodious three-decker arrangement and over it was a tester, or sounding-board. Behind it is the **respond** of a former arch, which still has traces of colour, whilst on the south side of the chancel entrance is a large semicircular respond, facing north. The masonry of the east nave wall nearby has been cut away to expose the remains of the mediaeval stone **reredos** for a side altar. Nearby are the 19th-century wooden eagle **lectern** and also the **priest's stall** dated 1873.

In the north wall is a tall and slender arched recess. Although it was later known as the 'aumbry for St Bridget's heart', this 13th-century recess was probably a **banner-stave locker**, where the poles for banners carried in procession were stored. There is an **aumbry** recess (a cupboard for storing the communion vessels) on this side; and in the east wall, to the north of the altar, is another **arched recess**, which may have been a niche, or a piscina removed from elsewhere.

The focal point of the chancel is the mighty **altarpiece** made in 1756, which is crowned by an open pediment with a cartouche at its centre. The **Creed and Commandments** which once adorned it are now fixed to the north aisle wall. The three-sided **communion rails** are also of 1756. The **altar** itself was made exactly 200 years later. Set high in the east wall, above

St Martin and the beggar with Dover Castle beneath (Boris Baggs)

the altarpiece, is a **plaque** recording the names of the churchwardens and of 'Bodowin Cuper, a Friend of this work' who were involved in the rebuilding of 1671.

The **floors** are paved with a variety of materials, including stone slabs, smaller pammments and a quantity of burial slabs and broken parts of them. Most interesting of all are the two areas paved with mediaeval **encaustic tiles**. One section, with patterned designs, is near the pulpit and the chancel steps and the other is at the east end of the nave on the south side.

The **stained glass windows** were mostly given as memorials and have appropriate inscriptions. The glass in the window east of the porch (1882) and in the east window of the north aisle (c. 1880) is by Ward & Hughes, who also provided glass for the southern lancet windows in 1874. Some attractive glass made in 1933 by the firm of William Morris & Co. adorns the north aisle lancets; one window shows St Martin giving half of his cloak to a beggar, and also a view of Dover Castle; in the others are St George and the Dragon, St Michael with his flaming sword, and St Nicholas with Manwood Court.

The **benefaction boards** record gifts for the benefit of the church, parish and poor from 1700 onwards, including the stone plaque of 1792 and the board recording the purchase of £4000 worth of 2½% stock for the church in 1956.



Left: Admiral Peter Ranier's memorial by Westmacott
(Boris Baggs)

Below: Tomb chests at the west end of the church
(Boris Baggs)

MEMORIALS

Amongst the many memorials in the church, the following are of note:

TOMBS

- In the north wall, to the east of the entrance, is a fine 14th-century arched recess, which is probably the tomb of William and Emma Leverick, who restored this church after the ravages of the French.
- In front of it is the brick tomb, with black inscribed slab, of Captain Joseph Jordan (1747).
- At the west end of the north aisle is the small brick tomb, with black slab, of Thomas Danson, the preacher's son, who died on his 6th birthday in 1674. It has an interesting epitaph verse.

- At the west end of the nave is the tomb of John Cricket (Mayor) d.1720.

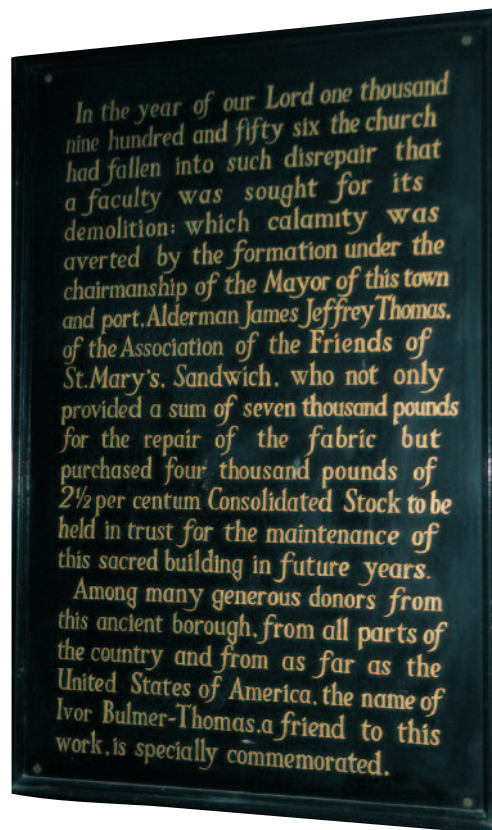
- Nearby is the tomb chest, with a white slab, of another Sandwich Mayor – Peter Nowell (d. October 1694), his wife Judith (May 1695), their son Thomas (February 1694) and his wife Catherine (May 1694). We read that – 'Fate ev'n improv'd their union, since it gave Death in one year and in one Tomb A Grave'.

In the floors are a number of **ledger slabs**, the most interesting of these being a group of three, with coats of arms, in the north-west corner, commemorating members of the Hayward family, and another, in the chancel, to Richard Emmerson's two wives.





At least seven **burial slabs** in the chancel have indents for lost brasses and there are others elsewhere in the church. One in the nave has the indents of many brass figures, forming an orle of 12 children around their parents. A slab in the chancel has the indent of a brass shield and an inscription around the border to Phebe, wife of Thomas Den, who died in 1612. A more ancient burial slab in the nave has the remains of Lombardic letters around its border; and the date 1333 has been identified in its very worn inscription.



Above: Memorials and banner stave recess on the north side of the chancel (Boris Baggs)

Right: Benefaction board recording the generosity which saved the church in 1956



WALL TABLETS

NORTH AISLE:

- Margaret Jennings Fowle, 1850, with mourning woman at the top.

CHANCEL, NORTH:

- Joseph Stewart, 1828. He was a magistrate, and also secretary to the Honourable Board for Sick and Wounded Seamen. His hatchment is above.

- Thomas Kite, 1728.

- Arthur Manners Chichester, 1912. Vicar of St Mary's and St Clement's for 44 years.

- Abraham Rutten, 1608. Small kneeling figures face each other across a faldstool in this very worn monument.

- A plaque to his descendant, the Revd John Rutton, who was incumbent here for over 50 years and died in 1763.

CHANCEL, SOUTH:

- Mrs Mary Stewart, 1775.

- A plaque marking the vault of Sarah, relict of Duncan Campbell, of 'North Britain' (i.e. Scotland), d.1814, and also her daughters Euphemia and Sarah.

- A handsome wall plaque to Solomon Hougham (Mayor), d.1658, and his family.

NAVE, SOUTH-EAST:

- A fine memorial by Westmacott to Peter Ranier, 'Admiral of the Blue' and MP, d.1808.

SOUTH WALL:

- Rear Admiral John Spratt Ranier, d.1822.

- Towards the west end is a plaque, with a coat of arms at the top and a skull at the base, to Richard Solly (Mayor), d.1731, and also his two wives, Anna and Mary. The latter had 13 children, of whom eight died in infancy.

WEST WALL:

- An attractive cartouche in wood by Arthur JJ Ayres, commemorating Irene Elaine Boyle, who died in 1965 and who helped to save this church.

The interior, before 1948, looking south-west (© Crown copyright. NMR)

THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

The Churches Conservation Trust is the national body that cares for and preserves English churches of historic, architectural or archaeological importance that are no longer needed for regular worship. It promotes public enjoyment of them and their use as an educational and community resource.

Whatever the condition of the church when the Trust takes it over its aims are, first and foremost, to put the building and its contents into a sound and secure condition as speedily as possible. Then the church is repaired so that the church is welcoming to visitors and those who attend the public events or occasional services that may be held there (Trust churches are still consecrated). Our objective is to keep it intact for the benefit of present and future generations, for local people and visitors alike to behold and enjoy.

There are over 330 Trust churches scattered widely through the length and breadth of England, in town and country, ranging from charmingly simple buildings in lovely settings to others of great richness and splendour; some are hard to find, all are worth the effort.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges the advice of the late Mr Ivor Bulmer-Thomas. St Mary's church is managed on behalf of The Churches Conservation Trust by the Sandwich St Mary's Community Trust. Details of their work may be found in literature displayed in the church.

*Right: Looking north-west across nave and aisle to the entrance (Boris Baggs)
Back cover: Royal arms of Charles II over the north door (Boris Baggs)*

Many of the churches are open all year round, others have keyholders nearby; all are free. A notice regarding opening arrangements or keyholders will normally be found near the door. Otherwise, such information can be obtained direct from the Trust during office hours or from the website www.visitchurches.org.uk.

Visitors are most welcome and we hope this guidebook will encourage you to explore these wonderful buildings.

NEARBY ARE THE TRUST CHURCHES OF

St Peter, Sandwich
In town centre

St Mary the Virgin, Capel-le-Ferne
2 miles NE of Folkestone off B2011

St Clement, Knowlton
4 miles SW of Sandwich off A256

All Saints, West Stourmouth
4 miles N of Wingham off B2046

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