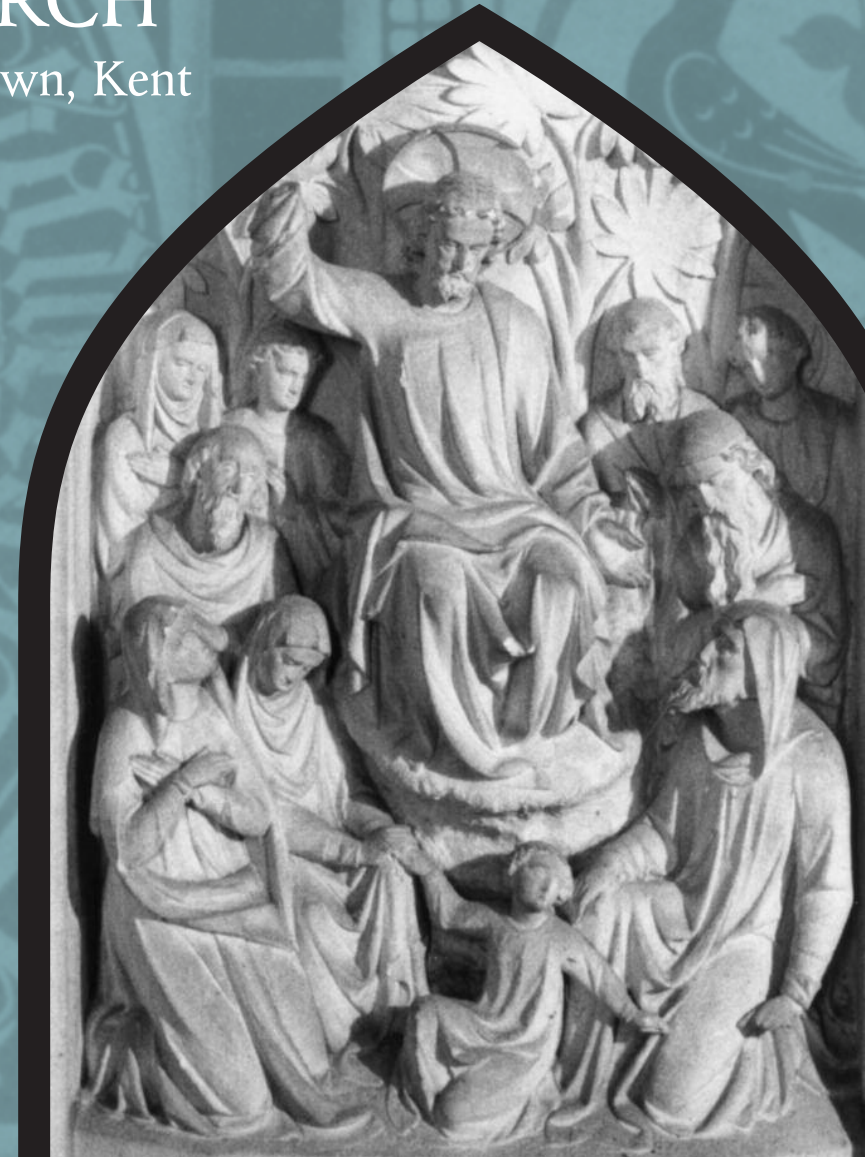




THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST

ST CATHERINE'S CHURCH

Kingsdown, Kent



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CONSERVATION TRUST

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Kingsdown, Kent

ST CATHERINE'S CHURCH

by John E Vigar (Historian, author and broadcaster specialising in ecclesiastical architecture. Regional Development Manager, The Churches Conservation Trust)

HISTORY

So far as is known, St Catherine's is the only remaining complete Anglican church by Edward Welby Pugin (1834–75) who was, like his celebrated father, a Roman Catholic. Pugin was given a relatively free hand with the design and is reported to have been pleased with the outcome, particularly the west window and roof.

Church and parsonage house (designed by William Burn), together with the garden landscaped by W A Nesfield, cost £7,000. For a parish that had only 96 inhabitants in 1865 when the church was built, this extraordinary outlay needed a benefactor. Thomas Pemberton-Leigh, the first and only Lord Kingsdown of the first creation, fell in readily with the rector's suggestion that the church be rebuilt. This is in stark contrast to other local churches that were being restored, rather than replaced, in the mid-19th century. The builder was Mr Smith of Ramsgate (E W Pugin having moved in 1861 to The Grange in Ramsgate which had been the home of his father A W N Pugin).

Front cover: Detail of carving on the pulpit (Christopher Dalton)

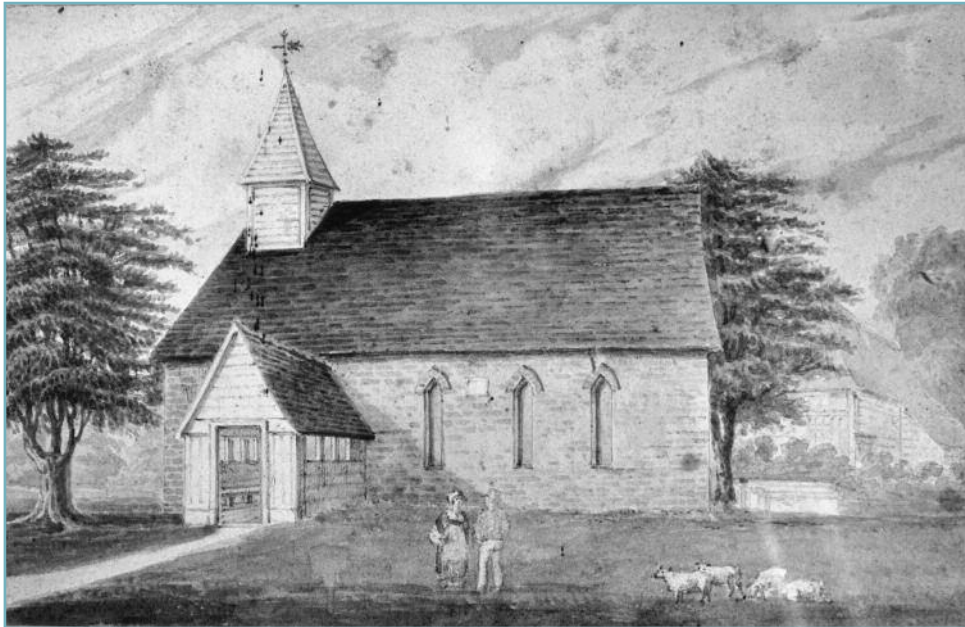
Left: Interior looking east (Christopher Dalton)



After a grim start in life, due to his father's early death, Lord Kingsdown had a very successful career at the bar. He was MP for Rye and later Ripon, but retired from visible public life in 1843, having inherited a fortune from a distant relative of his mother. He was appointed Chancellor of the Duchy of Cornwall and to the Privy Council's judicial committee. He improved the administration of both and was highly regarded for his judicial opinions. The rector of the time,

Houston James Hordern, makes clear the enthusiasm of its distinguished benefactor for the building. Most of the furnishings are by the firm of John Hardman, with whom Pugin was closely associated, and it may have been they who recommended Pugin for this commission since their records show that they installed a window in the previous church here in 1856.

The site for Pugin's church was old, the present nave standing on the foundation of the previous,



13th-century, church. The chancels of both buildings went to the edge of a disused chalk pit (later filled with spoil when the M2 was constructed nearby). This led to large cracks appearing in 1922 and the subsequent rebuilding of the east and south chancel walls. The list of rectors starts in 1313, although it is incomplete.

The isolated situation – made worse by the motorway which cut off the church from most of its parishioners – and damage done by the

infamous 1987 storm, led to a decision to make the church redundant. It was vested in the Redundant Churches Fund (now The Churches Conservation Trust) in 1989 when repairs were carried out under the supervision of Mr Jonathan Carey of Faversham.



EXTERIOR

Pugin's church consists of nave and chancel with a north vestry off the nave and tower with stone spire over a south-west porch. It is built of Kentish ragstone with Bath stone dressings, although the spire is built of brick with a stone facing. The roofs are of strikingly patterned tiles, with unusual cresting along the ridge. Because it was built as a whole, the church has an unusual unity, in the late Decorated style.

Above the entrance is a niche with a statue of St Catherine. The porch contains a board recording that the Incorporated Church Building Society gave a grant of £30 in 1923 towards repairs on the church, providing that all the seats remained free. It had been common in the 19th century to maintain church buildings through the levying of rents for pews, although by the 1920s this practice was less common. The tower contains two bells. One, dating from the 14th century, must have hung in the mediaeval church, whilst a second, cast by John Warner and Sons of London in 1868, carries the inscription in Latin 'St Catherine pray for us'.



The entrance porch with statue of St Catherine above (Christopher Dalton)

The elaborate font (© Crown copyright. NMR)

INTERIOR

The stonecarving in the church is one of its particular qualities. The nave roof is supported by six corbels carved with angels holding different musical instruments, whilst the label stops and mouldings around the windows accentuate the graceful shape of the openings. The carvings here, and in other parts of the church, may be by Richard Boulton, a favourite sculptor of E W Pugin, whose corbels at All Saints' church, Barton-upon-Irwell (Manchester) are very similar.

At the west end of the church is the font. This is octagonal and supported on coloured marble pillars. Four of its eight sides are carved with the symbols of the Four Evangelists. Above it, the great west window is a memorial to the first Lord Kingsdown who only just lived to see the church built. Its main subjects are Christ in the Temple, Moses, and the Massacre of the Infants. At the very top may be seen Christ's pierced hands and the symbol of the Trinity with the Latin motto *Pater Filius Sanctus*.

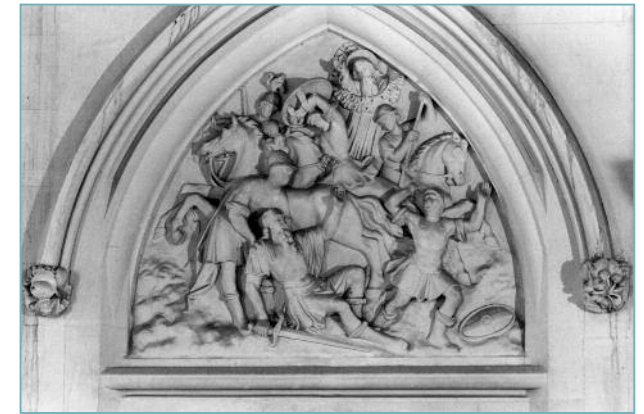
The six nave windows, which seem to represent the Twelve Apostles, have their main figures set into very pretty grisaille glass. This grey, patterned background was favoured by the Victorians who did not like the congregation being tempted to look at the trees, birds and clouds outside when they should have been concentrating on the worship. Glass of this design was first used by the Cistercian monks in the Middle Ages, and the nearby church of Doddington has some original grisaille glass surviving.



All the windows and most of the furnishings at Kingsdown were designed for Pugin by the Birmingham firm of Hardman and Co. E W Pugin's sister, Anne, had married the designer John Hardman Powell and there was already a long-established tradition of patronage between the Pugins and this Midlands firm.

The pulpit, which many think rather mean for such a noble building, is carved with a panel showing Christ preaching, whilst another large carved panel over the vestry door shows the Conversion of St Paul.

There are few monuments in the church, but behind the pulpit are three of interest. The oldest is to Thomas Fynche who died in 1555. This is a brass tablet that must have been removed from the old church. The lettering is of very high quality. Also commemorated here are two former rectors. The Revd Frederick Crooke (d. 1854) has a tablet from the studio of Ashton of Golden Square London. It too probably came from the old church. Crooke's successor, the Revd Houston Hordern who oversaw the building of the present church, was rector here for 57 years and is remembered by a brass plaque.



The vestry, which leads off the north-east corner of the nave is a real period piece. The matchboarded walls, fireplace, wardrobe and miniature sink are all original. Set into the wall are a series of mediaeval glazed tiles from the old church, discovered during repair works in 1990. The old ledger slabs covering earlier graves were also found to have survived *in situ* under the present floor, and were left undisturbed.

The chancel is the focal point of the entire church. The north and south windows glow deep red – they are filled with the most expensive Victorian glass made by adding gold in the manufacturing process. The window splays are particularly acute which gives the whole chancel a ‘sacred’ glow when viewed from the nave, with the windows themselves being out of sight. This is regarded as one of Pugin’s most successful techniques.

The elaborate ceiling, painted to give the impression of marquetry work, emphasises the importance of this part of the church, as do the fantastic floor tiles by Minton with alternating texts of ‘Sanctus’ and the Pugin family emblem the Martlett. The stalls have finely carved Wyvern’s heads at each end. The wyvern, together with the lion, forms the crest of the Pemberton Leigh family.

The altar displays the Ten Commandments as required by law since 1566 to be displayed on the east wall of every church, whilst the east window represents the Risen Christ.

In its tracery may be seen the coat of arms of the first Lord Kingsdown. The quarterings, containing buckets with gold bands and handles, represent the family of Pemberton, whilst the four lozenges are from the family of Leigh. The family still lives locally, although the surname has changed to Leigh Pemberton. In 1994 the head of the family, Robin Leigh Pemberton was created a life peer as Baron Kingsdown, so restoring the name of this small community and church to the peerage.

The elegant estate churches of the 18th century are well known. This Victorian equivalent is, in the eyes of many, as fine a building. Much love went into the construction of Kingsdown church – and that is still apparent 140 years later.

Please also visit the Trust church of St Mary at Luddenham, four miles (6.4 km) to the north-west. This lovely farmyard church served another tiny community and is as beautiful in its simplicity as is Kingsdown in the elaboration of its detail.

Left: The great west window

Above: The tympanum over the vestry door (Christopher Dalton)

THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

The Churches Conservation Trust is the leading charity 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.

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 Bartholomew, Goodnestone
1½ miles E of Faversham and 1½ miles N
of junction of the M2, A2 and A229

St Mary, Luddenham
2 miles NW of Faversham

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