



ST MARY'S CHURCH

CAPEL-LE-FERNE, KENT



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

89 Fleet Street · London EC4Y 1DH

Registered Charity No. 258612

PRICE: £1.00



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO
ST MARY'S CHURCH
CAPEL-LE-FERNE, KENT

Many years ago Christians built and set apart this place for prayer. They made their church beautiful with their skill and craftsmanship. Here they have met for worship, for children to be baptised, for couples to be married and for the dead to be brought for burial. If you have time, enjoy the history, the peace and the holiness here. Please use the prayer card and, if you like it, you are welcome to take a folded copy with you.

Although services are no longer regularly held here, this church remains consecrated; inspiring, teaching and ministering through its beauty and atmosphere. It is one of more than 300 churches throughout England cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust. The Trust was created in 1969 and was, until 1994, known as the Redundant Churches Fund. Its object is to ensure that all these churches are kept in repair and cared for, in the interests of the Church and Nation, for present and future generations.

Please help us to care for this church. There is a box for donations or, if you prefer to send a gift, it will be gratefully received at the Trust's headquarters at 89 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1DH (Registered Charity No. 258612).

We hope that you will enjoy your visit and be encouraged to see our other churches. Some are in towns; some in remote country districts. Some are easy and others hard to find but all are worth the effort.

Nearby are the Trust churches of:

KNOWLTON, ST CLEMENT
4 miles SW of Sandwich off A256

SANDWICH, ST PETER
Town centre

SANDWICH, ST MARY
Strand Street

ST MARY'S CHURCH

CAPEL-LE-FERNE, KENT

by ROY TRICKER

HISTORY

In mediaeval times this isolated church was the 'chapel amongst the ferns' – hence the name of the village. It was for many years a chapel-of-ease to the parish church at Alkham, built to serve the tiny community which lived in its vicinity. It is only in comparatively recent years that the present centre of population developed each side of the main Folkestone–Dover road, which is now served by the Church of St Radigund, built in 1966. In 1986 St Mary's was vested in what is now The Churches Conservation Trust, to be preserved by and for the Church and the Nation.

Some of the main landmarks in the building's long history are as follows:

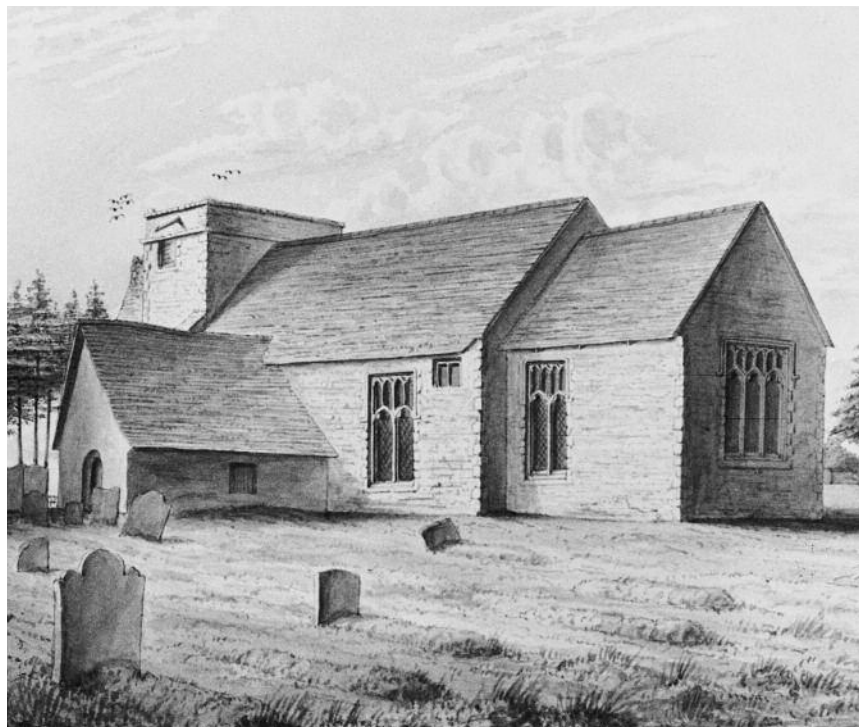
c.1100: The north nave wall, with its tiny Norman window, dates from this time, and it may well be that the core of the nave (and possibly also the chancel) walls survive from the original Norman church.

c.1150–1200: During this 'Transitional' period, Norman Romanesque architecture was gradually evolving into Early English Gothic. It was then that the western tower was built and features from both styles of architecture combine in its eastern arch and west doorway.

The 13th century: The present south doorway and possibly the porch were added, and also the chancel sedilia and piscina.

The 14th century: The remarkable triple chancel arch was made to serve also as a stone screen; and the window high in the north nave wall nearby was created to light the Rood and its loft, and also possibly the staircase which led to it.

The 15th century: The nave and chancel received their present square-headed windows, probably replacing small Norman windows (like that in the north wall), thus admitting more light and also giving scope for artists in stained glass.



Exterior from the south east before the 19th century restoration

(PHOTOGRAPHIC COPY BY JOHN CLAYDEN ARPS)

1866–90: A thorough restoration took place in three stages, leaving St Mary's much as it is today. Ewan Christian supervised the chancel restoration in 1866 (he designed Holy Trinity Folkestone, built in 1868); the nave was restored in 1873–74 to the designs of Michael P Manning (the architect of St Mary's, Primrose Hill, London). The tower was rebuilt and the porch restored in 1890, for which the architects were Burrell & Valpy of Victoria Street, London. Mr Valpy was probably related to the Revd J C W Valpy, who was vicar of Alkham and Capel at the time. The Bishop of Dover and the Revd Matthew Woodward (Vicar of Folkestone) preached at the Reopening Services in November 1890. Much of the work of restoration was paid for by members of the Morris family, who were generous benefactors to this church and parish.

EXTERIOR

St Mary's enjoys a picturesque setting in the fields, with fine views over open country. The churchyard, which is surrounded by a flint wall, is entered by means of a pretty lych-gate, given by Captain and Mrs Alfred Morris to celebrate their wedding in 1894. To the east of the church path are some good 18th century headstones – that to John Knot (twice Mayor of Dover) who died in 1727, has an hourglass, skulls and other symbols of mortality.

The beauty of the little church itself lies in its simplicity. The walls are faced with flints, and apart from the western corners of the tower there are no buttresses, the corners of the walls having stone quoins, some of which are of considerable size.

The rather squat **tower**, 31½ feet (9.6 m) in height, terminates just above the nave roof. In 1914 Mr P Morris offered to pay for a spire which would have made the church more conspicuous, but this was never built. When the tower was rebuilt in 1890, its single southern window was made and the small lancet belfry windows were renewed. However, the west doorway is original and appears to be Transitional Norman-Early English of the late 13th century. The rounded Norman nook-shafts remain at the sides (the northern one has a little carved capital) and the pointed arch is decorated with a simple nail-head design.

The two northern corners of the **nave** rest upon massive boulders. Beneath a 19th century two-light window there is evidence in the masonry of a former north doorway. The tiny Norman slit window to the east of this shows that the wall is 900 years old. Further east, the upper part of a two-light early 14th century window (which gave light to the Rood-complex inside) remains. The south nave wall is lit by square-headed 15th century windows. These were renewed in 1873, but similar windows in the **chancel** are original, including the three-light east window. A little mediaeval pilgrim cross has been carved in the massive block of stone in the south-east quoin.

The **porch** is rather large in proportion to the rest of the church; it is lit by simple single openings with ancient timber lintels above them, and is entered by a small and very weathered early 13th century arch, with remains of simple rounded moulding. Two gnarled mediaeval tie-beams straddle the porch and some ancient timbers remain in its roof. It shelters the simple 13th century south doorway.

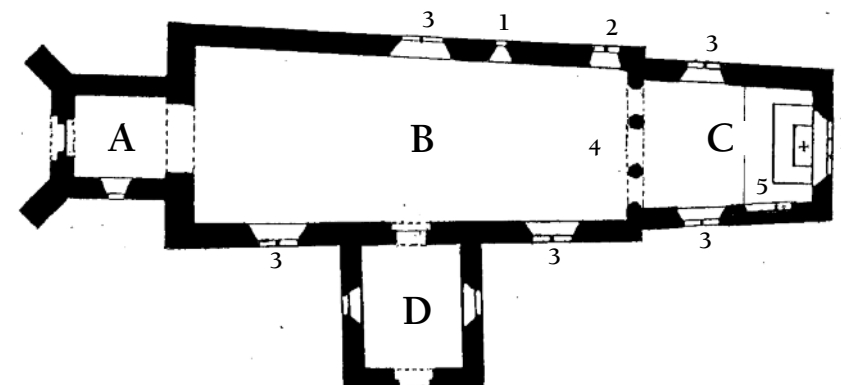
INTERIOR

For 900 years people have worshipped in this simple country church and their craftsmanship from many periods has moulded its unique character. The Norman nave is surprisingly broad and lofty, and tapers slightly from west to east (a difference of about three feet (0.9m) in width). The chancel 'weeps' (deflects) very slightly to the north from the nave.

The view eastwards is dominated by Capel's remarkable stone **screen**, which is actually a three-bay 14th century arcade, dividing the chancel from the nave. Its octagonal piers have moulded capitals and bases, and its arches are framed by stone hood-moulds which rest upon three carved corbel-heads. Above, four stone brackets once supported the upper structure of the rood-loft (a gallery which jutted out into the nave), or maybe the candle-beam, where many candles once burned in honour of the great Rood (Christ

Section of the mediaeval chancel roof

(ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF ENGLAND)



Plan of St Mary's church

| | | |
|---|---------|----------------------------------|
| A | TOWER | late 12th century – rebuilt 1890 |
| B | NAVE | c.1100 |
| C | CHANCEL | possibly also c.1100 |
| D | PORCH | 13th century |

1. Original Norman window
2. Window set high to give light to the rood loft
3. 15th century windows
4. 14th century arcade, which forms the chancel screen
5. Late 13th century sedilia and piscina

This plan also shows how the nave and chancel taper eastwards

crucified, flanked by His Mother and St John), which stood in the wide-arched opening above, where the 19th century cross now stands. The high-set north-east nave window would have given much-needed light here. Possibly the two stone **brackets**, now further west in the north nave wall, were originally located nearby and carried the timbers of the rood-loft.

The **roofs** of the nave and chancel are of simple 14th century open timber construction. They are supported by crown-posts which rise from sturdy tie-beams (some of which have been renewed).

The **tower arch** is Transitional Norman–Early English work of the late 13th century, with simple Norman impostes supporting a plain pointed Early English arch.

Most of the furnishings date from the restorations of 1866 and 1873–74. These include the nave **benches** (and those now in the chancel), the **choir**

stalls, with fleurs-de-lys ends (now at the west end of the nave), the **priest's stall** (with its traceried front) and the **pulpit**, which rests upon a stone base, with an appropriate text, also the Alpha and Omega, the 'IHS' and the fleur-de-lys emblems.

The low octagonal **font** is much older. It appears to have lost its original stem and the plain bowl now rests upon the simply-moulded base. It does stand upon its original stone step.

The chancel is comparatively short and the view of the stone screen from this side is very rewarding. In the south sanctuary wall is a wide **sedilia** recess, where the clergy sat during parts of the mediaeval Mass. Beside it is a pretty angle-**piscina** of the late 13th century, with trefoil-headed arches springing from a circular shaft, with a moulded capital and base. A piece of stone has now replaced the drain into which the water from the washing of the priest's hands at Mass was poured. The **rails** and patterned **tiles** in the sanctuary date from 1866, but the simple **recess** in the north wall



Interior looking east, showing the stone screen

(RCHME)

probably marks the position of a mediaeval aumbry (cupboard) and the stone **bracket** to the south of the east window is mediaeval and may have supported a statue.

In the tracery at the top of the east window are fragments of 15th century **stained glass**, which have been assembled here from elsewhere, although the two small pieces remaining in the south chancel window appear to be in their original positions.

Three other windows have **19th and 20th century glass**. The north chancel window is a memorial to 2nd Lieut. Harley Knollys Briggs, who was killed at the Battle of the Somme in 1916. He was the grandson of the Revd Thomas Briggs. A plaque beneath the window records this and another records the death of his nephew, Geoffrey, in Korea in 1952. The glass depicts mediaeval knights on horseback (their distinctive faces may well be portraits), with appropriate texts about sacrifice.

The south-east nave window illustrates the Christian's Armoury (from Ephesians, chapter 6), set in vines and placed here c.1896.

A figure of St George is depicted in stained glass in the tiny Norman north nave window. The wide splay of this window is decorated with a **wall painting** of scroll patterns, probably dating from the 12th century. There is evidence on the capitals of the stone screen that this was also beautifully coloured.

Several memorial inscriptions may be seen on the walls and floors of the church, to people who have been associated with it in the past. On the north chancel wall has been placed the **brass** of John Gybbis (d.1526) and his wife Margaret. Their effigies are portrayed, with four of their children, a shield with their coat of arms and an inscription.

Ledger slabs in the floors commemorate the following people:

- Alice Minet (1778), widow of John Minet, Rector of Eythorne, also Mary (1768), wife of Hughes Minet of London. (Chancel)
- A stone at the east end of the nave has a worn but interesting inscription, which proclaims 'Heare lieth intired ye Body of Mary Hughes, dafter of Mr. Henrey and M^e Elizabeat Hughes, who departed this life ye 2nd of March 1699, aged 3 weekes'.
- Captain Alexander Ridley, Jurat of the Corporation of Dover, d.1762.

People commemorated upon **wall plaques** include:

- Sylvia Minet (1855).
- Alice (1778) and Mary Minet (1768), as on ledger slab 1.
- Susan Millicent Staveley (lady of the Manor and daughter of Charles and Leah Minet), d.1918.
- Her husband, General Sir Charles Staveley (d.1896), has a plaque with a standard at its summit, upon which are inscribed the seven battles at which he fought.
- John Morris (1905), who paid for the restoration of the church and is buried at Highgate.
- Arthur Capel Morris, who fell at Gallipoli in 1915.
- Under the tower is a plaque recording its restoration in 1890 by Edward Ashurst Morris. He also gave the two **bells**, which were cast by John Warner & Sons of London in that year.

Front cover: Exterior from the south east in 1952 (RCHME)

*Back cover: Exterior from the north east showing the Norman window
(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)*

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