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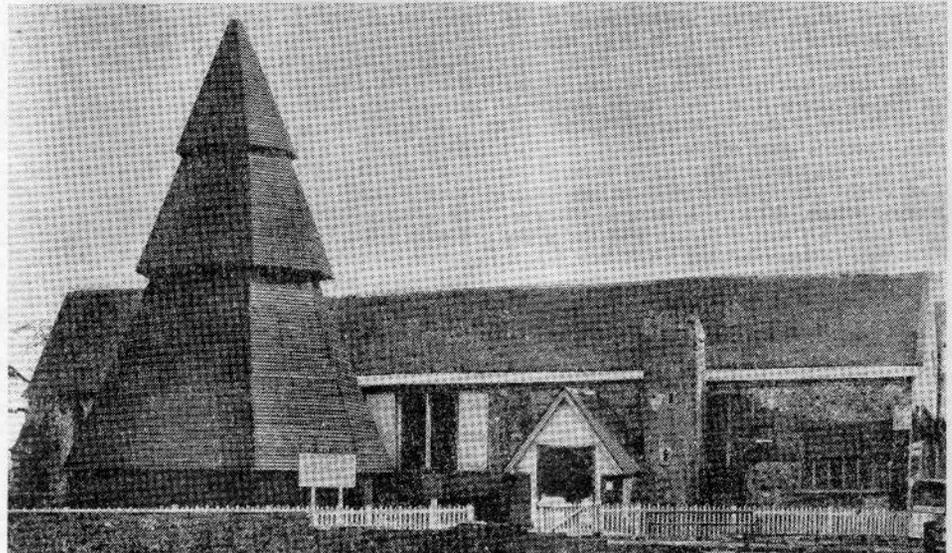
ST. AUGUSTINE, BROOKLAND, KENT

By THE REV. D. L. CAWLEY,
A.K.C., F.S.A. Scot.

ROMNEY MARSH was reclaimed from the sea by the Romans, and—far from being the swamp that the name 'Marsh' implies—is amongst the richest pasture for sheep-grazing in the country. Romney Marsh sheep are famed the world over. The Rhee Wall—they just call it the Wall there—separates this flat and most fascinating triangle of land from the sea, and many of its buildings bear witness to the treacherous nature of the soil upon which they stand, the former sea-bed. Go and ring on the six at Newchurch; the bottom two stages of the tower incline sharply to the west: they only put the belfry on a century later, when they knew that the tower had settled down. Look at the tiny church of Snave with its 14 huge buttresses supporting its fabric. The oldest inscribed bells in Kent hang in the tower at Snargate; but climbing to see them takes one's puff away as one battles against the lean of the tower. Brookland is nearer the sea than any of them; and although—as our photograph shows—they decided upon a timber pylon rather than a masonry tower, the arches of the south arcade (now happily reinforced and quite safe) lean out beyond the theoretical point of collapse in places.

There is rather obscure documentary evidence of the existence of Brookland as early as the 9th century, and to a church towards the end of the tenth. It was owned by the great Abbey of St. Augustine, Canterbury, which owned all the churches in Kent of this dedication, having passed to that institution about the year 997 by the will of Edward of Coombe: Coombe was a manor of Brabourne. Of the earliest church, nothing remains above ground; but there are traces of its Norman successor in some worked stone at the east end of the south aisle. The core of the present building, the nave and chancel, are of mid-13th century date. The chancel is unaisled, and retains a good quantity of Early English work of the highest order in the side windows, sedilia and piscina. The east window is of very late Perpendicular date and the chancel received a thorough hammering at Victorian hands. Most of its beauty remains, whilst the rest of the church has been little altered by structural restoration, despite the fact that a considerable amount has had to be done.

The aisles and porch were added in the 14th century, and it is the south aisle in



particular which has visible evidence of the unstable nature of the soil in which its pillars stand.

The building itself is good enough to deserve a visit; the sheer beauty of its proportions recalls others in the Marsh area. But, as if that were not enough, the church possesses several features of particular interest as well as the timber tower in which hangs its fine ring of six bells. On entering the church, one is immediately struck by the vast quantity of woodwork of different kinds: box-pews with doors (the writer remembers preaching here once to an invisible congregation, so tall are the pews); 18th century pulpit and reading-desk (a cut-down three-decker); Laudian rails in the south chapel; even wooden window shutters in the south aisle, together with a fine carved Bible Box. At the south-west corner is a large railed enclosure. Locally this is known as the tithe pen—the reason being that the tithe weights were till recently displayed here. After a theft, they were rehoused in a fine glass-fronted case at the west end. They and their scales are all finely finished and polished, and include weights necessary for solids and liquids, as well as measuring rods proper to particular trades. Made for this Hundred by Vincents, of London Bridge, each is inscribed 'HUNDRED OF ALOES-BRIDGE 1795'. Also in the panel is the crown, with canons and argent, of the former tenor bell (originally 11 cwt. 2 qr. 15 lb.) of the old ring of five. The bell was originally 40 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches diameter, by John

Hodson of London. The crown retains the inscription: *(coin) +(coin) *(coin) +(coin) *(coin) + JOHN * HODSON * MADE * ME * 1685 / JOHN * EVE * WILLIAM * CLARKE * CHVRCH * WARDENS * (coin) +. At the west end is a fine polished wooden chest, reputedly rescued from a wrecked Spanish galleon at Camber, after the Armada of 1588. An unusual mechanism situated on the ground operates the clock in the small north-west turret, by T. M. Hartley of Silchester, 1954. This electrically relays strike operation to the campanile, and is a 1939-45 War Memorial.

The great treasure of the church here is the Norman-Flemish 12th century lead font, the most important of the 38 surviving in England (four of them in Kent). Its outer surface is completely ornamented with two tiers of figures similar to those attached to early psalters. At Brookland, the upper arcade deals with the signs of the Zodiac, beginning with Aries; underneath are the months, beginning with Mars (March) and the representation of the occupation for that month. Thus for April one has in the upper row TAVRVS, a bull standing; beneath AVRIL, a female standing, probably representative of a goddess of fertility, as she holds a foliage spray in each hand. The representation for Aries has been mixed up with Capricorn; also, as there are 20 arcades, the months from Mars-Vitovvre (March-October) and the signs from Capricorn (for Aries)-Scorpio are repeated. (Continued overleaf)

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ST. AUGUSTINE, BROOKLAND—contd.

Crowning all is a set of three equidistant castings representing the Resurrection of our Lord. How this great treasure ever came to Brookland we shall probably never know. Pausing now to look at the fine and energetic supporters of the Royal Arms, dated J7 GHR 39, over the south door, we prepare to make our way to the church's most spectacular feature, the wood campanile.

There are many legends about the origins of this tower; but notwithstanding its having been twice blown down off the church roof, being transplanted from Lydd by Cardinal Wolsey, or falling off in amazement at the appearance of a confirmed bachelor and aged spinster to be married, there seems only one reason for such a tower, the treacherous nature of the soil. As originally constructed, probably about the same time as the nave, c. 1250, it consisted of a foundation of timbers laid flat, forming a square, supporting four large posts, canted pylon-like towards each other, each 27 ft. 8 in. long, and 18 in. square. Dendrochronological analysis, and the presence of the notched lap-joint in the bracing of the structure (the posts were massively braced on the north and south sides) suggests that the date of the central structure may be even earlier than 1250. The upper ends of the posts supported three horizontal beams, which carry the second series of four posts, set within the area of the upper structure, and containing a two-bell frame.

FRAME ALTERED

The larger pit is 45 in. wide, though it is doubtful if, at this stage, it would have carried a 15 cwt. bell. This frame was later altered with new posts and braces, and the smaller pit had built within it a short-headed braced centre-post frame, whose tree-rings indicate a felling date c. 1325; the frame was probably altered c. 1330-40, whilst in the mid-15th century the lower portion was extended into an octagon, with arched base-section, by putting out horizontal posts at 6 ft. 2 in. with beams at 22½° as we now see them. From the weathered appearance of the timber, it seems that cladding was only later introduced; originally weatherboarded, it now has cedar 'shingles'. The last portion of all to be enclosed was the base arcading, which, since the recent asphaltting of the ground within the tower and the removal of various obtrusive partitions, is clearly visible within. It seems likely that a new bell frame was put in beneath the older one about this period, the oldest bell now in use, by William Chamberlain of London, dating from this time. At the Edwardian Inventory there were iiiij small bells in the "steple" as well as a warning bell, sarringe bell and hand bell in the church.

In the last quarter of the 16th century, a new frame was required, and duly supplied. From its appearance—it survived till 1973—it contained much of the mid-15th century material. It was designed for three bells, swinging across the braced direction of the campanile, and was of the usual braced centre-post construction, with long heads, but without corner-posts. Tree-ring analysis gives a felling date of 1569 for the new materials. To give support to the new frame, a separate trusswork was erected within the lower part of the main structure consisting of three pairs of posts braced together and carrying the foundation of both the frame of c. 1575 and its modern successor. There were probably still four bells, but in 1685 the ring was augmented

to five by John Hodson of London. He reused William Chamberlain's bell of c. 1450 as the third of the new ring, and seems to have recast the rest and added the tenor. Alas the new ring was not well in tune, the front four bells being virtually a major fourth and the tenor half a semitone sharp. Additional framework was erected at right angles to the existing work, but as this swung against, instead of across, the main bracing, much oscillation was set up. The rope-circle was both awkward and anti-clockwise. The bells were rehung in the mid-19th century, but little other work was done (despite an appeal in 1919) and the bells became notorious for their bad 'go' and deafening qualities. The tower being octagonal, and the floor below the bells square, allowed one to see the bells swinging from the ringing area. Finally, in 1971, the oscillation was deemed to have become so great that the bells were condemned, and ringing ceased. With the encouragement of the Rector (the Rev. Nigel O'Connor), money-raising commenced almost at once, assisted especially by an appeal broadcast on B.B.C.-TV by Malcolm Muggeridge, and a firm offer from the Kent County Association to do freely all the work it reasonably could itself.

A scheme was devised for recasting the tenor into two trebles, and tuning the other four to make six; this would distribute the weight more satisfactorily, apart from other obvious advantages. Mr. George Elphick kindly offered to insert cross-bracing in the tower on the east and west sides, hitherto unbraced, and his craftsmanship may be seen there now. Many other generous offers came in, and in July 1973 the old five were given a last ring and immediately afterwards dismantled by Alan Berry and his team and conveyed to Whitechapel.

Now the bells have been tuned, and two new trebles cast; the crown of the former tenor is preserved in the church, as noted above. In common with Diocesan policy,

the older bells have been fitted with canon-retaining headstocks. In keeping with the superb craftsmanship of the tower is the fine new Iroko-wood bell frame. The bell fittings have been renewed throughout, soundproofing installed and the ringing area opened up for all to appreciate the construction of this place.

And so to February 24, when the Lord Bishop of Maidstone, the Rt. Rev. Geoffrey Lewis Tiarke, the son of a former vicar here, visited the Romney Marsh Group of Parishes and rehallowed the bells of Brookland and the devoted labours of those to whom the parish—and we as ringers—owe so much. LAUS DEO.

THE BELLS

N.B.—In the description, the sign + denotes a fleur-de-lis; coins are indicated as they occur; * denotes a sunflower stamp; (W) the Whitechapel Foundry stamp; and / a new line of inscription.

Treble (26½" diameter; note F; weight 4 cwt 0 qr 22 lbs) (soundbow:)

19(W)73 / WHITECHAPEL

Second (28½"; E-flat; 4-3-10) (soundbow:)

19(W)73 / WHITECHAPEL

Third (31"; D-flat; 6-0-8): *(coin)+(coin)* (coin)+ IOHN * HODSON * MADE * MEE * 1685 / * + I*EVE * W * CLLARKE * CHVRCH * WARDES

Fourth (32½"; C; 6-2-12): (coin)+(coin)* (coin)+ IOHN * HODSON * MADE * MEE * 1685 / I * EVE * W * CLLARKE * CHVRCH * WARDENS *(coin)+(coin)+

Fifth (34½"; B-flat; 7-3-25) (black-letters:) Sit Nomen Domini Benedictum (followed by two crests, one with crossed keys, the other with a banner, and between them a medallion inscribed Ihu Mercie Ladi Help)

Tenor (36" / 16"; A-flat; 8-2-0): *(coin)+(coin)* (coin)+ (coin)* (coin)+ IOHN * HODSON * MAD * MEE * 1685 / IOHN * EVE * WILLIAM * CLARKE * CHVRCH * WARD * ENS+



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Essex Association.**EAR PLUGS AND CANDLES**

Ear plugs and candles were the order of the evening when members of the N.W. District held their meeting at Arkesden on February 23.

The ear plugs were recommended as the ringing chamber is situated directly below the timber floor of the belfry, through which the bells can be seen swinging.

The candles were a necessity. We were not being patriotic in this time of crisis. The church had recently been rewired and as there are no local ringers the ringing chamber was forgotten. The Vicar (Canon Willard) did not realise until an hour or so before our arrival that we would find it rather difficult to ring in the dark. Having obtained candles from the church we enjoyed ringing until 8 p.m. Any villagers watching after the last bell was lowered might be excused for believing in ghosts as a procession of shadowy figures holding candles aloft made their way through the churchyard to the Vicarage, where Canon Willard and his wife had a most welcome log fire and a cup of coffee waiting. The evening proved to be an experience for both old and young and was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

M. H. W.