

# THE RINGING WORLD

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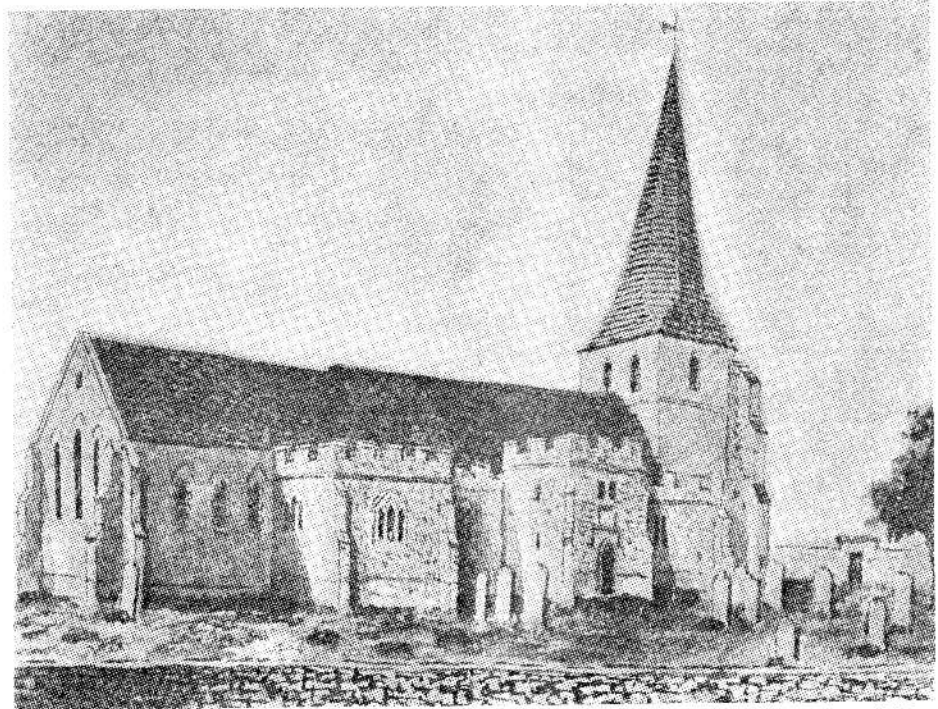
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## All Saints Woodchurch, Kent

THE PARISH CHURCH of All Saints, Woodchurch, is a fine heritage for an English village. Its beautiful architecture has been preserved for nearly 800 years, surviving the wearing of time, sectarian demolition and the dangers arising from unimaginative restoration.

The date of the present building may be estimated approximately by the predominance of 13th century Early English architecture. There are records that indicate the existence of an earlier church in the parish: in the Domesday Monachorum (the ecclesiastical Domesday Book) the first list of "Customs of the Archbishop at Easter from Presbyters and Churches" includes "Wude-cyrcce", which paid dues of 28d., the usual sum for one of the smaller churches. In *Archaeologia Cantiana* vol. XLV, Dr. Gordon Ward reasons that this list could have been drawn up in A.D. 1070, Archbishop Lanfranc's first year of office, although the Domesday Monachorum was not completed before the end of the century. At that time and for several hundred years Woodchurch was in the Deanery of Lympne. In the late 12th century a document relating to Cumbwell Priory was witnessed by "Wilelmus de Wdecherch", who may have been the priest, William of Woodchurch. But there are no visible traces of Saxon or Norman work in the architecture of the building: the earlier church, whether of wood or stone, on the present site or elsewhere, has vanished.

The Early English chancel and nave date from the 13th century and the tower is of the same period. The south and north aisles were either built or extended to their present width in the 14th and 15th century; the basis of their architecture is Perpendicular. The north porch, with the priest's room above it, belongs to the 15th century, and there are signs of an earlier porch over the south door. Immediately to the east outside this door, the run of masonry that forms the outer wall has no plinth and seems to be very old, suggesting that the small chapel of St. Nicholas within it was the oldest of the three in the church. Its eastern extension, forming the chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary, was built in the



[Etching by Charles Miles, 1847]

15th century. The origin of the north chapel is obscure, but its architecture is 14th century Perpendicular. It should be noted that most of the windows have undergone alteration and restoration at various times, though the lancets of the east end have remained untouched.

### HUGE GALLERY

The ground floor of the tower is separated from the nave by a glazed wooden screen bearing the date 1697 and the initials of Richard and John Clarke, churchwardens. At that date a huge gallery was built across the west end of the nave to accommodate the musicians and choir and, probably, a large congregation. This gallery was demolished in the Victorian restoration, and some of its timbers were used to make the screen. Inside the tower, in the north and south walls, are blind arches of the same proportions as the western arch of the nave. The small doorway in the north-west corner gives access to the belfry staircase.

The tower is reinforced by four unusually massive angle buttresses, the south-western one having a projection of 13ft. 6in. Rising to the summit of the tower in three stages, they cover the string course, which apparently passes beneath them, indicating that they are of later date than the tower itself, although, like all the rest of the walling, they are constructed in uncoursed rubble. In the north-west corner the spiral staircase can be seen, with its three slit windows, rising almost as high as the tower itself. The belfry has double lancet-shaped louvre windows on all four sides.

The broach SPIRE rises to a height of 102 feet and inclines southwards about 18 inches out of perpendicular. The shingles were originally of oak, cleft by hand, but, as these have been unobtainable in recent years, replacements are now of cedar. The work of keeping the spire in repair has continued through the centuries. A sample of three accounts from the records shows the decreasing value of money:—

(Continued overleaf)

**WOODCHURCH, KENT**—continued

Early in the 18th century, a receipted bill for repairs to the church includes, "for eight hundred and a half of shingles at 3s. the hundred £1-5-0".

In 1780: "Paid Wm. Bourne for shingling the steeple, as appears by the bill, £63-4-9".

In 1954 the spire was completely stripped and re-shingled at a cost of £1,126.

In 1500, John Spert of Tenterden left 4d. "to the Brotherhoods of the Blessed Mary and St. Nicholas in the Church of Woodchurch". These guilds probably maintained the two chapels dedicated to their patron saints. There are three bequests:

In 1490 Dionysia Norland left 6s. 8d. "to the making of a new window in the Chancel of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Church".

John Engham of Woodchurch (d. 1515) left 20s. "to making of a new rood loft within the parish church of Woodchurch, when the parishioners be disposed thereto", and 20s. "to the charges of casting of the bells there".

His kinsman, John Engham of Sandwich, also remembered Woodchurch in his will. Dated 1524, it includes 6s. 8d. to the Light of Our Lady and a sum of money "to the reperation of the Steeple and Bells".

In 1530, the will of John Reason asks that he shall be "buried in the high Chancel of All Hallows of Wodechurch before the Holy Sacrament of the Altar. A stone to be laid over my body, with a scripture of my name and day and year of death".

**THE BELLS**

The ringing chamber is on the ground-floor of the tower. There are six bells; four of those cast in the early 17th century by Joseph Hatch, in his foundry at Ullcombe, are still in use. The original bond he made with the churchwardens in 1609 is in the parish records. In it Hatch undertakes that, if the five bells he has just cast are broken by ringing within 28 days, he will re-cast them at his own expense, less the cost of carriage to his house at Broomfield. The inscriptions below show that three of these bells are still in use after more than 360 years:

- "WOODCHURCH, ALL SAINTS, SIX BELLS  
1. 31in. JNo. CLARKE JUNr & GABRIEL RICHARDS CH: WARDENS LESTER & PACK OF LONDON FECIT 1755  
2. 33in. IOSEPH HATCH MADE ME 1608  
3. 35in. IOSEPH HATCH MADE ME 1608  
4. 38in. IOSEPH HATCH MADE ME 1608  
5. 42in. IOSEPHUS HATCH ME FECIT 1623  
6. 45in. JOHN CLARKE JUNr GABRILL RICHARDS CH: WARDENS 1755 LESTER & PACK FECIT"

(Extract from "Church Bells of Kent", 1887, J. C. L. Stahschmitt).

Evidence of other bells earlier than these is found in the will of John Engham, who died in 1515.

The treble bell was re-cast and the peal re-hung by Mears and Stainbank of the Whitechapel Foundry in 1905. On the walls of the tower are framed records of two special peals, rung on 12th January, 1952 and 23rd June, 1956, and of a Victory Peal in 1945.

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**25 YEARS AGO**

Taken from The Ringing World for November 19, 1948

Members of the Lincoln Diocesan Guild rang a peal on the heavy eight at Louth. It was the first peal on the bells for 28 years, and the 100th peal together for Charles McGuinness and John Walden.

Twin sisters, Sylvia and Doreen Coker, rang a peal of Stedman Cinques, their first peal on 12 bells, at High Wycombe.

The death of Robert H. Brundle at the age of 97, deprived the Suffolk Guild of its oldest member. He was perhaps the oldest ringer in England, and was the oldest College Youth. Mr. Brundle met with a chapter of accidents during the last few years. On several occasions after ringing a heavy-going tenor to a peal, he stumbled from the box and had to be revived with brandy. In his long career he rang with five generations of the Tillett family in Ipswich.

**40 YEARS AGO**

November 17, 1933

James G. A. Prior rang the tenor at All Saints', Poplar, to a peal of Kent Treble Bob Royal, his first peal as conductor.

Three peals of Grandsire Doubles deserve special mention. At Redbourn, Herts, the first peal on the bells by an entirely local band contained three first pealers, and first peal as conductor. At Henlow, Bedfordshire, another peal by the local band, there were four first pealers, including Harry Bywaters who rang the tenor for his first peal at the age of 64. Finally at Madeley, Salop, there were five first pealers, and a first peal as conductor.

**Obituary****JAMES THORLEY**

The fact that Thorne Church was crowded for the funeral service of James Thorley, who died on October 22, was a mark of the affection in which he was universally held. Those who could not be present at Thorne attended the service at the Doncaster Crematorium. As the cortege arrived at the church the fine-toned eight were being rung to stately, half-muffled Grandsire Triples and the family express their thanks to those ringers who made this last tribute to a fine ringer and gentleman.

James Thorley was born at Thorne in 1908 and learned to ring on the old eight, ringing his first peal (on the new eight) in 1927. During his career he rang 171 peals, including 97 with his eldest son Martin. An excellent striker himself, he was nevertheless extremely patient with those who were not such capable performers, and a great number of ringers will gratefully remember how he stood with them for their first steps in change-ringing. However, good striking was his chief delight in ringing; he always looked back with joy to a peal of Cambridge Minor rung at Chapel Allerton as a welcome to his first grandchild, and one of his last peals was a similar peal in the same tower with this grandchild ringing with him. He was in great demand as a judge at striking competitions and had a fund of stories concerning Harold Chant and himself acting in this capacity.

As a youth in the 1920s he worked at various occupations before joining the

G.P.O. as a postman at Thorne. He served faithfully for a period of over 40 years, broken only by war service, and on his retirement in 1968 was awarded the Imperial Service Medal. During the war he served for over five years as an artillery signaller and took part in most of the major battles of the North European campaign, being wounded in the hand at the crossing of the Rhine.

He was very proud of the fact that his three sons became ringers and that his first two grandchildren have carried on the family tradition. Not a great conductor himself, he encouraged this aspect of the art in many other ringers, and the writer is particularly grateful for being taught to conduct 720s of Minor in 1945. He was always keen to foster a higher standard of striking whenever he rang and was a supporter of the promotion of versatility amongst ringers—although of slight build he had circled four towers to peals.

He will be sadly missed. J. M. T.

**HAROLD LINES**

It is with deep regret that we record the death in St. Woolos' Hospital, Newport, of Mr. Harold Lines of Bassaleg, Monmouthshire, on October 23 at the age of 73. Mr. Lines has been ringing at St. Basil's, Bassaleg, for over 40 years and was very regular at the Sunday service ringing until he went into hospital. Harold was also a sidesman at St. Basil's and until a few years ago was a member of the P.C.C. and church choir. The bells were rung half-muffled before and after funeral services by the Bassaleg and Machen Bell Ringers. R. J. B.