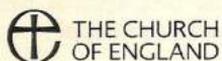


Church Guide

St. Mary the Virgin, Riverhead



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

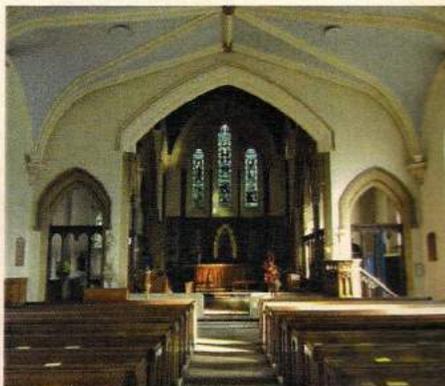




Welcome

You are very welcome here at our parish church of St. Mary the Virgin, whether you are here to worship with us or just visiting. These notes will tell you something of the church itself and also a little of its history and of the community it serves.

The church is in a prominent position overlooking Riverhead Square. The sandy hill on which it stands once formed the centre of the Hundred of Codsheath in Saxon times. The church building dates back to 1831 when the Nave was built to a design by Decimus Burton on land presented by the Amherst and Lambarde families. On

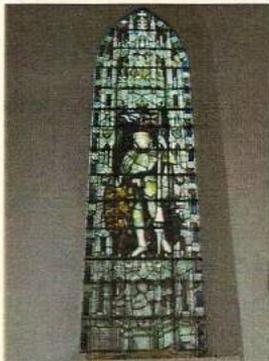


entering through the West Door you will notice that the Nave is large and light, totally unhindered by pillars, with a plaster rib-vault ceiling. The Chancel and Sanctuary were added in 1882 to an Early English design by Sir Arthur Blomfield ARA. You will see the crests of Canterbury and Rochester engraved on the glass of the inner doors. St Mary's belonged first to the diocese of Canterbury and was consecrated in August 1831 by Dr Howley, the then Archbishop of Canterbury. The church became part of the diocese of Rochester in 1905 and had first been a chapel-of-ease to Sevenoaks Parish Church built, it is said, to save villagers the climb up the hill to the town. The grave of our first priest lies just to the north of the west doors, recording the death of the Revd John Wilgress MA in 1850, 'Chaplain of Riverhead Chapel'.



The Nave

Just inside and above the west doors you will see the Coat of Arms of William IV. Immediately to the left stands the Baptismal Font and moving clockwise around the Nave, on the north wall there are four fine reproductions of Old Masters. Two of them are by Peter Paul Rubens [1577-1640] – *'Mise en Croix'* and *'Descente de Croix'* – and one each by Murillo [1618-1682] - *'Virgin and Child'* and Laurent de la Hyre [1606-1656] – *'The Christ Child'*.



In the north-east corner of the nave is an intricate and beautiful memorial stained-glass window depicting St. George and the Dragon, designed by John Wimbolt whose 'mark' is the black greyhound – can you find it ?

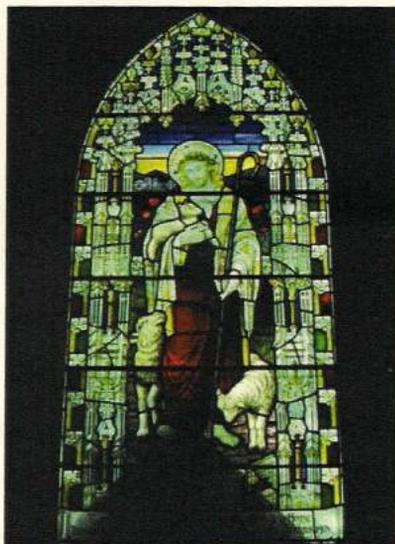
At the west end of the Nave and on the north and south walls above the balcony hang two hatchments that bear witness to the Amherst family history. On canvas and in black diamond-shaped frames, one depicts Canadian war Indians and is for 'Jeffery Amherst, 1st Baron Amherst' who died in 1797; the other shows the Order of Hanover and is for 'Sarah, daughter of 2nd Lord Archer and wife of William, 1st Earl Amherst' who died in 1838.



The banners hanging on the south wall were made and presented to St. Mary's by the children of Amherst County Primary School. They illustrate the long connection of the Amherst family with Sevenoaks

and Riverhead. A collection of the descriptions written by the children themselves is available at the back of the church.

There are four lancet windows, two each side of the south porch. Each is crowned with a heraldic device. The first is of the Lambarde family with the crest showing lambs as a play on the family name. The second bears the shield of the Amhersts featuring an Earl's coronet with arrows representing Canadian Indians. To the west of the porch we have the arms of Archer Windsor, 6th Earl of Plymouth,

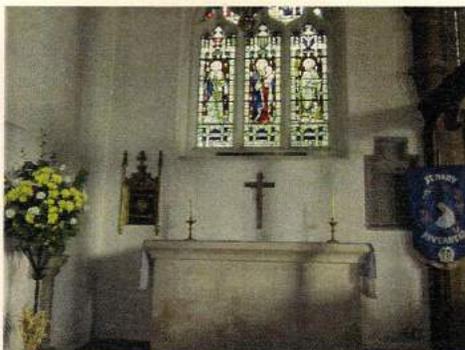


who became related to the Amhersts through marriage, and finally the arms of the Curteis of Appeldore, Tenterden. Over the south porch itself is the beautiful stained-glass Good Shepherd window which was installed in 1908 and paid for by monies collected over a period of three years by the children of the parish - £45 !



The Lady Chapel

Until the end of the First World War this had been a gloomy organ chamber that was being used as a broom cupboard. Canon Bell had it transformed into a Lady Chapel, a memorial to all those who had lost their



lives; to be added to with the names of others who were to perish in the Second World War. The east window design is of the Blessed Virgin and Child, flanked on the left by St Nicholas and on the right by St. Martin of Tours. Above them are representations of St. Joan of Arc and, on the right, by St Edith of Kemsing. Memorial tablets record the names of local people who had died in the two wars, and there is another memorial just inside the Sanctuary on the left by the Communion rail.

In the Chapel itself and beside the altar is the Aumbry where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved. There is also a memorial to Dr Worship who had died in 1892 after serving the community for 42 years as its doctor. On the south wall is a Corpus Christi in a wooden case, similar to one found in Ypres museum. It replaces an icon which was stolen in the 1950s. The red velvet mount was made by Mrs Winnie Oakley who worshipped and served at St. Mary's for many years. She died in 2006 at the age of 105.



The Chancel & Sanctuary



The Chancel and the Sanctuary are dominated by the reredos. The central panel depicting 'Christ in Majesty' is an Italian glass mosaic by Salviati; the gold background had at one time been painted blue but hours of work by the then congregation restored it to its original glory. The ceramics on the north and south walls of the Sanctuary are memorials representing the four Evangelists and soaring above the reredos are three glorious stained-glass windows by Kempe - his mark is a black wheatsheaf.



A history and background

St Mary's is not as old as some of the churches to be found along or near the old pilgrimage route to Canterbury but it does reflect local history. The name Riverhead itself might suggest 'head of a river' but there is no evidence that the small settlement had any connection with a river. The community was known as Rothered in 1548 and one meaning of the Saxon word 'hither' was 'hill' which might connect with the hill of Codsheath; it is not difficult to see how the years might have corrupted the sound to arrive at today's Riverhead.



Riverhead formed part of the estates of the Amherst and Lambarde families. Jeffrey Amherst was born in 1717 and became a page in the household of the Duke of Dorset at Knole House. He was commissioned into the army and in due course was promoted Major-General and given command of the British Expedition against the French in North America. One of his commanders was General Wolfe, born at nearby Westerham.

While Wolfe advanced up the St. Lawrence river to Quebec [where he was to die during its capture], Amherst advanced up the Hudson river from New York, capturing Crown Point and Ticonderoga on the way. After marching across wild country to Lake Ontario he finally joined with other forces to threaten Montreal where he received the surrender of the French forces in 1760. Returning to England in 1764 he was knighted and proceeded to build a mansion on the site of his former home, Brook House, and called it 'Montreal'. He was later created Baron Amherst, promoted Field Marshal and died in 1787.



He and his two brothers, also military men, are buried in Sevenoaks Parish Church but other members of the Amherst family were laid to rest in a vault under the south aisle of St. Mary's. In the last war and with the permission of the Earl, the vault was emptied to provide an air-raid shelter for children from the village school. The Amhersts were re-buried in the churchyard and their graves can be found along the pathway opposite the vestry door. The vicar at the time, Canon Bell, had the

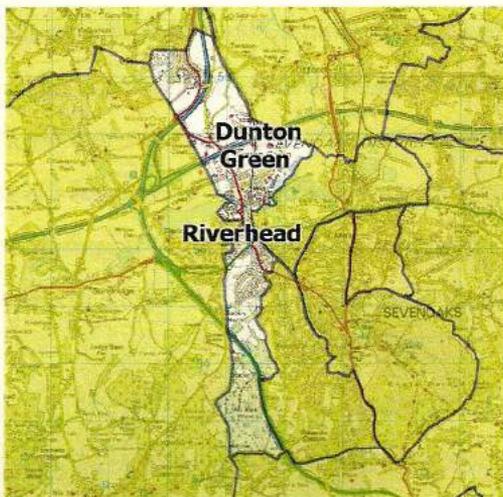
unusual task of re-burying several earls and countesses at very short notice. The vault was later converted into a chapel but is now used as a crypt for storage. Its use today for any community purpose is restricted by today's quite justified concerns about safety. Any part of a building open to the public must have an emergency exit - and there isn't one. The Amherst family finally left Riverhead in 1927 following the death of the 4th Earl. The mansion itself was pulled down and much of the former estate has been developed but two structures remain. At the entrance to the estate the original gatehouse still stands as does the obelisk at the top of Marlborough Crescent commemorating the reunion of the three Amherst brothers after the wars with France.

The Lambarde family had also contributed to the building of the church together with a vicarage and a village school. Whilst the school has long gone, the old vicarage still stands on Shoreham Lane, now a private house and renamed 'Glebe House', confirming that this land between Shoreham Lane and its junction with Worships Hill was once glebe land, provided to give an income for the support of the incumbent. Like many old vicarages, it catered for a large family and ideally a private income !

The family seat, Bradbourne House, and its successive owners have given names to many local roads today - Bosville, Betenson, Crawshay, Blackhall, Camden and Mount Harry. The coming of the railways in the mid-1800's was to split the Bradbourne estate into three parts and this began a series of sales which eventually saw the whole estate sold off for development. What remains are the Lakes which once formed part of

Bradbourne's ornamental gardens, where efforts are being made today to revive and restore them. There is also a small chapel to which the then owner Francis Crawshay added a belfry – and would ring the bell at 6 o'clock every morning 'to wake the lazy people of Riverhead' !

The northern part of today's ecclesiastical parish was originally a parish in its own right with its parish church of St. John the Divine, Dunton Green. Dunton, or then Donnington, was a farm on the Archbishop of Canterbury's manor of Otford and it grew to become an



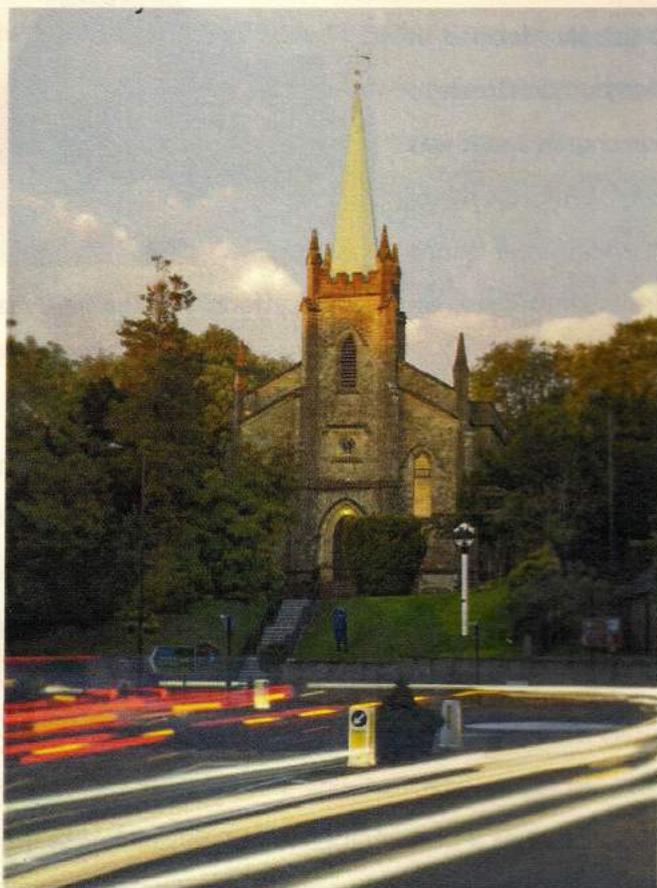
outlying hamlet of Otford, although as late as 1807 only 10 of the 109 houses in the parish were in Dunton Green. The village began to expand with the growth of coach traffic on the London to Hastings road – by 1836 12 coaches a day were passing through the village. In the 1860's the village was affected by the building of the railway and an influx of 'navvies' or navigators. These itinerant bands of workmen were to cover the face of England with a network of canals and they went on to build our railway system. The public house, the 'Miners Arms' was built to cater for the miners who were brought in to drive the tunnel through Polhill.

The church of St. John was built in 1890 when some local influential people decided it was time for Dunton Green to have its own church and it was Mr Samuel Wreford JP of Broughton Lodge, the much



loved squire of the village, who led the efforts. For the first years of its life the fledgling parish was in the care of Canon Burn-Murdoch of Riverhead but by 1904 a parsonage house had been built and the first Dunton Green vicar installed. Sadly, as a result of falling congregations, the church had to close and the parish again came under the care of the vicar of Riverhead as part of the joint benefice of Riverhead with Dunton Green. The church building still stands just by the road over the motorway.

St. Mary's is a Grade II Listed Building and much of the village around Riverhead Square forms a Conservation Area. This of course means that any changes to the church have to abide by numerous conditions, as we found when building our church hall a few years ago. The hall has been a welcome addition; before its construction any hospitality in the form of tea or coffee relied on one small tap in the vestry. The nearest toilets were across the road in the public car park! The building of the hall has indeed been a blessing!



The landmark church of St. Mary the Virgin, in the parish of St. Mary's Riverhead with Dunton Green, has stood in its prominent position overlooking Riverhead since 1831. Many have passed through its doors, to worship , reflect and admire. Long may it continue to welcome visitors and worshippers, and to be "a still point in a turning world" T.S. Eliot