

We are greatly indebted to Canon Greville Cooke, a former Rector, the original author and compiler of this guide.

Revised 1983 by the Revd Dennis Rankin and reprinted.

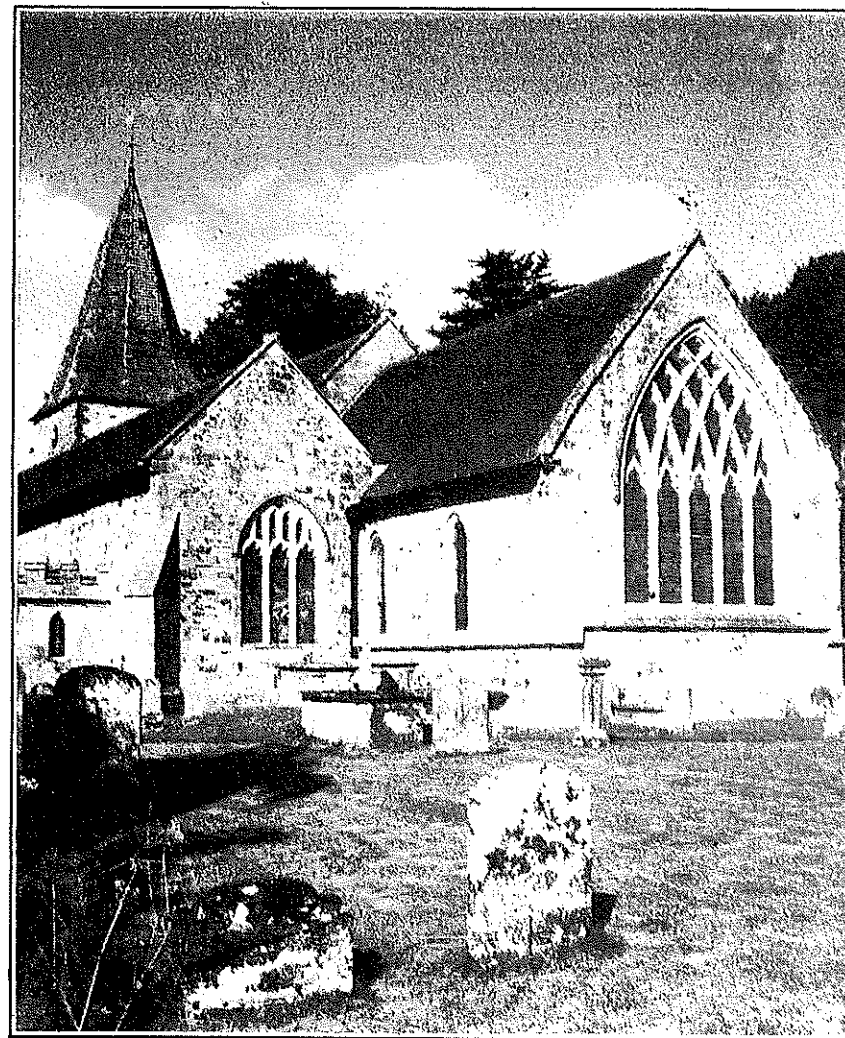
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PARISH CHURCH of St. MARGARET

BUXTED

SUSSEX



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BUXTED PARISH CHURCH

ST. MARGARET THE QUEEN

BY

CANON GREVILLE COOKE, M.A., F.S.A.

THE MANOR OF BUXTED was given by Caedwalla, King of Wessex, to the Archbishopric of Canterbury, in 680 A.D. and the patronage of the living is still in the Archbishop's gift. Indeed, it came within the authority of no local Diocesan Bishop until the reign of Victoria. This present church was built, almost certainly on the site of a much earlier church, in the year 1250 A.D. and was dedicated to God and in honour of Margaret Queen of Scotland (1045-1093 A.D.), the wife of Malcolm the King. She was the grand-daughter of Edmund Ironside, and it is through her daughter Matilda, wife of Henry the First, that our Royal Family can trace its ancestry back to the Saxon royal line. She is the only saint who was canonised for the domestic virtues, being an exemplary and most pious wife and mother, three of her sons being in turn Kings of Scotland, the youngest of whom became known as St. David. There are very few churches so dedicated, most of those bearing the title of St. Margaret's being named after the other and better known Saint, the early church martyr.

The style of architecture is known as Early English, and the church has been very little altered since it was built. You will perhaps notice that two of the northern pillars are octagonal instead of circular. Why this is so we do not know. (The same peculiarity is also found at Wadhurst). It is unusual too that the clerestory windows are only on the north side - perhaps because that side of a church needs more light than the sunnier south side. The fine barrel roof with its age-old main beams is a splendid feature of the church.

There is a relic of the first decade of the church's history in the magnificent vestment chest at the back of the north aisle, which dates from about 1260 A.D. and is one of the earliest in the country.

Moving along towards the east end of the church, we enter the Chancel, built by Sir John de Lewes, who became Rector in 1281. As chancels are nearly always built before naves, this alone shows that there must have existed an earlier chancel which was replaced by this new one, the old one not being in keeping with the new nave. The especially fine design of stonework in the east window is worth notice - an unusually large one, matching the equally large dimensions of the chancel itself - 46½ feet in length, and just over 21 feet in breadth. If you look carefully at the east window, you will notice that at the top is the figure of St. Margaret, dressed in robes mirrored by those worn by the choir ladies today.

Under the carpet in the chancel is a fine brass to Britellus Avenel, Rector at the end of the 14th century. Permission to rub this brass must be obtained from the Rector, and no treading on it is allowed. Another brass exists - but unfortunately under a step - to the builder of the chancel, and yet another to one Crispine Savage, whose son was Rector at the time of the battle of Agincourt - fought on St. Crispin's day, as you will remember. As this Crispine is spelt with an added "e," it is probable that this brass commemorates a lady.

Now look up at the fine plaster roof - the original barrel roof is still there above it. Tradition says that this beautiful late Elizabethan ceiling was given by the Rector in the last days of the ageing Queen, about 1600 A.D., in gratitude to God for a wonderful crop of hops on his glebe. You will notice the fine frieze along the sides, with urns out of which stem hop flowers, surmounted by the stylised marguerite daisy - in honour of St. Margaret. Two of the urns are dependent from the roof, turned upside down in libation to God! What a lovely touch!

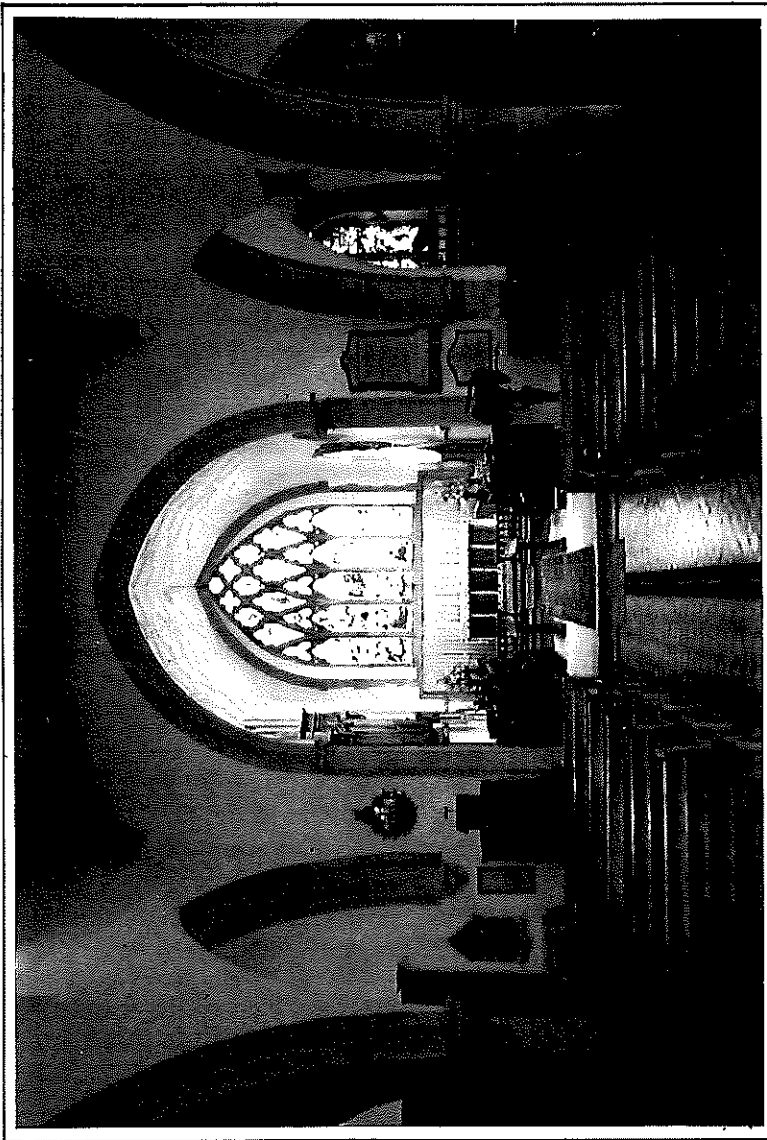
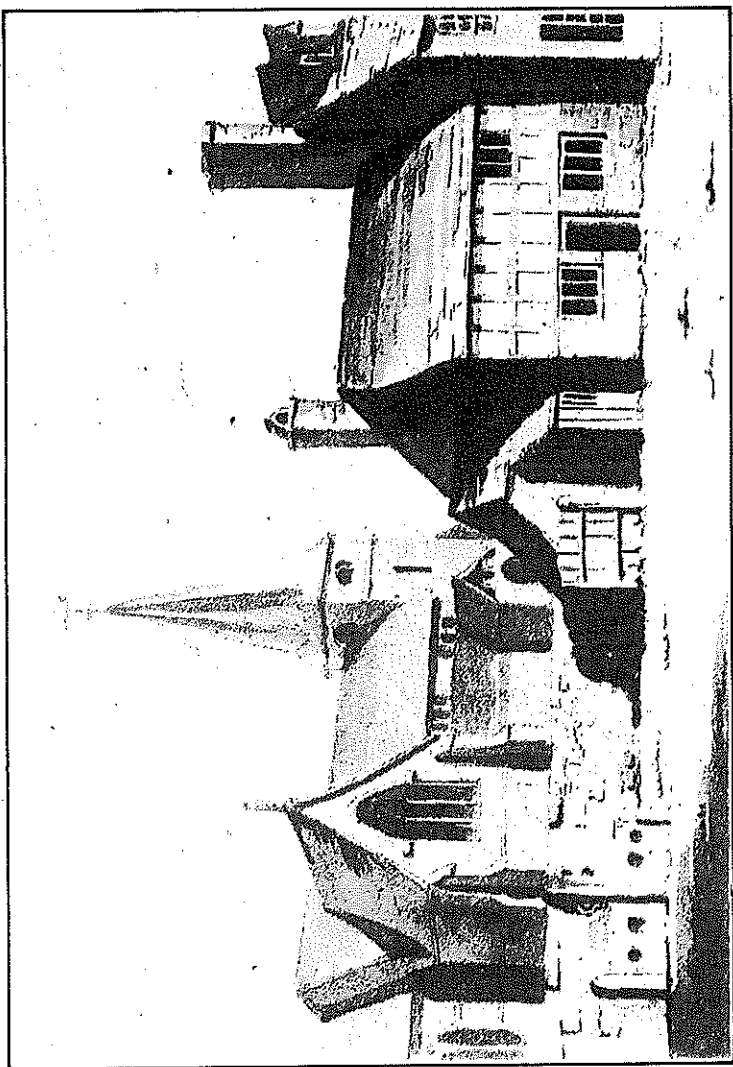


Photo Alec Mole 1986



THE CHURCH, STOCKS AND J. CORNWALL'S HOUSE, BUXTED.
FROM A VOLUME OF "VIEWS AND PLANS OF BUXTED ESTATE", IN 1798.

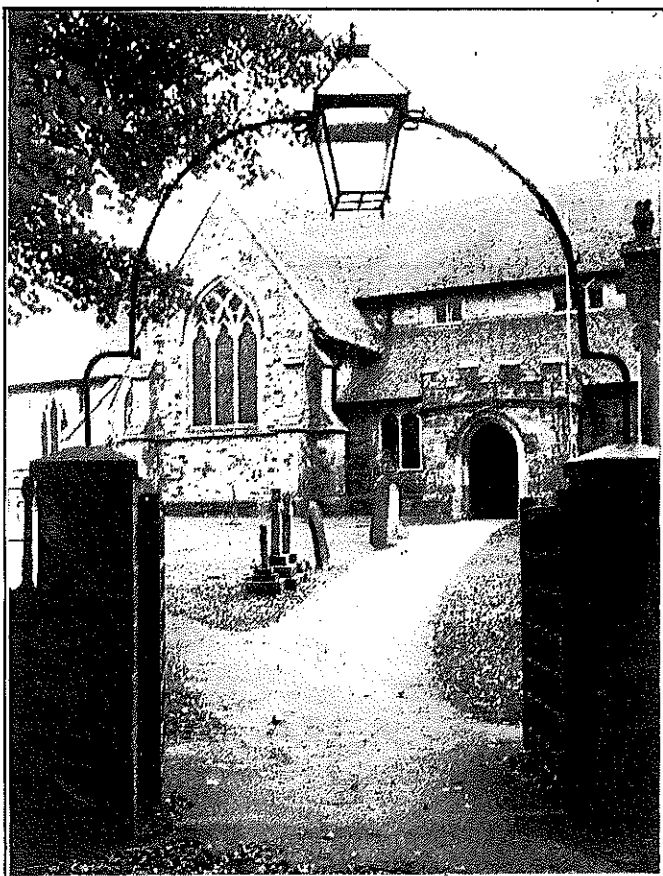
The Sanctuary is large and spacious, the altar rails dating almost certainly from 1630, for in that year Archbishop Laud ordered that the Holy Table should be moved away from its lengthways position in the body of the chancel, and put, as in medieval days, near the east wall. These rails, he ordered, were to have balusters close enough together to prevent a dog getting through them. This was a wise and right provision, since people were abusing the Holy Tables; and indeed in this our own parish, one Walter Cushman was accused of "leading his horse about the Altar," and was not allowed to receive the Sacrament until he had openly repented and acknowledged his sin.

Have a look at the candelabrum over the Sanctuary. It is worth a study with binoculars, if you have any with you, for there are many masks of faces in it, which are most delicately wrought. It is late 19th century workmanship and when taken to pieces – as it was some few years ago, to be cleaned and re-laquered – it was found to consist of one hundred separate pieces. Both in this fine example and in the other candelabrum in the north transept, you will notice that we have not as yet substituted the candles by electric light bulbs. Although we well know how brilliant these would look when lit, we feel that it is wisest and best to stick to tradition and retain the candles for lighting on festive occasions.

Notice also the fine triple Sedilia, wherein used to sit the Celebrant, the Gospeller and the Epistoller.

The Pulpit dates from about 1600 to 1620, and is finely carved - again with the marguerite as a motif.

Among those who have preached from this very pulpit is Anthony Saunders, who was also Chancellor of St. Paul's. He was Rector here from 1673 to 1719, and not only founded Uckfield Grammar School, but endowed a fund which still helps scholars to complete their education, and enables church schools to repair their buildings. In his time here, the sundial on the south



The north entrance showing the porch added in the 15th Century.

side of the church was erected, bearing the curious legend "We shall ..." to be completed by an imagined "die all," a punning reference to the dial itself. Alas, this original dial was stolen during a spate of burglaries in the 1980's. Then there was William Clarke, a famous literary figure and about the most celebrated authority of his time on old coins. There was also Christopher Wordsworth, brother of the poet. He was Master at Trinity College, Cambridge, as well as Rector of Buxted. He was offered, but declined, a Bishopric, and two of his sons and a grandson became Bishops.

You will see on the wall the long list of Rectors, some of whom became Bishops, seven being Archdeacons, and twenty-two Canons.

On the south side of the Chancel behind the Rector's Stall there is a small enclosed Chapel formerly known as the 'Park Pew'. It was probably originally a Lady Chapel, but about 1807 it was enclosed on its western side and roofed over with a vault – again the barrel roof is still over the latter – to become a pew for the family and staff of Lord Liverpool when he lived at the Park House.

The window was given by Lady Catherine Harcourt about 1853, being designed by her, so tradition says. Under the Chapel is a burial vault. This was opened in 1982 and was reported to be in good order.

The Chapel was mentioned in Horsefield's 'Environs of Lewes' which says:

" on the south side of the Chancel is a Chapel whose walls are almost covered with the tattered remnants of heraldic dignity. The extreme dampness of the church has defaced the assembled hatchments of the Medley, Waldo, and Jenkinson families and tinged the walls with all the colours of the rainbow"

Happily the Chapel is no longer in such a condition. The walls were restored and redecorated in 1982 and in the process of restoration the damaged piscina of the original chapel was revealed, and can now be seen in the south wall. The old 19th Century pews have been removed and replaced by memorial chairs made out of wild cherry wood grown locally at Hendall Farm and generously provided by the present owner, Mr. Alistair Fairclough.

In 1983 the old Altar Table which had served for some years as a book table at the back of the church was restored to its proper use and placed in the newly decorated and furnished Chapel. The Altar might well have been the original High Altar replaced in 1857, and for a time alienated from the church. It was brought back on the advice of Mr. J. Every of Lewes, and until now has served as a table in the Choir Vestry and at the west end of the church.

The Altar dates from the early Seventeenth Century and is of fine workmanship.

As the Chapel has now been restored to its original use, it was thought proper to call it by a more appropriate name and it was decided unanimously by the Parochial Church Council to name it the 'Chapel of the Ascension' after the glorious mystery depicted in the stained glass window.

Move over now to the north transept where another beautiful window with its wide range of colours may also have caught your eyes. This is not of conventional stained glass but was painted in 1875 and presented by the same Lady Harcourt who, 22 years earlier, had donated the window in the chapel just referred to above. That this has always been a chapel is proved by the Piscina that still survives. The candelabrum here is about mid-18th century in date. The panelling behind the altar came from Nell Gwynn's house at Twickenham – rather a "come-up," so to speak, to arrive in a church! You will notice that among the names on the Roll of Honour is that of Fergus Bowes-Lyon, a brother of the Queen Mother, and she as a Bridesmaid herself attended his wedding in our church to a daughter of the Countess of Portarlington, of the Park. This was in 1914; but alas, he was to die for his country very soon after.

Now make your way to the Font. This is co-oeval with the church, and is a fine example of the period. The canopy is much later, of course. There is a display cabinet holding some relics of former days including some cannon balls reminiscent of the fact that in 1543, Ralph Hogge made the first iron cannons here in Buxted – which were used doubtless against the Armada in 1588. He lived in the Hogge House near the entrance to the Park, which has a rebus – or punning name symbol – on its north wall, showing a hog and the date 1581. Also on this wall near the cabinet are some old prints of about 1800 showing the village as it used to be at that time – grouped around the east and north sides of the church. The Park was not enclosed until 1836, but access has always been of right to the church, as also for those walking through to Uckfield by the footpath passing the mansion, this being the nearest way for parishioners living in the Uckfield part of the parish to visit their mother church, or to see their Rector.

You will wonder, perhaps, why the church is so large. It is because it was the Mother Church of so great an area, which included not only High Hurstwood and Hadlow Down, and of course the other parish of Buxted, St. Mary's, but also the whole of Uckfield, and still earlier the parish of Crowborough. (The latter was soon after annexed to Rotherfield, before becoming a parish in its own right. It is now divided into two parishes). What was therefore one parish of Buxted in early days is now some seven parishes!

When you leave the church, have a look at the old yew tree. Experts say that it is 2,000 years old. See also the porch, added to the church in the 15th century, given by the Alchorne family - notice the girl holding a churn at the top of the arch - another rebus!

The fine spire of the tower is broached, having been not only re-shingled, largely re-timbered - with no alteration - in 1967. The tower itself houses eight famous bells. Ringers come from all parts to ring them, some of which are of 17th century manufacture.

Look up also at the gilded weather vane, which was made in 1665, the date being carved out of the flag - so that it has for over 300 years told Buxted folk of the winds of change!

We hope you have enjoyed looking round this beautiful and ancient church and have found this little guide an invaluable aid in observing its many notable architectural features.

Thank you for coming. Please do not leave without a prayer both for yourself and your loved ones, and for this parish. May God bless you always.

If you would care to become "A Friend of St. Margaret's", at a cost of £5 a year, please put your full address in the Visitor's book and a note to that effect and we will send you our periodical Newsletter.