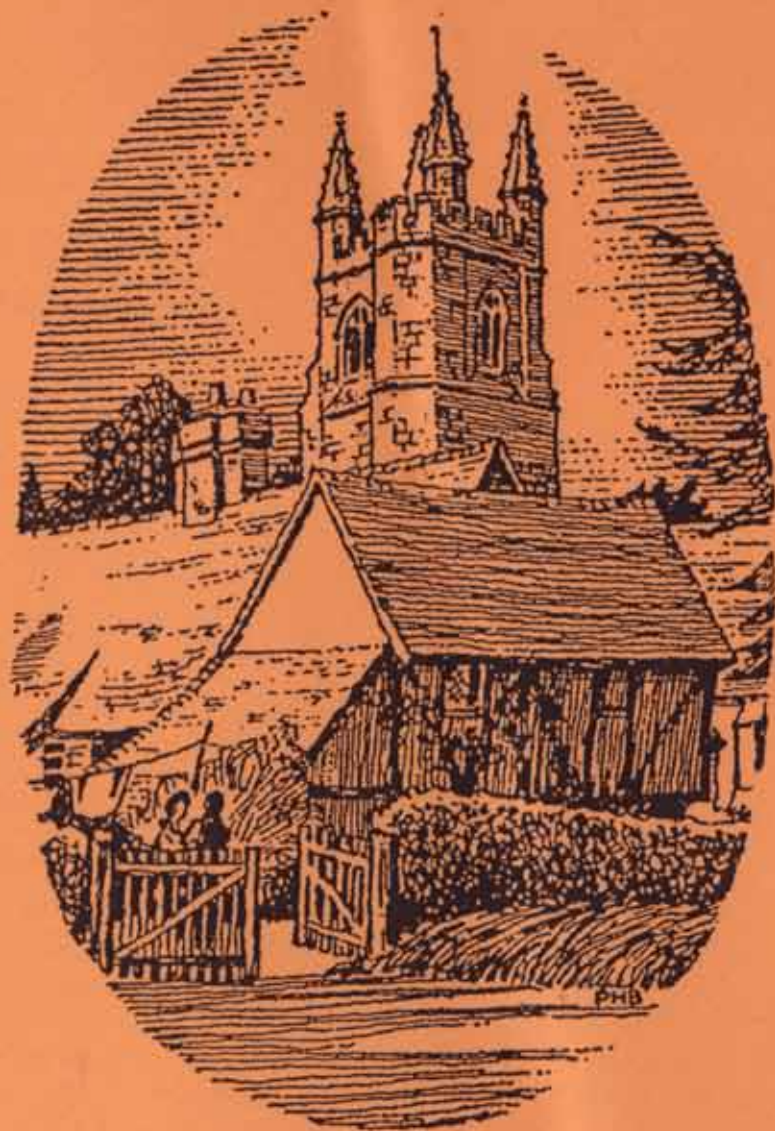


A GUIDE TO ST. MARY'S CHIDDINGSTONE



THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN CHIDDINGSTONE, KENT

CHIDDINGSTONE VILLAGE

Chiddingstone village is one of the prettiest and least spoiled in Kent. Little has altered over the centuries, and only two truly new buildings, the village hall and the new rectory, have been erected in the last century. The lovely half-timbered house at the east end of the row was occupied by Roger Attwood in 1453; in 1450 he had taken part in Jack Cade's rebellion, but was subsequently pardoned. The Post Office is first mentioned in a deed of 1453 when it was granted by Ann Chaloner to William Hunt, another pardoned rebel. In 1517 it was bought by Sir Thomas Boleyn, father of Ann Boleyn, and the owner of Hever Castle. After later becoming the property of the Seyliard family, it eventually passed to the Streatfeild family in 1700.

The beautiful house with the timbered porch was built circa 1550, and was owned by the Beecher family in 1575. The front room is panelled and has carved, over the fireplace, the initials "G.I.B." and the date 1638. This commemorates the marriage of George Beecher and Jane Elye which had taken place two years earlier in the parish church. The next house bears the date 1645, but was built long before then, and was originally the manor house of Chiddingstone Cobham. In 1572 it was owned by Henry Streatfeild, but passed through Benjamin Wakelyn to Ann Woodgate, and this is when the initials "A.W." and the date were put in the plaster work over the entrance. Subsequently, in 1739, the Streatfeild family re-purchased the house.

The earliest reference to what is now the Castle Inn occurs in 1666, when John Ashdown of Hever sold the property to Thos. Wakelyn; at that time it was called Rock House. In 1712, Thos. Weller, a tailor, bought the property, and in 1730 it was turned into an Inn, called The Five Bells. Until a few years ago there was a butcher's shop by the side of the Castle Inn, and this had been such for some 200 years. In recent times it has been an antique shop, and now, in 2002, is a "cyber café" for the village school.

Until 1816 there stood in the road by the church gate a "little house", and

it is so described in the Will of Richard Streatfeild, the iron-master. He left the house for one of the poor of Chiddingstone to "dwell in for ever"; the rent to be charged was six shillings and eight pence (34p) a year, and was to be used for the maintenance and repair of the church clock. Modern road requirements have left no trace of his "little house by the church gate".

Originally the main road went straight on past the Castle Inn, through where the fine wrought iron gates now are, and past the castle, or High Street House as it was then. When the Streatfeild who "Gothicised" the house started work however, he did not like the thought of the road still going past his house, so he diverted it to the present route, demolishing several houses and creating the lake. Before the road was diverted the town well stood opposite the entrance to the Castle Inn, and the village stocks were at the west end of the churchyard.

In 1833 the government made a grant of £20,000 in total towards the erection of schools in Great Britain, and Chiddingstone school was one of twenty-four built in Kent between that date and 1840. The land for the building was given by the Streatfeild family.

Behind the school, and reached by a pathway alongside the rectory garden, is the Chiding Stone, about which have sprung many legends. However, it is nothing more romantic than a natural outcrop of natural sandstone which has received the attention of local carvers over the years.

THE CHURCH

It is not known if the church was originally dedicated to St. Mary, but it was certainly so in 1486 when mentioned in the Will of John Wood, Rector. The church is an attractive building, constructed mainly from local sandstone, lemon and brown in colour.

It may be either the third or fourth church on this site, although there is no structural evidence of a Saxon or Norman church. There is written evidence of a Saxon foundation however in the "Domesday of the Monks" (1086) kept at Canterbury. In it is recorded that Bishop Odo in 1072 was made to give up the church to the Archbishop, as it had been held unjustly by Earl Godwin in the time of Edward the Confessor (died 1066).

Domesday Book has nothing to say directly about Chiddingstone, but this is only because most of the land hereabouts was held by the manors of Sundridge and Dartford. Various "denns" held by them can be identified with places in Chiddingstone; a "denn" can be translated as a woodland swine pasture, and several local place names still have this ending (e.g. Frienden, Somerden). In Textus Roffensis (1115) it is recorded that the church was paying nine pence (4p) chrim fee to Rochester. This was for the chrim oil used in the Sacraments which was collected at Easter from the cathedral at Rochester.

The earliest identifiable masonry is found in the random rubble facing to the exterior of the east wall of the Chancel where can be seen what are presumably the remains of 13th century Early English triple lancet windows. On the inside of this wall the extra thickness of the walling attached to the responds is possibly part of the Early English Chancel. Two pieces of walling projecting from the west into the Nave may indicate the limit of the earlier Nave. It is possible that this early church plan may have consisted of a Nave and Chancel without aisles.

EARLY HISTORY

The plan of the church as it appears today is basically of the 14th century, probably the first quarter. It is likely that this was when the walls of the earlier church would have been removed and replaced with arcades and aisles North and South. As evidence of this we can still see the early 14th century windows at the western end of each aisle, and the East window of the South aisle. The Chancel window is also of this period, and probably replaced the 13th century triple lancets.

Although rather early for such a conversion, it is possible that during this extensive rebuilding the Chancel arch was removed and the sides of the Chancel pierced with arches to open into flanking Chapels. The scroll mouldings of the abaci of the capitals of the arcade, and the roll mouldings of the bases are typical of the 14th century Decorated style.

The fine Perpendicular style West tower was built in the 15th century. It has a stair turret running its full height, and is capped with four octagonal crocketed pinnacles. An interesting feature is the collection of stone faces around the string course near to the top of the tower. One is double-headed; another has two noses, two mouths and three eyes, and several are putting their tongues out in a derisory manner towards the village and its inhabitants.

Also dating from the 15th century are the windows in the side wall of the North aisle; probably similar windows were also inserted in the wall of the South aisle. The aisle was rebuilt, however, after a fire in 1624.

SIDE CHAPELS

The Bore Place Chapel at the eastern end of the North aisle (where the organ is situated) was originally built at the same time as the aisle, and probably looked like the present east end of the South aisle. In 1488 John Alfeigh requested in his Will that he be buried "afore the aulter ther of Seynt Kateryne by Isabell late my wife". The dedication of the Altar in the Chapel at the eastern end of the South aisle may have been to St. John the Baptist, as this is mentioned in the Will of John Asshedow who also died in 1488. However, a list of inhabitants entitled to seats, copied in 1736 from an original of 1571, refers to "the long seat in the South Angle sometime called St. Edwards Chapell".

In 1516, Sir Robert Read of Bore Place, in the north of the parish, enlarged the Chapel to its present size, substituting a flat roof, and the following year founded a chantry. Commencing in 1517 the names of four chantry priests are to be found in the records of Rochester Cathedral. They would have said Masses daily for the soul of the founder and for members of his family, either for a fixed term or "in perpetuity". The period of time would have depended upon the terms of the foundation and the amount of money left for the maintenance of the priests. In 1547 came the Act of Suppression and this, together with all other chantries, was extinguished. The two image brackets on the eastern wall of the Chapel, on either side of the typical late Perpendicular window, are contemporary with the Chapel.

Adjoining the Bore Place Chapel is a doorway which leads to the rood stair turret. The medieval rood screen almost certainly went right across the aisles and Nave (as may still be seen at Shoreham, Kent). The entrance to the rood loft still exists inside the stair turret, but inside the church, it is hidden behind the 18th century monument to John Woodgate of Somerhill, near Tonbridge.

FIRE DEVASTATION AND RECONSTRUCTION

On July 17th 1624, the church was struck by lightning and caught fire. The damage was so extensive that it was not until 1629 that repairs were sufficiently completed for the Bishop to reconsecrate the church. At least £649 was spent on the rebuilding (equivalent to approximately £250,000 in 2002), most of which was raised by local taxation and "briefs". A brief was a royal mandate for collections in parish churches towards deserving causes, and for the Chiddingstone rebuilding, money was received from London, Oxford and many Kent parishes. The work then done has caused problems in dating various features of the church, as obviously attempts were made to make it match earlier work. Some authorities consider the porch to be architecturally the most interesting feature of the church. It is a remarkable combination of Gothic and Renaissance styles.

Following the Reformation in the 1530's little church building had been undertaken, and when the masons came to build the new porch they did so in a manner which used the old and new styles.

The arch at the entrance is semi-circular with a keystone and capitals to the jambs, all of which are in the Classical or Renaissance style. They are contained beneath a square moulded label in the Perpendicular style. The spandrels of the church are also Classic in style, but with the windows each side of the porch are in the Gothic tradition. The gabled cross is trefoiled at the extremities, and is of the same date as the porch. The sundial, an early example, is dated 1626. Other examples of this mixture in styles both Gothic and Classic are to be found in the porch at Ashurst church, and in the chapel and porch at Groombridge. These places are but a few miles distant, and the work of approximately the same date, and it is interesting to conjecture that the same master mason, William Holis, may have been responsible for all three works.

The south wall of the South aisle seems to be of one build with the porch, indicating a complete reconstruction following the fire. Parish accounts of this period include the cost of 80 loads of stone from Tyhurst and 180 loads from the "new quarry"; also several loads of ashlar. The Priests door at the eastern end of the South aisle bears the initials of the Churchwardens in office during the rebuilding, (Richard Hollamby and William Woodgate, 1627), but is medieval in character. It may be the original door, salvaged after the fire, or an exact copy. The main doorway into the church is 14th century, and it is possible that the porch was

rebuilt on the foundations of an earlier feature. The king-post roof must also have been entirely rebuilt following the fire, and was done so in traditional manner. Originally the nave roof had been much higher, and the weather course of the earlier roof may still be seen on the outside wall of the tower. Beneath it are the fire marked stones of the earlier church.

ASSESSMENT OF RECONSTRUCTION

The windows of the South aisle match those of the North aisle, and again; they may have been salvaged from the fire or be copies of the originals. They have evidently not been put back into their original positions, for if you take the probable line of the rood screen as being just in front of the modern screen, you will see that it would have terminated in the middle of a window, which can hardly be the same as the original arrangement. The question of how much was rebuilt becomes particularly difficult when dealing with the nave arcade. The junction of the arches with the pillar capitals is awkward, and the capitals themselves seem overlarge for the comparatively slender arches and thin walling above them. It is likely that everything above the capitals was rebuilt in the 17th century and this would explain the uniformity of the walling above the arcade, which shows no sign of disturbance or renewal. At the same time, if the pillars are the originals of the 14th century it could be expected that they would show some signs of damage by fire. The alternative theory is that the whole of the aisle, nave and chancel were entirely rebuilt in conformity with the original 14th century church, and that this is when the chancel arch was removed, making nave and chancel one. To accept this theory is to believe that the main body of the church as seen today is a rebuilt 17th century version of the 14th century building, even the Decorated mouldings to the pillars being copied, but in view of the Classic details used on the porch it seems unlikely that this was the case.

The churchwardens accounts support the theory that the entire South aisle was rebuilt, but that the North aisle was intact after the fire, or at least the outside wall and windows remained. Anthony Wood, the blacksmith, was paid, for mending "of ye old yron barrs" in the windows of the North aisle and also for some "new yron barrs" there. The cost of both of these items was around £1 in the money of 1627, but he was then paid over £3 for irons for the windows in the South aisle, indicating that little, if anything, had been salvaged from them.

LATER ALTERATIONS

The plan of the church has remained unchanged since 1629 although the internal arrangements have altered. On the South arcade pillar nearest to the main door hangs a water colour dated 1792. This shows the roof boarded and plastered (for warmth), a tablet with the Ten Commandments behind the altar, and the font and pulpit in different positions. There were two restorations in the Victorian era, fortunately neither of them too drastic. The second was in 1898, and was preceded by a discussion as to whether the bodies in the church should be re-interred in the churchyard. The present reredos was erected in 1866, but a plan of the same date drawn up by G.E. Street to put in entirely new seating for some 400, and for an elaborate screen to divide the chancel from the nave was fortunately not proceeded with.

FONT

The Font, made by the master mason, William Holis, cost £3-10s in 1628. Of sandstone, with an oak cover, it has been described by V.J. Torr as the best production of its period in Kent. The arcaded panels of the cover resemble that on contemporary pulpits, and as a dated piece of craftsmanship it is a useful guide to similar undated work. The bold cresting masks the spring of the eight ogeed and crocketed brackets which engage with a central shaft bearing a large ball finial. During the re-furbishing of 1662 the font was scoured and repaired which certainly reflects neglect, if not worse, during the Cromwellian period.

THE PULPIT

The pulpit dates from the same period, with carving in a similar manner to the font cover. The book rest is supported by the charming head of a cherub. In the water colour of 1792, mentioned earlier, the pulpit is shown positioned on the opposite pillar, together with a sounding board above. The marks where the brackets were attached to the pillar may still be seen, but unfortunately the sounding board itself has disappeared. Records for the period state that the pulpit cost four pounds (£4) of which two pounds two shillings (£2.10p) was collected by Mr. Nevett and his friends. An earlier pulpit in 1579 had cost one pound, six shillings and ten pence (£1.34p)

EAST END

The altar rails may in part date from the restoration of 1624-9, but a careful examination, together with evidence from the parish accounts, indicates that they are not in their original state nor of one date. In 1662, just two years after the restoration of Charles II to the throne, we find a considerable refurbishing of the church being undertaken. Part of this work involved payment for "turning of the poles about the communion table", cleaning the frame about the communion table and six shillings and eight pence (33p) to Edward Wickenden for "setting up the rayles about the communion tables". It is likely that during the Cromwellian period the altar rails were taken down and stored to prevent their destruction at a time when church furnishings generally were being destroyed. When the time came for re-erection it was found necessary to replace the balustrading, hence the payment for "turning of the poles". However, a further complication arises from the accounts of 1720 when payment is made of one pound, four shillings (£1.20p) for turning balustrades; timber, boards and balustrades for the communion rails costing a further five pounds, fifteen shillings and two pence (£5.76p). It is now almost impossible to state with certainty exactly what survives from each period.

The board with the Ten Commandments shown behind the altar in the 1792 water colour may date from 1720 as a painter was paid one pound, two shillings (£1.10p) for an altar piece, and five shillings (25p) for the King's Arms. Chapman the carpenter also received nineteen pounds, eighteen shillings (£19.90p) for a gallery, all trace of which has gone.

The altar tomb dates from 1650 and commemorates Frances, daughter of John Reeve of London and her two husbands, Thos Streatfeild of Shoreham and John Seyliard of Brasted. It is in freestone with a top of black Belgian marble.

THE CHAPEL

The chapel/meeting room at the base of the tower was built in 1978 to meet the need for a smaller, more easily heated, area within the church. The door and portion of screen are the original medieval ones which have been moved forward ten feet from their original position.

The chapel was dedicated in May 1979 - 350 years after the restored church was re-dedicated following the 1624 fire. This room is now in regular use for meetings and choir practices and for all early morning communion services during the winter months.

VINEGAR BIBLE

The bible on display in the glass case is one of the few surviving "vinegar" bibles. The left hand page heading should, of course, read "the parable of the vineyard". This particular volume served as a lectern bible for 100 years until replaced in 1860.

BRASSES AND GRAVES

There are three fairly late brasses in the church. Two are in the Nave, one to Richard Streatfeild of Cransted (1584) and the other to William Birsty, with a coat of arms (1637). The third is in the floor of the Chancel and commemorates Margaret Waters who died in 1638.

The iron grave slabs to be found in the floor of the South aisle and, the Nave are of interest, being products of a time when iron making was an important industry in the Weald. The slab in the Nave is one of the earliest known, dating from 1601, and it is to Richard Streatfeild, an iron-master.

HATCHMENTS

One of the finest collections of hatchments in Kent are to be found hanging in the South aisle. After the restoration of Charles II it became fashionable in this country, following the continental custom, that on the death of a member of the family entitled to bear a coat of arms, these arms would be painted on a board of wood or canvas and carried at the funeral. Afterwards the hatchment was hung outside the deceased's residence for a period of up to one year, and then placed in the church. The earliest hatchment at Chiddingstone dates from 1627, and the latest was painted in 1852 for Henry Streatfeild. A key to the hatchments will be found hanging on the western-most pillar of the South arcade. They are rarely, if ever, used today, although at Bilsington in Kent there is one which was carried at the funeral of Lord Luxmoor in 1945.

MASONS MARKS

Several masons marks are to be found in the church; these were the identifying marks used by the masons who built the church. There is one medieval mark immediately below the right hand image bracket on the east wall of the Bore Place Chapel. Other marks appear on the base of the eastern-most pillar of the North chapel, and at the base of the tower at the western end of the North aisle. Further marks are to be found on the porch walls, and on the buttresses at the east end of the church, which may indicate that they date from 1625/9.

CHANDELIER

The magnificent brass chandelier was given by Edward Tenison to the church in 1726. At the same time, he gave a similar one to Sundridge, which living he held for some time in plurality with Chiddingstone.

STAINED GLASS

The only piece of old glass remaining is in the centre of the East window in the side wall of the Bore Place Chapel. Tradition has it that the rebuilding of the church in the early part of the 14th century was largely at the expense of Sir Bartholomew Burgherst, and that the stained glass windows glowed with his coat of arms. If it was so, nothing now remains. The present stained glass in the East window of the Bore Place Chapel was begun in 1871 at the instance of some gentlemen of Cambridge University. The subject was the Last Supper, and the window was to commemorate Sir Robert Read, founder of the chapel, but the money raised proved insufficient to finish the project. The water colour of 1792 shows the window behind the High Altar full of armorial glass. Rubert Gunnis states that on the marriage of Henry Streatfeild and Anne Sidney in 1752 a very fine collection of armorial glass was brought from Penshurst and placed in the East window at Chiddingstone. When the Henry Streatfeild of the time died in 1852 the glass was then returned to Lord De L'Isle and Dudley at Penshurst and remained in the house until after the 1939-45 war. It was then placed in the West window of Penshurst church, though during the interim much had been lost or destroyed.

A stained glass window panel, set into the South window near the font, was dedicated on the 2nd January 2000 to celebrate the Millennium. "A Global Sun and Moon with Burst of Light and Creation". by Nicola Kantorowicz.

BELLS

The tower contains a peel of eight bells, the earliest of which dates from 1753. The first records we have of bells comes from the parish records of 1566 when it is stated that in the church are "a pair of organs, a clock, in the steeple four bells". After the fire of 1624 the bells were recast by John Willnor. During the 18th century the bell ringers were paid for ringing upon such occasions as Gun powder Treason Day (November 5th), Coronation Day, Restoration Day and the Royal birthdays. Fees ranged from two shillings and sixpence (12p) to five shillings (25p). The parish clerk, who was responsible for keeping many of the records, received £4 a year for his wage. He was paid an additional £1 a year for ringing the 'great bell at 8 o'clock in the evening from Michaelmas day (29th September) to Lady day (25th March), and at 5 o'clock in the morning from 18th October until Candlemas (2nd February). The evening, or curfew bell, was rung until after the first world war;

CHURCHYARD

In the churchyard is a vault of the Streatfeild family. The entrance is by way of a wooden door set in a small square building of the 18th century which has been described as being not unlike a gazebo. At the top of a long flight of steps is a bust of the founder, Henry Streatfeild. He designed and built the vault in 1736. At the bottom, on either side of the passageway, are great slabs built on brickwork, and on these lie fifteen or sixteen coffins, all made from trees grown on the Streatfeild estate. Their remarkable preservation is probably due to the fact that a false altar tomb to the north of the entrance has a grating, which allows a current of air to pass through the vault.

INSCRIPTIONS ON THE BELLS

Bell	Foundry	Date	Inscriptions
Treble	R. Patrick	1784	Henry Streatfeild Esq.
2	T. Mears	1838	
3	T. Mears	1813	Recast 1893
4	T. Mears	1838	
5	R. Patrick	1784	Rev. Sackville Stevens Bale, Rector, William Seal, Richard Price, Churchwardens
6	Lester & Pack	1753	Recast 1893 Streatfeild manest nomen J. T. Pearce Rector, C. Stanley Williams and James Hale, Churchwardens
7	Lester & Pack	1753	W.W. Ward, Rector. Bernard Hyde and John Woodgate Sen., Churchwardens
Tenor	Mears & Stainback, founders, London		H.D. Streatfeild and Abraham Hale Churchwardens. Laudo Deumberam, Plebem voco. Congrego clerum, Defunctor ploro. Pestemtago. Festa decoro, R. Catlin facit 1750. Redintegrate 1867

All the bells were removed and sent to the Whitechapel Bell Foundry to be retuned in 1991, the No.6 bell was recast and inscribed "To the memory of Philip Everest and Jane Streatfeild," the late Churchwardens of this Parish.

Revised February 2002

HATCHMENTS IN ST. MARY'S CHIDDINGSTONE

A hatchment is a painting of a coat of arms on a diamond shaped board. They came into vogue in England during the 17th century and reached their height in the 18th century. Hatchments originated in the carrying of ceremonial shields and helmets (afterwards left in the church) at funerals in the 16th century, and in the earlier practice of setting up in the church the actual shield of a deceased person. These elaborate ceremonies came to an end towards the end of the 16th century and were replaced by hatchments. The word "hatchment" is a corruption of the term "achievement" which is the heraldic term implying an emblazonment of the full armorial bearings of any person.

On the death of a person of any social position, a hatchment of his or her arms was set up over the entrance to his house, which remained there for twelve months, during the period of mourning. It was then taken down from the house and set up in the church. There does not appear to have been any obligation upon a clergyman either to permit their erection, or to allow them to remain for any specified period. In some churches they have been discarded and relegated to the vestry or to the rubbish heap, whilst in others they have been carefully preserved. Here in St. Mary's there are nine hatchments, all in the South Aisle, hanging high above the arches and windows. On the west wall of the church near the nave is a framed illustration showing 12 hatchments, which used to hang on the walls but three seem to have been lost.

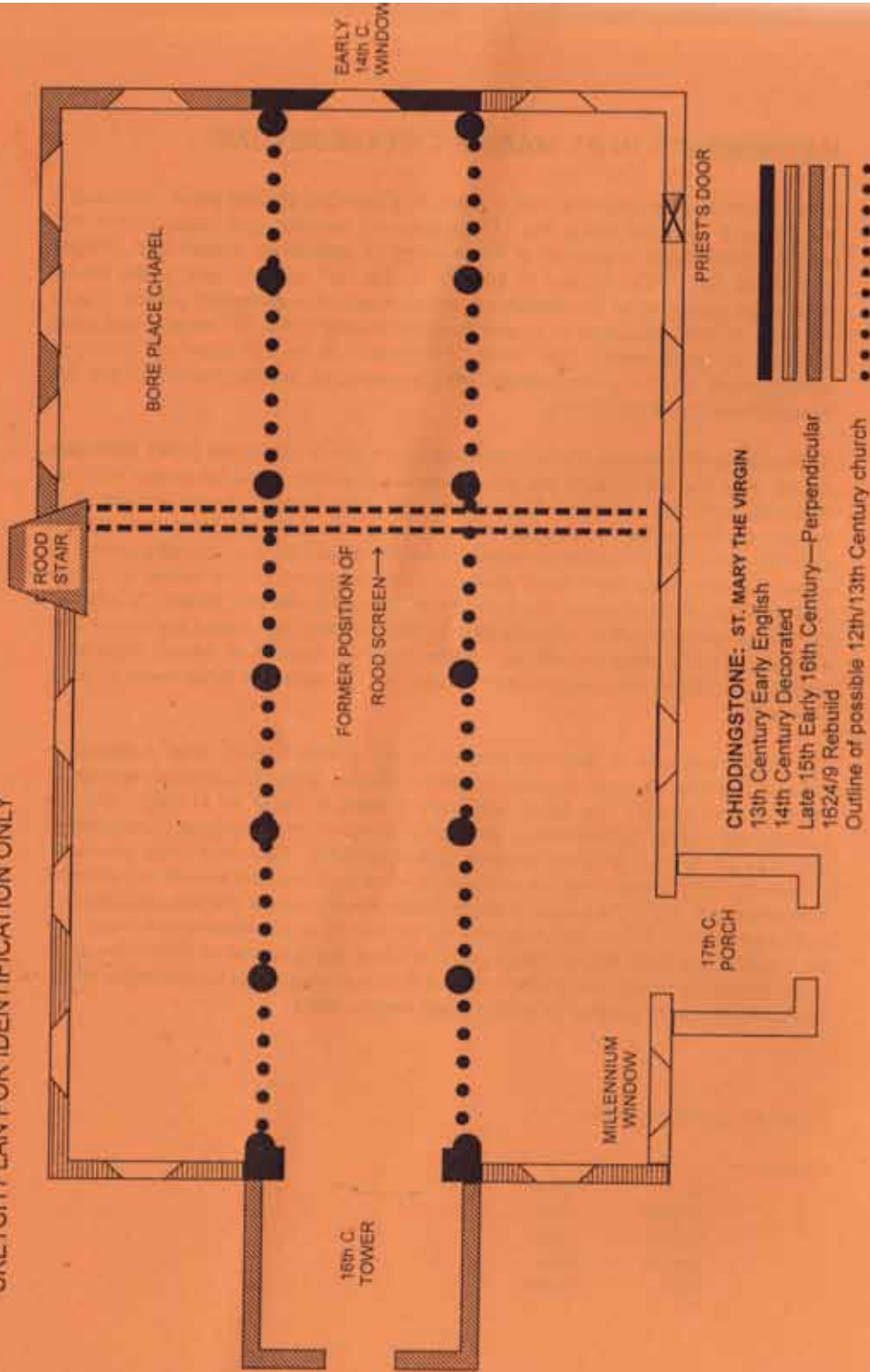
The hatchment was a diamond-shaped frame, painted black, and enclosing a painting in oils upon wood, or more frequently canvas, of the full armorial bearings of the deceased person. The frame was usually about five feet six in height and the rules for the display of arms upon hatchments afford an interesting set of regulations that may be applied to other heraldic emblazonments. The chief point, however, concerning a hatchment, and also the one in which it differs from an ordinary armorial emblazonment, lay in the colour of the groundwork upon which the armorial bearings were painted. For an unmarried person the whole of the groundwork was black, but for a husband or wife half was black and half white, the groundwork behind the arms of the deceased person being black, and of the surviving partner in matrimony white. The background for a widow or widower was entirely black.

Notes on Heraldic symbols

Colours :

Or	Gold
Argent	Silver
Gules	Red
Azure	Blue
Vert	Green

SKETCH PLAN FOR IDENTIFICATION ONLY



16th C.
TOWER

FORMER POSITION OF
ROOD SCREEN →

EARLY
14th C.
WINDOW

BORE PLACE CHAPEL

ROOD
STAIR

MILLENNIUM
WINDOW

17th C.
PORCH

PRIESTS DOOR

CHIDDINGSTONE: ST. MARY THE VIRGIN

13th Century Early English

14th Century Decorated

Late 15th Early 16th Century—Perpendicular

1624/9 Rebuild

Outline of possible 12th/13th Century church

