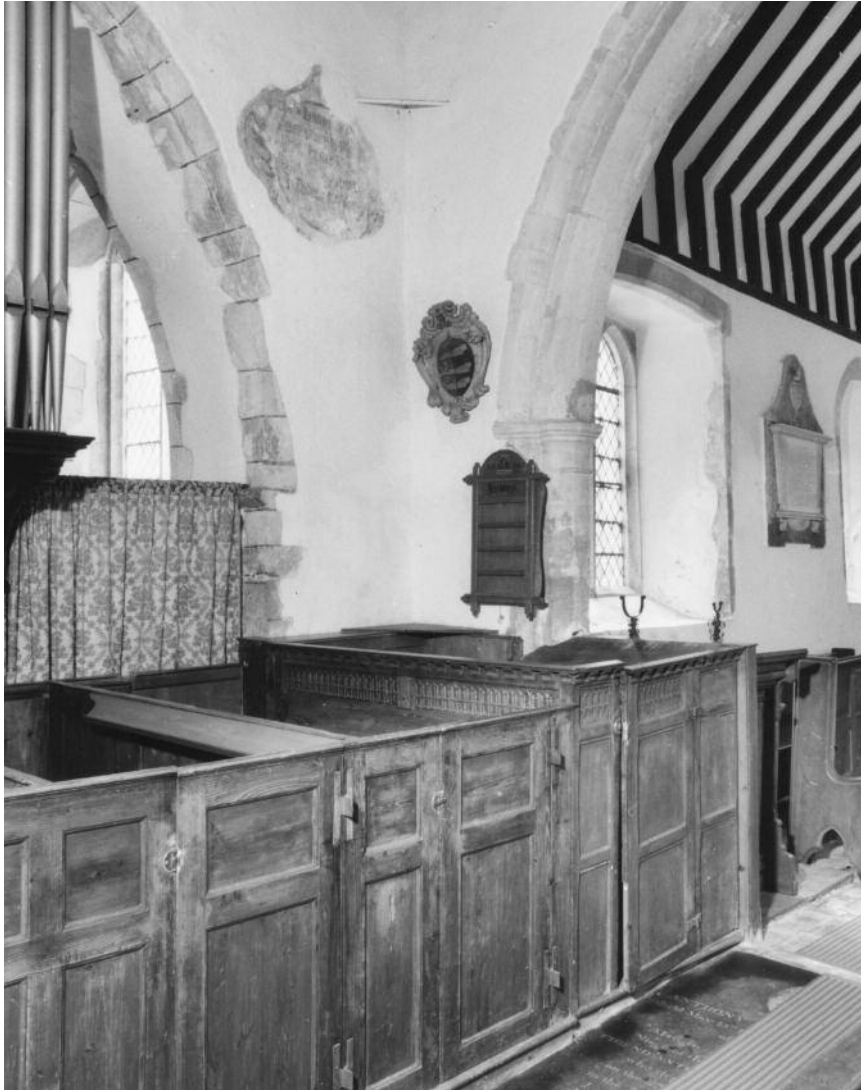




ST MARY'S CHURCH

FORDWICH, KENT



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

89 Fleet Street · London EC4Y 1DH

Registered Charity No. 258612

PRICE: £1.50





THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO
ST MARY'S CHURCH
FORDWICH, KENT

Many years ago Christians built and set apart this place for prayer. They made their church beautiful with their skill and craftsmanship. Here they have met for worship, for children to be baptised, for couples to be married and for the dead to be brought for burial. If you have time, enjoy the history, the peace and the holiness here. Please use the prayer card and, if you like it, you are welcome to take a folded copy with you.

Although services are no longer regularly held here, this church remains consecrated; inspiring, teaching and ministering through its beauty and atmosphere. It is one of more than 300 churches throughout England cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust. The Trust was created in 1969 and was, until 1994, known as the Redundant Churches Fund. Its object is to ensure that all these churches are kept in repair and cared for, in the interests of the Church and Nation, for present and future generations.

Please help us to care for this church. There is a box for donations or, if you prefer to send a gift, it will be gratefully received at the Trust's headquarters at 89 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1DH (Registered Charity No. 258612).

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ST MARY'S CHURCH

FORDWICH, KENT

by ROY TRICKER

People have lived at Fordwich – the ‘inhabited place by the ford’ – since at least 675AD, when it was first recorded. Now it claims to be England's smallest town and, with a population of less than 300, it is tiny in comparison with most modern towns.

It was however a ‘burgh’ in Saxon times and King Henry II granted it the status of a borough, which it enjoyed until 1886. It also served as the port for Canterbury and, as a ‘member’ or limb of the Cinque Port of Sandwich, it still takes part in the annual ceremony of paying its Ship Money. It was governed by a mayor and a corporation of 12 Jurats, who were also its Justices of the Peace. Accounts record payments in 1424 and 1425 for the shipment of over 400 tons of stone from Sandwich to Fordwich to build the south-west tower of Canterbury Cathedral.

Fordwich still has the feel of a little town of centuries past, with its quaint, narrow streets, its variety of old houses and cottages of different shapes, ages and sizes and its Town Hall, which comprises a 16th century brick and timber chamber above a stone undercroft. Nearby are the *Fordwich Arms* and the River Stour, which forms the northern boundary of the parish.

In the course of over 900 years, people from many periods have left their mark upon St Mary's. Much has been done over the past 150 years to maintain and beautify it. A scheme of 1852 to reorder the interior, replacing the box pews with open benches, thankfully did not take place, although about 1855 the tower and spire were restored by Mr James Moys to the designs of R C Hussey (the architect of St Peter's Folkestone and the restorer of 15 or more Kent churches).

The river divides Fordwich from the much larger village of Sturry. Both villages geographically form one community, their two churches being less than half a mile apart. St Nicholas' Sturry has now become the parish church for both places and St Mary's Fordwich was vested in The Churches

Conservation Trust in 1996, to enable it to continue its ministry in retirement as an historic, beautiful and sacred place. In 1997, extensive repairs were carried out under the direction of the church's architect, Mr John Sell.

EXTERIOR

St Mary's is set quietly back from the crossroads and the tiny square. Only its shingled spire may be seen from any distance because the church is almost completely hidden by the trees which surround it and which shade the attractive and peaceful **churchyard**. To the south of the church are several interesting 18th century gravestones, displaying fine carvings of the period. A group to the west of the porch includes the headstones for Henry Brown (a Jurat, who died in 1720) and his wife, Elizabeth, who died in 1706, which has a skull and crossbones, symbolising our human mortality.

The church itself presents a medley of mellow colours and textures in its **building materials**. Blocks of stone of various hues may be seen, including Kentish Ragstone. There are also flints from the fields, traces of render in places and bricks and tiles of differing ages.

The very simple western tower is unbuttressed and its only window is a single west window. It does however have its own 15th century entrance on the south side. This is set beneath traces of a larger blocked arch, which is believed to date from the 11th century and before the Norman Conquest. The tower is crowned by a shingled chamfered, or splay-foot, spire, the upper section of which is lined with lead. Small dormer openings on the spire's four cardinal faces let out the sound of the bells.

The **north aisle**, which, in typical Kentish fashion, has its own gabled roof, was probably added about 1200. If so, the two tiny early Norman slit-windows (one at the west end and the other in the north wall), may have been reused from the former north nave wall. Their semicircular heads are made out of single blocks of stone, indicating 11th century work. The aisle's three-light east window is probably that for which John Ancell left money in 1503. The gable above it has been restored with 16th or 17th century bricks. In the north wall are a simple entrance and a pair of distinctive two-light, square-headed windows. Three more of these windows light the south wall of the **nave**. They date probably from c.1400 and the large quatrefoils above each light make their design unusual, although identical windows may be seen at St Mildred's church Canterbury.



St Mary's from the south-east, in its tree-shaded churchyard (CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

The **chancel** windows have been much renewed; the southern ones in 1997. Only the north-west window shows its original stonework, but the windows retain their original shapes, indicating a double 15th century window and a single 13th century window on each side. The southern two-light window may be the one given by the Rector, Hugo Egirle, in 1474, which was to be glazed with figures of saints. The 'Y' tracery in the east window is of the 19th century, but the hood-mould which frames its arch is original 14th century work and rests upon two fine carved faces, one a mitred bishop or abbot. Beside the south wall is the low tomb chest of Walter (1631) and Stephen Bigg (1646). As is recorded inside the church, these were two generous people and clearly their generosity extended to providing, on their tomb, a place for people to sit.

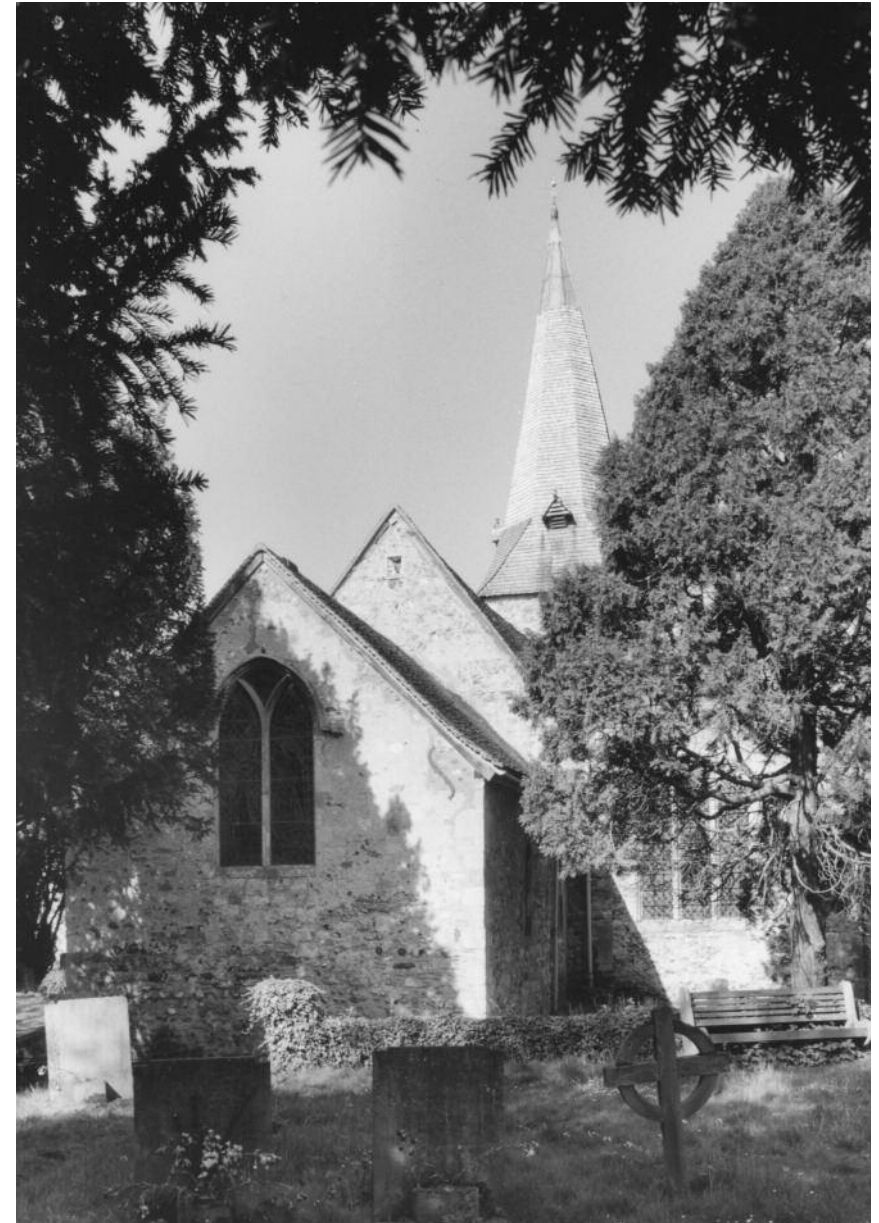
The **south porch**, now rather humble and domestic-looking, may have originally been one of Kent's lovely 14th century open timber porches, but the years have taken their toll and the timbers have been filled in with bricks from different periods. The plastered south face has an early 19th century wooden Gothic entrance arch. Some mediaeval timbers are visible inside, particularly the gnarled tie-beam near the 14th century south doorway. The south door itself is also mediaeval.

INTERIOR

St Mary's is memorable for its mellow and largely unspoilt interior, containing workmanship from several periods of history, reflecting the different Christian traditions of those who have used it over the years.

The **floors** are mostly of 18th century square pammments, although there are a few smaller and possibly mediaeval tiles in the north chapel. The **roofs** contain mediaeval timberwork. The nave has a plaster ceiling but its roof is supported by crown posts which rise from tie-beams. Tie-beams also span the north aisle and 14th century timbers frame its roof. Some ancient timbers are visible in the restored chancel roof, which is plastered between its rafters.

The **arcade** – or rather the three arched openings which pierce the north nave wall – are very simple indeed. Their only embellishments are the stone imposts at the springing of the crude arches, which indicate that they cannot be much later than c.1200. By contrast, the **tower arch** is tall, slender and elegant craftsmanship of the 14th century. At its base is a simple



Roof gables and shingled spire, framed by trees

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

and almost domestic-looking **tower screen** of the 18th century, which possibly incorporates earlier woodwork. Over its door, a small rectangular recess contains the **bread shelves** for the loaves provided by Thomas Bigg's will to be distributed weekly to the poor. This and other generous bequests are recorded on the **benefaction boards** which flank the tower arch, and were inscribed in 1826. The southern board describes benefactions by Walter Bigg (1631) of land, the income from which was to be given for the 'relief of poor and aged people in the parish' and by Stephen Bigg (1646) of 20 shillings yearly for 'six poor householders in Fordwich and six in Sturry from land rent', the remainder to be used to 'put out poor boys and girls of each parish' as apprentices. The northern board records gifts of bread by Thomas Bigg (1669) and Sarah Edwards (1819). Trustees of the Fordwich United Charities still distribute money to fulfil these bequests.

Above the tower screen is the **balustrade** of the ringers' gallery, from which a crude **ladder**, of considerable age, with treads made out of triangular logs, rises to the bell chamber. The four **bells** were cast by Joseph Hatch of Ulcombe – the second bell in 1624 and the others in 1633.

The church is furnished with **box pews** of differing sizes and dates. Many of these appear to be 18th century. Before the days of collections and planned giving, these could be rented by individuals and families for their sole use, thus providing the church with a little regular income. The large south-west pew, traditionally known as the **singers' pew**, contains 17th century panelling in its north and west sides, whilst the woodwork of the pew directly opposite may post-date it by about 150 years. The eastern box pew on the north side of the nave is the **corporation pew**, upon which are fixed the wrought iron supports for the Corporation's silver-gilt mace, made in 1720. The mace is now in safe keeping elsewhere but, together with another mace of 1665, it returns to the church each year on Mayor's Sunday. On the east wall, above the pew, is a cartouche plaque displaying the **arms of the Cinque Ports**. On the north wall nearby is a framed and **painted text** from the First Epistle of Peter, probably placed here during the 17th century. It was the custom after the Reformation to replace the 'superstitious' mediaeval wall paintings with godly and edifying texts from Scripture. The 19th century **pulpit** contrasts with the box pews, but earlier woodwork, maybe from its predecessor, has been reused in its base.

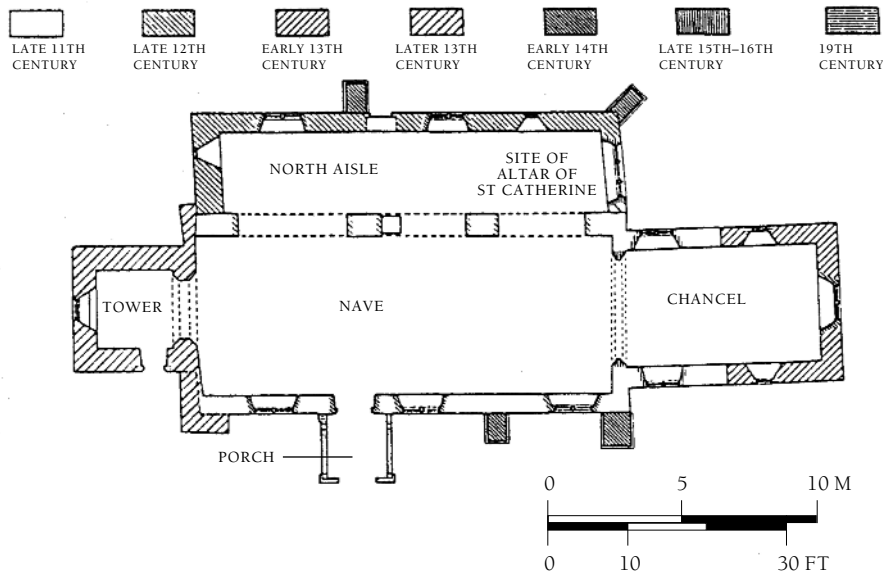


Plaster tympanum of 1688, with the royal arms and the Ten Commandments

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

In the south wall, behind the pulpit, is a shallow cinquefoil-headed arch containing a **piscina** drain, into which was poured the water from the washing of the priest's hands at the Eucharist, showing that there was once an altar nearby – one of two which flanked the chancel arch – in front of the former rood-screen. The **chancel arch** is 14th century and in its stonework can be seen where the beam fitted which probably supported the great Rood – the figures of Christ crucified, with his Mother and St John at the foot of the cross – providing the focal point of church interiors in mediaeval times, but destroyed by the reformers in the mid-16th century. In 1688 the arch was filled with the plaster **tympanum** (later refixed above it), inscribed with the **Ten Commandments** and displaying the **royal arms** of King William III, reminding the people that the monarch was the temporal head of the Church of England, by law established.

In the south wall of the nave, near the entrance, is a recess for a **holy water stoup**, where people dipped their fingers in holy water and made the sign of the cross upon entering the church. The **almsbox**, fixed to a



Plan of St Mary The Virgin, Fordwich – reproduced from Archaeologia Cantiana, Vol. CXIV with the kind permission of Tim Tatton-Brown

box pew opposite, was carved out of an oak beam from Canterbury's ancient Guildhall to commemorate the Coronation in 1953.

On the wall nearby is a framed **roll of service**, asking prayers for those serving in His Majesty's Forces during World War 2. This is beautifully inscribed, as is also the **list of rectors** (from the year 1283) which hangs on the north aisle wall.

The aisle, with its **leaning walls**, contains much of interest. Just west of its small doorway is the mysterious **Fordwich stone**, showing fine stone carving by craftsmen of c. 1100, of interlaced Norman arches beneath scaly decorations, in a great block of oolitic limestone, about 5½ feet (1.7 m) long. It was removed from the west wall of the church to the churchyard in 1760, then Edward Hasted, the Kent historian, had it moved to Canterbury Cathedral where it stayed until 1877, when it was returned to Fordwich. It may have originally come from Canterbury and was traditionally known as St Augustine's tomb. It was almost certainly a shrine,

fashioned to resemble a dummy tomb, beneath which were placed the relics of a saint – maybe even those of St Augustine.

Above the doorway nearby hangs an **oil painting** – a copy of Van Dyck's Madonna and Child, painted and given by Alfred Palmer (1877–1951), of Manor House, Fordwich. He is commemorated on a wall plaque nearby, beneath which is a piece of carved stone, maybe from a window.

The **parish chest** of the 17th or 18th century has two locks and may have originally been in secular use, before being brought here for the storage of parish valuables and documents.

Many generations of Fordwich people will have begun their Christian lives by baptism in the **font**, which dates from the 12th century. Its massive square bowl of grey marble from Bethersden has five simple blank arches each side. The piece of metal in the northern central arch may have been part of the locking device which secured its former mediaeval lid or cover to prevent the baptismal water from being misappropriated. The present **cover** dates from the 17th century; it is square and has four radiating scrolls supporting a central baluster.



The 'Fordwich stone', exquisitely carved around 1100 (CHRISTOPHER DALTON)



17th century communion rails and 18th century altarpiece (with later pictures),
flanked by the Lord's Prayer and Apostles' Creed (CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

The eastern section of the north aisle, originally the Chapel of St Catherine and now the vestry, is entered through a panelled **screen**, once surmounted by a model ship, made and given by William Leighton and family in 1936 but stolen during recent years. The **crucifix** on the aisle's eastern window sill, and also a pair of candlesticks, were carved in wood and presented by a parishioner in 1933.

The small **organ** with a single manual, pedals and seven speaking stops came from St Martin's Church, Canterbury, and was brought here in 1908.

The present **choir stalls** were given by the Dean and Chapter in 1938, but the 17th century **communion rails** are still in place. Archbishop Laud in the 1630s ordered that altars should be provided with rails, so that dogs should not 'defile ye sanctuary'. In the 18th century the lower part of the sanctuary walls received their present **wainscot lining** and the wooden **altarpiece** (or reredos) was made and inscribed with the Ten

Commandments, flanked by the Lord's Prayer and Apostles' Creed. The Commandments however were subsequently replaced with the present three **Arundel prints**, with the Crucifixion central.

The east window contains a colourful scene of the Annunciation in **20th century stained glass**, by Martin Travers. Dramatically portrayed are the figures of the Archangel Gabriel and Our Lady, also God the Holy Spirit, with a ray of light extending downwards from the Alpha and Omega emblem of God the Father at the top. This window was made in memory of the Revd Richard Hitchcock, who was rector here from 1893 until his death in 1931. His predecessor, the Revd Edward Brailsford, who was Rector for 41 years, would certainly not have approved of this window. He was an extreme Protestant who, in 1873, wrote and published an open letter to the then Archbishop of Canterbury, entitled *Incipient Idolatry in the Church of England*, berating the vicar of Sturry for having a reredos erected in his church, with the 'highly objectionable representation' of Jesus on the cross, and his Mother and St John nearby. He was the first incumbent for many years to reside in the parish, although he did spend periods of time living elsewhere. His predecessor, the Revd Thomas Lloyd, was rector for 50 years and never lived here. These three priests served this parish for a total of 129 years.

The quatrefoils in the nave windows and the north-west window of the north aisle are rich in **mediaeval glass** of the late 14th century. One authority has suggested that the lower sections of these windows may not have contained saints or pictures, but patterned grisaille glass. The glass in the quatrefoils shows:

Nave, south-east. The Coronation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, but with renewed heads wrongly placed on the two figures. The eastern figure should be Our Lady and the western figure, with his hand raised in blessing, should be Our Lord.

Nave, south-central. The eastern quatrefoil shows the Blessed Virgin Mary with her child in her arms. Mary is seen again in the western quatrefoil, this time with her emblem – a lily. The latter was probably part of an Annunciation scene, with the Archangel Gabriel in the other quatrefoil, so it is likely that this glass has been moved around and is not in its original position.

Nave, south-west. St Mark and St Luke (probably with later faces), both carrying their gospels and with their emblems (a winged lion and a winged ox) beneath them. Presumably another window once showed St Matthew and St John. The lower sections of the window contain some of their mediæval grisaille glass.

North aisle, north-west. The western quatrefoil has the figure of St Margaret, with her spear through the dragon's mouth. She was a popular saint in mediæval times and her prayers were sought by and for women in childbirth. In the tiny central quatrefoil beneath is a bearded face.

MEMORIALS

On the walls and in the floors are memorials commemorating people who were once part of this church and community. Some of their inscriptions, recording the lives of past mayors, jurats, chief magistrates, clergy and others of this town are worth reading. The following are amongst the more interesting:

- On the wall above the font is a **rubbing of a brass inscription** to Anne Harris (d.1570), daughter of Valentine Norton and wife of Richard Harris, who was 'the Queenes Maisties Fruiterer'. The original was discovered near the east end of the north aisle in 1893.
- Beneath small movable sections of the sanctuary floorboards are two **brass plates** commemorating Catherine, wife of Valentine Norton, who died in 1610, aged 21. One has a delightful epitaph to this young lady, recording that 'One onely sonne she bore, at whose deare byrth, She chang'd her earthlye joyes to heavenly mirth'.
- In the central nave gangway is the **brass** of Aphra Hawkins, who died in 1605, also aged 21. Above the inscription is her effigy, standing upon a circular pedestal and dressed in beautiful period costume, with a ruff, French hood and simple shoes. Above her is her coat of arms.

These three ladies were all related, Aphra Hawkins was the niece of Anne Harris. Catherine Norton was not only the niece by marriage to Anne, but also sister-in-law to Aphra.

Three diamond-shaped **hatchments** hang on the nave walls. It was the custom for these framed coats of arms to be hung outside the home of the

deceased person for a period of time, before being permanently displayed in the parish church. These hatchments commemorate:

- Nave, north-east – Robert Darrell (1668).
- Nave, north-west – Valentine Norton (1650).
- Nave, south – Anthony Jennings (1830).

Anthony Jennings also has a **wall plaque** in his memory on the south wall of the nave. He was chief magistrate of Fordwich for 45 years. There are other memorial plaques on the walls, all of 19th and 20th century date.

Anthony is further commemorated, together with other members of his family and a host of 17th, 18th and 19th century Fordwich worthies, upon the many **ledger slabs** in the floors of the church. Some of these are partly hidden beneath pews, etc.; others have become very worn and difficult to read. They include the Revd John Nicholls (rector 1714–42) – a forthright Jacobite supporter, who was twice mayor of Fordwich and also Colonel Samuel Short, Lord of the Manor (d.1716), who secured Nicholls' suspension for a sermon which he preached upon the Accession of King George I. It is said that Colonel Short's ghost still walks by the church gate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer is grateful to Michael Beck for his help and advice and to the staff of Canterbury Cathedral Archives for the use of material in their care.

Front cover: The south side of the nave, with its unusual window tracery, and the south porch (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

Back cover: The south-east corner of the nave showing the corporation pew, with the Cinque Ports arms cartouche and the painted text on the walls above it (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

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Series 4 no. 91

January 1998