A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE PARISH OF

HACKINGTON alias ST STEPHEN'S NEAR CANTERBURY

BY REV P P SOMERVILLE, Rector, 1915

The following is a complete reproduction of a record made by Rev Philip P SOMERVILLE, Rector of St Stephen's from 1906 to 1926, and published by Gibbs and Sons, Palace Street, Canterbury, in 1915.

It has been necessary to insert paragraphs into the orginal text, as it was originally published in one continuous form.

(Marten Rogers 1995)

Preface: We have been asked to repeat our note on the "Lady Loretta" who is buried beneath the steps leading to the Sanctuary.

The Lady Loretta was the Countess of Leicester whose husband was killed when on the Crusade with Richard Coeur de Lion. When widowed, she came to St Stephen's and devoted herself to the Church. She lived somewhere close at hand and ministered to the pilgrims making their way to the shrine of Thomas a Becket. She lived a holy ministering life and when she died her body was laid to rest in the Chancel. Her sister, to whom she left her house and property, was the wife of Simon de Montfort, so that it is more than probable that this great man worshipped in our Church.

The name of our parish seems to mean the town or settlement among the hacks or thorn bushes, and here probably in the days of our British forefathers would stand a number of their wattle and daub huts. Possibly under one of the oak trees of the forest which in those days stretched from the Stour to the sea, the Druid priest observed the rites of his religion near to the spot where now our Church stands, rites which included the sacrifice of human beings, but which were chiefly the worship of the spirits of the wind, the streams, and such things of nature.

Across the river Stour and the marshes that boarded its banks was the town of Canterbury as we now call it, then but a collection of wattle and daub huts surrounded by a palisade and ditch. And it was to Canterbury and through Canterbury that the Roman legions passed in the earliest day of recorded history. There they built a town of brick or stone and thither later the first knowledge of the Gospel came, probably from the Christian soldiers, and as the years passed on, at least one Church arose, dedicated to St Pancras the boy saint; whether any Christian Church was built at Hackington we know not, but at any rate the people who lived here would become Christians, and take part in the worship of the Church.

But after about two hundred years of Roman rule the people of our country saw the Roman army marching to the sea, and found themselves left defenceless at the mercy of the pirate Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, who came over the seas in their longships, burnt the Churches of the British, and reduced them to slaves; if there was a church here in those days it would be burnt to the ground, the priest killed and the people made slaves, but still no doubt there would be some who held to the old faith, some who would gather together from time to time in the depth of the forest to worship the true God, and to partake of the Sacrament of His love.

This period lasted for more than a hundred years, till the time of Ethelbert, King of Kent, who had married Bertha, daughter of the King of what is now called France, who, being a Christian, was allowed to worship the true God at the ancient Church of St Martin, and here any Christians who were still found in Hackington would be able to take part in, or at least see, the worship of their Church. Soon too there came the news of the landing of Augustine and his monks in Thanet (AD 597) of their march to Canterbury, and at last the baptism of the King and his nobles into the Church of Christ.

Probably about this time the first Saxon church was built at Hackington. At first probably one of the monks from St Augustine's Abbey came and preached on Sunday, where formerly the heathen Saxon priest had worshipped Odin and Thor, he would erect a Cross of wood or stone and as the winter drew on a shelter over it. Then the people of the place would erect a building joined to it for themselves, probably of split tree trunks, and roofed with thatch, forming the nave of the Church, which they kept in repair, while the part erected by the priest was the chancel kept in repair by himself or his monastery.

Here for many years our Saxon forefathers worshipped, sometimes driven into the forest by the raiding Danes, sometimes seeing not only their own Church burnt, but the town and Churches of Canterbury, seeing the growth of the great abbeys of Christ Church and St Augustine's, hearing of the reforms of Alfred the King (871 AD) of St

Dunstan the Archbishop (960 AD), of the murder of Alphege, the Archbishop, by the Danes, till the year 1066 when the Normans came.

Probably even that event made little change in Hackington, for the Manor was held by the monks of Christchurch, and though those monks became more French or Norman, yet as we are told that the Church of Hackington of those days was but a poor wooden structure, probably the priest who served it would be a Saxon still. And so passed those stirring times when Church and King were at variance, when the Pope was always gaining more and more power, till matters were brought to a head, when the horror-struck inhabitants of Hackington heard of the murder of Becket the Archbishop by three of the King's Knights, in his own Cathedral, in December 1170.

And this murder of the Archbishop had, indirectly, an effect upon the story of our parish, for it seems that not only the King, who had to do penance at the place of his martyrdom, but the then Archbishop too, felt that the power of the monks of Christchurch had become too great, as the result of the veneration which was paid to the Cathedral, and Baldwin, the Archbishop, determined to build a great Church which should outrival the Cathedral in its beauty and power, which should be placed under the care of Secular Canons who were not monks, and who would obey his wishes and those of the King, and in order to do so this he seems to have exchanged some of his lands for the Manor of Hackington, or have bought from the monks the Manor without knowing what he intended to do. Then he collected huge quantities of of materials around the site of the old wooden Chuch, which was pulled down to make way for Baldwin's Cathedral, which was to be dedicated to St Stephen, the first Christian Martyr, and St Thomas, the last one.

The monks of Christchurch saw with dismay this work commencing, and at once took steps to stop it. They appealed to the Pope of Rome against the Archbishop and King, and the Pope issued an order forbidding the work, and after some years of delay, during which both sides did their best to persuade the Pope to adopt their point of view, Baldwin gave up his idea and went with King Richard to the Holy Land to fight against the Saracens; and the materials which had been collected for the great Church were removed to Lambeth, where they were used by the Archbishop to build a college for certain Clergy.

Meanwhile the remainder was used for finishing off the Church at Hackington, not as the grand Cathedral it was to have been, but as the modest Church we know now, for though much of our present Church is of later date than this, yet the lower part of the tower and the nave of the Church, with the two round arches leading into the transepts, probably date from this time.

Possibly the work was standing still for many years which would account for some of the windows and the south door having the rounded arch which marks the the Norman period of building, while some of the arches of the windows in the nave and the west door have pointed or Early English arches, which became the common type of architecture about this time. The chancel arch was probably round and the chancel itself not so long as it is now, the tower would have no buttresses and was probably higher.

In the chancel we are told were interred the remains of a certain Lady Lora, or Loretta, daughter of Lord Brews of Brember, Sussex, and wife of the Earl of Leicester, who, having left the world, lived for some years as a hermit or anchorite in a cell in the woods in this parish, and died in 1219.

But before that, Stephen Langton, the Archbishop, seems to have given the Manor of Hackington to his brother Simon Langton, Archdeacon of Canterbury, who built for himself a mansion in the field where now our Church Room stands, and he seems to have finished off the Church and enclosed the Churchyard, giving Langton Lodge in the parish of Sturry to help the maintenance of same. In the reign of Edward the third we are told that the King held a tournament or Joust at Hackington, probably while he was the guest of the then Archdeacon, who was always a person of great importance, and often related to the Archbishop. It was probably about this time that further alterations were made in our parish Church; the chancel arch was taken down, and the chancel was extended to its present length, and the beautiful side windows erected; probably too the transepts were made deeper, and the windows in the north transept built as they are now, the great east window was probably not there in those days, but a smaller one or perhaps two, together the two little windows on either side.

The tower too was strengthened by the addition of the present buttresses, made out of old material which had been used or intended to be used for some other purpose, for their ancient mouldings are still easily seen. This strengthening of towers was very general about this time, for it is on record that several of the towers of parish churches fell, some as the result of an earthquake which seems to have affected Kent, and some as the result of the hanging of bells in towers which were not able to bear the strain of the vibration caused by the ringing, probably at this time, or perhaps later, from the same cause the tower was made lower, and the steeple removed, as the upper windows of the tower show them to be much later than the lower ones.

Let us picture to ourselves the inside of the Church at this time; the floor would be strewn with straw or rushes which were seldom changed, the walls were covered with pictures in very bright colours - gold, blue, green, and red; the ceiling probably brilliant blue, with golden stars; there would be no seats, but round the wall was a bench upon which the very old and young were allowed to sit, the rest either stood or knelt for the whole service. Besides the High Altar which would be very much ornamented, there were other altars, part of one which stood in the north transept still remains. There was at this time no screen, but there would probably be a large crucifix suspended from the chancel arch.

The churchyard surrounding the Church would be largely filled with graves on the south side, but the north side was given up to the parishioners for games, meetings, drill etc. There would be the yew tree, always planted in the churchyard, from which were cut those six foot bows with which our people gained so many a hard fought fight, in the perpetual wars of that time.

In the tower of the Church would be kept the store of arms with which the fighting men were armed, either to protect their parish from the assaults of enemies, or to furnish the quota of armed men which might be demanded by the King for his foreign wars.

Now it may be asked where did the money come from to rebuild and alter the ancient Church as well as to pay the Priest (or as he was always called in all parishes of those days, the "Sir John")

In some parishes it was raised by the people themselves, or by the great land-owners, or by miracle plays, or some other form of diversion which was dear to the heart of our forefathers; but in Hackington we know, from a later record that there stood, either in the Churchyard or in a garden of the Archdeacon's mansion, a statue of St Stephen, in whose name the Church was dedicated, and that this image, like many more all over England in those days, had the reputation of working miracles, and thus many of the pilgrims who flocked to the celebrated shrine of St Thomas a Becket, would come on to Hackington with their sick or troubled folk, in order to obtain as they believed from the celebrated image, so that at last folk no longer spoke of going to Hackington, but of going to Stephen's (as they still do now), and from these pilgrims came a steady stream of money and gifts, upon which we know the priest lived, and out of which there is little doubt the alterations in the building as well as the internal ornamentation were made.

Of these early priests we have the record of two: "John Gower" who died December 27th 1457 and whose tombstone was in the Church porch, and is probably that which forms the step from the Church porch into the Church, which evidently has had a brass inscription removed from it, and "John Deve", who died in August 1473, and whose tombstone with a small brass inscription on it is still to be seen in the centre of the aisle.

Probably these priests were chaplains to the Archdeacon of Canterbury, who seems to have owned nearly the whole parish, and they would live with him in the great house; the people, too, of the parish would be largely under the authority of the Archdeacon, who was very great, and would send forth his band of armed men to take part in the wars of those days, under command of his own steward. Probably the villagers took their part against the popular rising under Wat Tyler, though some of the younger men may have slipped away and joined the popular party. They may have listened to the socialist oratory of John Ball, the wandering priest, when he came to Canterbury, and have talked over his ideas; they would hear the teachings of Wycliffe and his Lollard followers, though to follow them would mean leaving their parish or death, they would suffer as all England suffered when the terrible Black Death swept over the land, killing half the clergy of England, and probably more than half the inhabitants.

They would watch and perhaps take part in the great tournament or "joust" which we are told King Edward the third held when he returned from the French wars, in a field near to the Archdeacon's Mansion in Hackington, where the King was probably staying at the time, for this house seems to have been the most important house near Canterbury. Here the Archbishops seem to have stayed with the Archdeacon, who was often a relative; and here we know that, in the reign of Henry V, Archbishop Arundel died, while later on, in the reign of Henry VIII, Archbishop Warham died whilst staying here, being the last Archbishop before the Reformation. It was probably a little before this that the Screen was erected at the end of the Chancel for we know that Archdeacon Warham spent considerable sums on beautifying the Church, and the lower part of the screen has upon it the Tudor rose, showing that it must have been erected after the time of Henry the Seventh's accession to the throne.

And now comes a change in our parish and Church.

The Reformation which had for many years been coming, came to a head, and among many other places which suffered at the time, Hackington was one; Archdeacon Warham, rather than give up the old way of worship, fled the country, and Henry the King took for himself his house and lands, though what use he made of them is not clear; apparently the Church like so many others at the time fell into decay; the tithes which were formerly paid to the Archdeacon were not paid, the image of St Stephen was broken down and the Minister, we are told, was starving, he as it seems having formerly lived upon the gifts which had been paid by those who came to be helped by the image, while the tithe seems to have been given to the Archdeacon.

What actually happened to the great house, to the parish, or who lived here during the next twenty years we do not know, probably like so many Churches of that time it was intended that the Church should be allowed to fall into decay and the parish be joined to some other, yet there is a tradition that the great reformer Erasmus stayed here and planted the mulberry tree still to be seen in the garden of the old Vicarage, and Manwood speaks in his will as if there was still a Minister though he says that the Church was ruinous and the Minister starving.

Thus we cannot say whether Archbishop Cranmer's great Bible was chained up in the Church, or whether the parishioners heard in their own tongue the first and second Prayer Books of King Edward the Sixth, but they must have heard of these things at any rate from their contact with Canterbury. They must too have heard of the Maid of Kent and her supposed revelations in favour of the old religion, and of the speedy end made by Henry of that attempt against his power and will; they would hear too of the dissolution of the great Monastery of St Augustine's and the destruction of the Tomb of Becket in the Cathedral; they would also see the pictures on the walls of their Church whitewashed, the glass in the windows smashed, the vestments and great cross or rood as it was called taken away and sold, and the old Altar of stone removed, while a table of wood was put in its place, which on Communion Sunday was carried down into the Church and placed along the aisle while the Communicants received the sacred emblems seated in their pews.

They would be affected too by the change which came in Mary's reign when the old order was re-established throughout the country, and probably they would see something of that cruel persecution which was carried out under that Monarch; they may have seen John Bland, Rector of Adisham, and John Frankesh, the Vicar of Rolvenden, burnt with others in the market place of Canterbury; they would hear of Bishop Ridley, sometime Vicar of Herne near by, who was burnt with stout-hearted Bishop Latimer; they would hear of the four persons who were starved to death in Canterbury Castle, and of their own Archbishop Cranmer, who, after having recanted again announced his hold of the reformed religion, and was burnt at Oxford; of the burnings at Wye, Ashford, Maidstone, and Rochester, and on November 10th 1558, of five more, one of whom, a girl Alice Snooth, sent for her Godparents that they might see that she was true to her baptismal vows.

Six days later they would hear the bells of the Cathedral, and perhaps of their own Church, telling of the glad news that Mary was dead and her sister Elizabeth was Queen. Where there had been a certain amount of liking for the old form of worship

when Mary came to the throne now all desired a change, and the services as held in the days of Edward VI were commonly used and a Prayer Book very much like that used at the present time was provided to be used in all Churches.

It seems that about ten years after the accession of Elizabeth, she gave the Manor and great house, which had formerly been the Archdeacon's residence, to Sir Roger Manwood who had been brought up and educated at Sandwich, but who had become one of the foremost lawyers in the Kingdom, and was made by the Queen Lord Chief Barton of the Exchequer. He seems to have made Hackington his home, for we read that in 1570 he built the Almshouses, which are still standing, which he had what he describes in his will as "a covered fore-court", probably a veranda in front of them, traces of which still are to be seen. This must have been removed in later times, probably to give more light to the houses. The seventh house which is a double one, was provided for the use of the parish clerk, who was to be Prior of the Almshouses, and to attend to the duties of parish Clerk, a by no means unimportant position in those days.

Sir Roger seems to have spent spent considerable sums upon the restoration of the Church, which appears to have been in a very ruinous state in his day. There is evidence that he restored the south transept, putting in the large south window which still bears the arms of the Manwood family; he also gave the font, which bears an inscription to that effect. In his lifetime he erected the tomb which still marks the resting place of himself and his family; to do so he blocked up a very early lancet shaped window, traces of which are still to be seen on the outside wall.

He also in his will tells us that he gave, subject to a deduction of ten pounds, which was to be paid to the Archdeacon of Canterbury, the greater and lesser tithes of the parish, on condition that the Minister should reside in the parish, and serve no other cure. He also gave for the maintenance of the Church the cottage at Tyler Hill, which was then occupied by one Hobson.

There was also resident in the parish a certain Captain William Alcock whose memorial tablet is still to be seen in the chancel "who served his country faithfully by land and sea", while on a tombstone near to the Church porch there was formerly this inscription:

"Under this stone the body doth here rest

of Robert Mourfield, at the seige of Brest

A souldier one with Frobesser and Drake

That in the Indies made the Spaniard quake

A faithful friend to all that ere him tried

A loving neighbour and beloved he died"

February 1st, 1629, aged 74

About this time too would appear those old square pews which were formerly seen in all churches; the Manwood pew being in the south transept, the Alms folk sitting in the north transept, the pulpit with its reading desk, and the clerk's seat, being on the north side; while the screen had not the overhanging top, but a flat top with fretted holes along the crown, a picture of which is still in existence.

The Communion table was probably the small table which forms still part of the present one, and which shows traces of its age. For the rest, the Church was much like what is at present, and the services were much the same except there would be no hymns, and very little singing of any kind. The times of the services were at 8.45 and 1.45 and there seems to have been no sermon at the latter service, for Sir Roger [Manwood] speaks of the people going to the Cathedral service to hear the sermon.

The parishioners would bring their dinners with them and probably eat them in the Churchyard, or at the Clerk's house, he providing the ale, from which it probably came about that his house became a licensed house.

On the death of Sir Roger the Manor passed to his son, Sir Peter, also a lawyer, who seems to have been a man of great learning, and closely connected with the Court of those days, for we learn that the cost of his entertaining and appearing at Court, so reduced the amount of his income, that he had to reside abroad to keep away from his creditors.

He presented to the Church the chalice and paten for the service of Holy Communion which we still possess. He also gave some land and two cottages (now demolished) beyond the brook at Tyler Hill for the up-keep of the Parish Church, and his widow, Dame Frances Manwood, gave a sum of money to be given to the poor, and for a sermon to be preached each year which is still carried out.

Sir Peter died in 1625 and was succeeded in the property by his son, Sir John Manwood, the memorial to whose wife is to be seen near the south door of the Church. He left a sum of money, the interest of which was to be paid to the parish clerk, who was to keep the family tomb, and the memorial of his first wife "very clean". Some time about this date the screen at the western doorway was erected, and it bears the date 1630.

Probably as a result of the expensive manner of living of his father, and the debts he incurred, and also it would seem as the result of the most extensive charities given by the whole family, Sir John seems to have found it necessary to sell the property, and the manor house passed to Sir Thomas Colepepper who died in 1643.

His son was an ardent royalist, and probably in order to raise money for the King's cause, sold the estate to the family of Hales.

During the time of the Commonwealth Mr Richard Culmer and Mr Robert Beak, we read, "officiated in this parish and injuriously received the tithes". Richard Culmer was the person who broke the ancient glass windows in the Cathedral, and we conclude that his presence in Hackington accounts for there being no ancient glass in any of the church windows.

During that time the services would be of a presbyterian or independent order, but at the restoration the old Vicar, Dr John GOFF seems to have returned to the parish, for we find him distributing Lady Manwood's gifts to the poor in 1661.

In 1691 Mr Richard Crooke, who seems to have taken a great interest in his parish, compiled a book called "Divers remarkable things collected and composed for the public use and designed for the benefit of this parish of Hackington, alias St Steven's", together with two books about the Almshouses and Dame Manwood's Charities, from which books most of the information contained in this article has been collected.

We also read that Mr Richard Crooke expended, out of his own pocket, a considerable sum of money in repairing the tomb of Sir Roger Manwood in the Church. He also collected from certain citizens of Sandwich a further sum of money, which he also expended "towards the sufficient and perfect restoring of the said Sir Roger Manwood's monument, to its beauty and graceful order, that so the good name and deserved memory of that, our, and their, renowned and charitable benefactor, might be more often and openly declared to us and all posterity for Christian imitation, and that other pious and wealthy surviving persons might not be justly discouraged to become public benefactors, by seeing the erected memorial of a deceased benefactor basely slighted, and unworthily suffered to continue defaced, and to be totally ruinated by persons who have, do, and may, greatly partake of the eminent benefits of his commendable Acts of Charity."

From which we may gather that the monument had suffered during the troubles of the great rebellion, and the years that followed.

In 1695 we read that the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments were "curiously painted, and fixed up in three several frames, on the Screen between the Church and the Chancel." How long they remained there does not seem clear, for they are not shown in the old painting of the screen before the ancient top was removed. At the same time the King's Arms were fixed up over the belfry door; whether the painter or the inhabitants of the parish were strong Jacobites we do not know, but the face of the lion bears a most striking likeness to the then banished house of Stuart.

Probably soon after this date, that blight settled down over our parish as it did over most of the Church of England, for even when Mr Crooke was writing he deplores the falling away of the people from public worship, and especially from attendance at the Holy Communion, and we know that all through England this was the case.

The Churches were neglected, the services were performed in a slovenly manner; the Clergy were often kind men and helped the poor, but vital religion was at a very low ebb. During this time we read of certain changes in our parish; the Hales family, who owned the greatest part of the estates, pulled down the old manor house which had been the Archdeacon's palace in days gone by, and erected the present house, then called Hales Place, traces of which can still be clearly seen, forming part of St Mary's College.

There is an old tradition that the owner offered to pull down the Church and build it on the top of the hill because he did not like it so near to his house, and when the parishioners refused their consent, he said he would bury it with trees, and planted trees around the Church, which now so largely add to its beauty.

But this can hardly be true for we read in the Chronicle, that in 1770 Sir Edward Hales planted an avenue of trees and made a wide gravel walk, and this is spoken of as a benefaction to the parish, while Sir John Hales in 1730 had given the present clock for the Church, showing that although the Hales family were not buried here, but at Tunstall, near Sittingbourne, yet they seem to have taken an interest in the parish, and were numbered among its benefactors.

In 1719 we read that the then Vicar, Mr Simon Hughes, largely rebuilt the Vicarage and beautified it at his own charges. Owing to the care of Sir Roger Manwood in giving the tithe only on condition that the Vicar should live in the parish and serve only this Church, we find that Hackington never suffered from having a non-resident Vicar, as so many parishes suffered in those days; and we find that as a rule the men who were appointed to the living held it till their death. Thus the Rev John Bunce was Vicar here for as many as 52 years.

He was followed by Rev Alan Fielding who was related to the novelist of that name.

Let us for a moment picture to ourselves what the Church would look like when he first came to the living. The pews for the most part were square, so that the worshippers sat facing one another in a box as we might say. The old flat top was on the screen, and there was a light screen that divided off the south transept from the rest of the Church. The children sat on little seats down the centre of the aisle, and it was the office of the warden to keep them in order by means of a long wand or cane, with which he was armed.

The pulpit was a "three-decker" as they were called, with a place below for the clerk who led the singing, and made all the responses. Above the clerk the place where the service was read by the Clergyman, and above that the pulpit with its sounding board above it, from which the sermon was delivered, there would be little singing, for hymns were not common in those days, and it would only be on rare occasions that an anthem would be attempted by the village choir, led by a violin, or perhaps unaccompanied.

In 1790 we read that "the church was robbed of the surplice and linen and the pewter plate which probably the thieves supposed to be silver as they left the two flaggons in the same chest. The cup and paten had been removed a little while before."

About this time the front was added to the Clerk's residence, which formerly was of the same design as the rest of the Almshouses, except that it was a double house.

In 1823 the Rev James Hamilton came, who sold the old Vicarage to the Baker family, and bought the present house which had been built for some time. He was followed by the Rev John White who removed the ancient top of the screen, erected an organ, and built and maintained the schools; he also gave several of the stained glass windows still to be seen.

He was followed in 1878 [correctly 1879] by the Right Rev Ashton Oxenden, who had been Bishop of Montreal and Metropolitan Canada, probably the most illustrious Incumbent the parish has ever had. It was he who restored and reseated the Church, removing the old high pews, and the lower part of the old pulpit; he also provided more decent fittings for the chancel; he also erected the mission room at Tyler Hill.

He was succeeded by the Rev Canon Hichens, who did much for the Church. Among other improvements the present top was put upon the screen, a new organ provided [see note 1], and the bells re-hung and one of them re-cast. In 1906 the present Rector [see note 2] was appointed, in whose time the Church Room was built [see note 3].

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Note 1 : Rev A E Pearce (Rector 1967 - 1987) notes that it was restored by Messrs Browns of Deal.

Note 2 : The author of this paper, Rev P P Somerville.

Note 3 : Commissioned for parish use in 1911.

The Rev Somerville then appends a list of Vicars and Clerks to our parish, which is not reproduced here.

The Rev A E Pearce (as at note 1 above) also noted the following within the work of Rev Somerville:

"Dr John Goffe (sic) Rector 1642 - 1646 was deprived of the living by Cromwell. He and his wife, Mary, had three children:

1. Mary, baptised 3rd January 1642

2. John, baptised 6th January 1643

3. Elizabeth, baptised 25th January 1644

Rev Pearce concludes that the baptisms must have been performed within the Rectory (or Vicarage in those days) as Dr Goffe would not have been allowed access to the Church for the ceremonies.

Dr Goffe was returned to the parish in 1661, but died that same year, and was buried in the chancel of St Alphege Church, Canterbury."

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