

CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS, STAPLEHURST.

THE first mention of this church that I have been able to discover, occurs in the year 1245, when the Rector of Staplehurst, and the Prior of Cumbwell, were contending for the tithes of seventy-seven acres in the manor of "Lofherst." After a litigation which lasted more than fifty years, the Prior won his suit, and the Rector of Staplehurst was stripped of all the Lovehurst tithes, save 4s. per annum.*

The next allusion to this church is found in Archbishop Peckham's Register,† which records that upon the 8th of the Ides of April, in the year 1284, that Archbishop caused sequestration to be made of the income of the rector of the church of Staplehurst. Similar punishment was dealt to the incumbents of thirty-three other churches in his diocese. What was their offence? The rector of Staplehurst, and his fellow sufferers, had failed to appear at the archiepiscopal ordination held by his Grace at Croydon, in the year 1284, on that Saturday upon which was sung the Scripture commencing "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters ("die Sabbati qua cantatur Scientes.")‡ Whether this was but one out of many

* Warham's Register, folio cxlj., a. b.

† Folio lxj., a.

‡ Canon J. C. Robertson informs me that this was the "Sabbatum post *Latari*," i. e. Saturday after the fourth Sunday in Lent. The

signs of disaffection on the rector's part, it is impossible to say, but we find that within four years from this time, Henry de Northwode resigned the rectory, and his successor, Nicholas de Waleton, was admitted to the benefice upon the 3rd of the Kalends of April, 1288.

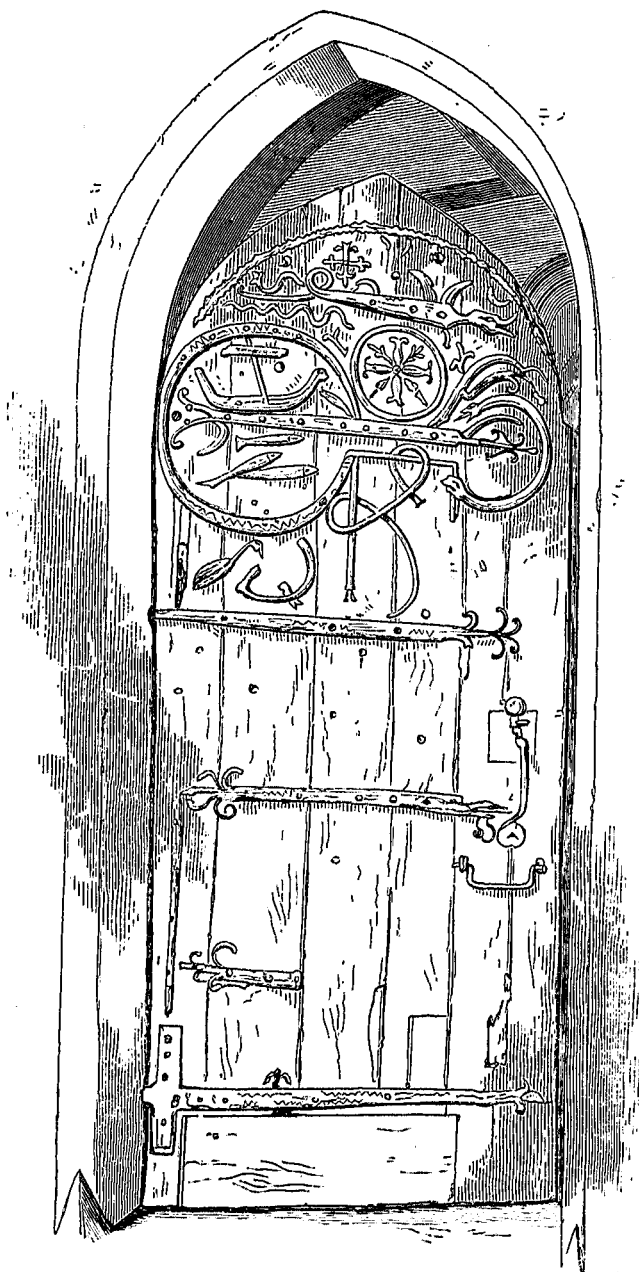
As Hasted says that the earliest patron of this rectory, whose name he could discover, was John* Kemp, Bishop of London, it may be well to state that at the time of which I have been speaking, and for two hundred years afterwards, the advowson belonged to the family of Somery. The same Christian name seems to have descended from heir to heir, so that the patron for more than two hundred years was always "John de Somery." The only member of this family who became rector of Staplehurst, was Thomas de Somery, a sub-deacon, admitted 10 Kal. June, 1295.

Of the actual building to which these thirteenth century extracts, which I have quoted, would apply, some portions are still extant, although much of this church dates from the fourteenth and fifteen centuries.

If you examine the arcade which runs between the nave and the south aisle, you will at once observe the western pier; with its clawed, square base; and its nearly square abacus. It certainly was part of the Early English church; so, also, were other pillars

"officium" in the Sarum Missal (folio lvj., ed. Paris, 1555) begins with Is. lv. 1. "Sitiētes venite ad aquas dicit Dominus."

* Hasted is in error as to the Christian name. Bishop John Kempe, afterwards Archbishop of York and of Canterbury, left the see of London in 1426. It was Thomas Kempe, Bishop of London from 1450 to 1489, who was patron of Staplehurst "as Lord of Stapelherst or Bleccourt," and presented Nicholas Wright to the living, 26th Feb. 1473, upon the decease of William Lee, the former rector.



SOUTH DOOR OF STAPLEHURST CHURCH.

of the arcade, all of which, as you will see, are now more or less out of the perpendicular; so likewise *may* have been the elegantly slender shafts which still remain as supports of the inner arch of a window, in the middle of the south wall. Some would say also, and not without reason, that the elaborate ironwork upon the south door was ornamentation of the Early English church, of the thirteenth century. The fishes, lizards, and other reptiles, into which the iron ornaments of the hinges and their surroundings are formed, are in the style of such early work, but the fact is that an ingenious village smith might have made them at any subsequent date. They are shewn in the annexed engraving. I would ask your attention to a central ornament which may have been intended for a monogram. If so, it was not made in the days of the old "black letter." The forms resemble the Roman F and B or K.

In the north wall of the chancel two windows, one of two lights, and the other of one light, contain tracery of the Decorated period, as elegant as can well be imagined in windows of their size. There can be no doubt that, during the fourteenth century, much was done in this church. The originals of the restored windows, in the south wall of the aisle, were doubtless of that period. A corbel which formerly stood over the first nave pillar west of the chancel, and between the two easternmost nave arches, has been removed to a higher situation, and further east. You will observe that it represents a female head with the wimple, and is of a date certainly not later than the fourteenth century. That was an eventful century; and while some were active in beautifying this church, probably under the guidance of the rector, other fourteenth

century work was not so commendable by us, nor agreeable to him.

In 1379 we find that the then rector, Richard atte Broke, exchanged with the rector of Sundridge, who was admitted to Staplehurst benefice on the 13th of May. The new rector, John de Granteham, is grandiloquently and oddly described as "*Canonicum et prebendarium prebende Magne misse majoris altaris in Monasterio Abbatisse et Monialium de Mallyng.*"* Ere Canon Granteham had been two years at Staplehurst, the rebellion of Wat Tyler broke out. In the "*Presentments of Malefactors who have risen against our Lord the King, 4 and 5 Richard II.,*" we read that "on Tuesday, next after the feast of the Holy Trinity (11th June, 1381), John Fynch, of Cranbrook, carpenter, made insurrection against the king and his people, and procured and abetted many unknown to rise, and also David Baker, bekeler-pleyer of Tenterden, came to the parsonage of Staplehurst and feloniously broke into the houses built on the said parsonage, and trod under foot and destroyed the goods and chattels of John Granton, the parson there, to the value of £20—the aforesaid John Fynch and David Baker were the maintainers of the aforesaid insurrection."* Little respect had Fynch and Baker for the goods of the Canon and Prebendary.

The roof of the south porch deserves a glance, small as it is. The octagonal king-post, with its well moulded cap and base, and the chamfered beams, with their chamfer-stops, are good in their way, although the whitewash obscures them. The handsome west tower seems to date from early in the fifteenth century.

* Archbishop Sudbury's Register, folio cxxix., a.

† 'Archæologia Cantiana,' iii. 80.

Over the well-moulded doorway are three escutcheons, with coats of arms; one in each of the spandrels, and one upon the centre of the square hood moulding. There is great difficulty in appropriating these coats, but the impaled coat in the north spandrel may be that of an archbishop; the central coat, bearing a lion rampant, was probably that of Sir Lewis Robsart, K.G., who in right of his wife was summoned to Parliament as Baron Bouchier. He died, in 1432, seised of the manors of Maplehurst and Exhurst in this parish. There is no other family connected with Staplehurst, at or near the date of the tower, which bore a lion rampant for its coat of arms. The third shield bears a cross engrailed. For this coat I cannot suggest a more likely family than that of Wotton, three branches* of which are recorded to have borne a cross engrailed; although the better known branch, from which sprung Lord Wotton of Marlay, and Dean Wotton of Canterbury, bore, not a cross, but a saltier, or St. Andrew's cross, engrailed. Just at the commencement of the fifteenth century, we find that a very distinguished and wealthy man of the name of Wotton held the benefice; and I think it probable that this coat, upon the tower doorway, was intended to represent his arms. This rector was John Wotton, who, when presented to the living by John Somerye, was described as "domestic chaplain."† He was admitted to the benefice on the 21st August, 1393, in succession to Walter Cudham (who was admitted 16th October, 1390).

John Wotton was a man of renown; the first

* Papworth's 'Ordinary of Armorial,' pp. 606, 620; Berry's 'Encyclop. Heraldica,' sub Wotton; Burke's 'General Armory.'

† Archbishop Courtenay's Register, folio cexii, b.

master of the College at Maidstone, a canon of Chichester, a great friend, and ultimately the executor, of Archbishop Courtenay; and one of the two trustees to whom, at Archbishop Arundel's decease, the temporalities of the see of Canterbury were assigned from February 17th to May 30th, 1414. He was buried in Maidstone Church, and a magnificent tomb, in former times ascribed to Archbishop Courtenay, (because in two places it bears his arms,) is now claimed for John Wotton. His will, dated on Thursday after Michaelmas, 1417, is preserved at Lambeth, and proves that he was a man of large substance. Among many other bequests, he leaves to his brother Robert the entire furniture and hangings of one bed; his second best robe, and his second best cloak, furred with miniver, and one furred hood. He also leaves bequests of 40*s.* and 10 marks to his kinsman, Sir John Wotton, a monk, and his kinswoman Alice. To each chaplain serving in this parish church of Staplehurst (so there were several) on the day of his obit, *ijjs. iiij*d.**; to his clerk here, *xxs.*; to the sacristan of this church, *ij*s.**; and for distribution among the poor parishioners here, *xiijs. iiij*d.*** He leaves bequests to "the work of the churches of Bukstede and Chorlwode," of which he had formerly been rector, and also gives one-third of the residue of his estate to the seven churches with which he was connected, Staplehurst being one of them. The bequests prove that John Wotton was a man who would have been able and willing to assist in the rebuilding of this church and tower; and I think it highly probable, that the cross engrailed is intended for his coat; that the tower was commenced before he died in 1417; and that the impaled and

* 'Archæologia Cantiana,' iv. 227.

defaced coat may have been that of Archbishop Chicheley, or it may have been that of the Somery family, who were still patrons of the living, and residents in Staplehurst—one of the participators in Jack Cade's rebellion, in 1450, being* "Robertus Somerey, de Stapulherst, gentilman," who lived to be pardoned. The two heads wearing coronets, which form the corbels of the hood-moulding to the tower door-way, may represent either the King and Queen, or Lord and Lady Bouchier.

About the same period as that in which the tower was built, the roodloft stair and doorways would be set up; and to erect them the original arches, at the eastern end of the nave arcade, were taken down, and the present eastern arch inserted in their stead. That arch is eighteen feet wide, while the width of the other nave arches is but thirteen feet. You will observe that very little of the pillar of the next arch was removed, so that only a thin new pier of Kentish ragstone was required in support of the new and wider arch. The cap of that thin pier presents a very curious appearance, from the fact that the superfluous portions of the block of stone, out of which it was cut, are left projecting north and south. This probably arose simply from the great difficulty of working off the unnecessary pieces of ragstone. The dagger-like chamfer stop, which appears upon the upper doorway of the roodloft stair, in the north wall, is likewise found upon the two stoup niches which remain in the south wall, and upon the arched tomb in the south aisle, seeming to suggest that all these were put up at about the same time.

In the north wall of the chancel you will observe

* 'Archæologia Cantiana,' vii. 251.

a curious and unusual square opening, with a round orifice at the back. I cannot explain what this may have been. You will see, at once, that it might have been used as an Easter Sepulchre had it been further east. There is no sign of its being an aumbry, nor of its having been a low side window. Neither does it look like part of a vestry doorway, yet this remark leads me to add that a "re-vestry" once existed here which has now disappeared.

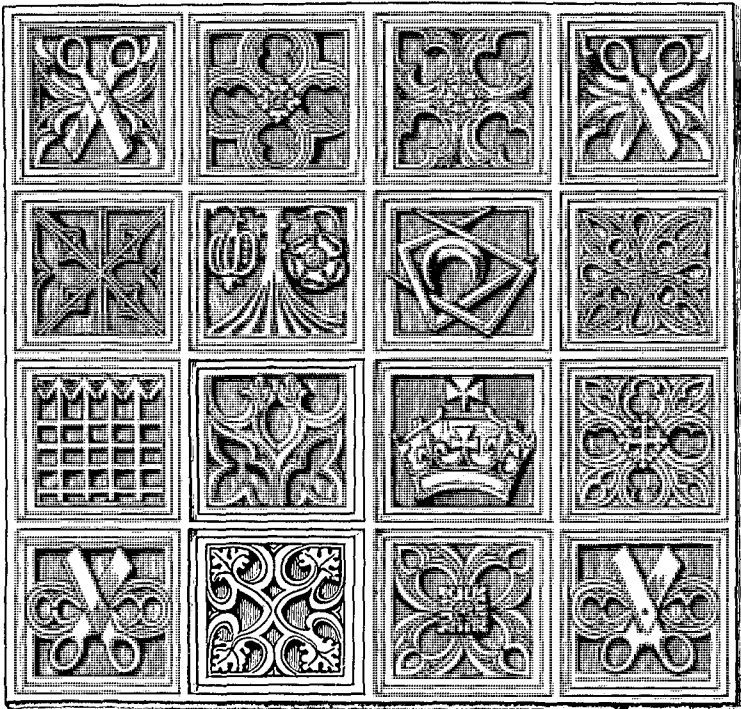
The records of Archbishop Warham's visitation, in 1511 prove that a re-vestry was then in existence, and had for some time been unroofed. Complaint was made, at the visitation, that although the Rev. Nicholas Wright (who in 1473 succeeded Wm. Lee in the rectory) had bequeathed 66s. 8d., for the roofing of the re-vestry, the work had not been done.* Doubtless it never was done, for certainly no traces of the re-vestry remain. This visitation, in 1511, also brought out the fact that there was in the chancel an image of Allhallows or All Saints,† to whom the

* "Compertum est that the parson lately dede bequethid to the mendyng of the re-vestery, which hath stoude uncovered thies xij. yeres, iij. li. vis. viij. d., the which is usid to another chirch, Richard Mount de Wy, Sir Symon Goffrith, parson of Netylsted in the diocese of Rochester, and Sir Robert Gosborn of Canterbury, executors." (Warham Reg., 58. b.)

On March 17th, the churchwardens appeared and said that they received xxxs. from Richard Hopper, executor of Master Wright, lately rector, in part payment of lxxvjs. viij. d. left by him for roofing the vestry, and they had expended it on other church expenses. They were ordered to refund and, if possible, to apply it to its proper use.

The executors appeared and said when the proper work was begun they would pay the residue. (Warham Reg., 58. b.)

† Lights were burned in this church in honour of All Saints, The Holy Cross, St. James, St. George, (to which four Stephen Bratell left "light money" by his will dated 5 Feb, 1475,) St. Margaret, St.



IN THE TOWER, STAPLEHURST CHURCH.

church is dedicated, and that this image was "sore decayed." The parish wished the rector to repair it. The rector left its repair to the parish. The Archbishop's commissary ordered the churchwardens to perform their duty, and repair "All Saints" before Pentecost, upon pain of excommunication (Warham Reg. folio 58. b.) At the same visitation, in 1511, complaint was made that rochets and surplices were lacking, and that "ther ar diverse men that will not paye their petirpenys to the Church."

I must now draw your attention to a series of sixteen panels, well carved in wood, and handsomely coloured, which form one of the peculiar features of this church. They now appear in the ceiling of the tower, but were originally placed over a dormer window in the roof of the south aisle. These panels are carved with some singular devices connected with the clothiers' trade, and with others which were the badges of our Tudor sovereigns. The clothiers' shears occupy the four corner compartments, and are easily understood; a pair of rectangular instruments, with a crescent between them, are difficult to name, but it has been suggested that they may represent the iron hooks with which pockets of wool (as of hops) are lifted by hand; this however is very doubtful. Another suggestion connects them with the name Staplehurst; the two rectangular instruments looking like staples. No suggestion however can be satisfactory which omits notice of the crescent, or horse-shoe. The Tudor devices prove the date of the

Nicholas, (both mentioned in the will of Robert Bowring, dated 20th Jan. 1476,) St. Mary, and St. Christopher (to the two last named lights Wm. Donnyngbery left a few pence by his will dated 1 May 1484).

carving; for we find not only the portcullis and the arched crown, but also the pomegranate of Katherine of Aragon, united with the Tudor rose. The date of the carving is therefore within the twenty-five years preceding 1533. It has been engraved from a sketch made by the late Mr. Pretty.

Other wood carving was formerly to be seen here, which had been inserted during the fifteenth century, or early in the sixteenth. Fifty years ago it was seen and sketched here by Mr. Pretty, formerly assistant secretary of our Society. It formed four chancel stalls, each stall having arm rests, which were carved with lions and foliage, and having the front edges of its supports moulded into round shafts with octagonal caps and bases. The original work, from one stall, may now be seen in the Charles Museum at Maidstone, having been saved from the fire to which the wood was doomed.

In the south chancel, which is called, from a manor in the parish, the Spilfill Chancel, you will see the altar tomb of Walter Mayney, Esq., of Spilfill, who was Sheriff of Kent in the thirteenth year of Queen Elizabeth, and who died in April, 1577. The effigies in brass of himself and his two wives formerly graced the top of the tomb, but only one effigy now remains, that of one of his wives. The Mayneys were of Biddenden; and this Walter was only the second son of the squire, John Mayney of Biddenden. The late Sir Richard Mayne, chief constable of the Metropolitan Police, claimed to be descended from this family.

In the tower is contained another relic of the sixteenth century. It is the third bell, upon which is the inscription "Robertus Mot me fecit, 1594,"

followed by Mot's trade mark. The other bells are— one by Joseph Hatch, dated 1605; one by William Hatch, 163--; one by John Palmer with the inscription "Non hujus sonus at Christi Salus, Henricus Kent, rector, Thomas Scoones, Robert Francis, wardens." Mr. Kent was rector from 1645 to 1650. There are some curious entries in the registers respecting him.* The fifth bell is inscribed "T. Lester, of London, made me, 1748."

We must not leave Staplehurst Church without some notice of the parochial registers. They are, perhaps, the most remarkable in the county. Commencing in 1538, they are perfect throughout the reign of Queen Mary, and as they are written upon paper, not upon parchment, they seem to be not copies, as is the case in most parishes, but the original registers.

* "Anno Domini, 1645. Henricus Kent Cantab. et socius colleg. Regal. Rector ecclesie Parochialis de Staplehurst institutus sexto die Novembris 1645 et ejusdem anni decimo septimo Novemb. inductus fuit. . . . Ecclesie possessionem non sine multorum oppositionibus accepit sed nonnullorum suffragiis electus et suo jure legali sustentatus per ordinem parlamenti specialem liberam tandem predicandi potestatem habuit, O tempora! O mores!"

N.B. After the words "septimo Novemb." there is an erasure, and the rest of the entry seems to be written by another hand.

"1650, July 25. Buried Henricus Kent late of Staplehurst clerke who dyed the Satturday before at night being the 20th July 1650."

"Æqua tellus—pauperi recluditur, Regumque pueris."

"Sept. 25th 1651. Baptised Elizabeth the daughter and Richard the son of Richard Baily and Elizabeth his wife, by Richard Burney Minister of Old Romney, who worthily honoured Mr. Henry Kent."

"In memoriam redivivam Henrici de Kancio

"Totus annus dolet, Fama redolet tota quia Caritas non fuit

Caritas est

July 25, 1650.

Sept. 25, 1651."

In the year 1597, a Constitution, made by the Convocation of Canterbury and approved by the Queen under the great seal, ordered that all the old registers should be freshly copied into a *parchment* book. These copies, or others made in 1603, are what we usually find in parish chests. But at Staplehurst it seems to be otherwise, and in these registers we find many entries containing prayers for the souls of the departed, which have been left out of other parochial registers when the Elizabethan copies were made.

The Rev. M. T. Pearman, when curate of Staplehurst, made numerous extracts from the registers, which he has kindly placed in my hands. He has also pointed out that Burns, in his 'History of Parish Registers,' after quoting Staplehurst entries on page 93, has erroneously inserted eight other entries from the same registers, upon pages 133 and 134 of his book, under the heading of "St. Peter's in the East, Oxford."

Of the population of Staplehurst parish we find several records. In 1549 (2 Ed. VI.) the Certificate of Colleges, Kent, No. 28, entry No. 2, returns the adult population, *i. e.*, those eligible to receive housel or Holy Communion, at 400 "housling people." In 1578 a similar return shews 440 communicants. In 1640 they had increased to 508 communicants (*i. e.* confirmed persons eligible to receive Holy Communion). In 1795 it is said that the parish contained not quite 1000 people, and in 1871 the census return shewed 1749 inhabitants.

The following extracts from the Staplehurst registers will be found worthy of notice:—

"1543—The last day of Dec., there was buried John Turner the elder, whose sowle Jesu pardon. Amen."

"1545—The 6th day of June there was buried the sonn of Thomas Roberts the yonger, called Henry, uppo whose soule I pray God have mercy."

"1548—(1 Ed. VI.)—11th daye of September, there was buried James Bragelond, an honest man and a good householder, whose soule Jhu pardon and bring to eternal rest."

These registers also illustrate the custom of giving the name "Creature" to infants baptized at home by midwives, in certain cases.

"1547—The 27th of Apryle there were borne ij. children of Alexander Beerye, the one christened at home, and so deceased called Creature; the other christened at church called Joha."

"1548—11th day of June there was baptized by the mydwyffe, and here buried, the childe of Andrew Partridge, called Creature."

"1548—17th Aug. there was baptized by the midwyffe, and so buryed, the childe of Thomas Goldham, called Creature."

That this name was only given in certain peculiarly hopeless cases, we learn from other instances, such as—

"1563—8th of Feb. There were borne too twynnes, being men chyldren, ye sonns of Wylliam Symon, which chyldren, being weake, were named and baptised by the mydwif, Thomas and Wylliam," etc., etc.

During the reign of Philip and Mary, Cardinal Pole, on two occasions (1555 and 1557) caused enquiry to be made whether the clergy entered, in the parochial registers, the names of those who stood as sponsors for the children who were baptized. Of the compliance with his rule Staplehurst register affords several examples.

"1557—The ij. of August was chrystenyd Martin Osborne; Martin Owteide and James Buckherst godfathers; Benet Batherst, godmother."

"18 eiusdem (May) tingebatur sacro fonte Robertus filius Edwardi Bapterst copri ejus Roberto Batterst ac Thoma Bapterst, comre Maria Bucherst."

In the first year of Queen Elizabeth we encounter another series of remarkable entries in the Staplehurst register. The rector, having secretly a great love for the ancient rites and ceremonies of the Un-reformed Church, made sundry observations upon the baldness of the new service.

"1558, Octavo Feb., obiit Joanna Taylor, sine sacramentorum receptione, et crucis signo super corpus vel sarcophagu quo deportabatur nil duodecima et pena hora nulla satisfactione facta."

"12th Feb., obiit Laurence Austrey more ecclesiastico in deportatus."

"Eodem obiit Tamis Lede deportatus sine crucis signo et introductus in templum non admissus lege Divina neque Regia more ecclestico."

Richard Besely, a rector who was presented to the living in 1535 by the well-known Thomas Cromwell, principal Secretary of State, makes some curious personal entries.

"1548—Vicesimo quarto die Martii—Magr. Ricardus Beseley sacre Theologie professor ac serenissimi et illustrissimi felicis memorie principis Henrici octavi nuper Regis strenuissimi et metuentissimi Sacellanus necnon Rector hujus ecclesie et eccliaistis Janam Lenarde orphanam virginem parvulam pudicam et honestam matrimonio rite solemnizato sibi accepit in conjugem."

"1549—The 9th day of June. This day being Whitsonday (wherin the booke of the Common Prayer and administration of the Sacraments and other rites and ceremonies of the Church after the use of the Church of Englonde began to be executed) there was first baptized Marie the daughter of Richarde Beseley parson of this parishe Church borne the last Thursday hora fere quinta ante meridiem of his lawful wif Jane who were maryed the yere before and in the firste day that the holly Communion in the Englishe tonge (after the order that now is) was there mynstered, thei bothe with others most humblye and devoutlie communicating the same. The parson christened his own child."

The following entries of Baptisms are also worthy of notice here:—

"4 Ed. VI. 9th day of April. There was baptized, and that at home, by the testimonye of good women, Thomas the sone of Gregorie Rutting, and after presented in the temple receiving other ritus (*sic*) accordingle and was buried the next day before noone."

"1555—xvth day of October, was crystened Godly Undrell the doghter of John Undrell."

"1557—19 Febr. Tinctus est aqua lustrali Alicia filia Johis. Byly, com'rbus Alicia," &c. &c.

W. A. S. R.

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