

DETACHED CAMPANILE OF BENENDEN CHURCH.

BY CANON SCOTT ROBERTSON.

THE Rev. Canon Samuel Joy, Vicar of Benenden, has had the happiness of recovering, for his parish, its earliest Parochial Register of Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, which covers the period from A.D. 1559 to 1635, together with its Churchwarden's Account Book for the period A.D. 1663 to 1743. These volumes had been absent from Benenden during about fifty years.

An entry in the Churchwarden's Book proves the accuracy of Kilburne's statements, in A.D. 1659: "The steeple of this [Benenden] church standeth off from the same, and is of rare and remarkable workmanship in the inside thereof. The same standing very high, having a long spire or shaft, and the foundation thereof (for a small part only of the height of the same) being of stone and all the rest to the top of timber of exceeding great bigness very full and rarely compacted."

Hasted in his *History of Kent* and Seymour in his *Survey of Kent* speak in similar terms of this detached campanile at Benenden. Hasted adds the fact that it stood upon the north side of the church. Canon Joy drew my attention to the statements of these writers, and I suggested that they perhaps had confused an account of the remarkable campanile at Brookland in Romney Marsh, with the church of Benenden. He appealed also to the late Mr. Granville Leveson-Gower and obtained a similar reply. Canon Joy told us both that undoubtedly such a *campanile* had existed at Benenden, as mention of it was made in the presentments to the Archdeacon of Canterbury in A.D. 1584, "The steple lackethe shinglinge."

The ancient Churchwarden's Book now restored to the parish proves that Canon Joy was fully justified in his belief; and it adds to our knowledge of the existence of a second detached *campanile* in Kent, similar in many points to that at Brookland which was described in *Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. XIII., 480, and illustrated by one of Mr. F. W. Wadmore's charming drawings.

These examples of the detached *campanile* are of more than local interest. It is known that in Canterbury, at an early period two examples of a detached campanile formerly existed. One, in connection with Canterbury Cathedral stood on the south side of the precincts of that Cathedral. The mound on which it was erected can still be seen in the garden of the house of residence occupied successively by Canons J. C. Robertson, W. H. Fremantle, and A. J. Mason. The site is on the left hand, or east side, of the carriage drive near its entrance. Another detached *campanile*, stood on the south side of the Church of St. Augustine's Abbey, its site being within the grounds of the Kent and Canterbury Hospital, not far from the highway called Longport. Of these two examples of the detached *campanile* no detailed description exists. That which is here given from the old Churchwarden's Book at Benenden is therefore all the more valuable.

The subjoined extract from the Churchwarden's Book of A.D. 1672 explains how the Benenden campanile was destroyed:—

“Munday the 30th day of December 1672, between 12 and 1 in the morning arose a storm of lightning and thunder, a hard gale of wind and some raine out of the south west, which set fire to the steeple at Benenden, whereby the said steeple with the rooffe and all the timber worke of the church was consumed in four or five howers time, the five large bells melted; also five houses adjoining to the churchyard gate on the north side burnt to the ground. The steeple was built of timber from the ground. The lower story was compiled of nine trees, or pieces of square timber 16 inches square, which stood upon great sells of a bigger square, the middle post being larger considerably than the other eight, and each outpost had a shore of the same bigness as their post; being twelve shores

which stood against the lowest post, two at each corner and one against the middle post and each outside.

“The bells hung at the top of the first length not higher than the church; from thence the steeple was carried up, with a less square, about 20 feet more from whence began the spire eight square.

“The whole frame was brass'd and tenanted [*i.e.* ‘braced and tenoned’] into one another, with curious arte and excellent workmanship, from the foundation to the top; it had a kind of bason or flatt above the top of the spire and above that across covered with lead.

“The lower part of the steeple had about it a stone wall eight square about eight foot high, whereon the foot of the rafters stood, leaning to the square sides of the steeple, in the nature of a shield or lean-too to secure the foundation from the weather.

“On each square of the steeple were two large dormant windows, for sounding holes for the bells, shingled over as the rest of the steeple and shed was. The steeple stood on the north-west corner of the church about 16 or 20 foot distant. The height of the steeple from the ground according to the best information was 134 foot.

“The five melted bells were cast in 1619, Simon Henden, churchwarden, was named on the fifth bell. On the fourth bell, between the crown rings this verse, ‘*In me Concordia.*’”

On the 20th of April 1691 the Churchwardens presented to the Archdeacon's official that although the church had been rebuilt, some years before, yet the steeple had not. The bell metal, from the five old bells melted by the fire, in 1672, had been carefully preserved, and the parishioners begged permission to sell that old metal and to devote its proceeds towards the cost of rebuilding the steeple and procuring fresh bells. Permission was granted on condition that a certificate of the weight and of the sale of the metal should be produced in the Archdeacon's Court. The work of replacing the bells evidently occupied some years. The sixth bell now in use is dated 1719, the eighth 1753, and the fourth 1764. The seventh bell bears an inscription which ascribes to Mr. Phillips Gibbon the honour of being “ *dignissimus benefactor,*” which suggests that to him was chiefly due the casting of that seventh bell. He was, in 1758, the principal Governor of the endowed Free School of

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Benenden. Hence we gather some clue respecting the date of that bell.

The similarity of the existing *campanile* at Brookland Church, with that which has disappeared from Benenden, is emphasized by the fact that both carried five bells. That is the number in Brookland steeple at the present time.

We are much indebted to Canon Joy for copying the description of the destroyed *campanile*, and for obtaining certain proof of its existence, and of its destruction in 1672 on the 30th of December.