

MORE KENTISH BEE BOLES

By MRS. V. F. DESBOROUGH

MORE bee boles have come to light since my last Notes in *Archæologia Cantiana*, LXXII, 1958, bringing the number of sites up to twenty-eight for our county.

Unfortunately I was not able to investigate the Canterbury bee boles, when they were reported by Mr. and Mrs. Baker, but Miss Joan Harding of the Bee Research Association went in my place, and I have her permission to quote her Report :

“ Two important sites of bee boles have been reported by *Mr. and Mrs. Baker of The Old Vicarage, St. Stephens, Canterbury*. Their house and the Manor House are separated by an imposing old wall which is scheduled as an ancient monument.

The Old Vicarage has three well-preserved bee boles, irregularly spaced and with the gabled top now familiar in older boles in Kent. Their measurements are 10 in. and 18 in. high, 10 in. wide and 10 in. deep, and they are 3 ft. above ground level.

It was an exciting moment when Mrs. Baker found on enquiry that there were niches on the further side of the wall, and a great surprise to see an imposing array of *twenty* boles down the whole length of the wall, every two separated by a larger niche which reached the ground. The measurements of these boles were 12 in. and 18 in. high, 10 in. wide and 10 in. deep. The ground level was much higher on this side, and the boles were only 1 ft. above ground level.

The only other comparable number of boles in Kent is at the Gatehouse, Eltham, where there were originally twenty—two of these have now been destroyed.”

Mr. Baker told me that much of the wall is built of earlier 2 in. bricks, now very soft and probably Dutch in origin. The monastery of Hales Place was within a mile away, and this wall may have a monastic origin.

Miss Mary Smith of Elham, Canterbury, reported two bee boles in a high old wall at *Simon Langton School, Canterbury*. She tells me that the measurements are 17 in. to top of gable, 10 in. wide and 6 in. deep, and that she remembers one or two similar recesses in another wall, with the same aspect N.N.E., but they were blocked in a few years ago. Unfortunately I have not seen these recesses, but the narrow depth of 6 in. and the wrong aspect for bee boles make them a problem. On the other hand, this Whitefriars site is full of interest, and a small portion of their church still remains. The old cellars, now blocked

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in, yielded various pieces of pottery when foundations have been dug. It could well be that these recesses are bee boles belonging to monastic buildings. The whole building is shortly to be demolished, but we hope to save the bee boles.

Our fourth site is situated in the grounds of our own Headquarters, *Maidstone Museum*. I have visited these bee boles, but as Dr. Eva Crane has also done so and given me the permission to quote her Report, I am giving our members the benefit of her superior knowledge on this subject, and printing *her* description :

“ *Maidstone Museum Bee Boles*. Five recesses, rectangular, in mortared ragstone wall (not brick), facing south. Only the easterly one could be reached, at any rate, until winter, because of vegetation. It is 18 in. high, 25 in. wide and 13 in. deep, and about 2 feet above ground level.

According to the Curator, the house itself, in which the Museum is housed, is Elizabethan, but there was a previous house on the site, reputedly pre-Tudor. The ragstone wall joins the house at the east end, the measured bee bole being only a few feet from the house wall. It is reputed to be mediaeval, but there is no evidence at all as to its date, except that it is earlier than the house. There is a recent (c. 1870) gate in it to the left of the measured bee bole, and the others are to the west of it ; there could possibly have been a bee bole destroyed when the gate was made. The portion of the wall to the west of the existing part was removed at some time (when?) and replaced by a brick wall, now the boundary of a printing works and not on Museum property. Again there may have been other bee boles there.”

The fifth site is at *Cossington, near Aylesford*, and was reported by Mr. G. Wright, Maidstone Branch Secretary of the Kent Beekeepers' Association. Mr. and Mrs. K. Showler, who measured the bee boles, have allowed me to include part of a Report they made for Mr. Wright :

“ Situate at the end of an unmade road, is an enclosure called locally ' the monastery garden '. It is a derelict garden encircled on three sides by walls made up of a wide range of materials from a fine-grained sandstone not found in Kent and of similar nature to that used in the construction of Canterbury Cathedral where it was imported from France, to a yellow brick of the nineteenth century.

The bee boles are in the southern part of the northern wall in a fine piece of sixteenth century red brick. It is all of a kind except for four courses which have weathered badly, and are of a pink colour, running from the fifth course of the boles. This might be due to poor manufacture.



A. The Old Vicarage, St. Stephens, Canterbury.



B. Simon Langton School, Canterbury.

PLATE II



C. "The Monastery Garden", Cossington, Aylesford.



D. The Museum, Maidstone.

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The top of the wall is finished with an elaborate capwork which may give a clue to the age of the craftsman responsible. This is a common sight on older walls in the South-East.

There are three boles in the wall as well as a little window on the open end of the wall. This is narrower than the boles and is about 4 feet from the ground. The other niches are not blocked-up windows for there is no sign of them from the back. The measurements of the boles are the following : 18 in. wide, 14 in. in height to arch, and 22 in. to top of arch ; 11 in. deep and 13 in. distance apart. All are identical and are 2 feet above the ground at the back of the raised border.

An interesting aspect of boles Nos. 1 and 2 is that at the front centre of the shelf a half-brick has been taken out. This has been done with care. Could this be a method of fixing a base on which the skep stood ?

The workmanship is of a high quality, and the wide joint at the base of each arch has a fillet of tile in it. The arches are well formed and the boles commence on the same course. At the present time I should place the work at a late stage in the period indicated and its fine finish leads me to think that this is a product of a travelling team of craftsmen and not the local bodger. This might prove a clue to other boles.

The farm in which the site is situate could, in the past, have adjoined that of which Maidstone Museum was once the farmhouse. It is about an hour's walk apart on the same road to Chatham."

The sixth site is at *Orpington*, and was sent in by our Local Secretary there, Mr. Stoyel. He and Mrs. Stoyel discovered this site after their attention had been drawn to a reference in Mr. P. E. W. Street's notes on Bark Hart. They called at 30 Bark Hart Road in order to photograph the bee boles, and found there were twelve built into a red brick wall at the bottom of the garden. I will now quote Mr. Stoyel : All the recesses are now bricked up flush with the wall. I think that there may originally have been more than twelve bee boles, since they ranged along the whole of the remaining part of the original wall. Three of them were in the garden of No. 30, one at the boundary between Nos. 30 and 32, and the remainder in the garden of No 34. The garden of No. 32 did not reach the wall, as No. 34 has an extra strip of garden at the bottom.

The measurements of the bee boles are approximately 10 in. wide, 12 in. high, with in addition a triangular portion at the top formed by bricks set diagonally, giving a further $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. internal height, or a total of $16\frac{1}{2}$ in. Each recess has been filled by 4 bricks, placed horizontally, which with the mortar just filled the space. The triangular sections

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were filled with portions of bricks, but one was missing at the top of the fourth recess from the east, so I was then able to measure the depth of this recess and found it to be approximately 11 in. The first and second recesses were 5 feet apart, and the second and third, 4 ft. 8 in., the third and fourth, 5 ft. A little to the east of the first recess was the blocked-up doorway in the wall.

Now about the site itself. The old house Bark Hart was built as a manor house, but did not long remain one. The Manor of Great Orpington was in the hands of Christ Church Priory, Canterbury until the Dissolution, following which the Manor was acquired by Sir Percival Hart. He promptly built a manor house, as his residence, right beside Orpington Church. This would have been about 1540, and it has always been stated to have been a new building—then it is quite possible that it incorporated part of a somewhat earlier building, but there is considerable doubt about this. Sir Percival did not remain there long, as he inherited Lullingstone Castle and moved in there. Bark Hart seems quickly to have lost its status as the Manor House. It was also considerably rebuilt comparatively soon afterwards, possibly owing to a fire.

So far as the garden wall, containing the bee boles, is concerned, I do not think it is as old as Tudor, and would date it about 1650. At present, the wall serves as a useful boundary wall between the gardens of modern houses, and the churchyard.

I should like to express my gratitude to Dr. Eva Crane, Mr. and Mrs. Baker, Mr. and Mrs. Stoyel, Mr. and Mrs. Showler, Miss Joan Harding and Miss Mary Smith, for their help and kindness. Also my sincere thanks to Dr. Eva Crane, Mr. and Mrs. Baker, Mr. and Mrs. Showler and Miss Mary Smith for their excellent photographs.

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