

### *Living through the Reformation at St Dunstan's, Canterbury*

Several University of Kent staff and students were among those gathered at St Dunstan's church hall on Saturday 9 April where they were due to take part in a Study Day organised by the churches committee of the Kent Archaeological Society. As chairman of the committee, Mary Berg opened proceedings by first thanking Dr Graham Durkin and Jose Gibbs for their help prior to the day and then introducing the first speaker. Alasdair Hogarth (author of the excellent church guide book) provided the audience with an informative and interesting introduction to the early medieval history of St Dunstan's church. In particular, he highlighted the Anglo-Saxon origins of the church and its role in Henry II's penitential pilgrimage to Becket's shrine, before turning to the establishment of two important chantries, the second involving the Roper family (linked to Sir Thomas More through his daughter's marriage).

Having established the church setting, the audience was then treated to an erudite and consummate analysis of the religious changes during the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and their impact on the parish by Professor Ken Fincham. He adopted a chronological approach, providing a clear and accessible review of a complex subject that included ideas about why certain changes occurred in addition to how and when. A short discussion followed that brought out further points which meant after lunch (ably provided by the ladies of the church) members of the audience were ready to examine the Reformation changes using St Dunstan's as a case study.

Drawing on documentary sources as well as the church itself, the leaders of the four workshops guided participants through the religious changes at St Dunstan's. This was achieved by dividing the audience into four groups, each group rotating so that by the close everyone had done everything. The two workshops in the church were led by Imogen Corrigan (a Kent graduate currently working on her doctorate at the University of Birmingham) and Professor Fincham. Imogen had probably the most difficult task because almost all of the medieval church fittings have gone, but nevertheless she ably explained what St Dunstan's would have been like before the Reformation. Ken's group looked at the effects of these religious changes on the church furnishings, especially matters regarding the pulpit, the altar/communion table and rails; St Dunstan's providing excellent examples.

Those in the church hall examined digital photos of different documents: churchwardens' accounts, wills and visitations, and were also able to see two originals brought specially from Canterbury Cathedral archives. These were under the care of Jackie Davidson, cathedral archivist and one of the leaders of the documentary workshops. The other leader was Dr Sheila Sweetinburgh, whose session on the wills and churchwardens' accounts from Henry VIII and Edward VI's reigns sought to investigate the evidence for devotional practices in the late medieval church and during the early Reformation. Having sources from the last year of Queen Mary and the early decades of Elizabeth, Jackie's group looked for evidence regarding later developments within the church, some seen to correlate extremely closely with the surviving church fabric. As a result participants enjoyed a rare opportunity to investigate complimentary types of evidence guided by enthusiastic and well informed leaders who brought to life the changes experienced by 16<sup>th</sup> century St Dunstan's parishioners, including the buying of a Bible in English in 1538/9 and the removal of the 'Idolatetrous steapes of the chawncell' in 1571.

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