

THE CHURCH OF ST MARGARET **UNDERRIVER**

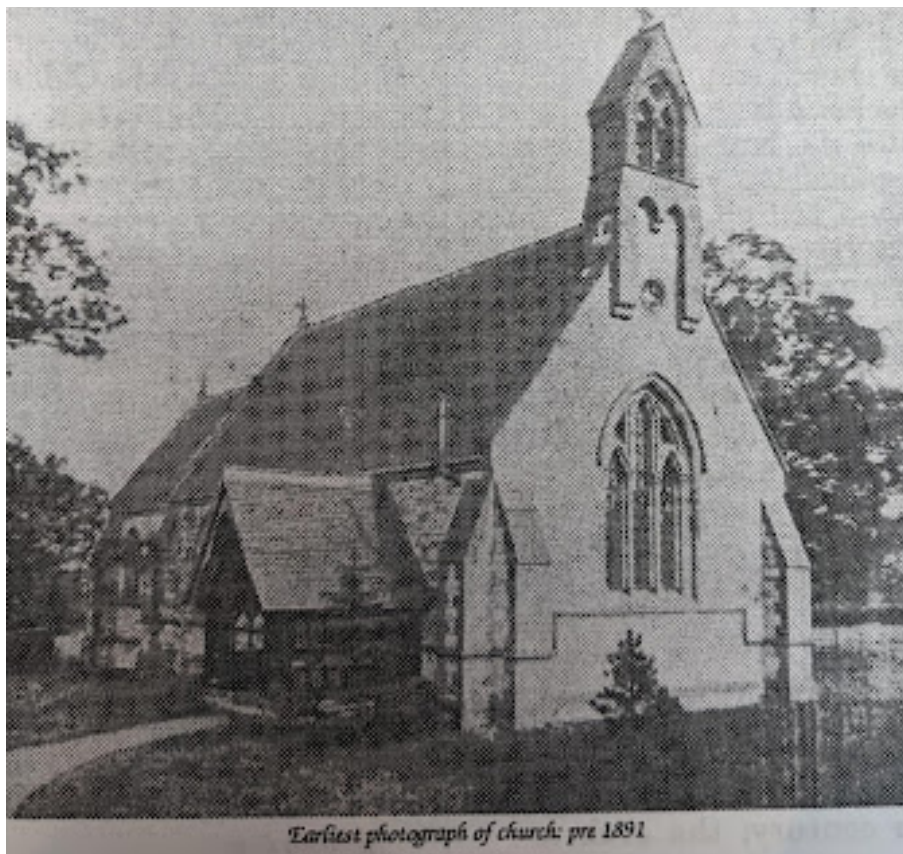


HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

The Church of St Margaret

The Architecture

The church was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott RA, who gained special fame for his restorations of Gothic churches and cathedrals. It was built in 1867 by John R Davison of Underriver House and cost £1,930.14s.24/2d. The contract was taken by Mr Henry Constable, builder, of Penshurst.



The plan is fairly typical of Gilbert Scott, though by his standards it is very plain. There is another of his churches in Langton Green: All Saints, built in 1862, a little larger immediately recognisable by the bell-cote. He chose the “decorated” late thirteenth century style for St Margaret’s.

The church is built of ragstone, otherwise called Kentish Rag (sandstone) dressing. Ragstone cannot be carved, but the sandstone makes beautiful ornamentation to the windows, arches and doorways.

Exterior

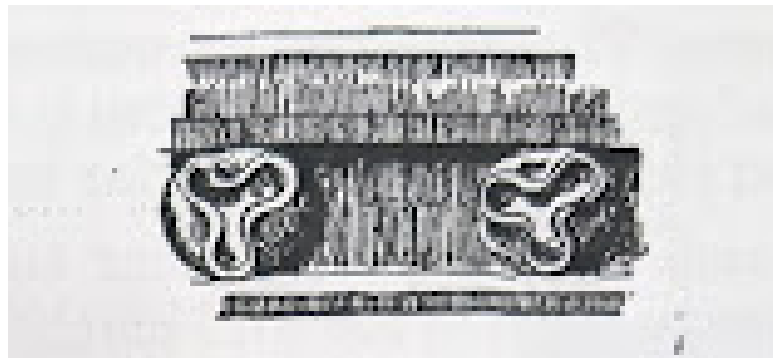
The church stands in the centre of the village, near the Old School and is altogether harmonious with its surroundings. Notice the buttresses, not decorative but necessary in the design and typical of the thirteenth century style. There is not really a bell tower, but two bells hang in an open bell-cote which rises from the steeply pitched roof at the west end and it is surmounted by a cross. The circular window below the bells, seen in earlier photographs, had its place taken by the Second World War memorial clock. The roof was re-tiled in 1992, using Keymer peg tiles. The vestry, matching the existing building, was added in 1930.

North Door

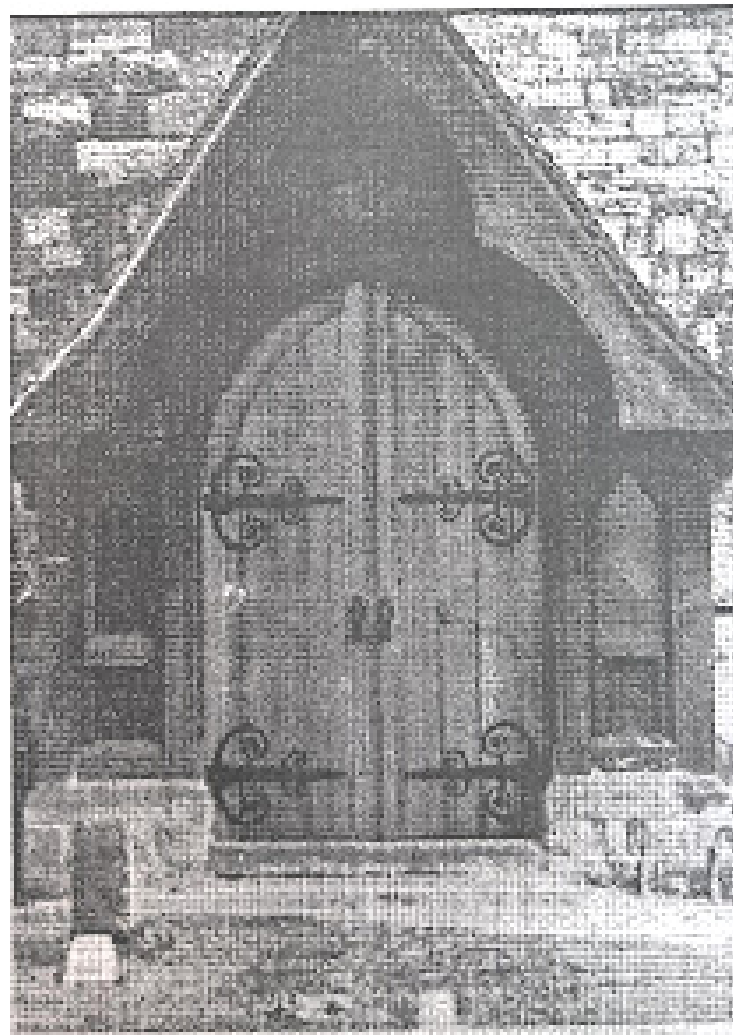
Originally there were little gates to the porch and the ornate Victorian doors were added in 1930. Inside, the arch is an adaptation of the 13th century; the arch is pointed but not so acutely as the early English style.



The mouldings are numerous and fine and on either side can be seen a copy of the ball flower ornament (1307-1327). These are globular with three incurved flowers. At the base of the arches there is a good example of a 'water holding' moulding, cut in this way to emphasise the shape of the column.



An early ball flower

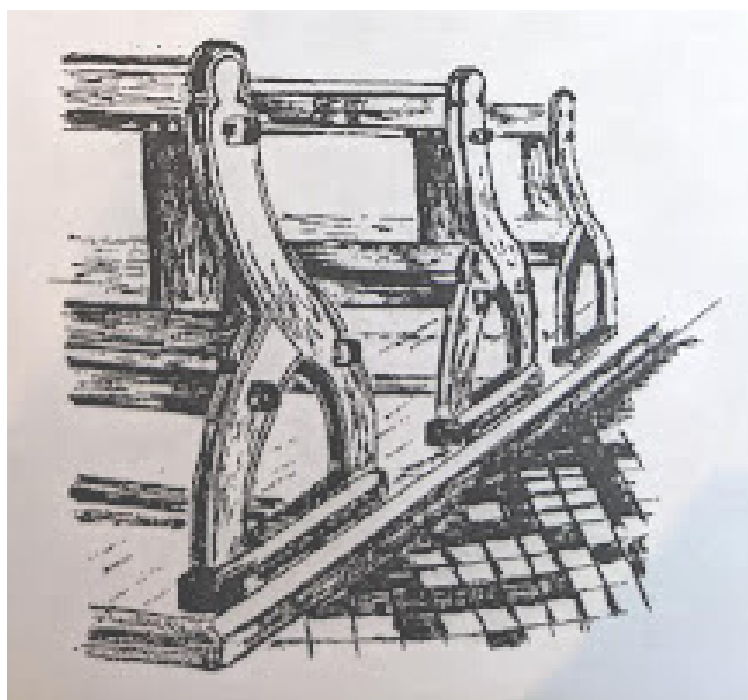


Porch and outer doors

Interior

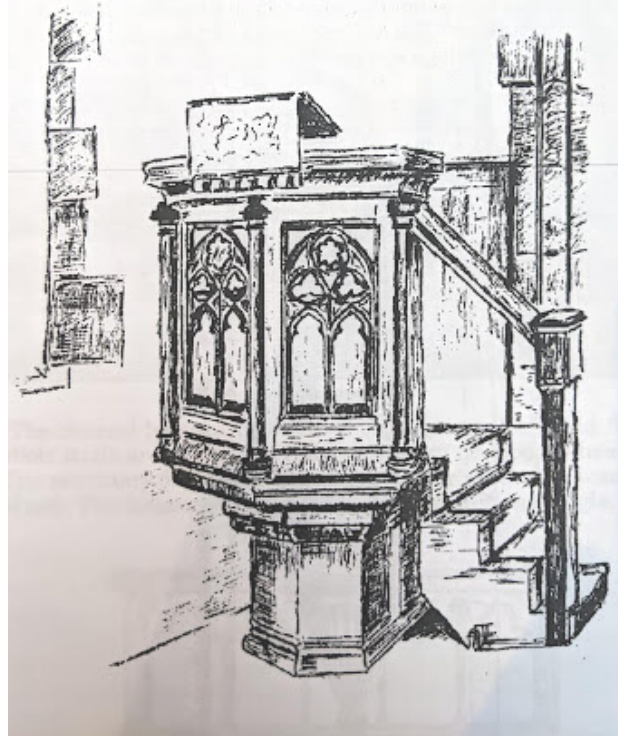
The church inside is of the simplest design, "two cell": chancel and nave. The nave has a wooden roof: it is open with rafters stained and varnished. Its form is simple: a high-pitched single framed rafter roof with a collar beam. The aisle has Victorian floor tiles, unglazed and laid in a chequer pattern of red and black.

The windows are in the decorated style with geometrical tracery and Victorian adaptations. The tracery is supported on vertical bars called mullions. Geometrical tracery started with having a single circle and sometimes three. St Margaret's has cusps (projecting points) within the circles. There was never any stained glass, but some panes are slightly blue. The pews are open and made of stained pine. They were cleaned in 1989. They had become very dark, but are now restored to a lovely rich colour. The Church-wardens' staves are most elegant: one surmounted by a mitre and the other by a crown.



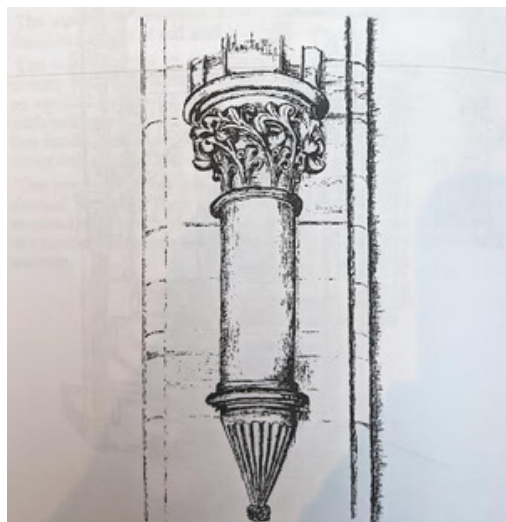
End of pews

The pulpit was installed in 1931, but there probably was an earlier one with an open front. Notice the carving on the front which echoes the shape of the windows.



Pulpit

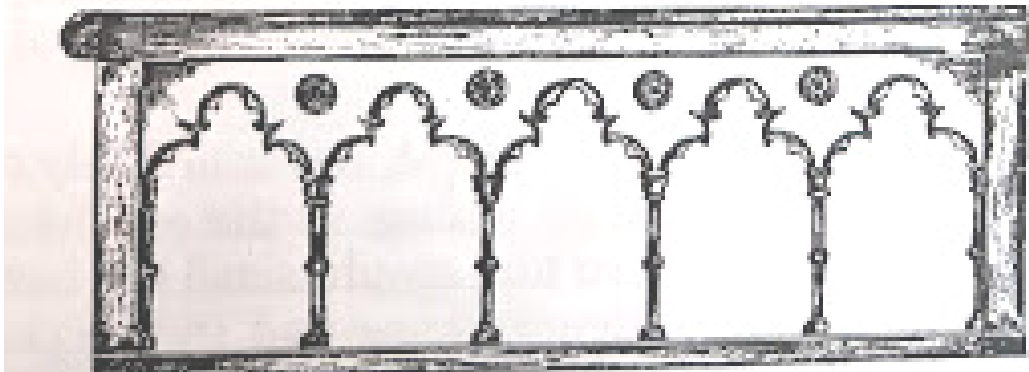
Between the chancel and the nave is the chancel arch. This is a Victorian adaptation of medieval columns, stopped well above head height so as not to impede the view for the congregation. Once again there are the ball flower bosses each side of the arch. The capitals are nicely carved, copies of the 13th century foliage style.



*Part of
chancel arch*

Chancel

The chancel has a simple barrel or wagon roof of wood. The choir stalls are of oak and have some very fine 'poppy heads'. The sanctuary chair stands inside the altar rails: all are made of oak. The lectern, given in 1902, is the traditional eagle.



Altar rails



Poppy Head



Lectern

Organ

The organ was installed in 1933 and given by Mr William Powell. It cost £2,000. The organ has two manuals and, for a small village church, is exceptional. It has superb quality of tone and an excellent range of stops, particularly the swell manual and the pedals, and can produce a rich and thrilling sound when used to capacity. The organ was completely overhauled in 1994 and the newly silvered and gilded pipes look magnificent.

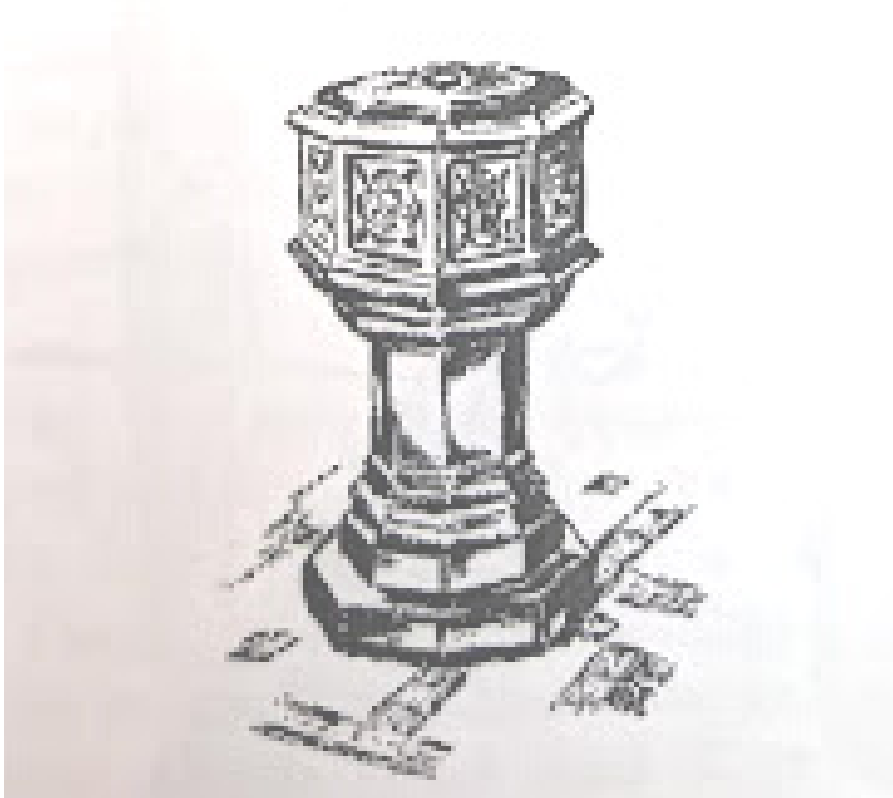
The organ case was designed by Caroe and is of finely carved oak. It was re-polished at the same time as the overhaul, and the button polish has darkened and emphasised the beautiful carving. The style is early Renaissance and in the classical tradition. Notice the balanced patterns and how the carving on the left is echoed over the door into the vestry.



Vestry Door 8

West End

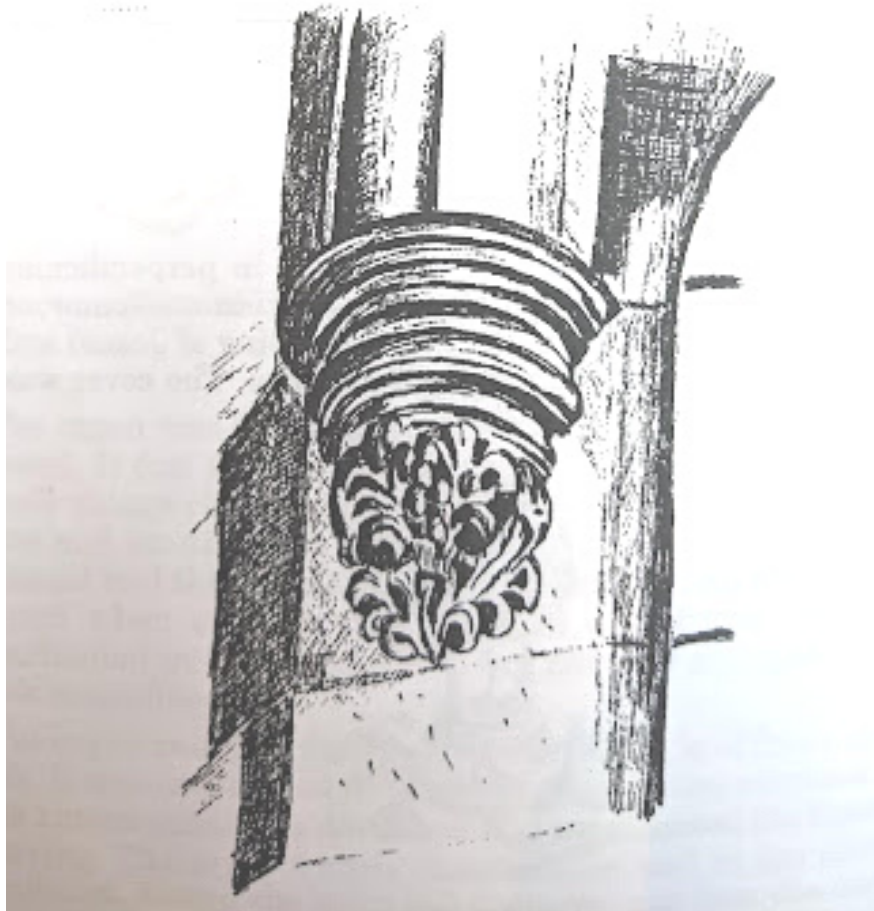
At the back of the church is a stone font, in perpendicular style, carved with the initials JHS (*Jesu hominum salvator*, or it may be the first letters of the Greek spelling of Jesus) and Kentish flowers: lilies, primroses, snowdrops. The cover was made in 1935.



Font

The cupboard, where the boiler was originally installed, has some attractive linen-fold panelling.

St Margaret's is a most harmonious small church, full of light and warm colour. It is not very old and yet it reflects man's love for God and his desire to worship Him. The church shines with this love; the brass is beautifully polished and the wood and tiles glow against the backcloth of pale stone. It is also full of God's wonderful love for us.



Where can you find this stone carving?



cc by sa/2.0 - Church of St Margaret, ... by Derek Harper - geograph.org.uk/p/3722606

The History.

The Oxford Dictionary describes a hamlet as "a small village, especially one without a church": such was Underriver in the early 1860s. It was situated in one of the most isolated parts of the parish of Seal, with a population of little over one hundred. It is believed that the one-room building, built in 1850, marked on the 1862 map as 'the new church', was Francis Woodgate's Chapel of Ease and was used for a Sunday afternoon service taken by the Vicar of Seal or by one of his five curates.

As early as 1849, Francis Woodgate was corresponding with Lord Camden about this plan for a church in Underriver and worrying that the Reverend T O Blackall, the Vicar, would "act much too hastily and without judgement".

Rev Thomas Offspring Blackall was vicar from 1846-1874 and was the last vicar of the joint parishes of Kemsing and Seal. He did much to pioneer the separation of the two parishes and had created the separate parishes of Underriver in 1866 and Seal St Lawrence in 1867, and we know that he donated £400 towards St Margaret's in the same year. He was buried at St Lawrence.

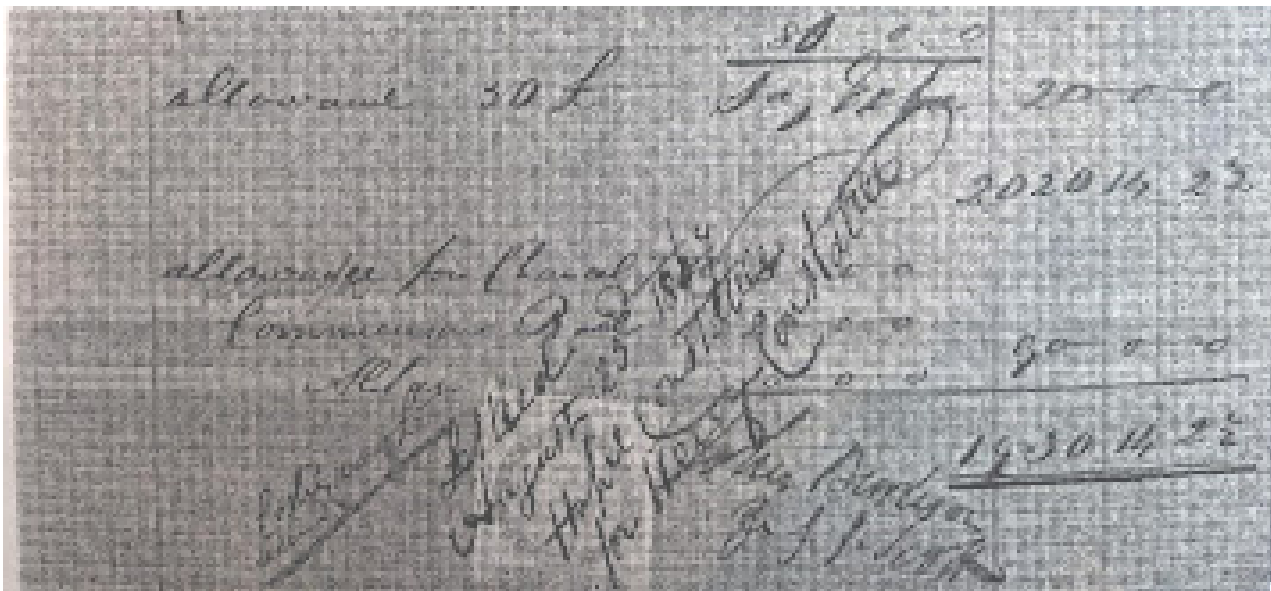
Mr Blackall was the great-great-grandson of Offspring Blackall, Bishop of Exeter. His father was tutor to the Earl of Plymouth, Mary Sackville of Knole's first husband. He married Emma Fenwick and built a large house at Godden Green.

In 1874 he retired and died five years later (1879) at 57 years, leaving three sons and four daughters. His unmarried daughter, Olive, lived at Godden Green until her death in 1945.

The Old School (the south end) bears the date 1850. Up to about 1862 this was possibly used as a Chapel of Rest and for afternoon Sunday worship. At this time, early records show that a room at the Old Forge was used as the school. It seems likely that the Chapel of Rest became available as the school, when the church was built and was extended in 1897. It was always a church school.

In about 1862 The Right Honourable John Davison had come to live at Underriver House and he soon felt that better accommodation was needed for Sunday worship and when Mr Blackall suggested the building of a small church, he saw an opportunity to "do his duty as landlord", as well as to erect a memorial to his mother, Margaret Pearson Davison. Hence the choice of patron saint.

He engaged the services of the architect Gilbert Scott, a noted Tory and well known for his restorations of Gothic churches, including Westminster Abbey, and designer of the Albert Memorial, the Martyr's Memorial at Oxford and St Pancras Station. Mr Constable, builder of Penshurst, was contracted to do the work, "to whom great praise must be accorded for the excellency of the work".



Invoice

The result was "a beautiful little building (in the 13th century style) without any ornamentation whatever, with sittings for above 130 persons". There is an invoice for £1,930.148.212d (see above) a sizeable sum in those days.

A licence having been obtained, the opening service was held on Saturday morning, 8th June 1867. "The inhabitants had done their best to make the hamlet assume a holiday appearance with garlands, triumphal arches and flags".

The church was crowded, with many people standing. A distinguished company of guests included fifteen clergy. The Archbishop of Canterbury was represented by the Rural Dean. The Seal Parish choir was assisted by choristers from Esher in Surrey and their organist presided at the harmonium.

The sermon was preached by the Vicar of Seal from St John IV verses 23 and 24: "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in Truth".

After the service a numerous company adjourned to the residence of Mr Davison (Underriver House) where, on the lawn, in one of Edgington's fine tents, a *recherché* luncheon was provided, the Penshurst brass band being stationed at the lower end of the lawn. After the meal, healths were drunk and speeches made. Mr Davison referred to "the very kind letter" received from the Archbishop thanking him "for building that little church". The Rural Dean said that the Archbishop would have been present if it had been at all possible.

Mr Scott, later Sir Gilbert, thanked Mr Davison for the opportunity, "though on a small scale", of carrying out his art. Mr Davison spoke self-deprecatingly of "the small matter that had brought them together that day", and said that all he had done was to "put his hand in his pocket".

The Honourable Mortimer Sackville West, representing the family at Knole, who held the patronage of Seal benefice, said he was much gratified "in seeing that pretty building so strictly ecclesiastical and so beautiful in style".

Mr Sackville West's mother, Lady De la Warr, donated the carved oak chair in the sanctuary and the communion stools.

There was a second service at four o'clock, after which the whole population assembled in a spacious booth outside the church for a substantial repast. The juveniles were provided with plum cake and tea in the school room, the Penshurst brass band played and the proceedings were brought to a close early in the evening.

In 1869 Jane Ann Davison, wife of John Davison, died tragically in childbirth. The children were brought up by a devoted aunt, Maria Foster Wood, whose memorial plaque can be seen in the chancel. Although John Davison's career flourished - he became Judge Advocate General in Gladstone's government in 1870 - he never recovered from his loss and died suddenly of heart failure in 1871, leaving no money for the church, which may be the reason for the delay in the dedication of St Margaret's. His son, Arthur, was only 5 years old when he inherited Underriver House and when he came of age there was little money to maintain the estate. Land was sold to Lord Derby and the house was let to the Peploe family. Arthur's and Dorothy's memorial can be seen in the church.

The church was dedicated and consecrated on 16th July 1875 to be known as St Margaret, Underriver, and three months later, the Reverend George Morley became the first vicar. Mortimer Sackville West became patron until, in 1907, the patronage was transferred to the Bishop of Rochester.

In 1876 it is recorded, in the minutes of a vestry meeting which took place in the school room, that Mr Horace Beaumont was appointed a church-warden.

In 1885, when Rev John H Hardy was vicar, the minutes record a deficiency of £2.0.7 owing to Mr Beaumont.

In 1886 at a vestry meeting, the accounts were passed and again showed a deficiency owing to Mr Beaumont. A conversation arose as to the desirability of having the stove repaired.

The same year, the Rural Dean, J Burnett Murdoch, wrote that he found the church in a fair state of repair, but that he thought that the pine tree at the west corner of the porch should be cut down or trimmed. He continued: "I have to suggest that a new surplice is much required. At present there seems to be only one and that in a bad state of repair ... It seems to me most desirable that the ground round the church and belonging to it should be consecrated for the purposes of burial. One body is already buried in it.

At present the bodies of persons dying in Underriver parish have to be taken to Seal for burial, a distance of 342 miles, up a very long and very steep hill, so that the expenses of funerals to poor persons is excessive, and the fatigue to relatives attending them very considerable... A parsonage house is much required."

In 1889 vestry minutes: "The Vicar (Rev R A Wood) presided and congratulated the parishioners on the fact that the warming apparatus had been put in and paid for, and was a success, and one from which much comfort would be derived. And also, the parishioners could now bury their dead in the churchyard attached to the church, it having been consecrated on March 4th 1889 by Bishop Marsden (for Bishop of Dover). A vote of special thanks was passed to Mr Horace Beaumont for all the trouble he had taken as regarded the warming apparatus and getting it done at so reasonable a price as £24..."

Between 1875 and 1891 there were numerous vicars; this large turnover was probably due to the fact that there was no accommodation for them.

As mentioned, there was "little ornamentation" in the church, but gradually much was added. There was a small organ which was played by Miss C King. Miss Herries gave a pair of curtains for the church door. New books, hassocks, carpet and curtains were bought and paid for out of church funds in 1892.

In 1893 it was announced that Lord Derby had promised an annual subscription of £10 towards church expenses ... and the Rural Dean ventured to renew his "recommendation that a small vestry be erected".

For the next few years, various things claimed the attention of the PCC: the upkeep of the churchyard, thanking the organist, the finance deficit, church cleaning, the election of a Lay Representative to the Rural Deanery, the resignation of Mr Davison, a vote of thanks for Miss Janet Allnutt for training the choir and the retirement of the Rev R L Allnutt.

(Almost the same things continue to exercise the minds of the PCC today! Editor.)

In 1900 the Reverend Sydney Stapleton Adkins became vicar and remained so until 1936, when he retired to White Rocks, Underriver.

Many of the major fittings were installed by him, presumably out of his own pocket. The lectern, 1902, is in memory of Sarah Adkins, widow of Stephen Adkins and mother of Rev Stapleton Adkins.

The altar cross was given in 1906 in memory of Henrietta Stanley who died aged 21. The pulpit was given in 1931 in memory of Sam and Lucy Stanley, while the font top (1935) is in memory of Lucy Stanley. Stanley is the family name of Lord Derby.

The minutes of the PCC AGM continued to be concerned with the every day, and most familiar, problems of a small parish. An efficient church-warden was thanked and re-elected. The bell ringer was paid. Mr Peplow (the tenant of Underriver House) took over the choir and presented a hymn board and book rests to the church.

Additional lamps were inserted. A new carpet and new hassocks were bought. The coal shed was repaired and a new wheel barrow was bought for the Sexton (Mr J Porter). Mr Peplow left. The only mention of the war is a reference to the extra work taken on by Mr Herries in conducting services in the church. During this time, the vicar was assisting at Shipbourne while Mr Schreiber was engaged in war work in France.

In 1923 the lychgate was built as a memorial to the fifteen men of Underriver who died in the First World War; on the coffin rest are inscribed their names. It was also decided to try to bring water to the church for cleaning purposes.

In 1924 the first elected Church Council was formed and, in 1925, Mr Temple joined this Council. The same year, Mr Herries gave the church a piece of land adjoining the churchyard. This might be a strip between the church and the school, to the north of the oak tree.

In 1927 it was decided to charge the school two shillings and sixpence, each year, for the right to have their cesspool in the PCC's field. And the WI was asked to pay one shilling for putting up a notice board in the same field.

In 1928 heating, lighting, the poor state of the organ and the pay of the organist and Sexton were the PCC's concerns. It was decided to install gas for the lighting and heating, but the church-wardens did not feel that it could come out of the Church Expenses Fund. However, Mrs Peplow and Mrs Mallett suggested that a concert and a sale of work should be held in aid of the scheme and the motion was carried.

When there was a surplus of £99 from the heating fund, the Council (or the majority) was in favour of starting a fund for a new organ. Mr Caroe, architect to the Ecclesiastical Commission, had designed a combined organ chamber and vestry in 1907 and a Tonbridge builder had quoted £120 for the work. However, it was considered prudent to have fresh estimates before the Council finally committed itself.

In 1930, after obtaining a faculty and several quotations, it was decided to go ahead with building the Vestry. The tender of £555.8.8 from Messrs Edward Punnett and Sons of Tonbridge was accepted. £601.8.8 had been collected by subscriptions, concerts, jumble sales etc, and the building was finished by the end of the year.

There remained £22.14.7 out of which a table for the vestry was paid for.

In 1933 Mr William Powell, of the Coach House, St Julian's, announced that he proposed to give the church an organ and that it would be in place by St Margaret's day (July 20th) 1934. The Council gratefully accepted this most generous gift. It was built by Messrs Walker and Co, the oak case was designed by Mr Caroe in the Renaissance style, and it cost altogether about £2,000.

In later years Mr Powell also paid the expenses in connection with the electricity required by the new organ for its bellows. He was also concerned that the church should be kept warm as the organ was suffering from the damp.

The porch doors were added in 1948 as a memorial to Dr Stapleton Adkins and, in the same year, the clock was given as a memorial of those who died in the Second World War. Below the clock is a stone giving their names and also listing the enemy devices which fell in the parish during that war.

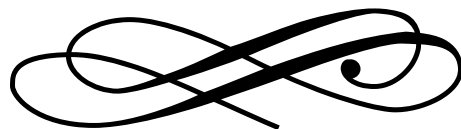
Underriver was very much in 'a bomb alley'; the church lost most of its windows and the Vicarage had a near miss.

A German fighter pilot, Erich Walter, aged 22, was shot down on 15th September 1940 and buried in the churchyard. In 1963 his remains were exhumed for re-burial in Germany.

The church became a Grade II listed building in 1976. In 1980 Rev J W Bazin, the last vicar, retired, and the Vicarage was sold. Rev Prebendary Donald Lynch, Priest-in-charge of Seal, was also appointed Priest-in-charge of St Margaret's.

Until the sale and dispersal of the Campbell Estate in the 1970s, the original connections between the church and Underriver House had been maintained. Mr Peploe played the harmonium for many years and trained the choir. He died at Fawke House in 1939. Mr C A Campbell was church-warden for twenty-one years until his death in 1957.

In 1967, a processional cross was presented as a gift to the church by the joint Village Associations to commemorate its centenary.



Acknowledgements & Thanks:

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