



The Old Palace Mayfield



Mayfield has had links with the See of Canterbury from the ninth century until the Reformation. **ST.DUNSTAN**, Archbishop of Canterbury from 960 to 988, built a little wooden church here. He was a statesman, reformer, musician and metal worker, whose forge at Mayfield was reputed to have been visited by the Devil, disguised as a beautiful woman. Dunstan noticed the cloven hoof, however, took his tongs from the furnace, and pinched the Devil's nose. The Devil leapt to Tunbridge Wells, plunged his nose in the springs there, now the chalybeate springs in the Pantiles. On another occasion, the Devil appeared disguised as a weary traveller, and asked Dunstan to provide him with a steel shoe; again, recognising the Devil, Dunstan beat him so severely while pretending to fix the shoe that the Devil begged for mercy. Dunstan agreed, subject to the Devil's promise never to enter a house where a horseshoe is hung.



The history of Mayfield begins with **St. Dunstan**, and no other records are preserved of the Old Palace until 1260 when Archbishop **Boniface of Savoy** obtained from Henry III for the Manor of Mayfield a charter granting Markets and a Fair. The Fair was to be held on three consecutive days: the vigil, day and morrow of St. Dunstan's feast, 18th, 19th, and 20th May. This fair has been revived in recent years.

Mayfield emerges into fuller light towards the end of the 13th century. Archbishop **John Peckham** (1279-1292) is known to have spent much money on building. He was in residence at Mayfield in 1285 and again in 1287, and probably the early English remains here are of his time. His successor, **Robert de Winchelsea** (1294-1313) was frequently in residence at Mayfield and entertained **Edward I** here. We know the dates of three of these visits: 30th May 1297 and 22nd June 1299, when from Mayfield he sent letters, made payments, received fines, and presented an offering of seven shillings to the Chantry Chapel of St. Alban at the Parish Church, and once more, on 28th June 1305, the 'Hammer of the Scots' rested at Mayfield during his last tour of Sussex.

The Great Hall was probably built by Archbishop **Walter Reynolds** (1313-1327) between 1325 and 1326. It was in this Hall that Archbishop **Simon de Meopham** (1328-1333) convoked the 'CONCILIUM MAGHFELDENSE' in 1332, a Provincial Synod which made important disciplinary regulations for the celebration of Church festivals. Meopham was the first Archbishop to have died at Mayfield. **John de Stratford** was appointed Archbishop in 1333. He spent much time at Mayfield and acquired a reputation for his charity to the poor, personally giving money and food each day to those in need. He died at Mayfield in 1348, the year of the Black Death. His two immediate successors, John de Ufford and Thomas Bradwardine, fell victims to it. **Simon Islip** (1349-1366) also spent much time at Mayfield. Here he drew up the charter of his new foundation at Oxford, Canterbury Hall, and endowed it with the annual revenue of the Mayfield Parish; and in 1359 he issued a licence for the marriage of Edward III's daughter, Mary, to John the Dauntless, Duke of Brittany. Archbishop **William Courtenay**, who succeeded him, was at Mayfield in April 1382, when he received his writ to attend Parliament. Owing to the fire which destroyed the Parish Church (1389) he held ordinations at the Palace, and on 20th September 1393, the last ceremony of this kind was performed here. (*Until Thomas*

Treherne of the Parish of St. Thomas of Canterbury was ordained priest by Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, bishop of Arundel and Brighton, in 1979.) **Thomas Bouchier** (1454-1488) resided mainly at Knole, but is known to have visited Mayfield in September 1479. His crest - a knot (two cords looped with the four ends loose, two in each direction) - was carved over a doorway. This knot can now be seen, on a stone, in the Well House.



As the other Archbishops of the 15th century did not reside at Mayfield with any frequency, its fortunes began to decline, though the last of its Catholic Lords, **William Warham** (1503-1532) revived its glories. He added the Gate House, and the porch of the Great Hall. His coat of arms is engraved on a first floor doorway. He was almost to the end of his life a dutiful servant of the king. However, belatedly in 1532, taking Thomas Becket as his role model, he was stirred into opposing Henry VIII's

ambitions for the Supremacy over the English church, knowing that he may face possible death for treason. Fortunately, as the records state, 'God took him first', and he died peacefully in his bed, an old man of 81.

A small portrait of **Cardinal Campeggio** was displayed until recently in the courtyard. Tradition has it that he visited Warham after adjourning the court case on Henry VIII's Great Matter. He had been sent by Pope Clement VII in 1527 with the instruction to hear but not to conclude the case, an instruction which was achieved because Catherine of Aragon demanded that her appeal should be heard in Rome. When Campeggio left Mayfield, he gave the small portrait to William Warham as a token of his appreciation for his generous hospitality.



Warham's death left the See vacant for **Cranmer**, who sanctioned Henry VIII's divorce and completed the breach with Rome by his acceptance of the Act of Supremacy.

Cranmer was the last Archbishop to own the Mayfield estate, and alienated it on 12th November 1545 by making it over, as part of the 'Great Exchange', to Henry VIII.

The king granted it to **Sir Edward North** on 5 January 1546. He sold it to **Sir John Gresham** on 2nd August 1546; in 1567 it passed to **Sir Thomas Gresham**, founder of the Royal Exchange, who repaired and added to it. He was already a successful iron master and arms manufacturer when **Queen Elizabeth I** visited him at Mayfield in 1573.



Legend has it that a new staircase was built to avoid close contact between the queen and her subjects. Remnants of its base can still be seen, as can the sword with which she knighted Gresham. On this occasion Warham's panelled room was used for the Queen and was known ever after as the 'Queen's Chamber'.

For her comfort, Gresham placed a stone fireplace in the day chamber (today the governors' room).

In 1575 the Middle House in the village was built, to house the Gresham retainers.

Gresham died on 21st November 1579. The property was bequeathed to **Sir Henry Neville**, who sold it to **Thomas May** of Burwash in 1598. His wife sold the property to **John Baker** for £ 4,100. Michael Baker dismantled the Great Hall, stripped off its roof, and removed much of the stone to build his house at the other end of the village. This was the Lower House, the Little Palace, now known as Aylwins, and until recently, part of the Boarding School.

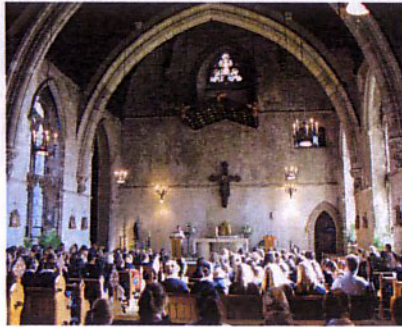
In 1858 the Old Palace was purchased by **Francis Cordrey**.

On Whit Tuesday 1863, a party of nuns and pupils from the convent of the Holy Child Jesus at St. Leonards-on-Sea enjoyed a picnic in the ruins. The large villa on site and the historical association with the pre-Reformation Church inspired **Cornelia Connelly**, foundress of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, to ask the necessary permission from Bishop Grant to purchase the property. He refused, but Louisa Catherine, **Duchess of Leeds**, a benefactor of the Society – and indeed of the Catholic Church in England – purchased it, and gave it to Cornelia Connelly, on condition that the ruins be restored. The project was daunting, and the magnitude of the task would have appalled anyone less courageous than Cornelia Connelly. But so much interest was aroused among Catholics by the idea of restoring this monument of the Catholic past, that, within two years, sufficient funds were collected to begin the restoration.

The work of restoring the Great Hall was undertaken by **Edward Welby Pugin** and on 21st July 1865, the first Mass was celebrated in the restored building, now the Chapel. The restoration of the buildings to the east of the Great Hall was undertaken by **George Goldie**. He unfortunately declared the great staircase unsafe, and impossible to restore, and created an ugly new entrance hall, and a staircase



Cornelia Connelly deemed 'very mean in its width'. The first eight pupils came to the Villa on 17th September 1872 and today – 2008 – the site is still occupied by the Independent Roman Catholic School for Girls.



The Great Hall

The Great Hall was built about 1325 and followed the plan of a typical manorial hall of the time, but in its spaciousness and design was without a doubt among the finest in the kingdom.

The **exterior** of the Great Hall is divided into three bays by buttresses of 7 ft. (2.1 mtr) projection and 3 ft.9ins (1.1mtr) in width. Between are relieving arches strengthening the wall which must have had a crenellated parapet with a walk behind.



The **porch** was probably added by Archbishop Warham. The carved capitals of the entrance are badly weathered – but the boss of the carved oak leaves in the centre of the quadripartite vault of the interior is well preserved. The ribs end in corbels in the form of devils.





The spaciousness of the building strikes one immediately on entering the Great Hall. The magnificent stone arches are the widest in England of the medieval period, with a span of 39 ft 9 ins (12.1 mtr), rising to a height of 42 ft (12.8mtr), with the roof a further 18 ft (5.5 mtr) higher. The Hall is 69 ft 6 ins (21.2 mtr) long,

constructed of local sandstone.

The arches are supported by buttresses, and spring from corbels in the form of foliated capitals supported by carved figures, most weathered.



The recess in the north east corner was probably used by the archbishops as a private dining area. It now contains the tomb - designed by Adrian Gilbert Scott - of Cornelia Connelly, the Foundress of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, who died in 1879.

The arches in the west wall originally led to the kitchen, buttery and pantry; above was the minstrels' gallery.



There are six windows, 30 ft. (9.1 mtr) high with mullion and transom; the lower lights have cinquefoil tracery while the higher are trefoiled; they are surmounted by a large triangular light of Kentish tracery whose innermost cusps end in 'roses'. The splayed jambs have moulded arches supported by slender engaged shafts with bases and leaf-carved capitals. There is also a hood mould above. Under each window is a stone seat.

High in the centre of the east wall there is a large triangular window, now filled with Victorian glass, and in the south-east a Tudor window of three lights; the



archbishops could have used this to observe proceedings below.



The combination of two doors in the south-east angle is very rare. Where the hood moulding of the larger door joins that of the smaller is a boss of a singularly attractive '**green man**', not grotesque as so many are.



A string course runs round the walls which are of ashlar with rubble above. The original roof was probably a timber barrel roof, the purlins resting on the arches. The Hall would have been heated by a central fire with a louvre above to let out the smoke.



The carved back of the Archbishop's throne, was moved to the north end of the east wall; the diaper carving is well preserved, and forms an appropriate setting for the **statue of the Madonna and Child**. This carved wooden statue dates from the fourteenth century, and is of English or Norman origin. It was dug up in the garden some time after the purchase of the property (1863), and was initially kept in a shrine in the garden.



The Crucifix is Italian, of the fourteenth century. It shows Christ in glory at the top, the symbols of the four evangelists on the arms and the donoress kneeling at the foot. The shape and design of the wood suggest Byzantine work of the eleventh or twelfth century; the inclusion of the evangelists characterised the Lucchese crucifixes of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and was thereafter only recorded twice, and in different form. There are striking similarities with a crucifix in the National Gallery, of the Sienese school (1305-1326), by Segna di Buonaventura, a pupil of Duccio, influenced by Simone Martini. There are likenesses, too, to the crucifix of Guaviento of Padua, in the Museo Civico at Bassano.

Study of a signed and dated (1360) polytych by Turone of Verona show striking parallels with ours.

THE REORDERING OF THE CHAPEL SINCE 1951.

War damage to the Chapel gave the opportunity to re-assess what was fitting to a fourteenth century Great Hall; the simplicity of the first restoration had been overlaid through the years by developments unsympathetic to the building. The heavy Victorian stained glass was removed and replaced by tinted diamond panes. The coats of arms of the original donors were placed in the trefoils at the top of each window. The heavy marble Gothic-style altarpiece, installed in 1881, was replaced by a simple stone altar.



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Below the string course was placed the polytych, given by Lady Russell of Killowen, originally to the Convent at Cavendish Square in London; but to preserve it from damage caused by pollution, it was moved to Mayfield. It hangs now in the ante-chapel at the back of the hall.



The Crucifix was purchased in 1952 from a private collection and hung above the string course. The large Stations of the Cross were replaced by ones carved by a craftsman of the community of Eric Gill at Ditchling. The same craftsman carved the angels on the testa (above the altar), carrying the shields of the Pope, St. Dunstan and the then Bishop of Southwark.



In the 1970s, after the Second Vatican Council, the earlier stone altar was replaced by a free standing stone

altar, the polytych was moved to the ante-chapel at the back, and the Crucifix was lowered.



When leaving the Chapel by the doorway in the east wall you notice a fine carving of a monk's head supporting the hood mould of the arch and in the room opposite an arched doorway which led to the cellars.

A wide stone stairway was unfortunately removed by George Goldie when a new entrance to the building was constructed.



The Old Palace was built round a **Courtyard**. Much of the existing walls are of the early English period as is also the carved statue of the Madonna and Child.



The **Sideboard** (*at present in the ante-chapel*) was found in one of the rooms of the first floor. The upper part is of English workmanship but the lower portion, of uncertain date and origin, is very elaborately carved with all the vessels and accessories used by an Archbishop in celebrating Mass. (one expert suggests that it might have a connection with the Teutonic Knights of Northern Germany .)

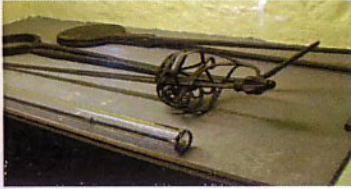
There are a number of prints on the walls which show the ruins of the Old Palace in the 19th century and the various stages of the restoration. There are also framed LEADEN VENTILATORS probably used in those portions of windows of the Great Hall which were permanently closed.

The **Gresham Parlour** (School Governors' room) has the original mantelpiece of Sir Thomas Gresham with his stone carved family crest of the grasshopper dated 1571. This is the room set up for Elizabeth I when she visited Mayfield. The fireback bears the Royal Arms during the Stuart period. In the **Front Hall** some 'relics' are preserved:



From back to front:

A pair of GAUFRE-IRONS formerly used in baking hearth cake.



The TONGS are supposed to have been used by St. Dunstan to fashion sacred vessels and articles of metal (and to pinch the devil's nose!), but are really of a later date.



The SWORD, according to tradition, belonged to Sir Thomas Gresham and was used by Queen Elizabeth I when she knighted him. It is a rapier of the 16th century.

The Riding Crop in the glass case belonged to Princess Victoria. When a girl of about 13, and staying at the Calverley Hotel, now called the Hotel du Vin, she came with her mother for a picnic in the grounds of the Old Palace. At the end of the day she gave the riding crop to a little girl who had come out from the crowd to greet her. The little girl grew into an old lady and when she died, she left the riding crop to the school.

The **Well House** being a covered building suggests that the well was once a place of pilgrimage. Here can be seen the so-called St. Dunstan's anvil, an iron mortar said to be a mustard mill and stones with carved Early English dog-toothed ornaments, fleurs-de-lis and one bearing the Bouchier knot.





The Old Palace

Gatehouse

This booklet is essentially the re-issue of an earlier guide to the Old Palace based on research by Sister Helena Desmond SHCJ.

Additional material was supplied by Mrs Margaret Bushell.

The photographs were added to help the visitor to identify the items of interest