

BADLESMERE

(Barsmer)

some historical notes

for further details of the history & architecture of our church,
readers are invited to consult the notes prepared some years ago by others
with Cherryl Fountain's drawings on the front page



Towards the end of the 18th century Edward Hasted, in his history of Kent, wrote
“It is a parish but little frequented a very forlorn rough country”



- Hasted considered the church *“a very small mean building, consisting of one isle and one chancel, with a small turret at the west end, in which there is one bell; there were formerly three bells here, but two were taken down and sold many years ago, towards the repair of the church”*
- is dedicated to **St Leonard**, a 6th century hermit from Vendome, near Orleans. King Clovis granted him authority to liberate prisoners, who were deemed “worthy”.
- In due course Leonard withdrew to solitude in a forested mountain, near Limoges – hence perhaps the dedication of this church – *“a place where peace envelopes the soul”*.

Our parish history falls neatly into three parts:

Four hundred years with the Badlesmeres & their descendants

followed by a century of turmoil & change

& then four centuries with the family of Sondes.

The Badlesmere family
Builders of the castle

Heirs of de Crèvecoeur
& Ancestors of the de Veres, Earls of Oxford

In 1086 the Domesday book records that **there was a church here** “with 2 servants”

- Before the conquest it was held by the **Abbot of St Augustine's at Canterbury**, & afterwards by Odo Bishop of Bayeux (half brother of the Conqueror)



- next came **Hamo de Crèvecoeur** (Heartbreak) the Conqueror's Constable of Dover castle, whose heirs adopted the name **de Badlesmere**
- For several generations the Badlesmere heirs were called either **Guncelin** or **Bartholomew**
- The first Bartholomew, was born around 1145
- They built a castle here – beside the church which would have served as their chapel
- Hasted says: *In the next field south-eastward of the church, the foundations of the antient seat of the Badlesmeres are easily traced out, by the different colours of the corn, and from the number of apartments in it appears to have been a very large and noble mansion; among them is a large pond, called the Cellar pond.*



- One of the Guncelins, with his brother Ralph, served in the army of King Richard the Lionheart at the two-year siege of Acre 1189-91
- Later Chief Justice at Chester for King Edward I, perhaps it was this Guncelin whose wooden monumental effigy (a cross-legged crusader) was recorded by the 17th century historian Thomas Philipott
- Probably this monument lay **in the small chapel** described by Hasted “*adjoining to the south side of it, the foundations of which still [in the late 18th century] remain, but it was fallen to ruin before the middle of the [17th] century; in this chapel or chancel, which had a door opening into the middle of the isle of the church, were the tombs of several of the family of Badlesmere.*”
- It is thought that the entrance to this chapel was through the arch on the south side of the nave now occupied by a 19th century window
- The **earliest recorded event in this church** seems to be the marriage in 1274 between Guncelin de Badlesmere (born circa 1244 in the adjoining castle) & Joan (born 1234 at Kingsdown, near Lynsted in Kent) daughter of Ralph Fitzbernard & his neighbour Joan Aquillon.

- The families of the bride & groom had been neighbours since the 12th century at least - both had inherited landholdings at Tong, near Bapchild, not far from Sittingbourne.
- The de Badlesmere lands included Tong castle – previously a fortress of the Kings of Kent.
- Those attending the marriage ceremony would surely recognise the present church building, which dates from the 13th century &, in outline, is still much as it was over 700 years ago.
- At first it did not extend eastwards beyond where the pulpit stands today – the original chancel is outlined by the narrowing of the building in that vicinity.
- The chancel step indicates the extension which took place in the late 13th century – shortly before or soon after the wedding mentioned above.
- Since then, apart from the disappearance of the Badlesmere family chapel, the only major changes are the fine 15th century roof with its 5 crown posts & the Georgian box pews & tower. (See below)
- The first child of this marriage, predictably named Bartholomew, was by far our most famous local figure - born in 1275
- He married Margaret, daughter of Juliana Fitzgerald of Offaly & Thomas de Clare, Lord of Thomond
- Margaret & Bartholomew had a son & 4 daughters
- Badlesmere served King Edward I in the French & Scottish wars, becoming in due course one of the most powerful men at the court of King Edward II, castellan of Bristol, Chilham, Tonbridge, &, most notably of Leeds.
- Though trusted as steward of the King's household, Bartholomew became exasperated by the King's tendency to consort with unsavoury favourites such as Piers Gaveston & the Despencers
- Turning against his royal master, he joined the rebellion of one of the King's cousins Thomas, Earl of Lancaster.



- Soon after Margaret Lady Badlesmere refused Queen Isabella entry to Leeds castle, the rebellious family fell from power & was deprived of all its possessions.
- In 1322 Lord Badlesmere was taken to his own lands at Blean, near Canterbury where he was hanged, drawn & quartered. His severed head was exhibited on a pole on the city's Burgate & his body was interred at the church of the Whitefriars in the city.
- Lady Badlesmere was imprisoned for a year in the Tower of London with her children.

- In 1328 the Badlesmere lands were granted afresh to Bartholomew's son Giles.
- After his death ten years later, the castle here at Badlesmere, with its church & the surrounding lands were inherited by Giles's eldest sister Maud, who in 1335 had married John de Vere the 7th Earl of Oxford, hereditary Lord Chamberlain
- Our church still bears the de Vere family's heraldic mullet – the star - on one of the pews near our communion table.



- John de Vere, the great-grandson of Maud de Badlesmere, was an adherent of the house of Lancaster in the Wars of the Roses. When the Yorkists were in the ascendant, John & his son Aubrey were beheaded in 1462 on Tower Hill by order of King Edward IV
- The manor of Badlesmere then reverted to the Crown, ending 4 centuries of involvement with one family

- In 1462 Badlesmere was granted to the King's brother Richard, Duke of Gloucester, who in 1483 became King Richard III

The last member of the Badlesmere family known to be connected with this place was a descendant of the great Bartholomew called Barbara Castlecombe (or according to some sources, Dunstanville) from Cricklade, Wiltshire, wife of John Writhe (or Wrythe).

A brass plate set commemorating her death in 1483 (or 1485) came to light in **1970** during renovation work in the vicinity of our communion table.

King Edward IV, acknowledging the foundation of the Order of the Garter by his ancestor King Edward III, created the office of Garter King of Arms & made John Writhe the first incumbent.

On his accession to the throne, Richard III founded the College of Arms, with Writhe at his head, but 2 years later, Richard's death at the battle of Bosworth ended the Yorkist years of power.

Barbara did not live to see her husband confirmed in the following year as Garter King of Arms by King Richard's greatest enemy, King Henry VII, ultimate victor of the Wars of the Roses.

To be one of the King's heralds during those days must have been quite a challenge – first question: *“who, at this moment, is King ?”*

To survive in office unscathed, John Writhe, true to his name, must have known how & when to wriggle & when to writhe.

A Century of Turmoil & Change

The Crown grants the manor to the Dukes of Norfolk

They are succeeded by
two generations of Auchers of Otterden & Sir Humphry Gilbert
who sells to the Sondes family of Throwley

As Badlesmere castle & the family mausoleum beside the church
are neglected & deteriorate,
the parish develops links with Leaveland

- King Richard III granted Badlesmere to



John Howard, Lord High Admiral & Duke of Norfolk who was killed in 1485 fighting for King Richard at the battle of Bosworth in Leicestershire

- The manor of Badlesmere then passed to Norfolk's son, Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey, who, after Bosworth was imprisoned for 4 years in the Tower of London
- After his release, Thomas, Earl of Surrey won a famous victory annihilating the Scottish army at the battle of Flodden in 1513.



- As a reward Surrey was granted his father's Norfolk Dukedom

- When Thomas died, his son succeeded to the Dukedom



Thomas Howard 3rd Duke of Norfolk



Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey

- Towards the end of the reign of King Henry VIII, the 3rd Duke & his son Henry, Earl of Surrey fell foul of the king & were condemned to death
- The young Earl was beheaded, but the old Duke escaped the axe - saved in the nick of time by the death of the king
- Badlesmere then passed to Sir Robert Southwell, Master of the Rolls – chief prosecutor of the late Earl
- After a year or so, Southwell sold Badlesmere with 2,000 acres to Sir Anthony Aucher of Otterden



- He was succeeded in 1558 by his son John whose daughter Anne married Sir Humphry Gilbert, a distinguished soldier, explorer & cosmographer.
- Seeking the North-West passage to the East-Indies by sea round the north of Canada in September 1583 Gilbert & his crew were lost in the ice.



The Sondes family arrive from Throwley – & remain for over 400 years

The only Sondes heraldry shown here is the funeral hatchment on our church's south wall
see page 8

In 1619 their coat of arms had 16 quarterings

Their complicated line of succession (& repeated changes of family name)
could be summarised as follows:

- 1581 Sir Michael Sondes acquired Badlesmere.
The parish Communion cup, hallmarked 1574, may have been given to the parish by Sir Michael – perhaps to celebrate his acquisition. Few of that period in England survived the Cromwellian melt-down – when church vessels, furniture & buildings suffered damage & destruction in an orgy of Puritan fanaticism. The cup is still brought to the church for special occasions
- Relationship
to predecessor*
- | | | |
|------|----------------|---|
| 1617 | son | Sir Richard succeeded |
| 1676 | son | Sir George became Baron Throwley, Viscount Sondes, Earl of Feversham |
| 1677 | son-in-law | Rt Hon Sir Louis de Duras (Marquis de Blanquefort, Baron Duras, Lord Chamberlain to the Queen, Lord Lieutenant of Kent etc) succeeded to the estates & was granted the local titles of his wife & father-in-law |
| 1709 | | Duras died - local titles became extinct |
| | brother-in-law | Lewis Watson (3 rd Baron Rockingham, Whig MP for Canterbury 1681-5 Lord Lieutenant of Kent from 1705 etc) succeeded |
| 1714 | | On the accession of King George I, for services rendered, Watson was created Baron Throwley, Viscount Sondes & 1 st Earl of Rockingham |
| 1722 | grandson | Lewis Watson, 2 nd Earl of Rockingham, Viscount Sondes, Baron Throwley (Lord Lieutenant of Kent etc) |
| 1745 | brother | Thomas Watson, 3 rd Earl of Rockingham, Viscount Sondes, Baron Throwley, (MP for Canterbury 1741-5) |
| 1746 | | Thomas died - titles extinct – for the 2 nd time |
| | cousin | Estates inherited by Hon Lewis Monson, (MP for Kent 1754-60) another grandson of Lewis Watson, 1 st Earl of Rockingham. Monson thereupon changed his name to Watson – his mother's maiden name |
| 1760 | | Monson/Watson was created 1 st Baron Sondes |
| 1795 | son | Lewis Thomas Watson succeeded as 2 nd Baron Sondes |
| 1806 | brother | Lewis Richard Watson succeeded as 3 rd Baron Sondes |
| 1826 | | Another brother, George John Watson, changed his name to Milles & then |
| 1836 | brother | George John Watson/Milles succeeded as 4 th Baron Sondes |
| 1874 | son | George Watson Milles, (MP for East Kent 1867-74) succeeded as 5 th Baron Sondes |
| | | (great-grandson of Lewis Monson/Watson 1 st Baron Sondes) |
| 1880 | | 5 th Baron Sondes created Viscount Throwley & 1 st Earl Sondes – new variations on the old titles |
| 1894 | | He died - his funeral hatchment hangs on our church's south wall |
| | son | George Edward Milles-Lade succeeded as 2 nd Earl Sondes |
| 1907 | brother | Lewis Arthur Milles succeeded as 3 rd Earl Sondes |
| 1941 | nephew | George Henry Milles-Lade succeeded as 4 th Earl Sondes |
| 1970 | son | Henry George Herbert Milles-Lade succeeded as 5 th Earl Sondes |
| 1996 | | He died – the Sondes titles were extinct once more. |



Hatchment of George Watson Milles, 1st Earl Sondes 1894



The estate is administered now by Phyllis Kane Schmertz, Countess Sondes,
widow of the 5th & last Earl



In 1773 the parish was combined formally with Leaveland

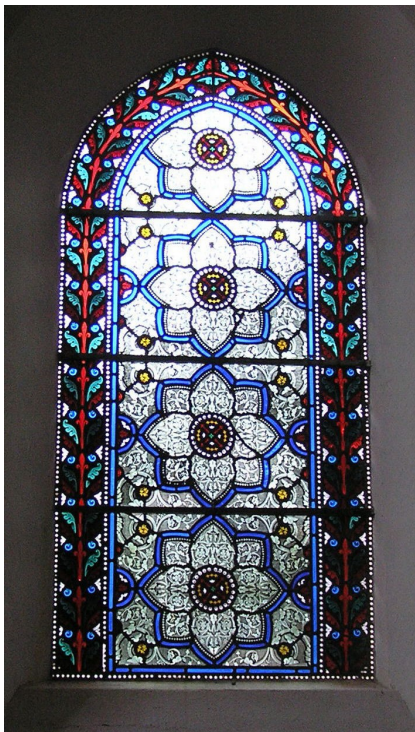
The 18th century brought good fortune to the church & its congregation
in several other ways:

- A silver cover, hallmarked London 1735, was provided for the Elizabethan communion cup - see page 7
- A circular silver paten was given, hallmarked London, it is engraved around the rim
"E Sacris Ecclesiae Parochialis de Badlesmere in Com. Cant. A D 1736"



drawn by Hubert J Pragnell

- About 200 years our box pews were installed – a rare survival in Kent. The tiered pews, flanking the west door were occupied by the choir. The pew just in front of them, beside the vestry, has a reading desk – reserved, probably, for the choir's leader.
- Also from this time are our reredos (whose top rail echoes the arches above it) the tower & its bellcote, the exterior rendering & the “church warden” windows, with their quaint opening hatches which, at a glance, gives the impression that the windows are always open.



In the chancel



In the nave

Our font has been here for over 500 years,
but our organ (replacing an old harmonium) arrived from Oxfordshire only a decade ago.



for perhaps 1,000 years a church has stood on this site
let us strive to ensure its preservation for those who come after us

