

ISSN 0308-8685



The  
**BULLETIN**  
of the  
**EAST GRINSTEAD**  
**SOCIETY**

No 123

Spring 2021

**Published by THE EAST GRINSTEAD SOCIETY**

Text copyright © The East Grinstead Society

on behalf of contributors, 2021

THE EAST GRINSTEAD SOCIETY

[www.eastgrinsteadsociety.org](http://www.eastgrinsteadsociety.org)

**The Society was founded in 1968 to protect and improve the amenities of East Grinstead and its environs. The Town has a long history and a unique architectural heritage, entrusted for the time being to the hands of our generation. It should be our concern that such contributions as we in turn make are worthy of the past and a fitting bequest to the future. Key to this is an active role in scrutinising planning applications and regular liaison with planning authorities and our publications: of which the *Bulletin* is one.**

The *Bulletin* was established and edited by Michael Leppard. His obituary follows. This is the first *Bulletin* to be produced since his death and in a very real sense, the continuance of the *Bulletin* is both a tribute to Michael's legacy to the Town and a source of future research on the Town's history,

So, we are very grateful to Caroline Metcalfe for taking on the editorship and ensuring that interesting and valuable local historical insights are offered to members and the wider public.

The *Bulletin* is an important tool for highlighting the rich and varied history of the Town and a key resource for the general reader, schools and researchers. As such we welcome suggestions for topics to be covered and, of course, draft articles for possible inclusion.

The strength of the Society lies in the extent to which it can be seen to represent public opinion: the larger the membership the greater the influence. We are committed to expanding our membership by offering benefits such as a regular Newsletter and meetings and a social programme when conditions permit.

Full information on the Society and updates on activities can be found on our website: [www.eastgrinsteadsociety.org](http://www.eastgrinsteadsociety.org).

We also welcome comments on the *Bulletin* and any aspect of the Society's role to: [Chairman@eastgrinsteadsociety.org](mailto:Chairman@eastgrinsteadsociety.org).

James Baldwin - Chairman

PRESIDENT **Mrs M. COLLINS, D.L.**

OFFICERS, 2021

CHAIRMAN **James Baldwin**

VICE-CHAIRMAN **Richard Lawrence**

HON. TREASURER AND MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY **Mike Lyons**

HON. SECRETARY **Alan Ward**

EDITOR OF *BULLETIN* **Mrs Caroline Metcalfe**

## Contents

EDITORIAL .....	4
The Origins of the East Grinstead Society, reproduced from <i>Bulletin</i> 024 (May 1978).....	4
The Bulletin of the East Grinstead Society.....	5
Michael J. Leppard, MA, 1937-2019.....	5
Anniversaries.....	7
c. 1078-81: The gift of St Swithun's church to Lewes Priory.....	7
c. 1078-1081: The foundation of Lewes Priory .....	7
1556 26 July: The Protestant Martyrs .....	7
15 July: St Swithun's Day.....	7
1609 8 February: Sackville College founded .....	7
1631 10 July: Sackville College gained a Royal Charter .....	8
1683 6 September Fall of St Swithun's Steeple .....	8
1785 12 November: Fall of St Swithun's Tower .....	8
10 August 1790: The wedding of Spencer Perceval to Miss Jane Wilson.....	8
1846 May: Rev'd John Mason Neale, came to Sackville College .....	8
1865 20 July: St Margaret's Day,.....	8
1866 6 August: Death of John Mason Neale.....	9
1943 9 July: Whitehall Cinema Bombing .....	9
1944 12 July: Flying Bomb.....	10
1955 11 September: Charity Cricket Match.....	10
Almshouses in East Grinstead.....	10
Whittington College .....	10
The almshouse of Dame Katherine Grey and Richard Lewkenor .....	11
Sackville College.....	12
St Swithun's Church- The Beginnings .....	13
Marriage of Spencer Percival.....	14
The Statue of Sir Archibald McIndoe .....	15
From East Grinstead Town Museum .....	16
New Publication .....	17

## EDITORIAL

### The Origins of the East Grinstead Society, reproduced from *Bulletin* 024 (May 1978)

#### THE ORIGINS OF THE EAST GRINSTEAD SOCIETY

by M.J. Leppard

The story of the origins of our Society is in part the story of the building illustrated in its original form on the cover of *Bulletin* 24, drawn by Mr R.H. Wood to accompany his article about it in our *Bulletin* 1, January 1969), 30-32 High street, a house of c.1480 whose back part was possibly older.

It was a listed building, and as far back as 1964 the Minister of Housing had disallowed a proposal to demolish and replace it, In April 1967 application was made again, arguing poor structural condition, and, after a little hesitation, the Urban District Council gave permission. At once expressions of dismay appeared in the correspondence columns of the local press and the case for demolition was challenged. The real outcry came, however, when demolition began in January 1968, for then every passer-by could see the quality of the building being destroyed and the experts who followed its progress were able to reveal that it was an even more valuable example of its kind than had been suspected. It was obvious that the whole street lost something of its appearance and something of its significance.

Meanwhile the late Mr I.D. Margary, the distinguished local antiquary, Mr R.T. Mason, the authority on the town's architecture, Mr R.H. Wood and Mr P.D. Wood formed themselves into a temporary committee to take up the growing clamour for a local preservation society and called a public meeting for Thursday 4 April 'to consider the formation of such a society'. The speakers were Mr Mason, on the buildings of the High Street, Mr Ian Abbott of the Civic Trust, who gave an outsider's fresh and appreciative look at the contemporary town, and Miss B.de Cardi of the Council for British Archaeology, on the problems of historic towns. Over 150 people were present and voted nem. con. that the Society be formed. About 100 joined on the spot, having first elected a committee to look after the Society's affairs until the first A.G.M. in the autumn.

## The Bulletin of the East Grinstead Society

Michael J. Leppard, MA, 1937-2019.

Many members of the East Grinstead Society knew Michael far better or for much longer than I did, but it seems right to pay tribute to him here.

Michael was the town's historian. He had extensive knowledge of East Grinstead and its history and he was devoted to the town. He was the lynch pin of the East Grinstead Society, and he wrote many of the articles for the *East Grinstead Society Bulletin*.

East Grinstead Society was founded in April 1968, in response to the destruction of a property in the High Street. As Martin Hayes, West Sussex County Local Studies Librarian wrote in Michael's last full *Bulletin*, for Spring 2018: 'The Society owes a huge debt of gratitude to Michael Leppard who has edited the *Bulletin* for the whole of this time, ensuring accuracy and interesting articles, many of which he wrote himself'. Michael's enjoyment of his writing sometimes showed in witty remarks such as the comment that the Churchyard Wall is 'not Listed but listing'.

Michael was East Grinstead born and bred, and educated locally. His friend, Peter Freeland, remembered that Michael came top in everything at school- except P.T! From the Grammar School, Michael went up to University College, Oxford, where he read Theology and stayed on to study for a Dip. Ed. He enjoyed his time at Oxford and kept in touch with his College. The present Archivist there, Dr Robin Darwell-Smith had corresponded with Michael for several years and wrote a fulsome tribute to him in the *University College Record*, based upon Peter Freeland's eulogy for Michael.

After Oxford, a distinguished career as a schoolmaster followed. Michael's last teaching post was at Sackville School. He often recognised former pupils in the town and could remember their names, those of their friends and the dates when they had been at the school.

In addition to teaching full time, Michael served St Swithun's church in various ways and wrote a guidebook for visitors to the church. Michael knew the late R.H. Wood, formerly Head Guide at Sackville College, who wrote the booklet *A Short Account of Sackville College*. Michael spent time at Sackville College in the Study in the 1960s carrying out research and was respected for his knowledge. A surviving letter from RH Wood in response to a query about some aspect of Neale's theology says that 'young Michael Leppard' would know the answer.

After retirement, Michael contributed a great deal of time and expertise to East Grinstead Town Museum. He ran Local History classes which resulted in excellent research undertaken by his grown-up students and supervised by him.

He became involved at Sackville College again in recent years and wrote a marvellous *Brief History of Sackville College* (Only £5, available from Sackville College or John Pye's Bookshop). The books in John Mason Neale's Study at Sackville College had fallen into disarray over the years. Armed with his own exercise book, dated 1968, which listed the books as they were then, Michael helped the Warden and me to restore them to a logical order. His knowledge of Neale's writings was encyclopaedic. I loved listening to him

explaining 'Ah, Dr Littledale was a friend of Neale's'. Michael's other contribution to Sackville College was to collect up coins on the pavements of the town, 'the streets paved with gold', as Peter Freeland described them. The money was then donated, latterly to Sackville College, and before that, to the Museum.

Michael enjoyed preparing talks for the East Grinstead Society and other groups. His research was meticulous, then he 'interrogated the sources'. After a talk, he could field a battery of questions, both on and off the subject. When he gave a talk about East Grinstead and the Second World War, he gave a wry smile when he recalled that on VE Day, in 1945, his mother had put him to bed at the usual time. He was then about 7 or 8 years old.

Michael's mental agility was extraordinary. When a television crew for BBC South East visited East Grinstead at short notice, a few years ago, to make a feature about John Mason Neale, Michael was interviewed at his flat and gave a clear account of Neale's life.

When St Swithun's church required a historical report, I asked him for advice. He lent me a precious only copy of a document, returned my papers within a week, and put pencil notes in to say 'More on this in *Bulletin* 1985, No 2' etc.

Michael was happy to revisit articles he had written before if new evidence came to light. His interest in collecting historical evidence and writing it up properly was undimmed. Shortly before he died, he was looking into the Diary entries written by William Wren, the porter at Sackville College in Victorian times. Although only a boy during the War, he kept detailed records about the bombing of the Whitehall Cinema in 1943. He particularly enjoyed writing about Dr Henry Rogers, the surgeon who had been a friend of John Mason Neale's but became a bitter foe. He wrote that 'Rogers always seems to be prowling around like a baddie' and that it was time to reassess Rogers. Michael did so, ably and thoroughly.

I am glad to have known Michael and am grateful for all his help, for his friendship in recent years, and for all that the work that he did to establish the history of St Swithun's church, the town, its buildings and people, and Sackville College. Michael is and will be greatly missed.

Michael's own publications include:

*A History of East Grinstead* (2001) and *100 Buildings of East Grinstead* (2006).

He wrote many articles for academic journals, including:

- 'The Chantry Commission of 1547 and some unpublished Chantry Records for East Grinstead' *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 109 (1971)
- 'East Grinstead Before the Town' *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 129 (1991)
- 'Church Origins at East Grinstead' *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 142 (2004)
- 'The Unregarded Sussex of John Mason Neale' *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 155 (2017), 165-179.
- 'Heretics and Martyrs in Marian Sussex' *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 154 (2016), 209-226.

**Caroline Metcalfe**

## Anniversaries

East Grinstead is rich in history and during 2021 there is much to remember and honour:

### c. 1078-81: The gift of St Swithun's church to Lewes Priory

St Swithun's church was gifted to Lewes Priory by Alured, pincerna or cupbearer to **Robert, Count of Mortain** (c. 1031-90), half-brother of William the Conqueror. Alured gave half a hide of land and the tithes of Brambletye to support the church. In return, Alured expected prayers for himself during his life, and for his soul after death, from the monks. The link between **St Swithun's church and Lewes Priory** lasted until 1537.

### c. 1078-1081: The foundation of Lewes Priory

Lewes Priory was a large important Cluniac priory. The mother house was the abbey of Cluny, founded by William of Aquitaine in 910 AD. Cluniac foundations aimed to follow the Benedictine rule, but even more strictly, with up to 8 hours of liturgy daily. Earl William de Warenne applied to King William I (the Conqueror) to have some Cluniac monks brought to England. The foundation of the abbey at Lewes is thought to have been c. 1078- 82, and most probably 1081. William de Warenne's wife, Gundrada, may have been influential in the founding of Lewes Priory.<sup>1</sup>

This year Lewes Priory Trust are holding a series of online talks to celebrate approximately 900 years. East Grinstead is connected to Lewes Priory through St Swithun's church.

### 1556 26 July: The Protestant Martyrs

465 years ago three people were burned to death for adhering to their Protestant faith during the reign of Queen Mary Tudor (1553-1588). John Forman, Anne Tree and Thomas Dungates were burned to death on market day. They may not have been from East Grinstead, but it was their place of execution. By tradition they spent their last night in the cellars at the building that is now Broadleys. A plaque to the three was placed outside the shop on the High Street and an early twentieth-century memorial to them stands outside the South door of St Swithun's church.

### 15 July: St Swithun's Day

The patronal festival of the parish church is usually celebrated on the Sunday nearest to St Swithun's day.

### 1609 8 February: Sackville College founded

1609 Sackville College was founded in the will of Robert Sackville, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Dorset. He died shortly after making his will on 8 February 1609. His son, Richard Sackville, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Dorset took time over carrying out his late father's wishes and the buildings were probably completed by 1619/20. The death of a resident of Sackville College was recorded in the parish records for 1621/22.

---

<sup>1</sup> Helen Poole, *Lewes Priory: The Site and Its History* (Lewes: Lewes Priory Trust, 2000).

### 1631 10 July: Sackville College gained a Royal Charter

Granted by King Charles I on **10 July 1631**, this Charter was one of only two granted by King Charles I in 1631. The other was to the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers, on 22 August. This was during the period known to us as The Eleven Years Tyranny, when King Charles I refused to meet Parliament to ask for money and instead levied extraordinary taxes such as Ship Money. This and other factors led to the outbreak of the English Civil War.

The Charter was written in Latin. A photographic record was made by the Public Record Office in 1939 August, when War was imminent. The Charter is now kept at The National Archives, Kew. A copy of a translation into English hangs in the Dining Hall at Sackville College.

### 1683 6 September Fall of St Swithun's Steeple

The church was struck by lightning and set on fire. The steeple and shingles were burnt and the bells were melted. Some bells had only been purchased a few years before from Framfield church, the tower of which fell in 1667.

An account of this from J.C. Stenning 'Notes on East Grinstead' (from Mrs Chevall Tooke) appears in WH Hills, *A History of East Grinstead*, pp. 64-65. A copy of the account is also in the notebooks of antiquary Sir William Burrell in the British Library.

### 1785 12 November: Fall of St Swithun's Tower

Just over a hundred years later, the tower fell, destroying much of the old medieval church.

WH Hills reproduced an account from *The Gentleman's Magazine* of 1785. This was again copied into Sir William Burrell's notebook. He had visited St Swithun's only a few weeks before the tower fell. Mr John Bridgland and Miss Avis Austen were married in the church on the very morning when the tower fell.

### 10 August 1790: The wedding of Spencer Perceval to Miss Jane Wilson

Spencer Perceval has the distinction of being the only British Prime Minister to have been assassinated. They were married in the ruins of St Swithun's church, or possibly in a blacksmith's shed.

There is no monument to Spencer Perceval in St Swithun's church. There is a splendid monument to him in Westminster Abbey, but visitors are not permitted to take photographs inside the Abbey.

### 1846 May: Rev'd John Mason Neale, came to Sackville College

175 years ago, the **Rev'd John Mason Neale** came to Sackville College to take up the post of Warden. He was soon followed by his wife Sarah, with their little girl, Sarah Agnes and their baby boy, Cornelius Vincent. Three more daughters were born there: Mary Sackville; Katherine Ermenild, who became first a Sister of the Society of St Margaret founded by her late father, then their Mother Superior; and Margaret Isobel.

### 1865 20 July: St Margaret's Day,

A procession was held to lay the foundation stone for The Convent of the Society of St Margaret. John Mason Neale wrote in a letter to his old tutor, the Rev'd W. Russell on 25 July 1865, St James's Day: 'The most brilliant and uninterrupted success'...the procession



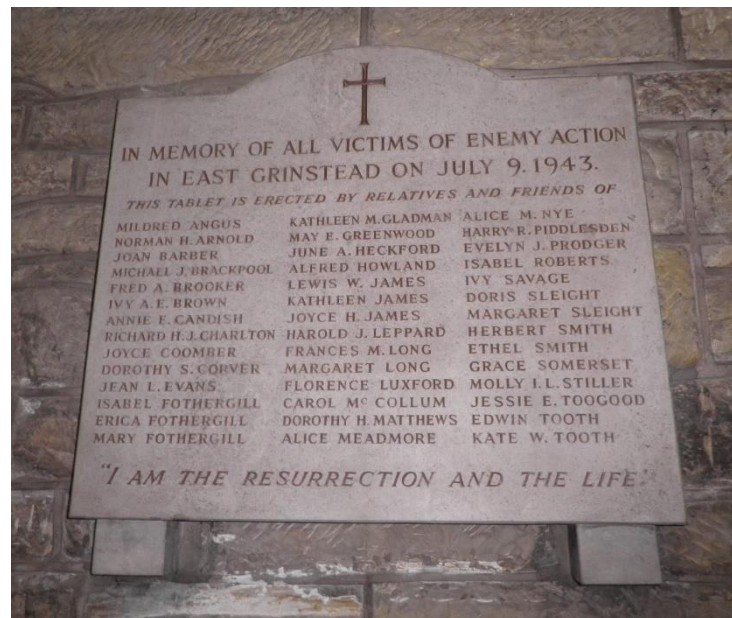
was nearly a quarter of a mile long...we sat down 360 to luncheon. The collection amounted to £713.'

#### 1866 6 August: Death of John Mason Neale

155 years ago, **John Mason Neale died, aged only 48**. He was buried in St Swithun's churchyard, with a monument designed by his friend, the architect G.E. Street. At the foot of the monument are memorials to William Wood Thornton, a builder of the Convent, and to a Sister of the Society of St Margaret. Mrs Neale is not buried with her husband but at Fairlight churchyard, high up on the cliffs above Hastings.

#### 1943 9 July: Whitehall Cinema Bombing

The Whitehall Cinema and surrounding area were bombed by enemy action. It is recorded that 108 were killed and about 235 were injured.



This tablet, mounted on the south wall of St Swithun's church, commemorates some of the victims whose families worshipped at St Swithun's.

There is a fuller list at East Court, in the War Memorial Garden. There is also a memorial on the site of the former Whitehall Cinema. Some are buried in a mass grave at Mount Noddy; others were buried privately.

The reason behind the attacks is not clear. Possibly a site in or near the town was mistaken for a military objective, but there are records of the deliberate strafing of civilians in Railway Approach. This must surely have been one of the worst civilian losses of life in the south east of England during the War. Those killed included children at the cinema, adults and service personnel. The bombs fell just after 5pm. Many of the town's children were home from school and went to the cinema on that fateful day.

### 1944 12 July: Flying Bomb

at 7.30 am, a flying bomb fell, causing 3 deaths, and an estimated 38-41 people were injured. Serious damage was caused to buildings and to ruins from the previous bombing. Those killed were: George Edwards, James Potten, and Ernest Russell

King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, en route to another engagement, stopped at East Grinstead, visited the scene, and spoke to Civil Defence workers.

A V1 was a pilotless plane sent from Normandy. V1 stands for Vergeltungswaffe, or reprisal weapon.

The small tablet in St Swithun's was placed close to the one commemorating some victims of the 1943 bombing. *Mors Janua Vita* means *Death is the gateway to life*.



Photograph purchased from East Grinstead Museum

### 1955 11 September: Charity Cricket Match

The Cricket Match 'Politicians' Against 'The Stage' took place on Sunday, 11 September 1955, to raise money for Sackville College. It was arranged by the Patron of Sackville College, the 9<sup>th</sup> Earl De La Warr, and took place at East Court. At Sackville College there is one surviving framed programme for the match. The Museum has more, including one filled in with the scores. There is a brief British Pathé film extract on YouTube. Harold Macmillan, who lived nearby at Birch Grove, played for the Politicians. The Stage team included the legendary cricketer Dennis Compton, and Richard Hearne, famous as the comic character 'Mr Pastry'. Richard Attenborough was struck on the forehead by a cricket ball and taken to the Queen Victoria Hospital for treatment by pioneering surgeon Sir Archibald McIndoe. Raffle prizes that day included a bottle of gin, a bottle of whisky and a very modern item, an electric iron.

Jonathan Parrett wrote about this match in *East Grinstead Living* January 2021, and this match is featured in Andrew Ward, *Cricket's Strangest Matches* (Past Times, 1988).

## Almshouses in East Grinstead

### Whittington College

Whittington College at Felbridge, just across the border between Sussex and Surrey, is a collection of twentieth century buildings, but the foundation dates from 1423. The real Richard Whittington was not the pantomime figure of today. He was a younger son of Sir

William and Lady Joan Whittington, born in Pauntley, Gloucestershire. Whittington made his fortune as a mercer, supplying luxury goods to lords and kings. He was Mayor of London three times. Whittington was never knighted. Whittington married Alice, daughter of Ivo Fitz Waryn but there were no children. His London properties were to be converted into cash by his executors, to endow his foundations. Whittington's College of Priests and the Almshouse for 13 men were created next to his parish church of St Michael Paternoster, by Whittington's executors. Management was to be by the Worshipful Company of Mercers, which ensured its survival. This almshouse is one of the first four London almshouses known to have been founded by London companies in the early fifteenth century. The prayers of the poor helped the soul of the deceased into Heaven. When the College for Priests was swept away in the Reformation, the almshouse took on the name of Whittington College. The College moved to Felbridge in the 1960s.

Although the real Dick Whittington never visited East Grinstead, it is remarkable that we have this link to the famous London mayor because of his surviving foundation, just outside our town.

#### The almshouse of Dame Katherine Grey and Richard Lewkenor

The second almshouse no longer exists. In St Swithun's church, the oldest surviving monument consists of the inscription for Dame Katherine Grey who died in 1505, two figures in armour representing her husbands, Sir Thomas Grey and Richard Lewkenor of Brambletye, and the wrong central figure (which is not Katherine). The words of the inscription state:

*Dame Katherine and Richard her husband yane founded indoed and inorned the present church of Estgrenestede to the laude and honour of god in diverse [blank space] and ornamentes and a alms howse of 3 poor men, 4 whose sowles jhu for thy utter passion yeve upon them they merciful compassyon Amen.*

Dame Katherine and her second husband Richard [re]founded, endowed and adorned the church of East Grinstead to the praise and honour of God in diverse ornaments and founded an almshouse for 3 poor men. A much later list of benefactors at the back of the church also states that they founded this almshouse. Katherine's second husband died in 1503 and she died in 1505. In her will she asked her executors to see to the almshouse specified in her late husband's will, and the 'londs (lands) therfor' and 'the fynding of thre poore men'.<sup>2</sup>

Michael Leppard suggested that Lewkenor's will has not survived. A later unsigned copy was found in the Folger Library by Mrs Beth Chase-Grey. This almshouse might soon have lapsed.<sup>3</sup> However, Katherine and her second husband trusted in prayers for their souls from the poor men in their almshouse, at her burial and at monthly anniversaries of her death. By

---

<sup>2</sup> Will of Dame Kateryne Gray. The National Archives Prob/11/14....

<sup>3</sup> M. J. Leppard, 'The Chantry Commission of 1547 and Some Unpublished Chantry Records for East Grinstead', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 109 (1971), 24-36 (pp. 34-36). *Bulletin* 82, Spring 2004, pp. 10-12.

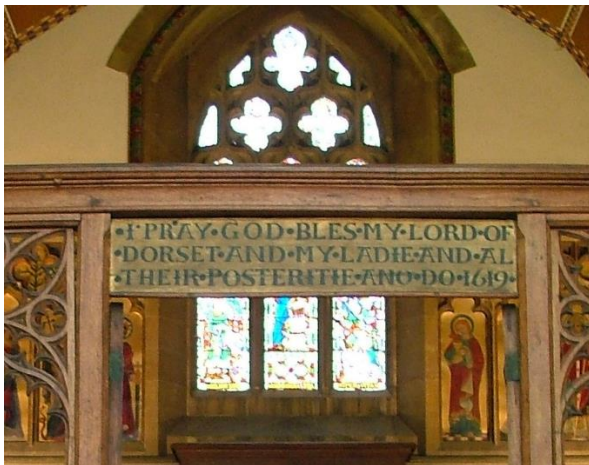
tradition the almshouse was in Church Lane, and the cottages recently converted are later buildings on the same site.

### Sackville College.

The most famous almshouse in East Grinstead is Sackville College. It was founded in 1609 in the will of Robert Sackville, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Dorset. He died soon after making this will, possibly of the plague, at his London house. His son, Richard Sackville, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Dorset, had the almshouse built over the next ten years. Despite a very grim time during the English Civil War, the institution of Sackville College has survived into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and still serves its original purpose of providing accommodation for independent living for those of more limited means.

The Will of Robert, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Dorset, dated 10 February 1609, stated that he had long wished to build and erect an Hospital or College in the town of East Grinstead, for the relief of thirty-one poor persons, single and unmarried. He wished his executors, Lord William Howard (his brother-in-law, brother of Robert's first wife) and Sir George Rivers, to 'build and erect a convenient house of brick and stone, to be called **Sackville College**'.

The executors took part in securing a site, which was part of the manor of Rowses. The architect is unknown. The design is Jacobean, not unlike medieval Oxford or Cambridge Colleges. Dates for the completion of the buildings are hard to identify. Some sources refer to a door knocker dated 1616, now lost. The triangular plaques in the Dining Hall and Chapel read: 'I pray God bless my Lord of Dorset and my Ladie also and all their posteritie, Anno Domini 1619'. If original, they point to a completion date of 1619. The first recorded burial of a resident was in 1621-22, in the parish records of St Swithun's church. The College may have been partially completed by 1619 and fully occupied by 1622.<sup>4</sup>



Earl Richard was probably responsible for having the grand wing, the Dorset Lodgings, created for his own occasional use when he and his retinue had business in East Grinstead. From outside, the larger windows in this wing are obvious. This is an interesting example of the poor and the rich sometimes living side by side.

---

<sup>4</sup> Wood, *Account*, p. 2.

Sackville College was mentioned in the **Diary of Samuel Pepys** for 1660.

‘To Westminster Hall where I heard an action very finely pleaded between my lord of Dorset and some other noble persons, his lady and other ladies of quality being there, and it was about £330 per annum that was to be paid to a poor Spittal which was given by some of his predecessors.’

This entry was on 9 February 1660, when Richard Sackville, 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Dorset was trying to secure the funding prescribed by his grandfather for the almshouse. A ‘spittal’ meant a hospital, or in this case, the almshouse called Sackville College.

## St Swithun’s Church- The Beginnings

There has been a church at this site for about a thousand years. The building, now slightly set back from our present High Street, is at the crossing of roads, which is traditional for a medieval church. The hilltop site means that the present church tower can be seen for miles around, from Ashdown Forest and the surrounding district.

**East Grinstead**, or **Grenestede** ‘green place’, was recorded as a small ‘hundred’ or settlement in the **Domesday Book**. This was compiled in 1086 on the orders of **William the Conqueror**. He wanted to learn about this country ‘how it was peopled and with what sort of men’ and ordered the survey to be carried out. The historian Simon Schama called William ‘the first database King’. The Conqueror died in 1087, when his horse reared after treading on burning timber in Normandy, causing William fatal injuries. The Domesday Book tells us that there were 13 scattered settlements here at that time.

An old Church Guide for St Swithun’s, written in 1975, suggested that there was a wooden church in the small settlement here before the Norman Conquest of 1066, and that it was dedicated to **St Edmund**. Edmund was a Christian King of East Anglia, killed with arrows fired at him by his enemies. By tradition, after his death, his tame wolf guarded his head. I have not found any documentary evidence of the church being dedicated to St Edmund.

We have a statue of **St Edmund** in the church, matching the statue of **St Swithun**. Edmund is shown with his tame wolf, and Swithun with ducks at his feet, because of the story that if it rains on St Swithun’s day, there will be rain for the next 40 days. The statues were created in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by the Scottish sculptor, Miss Elizabeth Dempster (1909-87).

There is also a tradition that a wooden church here was a resting place for the body of **King Edward the Confessor**, who died in 1066 and whose body was taken to be enshrined in Westminster Abbey. I have found no evidence for this.

The dedication of the church to **St Swithun** may help to date the origins of our church. Swithun was the **Bishop of Winchester** from **852-862 AD**. He was apparently a kind, humble man and a trusted counsellor to Kings Egbert and Ethelwulf. There is a story of a woman taking a basket of eggs to market to sell. She was set upon as she crossed a bridge and all her eggs were broken. Swithun made them whole again.

He asked to be buried outside the cathedral, with passers-by walking over him and rain from the cathedral eaves dripping upon him. Over a hundred years after his burial, in **971**, the

bones of Swithun were moved inside the cathedral. Violent storms followed and people thought that the Saint was angry. This may have been the beginning of the association of St Swithun with summer rain.

During the 10<sup>th</sup> century, St Swithun became a popular saint, so the dedication of our church to him may date to the late 900s.

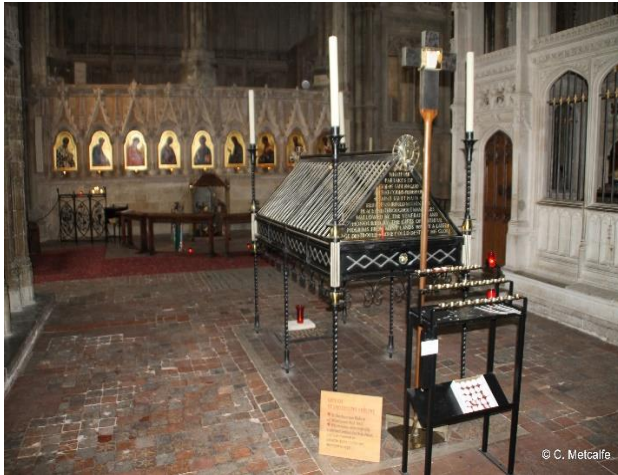


Figure 1 The tomb of St Swithun at Winchester cathedral today

After 1066 and the Norman Conquest, we are on firmer ground. There is documentary evidence that in the 1070s, St Swithun's church was given to the **Cluniac Priory of Lewes** by **Alured**, pincerna (cupbearer or butler) to **Robert, Count of Mortain** (c. 1031-90). The Count was half-brother to William the Conqueror.

The bare ruins of **Lewes Priory** today are only a faint echo of this once large, important monastic community. The link between **St Swithun's church and Lewes**

**Priory** lasted until **1537** when the Prior surrendered the Priory to Thomas Cromwell's agents, who took it for King Henry VIII. The Italian engineer, Giovanni Portinari, oversaw the destruction of the Priory and made detailed records of what he destroyed. The Prior's lodging was converted into a house for Gregory Cromwell, the son of Thomas Cromwell, and Gregory's wife, Elizabeth Seymour, sister of Queen Jane Seymour. They found the house, called Lord's Place, 'very commodious'.

St Swithun's church was embellished in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The steeple fell in 1683 and the tower was probably rebuilt badly. In **1785**, the tower fell and destroyed most of the old church. Rebuilding took a long time and cost a great deal.

I am indebted to Michael Leppard for his help in discovering the early history of St Swithun's church. The fruits of Michael's meticulous research can be found in:

M.J. Leppard, *A History of East Grinstead* (Phillimore, 2001); M.J. Leppard, 'East Grinstead Before the Town', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 129 (1991), 29-32; M.J. Leppard 'Church Origins at East Grinstead', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 142 (2004), 148-150.

Also used: Helen Poole, *Lewes Priory: The Site and its History* (Lewes Priory Trust, 2000);

*The Penguin Dictionary of Saints*

*St Swithun*- pamphlet produced by Winchester Cathedral.

## Marriage of Spencer Percival

Taken from *The History of East Grinstead* by W. H. Hills

The Right Hon. Spencer Perceval, a son of the Earl of Egmont, and the Prime Minister who was shot in the lobby of the House of Commons in 1812, after holding his high position for nearly two and a half years, by a man named Bellingham, has quite an accidental, but romantic, connection with East Grinstead. In 1787 the Hon. Chas. Geo. Perceval, his eldest brother,

married the eldest daughter of Sir Thomas Spencer Wilson, Bart., an ancestor of the well-known family still occupying Searles at Fletching. His brother, the Hon. Spencer, also became attached to one of the sisters, Miss Jane Wilson, a beautiful girl, but as he was then only a briefless barrister his suit was not encouraged by her parents. When Miss Wilson came of age the affection was as strong as ever, so her father apparently decided to give way, but not publicly. He accordingly discreetly remained ignorant while his daughter was sent to East Grinstead on a visit to Mr. Thomas Wakeham, an attorney in this town and estate agent for the Wilson family, then living at the Hermitage. Her lover followed her and on August 10th, 1790, the bride being dressed in her riding habit, they were married here, report commonly saying, in the ruins of the church which had been but recently destroyed. This is quite possible, as the main walls had been rebuilt in the preceding year. But the idea is not favoured by the family, for Sir Spencer Walpole, writing in 1876 to the Rev. D. Y. Blakiston, says:-

I understand from Mr. Perceval's relatives that the wedding did not take place in East Grinstead Church, but in a blacksmith's shed where service used to be done at the time. Miss Wilson was staying for the occasion at Mr. Wakeham's (The Hermitage), who, it is believed, was Sir Thomas Wilson's agent. So far as I know Mr. Perceval did not afterwards visit East Grinstead.

According to Cooke's "Topographical Description of Sussex," services were held, while the church was in ruins, in Sackville College Chapel.

The following is a copy of the entry in the parish register:-

1790. The Honorable Spencer Perceval, of Lincoln's Inn, in the County of Middlesex, Bachelor, and Jane Wilson, of this parish, spinster, married in this church by licence this tenth day of August in the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety by me Chars. Whitehead, Vicar.

Witnesses.	Dorothy Wakeham	Spencer Perceval
	T. Wakeham	Jane Wilson

The marriage was a happy one and the union was blessed by a family of twelve children. Two days after the assassination Parliament voted a pension of £2,000 a year to Mrs. Perceval and the sum of £50,000 to be invested for the benefit of her large family, some of whom, living to extreme old age at Ealing and elsewhere, have only quite recently died.

## The Statue of Sir Archibald McIndoe

The statue to Sir Archibald McIndoe represents a great man whose work repaired many damaged bodies. The figure of a young airman represents the many treated by McIndoe. He cared for the whole person as well. East Grinstead is known as the town that did not stare at men in various awkward and uncomfortable stages of their treatment. The Museum has extensive archives and a permanent display about his work.

In the present pandemic we are acutely aware of the importance of nursing, healthcare, and the development of new medicines and vaccinations.

The statue was designed by Martin Jennings, sculptor, whose own father had been treated by McIndoe at the Queen Victoria Hospital. During preparation for the sculpture, Martin Jennings was able to see notes and drawings about his father's injuries and treatment.

The sculpture was unveiled in 2014 by the Princess Royal. Although the Warden of Sackville College had been told that the Princess Royal would not have time to meet the Residents of the College, she took the trouble to speak to each of the Residents standing in a line to see her.

A new bench has been added to the McIndoe lawn area, honouring those who have died of the Corona virus. East Grinstead honours its past, responds to the present and looks to the future.



## From East Grinstead Town Museum

Although, like so many other things, the museum has been closed for much of the last year, we have still been acquiring new items for the collection. One highlight is a set of photographs of the building of Badger Way, which is a cul-de-sac off Blackwell Farm Road.

The photographs were taken by a local resident and show how the area was transformed by the construction, with the new road built between two properties. Sadly, the photographs are not dated, but it would be early in the building of the development, judging by the focus on the new road rather than the houses.

From looking at the Mid Sussex Planning Portal, Badger Way was built on the site of the allotments behind Blackwell Farm Road. From the dates of the planning applications, construction took place in the early 1990s. Interestingly, there are two applications, with the later one including more housing than the original one.

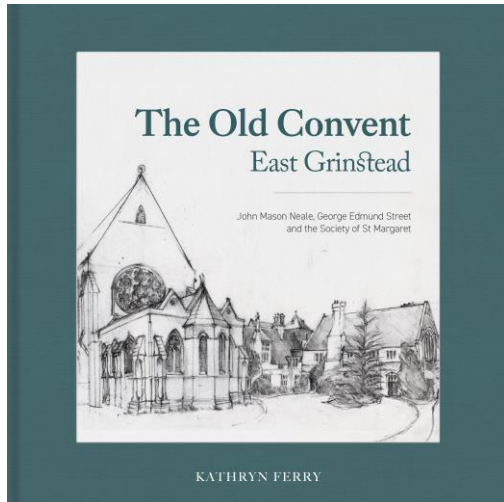
Whilst it might seem strange to collect something that happened within living memory, to my mind, it is important that the Museum does this, for several reasons. Firstly, as future generations will no doubt enquire about the history of their house, it is important that opportunities to gather material to help with this are taken. It is equally worth remembering that even relevantly recent developments, like Blackwell Farm Road, built soon after the Second World War are now approaching their 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversaries!



(For an interesting read on the building of the Blackwell Farm Road estate, see the recollections of E.C. Entecott, published in the Society's *Bulletin* No. 87 in Winter 2005-2006.)

By Jonathan Parrett

## New Publication



A new book is about to be published by residents of the Old Convent on Moat Road. Written by architectural historian and local resident Dr Kathryn Ferry, the book was intended to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convent's opening but has been delayed due to the pandemic. The same is true of the exhibition co-curated by Kathryn at East Grinstead Museum which will open as soon as restrictions ease.

As the most authoritative account yet produced on the town's Grade I listed Convent, the book explores the social and religious background to creation of the Society of St Margaret by John Mason Neale in 1855. It argues for the surprising emancipation that becoming a nun brought wealthy women in the mid-nineteenth century and looks at the varied activities this allowed them to pursue: cottage nursing, childcare at St Margaret's Orphanage, teaching at St Agnes' School and producing world-renowned ecclesiastical embroidery, the sale of which supported the convent funds. With an expanding global mission, by the 1880s St Margaret's Convent at East Grinstead was the largest Anglican community in Britain.

Beautifully illustrated with archive images and specially commissioned photography, the book is available to pre-order from <https://oldconvent1865.com/>