

The Life of the Church



Much of the life of the medieval parish church was dependent upon the parishioners. Their involvement went far beyond attending church services and paying tithes.

They were expected to maintain the churchyard and nave, and to supply liturgical books and other items. At some churches they performed plays or brewed ale for sale to raise money.

Saint Mildred's Church did not just contain devotions to saints and masses. It also had lights dedicated to the parish's bachelors and to comforting the maids, essentially the young members of the parish. These lights show that all the people belonged to the parish church, and as a community cared and offered prayers for all members of society.

What was the Jesus Mass? The Jesus Mass arrived early in Kent and is known from the 1460s. By the early sixteenth century, this mass was celebrated at **St Mildred's Church**. However, only a few Canterbury parishes adopted the Jesus Mass, which suggests the special value placed on this devotion to Christ by the parishioners here. The cult of the name of Jesus and the Jesus Mass was the result of an increased belief in the power of his name. As a special Mass, it was often celebrated on a Friday and emphasised the supremacy and humanity of Christ.



The Easter sepulchre comprised a wooden box that was often richly decorated to represent the empty tomb in the New Testament and set on the north side of the sanctuary, sometimes on a table-top tomb. At St Mildred's, Roger Rydle left £2 (about £1,371 today) towards the maintenance of the Easter sepulchre in 1472, which shows its importance.

On Good Friday each year a consecrated host was placed in the Easter sepulchre and watched over by the parishioners until Easter Sunday. It was then removed and Mass was celebrated as Christ's resurrection.

Credits: Research and text by Beth Brown. Photograph of St Mildred's Church interior pillar with niche for a saint's statue by Rev. Jo Richards. Image of the Luttrell tomb, St Andrew's Church, Imham, used for the Easter Sepulchre, photograph by Imogen Corrigan, M. Phil.



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The Church Roof



Between 2008 and 2013, extensive work took place on the roofing within the church, after plaster fell down in the north aisle. This resulted in the discovery of the medieval beams located in the nave of the church.



The Medieval Roof

In 2008 another fall occurred in the nave and a bulge had formed in the plaster by the second truss at the north end that supports the chancel arch. The work began on the north aisle between 2009 and 2010 to replace the plaster on the nineteenth-century roofing. Later, work began on the roofing over the nave. When they removed the plaster and lathing, the contractors discovered the medieval roofing panels and decided to leave them open and repair the unstable trusses. The trusses have been dendrochronologically dated to between 1355 and 1387.

Roof Building in Medieval England

One of the methods of roof building in medieval England can be seen in the nave roof of Saint Mildred's church. The roof, made of timber, probably oak, not only had to stay up but had to support the weight (and thrust) of the tiles acting against the wood, so that the timbers would not slide apart. To resolve this problem, medieval Carpenters placed wooden beams in various places to help stabilise the structure. Roofing methods Varied but in St Mildred's nave they used scissor beams.



Credits: Research and text by Beth Brown. Photographs of the medieval roofing beams in St Mildred's Church by Rev. Jo Richards. Photograph of the roof space under repair by conservation architect, Jonathan Carey.



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