

On the west wall of the nave is a marble tablet recording the death of George Douglas, of Chilston Park, a High Sheriff of Kent in 1852, and below an oval tablet to the memory of the Right Hon. Aretas Akers-Douglas, first Viscount Chilston, born October 21, 1851, and who died January 15, 1926. A little window in the west wall is to the memory of the Rev. E. Moore, who was responsible for enlarging the Rectory.

There are three bells in the tower, all made by Joseph Hatch and dated 1624. Two bear the words: "Joseph Hatch made me"; the third, "Josephus Hatch Me Fecit."

In the vestry is an enormous old oak chest with heavy iron bands and the original delicately-made keys. The church plate consists of three pieces—a copper gilt cup and paten and a hammered brass alms dish. The cup and paten were given by Lady Chesterfield in memory of her father and mother, whose arms are engraved on the cup. Lady Chesterfield's father was the last Lord Wotton of Marley, who died in 1630. The alms dish is said to have been given by Queen Elizabeth during her visit to Boughton Place. It came from Nuremberg, and contains a German inscription, which, translated, means, "I have happiness always."

Unseen from the road stands the Rectory in parkland, and approached by a private road. Gorgeous trees rise out of the ground, including a fine Spanish oak of perfect symmetry, and nearer to the house is a tall ailanthus, the sacred tree of China and known as "The Tree of Heaven." So large and important a house of Tudor date is not generally associated with a rectory, and it is quite possible that in early days it was a private residence, especially as a smaller house at Grafty Green is said to have been the rectory. The present building shows extensions on both wings, the large one having been erected by a former rector, the Rev. E. Moore. The whole of the exterior is faced with mathematical tiles, thus hiding the timber frame of which the original house was built. A quaint round turret rises from the centre.

The interior of the Rectory is at once made impressive by the large hall, with superb beams in the ceiling, deeply moulded and fluted. A stroll round the place discloses more timberwork, and the king-post which surmounted the original open hall is of artistic appearance. A powder-room still exists, in which there is evidence of a secret chamber close to a chimney. In mediæval days some

sort of hide was to be found in nearly every large house, especially those in any way connected with the Church. Religious tolerance was unknown, and the priest's hiding-place frequently came into use. There is a tradition that a subterranean passage runs between the Church and the Rectory, but I can obtain no evidence to support it. The story emanates from the existence of a secret tunnel at Boughton Place.

Standing close to the Church is Boughton Place, at one time one of the most ornate mansions in Kent. Before entering it, let us trace its history. In very early days it passed through different families until it came into the possession of Robert Corbie, who built a manor house on the site of an earlier and smaller one. He named it Boughton Place, and was granted a licence by Edward the Third "to fortify it with embattlements and towers." At that time no building could be fortified with such pretentious defences as embattlements without royal licence, for the simple reason that every monarch feared treason—and many a time suffered it—from his subjects, and only the most dependable among them were granted this special permission.

It was during the reign of Richard the Second that the property came into possession of the Wottons, with whom it was associated for many years. Nicholas Wotton had married the heiress to the manor, and, being a wealthy man—he was twice Lord Mayor of London—he made great additions to the house before he died in 1448, and was buried in the Church. His successors included two Sir Robert Wottons, Nicholas Wotton (Dean of Canterbury) and Thomas Wotton, who entertained Queen Elizabeth at Boughton Place, which he enlarged and decorated in honour of the event, and was offered knighthood by her, but refused on the grounds that his financial affairs would not allow him to keep up the position. In those days a knight was expected to spend much of his time in close attendance on the monarch, and this entailed the renting or purchase of a house in London. Later, on, however, Thomas Wotton accepted that honour. His bust is to be seen in the Church. The property remained in the hands of the same family—Lord Wotton was created by James the First—until by marriage it came into the possession of the Stanhope family, and Philip Charles Stanhope took the name of Wotton. Next we read that the elegant and witty Earl of Chesterfield of the Georgian period became possessor of the

manor. Just before his death, however, he sold the estate to Galfridus Manor, and in the hands of the Manor family it remained many years. Then came Horatio Mann as the owner, and from him the Cornwallises, and Lord Cornwallis, when he cut up this part of his estate, sold it to Mr. Kitchin in 1920, and he occupies it.

Many members of the Wottons became famous. Sir Henry Wotton, Provost of Eton College, was born at Boughton Malherbe in 1568. His biography was written by Izaak Walton, of "The Compleat Angler" fame. Although he took Holy Orders, he devoted much of his time to politics, and was sent to the Court of James the Sixth of Scotland, by whom he was subsequently knighted. He acted as British Ambassador to the Royal Courts of Europe, and in this capacity did much to promote Protestantism. One expression of his has frequently been quoted in diplomatic circles. It was this: "An ambassador is an honest man sent to lie abroad for the good of his country." Lord Wotton was a great lover of learning and had a very fine library. He had his books bound in what may be termed the Grolier style. A good many have survived and are much sought after by collectors.

Judging from the present front of the house, you would never suspect its age, for about a hundred years ago a new portion was added and the present hall was built in front of the ancient entrance, a stone arch, with rich moulding and every indication of having been exceptionally impressive. But some time since the whole character of Boughton Place was altered, large apartments being turned into several small ones, and it is impossible to come to any definite decision as to the original shape of some of the rooms and even parts of the main structure. Fortunately, however, there is an old print published in Nash's "Mansions of England," and here is depicted one of the rooms in all its glory. Like other rooms, it was panelled and with elegant recessed Tudor windows, but the great feature was the coved ceiling with remarkable mathematical designs in plaster. In the picture there is indication of a parquetry floor, but not until two years ago was this treasure discovered when the ceiling of the room below was opened up. This was the large ballroom, and probably specially decorated for Queen Elizabeth's visit in July, 1573, by Thomas Wotton. This room is on the first floor, while the adjoining room was also large and even more richly panelled than the other. Here in this second upstairs room we find a

beautiful Tudor window of eight lights, but the panelling, of almost priceless value, was sold about ten years ago.

The house is composed of three storeys. Up in the roof is a range of small bedrooms, and still higher up another small room, while on the first floor the two large rooms have been divided up into several apartments, and we can only conjecture what a fine effect the mansion possessed when these two magnificent rooms were richly furnished with the furniture of the period. On the ground floor we also find great alterations, but parts of a ceiling which once covered a large room can still be seen intact, the design being in the mathematical style. There are no bosses, but in the centre of the largest panels a representation of the sun casting its rays.

The difficulty in arriving at the original formation of the old mansion increases as you walk along the corridors. Here is a stone doorway, there a slit window deeply splayed, while in one room is the original solid oak flooring. In the present dining-room is a ceiling supported by wondrously heavy thick beams, and the larger of these extends the full length of the old house, which was of rather narrow design. In a cellar is a beautiful single-light stone window, in Gothic style, well preserved. An open fireplace is in the apartment, now used as a kitchen, and engraved on the back is the date 1584.

The outside shows different periods of architecture, and it is absolutely certain that they extend from an earlier to the later period. Nicholas Wotton is said to have made great additions to the house in 1440. But we can go farther back to the reign of Edward the Third, who granted to Robert Corbie the licence "to fortify his mansion house with battlements and towers." This takes us to the fourteenth century, and it is probable that some of the old walls were retained when the place was practically rebuilt in 1546, that date being still visible on one of the Kentish ragstone. For the building as we see it to-day is Tudor, one part slightly older than the other. The western side is picturesque in its ragstone walls, with conspicuous projecting windows and substantial mullions and diamond-shaped lead-lights in the eight lights. At the extreme end of the house is some fine Tudor brickwork, with a great collection of chimneystacks.

But interest in this historic spot does not end with the mansion, for close by is a crypt similar to those to be found on the line of the Pilgrims' Way in Kent. There is no indication that it was ever used for religious purposes, but the niches in the walls in which candles

could be burned, or clothes laid, are of the same style as those attached to other houses under the Downs. It was certainly the resting-place of travellers.

And yet another treasure. Actually and truly a subterranean passage. Many are the times when one is told that such a tunnel exists, but, alas! upon close inspection no passage running beyond a few feet can be found. But here, out of one of the cellars of Boughton Place starts a brick tunnel, large enough for a man to crawl along for a hundred feet at least. Indeed, members of Mr. Kitchin's family have crept along it and come out of the other opening in the middle of a meadow in the direction of the Church. It is believed that it branches off in another direction, but there is no reason to suppose that it reaches the Church. This is no ordinary smugglers' hide, but a place where residents or visitors of Boughton Place could seek refuge or use as an exit from the house in troublous times of the Reformation, when the monks were especially in danger of arrest. And the troublous times when Royalist and Roundhead fought were felt in this part of Kent. The tunnel is made of Tudor bricks, but it may have been used later as a hide during the Stuart and Cromwellian fighting, for Kent, as a whole, was Royalist and members of many leading families were hunted by the Roundheads when everything went wrong with Charles' adherents. Lady Catherine Stanhope, a member of the Wotton family, was governess to a daughter of Charles the First, and would, therefore, be in sympathy with the Royalist cause.

I should select the mile stretch from Boughton Malherbe Church to Grafty Green as one of the most beautiful walks in Kent. A white gate at the entrance may make you hesitate, for it might be a private road. But it is merely placed there to prevent the stock from straying out of the pastures through which you pass while descending the hill. For there are no fences or hedges; on one side a deep green hollow from which the stone for all the buildings hereabouts was quarried, and, rising above you, a lofty ridge of hills. Undulations in the land are everywhere, an orchard here, a bit of pasture there, or a bunch of trees forming a spinney in which many a pheasant must be hidden or, maybe, a stealthy fox.

And as you pass along the winding lane, now flanked with old-world hedges, you glimpse homesteads perched upon the slopes and one little house, standing quite isolated in the heart of the fields,

is the spot where a small water-mill once stood. Indeed, parts of the old wheel remain, but some years ago the water of the stream ceased to flow in sufficient volume and could turn the wheel no longer. The other water-mill of Boughton Malherbe is at Bowley, beyond Chilston Park.

We are still descending the winding road, and far away in the great distance is Fairlight, on the edge of the hills above Hastings, while the expansive map of the country that lies between the Sussex border and ourselves is in full view. And what a view! See it for yourself, and feel proud of that fertile stretch of land, breathe in the bracing air of the Weald and the Marshes.

And now we approach the little hamlet quaintly named Grafty Green. There's a click in those two words, a resounding touch of alliteration. It might have been the haunt of the smuggler or the lair of the highwayman. Strange how some names raise a spectre in your imagination—a ghost or, on the other hand, a gay romantic scene. You know not why. And, maybe, there is no such appeal to anyone else but you in the world. But to me it spells romance—Grafty Green. Were I a poet I should write verse all around it.

Such were my thoughts when I first visited Grafty Green, and then upon further enquiries I found that my imagination had not fallen upon barren ground, for this little bit of Kent once revelled in its famous smugglers and even a notorious witch whose ghost is still roaming about the fields. The great smuggler was a man named Christian, who headed a gang in league with colleagues along the coast. This little village was a secluded spot for hiding the contraband goods after they left the Channel, and he was the ringleader, aided by another fellow known as Dover Will, but whose real name was Else, and he came from Bethersden. The whole countryside was in league with these men, and "tubs" were frequently secreted in the cellars of farmers, who were fully rewarded as fellow conspirators. On one occasion the Excise officers suddenly arrived in the village just as Christian and Dover Will were carrying barrels on their shoulders. They made a rush across country until they reached Chilston Park, where they threw their loads into the lake and escaped. But Dover Will was hit in the leg and died, and some of the old people will tell you that his ghost still roams over the fields at night between Grafty Green and Chilston Park. The Grafty Green gang came to a bad end, no less than ten being hanged on Penenden Heath, but

Christian himself escaped punishment and actually watched the execution. At one time he was known as the Mayor of Grafty Green, and on a certain day in the year was carried shoulder high to a public-house, where he allowed every man half a gallon of beer. But after the execution of his followers he lost the respect of the villagers, and he died in solitude. But his ghost is said to haunt the countryside, and it rides Christian's famous white-faced horse, which was said to possess marvellous instinct, scenting Excise officers a long way off.

Another old inhabitant well-known to Grafty Green at the latter end of the last century was a man named Isaac Burbridge, who had an unprecedented number of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. This is not surprising, as he had twenty-one children—a fact recorded upon the mourning cards printed on the death of his wife, which read:—

“Some have children, some have none,
“But I was the mother of twenty-one.”

And now we come to two witches—Sue Twitt and Sally Clark. Sue had the reputation of possessing a mischievous nature, and the waggoners of the district feared her power, for she was reputed capable of stopping a team of horses by merely placing a wisp of straw in the middle of the road. The name of Sally Clark is still a bye-word, and she lived in a lonely cottage at the extreme end of the parish. Here she kept an old sow, and tradition says that she would ride it up the swathes which she would shake out with a fork while her hired man mowed her hay. An old inhabitant tells me that he remembered two beech pollars close to a footway in the fields adjoining the Headcorn road with a seat in the centre, and here Sally Clark would sit hour after hour, and her ghost is said to appear there on certain nights of the year, while some villagers will go further and say that the ghostly vision has appeared to them in the fields adjoining the village.

Come back to the cluster of many and various buildings that form a hamlet, perched in odd places on either side of the way—the King's Head, with a cricket ground at the back, where I played the game long ago and afterwards drank strong tea, ate cucumber swimming in vinegar, with chunks of home-made bread and the freshest of country butter, and, on top of all, great slices of beef and cake. What a high tea! And what digestion we had in those days.

Close to the King's Head is the weather-boarded Village Hall, erected during the War; a row of cottages, once a whole house and known as Liberty Hall, where the hunted stags were turned into venison, and you can still see the hooks upon which the joints were hung while being cured; the tiniest of Post Offices, with an equally modest general shop close by; two or three houses standing back, probably farmhouses and some three hundred years old; a picturesque hostel half hidden by an orchard in front and partly rebuilt in the old style of gables, and known by the strange name of "Who'd Have Thought It?" Why this strange name? Because you would never have expected to find it snugly half-hidden far away from the road. And then yet a third hostelry greets us—surely enough for any hamlet—in the "Pig and Whistle," demure and plainly dressed in a garb of stucco all over it. And still strolling along this road, or any other road in Boughton Malherbe, you see old yeomen's houses standing in the midst of farmyards, barns and sometimes oast-houses.

Like so many spots on the summit of the Downs hereabouts, ragstone is to be found, and quarries produce it in great abundance. Small streams run through the parish and enter the river near Headcorn, while on their way they freshen up the ponds in the farmland. You can spend hours in strolling across the fields, along the winding lanes, on the slope of the hills or down in the level country.

Along the Headcorn road are homesteads erected during the Tudor period. One, with evidence of age, especially at the back, is now almost in ruins, but another old house close by, known as Wood End, was rescued by Mr. McNeil, who, coming to England from India, became fascinated with the old place and determined to restore it by his own hands. In this he has been exceptionally successful, disclosing the inner framework of oak, a fine chimney corner and panelling. The exterior is at present plain, stucco having been used to cover in the timbered front. Under the garden Mr. McNeil has discovered a wealth of crazy stones. But the most interesting part of the little estate is an outhouse standing close to the house with loop-holed walls. These walls are very thick of ragstone of the Tudor period, with slips for gunfire being deeply splayed. It is said that smugglers used the barn as a defence, but the building stands in too prominent a position for this purpose. Smugglers, naturally, chose secluded spots for their hides. I should place this building as

belonging to Boughton Place, and may have been fortified in accordance with licence granted to Robert Corbie and his successors. Anyway, it is too substantially built for an ordinary farm building. The mortaring between the ragstone is similar to that to be seen in the walls of Sandgate Castle. The village stocks in the old days stood in an open space which is now the front garden of Wood End.

Take the road to Egerton, with much rich pasture or woodland on either side, and about midway between that village and Boughton Malherbe you come upon a historic spot. It is known, and was known, as Colbridge Castle, but to-day we find it acting as a farmhouse. There was no manor of that name, and it is unlikely that it was ever a castle in the accepted term, but a mansion guarded by a moat, such as we know existed in the olden days when marauders infested the countryside and defence was necessary. All sorts of legends attach to this place, one taking us back to the days of Queen Elizabeth, who had a lover living at Colbridge, and it is whispered that it was the mere excuse of being near him that prompted her to sojourn at Boughton Place. Another legend takes us back a century before Tudor days, when the reigning monarch of England—his name is never mentioned—imprisoned one of his courtiers in the old house after a romantic intrigue in which the nobleman had been mixed up with a lady of the Court whom the King himself desired. Here at Colbridge the captive lived long, beloved of everybody, acting as doctor and friend to all. Years passed, he grew old. Then, one day, a chariot drew up outside the entrance and a white-haired woman stepped to the ground, crossed the drawbridge and sought admittance to the house. It was she who had been the cause of her lover's captivity all these years. They met. She told him the King was dead. And a few hours afterwards an old couple, white-haired with years, were seen to leave the castle, enter the carriage and disappear along the road to London. That is the end of the legend. You can let your imagination conjure up what sequel you wish. Methinks it was a happy one. Anyway, for many years afterwards the memory of the captive of Colbridge Castle was revered by all who lived along this part of the countryside, and the story must have been handed down from generation to generation. And for that reason I believe it is true. Grandfathers' tales may be ridiculed by some, but it must be remembered that one

grandfather may have heard a story from his grandfather and that period covers centuries. And that is why I put a lot of faith in these old-world traditions.

To-day you find Colbridge a neat, almost square, house but with three sides of it consisting of walls nearly three feet thick—evidence that certain parts of the original stone house were used when the place was reconstructed. The windows are naturally deeply splayed. From the outside you can trace a large doorway now filled in, and it is obvious that only the walls are original and that the interior was gutted and reconstructed. It is probable that the mansion covered the whole ground within the moat, and this is the only part of it left. Parts of the moat are dry, but water fills other places, and the effect is delightful. As further proof that Colbridge Castle was important, we find remains of an outer moat running parallel with one side of the inner one—another indication that the mansion stood in an isolated spot, as it does to-day, and was dependent upon a powerful defence. This may have given rise to its designation of a castle. It is said—under what authority I do not know—that Colbridge was almost entirely demolished to provide material for the erection of the Tudor mansion of Boughton Place, while a more recent story is that heaps of ruins once lay by the side of the moat and the stone was eventually taken to make the road from Grafty Green to Egerton.

Although she did not live at Boughton Malherbe, a witch was on one occasion brought before Mr. Thomas Wotton at Boughton Place, and Scott, in his "Discovery of Witchcraft," published in 1854, gives particulars of the trial. Mildred Norrington was seventeen years of age and a domestic servant in the service of Mr. William Spooner, of Westwell, near Ashford, and said to be possessed. Her behaviour had attracted the attention of the vicars of Westwell and Kennington, who decided to question the girl closely before witnesses. All met one afternoon at Westwell Vicarage, and when questions were asked the natural voice of the maid ceased and a strange voice announced that it was the Evil One speaking. Scott, in relating the story, suggests that the change of voice was due to ventriloquism. The Evil One continued to speak and told some odd stories. He said that Mildred's mother had sent him and that "she had been keeping him in two bottles, one bottle hidden at the backside of her

house in Westwell Street and the other in the garden of Kennington Vicarage." After listening for some time the vicars gave the command for the devil to depart, and the command was immediately obeyed, for the wench appeared to regain her right mind. Mildred continued to enjoy much attention until one day she must have gone too far, for she was taken as a suspected witch to Boughton Place and there put on her trial. Mr. Wotton dealt gently and tactfully with Mildred, and succeeded in making her voluntarily make a confession. What afterwards happened to her is not recorded, but we are told that she showed "her feats, illusions and trances before a number of gentlemen and gentlewomen well-known in Boughton Malherbe."

