

Surrey Collections.

MERSTHAM.

By ALFRED HEALES, Esq., F.S.A.

THE NAME.

THE name Merstham has been variously spelt. The topographer Salmon, writing in 1736, calls it Mestham, but he adds that it was anciently spelt with an *r* as now. In the 14th and 15th centuries, we find it written Meyrstan, Merystham, and Marstham, but in Domesday Book it is Merstan. Spelling, however, being formerly phonetic, we must turn our attention rather to the sound than to the letters. The derivation is probably from the word "Mére," defined as a marsh-land or boggy swine-walk; and "stán," a stone, or house of stone. The situation, and the fact of the lord's rent being paid in hogs, affords a considerable presumption in favour of this view, in preference to another possible derivation, viz., from the word "Mœr," a boundary.

As appears by Domesday Book, it was held by the Archbishop "de vestitu monachorum," presumed to mean, for the clothing of the monks of Canterbury. There was a church and a mill and eight acres of pasture, and the lord's rent was twenty-five fat hogs and sixteen lean ones. The living is still in the gift of the Archbishop, and is one of his peculiars.

We gather something of the nature of the country in the time of Edward I., from the fact of his having in the year 1383 granted the right of free-warren of his

lands at Merstham, and various places in Kent and Sussex, to one Edmund de Passeleye, but reserving the king's own rights within the Forest.

THE CHURCH.

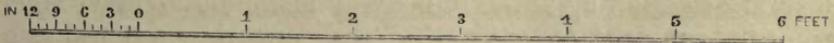
The earliest and chief part of the existing fabric dates from the end of the 12th century, being the period when pointed architecture emerged from the round-arched Norman style. It is dedicated to St. Catherine. The site, half surrounded by trees, and backed by a steep hill, is most happily chosen, and the building itself is more than ordinarily picturesque.

The structure consists of west tower, nave, and aisles, with south porch, chancel, and north and south chantries under separate roofs. The dimensions of the nave are 43 ft. by 18 ft. 9 in.; the north aisle is 7 ft. 8 in. wide, and the south aisle 7 ft. 5 in.; the chancel measures 28 ft. 9 in. by 17 ft. 8 in. A good south-east view of the church is given in Brandon's "Parish Churches," and also a ground plan: there is a south-west view in Cracklow's "Surrey Churches."

Entering at the west end, we find the tower little altered, except in detail of mouldings; the doorway, for example, has suffered from a severe cleaning, almost amounting to a re-cutting, about twenty-five years ago, but the design exhibits considerable character. (See engraving opposite, and section and detail, page 5.) The outer arch is enriched with the "dog-tooth" ornament, an unfailing indication of this style of architecture in England, but here cut in a chamfer, which is unusual; the doorway beneath is round—trefoil-headed, under a pointed arch. The mouldings of the hood, or dripstone, indicate a date not earlier than the middle of the 15th century. This doorway bears a considerable resemblance to that in the north transept of the neighbouring church at Chipstead, and to one in the tower at Cliffe at Hoo, near Gravesend. Lancet windows light the tower, and are original, notwithstanding the modern appearance given by careless scraping.



WEST DOORWAY AT MERSTHAM.



Five bells constitute the peal; the oldest bears a black-letter legend, with the words—

✠ Sancta Katerina ora pro nobis—

a not uncommon inscription, examples occurring in various parts of the country, but in the present instance probably adopted in accordance with the dedication of the church.

Another bell informs us :—

+ Robertus + Mot + me + fecit + 1597.

Robert Mot was a predecessor of Messrs. Mears, of Whitechapel, and died in March, 1608. (See Mr. Tyssen's exhaustive monograph on the *Church Bells of Sussex*, 1864.)

The next in point of date immortalizes the churchwardens as well as the founder; thus :—

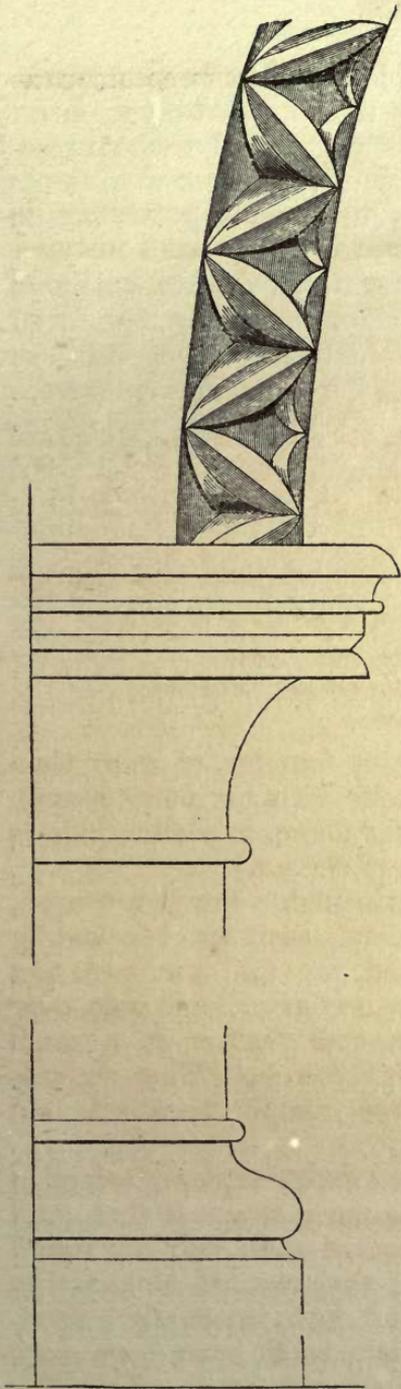
+ BRYAN ELDRIDGE MADE MEE. 1643.

NICHOLAS BEST; RICHARD SHARP; CHURCHWARDENS.

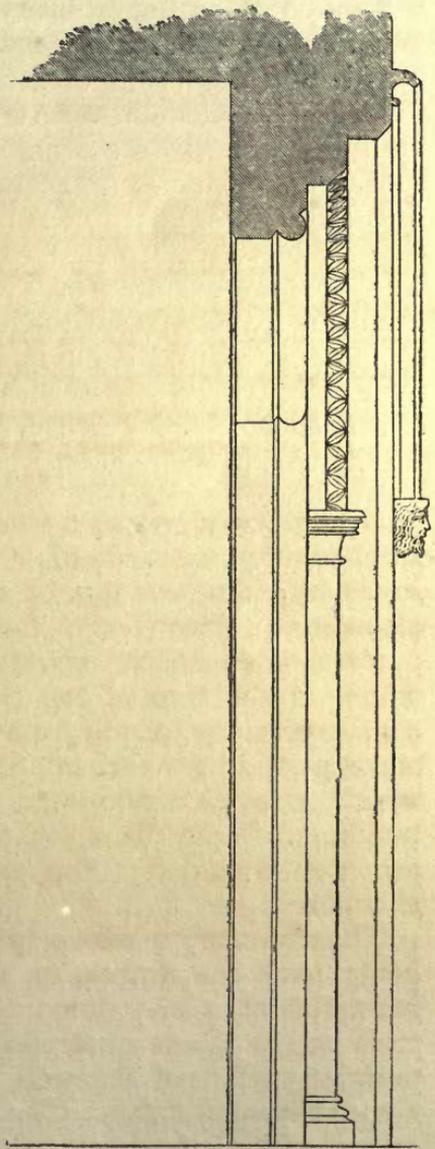
Bryan Eldridge was a Chertsey founder, of more than local repute; upwards of 50 bells with his name remain in the adjoining county of Sussex alone, as well as others elsewhere. (See *Church Bells of Sussex*.)

Passing on to the church through a fine tower-arch, which at the time of the Society's visit was blocked by a gallery, since happily removed, we find the nave and aisles parted by a row of three arches on each side, over which is a clerestory—an unusual feature in a small building of the date of this church. The capitals are well moulded; the arches simply recessed and chamfered.

The clerestory windows are set over the piers, instead of being over the arches, as was more frequent then, and invariable at a later date; those at each end are round trefoils, the others quatrefoils: they are set close to the exterior surface of the wall, and have internally a semi-circular-headed splay. The aisle roofs have been since raised, so that these windows are now within the church: a similar change has been effected at Chipstead Church.



DETAIL OF WEST DOORWAY.



SECTION OF WEST DOORWAY.

The font is of Sussex marble, of a form common at the period, having a square bowl, supported by a central cylinder and four smaller circular shafts, the whole resting on a square base. There is a very similar example at Shiere, in this county. A cut of it is given in the "Handbook for Reigate."

On entering the chancel, the arch beneath which we pass is well deserving of attention, from the sculptured foliage of the capitals. At the date when this arch was built, all traces of classic art were disappearing from the style prevalent in England, while in France its influence always continued perceptible, except during a century of the most perfect period of the Gothic style. The present example of sculptured foliage, resembling acanthus-leaves, is so different from what one is accustomed to see in England, and so like what was usual in France, that the hypothesis of its being the work of a French designer or carver readily occurs to the mind.

The wooden screens, or *parcloles*, which fenced in the chancel, were of Perpendicular date, of fair average work, but no special merit; that between the north aisle and chantry was still later. These have all been swept away during a "restoration" of the church since the Society's visit. Nothing so frequently and so justly excites the indignation of archæologists as the reckless manner in which falsely-called "restorations" are effected, and valuable relics of the past are suffered to become the prey of builders under the term "old materials."

Brandon, whose authority upon any point of Gothic work stands deservedly high, states the north chantry-roof to be of Decorated date,—the style of the 14th century, but I see in it nothing earlier than the next, or Perpendicular style. The windows here (and indeed throughout the church, except the tower and clerestory) are of rather late Perpendicular date; and beneath an arch in the north wall, at the spot usually occupied by a founder's burial-place, is a high-tomb to the memory of John Elinebrygge, who died in the year 1473. This is called the Albery Chapel, and belonged to the lords of the manor; the other belonged to the owners of the

Alderstead estate. The south chantry is designed with more elegance, and has a good "priest's door;" the east window contains some fragments of original stained glass, amongst which are figures of the Blessed Virgin and Child, St. Peter, and another saint. In the south wall is a triangular piscina, the sloping sides arched; it is unusually small, measuring only 12 in. wide by 7 in. high, and 4 in. deep.

Before the formation of the chantry, chapels, and the arches by which they open to the chancel, the walls of the latter presented a constructional arcade of high-pointed Early-English arches resting on shafts, and occupying the whole of the side-walls: portions remain. Such an arcade is very rarely met with; but a similar example occurs in the north side of the chancel at Merton, and in the tower and transept at Cliffe. The east window is a large, awkward one, of late date. There is a very elegant double piscina, with flat trefoil-headed arches and a central shaft. Beautiful foliage covered the projecting basins, but the delicacy of the carving was entirely spoilt by a severe scraping about twenty-five years ago.

It will be seen that this church presents some very distinct architectural peculiarities, and all of them occur in one or other of the neighbouring churches of Chipstead and Merton, and at Cliffe at Hoo, in Kent. Chipstead resembles it in the form of doorway and the "dog-tooth" worked on a chamfer, in its clerestory, wall-arcading, and porch; Cliffe has a similar west tower, clerestory, nave arcade, and wall-arcading; Merton in its lancet and wall-arcading; while all have unusually narrow chamfers. These features on comparison present a character so strongly marked, as to raise the presumption that all these churches were designed by one architect. To Mr. G. E. Street is due the first credit for this theory.

The church was once extensively decorated with paintings, which have been smothered with whitewash and completely "Protestantized." On the west pillar at the south side of the nave is a small figure of a bishop,

doubtless a saint, in the attitude of benediction; east of the chancel-arch on the same side was a painting of the Blessed Virgin and Child: these I take to date from the first half of the 15th century. Traces of painting are also visible along the whole wall of the south aisle, of which the most distinct figure is that of a man drawing a sword. Mr. Palgrave suggests that the series might have represented the history and martyrdom of St. Catherine; but it occurs to me, that as one of the direct routes of the famous pilgrimages to Canterbury, to the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket, passes through this parish, and was even until recently called "The Pilgrim's Lane," the painting may have represented his death or martyrdom. This is a mere suggestion, for the present state of the painting prevents anything accurate.

The church has suffered much by roughly scraping off the whitewash, and since the visit of the Society, the details have been utterly destroyed by the local builder who was called in to "restore" the church in 1861. The stone mouldings were ruined; the walls were ruled with lines in imitation of masonry of large stones; the contractor was allowed to remove all the screen-work under the name of "old materials," but I believe it was subsequently obtained and preserved by Sir W. G. Hylton Jolliffe; and the brasses were arbitrarily removed from their places, and one of them—a married man—was divorced from his wife. All this was done without reason or excuse; but, on the other hand, it must be admitted that much good was effected by removing all the high, mean pews, including the squire's parlour, which was far above the level of the profane vulgar, nicely carpeted, and fitted with chairs, tables, and fire-place: for these fittings suitable woodwork was substituted throughout the church.

Although, as a Churchman, one must feel pleased to see so great an improvement as the general aspect of the church now presents, as an Archæologist it is difficult to refrain from expressing *more* than surprise that a work of this nature so near London, and within half a mile of

the railway station, should have been carried on without professional, or even amateur, advice. It is a very sad example of zeal without knowledge.

THE PARISH RECORDS.

The Parish Registers were well kept, and continue in good preservation; they commence in the thirtieth year of King Henry VIII., 1539.

The names of both father and mother were at first usually given, and in 1559 and a few subsequent years, the names of the godfather and godmother were added.

In 1541 and 1542, the entry of baptism states, not that the child was baptized, but that it was "borne" at such a date. In 1570 and 1571, the expression "joyned in matrimony" is substituted for the usual form.

After the year 1638 the writing is very bad, and the entries are but few. In 1650, children are stated to be "borne," instead of baptized; and about this date the register becomes evidently very imperfect.

On the 28th November, 1653, John Monday was sworn to execute the office of "a Register" in the parish, pursuant to the Act of Parliament, 24th August, 1653 (*i.e.*, held during the interregnum), according to the best of his skill and ability, which appears not to have been very great. This state of affairs continued until 1660, when John Harris signs the books as rector, and from that date the entries are well and apparently carefully written until 1680, whence to 1695 they are very imperfect: from the latter year downwards they are in excellent order.

Among the surnames in the 16th century, there frequently occur several rather peculiar, such as Napkin, Gawton, Placeto, and Bristow; and the change in religious sentiment in the latter part of the same century is shown by some of the Christian names which supersede those previously in use; Patience, Millicent,

Prudence, Christabell, Mercy, and Judeth, will serve for examples.

Several certificates to his Majesty about touching for the evil are given, beginning with two in 1673. To one granted to George, son of William Palmer, in 1676-7, the record adds, "y^e Father and his son Harry touch^d before."

The collections made by virtue of briefs are at one time entered. In 1740, between 26th October and 21st December, inclusive, were no less than eight briefs, producing from 8 $\frac{2}{4}$ d. to 6s. 3d. The amounts were always small, and varied from 5d. upwards; one house-to-house visitation produced 6s. 8d.

The unhappy pew system gave rise to strife and heart-burning here as elsewhere. On the 10th June, 1734, the curate wrote formally to the churchwardens (and considered his letter sufficiently important to enter in the church books), to take immediate care that those farmers who pay to church and poor have quiet and peaceable possession of the several seats and pews in the church, of right belonging (as he recites) to their respective farms, and that the people may be duly accommodated without any illegal additions or alterations or new charges upon this poor parish, there being to his certain knowledge still room enough and to spare for all the congregation. This exhortation produced so little effect, that on the 14th November, 1736, a formal application was made to Dr. Bettesworth, the Visitor of the Archbishop, complaining of certain scandalous persons, in reference to the same subject.

THE MONUMENTS.

The oldest monument is a very mutilated stone effigy of a civilian, with gypciere, dating between 1420 and 1430; it is of life-size, and bears traces of red paint upon the coat. It is said to have been discovered about sixty years ago, having till then been turned face downwards, and forming part of the pavement of the north chantry: it now lies in the south chantry.

Next is a small brass to the memory of John Ballard and his wife, as appears by this inscription, in black letter :—

“ Hic iacent Iohēs Ballard qui obiit xxi° die marci Anno dñi Millm̄o cccclxii ij° . Et Margareta ux) eī q^r aīab; ppiciē de) amē.”

He is represented as a civilian, and the costume of neither figure presents any particular feature unusual at the date; his effigy, which was formerly under the altar-rails, is in fine preservation.

On the high-tomb in the recess in the north chantry is a brass to the memory of John Elinebrygge, with the following inscription, in black letter :—

“ Hic iacet Iohēs Elinebrygge armiger qui obiit viij o die Februarii A o dñi M o cccc o lxxiiij. Et Isabella uxor eius que fuit filia Nichi Jamys quonda) Maioris et Alderman) Londoñ) que Obiit vii o die Septembris A o dñi M o cccc o lxxii o et Anna uxor eī) que fuit filia Johēs Prophete Gentilman que obiit [blank] A o dñi M o cccc o [blank] quoru) animabus ppicietur Deus.”

Above were the three figures, but that of John has been long wanting; he was in civil costume, though described as esquire. The two wives are precisely alike both in figure and costume, and show that the brass was laid down at the death of the husband. It often happened, as in this case, that the date of the survivor's death was never filled in. From the mouths of the effigies proceed scrolls, bearing the legend :—

“ Sancta Trinitas—Unus Deus—Miserere nobis.”

Beneath is a group of seven daughters, with “butterfly head-dresses” (a cut is given in the “Handbook for Reigate”), and a group of sons is lost.

The Elinebrygge family were settled at a place of the same name, a chapelry in the parish of Doderhill, in Worcestershire, in the 13th century. There is a greater variety than usual in the mode of spelling the name, and the monument next mentioned, and dated in 1507, where the inscription is to Thomas Elinerugge, “alias dictⁱ. Thom̄s Elyngbrigge,” shows that they were then uncertain of their own patronymic. The following are examples of the mode in which it was variously spelt :—Ellerug; Elme-

rugge; Elmebrugge; Elmridge; Elmbrige; Elmebrygge; Ellmbridge; Elinrugge; Ellyngbrugg; Elenbrig; Elingbrig; Elyngbrigge; Ellyngbrigg; Elynbrege; Elinebrigge. The arms of the family are, checky, argent and sable.

It will be seen by the above inscription that a period of only seventeen months elapsed between the decease of this John Elinebrigge's first wife and his own decease, he having married a second time in the interval. The second wife afterwards married Sir William Pecche, of Lullingstone, in Kent, whom she also survived.

A brother of this John was Roger Elinebrugge, Esquire; while a young man he was nominated Sheriff of the counties of Surrey and Sussex, in the year 1437; but he died almost immediately after receiving that appointment, on the Feast of St. Clement (23rd November), 1437, and was buried at Beddington, in this county, where he is commemorated by an effigy in brass with the arms of the family and others, and his head rests upon a tilting helmet with a gryphon's head for a crest. This brass is engraved in Boutell's series of Monumental Brasses, and Hewitt's "Ancient Armour and Weapons of Europe," iii. p. 445.

Among the children of John by his first wife Isabella, was his son Thomas, who resided at Carshalton, in Surrey, and was a Justice of the Peace; he held the office of "Hostiarius" (? Gentleman-Porter) to Cardinal Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury. By his will (wherein the name is spelt "Elyngbrigge") he gives directions for his burial at Carshalton Church, near the place where his wife Elizabeth was buried, and he bequeaths £20 sterling toward his "buriall." He appoints certain land which he purchased of "Newdegate" to the Church of Carshalton for "an obite theſe yerely to be kepte for ev^l and specially certayn almes to be yeveñ yerely in redy money amongis the pou^r people than beyng at my saide obite to pray for my sowle, my wifes sowle, my Faders sowle & moder ppetually." He bequeaths £100 to his daughter Margaret, and appoints his sister Johanne Burton and her husband Henry Burton, with

two others, to be executors; and bequeaths all his "horsis" to the said Henry Burton. He died on the 22nd May, 1497, and his will was proved on the 23rd October in the same year.

His wife Elizabeth was the daughter of Nicholas Gaynesford, esquire for the body of Edward IV. and Henry VII., and his wife Margaret was one of the "gentilwommen" to their two queens respectively named Elizabeth. They are commemorated by a brass at Carshalton Church, but the dates of their deaths are left blank.

Thomas Elyngbrigge was buried at Carshalton, according to his directions; but his effigy and that of his wife in brass were stolen about twenty-five years ago; the arms of Elyngbrigge and Gaynsford remain.

Another of the children of John, and a sister of Thomas, was Johanne Burton, above mentioned; she married, first, Richard Fromond, of Fromond, Kent; and second, Henry Burton; and died on the 23rd December, 1523, and is commemorated by a brass at Carshalton.

Thomas's son and heir was also named Thomas; he resided at Merstham, where is his effigy with that of his wife on a brass, with the following inscription, in black letter:—

"Hic iacent Thom̄s Elinerugge Armiger alias dict. Thom̄s Elyngbrigge filius et heres Thome Elinerugge, et Johanna uxōr ei qui quidem Thomas obit xxvii die marcii A° dñi M° V° vii quorū al̄abus ppicietur dē. Amen."

By his will he directs that he should be buried in the "North Chauncell w^t in the church of Merysh̄m afore the pictur of mary Magdalen." The brass was in the floor of that chancel or chantry in the time of Manning and Bray, but now no longer marks the place of his burial, having been removed to the centre chancel. He bequeaths to the Church of "Cauntbury," three shillings and four pence; to the "high aulter of o^r lady of Merysth̄m, 3s. 4d., and to the repaçon of the church, 10s." After other similar gifts, he bequeaths 33s. 4d. for a priest "he to syng for my soule my faders and all my

frends soules named in the bedroll during the tyme and space of oon q̄ter of a yere. It. I will that two taps off wax shall brynne at myñ herse during the space of xxx daies that is to say 'fyve pounds wax in both taps.' Also 26s. 8d. for 'twoo obitts' yearly for 10 years, the 1st on the Monday after the Assumption, and the 2^d upon S^t. Valentine's day, to be performed by the curate and 7 priests; and a residue of the sum to be given to poor people in 'brede and ale.'"

His estates he leaves to his wife for life; and he mentions the Ellyngbrigg lands in the West Countrie; these were in Worcestershire. The will concludes thus:—

"To this my present testament and last will—Witness God Almighty and our blessed lady w^h all the hole convent of hevey), and in erthe my gostlyfader John) Johnson preste the day and yere aforesaid." (26th March, 1507.)

He died on the same day, and the will was proved on the 23rd April following.

He is represented in armour, with head and hands bare, and without spurs. His wife wears the ordinary costume of the period. Of four shields of arms the lower dexter only remains; it bears checky ar. and sa. imp. checky lozengy . . & . . , on a chief . . a saltire . . charged with 5 roundlets.

From him the estate passed by his daughter and heiress Ann to her husband Sir John Dannet, of Dannet Hall, Leicestershire; she survived, and died 17th March, 1577, and was buried at Merstham. In the Register are entries of burials of servants to "my lady Danett," in 1558, 1560, and 1561.

The next monument is a small brass effigy and inscription to one of the old and widely-spread family of Newdegate, of Astley Castle and Arbury Park in Warwickshire, Harefield in Middlesex, and Newdegate and New Place near Reigate. The inscription, in black letter, runs thus:—

"Hic iacet Joh̄s Newdegate Armiger nup dñs de Herfeld in Com̄ Midd̄ qⁱ obiit xxⁱ die mens̄ Februarii A^o dñi M^o cccc^o lxxxviii ¶ A^o regni reĝ Henr̄ VII, xiiii, cuñ aīe ppiciet̄ de."

The manor of Harefield, Middlesex, was acquired by the family in the 14th century. The effigy is very small and ill-proportioned; in armour, with the head resting on the helmet for a pillow. The Newdegate arms are: gu. 3 lion's gambes erased, ar.

His son (apparently) was also named John, and was a serjeant-at-law. The latter by his will bequeaths to his "son and heir apparant a standing cupp with a cover of silver that was my faders," and also "a cheyne of golde weying fourty pounds and more."

Another brass represented Peter and Richard Best, two children of Nycolas Best, of Alderstead, a house in the parish of Merstham. It has this inscription:—

"HERE LYETH THE BODYES OF PETER BEST AND RYCHARD BEST HIS BROTHER SONNES OF NYCOLAS BEST & ELIZABETH HIS WYFE OF ALDERSTEAD IN Y^e PARRYSHE OF MERSTHAM IN THE COUNTIE OF SURREY W^{ch} PETER DECEASED THE XIIth DAY OF AUGUST A^o Dⁿⁱ 1585. AND THE SAID RYCHARD HIS BROTHER DECEASED THE XXIIth OF JUNE A^o Dⁿⁱ 1587."

One of the children, that on the dexter side, and probably Peter, the elder of the two, is represented as a little child: the other effigy, as stated by the clerk in 1845, was stolen six or seven years before that date by a "gentleman," whom he left in the church rubbing the brasses; but it is engraved in the Rev. Herbert Haines' admirable "Manual of Monumental Brasses" (at p. 219), from a rubbing made with Richardson's bronze composition, which was only invented in the summer of 1844; from which we may infer that the brass is probably still in existence.

It represented an infant in swaddling-clothes, as a "chrisome." According to the custom of the period, an infant was anointed with chrisem (oil), and bound up like a mummy, and so kept until the churching of the mother at the end of a month, when the swaddling-cloth, called a chrisom-cloth, was presented at the altar; and it was directed by the Constitutions of Archbishop Edmund, A.D. 1226, that "Panni chrismales non nisi in usum Ornamentorum Ecclesie convertantur." In

the Office of Baptism in the Prayer Book of 2nd Edward VI. (1548), the "White Vesture, commonly called the crisome," is especially required.

Shakspeare alludes to the practice in relating the death of Falstaff, by the mouth of Mrs. Quickly:—

"'A made a fine end and went away an it had been any christom child."

In entries of burials in parish registers, the term may still be met with as late as 1722; and the custom of enveloping children in that manner prevails over the greater part of the continent of Europe at the present day.

The baptism and burial of Peter Best are thus entered in the parish register of Merstham:—

"Peter Best the sonne of Nicholas Best was baptized the 3^d of July, 1585.

"Peter Best y^e sonne of Nicholas Best of Aldersted (buried) y^e 12th of August 1585" (the day of his death).

The baptism of Richard occurs, but there is no entry of his burial:—

"Richard Best y^e sonne of Nicholaus Best of Alderstead was baptized the 6th daye of August 1586."

The family of Best was very extensive, and the name constantly appears in the parish registers at Merstham, besides stray branches in the neighbouring parishes.

The register at Merstham records the baptism on the 9th March, 1554, of Nicholas Best, probably the person mentioned on the brass as the father of the children commemorated; and his father Robert, described as of the Court Lodge, was buried in 1563. In 1625, one of the same name joined with the churchwardens in attesting the "reading-in" of a new rector; and a Nycolas Best was the churchwarden in 1643, as appears by the inscription on the bell.

One of the Best family, who was buried at Chipstead in 1534, left by his will "oone shepe" to the "hye autar of Chepsted," and others to Merstham, Gatton, and Chaldon. Another of the family, resident at Car-

shalton, in 1528 bequeathed to his son "a grete cawd-iron and a payres of shetts, a latten bason, and a candlestyke."

One other ancient monument remains to be mentioned; it is a stone let into the east wall of the south chantry, and engraved with the arms and crests of Southcote and Waldegrave, and the initials S. M. S. It appears by a note (for which I am indebted to Mr. Howard), that John Southcote purchased of Leonard Danett in 1578 the manor of Albery. This John Southcote was made one of the Justices of the King's Bench in 1562: he died 18th April, 1585, aged 74, and was buried at Witham. His son and heir, John Southcote, by a deed dated 14th October, 1588, settled this estate on his marriage with Magdalen, daughter of Sir Edward Waldegrave, and left issue John, buried at Merstham, 15th December, 1586, and Edward, of Witham.

The style of the workmanship corroborates this date; but the stone must have been moved, since the north chantry belonged to the Albery manor, and the south chantry (where the slab now is) appertained to the Alderstead manor.