

**Notes on the crypt and bones of Hythe Church / by H.D. Dale and F.G. Parsons.**

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# NOTES 2.

## ON THE CRYPT AND BONES OF HYTHE CHURCH

BY

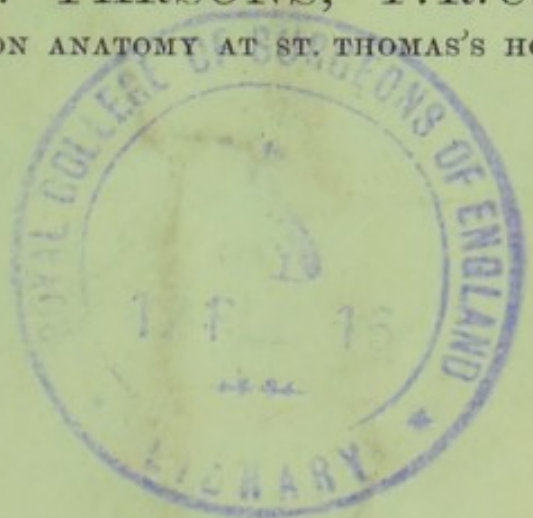
THE REV. H. D. DALE

VICAR OF HYTHE

AND

F. G. PARSONS, F.R.C.S.

LECTURER ON ANATOMY AT ST. THOMAS'S HOSPITAL



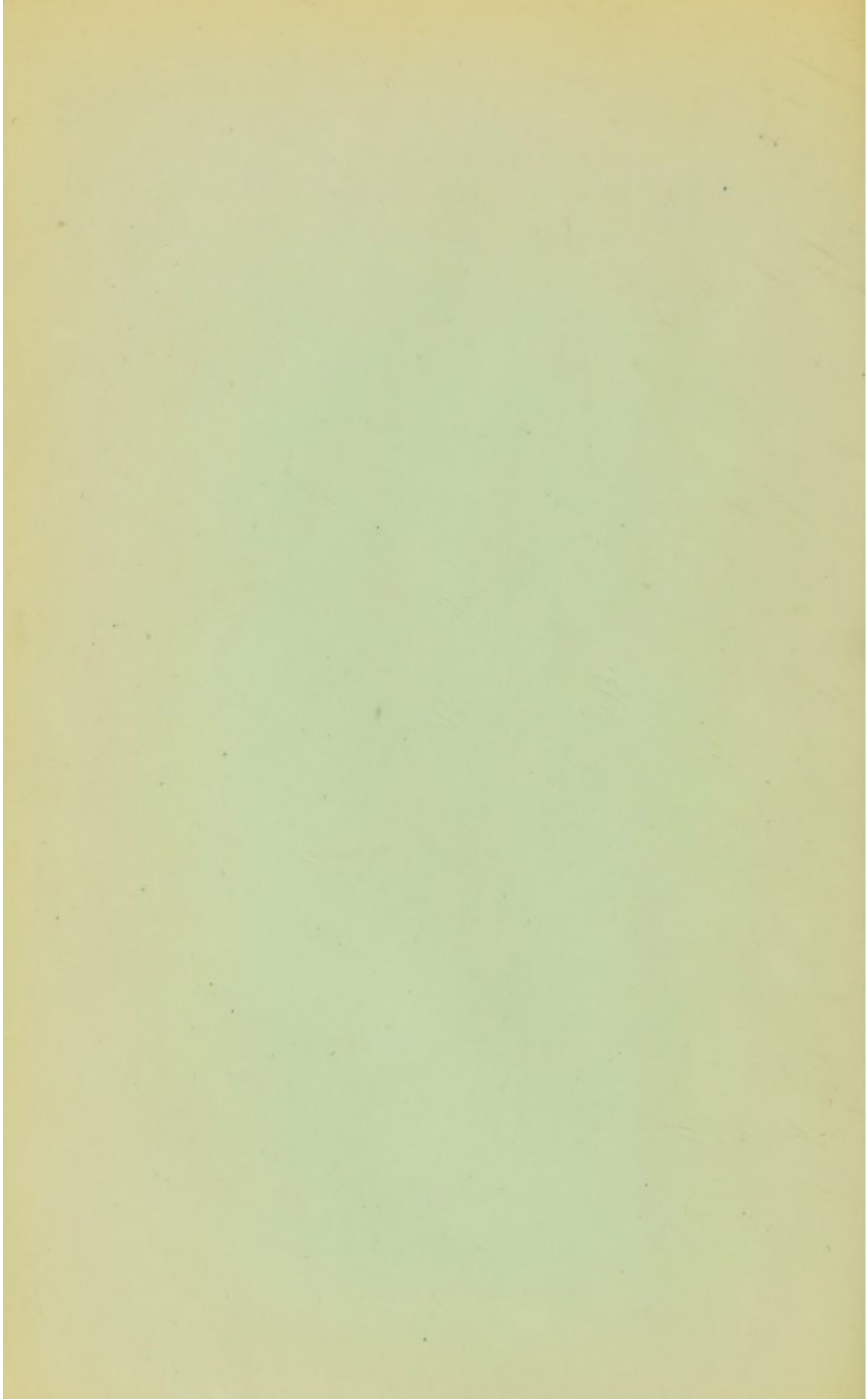
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1904

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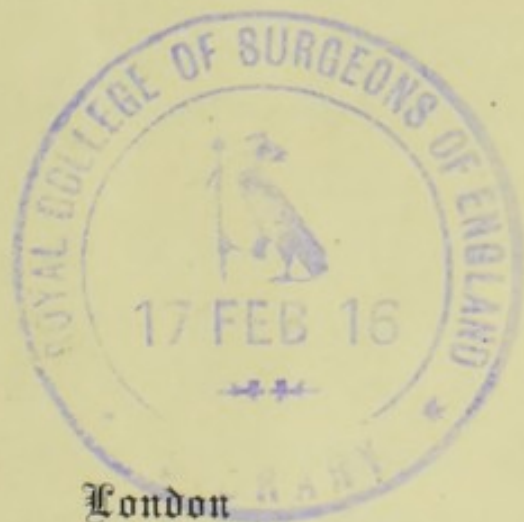
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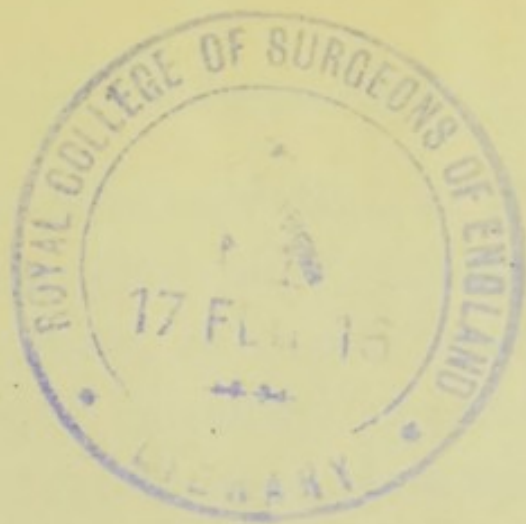
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NOTES ON THE  
CRYPT AND BONES OF HYTHE  
CHURCH

THE CRYPT

The word "Crypt" is derived from a Greek word meaning "that which is hidden." In church architecture the term is used to describe a vault or chamber underneath a church, and generally beneath the chancel. In very ancient times churches were often built over the graves of martyrs, or the place where they had been martyred; for instance, the great Abbey Church, now the Cathedral, of St. Alban, stands where England's proto-martyr suffered. These sacred spots were called the *confessio*, *i. e.* the place where a martyr had

confessed Christ. It was often enclosed by a vault, the church being built above, and this seems to have been the origin of a crypt. Very early Saxon crypts at Ripon and Hexham were certainly used for the exhibition of the relics of saints. In course of time most large churches were built with crypts, which were used for various purposes. In that of Canterbury Cathedral, the largest crypt in England, there were several chapels. One is now used for guild services, and, as is well known, part of the crypt is screened off to form the French Huguenot Chapel.

What is the origin and purpose of the Crypt at Hythe? A careful study of its architecture and position, with the approaches to it, will help us to come to a fairly probable conclusion. It is of the same date as the rest of the Chancel; a beautiful example of what is known as Early English Gothic. It must have been commenced soon after A.D. 1200. It was at this period that Hythe attained the height of its ancient prosperity as a Cinque Port; and so the inhabitants, encouraged no doubt by the Archbishop, who was Lord of the Manor of Hythe and Saltwood, pulled down the short

Norman Chancel which then existed, and replaced it by the present lofty structure, which Archbishop Benson declared to be the finest east end of any parish church in Kent. Now, if these early thirteenth century builders had intended the Crypt to be used as a chapel, it would, I think, have been differently constructed. First, there would have been an entrance from the Church itself, as at Canterbury and other places; and secondly, if not square, its greatest length would have been from west to east (and not from north to south), so as to place an altar at the east end. It was thought possible at one time that this might be the case, and that the Crypt extended under the whole of the raised Chancel. Careful investigation, however, prove that it was originally built as we see it at present. Coming now to the south entrance to it, the large and beautiful door there at once attracts attention. Formerly it must have been of noble appearance. The ground in front of it has been raised since that period far above its original level, large vaults having been constructed there. Probably when first built there were some steps *up* (instead of down) to the entrance on this side, affording an



entry from the road in front, as well as from the passage round the Church. Half the slender detached Bethersden marble shafts which support the mouldings of the door have perished from the effects of seven centuries of hard weather. But the hand of man has been still more wantonly destructive. The deeply cut, delicate mouldings of the arch, having also suffered from the weather in places, have been sawn away and mutilated instead of restored. Still, enough remains to show how much care and skill the thirteenth century builders had bestowed upon this grand entrance, proving that the Crypt once had a far more important purpose than that of a mere charnel-house for churchyard bones. Opposite, on the north, there is another very large door leading out into the Churchyard, which slopes up steeply on this side. This Crypt, then, formed a passage under the east end of the Chancel, between the north and south sides of the Church. Leland, the chaplain and antiquary of Henry VIII, who visited Hythe about A.D. 1545, describes the Church and Crypt as follows:—"It evidently appereth that wher the parish church is now was sumtyme a fayr abbey. Yn the

quire be fayr and many pylars of marble, and under the quier a very faire vault, also a faire olde dore of stone, by the which the religius folkes cam yn at mydnight." (The quaint spelling will be noticed, also that the same word might be differently spelt at pleasure). He also mentions "a fayr spring in the top of the church yard, and thereby the ruins of houses of office of the Abbey."

Leland is more correct in describing what he saw than in the deductions which he drew from his observations. No doubt there were old walls and ruins at the top of the Churchyard, but they were *not* the remains of an abbey. Neither priory, convent, or abbey ever existed in Hythe; nor were there any "religius folkes" (monks) to come "yn at mydnight." The name, position, endowment, etc., of every monastic establishment in the county were recorded at their dissolution, only a few years before Leland paid his visit to Hythe; but having seen such ruins near priory churches at Folkestone, Dover, and many other places, I suppose he jumped to the conclusion that those at Hythe also had been inhabited by monks. Leland noticed the fine door of the

Crypt which many visitors still admire. What was the reason for such architectural richness here? The groined vaulting of the interior is equally beautiful, showing the Crypt once formed an important passage-way. And visitors will observe that two doorways, cut on either side of the Church Porch, also give a direct passage through it from the Churchyard. Besides this, even the great eastern buttresses of the Chancel have a narrow passage-way cut through them. All this was clearly done to enable people to walk round the Church without going off consecrated ground; in short, I believe the chief purpose of the Crypt was to form a grand Ambulatory. It was usual on certain great festivals and anniversaries for clergy and people to march in procession round a church in mediæval times, and the rule was that the procession must not go off consecrated ground. Hence at Hythe, to avoid this, a passage was cut through the Porch, through the eastern buttresses, and a splendid one constructed under the Chancel. Such an arrangement is found in other places where the exigencies of the site of a church made it necessary. For instance, the tower of the well-known and

splendid Church of St. Peter Mancroft, at Norwich, is built at the furthest western extremity of the churchyard. And so side arches, forming a passage through the tower (in addition to the west door), have been constructed. Wrotham, in Kent, is another example. The south door of our Crypt being the finest, I imagine the old processions had to enter that way, leaving by the north entrance, which, being in the rear of the procession, did not require such elaborate treatment, although, of course, this latter idea is only a surmise. But all the surroundings prove that the Crypt itself was built for a processional, not a chapel. It could no doubt have also been used as a place for exhibiting relics, pilgrims entering by one door and leaving by the other; but there is no sign or tradition of its ever having been fitted up for this purpose. We know, on the other hand, that there was a flourishing guild at Hythe centuries ago, and that on the guild festival they had a grand procession.

It will be noticed that Leland does not say a word about there being any bones in the Crypt when he visited it in 1545. It is not safe to form conclusions from merely negative evidence,

and hence we cannot definitely say the remains were not there in his time. The burying grounds of churches in mediæval times were often very small, as was the case here. The old churchyard of St. Leonard's was only about a third of its present area; it has been enlarged three times within the memory of man. It was commonly necessary, therefore, to reopen old graves for fresh interments after a few years, and many churches had a "charnel-house," where bones unearthed on such occasions were deposited. It is probable that the crypt here was already used for such a purpose when Leland wrote. The same is said to have been the case at Folkestone, and no doubt at many other places he visited. At the request of the present writer, searches have been kindly made at the libraries at Lambeth Palace and Canterbury by the librarians, in the hope of finding some ancient evidence as to *when* the bones were first placed in Hythe Crypt. There are notices of Hythe in many ancient documents at both libraries, and in the Parvise, or room over the Church Porch; but so far as can be ascertained, they contain no reference to the bones. The Rev. J. Browne, rector of Cheriton (1679—

1719), writing of Hythe, says: "How or by what means the bones were brought to this place the townsmen are altogether ignorant, and can find no account of the matter." An old steel engraving of the crypt, now hanging in the Church, and dated 1783, shows the largest stack of bones pretty much as they appear now (the shelves are of later date). It contains an inscription, engraved at the same period. After mentioning a battle between the Britons under Vortigern and the Saxons, in which the latter were defeated, it says: "Their bones, as also those of the Britons whose bodies fell thereabouts, were collected and piled up in memory of so signal a victory. This stack is 30 feet long, 8 feet high, and 8 feet over. By long exposure to the sea and sun, the bones have become extremely white, with a beautiful polish on them." Hasted, in his well-known history of Kent, writes: "In the Crypt or vault (at Hythe) under the east end of the middle Chancel is piled up that vast quantity of human skulls and bones so often mentioned in this history, the pile of them being twenty-eight feet in length and eight feet in height and breadth. They are by the most

probable conjectures supposed to have been the remains of the Britons, slain in the bloody battle fought on the shore between this place and Folkestone with the retreating Saxons in the year 456, and to have attained their whiteness by lying some length of time exposed on the seashore. Several of the skulls have deep cuts in them as if made by some heavy weapon, most likely of the Saxons." It will be noticed Hasted quotes no authorities or evidence for this statement, and this account apparently is only a conjecture. The most recent investigations—as will be seen by the second part of this little book—do not support this theory. There is, however, a strong local tradition that *some* of the bones come from a battlefield. It is certain that when the foundations of the older part of the house now known as "Oaklands," in Stade Street, were dug in 1817, a good many human remains were exhumed, and added to the collection in the Crypt. There was never any churchyard on the site where they were found, which was formerly close to the haven of Hythe—if it was not actually covered by the water of the old harbour at high tide. There is said to have

been a fierce engagement in 1295 (temp. Edward I) at Hythe, when the French attempted to land, but were beaten back by the men of Hythe, who killed 240 of their enemies. But fights between the men of the Cinque Ports and the French were not infrequent in mediæval times; and ships were boarded and plundered, and raids made, even when the countries were nominally at peace. It is quite possible that some of the bones in the Crypt were placed there from an old battlefield, where they may have lain unburied; others were brought from the Churchyard, where they had been disinterred in digging over old graves; while shipwrecks might account for some. The number of male skulls so greatly exceeds the female, and so many are of men between twenty and forty-five or fifty years, that it is evident the remains cannot be all those of ordinary townspeople once buried in the Churchyard. In that case the sexes would be much more equal, and there would be a good many children among them, instead of comparatively very few. Hence the old tradition of a battle is very possibly true as regards the origin of a good many of these remains. Some are probably



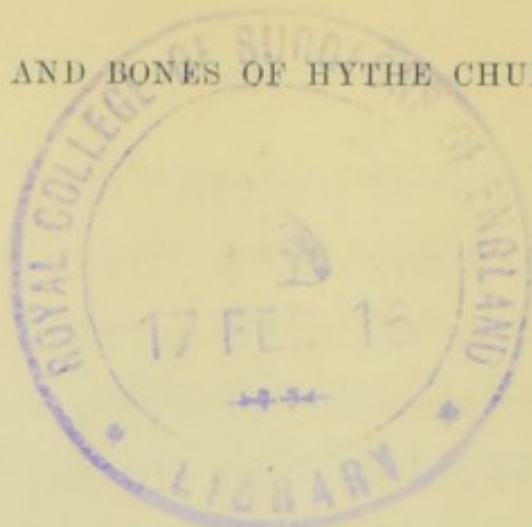
mediæval, others added from time to time from various sources. For instance, in 1901 some excavations for a new revolver range were being made in a field just above the School of Musketry. The soldiers working there came across a number of human skulls and bones, which they preserved as carefully as possible. These are now placed in the Crypt. The place where they were found is the site of the old churchyard of St. Nicholas, Hythe, a church which was in ruins or destroyed as long ago as 1545, when Leland visited Hythe. Hence these remains had been buried at least 360 years when they were discovered. Part of a very ancient skull, British or prehistoric, found with other human remains in excavating at Castle Hill, an ancient hill fort, has also lately been sent here. Once let such a place as this Crypt be made a receptacle for human remains, and it is natural that any others discovered near should be deposited there. Some, it is said, were formerly found in a field on Romney Marsh; in short, there is little doubt they came from various places near. Some have been buried; others very possibly not, and so became bleached whit

by long exposure to sun and rain. I think, on the whole, that it is probable that the large stack of bones *began* to be placed in the position we see it now *before the Reformation*, for the following reasons:—When the Chancel was restored in 1887, the north door of the Crypt was completely hidden on the outside by an accumulation of earth from the Churchyard, reaching almost to the apex of the drip-stone over the door. When this was cleared away, fragments of stained glass and the clasps of a missal were found some distance below the surface, the evidence of destruction wrought by the iconoclasts of the Reformation or Puritan times! It is clear from all this that when the Crypt ceased to be used for processions in Edward VI's reign, the passage through was soon blocked up on the north side. In my opinion, had bones been first placed in the Crypt *at* or *after* that period, the same care would not have been taken, as we see has been done, to stack them so as to leave a passageway for processions through the Crypt. The evidence seems to prove that the pile was at least begun while the place was used as an Ambulatory in Pre-Reformation times, nor would

the soil have been suffered to accumulate since then on the Churchyard side if the place was still intended to be commonly used as an ordinary charnel-house. I have shown that the pile has, on the other hand, received various additions from time to time down to the present day. But on the whole I am inclined to think that a large number of the bones were placed there in mediæval times, *i. e.* between A.D. 1220 (when the Crypt was certainly finished) and about A.D. 1540. Further probability is given to this by the fact that until 1850, when the shelves were made for skulls in the southern compartment of the Crypt, nearly all the skulls and bones lay carefully piled up just beneath the ancient High Altar in the Choir above. It is more likely they were first put in this position in mediæval than Post-Reformation times. More definitely than that I cannot speak. I have stated only what seem the *more probable* conclusions to be drawn from the evidence of the architectural features of the Crypt, and such historical facts and traditional lore as I have been able to gather. A study of the next chapter will show how far careful measurement of the skull and bones,

their anatomical features, etc., help us to arrive at any conclusion as to their history and date. It only remains to be mentioned here that the bones and relics of Waterloo were brought from the battlefield by my predecessor, the Rev. T. G. Hall, and I thought them of sufficient interest to place in the Crypt. The bones in the window-sill are from St. Nicholas' Church-yard. There are some thirteenth and fourteenth century crosses, formerly grave-stones, to be seen here; part of the lid of a stone coffin (fourteenth century) and some architectural remains, evidently from the Church. These consist of old gurgoyles, a fifteenth century window-head, and some well-executed Norman and Early English mouldings and capitols.

HERBERT D. DALE.



## THE BONES

HAVING cleared the ground by stating the few historical facts of which we are possessed at present with regard to these bones, we may go on to see what light anatomy can throw on their origin; but before doing so it may be well to recapitulate the chief historical points. These, to my mind, are—

1. That the bones have certainly been in their present place for at least 200 years.

2. That the passage or Ambulatory in which they lie was required for other purposes until the Reformation.

3. That Leland, describing this church soon after the Reformation (about 1545), mentions the vault or Ambulatory, but not the bones.

4. That the Churchyard was not formerly nearly as large as it now is, consequently many skeletons must from time to time have been disinterred.

5. That there were formerly at least four other churches in or near Hythe, all of which probably had graveyards.

6. That Hasted, in his 'History of Kent,' speaks of a battle having taken place between the Britons and Saxons in A.D. 456, but his authority for any such battle cannot be traced.

7. That frequent fights probably took place between the inhabitants and French landing parties, in one of which (in 1295) 240 of the enemy are said to have been killed.

8. That in ancient times shipwrecks on the coast were more frequent than now. The old registers refer to some.

9. That the plague visited Hythe in the latter part of Henry VIII's reign, also in 1597 and 1623, in the reigns of Elizabeth and James I, and probably many times before, if we may judge by its treatment of the rest of England.

Most of these points have been ably set forth in a paper read by Dr. Randall Davis, of this town, to the East Kent Branch of the British Medical Association in September, 1898.

On examining the skulls one is at once struck by their whiteness, and this is more evident when they are compared with the three which

have recently been dug up from a field on the site of what was once St. Nicholas' Church. These latter have almost certainly been buried for 400 years, and it will be noticed that in addition to their yellow colour they are more friable and porous than are most of the other skulls in the vault.

The generality of the skulls are in an excellent state of preservation when it is remembered that for two centuries they have been roughly heaped together, and that it was only in 1851 that 600 of them were carefully placed on the shelves where they now are. It is quite probable that within the memory of living men they have suffered greater damage than at any previous period of their history, because up to a few years ago they were freely handled by visitors, who wrote their names and the date on them, and apparently took away teeth and bits which they could break off as mementoes of their visit. In addition to this there is evidence that some of them have been carried off entire, because the late Dr. Barnard Davis, who amassed a truly marvellous collection of skulls, obtained four of these, which, with the rest of his collection, are now in the Museum of the

Royal College of Surgeons in Lincoln's Inn Fields. In the catalogue one of them is described as having been obtained by a lady under very peculiar circumstances, though what these circumstances were the writer thought it wiser not to disclose. This Dr. Barnard Davis was probably the greatest expert on British skulls we have had, as his huge collection and monumental works ('*Crania Britannica*' and '*Thesaurus Craniorum*') testify. He apparently never visited Hythe, but his examination of the four skulls he obtained is recorded, and is very valuable. He felt convinced from his experience with other skulls that they were of no very great antiquity, and suggests that they were probably skulls of Kentish people whose only great battle had been that against death. He was, however, specially struck with the shortness and breadth of the four skulls he had, which reminded him more of those of modern Germans than of English people. It must be remembered, though, that he was generalising on four specimens and not on the whole collection.

In 1860 Dr. Robert Knox read a paper on these skulls before the Ethnological Society, in



which he states his opinion "that the bones had never been interred singly in graves, but had been buried in a heap, perhaps after long exposure in the open air." In criticising this opinion one must remember that long exposure to the open air must necessarily have meant exposure to all sorts of other influences, such as birds and beasts, which would by no means have tended to their good preservation. In addition to this a great many contain earth, showing that they have been buried at some time, though whether in a heap or singly there is no evidence to decide.

There is no reason that I know why the bleaching should not have taken place during the two centuries or more in which they have been in the vault; the possibility of this is shown by the fact that the three skulls which have been lately added are already appreciably lighter in colour than when they were placed there only two years ago.

We next come to a very important point, on which the authorities who are in favour of the battle theory have justly laid great stress, and that is the sex of the skulls. Dr. Robert Knox says that "there were two crania of boys, all

the rest belonged to adult men. I did not observe any female crania." Here it must be confessed that no anatomist, however great his experience, can always tell a male from a female skull. In perhaps seven or eight cases out of ten it is easy enough when the necessary experience is acquired, but in the other two or three cases men of equal experience will give different opinions. This is especially the case with very young skulls, and the fact that Dr. Knox unhesitatingly puts down the two young crania he examined as boys', makes one a little sceptical of his experience in this direction. Personally I was doubtful how far my own powers were to be trusted, and it was not until I had worked through a large series of skulls, the sex of which was known, and found that my own ideas tallied fairly closely with the records of the catalogue that I undertook the task of determining the sex of these. Out of 600 skulls I found that 69 per cent. were undoubtedly male, 5 per cent. probably male, 12 per cent. undoubtedly female, 6 per cent. probably female, 3 per cent. children under ten, and 5 per cent. young adults between ten and twenty. From this it is evident that,

although Dr. Knox's impression that there are no female skulls present in this collection is not borne out by a more complete examination, he was correct in suggesting that males are largely in excess. Undoubtedly the result of a battle would be a likely means of accounting for this difference in the proportion of the sexes, though it would still leave about 25 per cent. of women and children to be accounted for.

The next point of interest, and one which bears on the battle theory, is the nature of the injuries which a certain number of the skulls show. In a considerable number there are gashes in the bones, usually more or less horizontal in direction, but in some round perforations exist. It is a little difficult to be sure whether these were wounds causing death, or whether they are the work of spades and picks during exhumation. With a view to determining this question, the following experiment was conducted. Two skulls from another collection were taken, one from a person who had recently died and another which had been buried for many years. The former represented the conditions found in a living skull, the latter in one long buried. A series of blows of about the

same force from a hatchet was given to each of these skulls and the resulting injuries compared. In the fairly fresh skull the cuts were sharp and the edges even, but in the dry skull the edges were broken and depressed.\*

From this result I am strongly of opinion that the wounds found in the greater number of Hythe skulls were inflicted not before death, but very many years after, and are in no way indications of their owners having died in battle, but rather point to the result of spades and picks in digging them up. Two or three skulls show signs of injury which had been repaired and quite recovered from, but this cannot be looked upon as evidence that their owners died in battle. There is one skull which has received more notice than all the others, and Dr. Knox regarded it as another instance of a healing wound. Two or three perforations appear surrounded by a great heaping-up of bony matter. This skull has been submitted to a pathologist of undoubted reputation, who recognised in it an instance of a specific disease

\* This result was confirmed by striking a buried skull with a spade and noticing that the injuries closely resembled those found in most of the skulls injured in the Hythe Collection.

which only appeared in England after the Crusades.

We must next consider what help we can get from an examination of these skulls in determining their nationality, and we have several theories to choose from.

1. They are Britons slain by the Saxons in A.D. 456, according to Hasted.

2. They are Celtic (British?), Gothic (Saxon?), and Roman, according to Mr. Walker.

3. They do not belong to a hardy, coarse, primitive race, according to Dr. Knox, although some Romano-Saxon pottery and mediæval coarse earthenware was found among them in restacking a portion of the pile, but are probably Frenchmen slain in the time of Edward I.

4. They are Celts, Saxons, Romans, and Laps, according to Mr. Prideaux and Sir Benjamin Richardson.

5. They are mediæval Kentish skulls showing some similarity to modern Germans, according to Dr. Barnard Davis, who saw only four of them.

6. They are skulls which do not differ markedly from those of Englishmen of the present day, according to Dr. Randall Davis.

In the first place, these skulls have, I am sure, never been systematically and thoroughly measured; such a proceeding would take months, as each would need at the least a dozen careful measurements, and in addition its capacity would have to be determined.

What has been done both by Dr. Randall Davis and myself is to determine the cranial index of a typical series of the skulls; that is to say, to take the ratio of the length to the breadth. The method is to multiply the greatest breadth by 100 and then to divide it by the greatest length. When the number thus obtained is under 75, the skull is described as long headed; between 75 and 80, as medium headed; while skulls above 80 are short headed.

We are both agreed as to the great diversity of shape in the collection—some are quite long headed, others remarkably short, but they are connected by a regular range of intermediate types. The average cranial index of 100 of these skulls selected at random works out at 78.

Dr. Macnamara has recently measured the heads of 120 Kentish labouring men, and has found that their average index comes to 78.5.

So that as far as the cranial index can help us, these skulls might very well be those of Kentish men. We must not, however, lay too much stress on measurements nor on the appearance of the skulls, since every one must have noticed how very variable the shapes of English heads are.

We can say, I think, fairly definitely that these are not pure Saxon skulls, since they are almost always long headed with an index under 75. For the same reason they are not Scandinavian, while their condition and appearance prevents us from thinking that they have anything to do with ancient Britons. It must be remembered that the modern and mediæval Englishman comes of a very mixed stock, and this also applies to the inhabitants of northern France. At least three long-headed and two short-headed races have contributed to the making of both nationalities, and it is at present beyond the power of science to determine between them.

With regard to the actual size of the skulls, they are smaller than those of average Englishmen of the present day; indeed, many of the actual lengths and breadths are less than any I

have hitherto met with ; this probably points to their owners being of small stature, and also of the lower class.

I have carefully compared the so-called Laps and ancient Roman skulls with a series of examples in our great collection at the College of Surgeons, and do not think that there is enough real similarity to speak definitely. The Ancient Roman hypothesis at least is a pure surmise, and I should say an unlikely one, judging by the state of preservation. The so-called Laps have probably been selected on account of the prominence of the cheek bones, but the unlikelihood of Laps being in Kent makes it more probable that these belonged to Englishmen with prominent cheeks and short heads, such as one occasionally meets with now-a-days.

The teeth, where they remain, show signs of a good deal of wearing down, probably pointing to rough food and badly-ground grain. Actual decay is not nearly as common as in modern teeth. It is of course quite easy to tell whether the teeth have been lost during life or after death, because in the former case the sockets have closed up.



With regard to the age at which the greater number of these people died, it is quite easy to tell a skull below twenty, as there is a cleft at the base which does not close till this age. The wisdom teeth usually come down to a level with the others between twenty and twenty-five, and if these are in place we may assume that the skull is near or over the latter age.

The obliteration of the sutures on the vault of the skull does not begin till between thirty and forty as a rule, and although the details are too technical to enter into here, a rough working estimate can be gathered from them as well as from the loss of the teeth and many other smaller signs only appreciable to an anatomist. Taking all the points into consideration, I am quite inclined to agree with Dr. Knox that a large number are men in the prime of life, though there are undoubtedly a certain number of old people.

I think at least we may fairly say that the total age of 100 of these skulls would not nearly equal the total ages taken at random from 100 tombstones in an English churchyard.

The rest of the bones bear out the evidence

of the skulls; the hip bones verify the conclusions arrived at as to sex, since a female hip bone can be at once identified. Most of the men seem to have been fairly sturdy, muscular fellows, though some of the women were small and feeble.

With regard to their height, the thigh bones are our chief guide: A thigh bone is about  $\frac{4}{15}$  or 0·275 the height of the body. One hundred of these bones were measured, and as far as possible the two bones of any individual were not taken.

The average length of the 100 was  $17\frac{3}{4}$  inches, and this would give an average height of 5 feet  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches for their possessors. This is probably rather an over- than an under-estimate, since males predominate, and apparently some of the longest bones have been picked out and kept for show purposes, and these have been included.

If the females had equalled in number the males, it is probable that the average height would not have been much more than 5 feet three inches.

This height is quite consistent with a mediæval English origin, since we know from ancient armour that the average size of the English

race has increased in the last three or four centuries.

In summing up the above evidence it is very important to keep a fair perspective, and not to place undue reliance on any one clue. Let us first think out the most probable origin of a collection of bones under a church. Undoubtedly it is that as the churchyard got full, in digging fresh graves the old bones dug up were stored in a charnel-house. This was quite a common practice in England and on the Continent, and must have taken place in Hythe, since the Churchyard was not nearly as large formerly as it now is. In addition to this, there were probably other churchyards in Hythe, and when these came to be used for other purposes it would be reasonable to suppose that the bones dug up would be transferred to the only remaining church. It seems to me quite probable that this is the somewhat prosaic history of at least a considerable number of these bones, and if the injuries are spade and pick marks, as they probably are, it adds to the likelihood of this. Something more, however, is needed to account for the large proportion of men between twenty and fifty ; ages which, from the small mortality

then, are, as a rule, not largely represented in our churchyards. It is quite possible that fighting may have accounted for this number, though it need not have been in any one single encounter. During the French wars, raids on the coast were frequent enough ; and in addition to this, when Hythe was a naval port, there were probably a good many sailors about from time to time, which must have added considerably to the male population.

There is another possibility which has not hitherto been considered, and which would account for so many of these skulls being in the prime of life, and that is that plague must have visited Hythe from time to time, as it did the rest of England ; we have evidence of it in the latter part of Elizabeth's reign, though before that the church records are lost. It is quite unnecessary to say that even if this were the case all risk of infection has been over for centuries.

As years roll on fresh evidence may be found, which will solve the mystery of this very interesting collection, but at present it is not possible to be very dogmatic. All one would care to say is that the bones probably came to

their present resting-place about the time of the Reformation, and that the greater number of them are not likely to have been buried for more than 200 years before that time. There is the probability that they are chiefly the bones of mediæval English people, and it seems likely that some of them died in battle or from a pestilence. At the same time it is quite possible that some of them may have belonged to French raiders who were killed, while wrecks on the coast, no doubt, would account for others.

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