

Hasted's Kent

Birling in 1798

Edward Hasted, *The history and topographical survey of the county of Kent*, second edition, volume 4 (Canterbury, 1798), pages 474–88

BIRLING.

SOUTH-WESTWARD from Padlesworth lies Birling, so named from the plenty of pasture grounds in it.

THIS PARISH is about three miles square, it lies in rather an obscure unfrequented country, at the foot of the range of chalk hills called here Birling hills, over which it extends to Punish mentioned before in Snodland, and to an estate called BOGHURST, at which Walter, son of John de Bogehurst resided in king Edward the 1st.'s reign, and then held lands of the bishop of Rochester, near his park in Snodland; there is no doubt but those of this name, now of Frindsbury, Stroud and Rochester, are descended from hence. The soil of this parish is various, in the southern parts sand, near and up the hills chalk and flints, and above them a heavy red earth, much covered with flints; in the low parts there is some tolerable fertile land. The village and church of Birling lies low on the southern side of the parish, having the church in it, between which and the foot of the hills is Birling-place, the antient residence of the Nevills; there are some remains of it yet left, particularly of a gateway of stone, reminding us of its former condition. It is now made use of as a farm-house, a mile from hence eastward is Comford, another seat of this family, adjoining to which they had a park. Henry, lord Bergavenny, resided here, and died at it, anno 29 Elizabeth. It is now only a mean farm-house, and was it not for the mention of this noble family, this parish lies so obscurely that it would hardly be known to any one. In Oxfield, adjoining to the church-yard, many foundations have been from time to time turned up by the plough;

/o See Registrum Roffense, p. 604.

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whilst the Nevills resided here, probably, this place was in a much more flourishing state than it has been of later time. This parish ought antiently to have contributed with others to the repair of the ninth pier of Rochester bridge.

THIS PLACE was part of the vast possessions of Odo the great bishop of Baieux, and half brother to the Conqueror, accordingly it is thus entered in the record of Domesday, under the general title of that prelate's lands:

Ralph de Curbepine holds of the bishop (of Baieux) Berlinge. It was taxed at six sulings. The arable land is In demesne there is one carucate, and ten villeins, with fourteen borderers, having six carucates. There is a church and six servants, and one mill of ten shillings, and three hundred and thirty eels, and a fishery of sixty eels. There are twelve acres of meadow, and pasture for fifty cattle, wood for the pannage of forty hogs. In the time of king Edward the Confessor it was worth twelve pounds, when he received it six pounds, now twelve pounds. Sbern biga held it of king Edward.

Ralph de Curva Spina, or Crookthorne, as his name was Englished, resided at Comport, or Comford-park, in the north-east part of this parish, where this family continued till the reign of king Henry II. when they

were succeeded in their possessions here by that of Magminot./p Walkelin de Magminot died without issue in the third year of king Richard I. anno 1191, and Alice, his sister became his heir, who carried this manor in marriage to her husband Geoffry, second son of William de Say, who in her right became likewise possessed of large estates at Deptford, Cowdham, and elsewhere in this county./q His descendant, William de Say, died possessed of the manor of Birling, in the 23d

/p Camd. p. 231. Rot. Esch. anno 15 Edward II. Reg. Roff. p. 169, 170. Dugd. Mon. vol. i. p. 641.

/q See Cowdham and Deptford, vol. i. p. 346. vol. ii. p. 60.

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year of king Edward I. holding it in capite by barony, and in some old deeds Birling is stiled caput baroniæ de Say, that is the capital seat of his barony. These baronies were of no determinate size, being more or less, according to the king's grant, each of which being held in capite by barons, was accounted a compleat barony, notwithstanding the difference in the number of fees contained in each. Those who held them were stiled barons, and as such were always summoned to parliament. But in the reign of king John and king Henry III. they were so greatly increased in numbers, and began to grow so powerful and turbulent, that king Henry, about the 50th year of his reign, summoned only the best of them by writ to parliament, and king Edward I. as well as his successors, continued the same course; from which time those only were accounted barons, who had writs of summons to parliament, and it has been observed that prudent king constantly summoned the wisest men of the most ancient families, but after their deaths omitted their sons, who equalled not their parents in understanding./r

His son, Geoffry de Say, was summoned to parliament, among the barons of this realm in the 7th year of king Edward II. as were his several descendants afterwards. He died in the 15th year of that reign, being then possessed of this manor, which he held of the king in capite, as of the barony of Maminot./s At length John de Say dying in his minority, and in ward to the king in the 6th year of king Richard II. Elizabeth his sister, became his heir, and possessed of this manor. She married first Sir John de Fallesley, by whom she had no issue, and afterwards Sir William Heron, who possessed this manor and bore the title of lord Say in her right.

/r Madox's Exchequer, p. 220. Chauncy's Hertfordsh. p. 56.

/s Dugdale's Baronetage, vol. i. 511, 730.

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In the 19th year of king Richard II. he, together with her, by the name of Elizabeth lady Say, levied a fine of it to them and their heirs male, remainder to her own right heirs, four years after which she died, upon which he continued possessed of it till his death in the 6th year of king Henry the IVth. s. p. likewise, all which was found by inquisition then taken, and further that this manor was held in capite, and that there was here a capital messuage and garden adjoining, and different lands therein mentioned, several rents of as=

size, a park, and two leets in a year, and that after Sir William Heron's death, this manor came by the above fine to her heirs, and next of kin, being the three sisters of her father William de Say and their heirs, and upon the partition of their inheritance, this manor among other estates was allotted to Sir William de Clinton, grandson of Idonea, the eldest sister, who thereupon bore the title of lord Clinton and Say, and having been summoned to parliament till the 9th year of king Henry VI. he died the year afterwards, leaving one son, John lord Clinton, his next heir.

Before which this manor had been for some time in feoffees for particular uses, as appears by an autograph in the Surrenden library, but on his death it became vested in Elizabeth, daughter and sole heir of Richard Beauchamp, earl of Worcester, and lord Bergavenny, son of Sir William, the fourth son of Thomas, earl of Warwick, then married to Sir Edward Nevill, fourth son of Ralph, the first earl of Westmoreland, by Joane his second wife, daughter of John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster.

The ancestor of this family of Nevill was a Norman, who came into England with the Conqueror, whose grandson Geoffry left an only daughter and heir,

/t Rot. Esch. ejus an. Dugd. Bar. vol. i. p. 730. See Cowdham, vol. ii. p. 60.

/u Dudale's Baronetage, vol. i. p. 582.

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who married Robert Fitzmaldred, of Raby, in the bishopric of Durham, whose son of the same name, in regard of his mother's great inheritance, assumed the surname of Nevill, and his descendants, from this principal seat of the family, were called Nevills, of Raby, and were summoned to parliament by that title. To trace this numerous and illustrious family, who became related, not only to most of the greatest nobility in this kingdom, but to the royal family likewise, would be much beyond the bounds of this volume, suffice it to notice here, that Ralph Nevill, earl of Westmoreland, by his first wife, was ancestor of the Nevills, earls of Westmoreland, and Nevill, lord Ousley, and by his second wife before-mentioned, he had five daughters and eight sons, most of whom became peers of the realm, and became men of great eminence and renown; for Richard the eldest became earl of Warwick and Salisbury, whose son Richard, the great earl of Warwick, surnamed Make King, ended in two daughters, married to George, duke of Clarence, brother to king Edward IV. and Edward, prince of Wales, son of king Henry VI. and secondly, to Richard, duke of Gloucester, afterwards king Richard III. John was created marquis Montacute, and George was archbishop of York; William was in his wife's right lord Fauconbridge, and was afterwards made earl of Kent; George was, by feoffment from his father, lord Latimer; Edward was baron of Bergavenny as before-mentioned, and Robert was bishop of Durham.

The arms of Beauchamp are carved in several places on the roof of Canterbury cloysters, as are those of the family of Nevill, with several impalements, as they are on the church itself there, and on the stone gateway leading to it, built about king Henry VIth's reign.

Sir Edward Nevill, doing his homage for the lands of his wife's inheritance in the 14th year of Henry VI.

/w Dugd. Bar. vol. i. p. 287 to p. 313.

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anno 1435, had possession of them accordingly, excepting the castle and lordship of Bergavenny. Notwithstanding the want of possession of which, he had anno 19 king Henry VI. in his wife's right, the title of lord Bergavenny, according to the antient custom of the realm, though he was not summoned to parliament till ten years afterwards. He died anno 19 Edward IV. being then possessed as tenant by the courtesy of England, of the inheritance of Elizabeth his wife, of this manor, with Mereworth in this county, among others. This custom of being tenant by courtesy was never gainsaid till the reign of king Henry VIII. when Mr. Wimbishe took upon him the style of lord Talbois, in right of his wife, having had no issue by her; when, for avoiding great inconveniences which might arise from it, the king, assisted both by the civil and temporal lawyers, gave sentence – that no man, husband of a baroness, should in her right use the title of her dignity until he had a child by her, by which he should become tenant by courtesy of her barony, for then by the law of England, which gave him title to the barony, he had also title to the dignity, as parcel of the same inheritance.

Edward Nevill, lord Bergavenny, left by his wife abovementioned, Sir George Nevill, lord Bergavenny, who succeeded him in this manor, and, as his father had before done, attached himself strongly to the interest of the house of York. He died in the 7th year of king Henry VII. anno 1492, and was buried in the priory of Lewes, in Sussex, leaving several sons and daughters, of whom George became his heir; Edward was attainted and executed, whose descendants succeeded in process of time to the title of Bergavenny; Thomas, who was of the privy council, and secretary of state to king Henry VIII. whose only daughter and heir, Margaret, married Sir Robert Southwell, of Mereworth.

/x Coll. Peer. vol. vi. p. 500. Dug. Bar. vol. i. p. 309.

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Sir George Nevill, lord Bergavenny, succeeded his father in this manor; and afterwards, on the castle and manor of Abergavenny becoming vested in the crown, by the death of Jasper duke of Bedford, Henry VIII. granted them to him, as unto the true and rightful heir upon a petition of right exhibited by him to the king.

In the 13th year of that reign, anno 1497, when the Cornish rebels encamped on Blackheath, he, with divers other lords, by their great credit and power, prevented this county from joining with them; and he had a share in the victory obtained over them soon afterwards. In the 2d year of king Henry VIII. he was made constable of Dover castle and warden of the cinque ports. In the 5th year of that reign he was elected knight of the Garter, and was afterwards with the king at the sieges of Terouenne and Tournay, and

in the 12th year of it was present at the memorable interview between king Henry and Francis I. in the plain between Guisnes and Ardres. His arms, within the garter, are still remaining in the east window of Bir- ling church, containing four quarterings; 1st. Nevill; 2d. Warren; 3d. Clare and Despencer quartered. 4th. Beauchamp. Having married Mary, daughter of Edw. duke of Buckingham, he was suspected of being privy to those treasonable attempts with which the duke was then charged, for which he was imprisoned, though he was, not long afterwards, received into favour. He died in the 27th year of king Henry VIII. possessed of this manor, which then consisted of the manor, with its appurtenances, seven messuages, and two thousand acres of land, in Birling, Ryarsh, and Addington, the advowson of Birling, and the rectory of the church of All Saints in it, and he possessed likewise a toft, pidgeon house, and five hundred acres of arable, meadow, pas- ture, and wood, in those parishes, which he had pur- chased of Reginald Peckham; having by his will en- tailed most of his lands, in failure of heirs male of his

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own body, to the heirs male of his brother, Sir Edward Nevill, the remainder in fee to his own right heirs, and ordered his body, to be buried in the church of Birling; y he was three times married.

Henry Nevill, lord Bergavenny, his son and suc- cessor, by his second wife Mary, above mentioned, was summoned to parliament in the 3d and 4th year of king Edward VI.

On Sir Thomas Wyatt's insurrection in this county, in the 1st year of queen Mary, he raised a body of forces to oppose him, and overtaking a party of his ad- herents at Blacksoil-field, in the parish of Wrotham, engaged and routed them there, great numbers being killed; after which he pursued them near four miles, and took sixty of them prisoners. He died at his seat of Comford, in the 29th year of queen Elizabeth's reign, anno 1586, and was buried at Birling with great solemnity.

By the inquisition, taken that year, he was found to die possessed of the manor of Birling, and the manor and rectory of All Saints of Birling, and the advow- son of the vicarage of it; and that his daughter, by Frances his wife, daughter of Thomas Manners, earl of Rutland, then aged thirty two, was his sole heir, and was married in the 17th year of queen Eliza- beth, to Sir Thomas Fane. She challenged the title of baroness of Bergavenny against Edward Nevill, son of Sir Edward Nevill, a younger brother of George, lord Bergavenny, father of this last mentioned Henry, lord Bergavenny. This Sir Edward Nevill had been a great favourite of king Henry VIII. and was said to resemble the king much in person; but in the 29th year of that reign he was accused, and found guilty, with others, of maintaining a correspondence with cardinal Poole, and was thereupon attainted and beheaded, by which he forfeited to the king all his remainder in his brother's

/y Dugd. Bar. vol. ii. p. 310. Coll. Peerage, vol. vi. p. 502.

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lands, entailed on him, who died possessed of the remainder, as did also king Edward VI. but queen Mary, anno 2 and 3 Philip and Mary, restored his son, Edw. Nevill, by act of parliament, to the remainder forfeited, so long as there should be any heir male; but the remainder to the heirs general, was reserved to the queen. He left two sons, Edward above-mentioned, who was restored to the title of lord Bergavenny; and Henry of Billingbear, in Berkshire, from whom the Nevills of that county are descended, on which Sir Edward Nevill the castle of Bergavenny had been settled, both by testament and act of parliament. The dispute was not determined till in the 1st year of king James I. anno 1602, when after great arguments on each side, the title of baron of Bergavenny was, both by judgment of the house of peers, and order of the lords commissioners for the office of earl marshal, decreed for the heirs male; and to give some satisfaction to the heir female, the king, by his letters patent, granted the dignity of baroness le Despencer to her and her heirs, from whom the present lord le Despencer is descended; which Edward Nevill, thus claiming the barony and honour of Bergavenny, died in the 31st year of queen Elizabeth, possessed of this manor and rectory of Birling, and the manors of Ryarsh, Yalding, and Luddesdon, in this county, and was succeeded by Edward Nevill, his eldest son, who, in the 1st year of king James, had the title of baron of Bergavenny or Abergavenny, as it became now to be generally called, confirmed to him, as above mentioned; and the year after he claimed the title of the earl of Westmoreland, as heir male, but it was determined against him. He married Rachel, daughter of John Lennard, esq. of Knoll, in Sevenoke, by whom he had several sons and daughters; of the former, Sir Henry Nevill, the eldest son, succeeded him in title and estates; and Sir Christopher, the third son, will be mentioned hereafter. Edward lord Abergavenny died in 1622, and was buried with

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his ancestors at Birling, whose descendant, George lord Abergavenny, dying at length without issue, in 1695, was buried in the church of St. Giles in the Fields, in London; upon which the title of lord Abergavenny, as well as this manor and estate of Birling, descended to the heirs male of Sir Christopher Nevill, next surviving son of Edward lord Abergavenny, and Rachel his wife, daughter of John Lennard, esq. of Knoll./z

Sir Christopher Nevill was seated at Newton St. Low, in Somersetshire, and was made knight of the Bath at the coronation of king Charles I. and dying in 1649, was buried at Birling. His grandson, George Nevill, who was seated at Sheffield, in Sussex, had two sons, George, who succeeded as lord Abergavenny in 1695, as above mentioned; and Edward, who was father of William lord Abergavenny, and died in 1701. George lord Abergavenny, with the title, became possessed likewise of this manor of Birling, and had two sons, George and Edward, who succeeded each other in the title.

He died in 1721, and was succeeded by his eldest son, George lord Abergavenny, who married Elizabeth, daughter of Edward Thornicroft, esq. of West-

minster, and dying without issue, in 1723, was succeeded in title and this manor by his brother, Edward lord Abergavenny, who married Catherina, daughter of lieutenant general Tatton, and dying without issue, in 1724, in the 19th year of his age, was succeeded in title and this manor by William Nevill, son and heir of Edward Nevill, only brother of George lord Abergavenny, father of George and Edward, the last lords Abergavenny above mentioned.

William lord Abergavenny married Catharina, lady Abergavenny, widow of Edward, the late lord, and by her had a son, George. He married secondly, Rebecca, daughter of Thomas earl of Pembroke, and by her had three daughters and one son; he died at

/z Coll. Peer. vol. vi. p. 508. Dugd. Bar. vol. i. p. 311.

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Bath, in 1744, and was buried at East Grinstead, and was succeeded in title and this estate by his only son by his first wife, George lord Abergavenny; a who was, by letters patent, dated May 1784, further advanced to the titles of viscount Neville of Birling, in Kent, and earl of Abergavenny in the county of Monmouth. He married Henrietta, widow of the Hon. Richard Temple, and daughter of Thomas Pelham, esq. of Stanmore, in Sussex, by whom he had several children, and dying in 1785, was buried at East Grinstead, being succeeded by his eldest son, the Rt. Hon. Henry earl of Abergavenny, the present possessor of this manor, the church of Birling, and the advowson of the vicarage of it. He married the daughter of John Robinson, esq. of Sion hall, in Middlesex, by whom he has several children. He bears for his arms, Gules, on a saltier argent, a rose of the first, barbed and seeded proper; for his crest, In a ducal coronet or, a bull's head argent, pied sable, armed of the first, and charged on the neck with a rose gules; and for his supporters, Two bulls argent, pied sable, armed, unguled, collared and chained or.

The original arms of Nevill were, Or, fretty gules, on a canton per pale, ermine and or, a ship with three tops sable; but in the reign of king Edward III. the heiress of this name marrying Robert Fitzmaldred, of Raby, though he assumed the name of Nevill, yet he retained his own arms, Gules, a saltier argent, as did all the Nevills, his posterity, with differences on the saltier, for distinction sake, except the eldest branch, earls of Westmoreland, who bore the saltier plain. He bears, including his own, one hundred and eight quarterings.

The old seat of the lords Abergavenny in this parish has been long since neglected, and the park disparked; nor have this family resided here for many generations, their present seat being at Kidbrooke, near East Grinstead, in Sussex. /b

CHARITIES.

EDWARD GODDIN, alias GODWIN, citizen and haberdasher of London, by will, in 1662, gave for the apprenticing of one or more poor children of this parish, land vested in the churchwardens and overseers, and now of the annual produce of 10l.

/a Coll. Peer. vol. vi. p. 509, 510. /b Lamb. Peramb. p. 424.

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BIRLING is within the ECCLESIASTICAL JURISDICTION of the diocese of Rochester and deanry of Malling.

The church, which is dedicated to All Saints, is a handsome building, consisting of a nave, south isle, and chancel. It has a good tower at the west end of it.

The church of Birling, with certain land in this parish, was given by Walkelin de Maminot, lord of this place, in the 15th year of king Henry II. anno 1168, to the priory of Bermondsey, in perpetual alms; which gift was confirmed by that king. Soon after which it seems to have been confirmed and appropriated to it by Walter, bishop of Rochester, at the king's request; and again more amply by the bishops Gueleran and Gilbert, his successor; and again by the Says, as heirs to the Maminots; and by Geoffry de Say, who married Alice, sister and coheir of Walkelin Maminot. The prior and convent of Rochester, in 1270, John, prior of, and the convent of St. Saviour, Bermondsey, acknowledged an annual pension of 20s. due from this church to the bishop of Rochester, which pension continues to be paid to the bishops of that see.

Upon a writ in the 20th year of king Edward III. the bishop certified, that the prior and convent possessed the appropriation of this church, which was taxed at ten pounds, and that the religious were not resident upon it./c

Richard Mann, perpetual vicar of this church, about the year 1447, anno 26 Henry VI. made complaint to the archbishop of Canterbury, of the insufficiency of the revenue of the vicarage for his maintenance, and that the prior and convent of Bermondsey, proprietaries of this church, refused to augment the portion of it; and he set forth that the produce and income belonging to the vicar and vicarage, did

/c Registrum Roffense, p. 126, 127.

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not exceed the annual value or sum of 4l. 15s. 8d. in the tithes of calves, milk, and foals 8s. 9d. yearly; in the tithes of lambs, wool, pigs, geese, apples, hemp, and in the tithes of the oblations of the four days yearly; and for sheep and cows forty-one shillings and twelve-pence, in the pension paid to the vicar by the abbot and convent forty-four shillings and ten-pence. And further, that the portion of the vicar and vicarage had been for some time, and was then insufficient, incompetent, and too slender; and that he could not, out of it, be supported in a proper manner, nor undergo the rights and burthens incumbent on him, or his vicarage, nor use that hospitality which he ought and was bound to do. That the parish church had a large and extended parish, containing six miles in circuit, having some of the parishioners of both sexes two miles or thereabout distant from the church, which, when there was occasion, he was bound to visit, and to administer to them the church offices and sacraments. That the mansion of the vicar there, and the buildings belonging to it, were, through the negligence of the abbot and convent, in a ruinous state, and would very soon, fall to the

ground; which if they should they could not be rebuilt again for twenty pounds. That he the vicar had exercised the no small cure of souls of the parish church, of one hundred parishioners, or thereabouts, although with great inconvenience, and in great misery and want during the whole time of his having been vicar, and had employed himself in every religious duty to the best of his abilities, and still continued so to do. That the portion of the fruits and profits of the parish church, belonging to the abbot and convent, proprietaries of it, had been from the time of the appropriation of it, and was then so rich and abundant, that, according to common estimation, the portion of the vicar might well be augmented out of it to the value of twenty marcs sterling, or

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thereabout; and that the abbot and convent, although they had been often requested, to augment the portion of the vicarage, out of the revenues of the church, in a competent manner, had, without alleging any reason, always refused it, or at least deferred it beyond reason, to the great damage, &c. Upon which it was decreed, that the prior and convent should augment the portion of the vicarage out of the fruits and profits of this church, or in money, to the amount of eight marcs sterling, beyond the ancient portion of it, within the space of one month; and they were condemned in all costs, &c. but on their neglecting to obey this decree, a further one was made, that in satisfaction of the payment of the said eight marcs, there should be set apart and assigned to the vicar, and his successors, (at his request) the tithes, as well great as small, yearly accruing and arising from the lands, fields, and places below the lane, vulgarly called Benetis-lane, westward, and from the north side of the said lane, according to the bounds and limits of this parish, to those of the parish of Snodland on the north side, and from thence to the bounds and limits of the parish of East Malling on the east side, to the common pasture of Hordo, and from thence to the south end of Benetis-lane aforesaid, &c.

When the church of Birling, and the advowson of the vicarage passed from the above mentioned monastery, I have not found, but it appears by an instrument made in chancery, and now in the Augmentation-office, that in the 13th year of king Henry VIII. George Nevill, lord Abergavenny, was possessed of a barn, and one hundred and fifty acres of land late belonging to that monastery, and then inclosed in the park of Birling, and also of the rectory of Birling, and all tithes, tenths, &c. belonging to it, and the advowson of the vicarage late belonging to the abbot and convent. Since which, they have descended

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down to the Right Hon. Henry, earl of Abergavenny, the present owner and patron of them.

The vicarage is valued in the king's books at 6l. 9s. 4¹/₂d. and the yearly tenths at 12s. 11¹/₄d./d

CHURCH OF BIRLING.

PATRONS,

Or by whom presented. VICARS.

Abbot and convent of Bermondsey. Richard Mann, in 1487./e

Nevill's Lords Abergavenny Philip Shatterthwaite, D. D. se=
questered in 1642./f

Thomas Guns, ejected in 1662./g

Michael Rabbett, inst. 1659, ob.

March 25, 1692./h

Theophilus Beck, A. M. ob. Oct.

1715./i

Thomas Winterbottom, 1715, ob.

1717./k

Hugh Pugh, obit. May 19,

1718./l

Edward Holme, 1757, obt. Jan.

7, 1782./m

William Humphry, 1782, the

present vicar./n

/d Ect. Thes. p. 383.

/e Reg. Roff. p. 172.

/f Walker's Suff. of Clergy, pt. ii.

p. 366.

/g Ejected by the Barth. act. See

Calamy's Life of Baxter, p. 286.

/h He lies buried in this church.

/i He lies buried in the chancel of
this church. He was also rector of
Barming, and formerly vicar of Re=
culver and rector of Ashurst.

/k Likewise rector of Ashurst.

/l Also curate of Otford.

/m That year a dispensation passed
for his holding Kemsing vicarage with
Seal annexed, together with this vi=
carage. See an account of his charity
school before under Leyborne, p. 210.

/n Dispensation passed in 1782 for
him to hold Kemsing with Seal an=
nexed, together with this vicarage.