

## ⌘ Introduction ⌘

Although there is no physical evidence now remaining, it is reasonable to suppose that there has been a Christian community based here in Barming for nearly 1400 years, and perhaps a history of devotion dating back to the Roman occupation of this area.

The present church, which, as you will see later, was begun in the 12th century, is dedicated to St Margaret of Antioch, a colourful early saint.

Margaret's story is now thought to be mostly apocryphal but that has not detracted from the almost fanatical devotion she has inspired over the centuries. She is said to have died in the persecutions of the emperor Diocletian, and very quickly, due to stories of her miraculous escape from previous attempts to execute her, she became a great encouragement to other Christians throughout Europe. Margaret was seen to be very popular in France and she is said to have inspired Joan of Arc as one of the voices that guided her in her vocation. She also had the dubious accolade of being a great champion to the Crusaders. In the early Middle Ages countless churches were dedicated to her, most especially in Norfolk. The dedication of this church to St Margaret may come through the very strong French connections in this part of the country with the family of William the Conqueror. St Margaret is the patron Saint of women, nurses, and peasants. In the past she was invoked by the faithful to help in childbirth, and against barrenness and loss of milk.

We hope that during your visit to our church you will be able to take a moment to let the centuries of Christian prayer and worship which permeate these walls touch your life, perhaps touch your soul with the devotion to Jesus our saviour which has preserved this ancient building for us to enjoy and to pass on to our children and their children.

## œ Early History ∞

The exact period in history when Barming, or more precisely, East Barming, became a Parish with its own church is unrecorded.

Between the departure of the Roman Legions and the reign of Edward the Confessor (1042 - 1066), no records whatever remain of the history of Barming.

With the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons in the sixth century by St. Augustine, there was considerable enthusiasm for religious worship, and it is highly probable that Barming possessed a church. Almost certainly constructed of wood, no trace of it now remains. The Domesday Book, compiled about 1080, reveals Barming as a highly valued estate. West Barming (now known as Barnjet) was a fief of Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, with a value of forty shillings, while East Barming, in which St. Margaret's now stands, was in the possession of Richard de Tonbridge, brother of William the Conqueror, and valued at one hundred shillings.

The Domesday Book does not mention a church in East Barming but this does not necessarily mean that one did not exist.

## œ The Present Church ∞

The original building was probably constructed in the early, years of the twelfth century and possibly stands on the site of the former Roman villa. The plan indicates that it was a typical early Norman church, being little more than a plain oblong building without aisle tower, porch or chancel arch. The east, wall of the present chancel with its three narrow Norman windows, a type rarely found in country churches, is the only visible remains of this original Norman church. The stained

glass, however, is nineteenth century. The blocked window in the west wall of the church is thought to be the remains of a Norman window.

The tower, with its impressive spire, together with the porch and possibly the chancel arch, were constructed c1450, and were probably made possible by the wealth of John Pimpe, who also endowed Nettlestead church. Only the tower is in its original state, both the spire and the porch being restored in the eighteenth century. The parish registers record that this was carried out between 1725 - 35 and that the vane was set up in 1726.

The bells were also re-hung during this period.

### œ The Bells of St. Margaret's œ

Until the nineteenth century, the belfry contained only three bells, the usual number for this part of the country, which was denominated "Three Bell Vale". The tower now contains six bells, which, with the exception of the third, were cast in 1883 1897. They are listed in order of size, with inscriptions:

**Treble** added in June 1887 in time for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

**Second** inscribed: *Margaritam Margareta nuntio* (Latin Margaret I announce a pearl)

**Third** the oldest bell. Cast by Henry Jordan soon after the tower was erected c1450 and inscribed: *Ora pro nobis Sante Petre* (Pray for us St. Peter).

**Fourth** *Fili Dei te rogamus audi nos* (Son of God, we ask you, hear us).

*Fifth* *Santa Trinitas miserere nobis* (Holy Trinity have mercy on us).

*Tenor* *Laus Domini in Ecclesia Sanctorum* (The praise of the Lord in the church of the Saints).

The present ringing chamber was constructed in 1975.

Ring out sweet bells,  
Across the lowly vale.  
Joyfully for them that worship here,  
For those we lay to rest,  
A muffled requiem. *Anon*

The bells were also re-hung during this period.

## ☞ The Reformation ☞

During the Reformation period, there were changes in the patronage of Barming church. A yearly pension of two shillings, granted with other estates of Leeds Priory in the reign of Henry II, was confirmed to King Henry VIII and his heirs in 1538. The patronage of Barming continues vested in the crown, the yearly pension, by the King's donation of 1540, being settled on his newly instituted Dean and Chapter of Rochester.

The first Rector installed under this new patronage was Sir John Sympton, a relative of William Sympton, Marshal of Calais. He had

previously been a Roman Catholic and held the living before the Reformation. Like the majority of his contemporaries he accepted the changes without resistance.

A record in Somerset House states..."in 1563, when Sympson, parson of Barming, made his will in the manner of the Reformation, leaving three cloths to cover the table".

Barming Church probably suffered more victimisation from the agents of Henry VIII and Edward VI than from the followers of Oliver Cromwell.

Few pre-Reformation treasures remain in the church, most having been given, together with the right of patronage, to the sovereign. Within weeks of the accession of Edward VI in 1547, orders were issued instructing, "That all images whatsoever should be taken out of the churches. All shrines, tables, candle sticks, tindrills, rolls of wax, pictures, paintings and other monuments of feigned miracles should be removed so that no memory of them remains in walls or windows.

## **☞ The Protectorate and Commonwealth ☞**

During the Protectorate and Commonwealth (1649 - 60) there was probably little left for the Puritans to deal with, their activities being confined to destruction rather than theft. In 1624 the Rev. Richard Webbe was presented to the living of Barming, his incumbency covering a period of the most violent constitutional change that this country has ever known.

Hasted, the Kent historian claims that Webbe was ejected during the Commonwealth and replaced by Mr. Repent Nichols, a Puritan preacher. However, an entry in the Parish register states that Webbe was still the incumbent in 1656. If this record is correct it seems to indicate that Barming suffered little religious intolerance during this troubled period.

## ☞ Years of Uncertainty ☞

The "Bloodless Revolution" of 1688 was followed by a temporary decline in the position of the clergy, covering most of the eighteenth century. The uncertainty of the times and political friction between many incumbents and the landed gentry was probably the main cause of many churches falling into disrepair.

In the mid-eighteenth century the poet Christopher Smart, a native of Barming, expressed his delight at the external appearance of the church in his poem:

### *The Hop Garden*

Here towering spires.  
First catch the eye and turn the thoughts to Heaven.  
The lofty Elms in humble majesty,  
Bend with the breeze to shade the solemn groves.

Towards the end of the century, however, the church presents a sorry sight.

The Rev. Mark Noble, who gained fame for his biographical writings on Cromwell and other notable personages, became the Rector of Barming in 1786. In his "History of the Parish of Barming", he writes of the church... "When I came into, possession nothing could be more out of repair; all was seeming ruin and dirtiness".

Noble, at his own expense, carried out much restoration and ornamental work, mainly in the chancel, and also gave an altar piece, tables and rails as well as a pulpit cloth. Despite this dedicated work the body of the church remained in great disorder until 1800, when, with the greatest of difficulty, Mark Noble persuaded his parishioners to take the responsibility of repairing the nave into their own hands.

## ☞ Restoration ☞

The year 1800 began a tradition of generosity, which raised the church to its present state. The font was erected and the large box pew towards the back of the church obtained a faculty in 1802.

William Selby who was a churchwarden for sixteen years, on his death in 1804 "Amplly", as he put it, "made recompense for so long deterring to repair the church". The belfry was divided from the nave and the seats were repaired and painted.

It is almost certain that in the 15th century the church contained a screen dividing the chancel and nave surmounted by a Rood Loft. Evidence of this was found during restoration work in 1815, when a narrow Gothic doorway was discovered near the chancel arch on the north side. This was evidently the former entrance to the Rood Loft.

In 1817 a copper sundial plate, five inches square, was unearthed on the north side of the church. It bore the date 1637 and the initials E.C. The parish book later records the cost of a new dial post, but since then the dial has been lost.

The vestry and north aisle were built in 1850. The bright stained glass there and in the nave and also in most of the chancel, was the gift of various local families, including the Beaumonts, who also donated the Flemish stall ends.

## ☞ A Lost Treasure of the Church ☞

An ancient alms box once stood just inside the main entrance to the church. Reputed to be made from a single tree trunk, its shape and design did not lend itself to dating, but some experts believed it to be either late Elizabethan or early Jacobean. However, an inventory for

Barming church c1840, mentions a "Peter's Pence" Box. This papal due was abolished by law under Henry VIII and this has led to speculation that the box may well have dated from the fifteenth century. Sadly, it was stolen from the church in the 1960s. The present box, a replica, was carved and installed by Gerald Wilton in 1974.

## œ A Modern Controversy ∞

The real treasures of the church are the choir stalls. Carved from heavy oak, they are considered to be among the oldest in England. Evidence suggests that they were the work of the same artist who carved the matchless stalls of a church in Cologne c1450. The carving depicts the "Harrowing of Hell", two figures clinging to each other with a little one trying to escape from the bottomless pit; St. Michael carrying a book and spearing a dragon (the devil); a lion representing St. Mark; and Samson and the Lion. On the arm rest and poppy heads are quaint faces and heads of bulls. It is possible that the stalls were carved earlier than this c.1300.

During the incumbency of the Rev. W.C. Granville-Sharp (1924-1944) these stalls became the objects of a controversy between the secretary of The Council for the Care of Churches, Dr. Esles, and the Banning Parochial Church Council. Dr. Esles contended that the stalls had been removed from Rochester Cathedral and should be returned there. Mr. Sharp disputed this, producing a letter from a member of the Beaumont family, which confirmed that they had purchased the stalls in Flanders, and presented them to Barming church in 1871. The letter also affirmed that, although Flemish work, they came from a cathedral in the South of France.

Canon Livett, a noted authority on Kent churches, closed the matter by declaring "The woodwork of the Miserere Stalls is foreign". (from the Rev. T.W. Carr)

## ☞ Modern Treasures ☞

Among the modern treasures of the church is the carved oak pulpit c 1901, on which are depicted our Lord, St. John the Baptist and St. Paul. The Holy Table (or Altar) was a gift from Mr. & Mrs. E. Croucher in 1953 to celebrate coronation year. The carved bas-relief on the east wall, depicting the visit of the Magi to the Holy Family, is by the sculptor John Ninich. This is reputed to have been brought from Italy by the daughter of the Rev. T.W. Carr.

The patterned design around the three lancet windows is also by Bucknell C. Comper and was carefully restored by Elizabeth Cheadle from the City & Guilds School of Art, Kennington, in 1980.

## ☞ The Registers ☞

Barming is noted for possessing one of the earliest existent registers in the diocese, extending from 1541-1611.

It is extremely well kept until 1580, after which it becomes very defective, many loose leaves having been lost. It is interesting to note that during 1575-6 there are only eight entries of christenings which record the names of the sponsors as "Gossipse", an old English word meaning "related in the services of God".

In the reign of Queen Mary (1553 - 1558) when the Church of England was temporarily reconciled to the papacy, Cardinal Pole directed that such entries should always mention the names of the sponsors. Although this custom was not continued under Elizabeth I, oddly enough the entries during Mary's reign also lack those particulars. Evidently Barming Church and its form of service was not radically affected by the religious difficulties of the times.

## ⌘ Notable Families ⌘

Many notable families have graves in the church or churchyard, including the Fletchers and Amhursts. Many graves within the church are now covered by nineteenth century tiling while those in the churchyard have become defaced by the weather. Noble in his "History of Barming" scrupulously recorded all.

## ⌘ The Church Plate ⌘

The oldest silver in the church is the communion chalice, dated 1697 and probably a gift of one of the wealthy neighbouring families. A pewter communion set, consisting of one flagon and two patens, is unmarked, and was probably a replacement for the silver set removed in the civil war.

## ⌘ Church Music ⌘

It is thought that, up to the turn of the nineteenth century, music in the church was provided by a barrel organ, which was later replaced by a small pipe organ. This organ was itself replaced in c1936 by a Hammond Model "A". Between 1982 and 1985, a small chamber organ was in use. (This is now installed in a church on Humberside). The James Mitchell organ, fitted in its own loft behind the chancel arch and controlled from a console in the north aisle, was installed in 1985. It was the culmination of many years of fund raising by the parishioners. This in turn has been replaced in 2004 by a Wyvern organ, which was paid for by the Friends of St. Margaret.

## ☞ Towards the Future ☞

It is a curious fact that, in an age noted for its general religious indifference, the church of St. Margaret's is now in a better state of repair than ever previously.

In 2004 a lavatory, facilities for flower arrangers and much needed storage space were installed. Then in 2007 a completely new lighting system was installed followed in 2008 by replacement of the sound system and the incorporation of a screen and projection facilities. The church now lends itself to all sorts of community functions including concerts and film shows while fulfilling its prime duty, which continues to be bringing God into the life of the village.

Barming is justifiably proud of its church in its very picturesque setting in the Medway valley. The building and its surroundings are a testament to those who in the past have devoted resources time and energy to the preservation of a Kentish landmark which will hopefully be a flourishing centre of the community for centuries to come.

## List of Rectors

- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| 13....Richard de St. Quentin |   |
| 1347 Master Bartholomew      |   |
| 1365 William Page            |   |
| 1422 John Gore               |   |
| 1434 Thomas Briggs           |   |
| 1493 John Punker             |   |
| 1499 John Fletcher           |   |
| 1501 William Ashurst         |   |
| 1504 William N assey         |   |
| 1506 Nicholas Harryson       |   |
| 1510 Robert Colenson         |   |
| 1523 William Howe            |   |
| 1524 John Symson             |   |
| 1554 Milo Garrett            |   |
| 1574 Thomas Robinson         |   |
| 1574 . John Naplesden        |   |
| 1581 William Nicholson       |   |
| 1603 Henry Barnewell         |   |
| 1605 William Collomb         |   |
| 1607 John Spileman           |   |
| 1608 'William Collins        |   |
| 1615 Wi1liam Naplesden       |   |
| 1623 John Grant              |   |
| 1624 Richard Webbe           |   |
| 1667 Benjamin Dereham        |   |
|                              | 1670 John Stileman                      |
|                              | 1685 Thomas Harris                      |
|                              | 1706 Theophilus Beck                    |
|                              | 1715 John Harris                        |
|                              | 1717 James Mashborne                    |
|                              | 1739 Thomas Pickering                   |
|                              | 1758 Thomas Marshal Jordan              |
|                              | 1786 Mark Noble                         |
|                              | 1827 Richard Cockburn                   |
|                              | 1832 Gilbert Elliot                     |
|                              | 1834 Charles Henry Barham               |
|                              | 1848 John Browne                        |
|                              | 1863 William Horne                      |
|                              | 1865 Thomas William Carr                |
|                              | 1912 Ernest John Wild                   |
|                              | 1921 Gerald Lloyd Murrell               |
|                              | 1924 William Charles<br>Granville-Sharp |
|                              | 1944 Douglas Mcleod                     |
|                              | 1956 Anthony Fitzroy Weigall            |
|                              | 1978 Peter Francis White                |
|                              | 1989 Andrew Daunton- Fear               |
|                              | 2004 Nigel Selwyn McGregor              |