

IT IS KNOWN that there was an Anglo-Saxon church here, and the core of the existing building probably dates from about the middle of the eleventh century and superseded an earlier timber structure. A western tower was added c. 1180–90 and, in the first quarter of the fourteenth century, the former chancel was replaced by the present one. The south aisle, with the Lady chapel at its east end, was built in 1520–30 and the clergy vestry to the north of the sanctuary was added at about the same time. Much reconstruction work was made necessary by a severe fire about 1630, and extensive restoration and alterations were carried out in 1863.

The **NAVE** north and west walls are the oldest parts of the church, much of the masonry dating probably from about the time of the Norman Conquest. The two Decorated windows on the north side were inserted early in the fourteenth century. The arcade and chancel-arch were built in 1863 to the design of the famous Gothic Revival architect, G. E. Street. The pews with their little doors (in imitation of the former box-pews) and the pulpit were also installed at that time. The roofs of the nave, aisle and chancel retain much of their timbering of c. 1635.

The fine set of eight funeral **HATCHMENTS** on the nave west wall are of members of the Polhill family who died between 1754 and 1847. The helmet in the chancel is late-Elizabethan and bears the Polhill crest.

One of the most unusual features of the church is that it is lit by candles (supplemented by electric lamps concealed in the roofs) and the beautiful brass **CHANDELIERS** were introduced in 1912. The most ornate one, in the centre of the chancel, is believed to be partly eighteenth-century.

The **CHANCEL** is early-fourteenth-century and originally had two Decorated windows on each side, in addition to the great east window. Only the latter remains open and its tracery was renewed in 1845.

The splendid **EASTER SEPULCHRE** on the north side of the sanctuary dates from 1510–27 and is among the finest in Kent's parish churches. The Tudor rose figures prominently in the design, while the pomegranate badge of Catherine of Aragon appears in one of the spandrels.

Through the doorway here is a comparatively unusual instance of a pre-Reformation **VESTRY**. In its western wall is a recess originally made as a wafer oven, with its flue and tiny outer opening now blocked; this is an extremely rare survival.

Ten panes of **PAINTED GLASS** in the east window depict the Crucifixion and some of the Apostles. They are the work of a seventeenth-century artist from the Low Countries and were given to the church in 1845. Shattered by blast from a bomb in 1940, they are now sandwiched between sheets of clear glass. Some seventeenth-century heraldic glass will also be seen at the top of the window by the pulpit and in the Lady chapel east window.

There are some notable **MEMORIALS** to members of the Polhill family. The earliest, a small floor-slab on the north side of the chancel, is to David and Alice Polhill and is dated 1585. The monument which dominates the chancel commemorates Charles and Martha Polhill; he was a merchant tailor at Smyrna,

later a Commissioner of Excise in London, and died in 1755. In the south aisle is a mural monument to his brother, David Polhill, who died in 1754; he achieved distinction as one of the Kentish Petitioners to Parliament in 1701 and subsequently became M.P. for Rochester and Keeper of the Records in the Tower of London. David and Charles were great-grandsons of Oliver Cromwell. Their monuments are both by Sir Henry Cheere, a leading eighteenth-century sculptor; that to Charles is one of his major works.

The **LADY CHAPEL** and **SOUTH AISLE** were built in 1520–30 and have late-Perpendicular windows and doorways. The recesses in the chapel east and south walls are seventeenth-century token reconstructions of pre-Reformation features, probably three image-niches and a piscina. The chapel reredos incorporates some seventeenth-century linenfold panels believed to have come from the old box-pews removed in 1863, and the altar table is also partly seventeenth-century. In the floor close by is a memorial slab to William Sidney, d. 1625, with the arms of this famous family, a pheon (broad arrow).

Against the chapel east wall are two small **SEPULCHRAL SLABS** of c. 1200, with identical crosses in low relief. They were dug up in the churchyard and must have covered the graves of children of a wealthy local family.

The **ROYAL ARMS** of William of Orange on the aisle wall are notable and bear the date 1697 with the initials of the churchwardens of that year.

The oak vestibule at the south doorway was installed in 1935, commemorating the Silver Jubilee of King George V.

The **FONT COVER** is outstanding and dates from the time of Charles I. It presents an interesting combination of Gothic and Renaissance design in woodwork. The font itself is nineteenth-century.

The **TOWER** is entered through the late-twelfth-century Transitional arch at the west end of the nave. The niche in the side of this arch was probably used for baptismal requisites when the font stood hereabouts before the south aisle was built. The two windows and doorway in the base of the tower are of the same period as the arch and the massive walls, upwards of 4ft. 6in. thick, should be noted. The upper stages of the tower and the timber broach spire are seventeenth-century. There are two bells, originally founded in 1622 and 1674 but recast in 1887 and 1975 respectively.

The **PORCH** at the tower doorway is dated 1637 and is a good specimen of the period. The door itself into the tower was made at about the same time.

Other features of the exterior are the inverted twelfth-thirteenth-century scratch dial on a re-used stone in the south-western quoin (by lamp bracket) and, in the chancel north wall, the blocked Decorated window with its original carved dripstone heads, notable for their cheerful expressions.

The Communion plate includes a silver chalice and paten of 1666. The parish registers begin with burials 1559–1618 and are complete from 1630.