

ELMLEY CHURCH AND IT'S HISTORY

By
Derek Faulkner

The small Elmley church had stood on Elmley since c.1247, when it was confirmed and dedicated to St. James. Later, in the reign of Henry 6th, it was in the hands of the Crown but in 1449 he granted the patronage and advowson of it to All Souls College, Oxford, and they continued as it's patrons until it's eventual demise in the 1950's. From then on there was a yearly pension of 40 shillings, payable from the church to the Abbot of St. Mary Graces near the Tower (of London?). In 1640 the rectory was valued in the King's books at £70 and by 1788 still only £80.

In 1816, after more than 200 years of dilapidation, it was fitted up again for Divine Service by a Dr. Percy, which seems quite surprising given that the scattered population of Elmley by 1831 was still only 29 people. However, from 1697 it had still continued to have a continuous line of Rectors, appointed to it, almost always the vicar from nearby Iwade church, who would have the responsibility for services at both churches. Among a long list of Rectors names, the stand out one for me was one Savage Tyndall, rector from 1746-1751 - what a splendid name for a vicar!

However from 1850 as a brick-making factory and it's subsequent workers' cottages began to take shape alongside Elmley hill, the need for what the church could offer intensified. But before that could happen the church was in need of repairs, substantially so. Therefore in 1853, presumably as the result of a request, the church was awarded a grant of £70 by the Incorporated Church Building Society. An article to this effect appeared in the London Standard newspaper on Wednesday July 20th 1853, announcing that St. James Church Elmley was among 31 churches and chapels awarded grants for rebuilding/ repairing, by the Society. Following that the church was quickly re-built and slightly enlarged, although to the eye it still remained quite small. It had a chancel, nave, south porch and a bell tower containing the one bell. Seating was for 150 people, although it must have been a rare event if it ever seated that many people in it's life-time. Unfortunately, the church register only recorded events from 1828 onwards. A metal plaque was installed in the church recording the involvement of the Incorporated Church Building Society.

So, in 1853 the church had been rebuilt and the population at Elmley was about to show a rapid rise in numbers thanks to the industry and it's associated small village being created there. The church went on to quickly became the hub of social life for those people, as many articles in local papers, church magazines and ex-inhabitants accounts would show.

In 1866 the Rev. W.A. Scott-Robertson was appointed to the Rectory of Elmley, the living as a rectory being a gift for some years from his cousin Miss E.M. Robertson and by 1887 the gross yearly value of the rectory was £350, raised from tithe rent charges. Scott-Robertson went on to serve as Rector of Elmley for the next eighteen years, before moving on to higher office in the Church, and throughout that time lived at Whitehall, Sittingbourne. He was a member of Archaeologia Cantiana and throughout his life went on to write and contribute almost a hundred religious and historical papers to that organisation. He was a remarkable man with a great love for Elmley, it's church and people and much revered in return. Although he left the area in 1884, he was still the driving force behind getting a new school built and opened at Elmley in 1885 and extensive repairs to the church made in 1886.

On church service days he would normally ride to Elmley Ferry from Sittingbourne on a weedy thoroughbred, which survived for many years. Leaving the horse behind on the mainland side of the Ferry, he would cross The Swale in the ferry boat and then walk the three-quarters of a mile to the church. Expecting his arrival, impoverished children from the cement factory village would always be on hand to open the marsh gates for him, knowing full well that his pockets were always full of sweets to thank them with. On days when the weather was inclement he would remain at Elmley until after the afternoon service was over and would while his time away in the church vestry, subsisting on a packet of sandwiches that he carried with him. (In later years a room was normally made available for a rector in Kingshill farmhouse should they have reason to stay longer on Elmley). Scott-Robertson also always made a point of being at Elmley on Christmas Day and begun a tradition of supplying a large plum pudding for the day. That and other good things, he distributed among the school children after the service.

An illustration of the way that many of the Elmley residents either helped to decorate the church, or simply attended the services there, are well described in a write-up in the East Kent Gazette dated the 30th December 1882 - "Over Christmas, Elmley church was brightly filled with Christmas decorations. On entering the nave the eye sees on the west wall "Glory to God in the highest" and fittingly on the wall beside the font, stands the text "God is Love" in three lines of large evergreen letters, framed in ivy bands. The font itself is prettily decorated with ivy and holly by Miss Charlotte Rutland.

Along the north and south walls of the nave run the words "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not the benefits," formed of large evergreen letters, made by Mrs. Dunham and framed in broad ivy bands, which run the whole length of the walls. Above this, on the north wall, is a large Star of Bethlehem, made of evergreens, between the words "King of Kings" and "Lord of Lords." Below is the exhortation "Pray without ceasing," between two large wreaths of holly and yew. On the opposite wall "Rejoice in the Lord" appears with wreaths and other devices. Branches of berried ivy fill the sills of all the windows. The pulpit, banded with ivy and holly, bears in front a handsome banner inscribed with "God with us." Large wreaths hang on the chancel screen of Caen stone and the lectern has ivy bands over a crimson hanging, on which is a white cross made by Mrs Hinge. Over the reading desk hangs a Christmas banner surrounded by broad ivy bands, which are continued all around the walls of the chancel, over the windows and vestry door. On the dossal curtains over the communion table is the text, "The desire of all nations shall come." The simple bands, four inches wide and covered with ivy, are very effectively arranged. Some scores of yards were made for the church by Ann Dodd, Emily Rutland, Eliza Atkinson, Ellen Hart and Esther and Harriet Dodd and put up by Walter Pay.

On Christmas Day, after the morning service, the rector Rev. Scott-Robertson, according to his usual custom over the years, invited all the congregation to the schoolroom. There, while the children sang several Christmas Carols, he cut up a huge, cold plum-pudding, so large that it alone furnished 42 slices and into each slice a bright flag was stuck. These were kindly handed round by Mr. William Rutland until all were supplied, which often meant a supplement pudding of smaller size needed to be brought in. Oranges, and a box of sweets for every Sunday scholar and Elder present, were also distributed. Thus ended what was the 15th annual gathering of this kind, to which the children ever looked forward with great glee, as a principal feature in their Merry Christmas at Elmley."

What a wonderful description of a warm and much loved little church in it's prime and the hard work that the resident families regularly put into creating it. But it wasn't to last, because despite it's re-build just 30 odd years before, it was starting to fall apart again.

Moving forward to 1886 and with the new school now finished and open alongside the church, use of the Elmley church as a makeshift school now ended and so during that year, attention could now turn to the sad state of the church, which had been slowly falling apart for some time. Like most of Sheppey, the natural soil is London clay, soil which in summer shrinks and cracks and then in winter as it gets wet, expands again. Being sited on high and exposed ground, the church was vulnerable to such soil movements, hence the regular need for repair work. In 1886 the soil had sunk to such an extent that the walls and window frames had cracked in all directions and the timbers of the roof had been strained and drawn out of place. The church was therefore closed while extensive work took place in under-pinning the walls and inserting beneath them, broad and deep foundations of cement. The porch had to be taken down and re-erected and buttresses built against the west wall, while the roof was given a new internal lining by taking down the plaster and replacing it with match board. The expense of all that was met by the University of Oxford, the owners of all the land on Elmley.

Once all this work was finished the village and out-lying farm cottages could truly rejoice, they now had a new school and a newly refurbished church, and on Thursday 9th December 1886 the parish celebrated the re-opening of the church. Some of the parishioners decorated the church with flowers and banners and the new, small iron tie-beams, the pulpit and lectern were all adorned with coloured hangings. During the late afternoon the new Elmley Rector, G.H. Mason and his wife, entertained most of the parishioners to tea in the school-house. It was crowded and many of the parishioners lent their crockery and no doubt supplied some of the food and drink. The following people gave their time in helping with the tea. Mr. and Mrs. Rutland and their three daughters, Mrs. Shield, Mr. Atkinson the new Superintendent of the Sunday School and four other Rectors. After the adults had concluded their tea, the children then had their turn and were regaled with cake, oranges and grapes provided by Mr. and Mrs. Mason. At 7.00 everybody then moved across to the church for the official re-opening service, where each of the five Rectors took it in turns to read a Lesson and hymns were sung. For the hymn singing there was one last surprise, Miss Ada Rutland accompanied the singing on an organ newly presented to the church by the now, Canon Scott-Robertson. Apparently the organ was an old one from Scott-Robertson's current Throwley church and it's repairs and carriage costs had been met by Elmley resources. The whole function was a great success, the villagers and indeed everybody connected with Elmley, must have felt cheered by it but there was still, one last contribution from Canon Scott-Robertson.

He gave the church a gift of a silver Chalice and Paten for use in Holy Communion there. It had been originally sold by the Church-wardens of St. Lawrence, Huffam, was of great antiquity and was rescued from dealers by Scott-Robertson. Both the chalice and paten were hall-marked for 1684. The chalice, which was goblet shaped, had a height of 6 inches, diameter of both mouth and foot 3.5 inches and a weight of 6.75 ozs. Inscribed on the bowl of the chalice was "*Given to Elmley Church Dec.9 1886 for use at the Holy Communion*"/*This cup which was formerly used used in the Church of St. Lawrence, Huffam.*

The paten-cover, which was basically a silver saucer, had the same hallmark as the chalice and in its depression the following, *"Given to Elmley Church, Kent, December 9th 1886, by Rev. W. A. Scott-Robertson, formerly Rector of Elmley"* Around its reverse was, *"Sold by the Church-wardens of St. Lawrence, Huffam"*

This Chalice and Paten are now in the Archives Dept. at Canterbury Cathedral where my partner and I have had the privilege of handling it and being photographed with it. Unfortunately, the Archives Dept. have retained the copyright of the photos that they took at the time and only allowed us copies for our personal files.

So life on Elmley in the early 1890's had probably reached the peak of both its social and employment history but it didn't last long, employment storm clouds began to gather as the century ended.

In 1884 the Rev. George Holdich Mason had replaced Scott-Robertson as the Rector of Elmley church and became almost as popular as his predecessor. Unfortunately in May 1893, his death was announced - it was claimed that the last two severe winters had tried him, causing ill health. He was buried on the 30th May in the north-west corner of Elmley churchyard, possibly the only rector to have ever been buried there. His replacement, the Rev. Arthur T. Theodosius, was inducted on the 22nd June 1893 but it was to be another two months before he put in an appearance at Elmley. Throughout his tenure there, I've seen nothing that suggests that he had much of an effect on Elmley. He was replaced in 1898 by the Rev. Robert Beetenson Barber, who unfortunately had to see Elmley and its residents through some pretty dark times.

By 1900 it was clear that the cement works at Elmley, where most of the parishioners lived in a specially built village alongside, could not exist against stiff competition from cement producers across The Swale. It struggled on for a while but the workers, seeing how insecure the working future was looking, had begun drifting away and by 1901 when the factory finally closed, the Elmley population had already dropped from 219 in 1891, to 146. After that, the village there quickly became deserted as people fled unemployment and starvation. By 1911 the resident population on Elmley had dropped even further to just 41 people, now mostly farm workers and the school had just six children attending, and some of them belonged to the schoolmistress. Basically, the only two families left in the cement works village for any length of time after that, were the Williams and Dodd families who remained there in Seaview Cottages. Other than that the population was made up by those farm workers living at Kingshill Farm and a few farm cottages scattered elsewhere around Elmley, there was not a lot of need for the church and schoolhouse.

It could not have been a happy time for the Rev. Beetenson Barber watching the attendances at both Elmley church and the school diminish but he died in 1907 and was replaced in 1908 by the Rev. Wallace Woodruff. Surprisingly, he remained as Rector of Elmley church until 1930 but apart from the odd baptisms, weddings and funerals, he rarely held more than a monthly service at the church, riding there across the marsh on horseback. Sometimes he would stop for lunch with the elderly Mrs. Dodd, at her Seaview Cottage, especially after her husband died in 1923, leaving her on her own there apart from visits from her family. He often gave her Holy Communion, always using the same glass jug as his Communion Cup. Her Great Granddaughter still has the jug to this day.

On the 18th April 1914 the East Kent Gazette reported in its paper the outcome of an Easter vestry meeting for the parish of Elmley which had been held the previous Tuesday afternoon and presided over by the Rector (Rev. Wallace Woodruff). He again nominated Mrs. Jane Harris, who had been the Elmley schoolmistress for a number of years, as his warden for the ensuing year and re-appointed Mr. H. Triplow, Elmley's tenant farmer, as his parish church-warden. Earlier that same day, Mr. Triplow had also been appointed as parish church-warden for Iwade. The church accounts were presented and they were considered to be very satisfactory, considering the expense incurred in repairing the churchyard fence during the last year. The sidesmen were re-appointed and the Rector also mentioned that there had been a slight increase in the number of communicants on Easter Day.

After that, news of events to do with Elmley Church become hard to come by until much later. It was probably members of the Williams family from Seaview Cottages that used it the most. During their married life Mr. and Mrs. Williams had had fourteen children. By the time that the cement factory closed many of the children had, or were close to, leaving home, but they made frequent visits back in order to use the church for various ceremonies. This continued at least until their parents retired to Queenborough in 1927. In total, between 1884 and 1927, Elmley Church provided that family with a total of 18 baptisms, 4 weddings and 4 burials with the last event being a wedding there in 1927.

A violent storm in November 1928 caused much damage to the church roof but for no reported reason, repairs weren't carried out until September 1929 at a cost of £130. A Service of Thanksgiving was then held during the next month.

In 1930 the large Gransden family moved into Kingshill Farmhouse and its neighbouring cottages and went on to become the sole agricultural tenants on Elmley. Sadly, just two years later, their 11yr old daughter drowned in an accident at Elmley Ferry and she was buried in the cemetery alongside Elmley Church.

In the 29th September 1938 issue of "The Motor Cycle" magazine there appeared an article written by presumably a motor cyclist from London, who had decided to motor down to Sheppey from London and have a look at Elmley, for whatever reason. The copy of the article that I have is not very good and some parts are illegible but below is a brief account.

After leaving the main road and driving along the bumpy track on a hazy summer's afternoon he finally arrived at what he called "the main street" of Elmley, alongside the large barn. The first people that he saw were the tenant farmers there, Mr. and Mrs Gransden, who were about to walk down to the main road. "If you'd like to have a look at the church," Mr. Gransden said, "just ask at the house for the key and they'll give it to you."

His description of the church was very brief, describing it as a tiny, grey-stoned church whose inside had a charming, simple dignity and was spotlessly neat. Returning the key to the house, (Kingshill farmhouse presumably), one of the Gransden daughters told him that there was now only about three services a year held in the tiny church. "One Sunday morning we may hear the church bell ringing and we all get up and go to church" she said. "Recently my brother was married to a London girl in the church and eighty-eight people managed to get inside, while more stood outside. The bride and groom went to the church on a milk float".

Although not published in the Sheerness Times-Guardian until 1953, yet another article written by somebody who went simply by the initials of M.P., saw the author begin his tale by describing a visit to Elmley church one hot July afternoon in 1939. A brief but beautiful description of the end of a way of life at Elmley.

“I left the rough cart track, crossed the little churchyard into the porch, the air was chill and damp. Yet flowers were on the altar and sills, wild flowers such as only children would pick. And in the middle of the aisle, on her knees, was an old lady scrubbing red tiles. I remember those red tiles and the old lady, whose face was creased with age and the memory of many smiles. She looked up at me and then turned down again to her loving toil. I stood and watched. When I left that little church it was to go to war. In 1943, when victorious armies had swept through North Africa, I stood in the great mosque at Kairouan, in Tunisia. Beneath it's enormous chandeliers of a thousand winking oil lamps, I stood on red tiles and England, so far off, was near. For the mind's picture was of the little old lady at Elmley and I resolved that I would make one last pilgrimage to the Isle of Sheppey” and again in 1953 - “The winds were truly cold. The March air bit the flesh. Along the banks of The Swale was wreckage brought by the February's floods – a dead cow nobody had bothered to bury. And inland up the winding road to Elmley. A lamb met us at the porch door. Even before the churchyard was gained, the bare rafters warned us of changes wrought. (*A faded photograph showed the church with just roof A frames and no covering of roof tiles*). But inside, all was covered down with bedding for cattle. The altar gone, the tiny font lying turtle outside.....and the red tiles? I stirred the straw and dung with my foot, here and there an odd tile remained.” (*A second photo shows the font now laying on the ground outside the church – how sad and disrespectful that the major part of so many baptisms there should be discarded in that way.*)

Shortly after it appears that the writer had made contact with Canterbury Cathedral. He wrote “In that distinguished house in Canterbury, where Diocesan records are kept, a great churchman was speaking”. “Now, Elmley” he mused. “That has been demolished. No you say?” The Canon paused and tapped his boot. For in ecclesiastical records, a faculty dated 1948 is shown, providing for the removal and for the site to be levelled. A contractor had undertaken to remove all in exchange for the materials. And the little churchyard, with it's tragic inscription to so many children – the young wife of 17 whose beauty was so striking they recorded the fact above her grave – was to be kept inviolate. “Give me a day or so,” the Canon was speaking. “I'll see that enquiries are made and this matter is finally settled.”

But before we leave that newspaper article, who was the little old lady cleaning the red tiled church floor in 1939? It seems almost certain that it was Martha Dodd, who would have been aged 88 at the time and was almost as much a part of the Elmley legend, as the church. I have written a fuller history of her life in another article, but briefly:- She had been born on Elmley in 1851, part of the Flood family. In 1868 she married another Elmley resident, James Dodd. After living at other cottages on Elmley, they arrived at Seaview Cottages, alongside the old Elmley village, where Martha was to stay for the rest of her life, enduring quite happily a lot of harsh conditions there. James died in 1923 and as other neighbours came and went, Martha often lived a solitary life, especially in later life. According to family and friends, by 1939 she had been the self-appointed cleaner of the old church for some years, meticulously cleaning it on a regular basis, despite the fact that it was rarely used by then. Later that same year, aged 88 and due to her frailty and ill-health, Martha was transferred to Orpington Hospital in Kent where she died in 1942, aged 91, suffering from Myocardial Degeneration and Senile Dementia.

So in 1939, the person that had later written that article for the Times-Guardian, had almost certainly witnessed sight of Martha Dodd, who had lived on Elmley for 88 continuous years – some kind of record!

But despite the fact that the correspondent above had seen much of the church still in-situ in 1953, let's go back a bit. In an article published in the East Kent Gazette on February 17th 1950 it was announced that the church of St. James at Elmley was to be pulled down. It stated that the church had been without a rector for many years and although the congregation of Iwade went across the Elmley marshes to the church on St. James Day (25th July) each year to sing evensong, no service had been held there for the past ten years. The church had been under the control of the Iwade church for many, many years but the absence of any regular congregation there had led to the cessation of services, save on the Patronal Festival each summer. The article went on to state that a recent examination of the fabric of St. James Church had revealed serious deterioration, the wall at the east end being cracked and a large sum would be necessary for restoration. With the consent of the Gransden family, (as tenant farmers there since c.1930, the only people then living on Elmley), and in the absence of any representation against the proposal that the church be demolished – proper notice having been exhibited in Iwade Church porch – a faculty** has now been granted by the Canterbury Diocesan authorities for the building to be taken down. It is probable that the work will begin soon. The article went on:-

Though the destruction of a church is always a matter of regret, it is felt that it is better to do this than to allow it to fall into complete decay and ruin. The whole fabric is in an advanced stage of deterioration and as there does not seem any remote prospect of the church being needed for public worship. The building has little architectural merit and no trace of the earlier church is to be found. A memorial tablet is being taken from the wall in the vestry and both this and the safe, with it's registers and plate are being transferred to Iwade Church. The churchyard is being preserved and will stand as "God's Acre" for perpetuity.

*** A faculty is a permissive right to undertake works to a church or it's contents and it appears that one was issued for Elmley Church in 1948.*

Not long afterwards, on the 12th May 1950, yet another article appeared in the East Kent Gazette referring to the Elmley Church, that time concerning a recent meeting of the Sheppey Rural District Council. That article is worth repeating in full because it gives various councillor's comments on what was or wasn't happening to the church and illustrated the degree of both neglect and lack of respect afforded to the church and it's cemetery at that time, something that basically set the pattern for the site up to the present day.

“Sheppey Rural District Council has decided to negotiate with the appropriate authorities in order that some form of memorial stone or plaque be erected on the old site of the church, which at present is being demolished. In the Works Committee report it was stated that a letter had been received from the Minister of Health asking if the Council had any observations to make in connection with the proposal to close Elmley churchyard. The letter asked if the Council were prepared to maintain the churchyard if called on to do so. It was the Committee's recommendation that no objections be made and that the Council should not undertake to maintain the churchyard.

Councillor Parris suggested that some form of stone be erected on the site of the church and that an article of the church furniture be kept in the Council Chamber as a permanent record of the parish of Elmley. “It is lamentable that the churchyard has been closed so quietly, and if we allow it to pass out of existence without some form of recognition we shall be doing wrong.”

The Chairman, (Councillor A. Johnson) said that to his knowledge two years previously, the church was being used as a granary and was stacked full of wheat. Councillor Parris said that when he visited the church, also two years previously, it was full of the most elaborate and expensive furnishings for people to play about with as they liked. This was reported to the authorities and he believed that as a result the church was being demolished and the churchyard closed.

Councillor Parris said that he would like to see a stone erected on that land to commemorate the foundation and passing of a parish. Councillor F. Purvis said that he agreed because the Island is absolutely chock-full of history, both glorious and inglorious, and we should make a note of such an important event as this. Councillor W. S. Evans pointed out that Elmley church was attached to the church at Iwade on the mainland but he thought that it was their duty (SRDC), to raise the matter to a higher level. Referring to the article that they intended to preserve on the Island, he pointed out that it would have to be something which would not look out of place in a church of modern design.”

There is no evidence that any memorial stone was ever erected at the churchyard, or that the church was fully demolished during 1950.

In recent times the current owners of Elmley have often been blamed for the sad state of the small site that the church and school once stood on, but it is obvious that there is little that they can do now to re-instate it to how it once looked. Earlier this year, dumping a load of soil and rubble on the church site was seen as some kind of act lacking in respect for what lay beneath. But let's be brutally honest, difficult as it might be to accept for some relatives of previous tenants of Elmley, the worst period of desecration begun many years before the current owners came onto the scene.

It was clear, all that time ago, that Oxford University, the church authorities and even the local council, by not wanting to look after them, appear to have pretty much washed their hands of both the church, cemetery and neighbouring empty schoolhouse. This appears to have given licence to the tenant farmer, despite having a young daughter buried in the churchyard, to utilise the site and buildings as he wished and it appears from various witness accounts and a few photographs, that that was the case, first storing grain in the church and then cattle and later using the site to store trailers and even scrap items.

Incredibly, talking to Ken Ingleton, a well known local historian this year (2019), part of the church still remained for several years before Sheppey Rural District Council, who I believe he was working for at the time, finally demolished the ruins of Elmley Church in c.1962 /1964. Apparently by then only the walls were still standing and were considered a danger to the public, the rubble was left on site and later used around the farm.

The one thing that I've been unable to get, is evidence of how the cemetery was laid out. From the few photographs available of the church, just one of them and a black and white drawing drawn in early 1950, show a couple of headstones present at the front of the church. Given that there were a total of 160 burials recorded there, most of the frontage must have been taken up with graves. But when and more importantly why, were the headstones of the graves removed or flattened, leaving just a few over the years that people have found in the long grass.

There is, in Sheerness library a file, with family names, of all baptisms, marriages and burials that were carried out in Sheppey churches, all put together by one person from parish records. In this file, for Elmley church, it notes that as far as weddings went, only those between 1850 and 1938 are mentioned, a total of 62. After 1938 all registers went to Sheppey District, which presumably means that from 1938 all weddings were registered as in the Sheppey District, or possibly, that the Elmley church had ceased to carry out weddings any more.

In respect of baptisms, between 1827 and 1938 the names of 394 children baptised at the church are noted, with a Gransden child baptised there in 1938 being the last one. That seems an awful lot of baptisms but it has to be remembered that at the height of the nearby cement works operations, in the early 1890's, there was a total population on Elmley of 219 people. I have already shown how the Williams family contributed to these totals themselves.

Turning to burials at Elmley the file also notes that none were recorded at Elmley before 1834, despite the church having been repaired in 1827. It notes that parishioners prior to 1834 and perhaps between 1834/5 and 1844 were buried at nearby Murston. The file not only gives the names of the people buried there but a breakdown of sex and age when buried, as follows:-

Males – 88 buried

23	(less than 1 yr old)
18	(1 – 5 yrs)
23	(5 - 40 yrs)
24	(over 40 yrs)

Females – 72 buried

24	(less than 1 yr old)
12	(1 – 5 yrs)
25	(5 – 40 yrs)
11	(over 40 yrs)

The second to last burial at the church was on the 13th January 1934, when a Thomas Mackiness, aged 84, was buried there. The Rev. P. Hornton, vicar for Harty and Leysdown was called in to carry out the ceremony.

Then eight years later, what was possibly the last ceremony to be carried out at the old church, took place. A man by the name of Philip Hammond had been living in an old lean-to attached to the side of Seaview Cottages. He and his brother were employed to repair the sea wall from the Kingsferry Bridge and past Elmley towards Harty. One morning in July 1942, his brother found him dead on his bed in the lean-to, he was aged 73. On the 23rd July 1942 he, although unfortunately not being alive to know it, became the very last person to be buried at Elmley church.

By 1961 there were few headstones still present, or at least visible, in the Elmley churchyard, what was legible on them was as follows:-

Phoebe Ivory beloved wife of James Adam Dye who died Dec 8 1886 aged 19 years.

Albert Heatherington aged 80 years also Elizabeth wife of above who were accidentally drowned off Elmley Cement works 18??

Florence Jane Williams died April 13th 1898 aged 8 months. (daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Williams from Seaview Cottages)

George Swan died Sept 9 1897 aged 42.

Stephen Walter child of Walter & Eliz. Rutland died Nov 26 1886 aged 6 years & 4 months.

****The Epitaph on Phoebe Ivory's stone read:-**

Goodbye dear child I am going home

To meet our loving father who wants me on his throne.

Dear husband you know I was but lent, so do not weep for me.

Weep not for me husband and child so dear

I am not dead but sleeping here.

God does not always warning give

So all be careful how you live.

Unfortunately, even those few surviving headstones have now disappeared and nothing now remains to make anyone aware that a church and it's cemetery ever existed there on Elmley.

What little remains of the old schoolhouse a few yards away, is now on the point of collapse and presumably once that occurs then little, if anything, will be left to remind people of the part that those two buildings played in Elmley's history.

Finally, this is where the current owners could play their part. It would be nice if a large, coloured information board showing a photograph of the two buildings, with a brief history, could be placed at the site.

ELMLEY RECTORS

Thomas Creech	1697-1699
Edward Digges	1699-1700
Peter Preaulx	1700- ?
Francis Offley	? -1708
Robert Bright	1708-1723
Milo Weft	1723-1724
Thomas Martin Fiddes	1724-1725
Thomas Leigh	1725-1732
Robert Chernock	1732- ?
William Stephens	? -1746
Savage Tyndall	1746-1751
Thomas Bathurft	1751-1765
Thomas ST. Loe	1765-1766
John Lang	1766-1788
John Montague	1788- ?
John Poore	1841-1866
W. A. Scott Robertson	1866-1884
George Holdich Mason	1884-1898
Robert Beetenson Barber	1898-1907
Wallace Woodruff	1908-1930
Edward Henry Morris	1930-1934 (last known date)