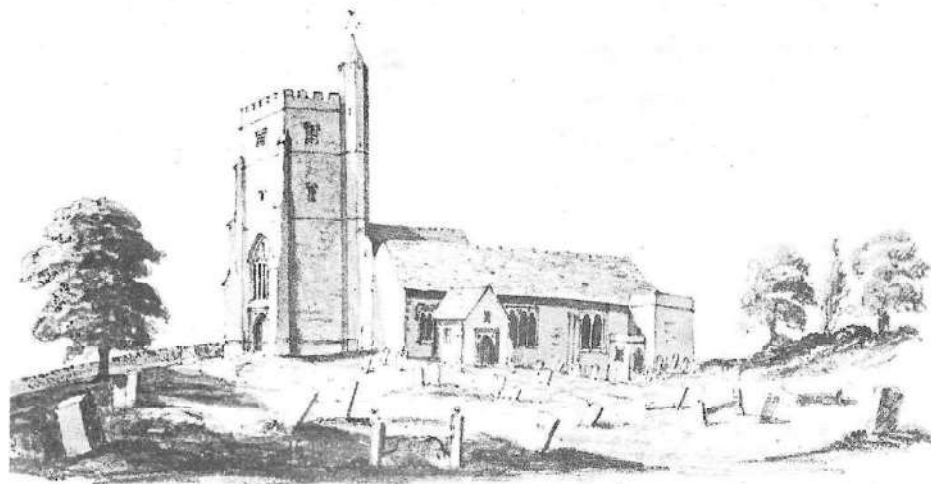


St. Peter & St. Paul  
Seal, Kent



*Seal Church, Kent.*

SEAL CHURCH at the end of the 18th Century (from a print in the British Museum)

#### FOREWORD

It is with all modesty and a full realization of my own inadequacies of scholarship and literary ability that I put forward this description of Seal Parish Church in order to coincide with the centenary celebrations of the official separation of the Ecclesiastical Parish from that of Kemsing.

The work could not have been attempted, much less accomplished, without the great archeological and historical help of Mr. A. D. Stoyel of Otford who has been untiring in his researches, advice and revision. In acknowledging most gratefully and unreservedly all he has done I apologise if any errors have crept in. To him the credit; to me the blame!

I acknowledge also the debt I owe to Mr. H. J. Yallop, M.A., B.Sc., of Farway, Devon for kindly allowing me to draw upon his booklet 'Sir William de Brian' for my references to the famous brass to this medieval character. Mr. Yallop has made a study of the de Brian family, and his booklet forms part of the 'Devonshire Associations Transactions'.

My grateful thanks are due also to Mrs. Joan Wyatt of Seal for the drawings which appear in these pages and my acknowledgements to the Trustees of the British Museum for allowing the reproduction of the picture of Seal Church at the turn of the 18th century, and to 'Aerofilms Limited' for the use of their picture of Seal which adorns the back cover.

I should also like to express my thanks to Canon John Barnard, the present Vicar of Seal and to the members of the Parochial Church Council for their kind permission for me to finish this booklet after my retirement and for having free access during this time to the records, registers and other documents of the church.

*Stephen Crookshank.*

June, 1974

Vicar of Seal 1966 to 1973

## The Parish and Church of Seal

### THE PARISH

#### ITS ORIGINS

In Saxon times Seal was a hamlet within the boundaries of Kemsing and although it possessed a large measure of independence did not become a separate Ecclesiastical Parish till 1874—other significant dates are given below.

There are two authoritative versions of the origin of the name. One is, that in Saxon days it derived this from a 'Hall' within its boundaries and that the ancient name of 'Sele', or 'La Sele', or 'Zela', or 'La Sela', or 'Sela', or 'Seale' as it has at different times been rendered is none other than the modern French word 'Salle' meaning a Hall. If this is the case we have no idea what building was referred to. It may well have been the ancient manor house (long since vanished) of the Manor of Kemsing and Seal which, at a much later date, belonged to the Lords Saye and Sele and from which they took their title.

The second suggestion is that the present name is derived from the Anglo-Saxon 'Sealh' and 'Saleg' meaning sallow or willow. There are other villages in England with similar names and probably the same derivation, meaning that willows grew in some damp neighbourhood round about.

#### ITS FAIR

By a charter dated August 3rd, 1233 in the reign of Henry III, Eleanor, daughter of King John and widow of the Earl of Pembroke, obtained the right to hold a market each Wednesday on her 'Manor of Sele' and an annual fair there at the Festival of St. Edith who was held in high esteem in Kemsing where she had lived part of her life.

Later, in the reign of Edward I by a charter dated January 1st, 1285, Otho Grandison the then Lord of the Manor obtained the right to hold a market each Monday at 'Sele' and an Annual Fair at the time of the Festival of St. Peter and St. Paul.

This would point to a Church being in existence by the latter date as Fairs were associated with its Patron Saint.

This Fair has been revived in a modified form in recent years as a community effort and the ancient right to have the traffic stopped along Church Road (where the Fair used to be held on the Green) has been maintained.

Although Seal was officially part of the Ecclesiastical Parish of St. Mary, Kemsing, till 1874 it always had a large measure of independence (it

was recognised as a separate district at the time of the Commonwealth) with a distinct advowson and often referred to in civil and ecclesiastical matters as a separate parish, possessing its own Churchwardens from early days and latterly having its own 'Overseers of the Poor'.

The Vicar of the Parish of Kemsing and Seal more often than not, according to various references, lived in sundry houses in Seal rather than in Kemsing.

In 1867 the churches of Seal, St. Lawrence and St. Margaret's, Undernver were built, but the latter did not become a separate parish until 1877.

The name of Seal is not prominent in national history — no battles have been fought in its boundaries and no significant event is known to have taken place there. Its growth and development are similar to those of innumerable other rural parishes in England; but its life used to revolve round the church, and it is there that one finds records and memories of our ancestors who lived in this place and loved it even as we do in the 20th century.

And we hope that in the years to come the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul may be spiritually and socially, even as it is geographically, the focal point of the parish.

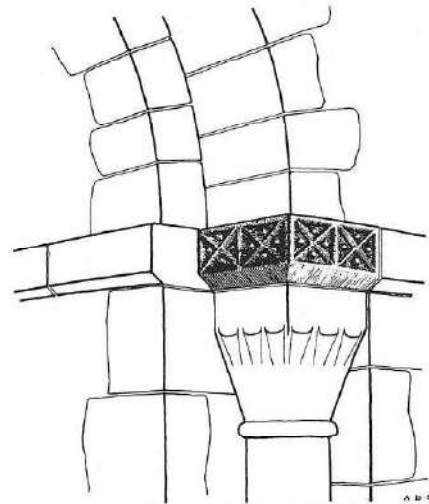
## The Church

### ITS DATE

The exact date of the foundation of the building is unknown. There is a valuable document called the 'Textus Roffensis' which was drawn up in 1120 or thereabouts and gives a list of the Churches at that time paying chrisms fees to Rochester Cathedral. 'Sela' appears in this list but only inserted in the margin, so some doubt is cast on its date of origin. Was it added in later? Or at the time to rectify an omission? The late Dr. Gordon Ward put forward very convincing evidence of the latter view which is generally accepted by modern scholars.

More recently a further clue has come to light indicating the existence of a church prior to the mid 13th century from which period the present building originates.

In 1969 the floor was relaid and two similar sized blocks of Hassock (a grey-green sandstone) were discovered at the foot of the South West pillar of the Nave. Mr. A. D. Stoyel and others subjected them to careful examination and tests. One of them proved to be of particular interest, being carved with a pattern of late Norman ornamentation. It was identified as an abacus from an arch formerly within the church and was dated about 1180-1190. The accompanying photograph clearly shows the ornamentation on one of



A re-construction by Mr. A. D. Stoyel showing how the stone on the right may originally have been used.

them (a repeated square with a saltire with a pellet in the triangular space formed by the arms). The 'pellet' form of ornamentation virtually disappeared as a decorative motive by the close of the 12th century. This discovery strengthens the argument for there being a church here in earlier Norman, if not Saxon, times and therefore the omission from the *Textus Roffensis* was an unintentional one.

Obviously after 1180-90 important reconstruction work or a complete re-building was carried out and the plan of the church as we now know it began to take shape. This consists of a 13th century Nave; a South Aisle of either the same date or a later one; the Chancel rebuilt; and a



Chapel added at the end of the South Aisle in the 15th century. There is a fine 16th century West Tower and South Porch; a 19th century North Aisle (1855, and extended later in 1879 to house the organ) and there are vestries South of the Lady Chapel, built in 1878 on the site of an earlier one (of which it includes a window and some other parts)—and these were extended in 1913 when an old 15th century window found lying in the Churchyard was inserted in the East wall.

#### THE EXTERIOR

The dominating feature as we first look at the church is the fine Tudor tower, which according to various references in wills and other documents was being planned in 1510 and seems to have been completed by 1529. Standing on a slight hill this massive and tall tower is often quoted as being a splendid example of the typical Kentish towers with an embattled parapet and an octagonal stair turret (also embattled), rising above it in the South East corner. The clock is dated 1854, being made by C. Frodsham, well known in his day.

The approach to the church from the 19th century Lych gate is between an avenue of yews and looking down on us from his niche over the doorway of the Porch is the benevolent figure of St. Peter carved in the 1920s by a Miss Hensman of Sevenoaks. To the right of the doorway is a



#### Holy-water stoup.

The Porch that we enter was built in the early 16th century and contains two small windows. In the West window are remains of some 15th century glass, as illustrated, and in the East window are to be seen two examples of some Flemish renaissance period glass depicting the Resurrection, and inserted here in 1939.

The actual South doorway into the church is probably early 14th century work—pleasant but with no remarkable feature. An inner wooden vestibule was added in memory of the Revd. H. Jones-Davies, Vicar from 1920 to 1945.

#### THE INTERIOR

This is more spacious than one would have imagined from the outside.

If one stands at the West End of the Church, in front of the screen under the lofty tower arch and looks up, one sees a very attractive medieval roof stretching to the East End of the Nave and a similar one in the South Aisle.

There are tie beams supported by arch-braces, moulded and carved with little capitals in the wood at the spring of each arch from its wall-brackets. These tie beams carry crown posts (not king posts) supporting the central collar purlins.



The arcade between the Nave and the South Aisle has been little altered since its construction in the 13th century and thus displays the oldest recognizable masonry still in its original position anywhere in the Church. It is balanced by the Victorian North arcade built in similar style, the whole producing a very pleasing general effect.

There must have been an Altar at what is now the entrance to the Lady Chapel as in the South wall at this point there is a medieval Piscina—used for washing the sacred Communion vessels. (There is also a Piscina of the 15th century in the South wall by the High Altar, but this latter one has been heavily restored).

#### **THE SCREEN—and an intriguing tale**

Now perhaps is the time to introduce a most interesting tale of which there is some fragmentary written evidence.

The story is that the rood screen was taken down by the Lord of the Manor at the time of the Civil War (possibly to prevent its destruction by the Puritans) and was stored in his cellar. This was the great rood screen, which had carried a loft accessible by a stairway, the blocked entry to which is still visible just inside the Lady Chapel. (In the blocking masonry is an inverted scratch-dial of the 12-13th century type brought in from outside, where it had served as a sundial marking the times of the daily offices.)

However, the Lord of the Manor had a change of heart after the Royal Restoration in 1660 and instead of returning the Screen to the Church, used most of it for making domestic furniture for his own house! He then gave the remainder to his bailiff who in his turn used this to make a sideboard (which is to be seen near the Lectern) with a bench end as its central feature—and the descendants of this bailiff gave the sideboard to the Church in 1947 during the incumbency of the Revd. Leslie Hills.

This piece of furniture is carved with scallop shells, the head of an animal such as a hind, and with roses similar to the Tudor rose. Probably the wood and that of the 'Poppy-head' end of the bench is of the 15th or possibly early 16th century.

Another screen was erected in 1931, the architect being Mr. C. R. Ashbee, as a memorial to Nevill Forbes his wife's brother. It was removed in 1990 in order to open up the Chancel once more. It was not considered to be a good example of Mr. Ashbee's work and he himself wrote that he had faithfully continued the work of Mr. Somers Clarke who was responsible for the screen in the North Aisle—and which was to be copied again in the screen in the South Aisle.

A fine example of Mr. Ashbee's work is the lower portion of the tower Screen which was erected in 1897.

**THE PARISH REGISTERS—An Interesting Story**

Seal Church possesses registers of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials from 1561 (by which time such registers had been made compulsory by law) to the present day.

A most interesting story concerns the volume covering the years 1561 to 1655 which for over 100 years was missing.

It so happened that the Revd. H. Jones-Davies (Vicar of Seal 1920-1945), in the early days of his life was staying with a family in Bethlehem in South Africa where he was shown some ancient books in their possession. When he later became Vicar of Seal he remembered that he had seen the missing register amongst these. He wrote to the lady concerned who quite rightly returned the register to Seal Church in 1931. Apparently it had been taken out to South Africa (with other books) by a member of the Kipps family who used to live in Seal—the last entry referring to them being 1812.

The registers up to 1812 were transcribed and typed in 1925 and 1933 by Sir Thomas Colyer-Fergusson of Ightham Mote.

There are no very interesting items of history recorded in these registers, though one can trace the development of social life over the centuries and various references to the hamlets and residences in the parish, and to the chief families such as the Theobalds, the Bickerstaffes, the Olivers, the Piers, the Pratts (who became titled under the name of Camden) and more recently the Mills family (the first of whom became Lord Hillingdon). The Cronk family, formerly of Fullers Hill, featured a lot in these registers. They had many connections with the church.

Of human interest it is recorded that the plague visited Seal in 1603 and carried off 16 persons within two months and there is a sad reference to Sir John Chichester and his wife Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Charles Bickerstaffe of Wildernesse now Dorton House. They were both buried on September 16th, 1680 at the ages of 22 and 21 respectively after having been married less than a year.

### THE WINDOWS

Except for the porch glass already mentioned and some medieval fragments in the organ chamber window, the stained glass is all of the 19th century. In the opinion of English Heritage, these windows are good examples of this period.

The glass in the two east windows and the two south windows is in memory of various members of the Pratt family.

The window by the Font was given by a former Vicar—the Revd. C. E. Few—in memory of a daughter of his whose fascimile is to be seen in the bottom right corner.

The west window in the North Aisle looks very attractive in the summer with the setting sun behind it.

There are two 'blocked up' windows which can be seen only from the outside. That in the South aisle, near the entrance to the Lady Chapel is a small Early English lancet of the first half of the 13th century, but it is unlikely to be in its original position because the aisle appears to have been widened in the following century. The other in the North wall of the Sanctuary is in the Perpendicular style of the 15th century.

### THE BELLS

These are six in number and of good quality, and have one of the longest 'drops' of any in Kent, the ropes being 80 feet long.

1. THE TREBLE (4½cwt and 28½in. diameter) which was cast by John Warner and Sons of London in 1886 and bears the inscription 'THIS BELL WAS PRESENTED TO THE CHURCH OF ST. PETER, SEAL BY CHARLES HENRY MILLS ON THE OCCASION OF THE MARRIAGE OF HIS SON CHARLES WILLIAM MILLS WITH THE HONOURABLE ALICE HARBOARD. APRIL 1886.'
2. THE SECOND (4¾cwt and 30in. diameter) with the inscription 'JOHN HODSON MADE ME 1660. WT. IL. C.WARDENS. W.H.' (Note: John Hodson was a London founder, and the initials W.H. are those of his foreman William Hall.)
3. THE THIRD (5½cwt and 31½in. diameter) with the inscription 'JOHN HODSON MADE ME 1660. WILLIAM THOMPSON. JOHN LOVEJOY. CHURCHWARDENS. W.H.'
4. THE FOURTH (5½cwt and 32½in. diameter) with the inscription 'THOS. LESTER AND T. PACK OF LONDON FECIT 1758.'

5. **THE FIFTH** (8cwt and 36½in. diameter). This was cast by William Burford of Aldgate in the City of London between 1371 and 1392. It was cracked in 1957 when it was recast. The original crown of this old bell (shown below) is to be seen by the entrance into the Choir vestry bearing the inscription 'SIT



NOMEN DOMINI BENEDICTUS'. (There is a legend that this bell was taken from St. Mary's, Kemsing.)

6. **THE SIXTH** (10¼cwt and 38½in. diameter). It was recast by John Warner of London in 1886 and bears the inscription 'ST PHANUS SWAN FECIT ANNO DOMINI 1609. WILLIAM COX. JOHN RAVEN. WARDENS.' Note: Stephen Swan was a Kentish man, and the 'E' of STEPHANUS was missing in the original casting.

#### THE MONUMENTS

There is naturally a plethora—many from the 19th century—of tablets extolling the virtues of our ancestors. What a godly and pious lot they seem to have been!

##### The Famous Brass

We must however describe more fully one of the glories of this church—i.e. the fine brass of Sir William de Bryene (or Bryan) in the North-East Corner of the chancel where he has lain since 1395 (though it would appear that vandals of the past have tried to prise open his tomb).

It is by no means the earliest brass in England but it is one of the earliest ones to be in such good condition and does have some distinguishing features. The excellent effigy 54in. tall of the knight in armour of detailed workmanship is

encircled by an oblong frame with the Latin inscription in it 'HIC JACET DNS WILLMS DE BRYENE MILES QUONDAM DNS DE KEMSYNG I DE SELE QUI OBIT XXIII DIE MENSIS SEPTEMBR ANNO DNI M CCC LXXXXV CUIUS AIE PPICIET DEUS AMEN.' Or if you prefer it 'Here lies the Lord William de Bryene, knight, formerly Lord of Kemsing and of Seal who died on the 23rd day of the month of September in the year of our Lord 1395, to whose soul may God be propitious. Amen.' At the corners of the inscription are the badges of the four Evangelists: an angel (St. Matthew), a winged lion (St. Mark), a winged ox (St. Luke), an eagle (St. John). There are also the coats of arms of Sir William and of his wife.

Sir William, who was the son of Sir Guy de Bryene K.G. (1307-90) inherited some Kentish manors (including Kemsing and Seal) from his mothers' relations the Grandisons. He led an active life of ups and downs and was involved in many law suits—some with members of his family—till he died in Seal in 1395, being the last direct male descendant of the de Bryene family. Perhaps it was the very stormy life he led that ensured his fully documented history even as his fine brass effigy has commemorated for time yet to come a character that would otherwise have been forgotten.



Mounted in the Lady Chapel is a second brass commemorating John Tebold alias Theobold who died in 1577. This is of interest as an example of a palimpsest, having on the back the figure of an unknown lady of about 1500. There used to be other brasses in the church but vandals (who were a breed that existed before this century!) have removed them less than 100 years ago—(as were removed the medieval glass amorial bearings of the Grandison family of which only the remains are to be seen, as mentioned above, in the window behind the organ).

One or two other memorials deserve mention. In the sanctuary (on the North wall, alas, blocking up a window) there is a beautifully carved marble cartouche of the baroque style dated 1680 in memory of Sir John Chichester and his wife Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Charles Bickerstaffe.

Opposite, on the South wall is a smaller tablet to Steven Theobald and his wife Catherine dated 1619. The original colours are just visible and it would be lovely if these could be restored and the memorial repaired as a gift to the church.

In the Lady Chapel are 19th century memorials to the Pratt family by Chantry one of whom became Lord Chief Justice of England, another Earl

Camden, Lord Chancellor of England. Their home, Wildernesse, was subsequently bought in the 19th century by Charles Mills who became the first Baron Hillingdon and there are various memorials to members of that family.

The outstanding one of these is the exquisitely moulded bronze figure of Elizabeth Mills who died in 1908 at the age of six. She is shown as a child asleep between two angels' wings. It is possibly the most original work in the church and is shown on page 15. Another gift of the Mills family, namely the Lectern, commemorates three of their members who died in the First World War. It is the figure of the Angel of Victory holding a laurel wreath of victory and the carving is as well executed in wood as that of the Elizabeth Mills bronze mentioned above. It is a pity that there is no record in either case of the designer, architect, or craftsman concerned — possibly the same in both cases.

One final memorial should be singled out — namely the tablet over the entrance to the vestry to John Theobald and his wife Clemence who, before she died, was mother, grandmother and great grandmother to 115 children! The tablet is decorated with Ionic side-pilasters and was set up after her death in 1605.



#### OTHER FEATURES

The Pulpit is Jacobean; likewise the Font cover, both good and typical examples of the work in the early 17th century. It is possible that the font pedestal and base are of the 14th century, though the bowl itself is modern.

There is a fine brass Chandelier hanging in the Nave, given in 1725 and bearing an inscription saying that it was "In memory of Dr. Maximilian Buck, Vicar of Seal 1674 to 1720. The gift of Ms Rebecca Buck 1725."

#### THE HALLOWING of a CHURCH

This is initiated by its consecration by a Bishop. It is carried on after that by the prayers of those who meet in it for the Sacraments and for worship. This feeling of being a building set aside for the Glory of God is emphasised by the gifts of people made out of gratitude and love.

Seal Church is rich in these. Apart from the monuments already mentioned there is the fact that the South Aisle was rescated in oak pews before the Second World War in memory of individuals whose names are commemorated on each one.

In 1966 an appeal was launched as a memorial to Philip Lea, Vicar from 1960 to 1965. Part of the money raised was sent to the Church of

South India where he had worked for many years as a Missionary. The other part became the nucleus of a fund by which new oak pews were put into all the remainder of the Church. The money for this came in as individual gifts—as the tablets on them bear witness — and as the result of a corporate effort by the congregation on one of their annual Gift Days.

The opportunity was taken to remove the old wooden flooring and replace it with a concrete one. This work was continued in 1973 into the Lady Chapel which was also redecorated and fitted with new seating in memory of Stanley Berwick, a much loved Churchwarden and Lay Reader, and his wife Edith.

The silver of the church includes a Jacobean chalice and patten of 1674 given by Dr. Maximilian Buck, a Georgian silver flagon, a Victorian chalice and patten and a more modern ciborium and chalice and patten. All these have been gifts to the church that people loved.

The church possesses a tithe map of the parish in 1839 which is very interesting (a copy is in the Archives Department in County Hall, Maidstone) and other records of bygone days—though many books are on loan and in safe preservation, to the County.

#### THOMAS THEOBALD

An unusual and absentee incumbent was Thomas Theobald, vicar from 1524 to 1542. He was born of a Seal family and was a Godson of Sir Thomas Boleyn of Hever. He travelled extensively on the continent as an agent, sending back information to Henry VIII's ministers. Some of these letters exist among the State Papers. He studied at Louvain and Tübingen universities and followed the reformers. He died a Catholic in 1550 and was buried at the Greyfriars at the Louvain.

*Finally—a prayer: 'God, make the door of this House wide enough to receive all who need human love, fellowship, and the Father's care, and narrow enough to shut out envy, pride and hate. Make its threshold smooth enough to be inviting to children or straying feet, but rugged enough to turn back the tempter's power. God make the door of this House the gateway to Thy Eternal Kingdom.'*



The Elizabeth Mills memorial in the Lady Chapel

**INCUMBENTS OF KEMSING  
AND SEAL**

Seal was a Chapelry of the Parish  
of Kemsing until 1874

(1265)*	Richarde de Kemesinge	(after 1431)	William Aldebarough	1654	John Stevens (or Stephens)
(1294)*	Jacobus (James) Sinobaldi	1437	Richard Lirtelman	1668	Thomas Stevens
1317	John de Dittonc	1438	John Gorsich	1669	John Tattersall
1326	Richard de Theukesbury	1445	Henry Esthaw	1674 †	Maximilian Buck, D.D.
1327	Richard Duraunt	1456	John Willeston	1720	Robert Parran
1338	Gilbert de Keleshill	1458	Richard Cutler	1739	Thomas Curteis
1341	Thomas de Hope	1460	William Englissh	1744	Gregory Sharpe
1348	William de Pencbrugge	1464	Richard Cutler	1761 †	Carswell Winder
1354	John de Shippedham	1478	Robert Snowe	1770 †	William Humphry
(1370)*	Richard Meany (or Mowys)	(1492)*	William Yanson	1816 †	Gervas Whitehead
1370	Thomas Perd	1508	William Lincoln	1838	John Harward
1396	Thomas Ridlyngton	1509	Nicholas Metcalf	1846 †	Thomas O. Blackall
1399	Adam Usk (who twice narrowly escaped a Bishopric, but his enemies were strong enough to keep him out of both Hereford and St. David's)	1517	Richard Sharpe		
1402	Rodelandus (Roland)	1524 †	Thomas Theobald	<b>VICARS OF SEAL ONLY</b>	
1417	Kerbroke	(1542)*	John Semnocke	1874 †	Charles Edward Few
—	John Jordan	(1545)*	John Denman	1912	Septimus Hebert
1422	William Matthew (or Mathew)	1550	Thomas Hicklyng (dispossessed of the living during the persecutions in the reign of Queen Mary Tudor)	1920 †	Henry Jones-Davies
1426	Thomas Stour	1554	Thomas Tayllour	1945	Leslie Hills, M.C.
1426	Stephen Porchet	1558	Thomas Dale	1960 †	Philip Lea
1431	Thomas Well	1561	Gilbert Gennyns (or Jenyns)	1966	Stephen Crookshank
		1602	Richard Buckley	1973	John Barnard
		1608	Robert Baker	1983	Robert Goldspink
		1644	John Baker	1988	Alan Morris
		1650	'Master' Marten, alias Barton (an interloper during the Cromwellian Commonwealth). At this time Seal gained a large measure of independence.		

\* These are chance references

† There are memorials of one sort or  
another to these (or to members of  
their families) in the church.

(The illuminated and decorative list of  
the incumbents, which is displayed in  
the Church was given in memory of  
Philip Lea, Vicar of Seal from 1960  
to 1965, by his wife Audrey.)

*This Guide was revised and reprinted 1992.*

