

Village Trail

Charing



Charing High Street, early 1900s



The Same View, 2019



CHARING & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

www.charinghistory.co.uk

Historical Background

Charing lies on a line of springs that surface where the porous chalk of the North Downs lies above the impervious clay. The earliest archaeological evidence of human habitation in the parish comes from a recently discovered early Roman cemetery, which contains high-class burial goods; there is also evidence for Roman buildings in the vicinity. The name Charing is thought to derive from that of a local Jutish chief, 'Ceorra' (pronounced Cheorra), of the Anglo-Saxon period.

Charing was given to the Church of Canterbury by Egbert II, King of Kent between 765-780, and the manor remained the property of the archbishops until Henry VIII took it from Archbishop Cranmer in 1545. The land below the Downs has always been a major transport route. An Iron Age track at the top of the Downs was duplicated by another at the foot, which became incorporated into the North Downs Way, now known as the Pilgrim's Way. In the Middle Ages, a road from London to Canterbury and the coast, passed through the village. This was used by the archbishops, who established a manor house here, a day's journey from Canterbury. A market grew up outside the manor gates, and the present settlement was largely in place by the fifteenth century.

In the eighteenth century some elegant houses were built, and access was improved by two rival turnpike roads which had to share the High Street – a situation which occasionally led to violence. Small alehouses gave way to large coaching inns, but these declined in importance with the coming of the railway in 1884.

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1 The Church



The earliest parts of the present church, dedicated to SS Peter and Paul, are the chancel, nave and parts of the south transept. It was built of flint in the early 13th century, the clues being the single lancet windows and simple roll moulding beneath the east window of the south transept. The original transepts and nave were updated in the early 14th century when larger windows were inserted, followed shortly by the vestry. The stone tower at the west end and the porch were built by the parishioners in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, many bequests towards their building being recorded in local wills. In 1590 a disastrous fire destroyed the church roof and most of the interior. Records describe arrangements to prevent looting, to recover salvage and to seek new roof timbers. The parishioners, who were responsible for the nave, completed the main repairs by 1592, the date being visible on one of the unusual painted beams next to the chancel arch. The lessee of the Rectory was responsible for the chancel, and he took 30 years to repair that roof. One item of interest is the wooden screen in front of the choir stalls. It is not immediately obvious that it is a memorial to the First World War, until you read the gilded inscription along the lower section of the panels. The screen was unveiled and dedicated on 9 November 1923. The interior has many other interesting features, described on printed boards available for the use of visitors.

2 The Barn behind the church was 'imported' from High Halden. It was purchased for £150, moved piece by piece and re-erected in Charing in 1957. It is used for many functions including theatrical productions by the Charing Guild of Players, along with Cream Teas on summer Sundays.

3 The Vicarage Close has two separate buildings. The left-hand range is one of the oldest surviving houses in Charing and may have been the early vicarage. It has an open hall dating circa 1400 in a style known as a 'Wealden'. The building facing you was built in the early 16th century as a first-floor church hall with storage below. It was later converted to a house and became the Vicarage in the 19th century.

4 The Palace of the Archbishops *is private property and visitors must not go beyond the gateway.* It was reputedly one of Thomas Becket's favourite residences, but the present buildings date from the early 14th century. From the churchyard you can see the former Great Hall, now a barn. The Palace was entered via the gateway, under which, to the left, are the doorway and window of the porter's lodge. Directly facing you are the archbishop's private apartments, built of stone in the 14th century and heightened in decorative brickwork 150 years later. Over the gateway was a fine chamber with a fireplace, the back of which was made of medieval tiles set in a herring-bone pattern. The buildings along the street contained lodgings for the archbishop's visitors and retinue. The cottage to the west, and the building behind, were the garderobes, or communal toilet blocks, required for visitors as the archbishops entertained on a vast scale. On 26 March 1343, 80 horses were stabled, 212 loaves were baked, 300 herring and many other fish eaten, and 82 gallons of beer and 27 gallons of wine drunk. Henry VIII took the Palace from the archbishops in 1545, and it was sold into private ownership in 1629. When visiting the church the Archbishop of Canterbury still robes in the Palace.

5 The Market Place



This is in a traditional site outside the lord of the manor's gates. It had a row of small lock-up shops supplemented with boards and trestles on market days. The market, which never needed a royal charter because of its antiquity, flourished in the Middle Ages but declined during the 16th century.

6 Clewards Meadow lies south of the Market Place. It belonged to the lord of the manor, but is now a permanent Village Green. A survey suggested it once contained fish ponds, fish being an essential part of the ecclesiastical diet.

7 The Sundial Garden and Memorial to Corporal Frederick George Coppins VC

are situated in the Market Place, the official name of which is 'Clewards Garden' due to the proximity to Clewards Meadow on the other side of the flint wall. However since the 'analemmatic' or 'human sundial' was added, it is now usually known as 'The Sundial Garden'. On 9 August 2018, Charing celebrated the centenary of the award of the Victoria Cross to Corporal Frederick George Coppins for his bravery in an encounter at Hackett Woods, near Amiens in France during WW1. Corporal Coppins was born in Charing, and is the only person born in the Borough of Ashford to be awarded the VC. The centenary was marked with a commemorative ceremony,

during which this lasting memorial to his achievement was unveiled.

The design of the stone Victoria Cross is unique in the UK. Corporal Coppins survived the war and died peacefully in Oakland (California) in 1960.

Please pause for a few moments here, and reflect on those who like him, were involved in this and other conflicts over the years.

8 No 4 The Market Place was the old Poor House, and has a small window (outlined in white) through which alms were given to poor travellers. The garage to the east once housed the manual fire engine.

9 No 54 High Street was built in the 15th century. Richard Dubble, a grocer, lived here in the early 17th century, selling raisins and sugar, bolts of cloth such as linsey-wolsey, tobacco and pipes, gunpowder and aqua vitae. Originally this house did not front on to the High Street, but faced the one across the lane to the Palace and Church.

10 No 50 High Street, on the opposite side of the lane entrance, was once of similar form to Richard Dubble's, but is now much altered.

11 Elizabethan Court

Formerly the Swan Inn, contains a medieval timber building, enlarged in brick in the 17th century and later. Note the blocked-up windows on the



upper floors It was probably an inn from the 13th century when we know the archbishops owned an inn in the village. The name, 'The Swan', is an early one. The large iron bracket carried the sign.

12 The Old School House, built in the 18th century, was the first known school in Charing. Girls were taught upstairs and boys below. Wheler House, next door, became the schoolmaster's house. After the school was moved to School Road following the Education Act of 1870, the house had many uses, including as Charing's first post office.

13 Wakeley House

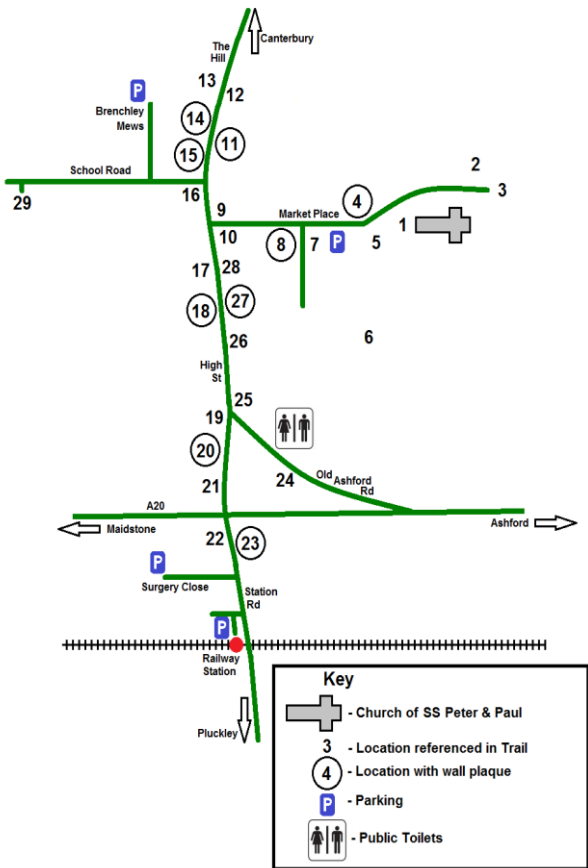
was built by Edward Wakeley in 1718. It is one of a number of elegant dwellings of this period in the High Street, and has finely decorated window heads.



14 No 61 (Venture Works) This is opposite Old School House, and was a corn chandlers. The Cackett family, who lived there early in the 20th century, had first a bicycle and then an early motor car business. They were credited with building a motorbike named the 'Invicta'. Note the early petrol pump.

15 Ludwell House dates to the early 18th century. A monument to Elizabeth Ludwell, who died in 1765, is in the church. She was a generous benefactor to Charing, providing money for a schoolmaster; a trust fund still provides for students.

16 The 'Wady & Brett' Shop is a medieval building. It originally faced School Road, which was the main early medieval through-road from Maidstone to Ashford past the church. The road was later moved north and then south of the village, until the A20 was created in 1928 cutting through the lower part of the village.



*This Village Trail is defined partly by wall plaques erected by the **Charing & District Local History Society**, and starts at the Church, visits the Barn and The Old Vicarage behind the Church, then passes through the Market Place and turns right into the High Street.*

Thank you to **Charing Parish Council** & **Ardo UK Ltd** for sponsoring the printing of this leaflet.



17 Peirce House

has a well documented history. In the Middle Ages the house was at least twice its present size, but half the open hall and the entire parlour end were demolished. In the early 16th century the Brent family added the fine porch and doorway. Margaret Brent married George Nevill (Lord Abergavenny) around

1501, and the spandrels over the porch doorway contain the arms of the Brents (left), and the crossed staples badge of the Nevills (right).



18 Nos 27 & 29 were built in the early 16th century as a row of shop units. Note the unusual survival of the original shop windows and doorway behind the name board 'Sherbourne House'. Upstairs there may have been workshops, probably used by leather workers or weavers. In the 17th century the north end became a dwelling.



19 No 19

The earliest part, to the north, is a medieval cross wing containing a purpose-built shop on the ground floor. Note the winged wheel of the 'Cyclists Touring Club' which may have been moved there from The Swan when the latter closed in the 1970s.



20 No 9 This building has the remains of a lath and plaster chimney in the roof.

21 The Oak Public House formerly housed the Assembly Rooms on the first floor, where many local functions took place. Regrettably it closed in 2016, but has subsequently been listed as a 'village asset' by the Parish Council, which limits its future use to that of a Public House, Restaurant, Hotel or similar. The village hopes that one day it will reopen as a village pub.

22 The Parish Hall can be found on the south side of the A20, in Station Road. It was built in honour of Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1897. The Memorial Porch was added after the end of the First World War and contains the names of those from Charing who lost their lives in the conflict.

The names of those who died in the Second World War and in Afghanistan have now been added. During WW1, it was used as a Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) hospital, and was one of three in Charing. These all closed in March 1919.

23 The Old House

is opposite The Parish Hall. The rear part contains medieval timbers, but the timber-framed front part was rebuilt in the early 17th century. At one time it was used as a poor house, and the memoirs of a man born in 1864 describe the eviction of a pauper family.



'They were dressed in sacking with no footwear at all - there were eight children, two of them died from exposure and being underfed'.

24 Tanners

was likely to have been connected with a local industry. In the 17th century Charing had a tannery and many associated trades such as fellmongers (dealers in animal hides), glovers, saddlers, cordwainers (makers of fine shoes) and cobblers. The present brick building dates to the 18th century and may have been a meeting house.

25 Ridgemount and No 28

were once one medieval house. In the 17th century the north end, now No. 28, was rebuilt. The hall dais has an inscription that reads *'As God hath but His earthly foode - Our bodies to preserve - So Heavenly foode He hath in store - For us if Him we serve. 1616'*.

26 Nos 30 & 32

are two small medieval houses, hidden behind the Georgian facades. No 32 has evidence of three periods of heating: an open hearth on the floor of the hall, a lath and plaster chimney, and the brick stack which followed that. The roof space over the open hearth is still heavily sooted from the earliest period.

27 Nos 38, 40 & 42 are a 17th-century building, modernised in the 19th century. For a time this was the Post Office – note the posting slot. The plaque on the wall shows some of the many trades that have prospered in Charing.

28 Nos 44, 46 & 48 were once one medieval house. The upper floors of the end bays have thin mathematical tiles over timber framing, best seen at the north-east corner. The building was used by wig-makers, patten-makers and barbers.

29 **The Cemetery** is located in School Road immediately beyond the Primary School. It was opened in the mid-1880s when burials in the Churchyard ceased.

In the middle you will find an information board about Captain Ronald Neil Stuart VC, DSO, near his grave. He served with the Royal Navy, and was also awarded the French *Croix de Guerre avec Palmes* and the US Navy Cross. He was born in Liverpool where his VC was commemorated in 2017. He died on 8 February 1954, aged 68, in Charing. The information board also contains details of First and Second World War graves and family memorials of servicemen associated with Charing who were lost. These are all marked with a large red poppy.



The Church and Archbishop's Palace