

CENTURIES

A Brief History



L. W. A. Osborne

Edited by John Osborne

To Dora, for if it had not been for her foresight and love of old things, I would never have lived in *Centuries* and become so close to it and enjoyed learning more about this lovable house.

L.W.A. Osborne 1980

This little book is edited and published in memory of my parents, Lionel and Dora, who purchased *Centuries* in 1965 and gave so much of their love of life to their home and the community of Hythe.

John Osborne 2011

This booklet is produced here just as John Osborne wrote and drew all the illustrations and maps, with just a few minor corrections. He did not complete editing it before he returned to America and current findings have changed some of the views expressed by John, who admits to erring on the romantic side.

I thought it best to leave it essentially unchanged but with some a few additional notes.

R.G

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In the early thirteenth century, *Centuries* was on the quayside at the bottom of Clyme Hill, the main road to Saltwood and beyond to Canterbury. Local fishing boats and larger ships from France, Northern Europe and the Mediterranean would have filled this bustling dock.

The sketch of the 13th Century 'quayside 'dock'. It now seems more likely to be a stade (beach) where small boats were pulled up facing north/south, after unloading from bigger ships anchored off shore. Not east/west alongside a dock. John Osborne's lovely drawing has been left but should now, not be regarded as strictly accurate.

Setting the Stage

The North Downs run southeast towards the Channel ending at the White Cliffs on the coast of Kent, while the South Downs run parallel and to the south towards the Sussex coast at Beachy Head. Between these grassy chalk hills lies the Weald, fertile and heavily forested, terminating in a vast lagoon protected from the Channel storms by a sweeping shingle bar breached at the east end by the River Limen, allowing shipping access from the sea to the shelter of the lagoon.

From the earliest of times settlements, primarily engaged in fishing and sea-trading, were dotted along the shore at the bottom of the greensand and gault clay escarpment known as the *Roughs*. It was at one of these locations, just to the west of Hythe, that the Romans built *Portus Lemanis* and the fort of *Stutfall* just west of West Hythe. The Romans constructed a breakwater known as the *Rhee Wall* to protect their fleet. It was this, together with a major storm that changed the course of the Limen, causing the original harbour and lagoon to silt up over hundreds of years. Lympne and West Hythe became derelict and trade, merchants and commerce migrated eastward to Hythe with its deep-water port.

It was in 1170 when four knights sailed from France at the urging of King Henry II, moored their boat at the bottom of Clyme Hill, rode up the hill to Saltwood Castle where they stayed the night, and the next day rode on to Canterbury and murdered Thomas à Becket. And there were others passing to and from Europe who would have used the mooring in front of *Centuries* as their embarking point. Pilgrims and crusaders on their way to the Holy Land, kings and statesmen conducting their shuttle diplomacy, all came and went through Hethe Haven.

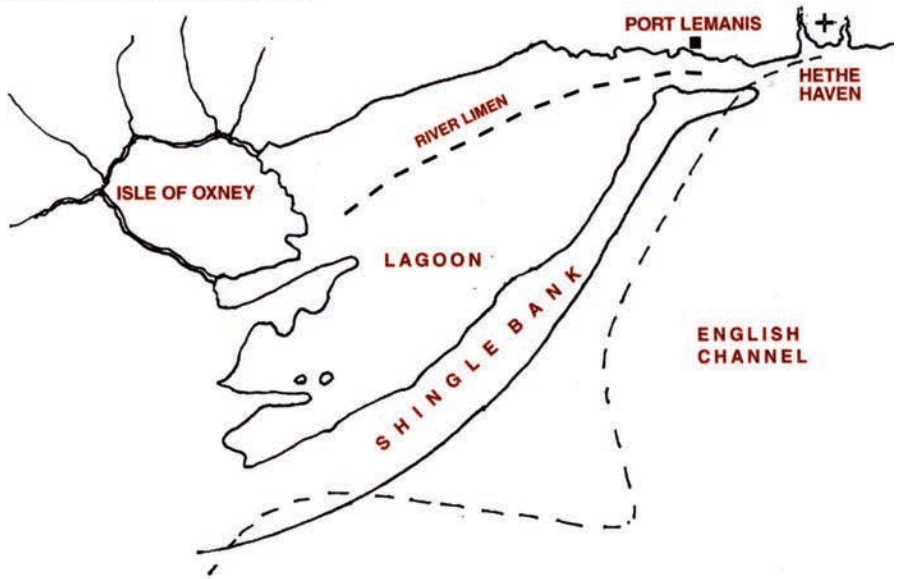
Stutfall Castle was one of the late Roman forts of the Saxon Shore and now almost unrecognisable, due to numerous landslips along the *Roughs*.

It is doubtful that *Portus Lemanis* was ever a 'deepwater' port more likely a sheltered bay harbour with a stade and perhaps a fortlet and harbour buildings. It never seems to have been well fortified, perhaps because the Romans were very 'friendly' with the locals! This is not to say it wasn't important - the Romans would never have built Stone Street if that were not the case.

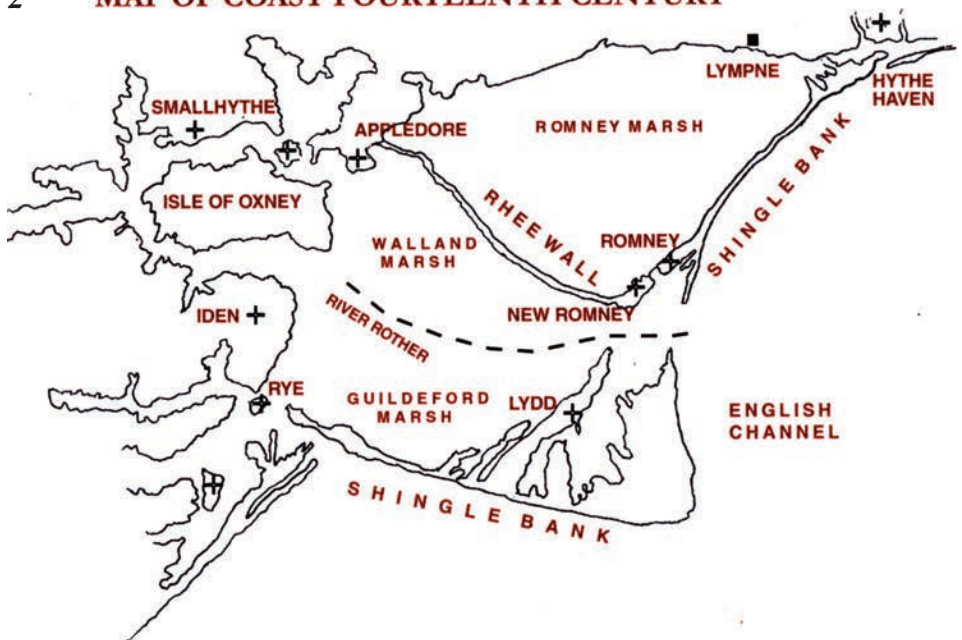
Since 1980, it now seems generally held that the Romans did not build the *Rhee wall* (see Jill Eddison and others).

Some historical accounts say that 2 of the Knights landed at Romney/Hastings and at Dover/Sandwich. Traditionally, some of the assassins landed at Hythe and others at nearby Cinque Ports, although all 4 then met up at Saltwood Castle.

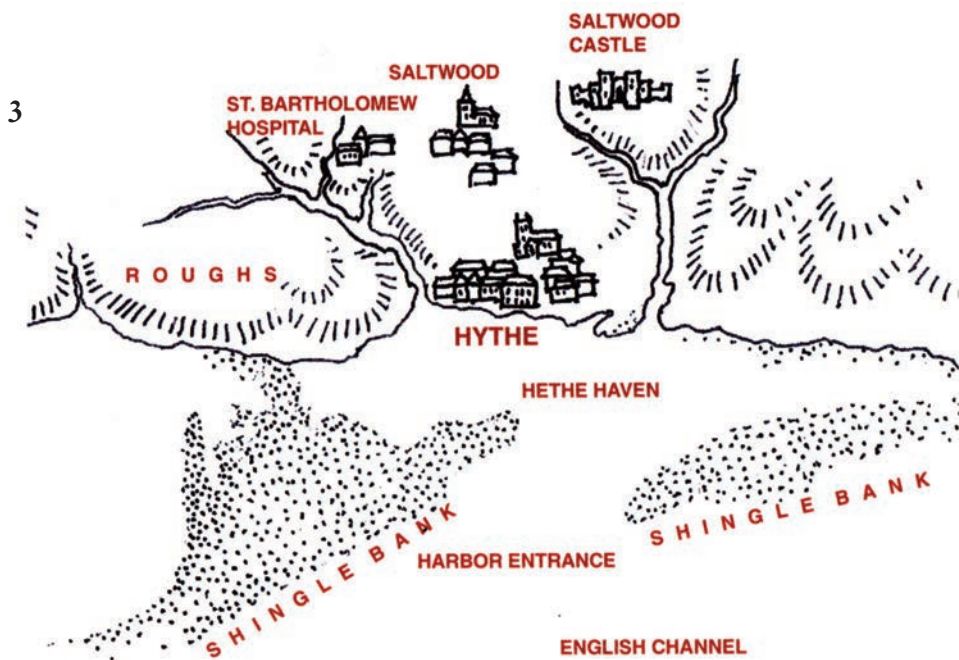
1 . MAP OF COAST 55 BC



2 MAP OF COAST FOURTEENTH CENTURY



It was in 1107, just forty-one years after the Norman Invasion, that a gentleman by the name of Noble built a simple two-storey stone structure with a sizable cellar for storage and trade. Built of local ragstone, it was in a preminent location on the docks at the bottom of the main road to Canterbury, and must have been at the centre of life in Hythe in the early twelfth century. There is evidence that this Noble was in the import/export trade, exporting local products across to France and importing French brandy and wine. The Noble's family prospered at *Centuries* and it was in 1275 that a boy was born to the Nobles and baptized Haymo at St Leonard's Church just one hundred yards up Clyme Hill (now Church Hill) from his birthplace.



Map 1. Shows the coastline at the time the Romans arrived in 55 AD, with the entrance to the lagoon to the west near Hythe. The dashed line denotes the existing coastline.

Map 2. Shows the coastline in medieval times with the River Rother emptying into the Chanel at Romney.

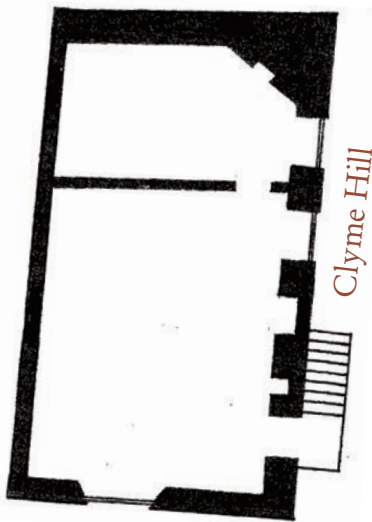
Map 3. Shows the port of Hythe as it would have been when *Centuries* was built.



Centuries as it stands today showing the 1107 structure with its fourteenth century addition on the left. The line on the wall where the ragstone changes to sandstone can be clearly seen. The steps on Church Hill are a later twentieth century addition to the original dirt and cobble hill to Canterbury, once called Clyme Hill.

The Birth & Survival of a Medieval House

Built of Kentish ragstone and wide-joined rubble, a simple two-storey structure, with a raised entrance by way of an outside wooden staircase on the east side, was constructed in 1107. The cellar, with its door facing the dock, was used for storage and trade while the ground and first floor were living quarters. The original cellar door remains but the south facing windows probably had horizontal lintels and a central stone mullion in the Norman style and were later adapted to the pointed Gothic arches when the west addition was built in 1336. There is a large stone on the southeast corner that is probably one of the original mooring bollards. The aumbry, or niche, in the west interior wall of the cellar may well be of Saxon origin.



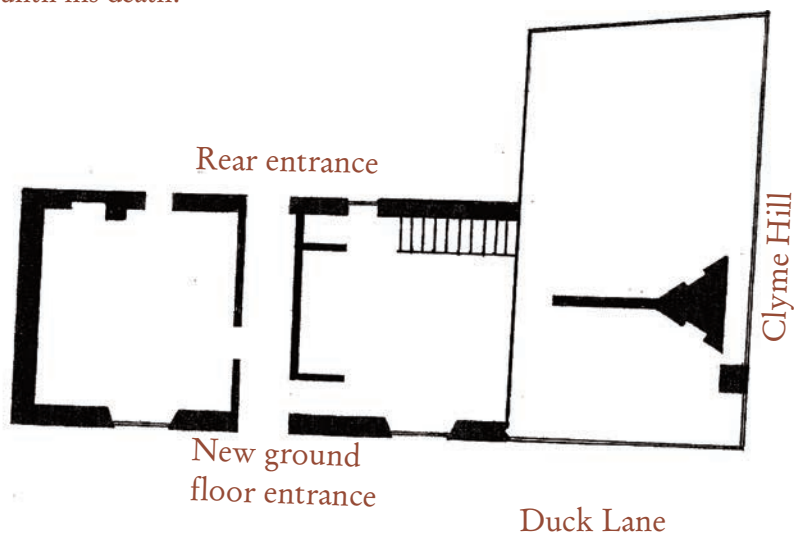
The original structure built in 1107 was located at the bottom of the hill road now known as Church Hill and facing the docks. It was built on the site of an older Saxon dwelling. Note the outside wooden stairs leading to the first floor. Remains of the stairs and landing can still be seen in the East wall. The chimney breast in the Northeast corner had a fire hearth on both the ground and first floor.

The descriptions 'aumbry' and 'mooring bollard' are quite speculative but as there is no better explanation at present, should remain as part of the charm of *Centuries*.

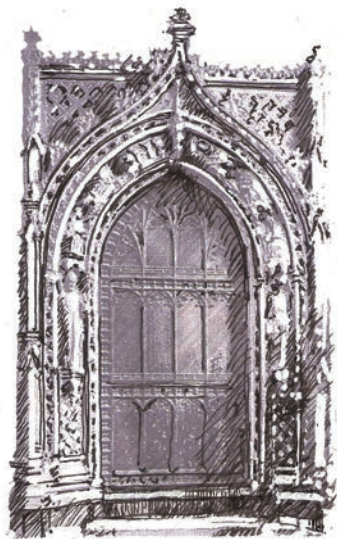
Little changed to the structure of *Centuries* until 1336, when the west wing was added by Haymo de Hythe, then Bishop of Rochester. It was built of roughly squared sandstone rubble with simple gothic arched windows and a central door with a new entrance on Duck Lane. It was possibly at this time that the windows above the cellar door were converted to pointed arches in keeping with the new addition. The outside wooden steps were demolished and an interior stairway built. In the west interior wall of the cellar, a stairway to the living quarters was constructed. There were a number of attached and free standing out-houses on the north side of the house but they have since been demolished. It is believed they were added in the 16th century.

Haymo de Hethe, the boy born in 1275 and baptized in St. Leonard's Church, grew up in *Centuries* and as a young man became a novitiate with

The 1334 addition to the west along the quayside on Duck Lane was added by Haymo de Hythe. The external stairs were removed and an interior staircase added. At this time it is possible that the Gothic style windows and main door were built and the windows on the 1107 structure were faced to match the new ones. Haymo used the house as a summer residence from 1336 until his death.



the Benedictine Brothers at their Priory in Hythe. He later moved to St. Andrew's Priory in Rochester where he became the private secretary and chaplain to the Bishop. In 1316, at the age of 41, he became Bishop Elect and in 1319 was ordained Haymo, Bishop of Rochester. Among his many architectural accomplishments is the door to the Chapterhouse at Rochester Cathedral which is regarded as one of the finest examples of Decorative Gothic architecture in England.



With donations collected from pilgrims visiting St. William of Rochester's shrine Bishop Haymo was able to build the Chapterhouse Door, considered to be one of the finest examples of Decorative Gothic architecture in England, and rebuild the main tower of the cathedral. Among his other architectural accomplishments are the Great Hall at Hallinge and the Palace at Trottscliffe, Kent.

In 1361 the Plague descended on Hythe, leaving many without a livelihood, followed just forty years later with a fire that destroyed most of the buildings and a number of ships in the harbour. These events, together with the continued silting of the harbour, led to Hythe's decline. Although Haymo originally intended *Centuries* to be his summer residence it was just two years after the construction of the west wing, at the urging of his father, that he decided to turn *Centuries* into an alms house to offer shelter and sustenance to poor men and women who through no fault of their own had fallen on hard times. In the original charter of 1336 it was to be called St. Andrew's Hospital, after the patron saint of his priory in Rochester and a Kinds (King's) License from Edward III was received. Haymo later turned the property over to the Priory Brothers at Hythe for safe-keeping.

It was not for another three hundred-plus years, about 1574, that Haymo's intentions were realized and *Centuries* finally became a functioning alms house. Before then it was decided that St. Bartholomew's Hospital, the alms house run by the Priory Brothers at Saltwood, would be used instead, and *Centuries* remained a simple residence owned by the monks.

The Reformation and Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII resulted in the destruction of the Priory and St. Bartholomew's Almshouse in Saltwood. Miraculously, *Centuries* remained unharmed and St. Andrew's Hospital was renamed St. Bartholomew's Hospital in 1685, opening its doors as an alms house as Haymo had wished.

By this time the harbour had completely silted up and Duck Lane was renamed Bartholomew Street. The Lagoon, which had provided Hythe's economic prowess, had become what we now know as part of Romney Marsh. *Centuries* was no longer on the docks but simply nestled in the centre of an Elizabethan town. What few ships remained, were winched up on the shingle beach on the Stade and *Centuries* was some half mile inland from the sea.

The structural changes at this time were to the interior with the exception of four sash windows installed on the east wall. These were imported from Holland and are reportedly some of the earliest examples of sash windows in England. The larger rooms were divided to make accommodation for the residents and fireplaces were added for heating. Wood panelling was installed on the walls in the main hall. Evidence of this is to be found in the numerous handwritten receipts for building materials and labour from the late 1500's to 1685 that were found in the building and remain in the possession of the current owners.

There was a flurry of activity at *Centuries* in the late 16th and early 17th centuries as the Priors prepared for St. Andrew's Hospital to become St. Bartholomew's Hospital and open its doors as a refuge for ten men and women who had fallen on hard times. The bills and receipts on the following page are a few of many from that period that were found in the attic of *Centuries*. They are in the English of the time and some are by educated hands while others are simply written by tradesmen.

Receipt for apparel dated 1603. Lists of material and labour totalling one pound, fifteen shillings and threepence.

A handwritten receipt on aged paper from 1603. The text is written in a cursive script and lists various items and their costs in a columnar format. The items include materials and labor, with a total sum of one pound, fifteen shillings, and threepence.

Bill for bricklaying dated 1605.

A handwritten bill for bricklaying from 1605. The text is written in a cursive script and details the work done, including the laying of bricks and the cost of materials and labor. The bill is written on aged, slightly stained paper.

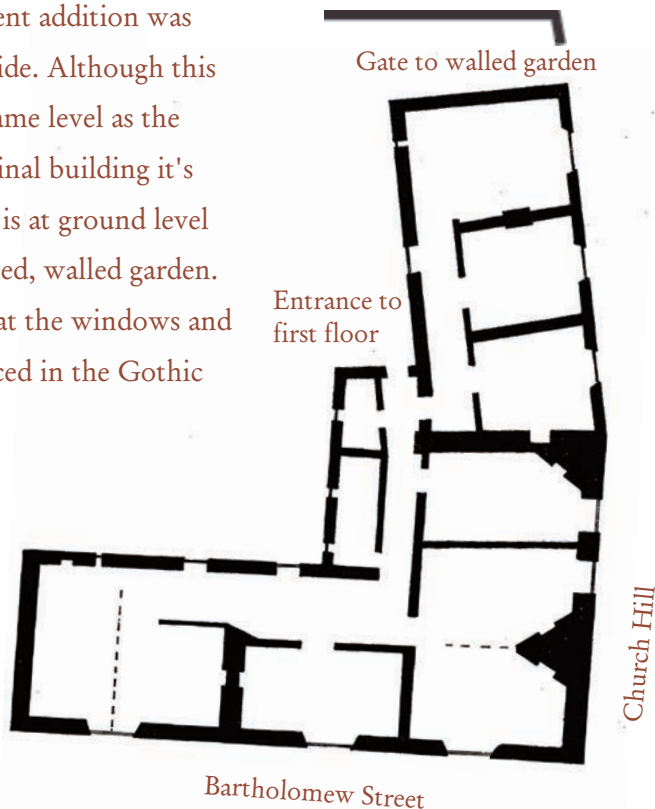
Bill for carpentry dated 1612 for four pounds and four shillings that shows an itemized list of material and labour.

A handwritten bill for carpentry from 1612. The text is written in a cursive script and shows an itemized list of materials and labor. The bill is written on aged paper and includes a total sum of four pounds and four shillings.

Bill for bricklaying dated November 8 day 1642 for a total of seven shillings.

A handwritten bill for bricklaying from 1642. The text is written in a cursive script and lists items and their costs in a columnar format. The items include materials and labor, with a total sum of seven shillings. The bill is written on aged paper and includes the date 'November 8 1642' and the signature 'Wm. L. ...'

In 1811 the most recent addition was added on the north side. Although this addition it is at the same level as the first floor of the original building it's entrance, at the rear, is at ground level and accessed via a gated, walled garden. It was at this time that the windows and front door were refaced in the Gothic style.



In 1811 an addition was built on the northeast side of the house, running from the north wall of the 1107 structure up Clyme Hill, now called Church Hill. This late Georgian addition preserved the architectural style and was constructed of square cut ragstone. The windows are in the Gothic style and the windows and doors on the south side of the building were refaced in the same style.

Only the cellar door remains in its original medieval form. This wing was added to make room for more residents, and in Victorian times an addition with toilets and scullery was added and this now provides a rear entrance to the property via the walled garden.

Changes have been made, out-buildings demolished, gardens tended, streets paved, street lights installed and steps added to Church Hill. Hythe was evacuated during WWII. Bombs fell and damaged adjacent structures and in 1941 *Centuries* was facing demolition. Thankfully it was purchase by



The aumbry in the west cellar wall possibly held a statue of the Blessed Virgin or a vessel of Holy Water.



A surviving section of the wainscoting that covered the walls of the Main Hall on the ground floor in the early 's

James Rosslyn Smith, the demolition was thwarted and *Centuries* was split into two flats, and the interior stairs were removed. (Was Mr. Smith an angel sent by Haymo to preserve his beloved home?)

In 1965 *Centuries* was purchase by Lionel and Dora Osborne who were to honour its history, preserve its charm and tastefully and carefully modernize the interior to current living standards. The house was left to their son John with the clear understanding that it was to be preserved, loved and handed down to future generations.

Life on the Hill is idyllic, peaceful and above all filled with joy. John and his wife Milaena live in the house, their daughter Phoebe was christened at St. Leonard's Church and Lionel and Dora are buried in the graveyard there. As for John and Milaena, they plan on growing roots that will see *Centuries* surviving to the 22nd Century and beyond. They trust that Haymo will smile down on them and assist in the continued preservation of this magical building.

It should be noted that John Osborne got the Listed status for *Centuries*, raised from Grade 2 to Grade 2*.

Chronological Table of Significant Events:

- 43 AD Claudian Invasion
 - 456 Battle between the Britons and Saxon invaders fought in Hythe
 - 731 Salt Charter of Sampton/Hythe given to Hythe by King Ethelbert
 - 833 King Egbert, First king of the English, confirmed the Salt Charter
 - 1034 King Canute gives the Salt Charter to the Benedictine Priors
 - 1064 Cinque Port's ships used by Godwin against Edward the Confessor
 - 1066 Norman Invasion
 - 1067 Cinque Port's Charter given to Hythe by William I
- The Cinque Ports consisted of five ports: Sandwich, Dover, Hythe, Romney and Hastings, chartered to supply ships and crew to the king as needed for defence and transport in exchange for certain rights and privileges.
- 1107 *Centuries* original structure built
 - 1199 Corporation formed with the Barons of the Town and Port of Hythe
 - 1275 Birth of Haymo de Hythe, son of Noble
 - 1278 Cinque Ports' Charter confirmed by King Edward I

- 1319 Haymo ordained Bishop of Rochester
- 1334 West addition to *Centuries* planned by Haymo de Hythe
- 1336 Charter of St. Andrew's Hospital, created by Bishop Haymo
- 1361-69 The Plague (Black Death)
- 1402 Fire destroys 200 homes and five ships. 150 men were drowned
by 1409 Hythe fell in to a state of squalor
- 1420-22 Hythe harbour silted up with shingle despite attempts to prevent it
- 1533 Reformation and Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII
- 1685 St. Andrew's Hospital renamed St. Bartholomew Hospital
- 1811 Georgian wing added to the north side of *Centuries* on Church Hill
- 1940 Hythe evacuated, St. Bartholomew's Hospital inmates relocated
and *Centuries* was left vacant and demolition was planned
- 1941 *Centuries* purchased preventing the planned demolition
- 1952 *Centuries* becomes a private residence
- 1965 *Centuries* freehold purchased by Lionel and Dora Osborne

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Acknowledgements & Sources

Jeremy Gaunt:	Ecclesiastic scholar and local historian
Hythe Civic Society:	General history and information gleaned from conversations with members and society sponsored lectures and publications
Hythe Museum:	Maps of Coastline
Kent Archives:	Original Charters of 1336 and 1348
Anne Roper MBE:	Archivist to Corporation of Hythe, local historian and author
The Heaths of Surrey County:	A genealogy of the descendants of Haymo de Hethe compiled by J. Cooke from the State of Virginia Genealogy Database

A Special thanks to

Lionel and Dora Osborne for inspiration

Milaena Sanderson for copy and print editing

1336 Charter of the Foundation of a House for Poor People at Hythe in Honour of St. Andrew

To all the sons of Holy Church under whose notice these presents shall come, Brother Haymo, by divine permission Bishop of Rochester, in the diocese of Canterbury, eternal health in the Lord.

- I. In the administration of the works of piety, since it is not in our power to succour all, the right order of charity indicates it to be in keeping with canonical sanction that the pious, the honest, the aged, the feeble, and the meek, should come before others of different condition.
- II. Long ago we were told, and in our own days we have seen for ourselves, how many there are in the town of the aforesaid port who, in the beginning of their career, were noted for their integrity and affluence, who, later on, when far advanced in years, contrary to all human expectation, were reduced to such a state of destitution that deprived of the consolation of the goods of this life and the assistance of friends, they were forced to beg the bare necessities of life.
- III. Desirous therefore to provide by a work of charity, as necessary as it is worthy, for the needs of poor people of this description, who, as we often read, are visited by hidden judgements of God, either for the meritorious testing of their patience or else for their purgation, we have built and established to God's honour and that of St. Andrew the Apostle, a hospital for the support of the poor according to the regulations herein set forth by us, with the permission and special license of the Most Excellent Prince and Lord, our Lord Edward, by God's grace Illustrious King of England, the Third from the Conquest and with the permission and consent of our revered Father and Lord John, by the same grace Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of All England, upon the spot where we, aforesaid Bishop of Rochester, and our ancestors first saw light, situated in the parish of St. Leonard in the aforesaid town.

- IV. We ordain therefore that to the said hospital lepers shall not be admitted since there is another hospital in the aforesaid town into which such as are afflicted with leprosy are specifically received; but that a community of poor folk may be inaugurated in our hospital ten poor people of both sexes, well advanced in years, and of feeble health, natives of Hythe, or such as have lived there blamelessly for long, as far as possible such as may reasonably be regarded as having been reduced from affluence to poverty without any fault of their own, shall be admitted primarily by us, with unanimous assent, to the aforesaid hospital, and shall be known as the Brothers and Sisters of St. Andrew. Of the number of these one fit and prudent man and better able to work shall be appointed Procurator and Master of the said hospital, and he shall select a mistress for the sisters and provide for the several concerns of the home. To him all the other brothers and sisters shall be reasonably obedient in all things just and lawful which regard the tranquillity and convenience of persons and things.
- V. In the event of the departure or retirement of any of the above mentioned brothers or sisters, others equally poor, and complying with the conditions already set forth, shall be chosen in their place for ever after the following fashion - viz., the candidate for admission shall first be examined as to whether they can repeat correctly, provided they have not lost the use of speech, the Our Father with the Hail Mary, and the Creed, by three qualified men in whose custody the common seal of the Commonality shall remain, or by others to be chosen by the Commonality itself, who shall be known as the guardians of the above home: and if the candidates know what is required of them, and are found to be such as we have described above, then shall they be presented to the master of the said home by the guardians themselves, or in case they disagree, by two of their number, to be cordially welcomed by him, and to dwell thenceforth in the home without question of interference, if it so pleases them, to the end of their lives.

- VI. In case of the death or departure of the master of the said home, the guardians, or two of their number, the third disagreeing, shall advance to the post of procurator and master one of the brothers aforesaid, if a suitable person can be found amongst them, or else some other equally poor man of said town who is fit for the post, who at his installation shall bind himself by a corporal oath to administer faithfully the goals of the said home, and to discharge as far as lies in his power the business of the same advantageously, and to render a strict account, in accordance with the demands of the law, of his administration once a year, and that about the Feast of St. Michael, in the presence of the said guardians and two or three of the brothers.
- VII. Moreover, we ordain the said master, brothers and sisters shall wear an upper garment, if possible of a uniform material, and that they shall be present at solemn Mass and other Church services while they are being celebrated in the aforesaid parish church until such time as they have their own chapel and chaplain, and that each of them shall recite every day, unless reasonably impeded by reason of grave actual infirmity, the Our Father, and Hail Mary, three hundred times for their founders and benefactors. The remainder of the day they shall spend in useful and honest occupations.
- VIII. Moreover, we wish and ordain that each of the said brothers and sisters shall receive each week for their support fourpence from the charity of the founders, to be paid through the hands of the said master, and, if needs be, in the presence of the aforesaid guardians.
- IX. And if through God's grace and the generosity of the faithful the property of the said home shall increase, the number of inmates and their allowance shall be augmented in accordance with the regulations of the said Commonality, fortified with the Authority of the diocesan, by whom also all other matters which may be considered useful according to the said home shall be decided to be inviolably carried out according to the times and emergency cases.

X. In testimony of all which we, Brother Haymo, aforesaid Bishop of Rochester, have affixed our seal, and we, the Commonality of the port of Hythe, our above-mentioned common seal likewise.

Given as regards us, the Bishop of Rochester aforesaid, at Hallinge, in our diocese, on the day previous to the Ides of October, in the year of our Lord 1336; and as regards us, the commonality of the aforesaid at Hythe, on the 5th of the Kalends of November, in the same year of our Lord, and the 10th year of the reign of King Edward the Third after the Conquest.



The Great Seal of St. Bartholomew given to Haymo de Hethe and the Prior Brothers in 1336

Glossary

Aumbry	A recess or niche in a wall often used for keeping sacred object or holy water
Corporal Oath	An oath taken while touching or holding the Blessed Sacrament or Sacred Relic
Gothic Architecture	A building style that was fashionable between 1150 and 1400 and is identified by a pointed arch and high vaulted ceilings
Haven	Old English for a safe sheltered harbour
Hethe	Old English name for Hythe - de Hethe, simply meaning from or of Hythe
North & South Downs	Two ridges of chalk hills running on a northwest/southeast axis in the southeast of England. The North Downs meet the sea at the White Cliffs of Dover in Kent and the South Downs at Beachy Head in Sussex
Romney Marsh	The general name given to the marsh at the mouth of the River Rother. Formally a large lagoon, the marsh consists of four distinct marshes, Romney Marsh, Walland Marsh, Denge Marsh and Guildeford Marsh. The overall area is about 25 miles in width by 10 miles inland
Roughs	Rugged greensand and gault clay escarpment that delineates the original coastline of Romney Marsh
Stade	Shingle beach used as a landing area for fishing boats
Stutfall	The Roman fortified settlement on the high ground above their sheltered port, Lemanis
Wainscot	Wooden panelling on the interior walls
Weald	Forested area of low land between the North and South Downs