

## Time is for the patient at Ticehurst House private clinic

Peace and privacy, skilled treatment and care for psychiatric and general patients is provided at Ticehurst House, South-east England's oldest established private clinic. Time and care devoted to the patient's well-being and comfort is the first consideration of our staff. The standard of individual attention is high, and staffing both by day and night ensures that this standard is properly maintained.

Accommodation consists mainly of single bed sitting-rooms, in which television and radio can be fitted. Other individual requirements are given every consideration. There is a large garage and ample parking space for patients' cars.

We can accommodate short or long stay patients, including the elderly, and a limited number of convalescents. Short term accommodation for the chronically ill and infirm can be booked in advance to enable relatives to go on holiday.

With the customary exception of chronic illness, Ticehurst House charges may be claimed under private hospital treatment insurance schemes. Prospective patients, relatives, friends and doctors are welcome to visit Ticehurst House at any time.

Further information and enquiries to the Medical Secretary, Ticehurst House Private Clinic, Ticehurst, Wadhurst, Sussex. Telephone Ticehurst 391-2.

# IN SEARCH OF AN ABBEY

BY GEORGE F. TULL

**O**F all our pre-Reformation monastery remains, Robertsbridge, the only Cistercian foundation in Sussex, must be the most forgotten. Most books on the county scarcely mention it, perhaps because it remains in private occupation and is not too easily accessible. There is not even a sign-post to direct one from the main road, past the Seven Stars, down East Street to Abbey Farm, but that is really a blessing, since no traffic disturbs its peace. Like Lewes Priory and Battle Abbey, this monastic site retains a deep atmosphere of peace and order, which is especially noticeable on a winter's afternoon, as when I first went there. It is as though tranquility has endured through the centuries, for those who are sensitive to it.

Robert's Bridge, over the (eastern) River Rother, was built about 1170, that is contemporary with the murder of St. Thomas à Becket at Canterbury. The Abbey of Blessed Mary at Robertsbridge was founded a little later in 1176, one of the founders being Robert de St. Martin who was also, by tradition, the builder of the bridge which has given the village its name. Alvred de St. Martin, Sheriff of the

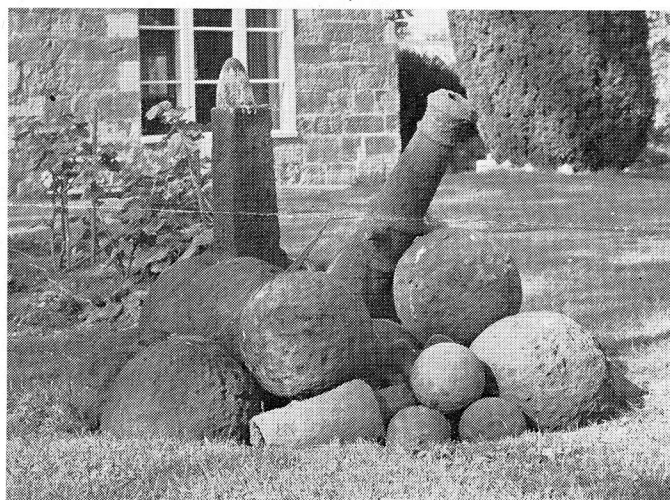
This stone angel supporting a coat of arms was among many interesting finds discovered in the crypt.





**The Refectory ruins.**

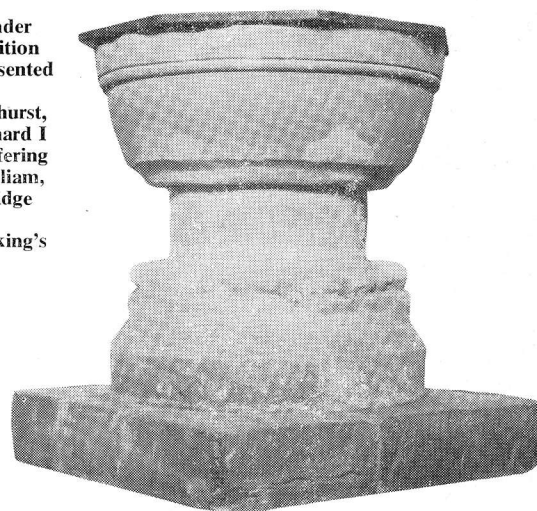
**Cannon and cannon-balls from the iron foundry which was first set up on the abbey lands by Sir John Horrocke in 1541.**



**The crypt.**



**This Salamander Font, so tradition says, was presented to St. Mary's Church, Salehurst, by King Richard I as a thank-offering to Abbot William, of Robertsbridge Abbey, for securing the king's release from captivity in Bavaria.**



abbey was dissolved on April 16, 1538, by order of the despotic Henry VIII. Abbot Tayler had then eight monks, the same number as were resident in 1418.

It is not possible for us to reconstruct an accurate picture of the monastery, though the abbey's 13th-century circular seal shows a composite side of the church with a tall central spire and each gable end topped with a cross; standing figuratively on a bridge of three arches, pointed and trefoiled, and with a round tower embattled at each end, over water. The letters P.R. (above) stand for "Pons Roberti". The reverse of the seal shows the Coronation of the Blessed Virgin, patroness of the abbey. There was also a pointed oval seal, of similar date, used by the abbot personally. The stone mensa from an altar in the abbey church, with its consecration crosses still plainly visible, now stands edgewise supporting a credence shelf in Salehurst Church. The abbey had side altars of the Holy Cross, St. Giles, the Holy martyrs and also a Chapel of St. Mary at the abbey gate. It has been suggested that the Salehurst font, with its unusual design of salamanders round the base, came from the abbey, as also the few small pieces of medieval glass depicting birds.

In spite of being a Cistercian foundation, Robertsbridge does not seem to have possessed large flocks of sheep, possibly because of flooding. Neither had the monks taken advantage of their potential mineral wealth, but immediately after the Dissolution, the secular profit motive asserted itself and Sir William Sidney (to whom the lands of the abbey were granted), set about establishing ironworks, traces of which can still be seen. Sir John Horrocke, priest, then vicar of Salehurst, as agent for the Sidneys, erected a forge and furnace in 1541. The iron foundry operated in the 16th and 17th centuries, at that period of Sussex history when the iron industry was in the ascendant. This probably accounts for the cast-iron tomb slabs from the 1660s in Salehurst Church.

The three fish ponds close to the Rother still exist, though not for any purpose. As I walked in the February sunshine, past hop gardens and oasts, the silence of the countryside could be felt, an essential background to bird-song. At such moments one can think deep thoughts, as no doubt the monks of Robertsbridge did. The life of the world has receded and what is left of the abbey stands in a strangely beautiful isolation at the end of a private road. Abbey House incorporates part of the monastic buildings, the house being most likely the abbot's house (c. 1250), with its well-preserved crypt. In the garden are ruins of the refectory, at first sight a little incongruously.

In the crypt I saw many interesting finds discovered by the present owner and his family; fragments of glazed tiles, stonework from corbels and roof bosses and the delightful stone angel supporting a coat of arms which, though never identified with certainty, also appears with three others on the west porch of Salehurst Church. Much of the stone used was imported from France. Outside the house are cannon balls and other products of the long defunct foundry. I must express warm thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Heath for so kindly showing me all that remains above ground of the abbey and for allowing these photographs to be taken.