

THE FRIARS AYLESFORD

Reported by Patricia Hooper-Sherratt

After our morning visit to The Museum of Kent Life, we arrived at the Friars around lunch-time to a stampede of 1600 children. I was informed there would be a group of children, but not how many! I had to tell Jack to stand still; he was almost in the head-count. They had just finished a service held outside, and were making their way to the picnic area. I have to say, they were very well behaved and if we hadn't experienced the stampede we would hardly have known they were there. While we were in the restaurant having lunch, the children finished their picnic and boarded the coaches to head back for their respective schools. All was very tranquil for the rest of the day.

Visitors were able to watch the potter at work but unfortunately the upholsterer was not there that day.



Aylesford is a centre of prayer and pilgrimage. It has a guesthouse that can accommodate up to 80 people. There is also a conference Centre for businesses and educational projects. The West Barn, built in the 17th century, has been restored to house the tearoom and shop.

Carmelites first came to England with knights returning from the Crusades in the Holy Land. In 1242 Richard de Grey, Lord of Codnor founded a house for them on his manor of Aylesford, with the consent of the bishop of Rochester. As the founder's means were insufficient to complete the building of the church, on 25th January 1247 the Bishop of Rochester, Richard of Wendover, granted a relaxation of thirty days of enjoined penance to all who should contribute to the work. When dedicating the church on 31st August 1248, in honour of the Assumption of the Virgin, the bishop granted an indulgence of forty days to all who visited the church on the day of the dedication and the following week, and who contributed to the support of the house.

Richard of Ingworth, bishop of Dover, visited the White Friars of Aylesford in July 1538 and found that they had sold



much of their necessities. The friars told him that two men came to the prior, saying that the house was given away, and that they had commission to put them out at their pleasure, so they sold what they had and paid their debts. The house was in a 'meet state' (a fit state). Before 13th December 1538, the house was surrendered to the bishop of Dover.

The property was put under the charge of Sir Thomas Wyatt and was in 1542 granted to him by the king in exchange for other estates. Wyatt leased it to John Morse for forty years at an annual rent of 102 shillings. The land consisted of nine acres of arable and eleven of pasture, besides the churchyard, gardens, orchard, ponds, etc. Some of the houses and gardens had been leased shortly before the Dissolution to William Tilgeman and his wife, and to John Clyffe.

On the rebellion of Sir Thomas Wyatt, son of the above, the property was forfeited to the



crown. It was rated for Thomas Morse in 1557 at twenty-six years' purchase, at £132.12s. but it does not seem to have been purchased by him. Elizabeth granted the priory and lands to John Sedley, son of John Sedley of Southfleet. The subsequent history of the site is given by Hasted.

It was the perfect end to a lovely day.