

## THE ARMADA SESSE

A brief résumé of this valuable document

The 'Armada Sess' is a paper document with writing on both sides, and gives the names and amounts each man was duty bound to contribute, according to his wealth. The document is now stored in Canterbury Cathedral Archives.

It opens with the following words -

"This sesse (*or assessment*) was made the 28 day of April 1588, by the consent of the parishioners of Birchington, for and concerning the £23 6s 8d to be paid to the Mayor and Jurratts of Dover, towards the setting out of their ship for viii weeks service as followeth, whereof our part is £5 16s 8d." [The money raised was known as 'Composition Money', because it was composed of contributions from the parishes of "St John's, St Peter's, Goresend and Birchington".]

There follows the list of the names of 40 men and the amounts each of them paid, varying from 3d to £1.

The sum the sesse was fixed to raise amounted to £6 8s 9d.

When the book was closed, Birchington had actually raised £7 2s 6d.

The great Sir Henry Crispe (of the altar tomb in Quex Chapel) had died in 1575 and it appears that in 1588 there was no clear leader in the village to take his place. His elder son, John, had died in 1583 and his grandson Henry (Bonjour) Crispe was only 12 years old at that date.

The great Sir Henry Crispe had another son, Edward, who would have been about 24 at this time, but he does not appear to have taken an active part in the life of the village. In 1643, he signed the Vow and Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant, supporting Parliament, but by then he was about 79 years old, so he was aged about 24 at the date of Armada.

In December 1587 England's Grand Fleet assembled at Queenborough, on the Isle of Sheppey, while Drake's smaller scouting force lay at Plymouth. There was also a light squadron at Dover, to which our payment contributed. This light squadron was to keep an eye on the forces of the Duke of Parma in the Netherlands and try and keep it on land. In May 1588 the Grand Fleet moved first into the Downs and then on to Plymouth to join Drake's scouting force, leaving the light squadron at Dover. On 30<sup>th</sup> May the Armada left Taquis, but was caught in storms in the Bay of Biscay. It finally left Corunna on 12<sup>th</sup> July and came in sight of the Lizard on the 19<sup>th</sup> July. Between 21-30<sup>th</sup> July, a major battle was fought at sea in the English Channel. The Armada was defeated by superior English strategy at sea, a no-boarding policy, and the weather, and also by the fact that no contact was made with the forces of the Duke of Parma, who were landlocked in the Netherlands.

