DISCOVERY

An earlier typed guide to the church [probably 1950s or 1960s] states that "Until about 1700 the bone crypt was discovered 'legend says by a grave digger, who wielding his mattock suddenly found himself precipitated into a dark abyss..... discovering himself in this awful assemblage of past generations.' " The sexton found himself falling through one of the two southern windows to the bone crypt (one pictured below). These windows were likely covered up by the ground soil at the reformation (as they are today). The porch in the south aisle at the south west end is 19th or early 20th century and therefore the original entrance door to the bone crypt would have been from outside.

![Bone Crypt Entrance](image1.png)

The sexton would have been confronted by the following vision (hopefully without the spectral vision of a vicar in the crypt doorway!);

![Bone Crypt Interior](image2.png)

This early 13th century crypt (more correctly known as an ossuary or charnel house) lies beneath the south aisle of the nave and measures 9 metres by 4.5 metres and is 2.5 metres high. Written papers have been published about this bone crypt since it was discovered in about 1700. F G Parsons in 1910 wrote that the bones in Rothwell lie in a true crypt rather than at St Leonard’s Hythe as the Rothwell crypt has;

“..... a groined roof and only a glimmer of natural light, although it once had two windows in the south wall. At the east end are some faint traces of fresco work, which makes it probable that this crypt was once a chapel”. 1

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The fresco was identified in the nineteenth century as being of the Resurrection or Doomsday Painting which would tie in with the chapel's use as an ossuary.

Parsons also notes that in pre-Reformation times there were numerous ossuaries, but by 1910 there were only collections at six locations; Rothwell and Hythe (both extant), Folkestone, Dover, Ripon Minster and Upchurch. When a local bank required its premises enlarging a church vault under Dover's market square car park was opened up which had not been used since the Reformation and a crypt filled with bones was found. Ripon Minster’s bones have now been re-interred. In 1877 at St Mary the Virgin, Upchurch, Kent a crypt was discovered, however these bones have also been re-interred. Dr Crangle has stated that there is evidence of 65 ossuary sites in England & Wales and probably was a lot more.