

Village Echoes

Jane Davidson writes: I recently attended a day in Canterbury as part of a Tudor and Stuart study weekend at Christ Church University which included some entertaining speakers such as David Starkey, and also identified some Goudhurst connections.

I had booked to see 'Canterbury Cathedral Library Treasures'. These were displayed in the old Cathedral library not usually open to the public. I noticed that one of only two pictures hung on the wall was very familiar. It appears in the Tiffin Jubilee Book of 1935 with the title Rev Henry Harrison, First Vicar of Kilndown, but in his 1937 Coronation Book it was pointed out that this was not Henry but Benjamin Harrison, Archdeacon of Maidstone. His portrait had been displayed in Goudhurst Church vestry because of his help with the restoration of the south aisle in 1884, hence the confusion. After his death, his widow presented his large collection of bibles and liturgical works to the Cathedral where it forms the Howley-Harrison collection. The librarian explained that there were numerous Harrisons and ours were probably related in some way.

I was next on a tour with the title 'From Monastery to Minor Royal Palace', which covered the land and buildings adjacent to the National Trust Abbey ruins. These are now occupied by The King's School and again, not usually open to the public. Director of Canterbury Archaeological Trust, Dr Paul Bennett, outlined the history of the site from the destruction by Henry VIII. Initially he built a house for Anne of Cleves incorporating the old Abbot's lodging, which she only used for one night before their marriage. It then passed through various titled owners who took much of the stone for their own houses and left the rest to decay.

In 1843 the ruins had been put up for sale despite being described as "a scene of sordid revolting profanity and desecration", having been converted into a brewery, pot-house and billiard room. Alexander Beresford Hope of Bedgebury read this report in horror and bought the property of one and a half acres for £2,020. He immediately gave it over to the Church and, following permission from the Archbishop of Canterbury, headed up a building committee to construct a Missionary College.

William Butterfield was employed to design the new buildings with knapped flint and stone dressings. The collection of library, ambulatory, chapel and students' apartments, surrounding a quadrangle was considered to be one of his finest works. Alexander had already been acquainted with Butterfield when he asked him to produce designs for the brass eagle lectern and two crown taper holders for Christ Church Kilndown, which was completed in 1840.

The consecration of the College took place early on June 29th 1848 attended by about 2,000 people followed by a luncheon for 1,200. As this day coincided with the Queen's State Ball, Alexander had to rush up to Buckingham Palace where he was

expected to attend. Rumour has it that he fell asleep in a chair and was woken by Queen Victoria standing before him.

The College closed in 1942 after damage during the notorious bombing of Canterbury but re-opened in 1952, eventually becoming The King's School. There is little doubt that if Alexander Beresford Hope had not made this impulse buy, these ancient ruins might still be languishing in a state of disrepair.

With thanks to our late Chairman, Gordon Batchelor and his book *The Beresfords of Bedgebury Park*.

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