



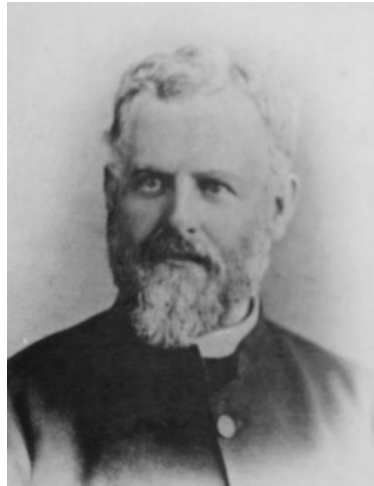
The Church of the Ascension, Telham



This church lies at 128m (420 feet) above sea level at nearly the highest point on the sandstone Battle Ridge extension of the High Weald of Sussex, which extends towards Hastings and ends at Fairlight cliffs and the cliffs at Hastings itself. Telham Hill, just west of the church, north of the road to Crowhurst, is probably the site at which William mustered his forces before moving further along the ridge northwards 2.5km (1 ½ miles) to the field of the Battle of Hastings.

From some time before 1877 up to the time this chapel was opened services at Telham had been conducted in 'Mr Turley's barn', opposite the turning to Crowhurst from the Battle-Hastings road. Initially named "Mission Chapel of the Ascension" the church stands on 828 m² (32 3/4 rods) of land given to Dean Edward Crake of Battle in 1875 by Sir Archibald Lamb, who then owned the large Beauport Estate which stretched towards Battle from the outskirts of Hastings. He had originally offered another site in 1874, possibly nearer the Black Horse pub, but this was deemed unsuitable. Before the church was built Dean Crake had referred to the site as the 'Black Horse Chapel site'.

The building was constructed during 1876 on behalf of and paid for by the then Dean of Battle, the Very Reverend Dr Edward Neville Crake. To confirm the year a stone under the altar window bears the date 1876. The original intention of Dean Crake was that the building should be used as a school during the week and a mission chapel on Sundays and for other purposes 'in connection with the Church of England'.



The Very Reverend Dr. Edward Neville Crake

It was initially not to be consecrated. However it was given a discretionary licence for use as a place of worship by the Bishop of Chichester in 1877, for the benefit of Battle residents, living at a distance from the Parish Church. This obviously was to replace Mr Turley's barn, but was undoubtedly also to some degree a response to the inroads the Non-conformists of Battle had made on the numbers of worshippers in the Church of England. A further dedication was made on 29th April 1880.

In his will of 1909 Dean Crake left his house on Abbey Green the proceeds of which were to be kept in a Trust to be used for the upkeep of the Telham church. Its sale realised £343 8s 4d (£343.42) and this money plus another £15 3s 9d (£15.19) was originally invested in India 3 1/2% Stocks and initially produced £15 per annum. After the passing of the Trustee Investment Act, 1961 the endowment was changed to 468.62 COIF Charity fund shares and produced a little more. The COIF Fund originated from the Charities Deposit Fund that was formed in 1985 as a Common Deposit Fund for charities.

The income from the fund is administered in conformity with the Charity Commissioners scheme of 4 June 1912 under the title of 'Dean Crake's gift' A trust deed was drawn up by the Charity Commission, which covers the fabric of the building and its maintenance and also allows for the building's use as *'a Chapel, school for the education of poor persons, as a residence for a schoolmaster or schoolmistress, for literary, scientific or musical entertainment or for use for meetings or other uses connected with the parish work of the Dean and his Curates'*. The trustees of this are the current Dean of Battle and Churchwardens. In practice they are joined by six members of the congregation appointed annually at an AGM.

The church is of red brick with a tiled roof. There is a small belfry towards its east end with a fixed bell with another small belfry attached to the west wall containing three tubular bells

given in memory of Gertrude Breeds (d.1911) – see picture of church above. A wooden eagle lectern is a memorial to Margaret Christie (d.1892) and the east window, with a powerful representation of the Ascension, to the Rev. Campbell Manning Christie, who served the church from its beginning until his death in 1880. At the time of repairs to this window in 1989 it was suggested that it may have been transferred from another church, but there is no record of this and it is unlikely as it fits perfectly.

A small portable organ was given to the church in about 1898 by a Miss Duke of Telham Lane, but by 1970 needed replacement. So in 1970 a second hand Norvic type B organ was purchased from the church of St Margaret at Fenhurst for £35, installed at Telham at a total cost of £370 and dedicated on Saturday 10th October 1970 by the V. Rev. H R Darby. It was then overhauled in 1999 at a further cost of £5934 and re-dedicated on Sunday 28th November 1999 by the V. Rev William A V Cummings. A new altar frontal was dedicated at Easter 1995.

It is believed that there was a Sunday school at one time, but the only record of this is for a girl named Kate St. Clair Conquer for whom a baptism certificate survives dated 20th January 1907 plus four more certificates which date through to Christmas 1915. It is also believed that at one time there was a choir but no written or photographic evidence of this exists.

The church has unfortunately been the scene of a number of burglaries and also impact damage from traffic incidents. Significant damage was done to the building on 11th January 1996 by a vehicle followed by associated fire and smoke damage, which cost £12,000 to rectify. Another incident happened on 19th June 1997 when the iron railings were substantially damaged. The railings were replaced by special safety fencing and East Sussex County Council painted double white lines and erected bend warning signs.

To mark the year 2000 a yew tree propagated in that year from the Tandridge Yew, Surrey which is estimated to be about 2500 years old, was presented to the church by Professor David Bellamy OBE, co-founder of the Conservation Foundation. This was planted to the rear of the church on Mothering Sunday 25th March 2001 by Canon David Fricker.

The history of the donor of the land on which the church was built (Sir Archibald Lamb, of Beauport Park) is also of historical interest. The first mention of Beauport Park is when General the Hon. James Murray is shown in local records as paying rates on some woodland. He built the house between 1763 and 1766, subsequently added to the estate until it comprised about 20 km² (5,000 acres). Murray had served under General James Wolfe at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in 1759. He was the military commander of Quebec City after it fell to the British and he named the local estate after Beauport in Canada.

Following Murray's death in 1794, Beauport Park was purchased by James Bland Burgess who served as Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to William Pitt. In 1821, James and his eldest son Charles changed their name to Lamb in honour of John Lamb, a benefactor of theirs. James became a Baronet in 1795.....

By 1860, the estate was owned by Sir Charles Lamb's son, Archibald, who leased the house to Thomas Brassey, a leading railway engineer of his day. After Thomas Brassey died in 1870 the lease was inherited by his son who later became Lord Brassey who lived at Normanhurst.

Archibald Lamb's father died before his own father and on his grandfather's death in 1860 Archibald became the 3rd baronet, in addition to inheriting yet another 11 km² (2700 acres) of land. So he would have hardly noticed the loss of the small parcel of land by the main Hastings to Battle road that he gave to Dean Crake in 1875.

A significant amount of information about this Church has been supplied from a leaflet by Alec B. Carter written in 2001 loaned to the author by Julia Thorp in 2010. He in turn acknowledged the help he had been given by the late Brig. Sam Learmont, who had given him information about Telham and also by the late Harry Cockcroft who was organist at the Church for more than 42 years before he retired in April 1973. Harry lived to be 100 on 10th July 1991 dying the following November.

Dean Crake's Gift is still the charity which owns and maintains the church and churchyard. Fund raising is ongoing, on behalf of the trust, to top up funds and its dedicated congregation remain enthusiastic fundraisers!

Keith Foord 2011 + 2017 modifications
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A more detailed history of James Murray can be found in Section J, <http://battlehistory.btck.co.uk/Collectanea-OurVirtualLibrary/JGreen> and a further article about Beauport Park in Section O <http://battlehistory.btck.co.uk/Collectanea-OurVirtualLibrary/ODarkpink>

References:

Carter, A: *Chapel of the Ascension 2001*. A typescript history of the Chapel of the Ascension, Telham (Personal Communication)
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Foord, KD. *Battle Abbey and Battle Churches since 1066* (2011)