



MRS GERTRUDE JULIA BARCLAY

Meg Ryan, a friend of mine and one of the river walkers, moved to Tenterden in the early 1980s with her husband Freddie and her widowed mother Hazel. Freddie was an Irish Catholic, who attended St Andrew's Church, close to their home at Penderel Court. Meg accompanied him and so met Father John Hagreen who had moved to Tenterden after 10 years at Brixton. She helped him in administration duties and subsequently agreed to research the life of Gertrude Julia Barclay, known as the benefactress of the Catholic Church in the town. Meg then gave me the findings of her extensive research to add to the records of the Society.

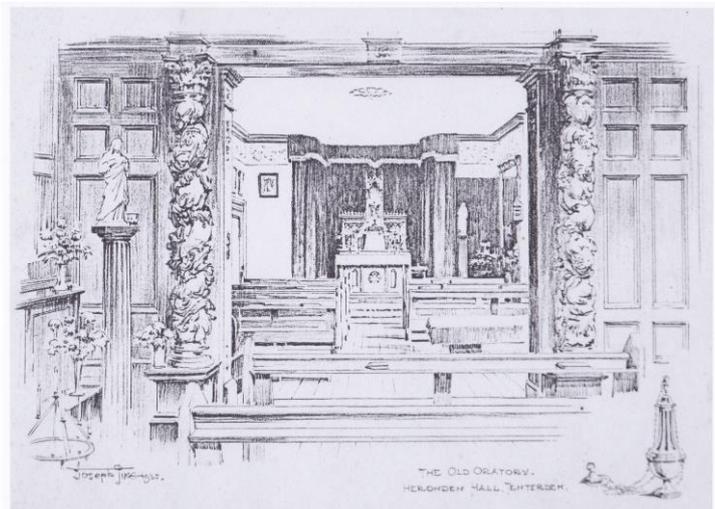
Gertrude was born on 15 December 1869, the daughter of Major General Hanwell, Commanding Officer of the Royal Artillery base in Gibraltar. She married Elwyn Frederick Barclay on 18th June 1891, he being a member of the Barclay family of brewers (later Barclay Perkins) who were Quakers. Children of the marriage were Dorothy (1892-), Colin (1893-1927) and Neville (1897-1943).

Colin was wounded at Ypres in 1915 and never really recovered from his wounds. Neville, also in poor health throughout his life, went to Balliol where he became a Catholic. He died of pneumonia in 1943.

Mrs Barclay came to Tenterden in 1930 after the death of her husband the previous year. She had recently converted to Catholicism, perhaps influenced by her son Neville. Her ambition in coming to the town was to provide a place for Mass to be said for people who had previously been deprived of the opportunity. Originally she lived at 39 Ashford Road where she arranged for an oratory to be built on the side of the house. Soon that became too small for the number of worshippers attracted, whereupon she bought Heronden Hall in 1933. The large dining room, 44ft x 18ft, was converted into an oratory, and she used the smaller sitting room which faced south. The oratory was a beautifully proportioned room divided by a bold archway, with massive oak pillars carved in the style of Grinling Gibbons. Both at Ashford Road and Heronden Hall she paid for the priest to attend and arranged for buses, later cars, to bring in worshippers from outlying villages. The oratory at Heronden Hall was open from 8 am to 8 pm every day for prayers.



Oratory at 39 Ashford Road



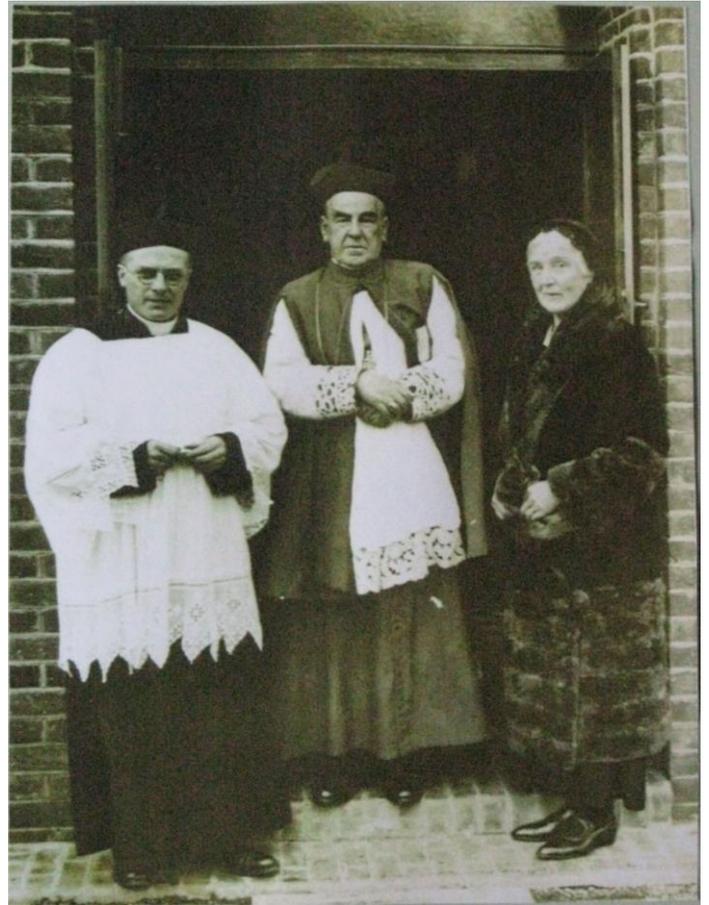
Oratory at Heronden Hall

In July 1934 Father Hopetoun Currie was appointed parish priest for Tenterden and until the present St Andrew's Church was built on ground purchased in 1925 he said Mass at Heronden Hall. [The road into Turners Avenue was built on property down the eastern side of the church] When the building of the church was completed, Heronden Hall was no longer required and Mrs Barclay was finding it increasingly difficult to fund the upkeep of such a large house. In 1940 she moved back to London, her daughter Dorothy offering her a home but Mrs Barclay preferred to be independent by returning to a service flat. After years of declining health, she entered a nursing home at Haslemere where she died in 1957. Her grave however is in Kensal Green Cemetery in London.

She had worked hard to give Catholic worshippers the chance in the town to attend Mass locally under suitable conditions until the building of St Andrew's Church. This was an improvement upon the situation where a visiting priest had attended for this purpose in various buildings in the town, especially during Victorian times when the manager of the London & Counties Bank (now the NatWest) had allowed the use of his premises.

Acknowledgements:

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photographs for the article.



Canon Hopetoun Prescott Currie (1896-1984), Bishop Brown of Pella and Mrs Barclay at the opening of St Andrew's Church
November 30th 1935



St Andrew's Church, Tenterden, as it is today