



TENTERDEN'S NELSON CONNECTION

Around the first few days of February 1801, the professional “wet nurse” Mrs Gibson, of Little Titchfield Street had a visit from Lady Hamilton, who brought her a baby girl called Horatia, no more than a few days old in Mrs Gibson’s expert opinion. The parentage was not divulged – Emma Hamilton claimed to be acting for the unknown mother, a position she held to until she died. Lord Nelson, in a letter to the four-year-old girl, as the French and Spanish fleets approached at Trafalgar, signs off – “Receive, my dearest Horatia, the affectionate parental blessing of your father”. As Lady Hamilton’s movements are unknown for 29th and 30th January 1801, we have to draw our own conclusions as to Horatia’s parentage, and are likely to agree with the conclusions of historians who have investigated the mystery.

Nelson’s public position of adoptive father or godfather gave the infant the name Horatia Nelson. Her early childhood at Merton was happy. After Nelson’s death, Emma Hamilton went through her resources in profligate fashion, and, with Horatia, lived mainly in Calais until her death in straitened circumstances in 1815. At this juncture, Horatia was quickly taken in by the Nelson family (there never seems to have been any public doubt that she was the Admiral’s natural daughter).

At Burnham in Norfolk, the lively and attractive girl was engaged in succession to two young curates, marrying the second, Philip Ward, in 1822. Between then and 1836, they had ten children, the last four born in Tenterden, Philip having been instituted as Vicar in 1830. The eldest, Horatio, himself became a clergyman, and indeed, conducted the marriage ceremony of his sister, Horatia junior, in St Mildred’s church in 1858, Philip, the Vicar, acting as bride’s father. One child died in infancy, and the youngest Caroline, died aged only twenty one. The boys entered the church, Law, Surgery, and the Army. The last Tenterden descendant, Marjorie Johnson, grand-daughter of Horatia junior, died in the 1970s, and bequeathed to St Mildred’s Church a



Wards at Marriage

piece of embroidery (pictured) worked by Horatia senior herself while Vicar’s wife between 1830 and 1859. The family seem to have been popular. Philip’s incumbency was scarred by disputes over the tithes of the town. In this period, Parliament was reforming the ancient tithe system, leading to much litigation nationally over disputed land. Tenterden’s case was particularly troublesome, believed by many in the town to contribute to Philip Ward’s failing health and death.

However, even his legal opponents held him to be an excellent Vicar. Horatia and the children seem to have been held in high regard also. St Mildred’s church also possesses the actual tithe map used by Philip Ward in the Chancery Court litigation, endorsed by the court clerks with the witnesses attesting its accuracy. Compiled in 1822 by John Adams, it is a very early example of a tithe map of such accuracy, and the earliest really accurate map we have of the town. Philip Ward’s sudden death in January 1859 was traumatic for both family and town, as is evident from public obituaries.



Horatia’s Embroidery

Horatia Nelson Ward had, of course, to vacate the Vicarage for the new incumbent, and lived out her days with her son Nelson (a lawyer who became Registrar of the Court of Chancery) in Pinner, Middlesex, where she is buried. Initially her memorial read “Adopted daughter of Vice-Admiral Lord Nelson” but the family had this altered to “Beloved daughter..... etc”. Philip and some of the children are buried in St Mildred’s churchyard in the vault marked “Ward” opposite the wall of The Woolpack.



Horatia – Old Age

THE OPENING OF TENTERDEN LEISURE CENTRE

On Wednesday 12 October 1990 the Princess of Wales visited Tenterden to formally open the new £3.7 million Leisure Centre which had been in use by the public since 31 March 1990. The Mayor of Ashford, Cllr Bernard Moorman hailed the visit as a joyful and memorable day. Crowds turned out to see her arrival by helicopter at the town football ground next to the centre and she was cheered in by a flag waving contingent of schoolchildren from Tenterden Infants' and Junior schools.

The Princess, escorted by Deputy Lieutenant of Kent Brigadier Maurice Atherton, was wearing a suit in red and black tartan with a long line jacket and knee length skirt. As she arrived and later on her way back to the Westland helicopter she walked round the waiting crowds to talk to people and her arms were filled with flowers given to her. Following the presentations to Tenterden's Mayor Henry Edwards and others in the official party, she toured the centre seeing keep-fit enthusiasts pumping iron in the In-Shape room. One keep-fit devotee said: "She was nice, she was walking round seeing it all and talking to the people. We were all getting exhausted because we were working on the machines all the time." In the foyer and at the poolside disabled members of Tenterden Day Centre (now Tenterden Hub), some who come to the pool for the disabled swimming classes on Tuesdays, were given good vantage points to see the Princess from their wheel chairs. A party of nine patients and nine helpers from West View, Tenterden's hospital for the elderly, were also at the poolside and she went over especially to speak to them.

Guided round the centre by manager Matthew Roberts, the Princess saw the In-Shape fitness studio, the main hall where short mat bowls and Eastern martial arts were being demonstrated, a trampoline display by a team from Homewood School, a squash game and the centre's ante-natal class. After seeing the bridge club playing bridge on the balcony, the Princess came to the poolside to see the mother-and-baby swimming class in the training pool and aqua-aerobics. There was also a swimming display by Tenterden Junior School pupils in the main pool and a succession of children sliding down the water flume. "She liked it all," said Matthew afterwards. "I didn't realise how many sport and keep fit activities she did herself."

In the Rainbow Room the Princess unveiled a commemorative plaque opening the centre and was welcomed by Ashford Mayor Cllr Bernard Moorman, who said: "This centre was built by Ashford Borough Council on land made available by Tenterden Town Council, for the people and children of this borough." The Princess was presented with a Royal Doulton crystal bowl.



Cllr Bernard Moorman watches as the Princess of Wales unveils the plaque to officially open Tenterden Leisure Centre

The most poignant moment of her visit was the presentation of a Stevenson Brothers rocking horse to a nine-year old boy who suffers from leukaemia.

The rocking horse, a traditional Victorian-style dapple grey made at Bethersden, was presented to the Princess by Ashford Borough Council as a gift to the charity of her choice. The Princess handed on the horse to Padua children's ward at the William Harvey Hospital. It was received by youngster Robin Mills, who had been treated there, and children's ward Sister Brenda Allen, who said afterwards: "She was lovely – and the children will love that horse."

Alexia Best, aged six, was the little girl with the big mission to present a cream and pink posy of roses, Singapore orchids and freesias to the Princess of Wales. The names of the girls in the two top classes of Tenterden Infants' school went into a hat and Alexia's was first out.

Head teacher Judith Harper said she was surprised that the Lord Lieutenant's office had stipulated that the posy presenter had to be a girl. "The boys groaned when I told them."



After the opening, the Princess chatting and enjoying one of the famous Royal walkabouts to the obvious delight of the admiring crowd