



Refurbishment of Tenterden Church Tower 1908-1911

Collectors of postcards sometimes have difficulty in dating when they were printed. One thing is to look and see if there is any writing on the back or if there is a postmark which gives a clue. Tenterden is a town which was well photographed in the early part of the 20th century. Postcards were used in a big way for people to communicate with one another. There are a lot of postcards showing St Mildred's Church with scaffolding and it is known that the church tower had scaffolding around it between 1908 and 1911 (and as far as I know the only time in the last century) and so these are easily dated. Although there was a limited amount of scaffolding around the church a few years ago in the 21st century, it did not lead to any postcards appearing. [In a similar way one can date the Town Hall photographs as pre 1911 or post 1911 depending on whether there is a balcony]

The church tower was erected in the reign of King Henry VI and has attained fame through being quoted in connection with the Goodwin Sands. A legend runs that the removal of stone from a sea wall on the coast of England, with which to build the tower, was the cause of the formation of the Goodwin Sands. It is certainly true that a beacon, in the form of an iron kettle was set ablaze on the top of the tower when the Spanish Armada was sighted. By the beginning of the 20th century the tower was naturally suffering from old age with very little attempt to carry out any repairs before September 1908. About five years previously it was apparent that something very serious was wrong and a committee was formed to deal with the matter.

Experts were called in, who reported that the tower was in an exceedingly bad condition generally. The four pinnacles were in such a deplorable state as to be absolutely dangerous. The original estimate of the costs was £700.

The advice from the experts was that it was best to start at the top and work downwards. In August 1908, the first stage of the work was visible to the public when a commencement was made with the erection of the huge scaffolding at the top of the tower. This in itself was by no means a small undertaking, when it is known that the height from the ground to the top of the weather vanes is 130 feet. The work then commenced, under the superintendence of the architect Mr Breakspear, the work being carried out by Messrs Thompson & Co of Peterborough.

The work was commenced on the two eastern pinnacles, which were considered to be in the most dangerous condition. These having been pulled down and re-erected, a halt was cried. It now appeared that to complete the work would require £2000, a big sum for a small parish. Money slowly came in and after a few months work was resumed on the two western pinnacles. Mr Caroe, the ecclesiastical architect, undertook the work which was now carried out by Messrs Cornish and Gayner of North Walsham, Norwich. By the end of 1911 this firm had put the final touches to the complete restoration of the pinnacles and the upper portion of the tower. The scaffolding came down and the fund had reached £1,542 11s on 31 December 1911 with roughly £500 still required to complete the work.

On Friday afternoon 12 January 1912 a thanksgiving service to commemorate the restoration was held in a crowded church at which the Archbishop of Canterbury (Randall Davidson) preached the sermon. The Vicar of Tenterden (the Rev J A Babington) was supported by the Archdeacon of Maidstone (the Rev Canon Spooner), Rev Canon Bell (the Rural Dean and Vicar of Cranbrook), Rev E K B Morgan (Vicar of Biddenden), Rev W Raven (Vicar of Smallhythe), Rev John Jarvis (Vicar of St Michaels), Rev D H Ceaton (Vicar of Bethersden), Rev B W Gilpin (Rector of High Halden), Rev A O Scutt (Vicar of Appledore), Rev J H Burrows (Vicar of Newenden) and Rev E L A Hertslet (the Archbishop's Chaplain). The hymn "O worship the King" was impressively sung before the Archbishop gave his address in the course of which he spoke "a few words of the simplest kind" about the meaning of the gathering there. Mr A H Smith was the organist and the two Churchwardens, Mr E H Hardcastle and Mr J S Winsler, were in attendance.



After the service the Vicar and Miss Margaret Babington (vicar's daughter) were "At Home" in the Town Hall to meet the Archbishop and Mrs Davidson, when there was a very large number present. The Town Hall was very prettily decorated by a number of the parishioners and after tea an excellent musical programme was carried out and much appreciated.

How was the money raised?

In 1911 to raise £2000 was equivalent to finding over £200,000 in today's money. Besides the donations that there had been over the years, one of the fundraising projects was a cookery book entitled *Recipes worth Trying* with all the contributions coming from local ladies and their friends together with a handful of men. Three of the ladies were Lady Drury, Ellen Terry and Margaret Babington in a book which had over 75 pages of recipes for soups, fish, breakfast dishes, entrees, puddings, sweets, savouries, cakes and pickles. The beginning page had the following witticism.

"No woman now, whate'er her looks,
is worth her salt, unless she cooks."

If one had been dining with Ellen Terry, they may have been offered the following cold sweet with a recipe given by

'Boil 50 chestnuts (or 25), carefully remove skin when tender, serve quite cold with a dusting of powder sugar over them and afterwards whipped cream'.

Secondly a grand bazaar was held in 1911 in the grounds of Hales Place by kind permission of Mr E H Hardcastle JP, the owner. The two-day event, organised by the Vicar and Miss Babington, was held on Tuesday 11 July and Wednesday 12 July. This was not going to be a 'short Saturday afternoon event' but would involve the whole community and beyond. A long list of supporters appeared in the June church magazine. The opening ceremony on Tuesday at 3 pm was carried out by the Dowager Countess of Guilford, having been introduced by the Vicar. Mr Hardcastle in his capacity as a churchwarden proposed a hearty vote of thanks, seconded by Mr Winsor (the other churchwarden) to Lady Guilford for opening the bazaar. Lady Guilford, in returning thanks, said she hoped they had all come with full pockets and would leave them quite empty.

The second day's proceeding on Wednesday afternoon again commenced at 3 pm when the opening ceremony was performed in front of a large crowd by Lady Mabel Egerton in the unavoidable absence of Viscountess Brassey. Lady Mabel was accompanied by her father, Viscount Brassey, Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports. The Vicar said before he asked Lady Egerton to declare the bazaar open, he should like to say a few words. They were that afternoon honoured by the presence of Lady Egerton and Viscount Brassey, Lady Egerton kindly coming in the place of her mother, who, he regretted to say, was quite unable to be with them. With regard to the Bazaar it had elicited the sympathy of the whole population of Tenterden. They were proud to think of their results. Already they had realised £180, a sum of which he thought they must be proud. They had received much support and sympathy support from those outside Tenterden, many of whom had consented to be patrons of the Bazaar. He would like to remind Lord Brassey that in history, at one period, Tenterden was ten times a more important Port than Liverpool! In fact a staggering amount of £459-10-10 [459 pounds 10 shillings and 10 pence] was made – over £50,000 on today's money.

References

Kentish Express
Kent Examiner

