



Rev John Albert Babington MA (Oxon) and Miss Margaret A Babington OBE

The Rev J A Babington, born in 1844 at Namur, Belgium, was a son of Mr Thomas G Babington of Rothley Temple and Cossington in Leicestershire and a grandson of Thomas Babington, who, with William Wilberforce, played a prominent part in the abolition of the slave trade. He was educated at Rugby, where he became head boy under Dr Temple (afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury) and captain of the football twenty. He gained one of the first two scholarships awarded at New College, Oxford, when these scholarships had ceased to be confined to Winchester boys and was ordained at Lichfield in 1873. After serving as assistant master at Marlborough from 1867 to 1875, he was for five years Headmaster of Lincoln Grammar School and then, from 1880 to 1903 was second master and in charge of Judd House at Tonbridge School. From 1886 he was a licensed preacher in the Canterbury Diocese except between April 1907 and March 1924 when he was **Vicar of Tenterden**. Coming to Tenterden at the age of 63, Mr Babington was a fine example of a type of clergyman who was a first class scholar, a cultured gentleman and a devoted parish priest. Although of a shy and retiring disposition, he would be out of his house soon after 2 o'clock every afternoon to start on his pastoral visiting and as a consequence he was a man greatly revered and beloved by his parishioners. Indeed, in his walks-abroad in Tenterden, he found his progress so frequently interrupted he adopted the harmless but effective little device of reading a book while passing along the streets. Indeed parishioners were heard to complain "the Vicar tears along so fast," that they can scarcely catch him when they want to speak to him. During Mr Babington's incumbency, a considerable amount of money was spent on repairing the church roof and tower. By means of successful pageants, fetes, exhibitions, bazaars, etc, which were organised under the superintendence of his daughter, Margaret Babington (Mrs Babington had died before they came to Tenterden), he carried out his aim of drawing together the people of Tenterden.

The people of Tenterden were greatly saddened by their departure in 1924. A presentation was made to them at Heronden Hall, the home of Captain V Dampier Palmer and the scene of so many charitable events run by Miss Babington. Mr A H Burtenshaw (Burtenshaw's was the fore-runner of the Halifax Estate Agency business in Tenterden), the People's Warden, at the end of a farewell speech presented Mr Babington with a book wherein was inscribed the names of many of their friends and well wishers together with a cheque for £150 (then a considerable amount of money). On referring to Miss Babington - "Our Margaret" - words were totally inadequate. Her most remarkable genius was for organisation and that had been directed entirely for good purposes and had met with extraordinary results. There was hardly a society (including country dancing) or organization for good in the town that did not derive its being or vitalizing energy from her. Captain Dampier Palmer then asked Miss Babington to accept an inscribed silver table clock and a book containing the names of the 148 members of the Mothers' Union, which she had brought into being in 1910. In reply Mr Babington said he found it difficult to express his thanks for the kindness that prompted the gifts. He was thankful that during his seventeen years' work he had only been confined to his room for five days. That had enabled him to visit the furthest extremities of the parish. There was not a house in the parish that he had not visited and he was received with kindness and welcome. He could count on the fingers of one hand the places where he had not been welcomed. The helpers in his work at Tenterden had been numerous and willing and had considerably lightened his load. One of the reasons that he accepted the living was because he would be accompanied by his dear daughter and as she had won all the hearts in Tonbridge, he knew she would do so in Tenterden, and how well that prophesy had been fulfilled they all knew. Never was there a clergyman's daughter so devoted to her father and his work. Several people said she had done the work of two curates. No doubt they would have vicars, more able and more conscientious, but no one could love the parish and its people more than they.

Mr Babington retired to 14 The Precincts, Canterbury, where he passed away on 13 May 1929. The funeral took place at Tenterden Parish Church and he was buried in Tenterden Cemetery. He left Margaret and a son, Mr Percy L Babington, another son being killed in the First World War. Mr Babington had property in Leicestershire and was Lord of the Manor of Cossington until the abolition of the title a few years before his death. At Canterbury, Margaret gave the rest of her life to the Cathedral. During the Second World War she was to be seen cycling through the precincts at the height of the great fire blitz dumping sandbags on incendiary bombs. She became the honorary steward and treasurer of the Friends of Canterbury Cathedral, which by 1956 had developed into a worldwide organization of 6,000 people. At the 1956 Annual Meeting of the Friends of Canterbury Cathedral, attended by over 500 people, she was presented with a cheque for 1200 guineas in recognition of her "28 years of wonderful stewardship" by the Archbishop, Dr Fisher, President of the Friends. The money was part of nearly £2000 collected by the Friends. Dr Fisher explained that the balance was being withheld for the time being until the Friend's Committee had discussed with Miss Babington how it should be applied. In October that year she made her sixth lecture tour, lasting about two months, of America raising funds for the Cathedral. She made her own arrangements with all her travelling in America done by air. On a previous tour she spoke in 58 towns and cities of Canada. On the 23 January 1957 she gave a talk on "A Tour of

Canterbury Cathedral” to over 80 members of Tenterden and District Local History Society at the Unitarian Church, Tenterden.

Miss Babington died, aged 80, in her office in the cathedral precincts on 21 August 1958. Her ashes were interred by Dr Hewlett Johnson (Dean of Canterbury), in a short ceremony at a spot near the Martyrdom door in the cathedral cloisters. The Poet Laureate, John Masefield, one of her distinguished friends, wrote a poem in memory of her 30 years as honorary steward and treasurer of the Friends of Canterbury Cathedral and this tribute in verse appeared in a memorial appeal leaflet issued on behalf of the Friends.

Source: Kent Messenger Group Papers

Tenterden and District in Verse – Part 1

TENTERDEN BALLAD

(These verses were written in 1949 by J V Hewes to mark the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the granting of the Charter of Incorporation)

1449

The waves of the channel ran short and steep
To crash on the Smallhythe beach,
Where cogs and carracks and caravals
Lay moored in Oxney Reach.
And up the hill and over the fields,
The path to St Mildred’s ran,
Where the bells would speak at the sunset hour
As a maiden speaks to a man.

1549

The fires of religion were kindled fast
In the years that have sped away;
Women and men were devoured by the flames
On many a bitter day!
Little by little, the hate died down,
And the stake was used no more;
For ‘tis better to live in brotherly love
Than to die in a civil war!

1649

The fields of our yeomen spread far and wide,
Dotted with sheep and kine;
Their hogs would snout in the Andreasweald
Beneath the columbine.
And life in the Borough was full and free
When the long day’s work was done:
The taverns, that stood the length of the town
Held promise of furious fun.

1749

The wool from the marsh came up to the town’
Heavy and warm and thick;
They sorted it out and packed the best
To hide in the barn and rick.
When the nights grew dark and the moon was hid,
They carried it down to the sea;
And the boats from France poled over the sand
With their cargo of schnapps and tea ...

1849

The trade of the Borough increased apace;
The forges’ merry din,
The brewing of beer and the tanning of hides,
It fetched the money in.
And the toll gate clanged as the carts rolled through,
Laden with goods for all;
There was peace by day and peace by night
For cottage and house and hall.

1949

We have stood our ground and faced our foe,
Right through the loaded hours;
The noise and smoke of the battle have died,
For we beat the warring Powers!
But still there is much that we must do,
Much to be built again;
Shoulder to shoulder, we must press on;
For we see God’s Law is plain!

Tenterden Street is clean and wide
And tall trees stand on either side,
The pavements, too, are fringed with grass
Which may be why the folk who pass,
On business or on pleasure bent,
Find in this place a sweet content.
It has an air of spaciousness,
Of dignity and graciousness
And, from St Mildred’s lovely tower,
A pleasing time chimes every hour.

Frank Freeland

Naughty Ashford, Wily Wye
Poor Kennington hard-done-by,
Dirty Charing lies in a hole,
She had one bell – and that she stole

Cowden Church, Crooked Steeple,
Lying Priest, deceitful people

Wye, Chilham (Read aloud as: Why kill’em and
And Chartham cart’em to Canterbury)
To Canterbury