



A Tale of two Chapels

Frederick Tuppenney

1843-1910

Although from humble beginnings in Tunbridge Wells, Frederick became very well known as “a gentleman” and was an important political figure in Hastings. He was also the long-time Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Ore Workhouse

HIS MAIN CONNECTION TO SEDLESCOMBE WAS THAT HE WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN BUILDING IN 1879 AND 1892, TWO ADJACENT CONGREGATIONAL CHAPELS

WHAT MORE DO WE KNOW ABOUT **FREDERICK?** He was:



Although originally from humble beginnings, he became a wealthy “young man” with enough money to provide the land for the first Chapel in Sedlescombe. He was one of the most prominent men in local government in Hastings

Alderman and 3 times Mayor of Hastings. *“In his first year as Mayor of Hastings, he attended 737 meetings of various kinds. Although he had many irons in the fire, he neglected nothing, believing that, if a thing is worth doing at all, it is worth doing well.”* He was also:

- Justice of the Peace for Hastings
- County Councillor
- Battle Rural District Councillor
- Deacon at Robertson Street Congregational Church
- Local Preacher around the villages

WHAT MORE DO WE KNOW ABOUT **FREDERICK?**



He had at least two houses of his own. One in Hastings and the other “Moorhurst” in Westfield.

He was Chairman of the Board of Guardians for the Poor (a post he held for more than 22 years)

When he died in 1910 he was described in the local paper as *“one of the hardest working public servants in the whole of Sussex”*.

Frederick Tuppenney's early years near Tunbridge Wells 1840/50s



From 10-yearly census reports, Frederick's father, Samuel, remained in Ely Lane working as a shoemaker throughout his life.

Frederick's early life was spent in Tunbridge Wells. He was born in 1843 into a humble household with his father Samuel working as a "cordwainer" or shoemaker. His mother was Carey Bassett, after whom his daughter was later to be named.

In the 1851 census when Frederick was 8, he was living with his parents and an elder brother and sister in Ely Lane, now known as Ely Court, part of the Royal Victoria Shopping Centre. He was shown as a "scholar". Later, it would be obvious that Frederick had received a really good education, probably through the *Mechanics Institute*, which was set up across the country to educate the working man and his children. There were lending libraries, lecture theatres, classrooms and laboratories in Tunbridge Wells and Frederick is known to have served on the Mechanics Institute Committee there when a young man.

Frederick Tuppenney's late teenage years

By the 1861 census, Frederick was a 19-year-old footman in the household of James St George Burke, a barrister in practice in Parliamentary Chambers in the prestigious Upper Harley Street, Portland Place. The area was full of extremely wealthy people.



The Auberies, Bulmer, Suffolk

We know that Frederick's master James St George Burke bought The Auberies in Bulmer, Suffolk, in 1857, and that he employed both a footman and a lady's maid. In the 1861 census Lucy Bacon was described as "a lady's maid" and Frederick "a footman". Could this be where Frederick and Lucy met?

In a later report, the Ipswich Journal described Frederick as "formerly of Bulmer" and this seems to be his only link with that place.

The move to Hastings

In 1867, when he was 24, Frederick and Lucy Sarah Bacon, aged 40, were married in Hastings. She was old enough to be his mother. Throughout her life Lucy pretended to be younger, but it is clear that Lucy was born in 1827 in Great Baddow, Essex. Her father was a carpenter. She had several siblings including a younger sister Ellen who later was to play a big part in the life of Frederick Tuppenney. The following year the couple were grieving the loss of their baby daughter named Lucy after her mother. By 1869, Frederick had become a Committee member of the Hastings Mechanics Institute.



*One of the Tuppenneys' lodging houses,
in St Leonards on the seafront*

It is obvious, that something momentous had happened to Frederick and Lucy between the censuses of 1861 and 1871 because:

In 1861, they were both servants while, by 1871, they were described as “lodging house keepers” in St Leonards with three servants of their own!! Frederick no longer had any need to work. Lucy ran the lodging houses although the law meant they had to be in Frederick’s name as her husband.

Frederick's affiliation to the Congregational Church

With no work to occupy him, Frederick was able to devote time to his other interests relating to religion and help for those who had fallen on hard times. He was soon encouraged by the preaching at the Robertson Street Congregational Church in Hastings to enter its fold, leaving the Church of England, where he had grown up. He was really against the Church of England's support for hunting and was always willing to confront religious views that were not his own. A couple of years later, he became a deacon of the Robertson Street Church. (A deacon is a lay person who is involved with and has to be consulted about the running of the church.)

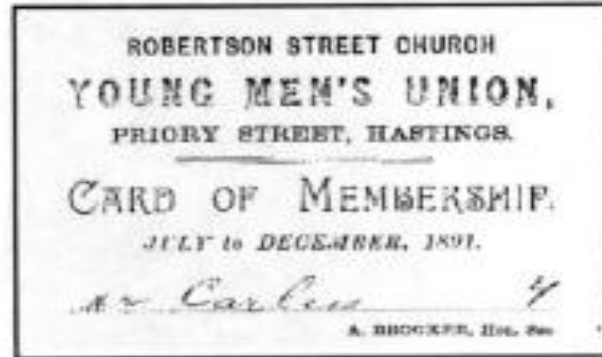
Soon, Robertson Street had a new assistant Minister, fresh from college, named the Revd. Charles New. The Revd. New set out his plan to bring local people into the church by setting up three new societies. One of these was ***The Young Men's Christian Union*** which had the aim of working amongst the young men of the town trying to drag them away from what they thought were unsavoury activities such as going onto the new pier. The Union was known for its spiritual enthusiasm, fervour and consecration and it soon had a hundred members. Frederick became its Secretary and he and Charles New became firm friends.

Since the first train arrived in Hastings in 1851, Hastings had seen a rise in its popularity.

The new Hastings pier was officially opened in 1872 on the first ever statutory bank holiday. It rained hard all day. The 900 feet pier attracted 482,000 visitors in its first year. But it was not only visitors that were increasing. Land was being sold for development making good prices all over the town. Maybe Frederick benefitted financially from this development but there is nothing to suggest this could be the case.

Frederick & the Young Men's Union's evangelism

The Young Men's Union at Robertson Street Congregational Church was thriving and attracting lots of young men to mid-week meetings. These men were fired up with religious fervour and by 1876 had decided they wanted to take their beliefs out into the villages around Hastings. In 1876, a deputation from The Young Men's Union led by Frederick Tuppenney went to Rev New suggesting that they should start taking Sunday evening services to Sedlescombe Village Green.



THE YOUNG MEN COMETH. Starting in 1876, a group of young men began to travel out from Hastings on summer Sunday evenings to preach the gospel on the Village Green. They were known as **“The Ranters”**.



They were very popular with Sedlescombe residents and it was not unusual for 200 people to gather on a Sunday evening on the Green to listen to these enthusiastic young preachers.

ROAD CONDITIONS. Of course, the road conditions in Sedlescombe were no comparison to today. They were often a playground for local children. Although there could be a few steam-powered vehicles on the roads, the first petrol-driven vehicle did not appear on English roads until 1895.



Travel to Sedlescombe



A21

TO HASTINGS
↓

RE-ENACTMENT



The coming of the young men to evangelize Sedlescombe was re-enacted in 1979 for the Congregational Chapel's centenary. Back in Victorian times, the journey from Hastings was quite a feat in itself.



TRAVEL TO SEDLESCOMBE FROM HASTINGS



Driving from Hastings meant coming by horse and trap. The A21 was little more than a lane. On arrival in the Village, the horse had to be stabled and, as few of the preachers knew about horses and how to drive, many mistakes were made. The story was told of the night they mistakenly backed the horse and trap into a hedge in the dark. They did lead the horse home but had to leave the trap in the hedge until the next morning.

Winter services in Sedlescombe

To hold services in the winter was another matter and it was decided to use a barn for the meetings. A farm outhouse was rented – uncomfortable without floor or fire and situated at the end of a dark and muddy lane. Each time, the preachers had to remove the carts, set out the forms, arrange the tarpaulin along one of its sides, light the lamps, fetch the harmonium from a friendly neighbour and make the place neat. After the service, the building had to be left as they found it so all the rearrangements had to be made in reverse.

MID-WEEK SERVICES WERE HELD IN LOCAL COTTAGES



These are Fir Tree Cottage (left) and Sackville Cottages (right) before the building of Linton House on the front. There is no proof any of these cottages were used for services although some nearby would have been.

DESCRIPTION OF AN ACTUAL WEEKDAY MEETING AT SEDLESCOMBE

Lifting the latch and entering, we found the comfortable kitchen prepared for the gathering. The small round table, on which were a lighted lamp, a Bible and hymn books, was placed at the further end, the rest of the room being filled with chairs and benches to accommodate as many as possible.

By the time we began, the room was nearly full and, ultimately, we numbered exactly thirty. More than one third of these were men, about as many women and the rest children.

Very homely, but very devout was our service. The singing was assisted by a violin and flute. We read the passages of Scripture which speak of Christ as the Shepherd, Mr Morris offered prayer, and we then spoke of ourselves as Christ's sheep; another hymn, and the closing prayer, and with many a hearty handshake, and the expressed wish that the service had been longer, our little audience disbursed. It was with deep thankfulness that we drove home in the quiet night

FREDERICK LOOKED FOR A SITE ON WHICH TO BUILD A CHAPEL

The young men soon felt that they shouldn't be in a comfortable building in Hastings, when Sedlescombe folk were meeting in uncomfortable conditions. So they started to look around the Village for a piece of land on which to build a Chapel.

Later, Frederick said it took some time to find the land because he thought Sedlescombe people were too rich to want to sell their land to the "Ranters".



Frederick Tuppenney

FREDERICK BOUGHT LAND ON WHICH TO BUILD A CHAPEL

In 1878, Frederick Tuppenney bought a piece of land on the road to Westfield, now known as Chapel Hill, but then called "Sedlescomb Hill". Later the land was passed to the young men. Tenders for the building were invited to be sent to Frederick by 19/05/1879. Sadly, just before the closing date for the tenders, Lucy Tuppenney, Frederick's wife, died.



The following month, in June 1879, despite not yet having the extra £600 needed to complete the building, the foundation stone was laid by Rev New at a ceremony attended by 200 people.



Rev. Charles New

CHAPEL OPENING

Just five months later in November 1879 the Chapel was opened with much rejoicing, sports and a special tea.

Every last seat was filled at the 7pm service despite there being snow on the ground and it being pitch dark! Electricity was not installed in the Chapel until the 1930s!

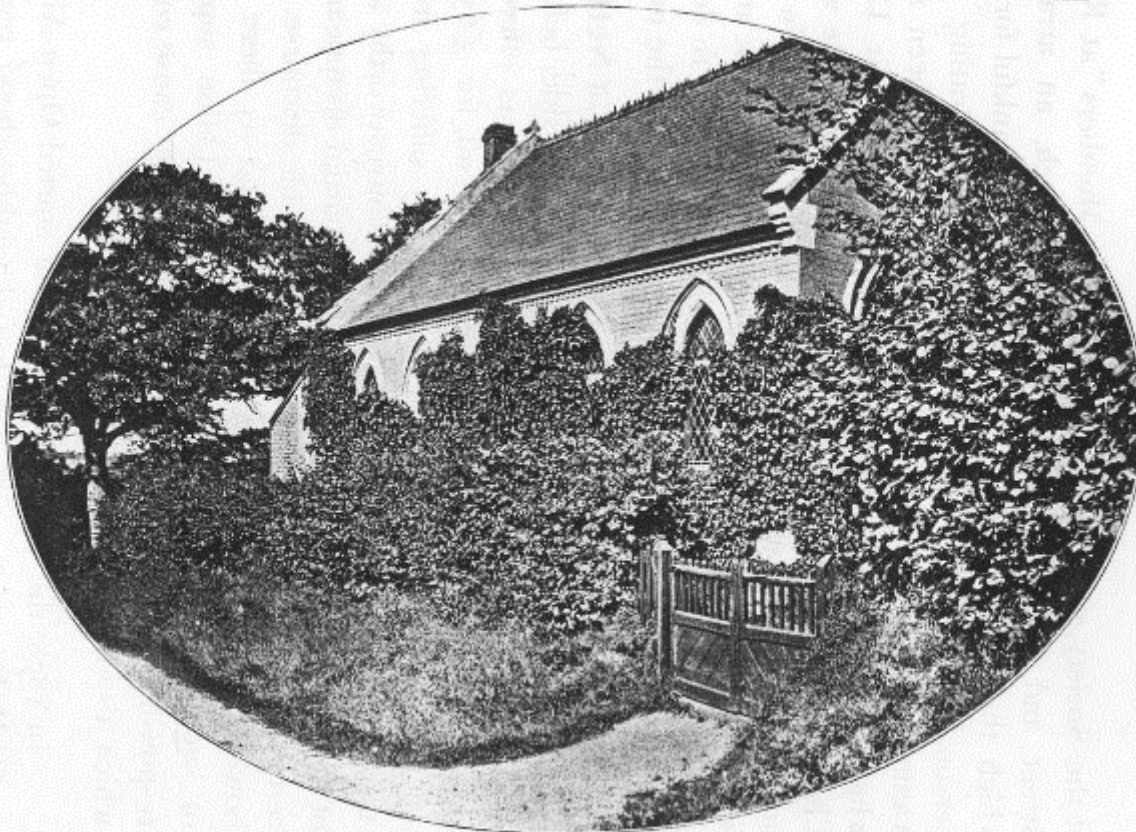


Photo. by]

Mission Church, SEDLESCOMBE. Built 1878.

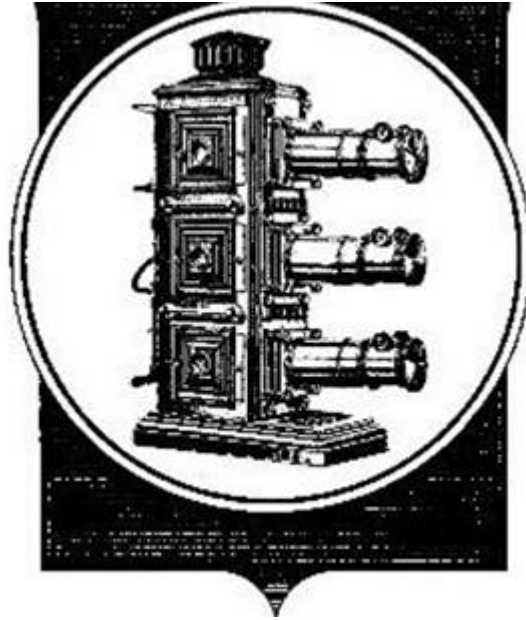
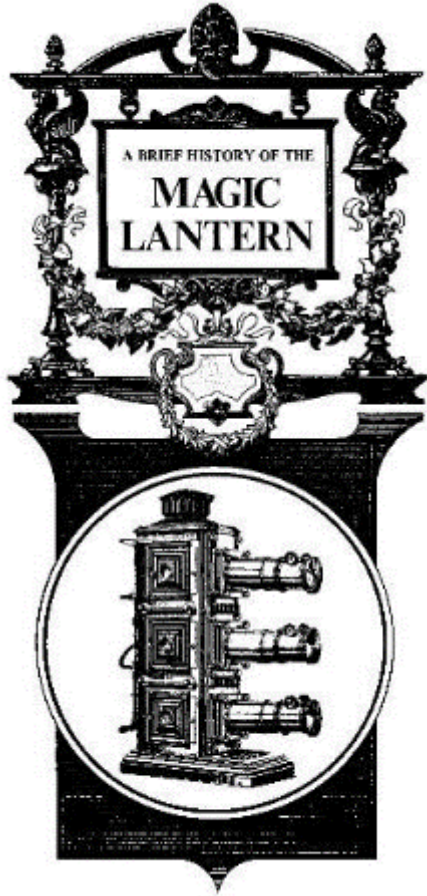
[Bristow, Hastings.

THE SEDLESCOMBE MISSION CHURCH UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF **FREDERICK TUPPENNEY**

In the year 1879 as the Mission Chapel was opened Frederick Tuppeney found himself widowed following the death of his wife Lucy. Although the local newspaper had plenty of notices of condolence for Frederick, absolutely nothing was written about poor Lucy herself. Frederick and Lucy had had no children as their only daughter had died soon after birth.

Frederick seemed to throw himself into work in connection with the Mission Chapel, chairing a committee in connection with the running of the Chapel and being its Secretary. The Chapel thrived under his care. He belonged to the Photographic Society after it was set up in 1888 but earlier in 1881 a special evening is reported in the newspaper when he showed using a magic lantern 40 pictures of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress and then other pictures of the Chapel by day, night, summer and winter. When the audience left it was 9.30pm and it is said they did so reluctantly despite them possibly having a long walk back home in the dark to as far away as Robertsbridge (7 miles) unless they could catch a lift on someone else's buggy. As they left, a lady from Hastings gave out oranges to the children, probably a rare treat.

SPECIAL MEETINGS WERE SOON BEING HELD AT WHAT WAS CALLED THE MISSION CHURCH UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF **FREDERICK TUPPENNEY**



The art of projection of both still and moving images reached the zenith of technical brilliance during the Victorian era.

ELLEN BACON ARRIVES BACK ON THE SCENE

A couple of years after Lucy's death and the opening of the Sedlescombe Chapel, the 1881 Hastings census reveals that a new chapter had opened in Frederick's life. He had moved from his home on the Hastings seafront and was living not far away in a property where the head was none other than Ellen Bacon, Lucy's younger sister.

Ellen had previously been living in Egham where she owned a lot of property because she had married young and had been widowed twice. Strangely, although she was a servant girl herself with a humble background, she had financially married very well on each occasion. Her first marriage was to extremely wealthy Henry Backhouse. An interesting liaison as Ellen had been a servant girl in the household of Henry's parents. Henry died at the young age of 32, ten years after their marriage and Ellen's second marriage had been to Henry's doctor who was twice her age. He hadn't survived long after their marriage either and now here was Frederick moving into the same property as Ellen in Hastings and then, soon afterwards, giving up most of his commitments to the Church and Workhouse in Hastings and moving back with Ellen to live in a large property in Egham.

The next step was for Ellen to change her will to make Frederick one of two executors of her will and soon after to make him the sole executor. Ellen then changed her will to make Frederick the main beneficiary, to leave him several large properties as well as money. Then, in 1883, a further two years after the Hastings census previously mentioned, she herself died, leaving Frederick an extremely wealthy "gentleman". Although no records confirm it, it is feasible that Ellen had been the benefactor that allowed her sister Lucy and the young man she had married back in 1867 to cease being servants and to become instead "lodging house keepers" with plenty of money to make sure that Frederick did not have to work. The reason that this might be a sensible proposition is that in 1867 Ellen's first husband had just died and Ellen would have been left with more wealth than she could even have imagined, sufficient easily to make a generous gift to her sister and her sister's husband.

FREDERICK MARRIES JACOBA

And then, just a few months after Ellen's death, at the end of that year, when Frederick was still living in Ellen's house, he married a Dutch lady called Jacoba Vanvliedt Pannevis who had money, a lady of independent means. She was a teacher who had trained at Oxford and was probably teaching at the new and very grand Holloway's Women's College.

Their wedding in Holland was extensively covered in the newspapers. The service was held at the British Embassy in The Hague and then the usual legal ceremony was held at the Town Hall and afterwards at the Williams Church. The honeymoon lasted 3 months touring Italy and the South of France.



British Embassy
The Hague

THE WEDDING

From Hague and South Holland Journal, December 21st 1883

“Yesterday was an important day in the history of a lady, whose name is well known in the Hague, and who, in educational circles is so much appreciated – Miss Vanvliedt Pannevis.

The fact that the above lady was to be married to an English gentleman, and that the popular Dr Gunning from Amsterdam would officiate at the Williams Church, brought together a large congregation, so that the vast edifice was well nigh filled an hour before the arrival of the bride and bridegroom, who previously had been through the English marriage service at the British Embassy.”

Visit to Egham by Rev New

During the time they lived in Egham, the Rev New visited Frederick and Jacoba Tuppenney there twice. They were all good friends. Frederick was probably attracted to Jacoba through recognising her considerable ability and great energy similar to his own. A couple of years later they had a daughter Carey (named after Frederick's mother). She was born in Holland but in 1886 they returned to live in Hastings when Frederick bought La Haye in Laton Road. Later a second daughter (Dolly Baby) was born but she died within six months.

The start of Frederick and Jacoba's troubles

In 1887, Frederick agreed to become deacon of Robertson Street Church in Hastings again and he and Rev Charles New worked closely together and were very good friends.

Jacoba also became increasingly involved in church work, rather more than Frederick approved of. There were all sorts of meetings and classes including women's meetings and French classes all at the Robertson Street Church. Frederick became particularly angry when he found that she had been at a French class until 10 in the evening leaving her small child in the care of a servant.

To put this into context –

The role of a woman in a Victorian marriage was very different from that which is expected today. Gender roles were very clear and generally followed.

Women were required to look after their husbands, to be ready to greet them when they returned home and to raise their children.

Women were not expected to express an opinion publicly, at least not in the presence of men and, if well-off, should not work.

Frederick and Jacoba had married in 1883 and, up to 1887, the husband would be in control of all property, earnings and money and the wife's rights would be legally given over to her husband.



Jacoba proposes she run a school

In 1888, Jacoba proposed to Frederick that she be allowed to open a school but he did not approve. He saw no reason why she should be allowed to do this. She had no need of additional finance and should be at home to look after him and their child.

This is when Rev New first became involved and spoke to Frederick after a Sunday evening service to try to persuade him to allow his wife to run the school.

Frederick said he strongly disapproved and would rather lose £100 than his wife should take a school. Frederick angrily said that he didn't want to discuss it but would send his wife to see Rev New in the morning. He hoped that Rev New, as his friend and someone very well aware of a woman's duties, would persuade Jacoba to do what her husband wanted.

Unfortunately, all was not sweetness and light at the Chapel.

Dark clouds were gathering with a domestic dispute between man and wife and the interference of the Minister casting a huge shadow over the life at the Chapel.

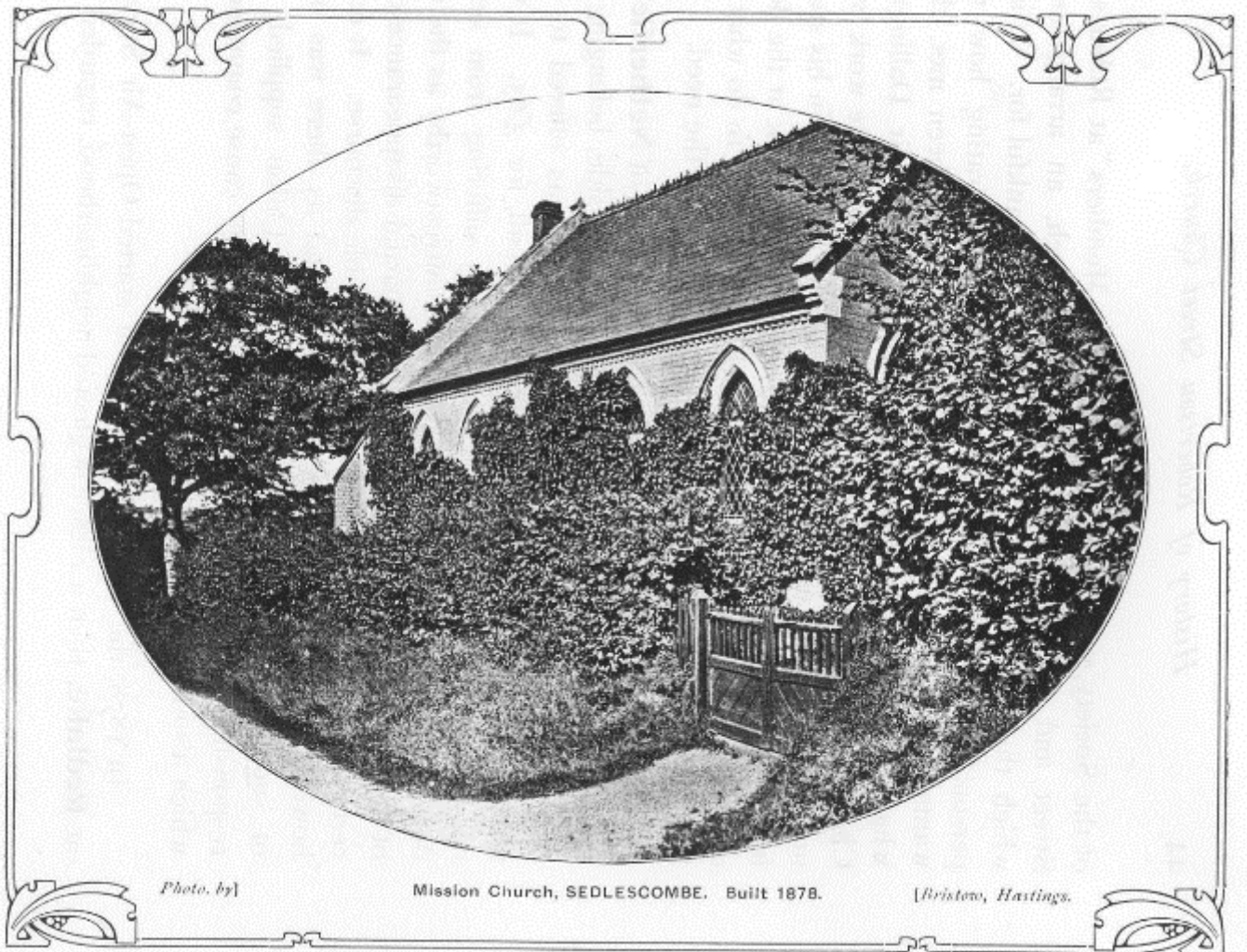


Photo. by

Mission Church, SEDLESCOMBE. Built 1878.

[Bristow, Hastings.]

- Then, to cap it all, Jacoba decided that she would, in addition to other activities, start a fee-paying school which was contrary to Frederick's wishes.
- They argued about this and, when Jacoba refused to see sense, Frederick wrote her a very strong letter.
- Frederick agreed she could show the letter to Rev Charles New. He thought his friend would back him up. After all they were both aware of the role of a woman in a Victorian marriage. She was subservient to her husband and if he wanted her to stay at home, she should do so.
- However Charles New didn't back him but considered that, as their Congregational Minister, it was his duty to mediate between the couple.
- Lots of letters were written, 40 or 50, some between Frederick and Charles and some between Frederick and his wife and back. The letters ended up being read in court and published in the newspaper. All the time, Frederick resolutely objected to Charles meddling in his domestic affairs. Frederick reached such a state that one letter from Jacoba he threw unopened on the fire.

- In time, thinking that it might keep Jacoba at home more, Frederick reluctantly agreed she could set up a school at their house in Hastings but things went from bad to worse when Rev New helped Jacoba produce a flyer for her new school. They didn't show it to Frederick.
- It wasn't until the flyer had been printed that Frederick found not only were there pictures of his houses in Hastings and Westfield in the brochure shown as the intended Schools but that Rev New featured strongly supporting Jacoba in her venture which Frederick of course strongly objected to.
- The correspondence deteriorated further when Rev New wrote that he had heard rumours from a tradesman from outside Hastings that Frederick was ill-treating his wife and "treating her no better than a dog".
- Rev New told the other deacons of the Church in Hastings and they decided to remove Frederick from membership of that Church. It was a Deacons' Meeting at Frederick wasn't invited.
- At this stage Frederick decided to sue the Rev Charles New for libel for £1,000 and hence the case came to court in the Queen's Bench Division before the Lord Chief Justice Coleridge, the second highest judge in the land after the Lord Chancellor. An impressive array of counsel was engaged in the court.



Mr. Frederick Tuppenney, J.P.

**THE HASTINGS
SLANDER CASE**

Frederick
Tuppenney JP

v

Rev Charles
New



Rev. Charles New

THE HASTINGS SLANDER CASE

TUPPENNEY v NEW

**TRIAL BEFORE THE LORD CHIEF
JUSTICE**

CASE WITHDRAWN

- The Lord Chief Justice was not impressed with the domestic detail that came out in the trial and was, no doubt, pleased when, eventually, after reading interminable letters which had passed between the three people, Charles News agreed to withdraw all allegations and Frederick Tuppenney agreed to withdraw his libel case.

- But they didn't all go home and live happily ever after.

- Frederick had one last card to play. He decided to leave his beloved chapel in Sedlescombe that he had been so involved with from its inception and to build, on his own land right next door, an alternative chapel.

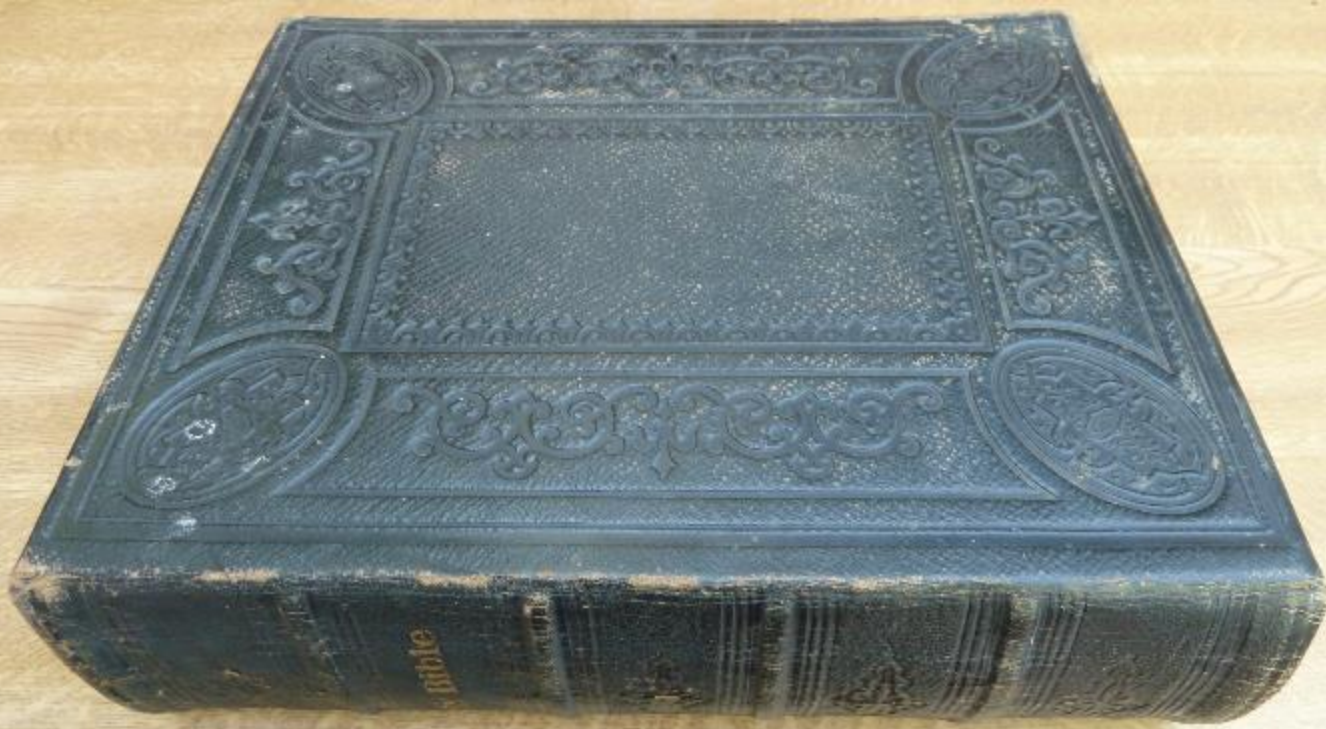
- What an amazing and dramatic action to take.

- Just nine months afterwards the new chapel was opened with a congregation made up of defectors from the old chapel including the local grocer John Ditch and the Carrick brothers, brickmakers from round New England Lane.

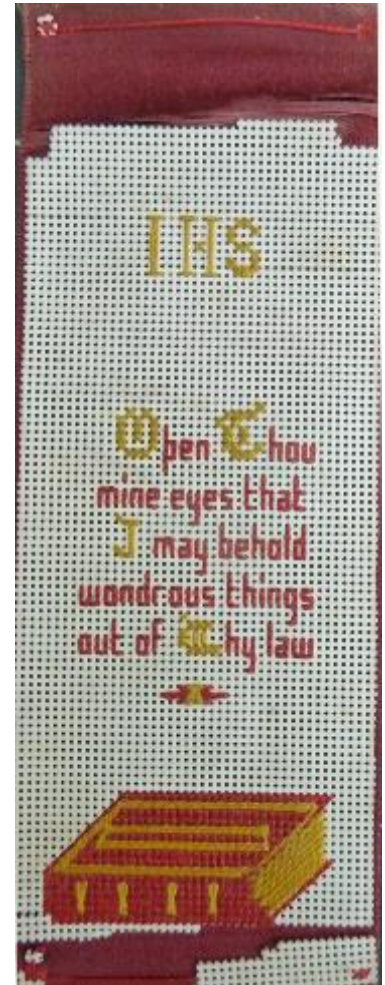


The second
Congregational
Chapel in
Sedlescombe





The bible used at the opening service at the Alderman's Tuppenney's Sedlescombe Congregational Church on Easter Sunday 1892



This Bible together with a Pulpit hymn
book was presented for use at the
opening services of the Sedlescomb Cong^o
Church by Miss Libian Carrick and
the following subscribers - Emily Boots
Miss Carrick Libian Carrick Chas Carr

Lottie Wilson (left)
&
Ivy Cooper (right)

Lottie attended the
Congregational Church in its
early years and speaks about
the flowers that have grown
on the bank for over 100 years
and which are still there today





By 1910 when this photo was taken, the Manse had been built and the 2 chapels had become one again after a bumpy ride. Mr Tuppenney died in 1910 and, surprisingly, Rev New officiated at the very impressive funeral.

END

**PART OF THE 2020 SEDLESCOMBE LOCAL HISTORY VIRTUAL
EXHIBITION
COLLECTION ADDED TO BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
WEBSITE 2024**

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