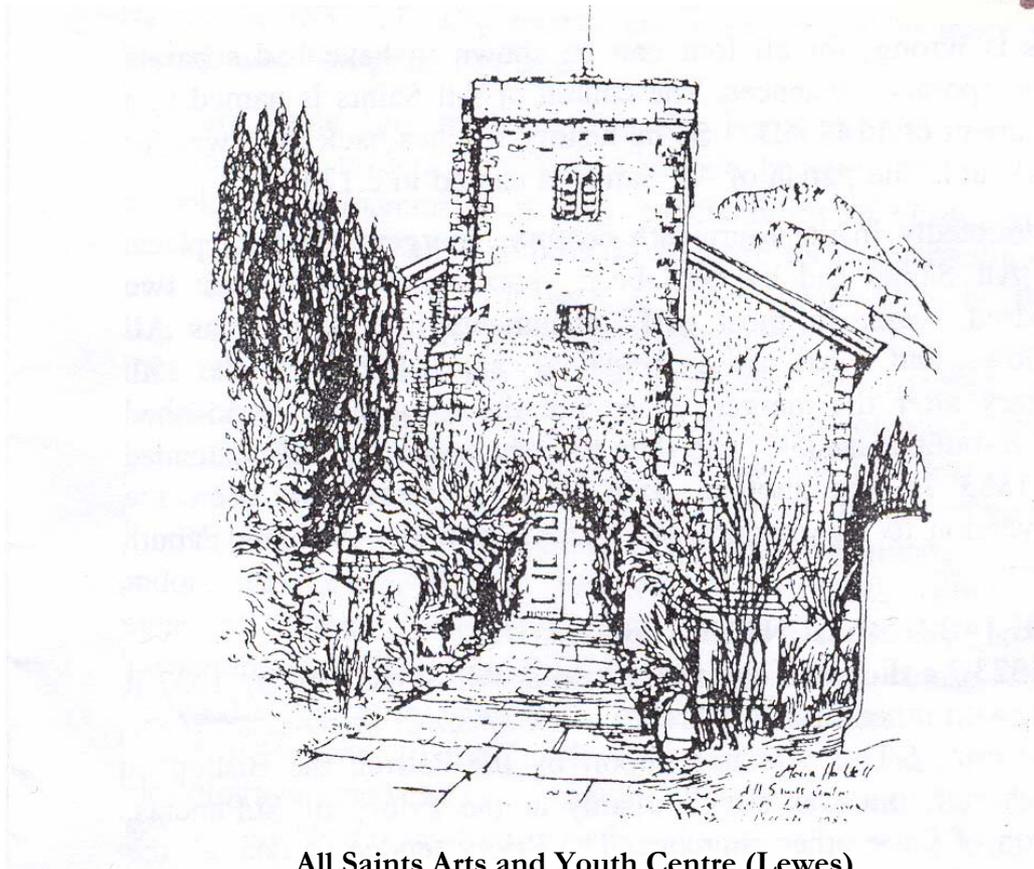


# ALL SAINTS



## Friar's Walk, Lewes

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**All Saints Arts and Youth Centre (Lewes)**

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## ALL SAINTS IN LEWES

### THE EARLIEST CHURCH

Folk Legends die hard, and the most persistent is that three early, now 'lost' parishes of Lewes (St Peter the Less, Holy Trinity and Holy Sepulchre) were merged and renamed All Saints.

This is wrong, for all four can be shown to have had separate contemporary existences. The church of All Saints is named in a document of 1148 AD <sup>1</sup>. So its history reaches back in Lewes for 850 years. The parish of All Saints is named in c.1250. <sup>2</sup>

Undoubtedly in the fourteenth century mergers did take place, but All Saints had by then been in existence for at least two hundred years. In most early documents it is known as All Hallows, and it has had a chequered career. Rebuilt in the 15<sup>th</sup> century after the merger, all except the tower was demolished and rebuilt in 1805-7, and then the whole substantially extended in 1883 in yet another style. Finally, there has been the conversion to its modern use as a Community Arts and Youth Centre.

### THE 14<sup>TH</sup>/15<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY BUILDING.

In 1323<sup>3</sup> a diocesan court was held at All Saints, yet by 1337 it was, with other Lewes churches, '*diminished, impoverished and unserved*'<sup>4</sup>. This was in a report by the Patron, the Bishop of Chichester, but was aimed mainly at the Priory of St Pancras, patron of three other churches. The Priory tended to take all the revenue it could from them and put nothing back. The proposals in the report, as such, were not carried through, but over the next hundred years, All Saints absorbed Holy Trinity and Holy Sepulchre, and also the parish of St

Nicholas. For many years the Bishop regarded All Saints as his diocesan church in Lewes, a proud distinction in a town that has also been relatively overchurched. The parochial re-arrangement that took place during the 14<sup>th</sup> century meant that the parishes of the smaller churches were absorbed to make up the enlarged parish. The bishop's patronage passed into lay hands during the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but was back in his hands after that, and remains so now.

### **THE FIRST REBUILDING**

After the merger, a new and better church was built, and of this there are several illustrations.

The present tower is seen as it was built, and the rest of the building is well proportioned to the tower. The window at the top of the tower looking east is still there but now looks into the roof space of the 1805-1807 nave, showing that it is the nave that is out of proportion to the tower, not the other way round.

On the south side of the old nave was a two storied porch, with a door facing south. It has been said that the upper room of the porch was used as a school, but while this is likely there is no evidence. The path would then have led directly from the street, up the bank to the porch door.

The present path from the end of Church Twitten could only have been arranged in or after 1735 when the Pelham family gave the land of an old house for its grounds to be thrown into the churchyard <sup>5</sup>. The old Chancel flanked on its north side by a chapel, had a fine contemporary 'decorated' east window and a Priest's door in the south wall.

This gave the Priest access to the chancel without having to enter the nave by the porch. The whole length of the old building, tower nave and chancel was less than the present main hall, and no wider than the space between the wrought iron pillars supporting the balconies

### **THE ORIGINAL BELLS**

Until recently the tower contained three bells, one made between 1390 and 1418 by Stephen Norton or an un-named successor to his business is one of the earliest bells in Sussex <sup>6</sup>. It is earlier than the tower and may have belonged to the original church, perhaps its only one. The other two must have been obtained progressively after the tower was built. After All Saints was redundant, the three bells were given to Poynings Church, near Brighton.

### **19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY RE-BUILDING**

At the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Lewes experienced rapid commercial growth, particularly in All Saints parish, sometimes called the *'parish of the shopocracy'*. The Church was by then said to be in *'so infirm a state as no longer to admit of divine service being performed in it with safety'*.<sup>7</sup>

By Act of Parliament of 1805 the parish was authorised to pull down the old building, although financial prudence decided (happily) to retain the tower. The times were such that the Anglican church then placed great emphasis on preaching and teaching, and less on ritual. As a result the simple, rather severe (dare one say dull?) brick-built nave had only a small proto-chancel, where the stage now is. This was all that was built during 1805-1807, and was consecrated at the end of 1807. It was to the design of Amon Wilds (the elder), a Lewes builder whose work was later dignified by calling him an Architect. Wilds went on, with this partner C.A. Busby to do much of the development of Kemp Town, Brighton. All Saints is his earliest known building still standing, but it is difficult not to agree with "Buildings of England, Sussex" which says it is 'long but not specially interesting' <sup>8</sup>. The arrangement of three galleries supported on cast-iron columns is a style reflected in several later buildings. The Organ and the Choir in that design were placed in the west gallery.

### **LATER VICTORIAN ADDITIONS**

A revival of interest in Anglican ritual, arising from the Tractarian (or ecclesiological) movement of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century led to dissatisfaction with the style and the limiting layout of the 1805-7 church. Plans were made to pull down the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century work, and build a new, enlarged Gothic Revival design. Rightly or wrongly the parishioners would not make (or perhaps pay for) such drastic change. Thrift came to the fore, and only the sanctuary of Amon Wilds' design was demolished

to accommodate the crossing and new chancel. Drawings of the entire proposal exist and one artist's impression can be seen in the building.

The 1881 design, by Bassett Smith and E J Munt, provided for lateral extensions on either side of the Georgian sanctuary for a north Organ Chamber, two vestries on the south side, and a long chancel rising by steps to the high east Altar. Behind the site of the altar (now behind the mirrors in the small hall) a mosaic reredos by Salviati of Milan is still present. The Organ, by William Hill & Son, Lewes organ builders, has been progressively evolved from the simple early 19<sup>th</sup> century baroque type, through added voices. It has moved from the chancel north chamber by volunteer workers under professional guidance, and re-established at the crossing behind the stage in 1985.

## **INTERIOR**

Some guide books will tell you that in the tower are stone figures of a school boy and girl, from the Old National Central Schools. They have since been moved to Anne of Cleves House Museum in Southover. The two little figures, high up, should not be confused with them, but are kneelers from a now dispersed memorial to one Robert Hussard (d.1624), and are of terra cotta. Several interesting mural monuments have been kept, the most interesting being fragments (in alabaster) of that to John and Jane Stansfield. He was grand-father to John Evelyn, the Diarist. The interior of the tower was converted into a reception area (after the redundancy) as a memorial to the late W. Emil Godfrey, son of the late Walter Godfrey. (See also under 'memorials'). A fine oak screen of the Victorian chancel, separating the nave from the chancel was moved to St George the Martyr in Kemp Town, Brighton, another church by Wilds with Busby. A large oil painting of St John the Baptist in prison, presented to the church in about 1790 by the Pelham family, was sold by the Diocesan authority at auction. The majority of the pews, an undistinguished varnished pine, were sold by the Centre to go towards the heavy costs of restoration. Much of the painted glass is by Henry Holiday, perhaps not the best examples of his work.

## **MEMORIALS**

During the building of the Chancel, many earlier interments had to be built over, but the north-east extension of the churchyard, obtained in 1851, allowed memorials to be erected to those so affected, who had pride of place.

There are some fine memorials in the burial ground, and in observing their present condition it should be remembered that the upkeep of memorials is the responsibility of those who placed them there. Those commemorated are local personalities, many important in the history of the town. Outside the south-west corner of the nave, is a memorial to John Baxter (1781-1858) the Lewes printer and publisher who invented the composition inking roller. He had three sons, one of whom was Wynne Edwin Baxter, the last High Constable and the first Mayor of Lewes. His memorial is against the east wall of the churchyard. (Another son, who left Lewes and established his reputation in London, was George Baxter, inventor of the 'Baxter print', a system of colour printing). In the north-east corner is a mausoleum, extending into the grounds of Lewes House (the building to the north), built for John Scobell, Rector of All Saints for 46 years (d.1867). He was violently opposed to the ecclesiological movement (personified in Sussex by the Rev.J.Mason Neale), and to him the extensions of 1883 would have been objectionable. Also in this mausoleum are interments of members of the family of E.Perry Warren, an American aesthete and art connoisseur, and Walter H Godfrey, Architect and sometime director of the National Building Record. Both were later owners of Lewes House.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is easy to point to a decline in Christian worship as the reason for failing support for a church. This may partly have been true for All Saints, but there were other processes for change at work. Greater personal mobility has meant outward dispersion of the once resident population of the parish from which All Saints drew its congregation

Now if they attend church at all, they do so near where they live, usually away from the town. There came a time when the Diocese, in view of the substantial cost of administering a shrinking parish in a town admittedly already over-churched, was forced to rationalise. It was a process little different from the 14th Century rationalisation, and led to the churchyard and building being declared redundant.

The property now remains in perpetuity in town hands. All Saints as a Church, a congregation of worshippers, still exists. The Parish was merged into a team ministry based on St. Anne's church at the west end of the town, and All Saints Centre began its career as a community arts and youth centre.

Author: John Houghton© All Saints Arts & Youth Centre 1991

Sources:

- (1) Sussex Record Society (SRS) 40 No.60
- (2) SRS40 p.23
- (3) SRS 40 p.90
- (4) Public Record Office ancient Deeds A14181
- (5) East Sussex Record Office SAS a 458
- (6) G P Elphick, "Sussex Bells and Belfries" p.338
- (7) T W Horsfield, History of Lewes Vol.1 p.283
- (8) Penguin Books p.64