

THE HALES OF HALES PLACE, ST STEPHEN'S, HACKINGTON

By Christopher Buckingham

The Hales Place property, just outside Canterbury, belonged before the Reformation to the Archdeaconry of Canterbury. Queen Elizabeth granted it to Sir Roger Manwood who rebuilt the mansion house — 'Great House' or 'Place House', as it was then called — as well as the picturesque present-day Elizabethan almshouses and 'Ye Olde Beverlie' Inn. The estate passed through his second son to Thomas Culpepper who sold it in 1675 to Sir Edward, Third Baronet Hales, of Tunstall.

Sir Edward was the son of Sir Edward, Second Baronet Hales and Anne, daughter of Lord Wotton, a 'Crypto-Catholic'. He may well have been baptised a Catholic as an infant and in his upbringing was surrounded by 'papists'. When he was twelve years old he went to France with his Catholic tutor, Lambert Gogleman, and was educated at Padua.

Returning to England he sat in Parliament and skilfully concealed his Catholic faith until King James II acceded to the throne. The subsequent events created legal history. In June 1685, at the outbreak of the Monmouth Rebellion, Sir Edward raised a Regiment of Foot — the origin of the present-day West Yorkshire Regiment (the Prince of Wales' Own). He formally declared his conversion on 11th November: a fortnight later he was admitted as Colonel-in-Chief and by law was required to take the oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy. This he failed to do. Reported in a collusive action by his coachman, Godden, who was entitled to collect £500 as an informer, he was convicted of the offence. The judgment was quashed by the Judges of Appeal who, under the king's instructions, upheld the disputed power of the monarch to dispense with the law of the land in certain cases. After this Sir Edward acquired considerable political power as well as a personal friendship with King James II.

When news of William of Orange's landing at Brixham came to the Royal Court the king, disguised as Sir Edward's servant, after throwing the Great Seal of England into the Thames, fled to Elmley Ferry in the Swale intending to take ship across to France. Through the suspicions, however, of some local fishermen, probably supported by the vigilantes on the look-out for escaping Catholics, Hales, a 'well known and much disliked man', was recognised and the scheme unmasked. King James was allowed after a regal dinner at Whitehall to go into exile to the Court of St Germain and, after a spell in prison, his faithful servant, Sir Edward Hales, arraigned for high treason, jumped bail and joined him. As a reward for his services the king created him Earl of Tenterden, Viscount Tunstall



Sir Edward, First Baronet Hales, 1576-1654.
(Arch. Cantiana)



Sir Edward, the Second Baronet 1626-1684.
(Arch. Cantiana)

and Baron Hales of Elmley. Sir Edward's eldest son died fighting for James II at the Battle of the Boyne and so in 1695 it was his second son, John, who succeeded him.

In his youth John is recorded as being 'an exceeding gay man who mixed much with the polite world'. He had, of course, been a Catholic in his youth but, as he grew older, he seemed to find the disabilities of belonging to the Catholic Church too much for him. In 1718 Sir John, having left the Catholic Church, recalled the three sons of his second marriage — who attended Douai College in France — back to England to be brought up as Protestants. Edward, the only surviving son of his first marriage and consequently his son and heir, was already an adult. Fortunately for the Catholic Church, but regrettably for Edward, his father took a dislike to him. When he married, the young man received 'no estate and a totally inadequate allowance'. Since he had hardly enough to live on and it was highly probable that he would never be able to pay his debts his creditors closed in. He was arrested and, having signed an unfair agreement with his father and been refused any extra financial help, died in debtors' prison (Westgate, Canterbury) in October 1729. His young son was taken by his widow to the usual refuge of the Court and Castle of St Germain and lived there happily until the death of his grandfather.

Sir John Hales lived on until 1745 into his seventy-fourth year. He became a notable eccentric and, having got rid of his second family, became a recluse in Hales Place. 'His children were not suffered to come near him, nor anybody else,

for if ever he espied a human being near the house, he immediately ran and locked the door . . . The estate around his house . . . lies quite untenanted and uncultivated. As he lived,' continues Miss Elizabeth Carter, a famous intellectual of the time and friend of Dr Samuel Johnson, 'so he died, quite alone, and not discovered for some time after his death'. He was, in fact, found lying across his bed fully clothed, after the man who went shopping for him did not find the usual shopping basket in the stables 'after the space of a fortnight'.

With the return of Edward, Fifth Baronet Hales, from France, Hales Place became the centre of Catholic worship again. In his diary Bishop Challoner, the Vicar Apostolic of the London District, records in 1773 that there were one hundred worshippers attending the chapel out of a total of three hundred in all Kent. In 1766/8 Sir Edward — at great and ultimately devastating expense — undertook the re-building of the mansion house, pulling down Manwood's beautiful Elizabethan building and erecting another described as: 'more fit for the residence of a monarch than for a simple country gentleman'. Soon after this began the piecemeal sale of the family properties in Kent and elsewhere. His son, Edward the sixth baronet, died without issue in 1829 and with him the baronetcy became extinct. The entailed property passed to the son of his youngest sister who had married into the French family of de Morlaincourt. This son, Edward, had married the daughter of the Marquis de Sercey. When he inherited the Canterbury property he assumed the name of Hales, but lived on his estate at Passy near Paris where he died in 1837.

The only child of this marriage was Mary Barbara Felicity. She was born in Boulogne on 4th December 1835 and rushed to Canterbury to be baptised 'in the parish of St George' the following day by James Quinn, *Capellanus apud Sacellum de Hales Place, prope Cantuarium*. Her father died when she was only one year old and while she was a minor she lived mostly with her relations in France and the mansion was leased out. As she grew older she became decidedly anglophile and estranged from her French relations. Influenced by a Carmelite chaplain at Hales Place, she entered the Carmelite noviciate in the Rue de Messine, Paris, and was professed in the community in May 1859 as Sister Mary Clare, rashly taking the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

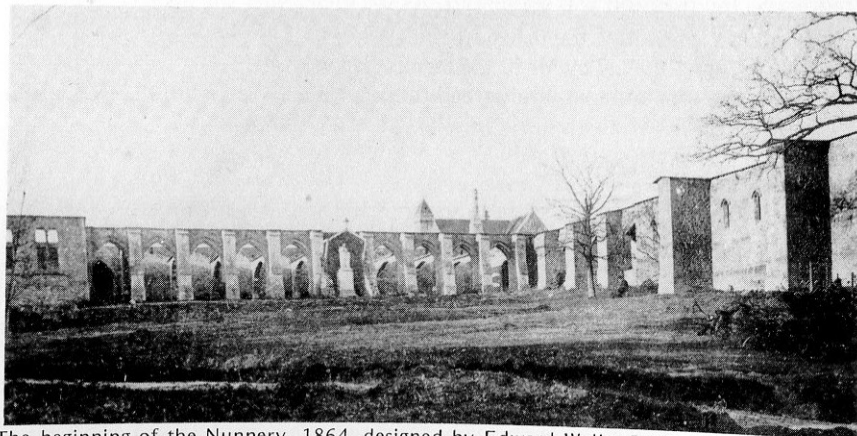
Mary Barbara Felicity was a forceful and domineering character with definite ideas of what she wanted with very little consideration for the wishes of others. Having got herself transferred to the convent of the English Carmelites at Valognes, with many generous promises she travelled to England with the Prioress with the intention of building a convent at Hackington and establishing the English Carmelites there. The project was never to find fulfilment due to her assertive nature: 'an unmortified and self-willed religious', as she called herself — although she was under the vow of obedience. Although the building was 'considerably advanced', her superiors realised that the Hales Place convent would be detrimental to the spiritual welfare of the community — as well as to her.

Influenced by this disagreement and wanting to be free to run her estates as she pleased, she went to Rome and, with the assistance of Monsignor Talbot, to whom she promised a large donation towards the building of the new church of

St Thomas there, she was granted a dispensation from her vows by the Pope. At her request she was allowed to remain under the vow of chastity and because of her subsequent actions, ran rapidly down the road of poverty, recklessly continuing the devastation of the family properties started by her English forebears. She attempted to found a Benedictine nunnery by opening her mansion to them and later considerable building was done towards a proposed Benedictine Priory. Her expenditure being far in excess of her means, she became bankrupt in 1879 and died in penury at Sarre Court, Thanet, in 1885.



The new Mansion House, built 1768-70, extended by the Society of Jesus in 1880.
(Beaney Institute)



The beginning of the Nunnery, 1864, designed by Edward Welby Pugin, whose father was much involved with the re-building of the Palace of Westminster.

The property was bought by the French Jesuits exiled from their country by the Third French Republic. The house, which became known as St Mary's College, was greatly added to and subsequently used for various purposes until the return of the French community to its homeland in 1923. Eventually in 1928 the buildings were demolished and the property sold for development.

The Little Chapel

This unusual circular building is labelled on the 1840 Tithe Commutation Map as a Dove House. It was converted into a chapel in Miss Hales' time — possibly between the years 1847 and 1855. In 1847 it is recorded that the altar in the chapel, which stood on the west side of Hales Place mansion house, was of 'various coloured marbles'. In 1855 this house chapel had a white marble altar built by Edward Welby Pugin in his work on the chapel. The coloured marble altar was removed to the 'petite chapelle rustique'.

In Mary Barbara Felicity's occupation of Hales Place the little chapel was not, of course, surrounded by a cemetery. It had lawns around it and was used for non-liturgical religious devotions. After 1879 when the French Jesuits bought the property the building became a mortuary chapel. The first young student of St Mary's College to be buried there was Etienne Dijols, aged fourteen, in 1884. His fine marble tomb is the best preserved monument in the cemetery. The inscription on one lateral side is said to be his dying words: 'Dites a mon comrades qu'il n'y a rien de plus beau que le Bon Dieu'. There is a translation on the corresponding side.

Through the years when the college passed from being a school, a Jesuit Juvenile and Novitiate, temporarily a home for the French Sisters of Notre Dame from London, then a theological seminary for the Jesuits from Lyons and finally returning to be a Juvenile and Novitiate residence until 1923, there were nineteen interments in the burial ground.

The change came after the mansion and estate, having remained derelict, were eventually bought in 1927 by Mr R.A. Dagnall. He wanted to sell the whole estate within two months, otherwise he agreed to sell it by auction. It was, in fact, sold piecemeal the following year. In January the fixtures and fittings were sold and in February Mr Dagnall sold the shell of the mansion and its three million bricks. He offered the little chapel and the cemetery property, restored at his own expense, to the Catholic Church and so, on 3rd February, the mortal remains of Sir Edward, Fifth Baronet Hales (died 1802), the Dowager Lady Frances Hales (died 1832) and Mary Barbara Felicity Hales (died 1885) were removed from the old chapel vault and transferred to the burial ground between the graves of Charles Lasuage (teacher, died 1886) and Marie Charles de la Tour d'Auvergne (an infant, seven weeks old).

Mass was celebrated there annually, as promised by the then Catholic priest, for a few years, but the whole property soon fell into disuse. After much neglect when regrettably not only nature but vandalism had made the building as well as the cemetery a scandalous eyesore, with the financial assistance of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Southwark, the concerted efforts of the Canterbury com-



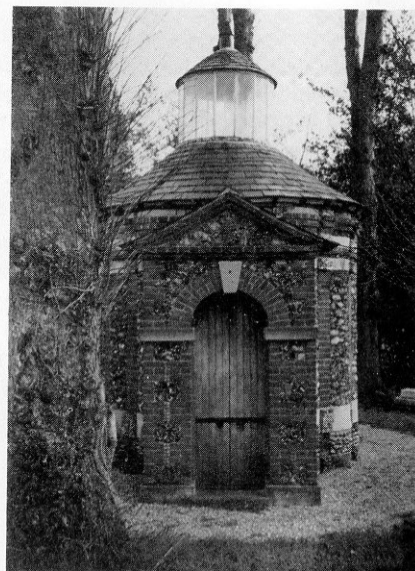
Sister Mary Clare at her profession, Paris, 1859.



Mary Barbara Felicity Hales, about 1875.



The Little Chapel before restoration.
(K.G. Photographic Services)



The Little Chapel, March 1987 after restoration.

munity and a small group of enthusiasts advised by the architect, Anthony Swaine, money was raised to start restoration work in 1976. It is now a Grade II listed building and owned by the Canterbury City Council. The cemetery and the chapel have been restored and once again the chapel can be a centre of ecumenical Christian worship.

The architecture of this building is unusual. Internally the diameter is merely twelve feet. It is built of knapped flint with red brick strips and is bonded with two courses of stone and flint. The most distinguishing feature of this little chapel is the little blocks of animal 'knuckle bones'.

The chapel has a conical slated roof surmounted by a glass lantern of fifteen lights on top of which is a cross. The rectangular entrance porch has a flint pediment with a red-brick cornice containing a cross made of animal knuckle-bones. The shafts of the doorway, with a keystone, are of knapped flints. The simple interior has blue-painted plaster with gilt decoration and an east-end altar with a statue of the Madonna and child ('N.D. du Sacre Coeur'), dated 7th September 1875, on a pedestal over it. On the floor immediately through the chapel inner door is a memorial brass set in black marble and removed from the entrance to the mansion house chapel vault. It is in very good condition and depicts Sir Edward, Fifth Baronet Hales, in full medieval armour.

This article is an abridgement of a detailed booklet in preparation, and on the point of completion, on the Hales of Hales Place, Hackington (St Stephen-Without), Canterbury.



Monumental brass to Edward, Sixth Baronet Hales, removed from the chapel of the Mansion.
(Donald Bird)