

The Friends of Friendless Churches: Tuxlith Chapel, Milland Church, Sussex

by

LESLIE LLOYD

A few yards south of the old London to Portsmouth road (until recently the A3, now the B2070), three or four miles south-west of Liphook (SU825283), lies the nineteenth-century church of St Luke, Milland. It is a lonely secluded spot hidden in woodland, invisible from the road and remote from human dwellings (apart from the large and contemporary former vicarage). A few yards south of the church the ground falls away very sharply – almost cliff-like in places – into the valley, shown until recently on maps as ‘Milland Marsh’. In this valley a mile or two south of the church there has grown up this century the agreeable little village of Milland, the Marsh having been largely, but not entirely, tamed.

The church, consecrated in 1878, was designed by Street – not alas the great G.E. Street – but a much more minor luminary of the Victorian Gothic scene, William Street, the brother of a local benefactor also called, rather confusingly, George Street, the founder and head of a well known newspaper advertising agency. Pevsner has harsh words to say about the church but it has mellowed quite nicely and is well loved and cared for by its congregation. It is worth a visit to see the outstanding windows by the Arts and Crafts stained glass artist, Christopher Whall (Fig. 1).

Just a few yards east of the church, within the churchyard, stands the small building of numinous presence and immemorial antiquity, the subject of this paper, Tuxlith Chapel.

The chapel (also known as St Michael’s Chapel, St Luke’s Chapel, Milland Chapel, Milland Old Church, the Chapel of Lyth and several variants of ‘Tuxlith’)



Fig. 1

was one of the first buildings to be acquired by the Friends of Friendless Churches; this was in 1974. When the new church came into use in 1879, the chapel was reserved for use as a Sunday School. As the decades passed, however, the building deteriorated and the school closed. There was little interest in the parish in spending money on it and little or no knowledge of its history. Various proposals were floated to remove the pulpit, to demolish the superstructure, leaving only dwarf walls to show its outline, or to move the entire building to the Weald and Downland Museum at Singleton. None of these schemes were proceeded with and by the late 1950s the chapel was in a sorry state. Most of the windows had gone, a section of the roof had fallen in, there was a serious crack in the masonry, large patches of external render and much internal plaster had fallen away, internal fittings were falling apart, and vegetation was rife inside and out. It was in 1960, in this state of impending doom, that the chapel had the good fortune to be drawn to the attention of Dr Ivor Bulmer-Thomas, founder and then Honorary

Director of the Friends of Friendless Churches. The credit for taking this step, which ultimately led to the rescue of the chapel, probably falls to Mr Rodney Hubbuck, the artist and leading authority on country churches.

Little was done immediately however, partly because of the lack of a proper legal framework to transfer control of the chapel. In 1969 the Friends commissioned a structural survey by the late David Nye of Guildford. Whilst not very encouraging, the report concluded that an investment of £2,550 in repairs to the walls and roof would suffice to keep the structure wind and water tight for the time being. In March 1972 the chapel was formally declared redundant (some ninety-three years after *de facto* becoming so). Time was running out fast, for when Mr Hubbuck visited the church in August 1972 he reported that the 'Chapel's condition is very much worse. In fact it is now almost on the point of change from dereliction to ruin'. The National Monuments Record photograph (Fig. 2), shows its lamentable condition in that year. This should be compared with its repaired condition after the Friends' first conservation campaign (Fig. 7).

In 1973 a scheme of redundancy was approved and as from 1st January 1974 the chapel passed, under a ninety-nine year lease, to the protection of the Friends of Friendless Churches 'for use as a monument'. In anticipation of this, and with



Fig. 2

the agreement of all the parties, work started early in 1973, at the expense of the Friends, on the essential work recommended by David Nye. The final cost was about twice that which had been originally estimated and it is possible that some aspects of the work would probably have been done differently if more money had been available, but £5,000 was a very large sum for the Friends at that time and in any event, the work has stood up well and preserved the chapel for posterity. The present roof structure, with its rather thin planking instead of the earlier boarded ceiling, is the work of David Nye.

It had always been Dr Bulmer-Thomas's hope to see the restoration of the chapel completed, but sadly this was not to be. Once the essential preservation work had been completed in 1973 the chapel slipped down the priority list of the many claims on the limited funds of the Friends. In 1993 Dr Bulmer-Thomas had the pulpit restored (Fig. 3), but he died suddenly, two days before he was due to inspect the finished work.

Before looking in further detail at the conservation of the chapel, let us look back over its history which spans almost the past millennium.

HISTORY

To the extent that anyone thought about it, the prevailing view until recently was

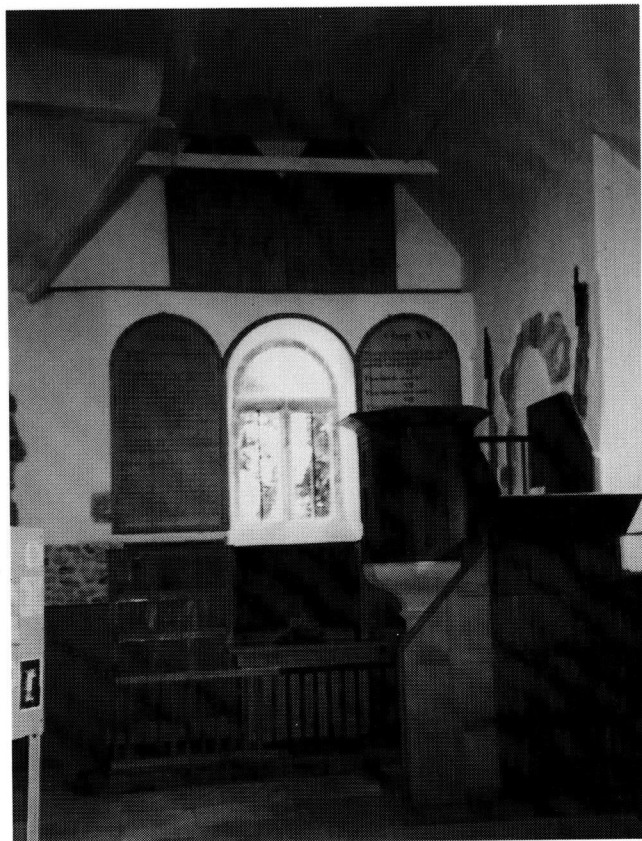


Fig. 3

that the chapel was of late medieval or early modern origin.¹ This was perhaps understandable as most of the evidence of early origin was concealed by nineteenth-century render. There were some doubters, however, including the Reverend Tony Way, ARIBA, then Secretary of the Chichester Diocesan Advisory Committee, who argued, in an unpublished paper, that certain features of the Chapel visible either in situ or in the drawings of 1804 made by Henry Petrie (now in the Sussex Archaeological Society collection at Michelham Priory with copies on exhibition in the chapel), suggested a very early origin. Features newly uncovered during the recent conservation work have added weight to this contention.

On the basis of features exposed during work on the

chapel in 1994 the archaeologists provisionally identified three main stages in the early history of the Chapel.²

Figure 4, a ground plan of 1938 taken from the *Victoria County History*, shows the then current state of knowledge with the earliest work put at the sixteenth century. In fact, we know now that the building began as a small two-cell chapel almost certainly of eleventh-century date, all walls being of the thickness of the surviving west wall, the outer surface of the chancel walls being aligned with the inner surfaces of those for the nave, and with doors to both the north and the south opposite each other. Then, after partial collapse of the east end and the eastern portion of the south wall these last sections were replaced with a timber-framed structure. Then this was itself replaced by masonry walls incorporating some of the timbers (see Fig. 5) and the old window embrasure resited from elsewhere in the chapel. At this stage the south wall of the chancel was effectively moved about three feet south, thus upsetting the symmetry, as a result of which the ridge of the roof was recentred on the chancel walls, thus producing the lopsided effect in the nave and the west wall. The height of the north wall of the chancel was presumably

Milland Chapel

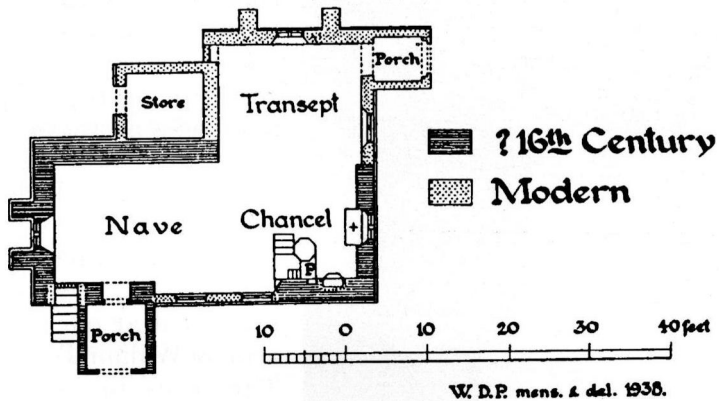


Fig. 4

also raised at this time to match that of the new south wall so that the planes of the roof and the nave were continuous.

Since the publication of that report in the VCH, work has proceeded at the chapel with the removal of most of the external render on the nave, the chief and most exciting find being the external appearance of the early late Saxon/early Norman window (Figs 6a and b).

It seems now likely that the massive rough hewn quoins in the western corners and the nave door jambs, both north and south, and the predominantly greensand masonry associated with them, survive from the earliest, very possibly Anglo-Saxon, structure. Later, but still at a very early date, there was a substantial rebuild represented now by the cleaner-cut upper western quoins, the south-east quoins, the blocks in the upper sections of the door jambs and by the extensive use of ferruginous pebbles and herringbone courses (again visible in Fig. 6). This rebuild almost certainly involved raising and recentring the roof, filling the north door, rebuilding at least part of the north wall of the nave, and constructing the new resited south wall of the chancel.

The earliest documentary reference to the Chapel so far identified (the will of Roger Lewkenor)³ dates from 1478 with much documentary evidence surviving from the sixteenth century. Little of it, however, concerns the structure of the chapel. An exception is the will of Thomas Bettesworth, Lord of the Manor of Rogate, Bohunt, who died in 1594. *Inter alia* he left money for the 'reparation of the Chappell of Tewkes Lyth'. Apart from the addition, sometime before 1610, of a porch⁴, and of a west gallery (possibly seventeenth century), the chapel must have remained for centuries more or less in the form left by the very early build mentioned above.



Fig. 5

distinctive peephole shutter in front of a grille. This may have been ejected from a local prison, or, more likely, workhouse.

The interior of the chapel is dominated by the striking timber pulpit set on a high stone column (some 5 feet 4½ inches high) approached by a flight of wooden steps with a surviving reading desk. In November 1610⁶ the chapel warden was ordered to instal a pulpit and was later excommunicated until he had done so. In October 1611 he certified that he had as he was told and thus he was absolved and restored. The stone column could well date from that period although the bulk of the work is clearly eighteenth century (Fig. 5). Other late Georgian survivors are the Commandment boards flanking and matching the east window. The boards with the Creed and Lord's Prayer set high in the gable had been overpainted and reused and cut down to fit their new position. It is possible that they were the original boards flanking the old rectangular windows shown on the drawings by Petrie in 1804. By the time the Friends took over the building remains of the pews and wainscot panelling were minimal and the present panelling is largely replica work put in recently.

The great surge of modernization that overtook the country in the 1830s, however, left its mark on Tuxlith. It was decided⁵ following an agreement of April 1835 to enlarge the chapel by building a northern transept, thus giving the building its unusual, almost Scottish, L shape. Roughly contemporary too is the small east porch and the new tripartite east window which is known to have contained at one stage the royal arms of William IV in stained glass. The transept used to contain a gallery for the Sunday School children and there is indeed a blocked doorway and indications of an external flight of steps at gallery level on the western side of the transept, something of a counterpart to the steps by the south porch which led to the west gallery. Both these galleries are now lost.

Another nineteenth-century import of uncertain origin is the door within the south porch with a



Figs. 6a & 6b

The oldest surviving fitting in the chapel is the small medieval piscina in the south wall of the chancel (Fig. 5). Adjacent to it is a much larger counterpart of later date which may well have done duty as a font (there is no surviving free-standing font in the chapel, but that in the new church is very primitive in appearance and may well have been ejected from the chapel).

THE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGN

We left the account of the rescue of the building in 1993, by which time the Friends had safeguarded the structure and restored the pulpit. In that year a group of local people interested in restoring, preserving and studying the chapel came together under the leadership of Sir Desmond Langley and the professional guidance of Sir Hubert Bennett, FRIBA, architect to the Greater London Council who had retired to Milland. This group - the Friends of Tuxlith Chapel - now number over 100 and have raised many thousands of pounds for work on the chapel. [Editor's note: As Clerk to the Friends of Tuxlith Chapel Leslie Lloyd has been a pivotal figure in rallying local support for the chapel and raising money for it by concerts and other activities held within the chapel itself.] Internally the plaster work has been reinstated as has more than half of the wainscoting and boarding of the walls. A



Fig. 7

raised wooden sanctuary floor has been put back, the surviving altar rails repaired and reinstated, and in 1998 a new altar installed to a beautiful design by Sir Hubert Bennett. All the sanctuary furniture is designed so that it can be removed when necessary for fund raising activities. Externally the rain-water gutter and downpipe arrangements have been reset, sealed and repainted. Nineteenth-century

partly cementitious render has been removed from the south and west walls, defects in the masonry made good, organic detritus removed, and the walls repointed with traditional lime mortar. This work has been carried out by Mrs Isabella Morton-Smith under the aegis of the Winchester Lime Centre.

CONCLUSION

Quite a lot remains to be done, particularly in building up a fabric fund to endow the chapel, but excellent progress is being made. Thanks to the Friends of Tuxlith Chapel and the Friends of Friendless Churches the chapel has now been restored to life and is reasserting its presence in the hearts and lives of the local community it has served for so many centuries. It has become, to use one of Matthew Saunders' felicitous turns of phrase, 'one of the least Friendless of our churches'.

The chapel is always open to visitors but please be sure to close the door behind you when you leave.

NOTES

1. Victoria County History, *Sussex*, IV, 39.
2. 'The Archaeology of Chichester and District 1995', *Southern Archaeology*, 27. Magilton and Kenny.
3. PCC Logge Fol and Suss. Rec. Soc. xlv, 259.
4. Mentioned as 'in decay' in Epl/17/13.
5. West Sussex Record Office MS305.
6. West Sussex Record Office Epl17/13f109.

A much more detailed history of the chapel written by Leslie Lloyd is available from the Friends of Tuxlith Chapel, c/o The Loke, Rake, Liss, Hampshire GU33 1JA (Tel. 01730-892998). All profits from the sales go towards the restoration and preservation of Tuxlith Chapel. (Price £1.50, including postage.)