

This is the Forty-Eighth of an occasional series of articles by David Stone about incidents in the history of Swanton Morley and its church

MARY ISABELLA LOMBE, THE WIDOW OF REV. EDWARD LOMBE PROVIDED FUNDS FOR A NEW CHURCH TO BE BUILT IN CANADA

In my last two articles I talked about Edward Evans Lombe who was rector of All Saints' Church, Swanton Morley from 1863 to 1894. He first married Mary Ellen Fenwick in July 1852, but she died in October 1878 and was buried in Swanton Morley. For a while he lived in the rectory with his daughter Ellen, but in 1887 he married Mary Isabella Fox, who came from Durham. By then he was aged 63 while she was only 44. He retired in 1894 and they moved to Westhoe, Torquay, in Devon. Edward died there aged 85 in August 1909, and under normal circumstances there would be nothing more to tell you. However, an email which came out of the blue from British Columbia has revealed a very interesting story.

This story begins on 11th November 1911 when Mary Isabella Lombe wrote a letter to Bishop Frederick Du Vernet, who was the second bishop of the new Diocese of Caledonia, which is in the Ecclesiastical Province of British Columbia and the Yukon. She explained that she wanted to make a gift of \$500 to the diocese for the construction of a new church. This was to be a memorial to her late husband, the Rev. Edward Lombe who had been a committed Evangelical and was heavily involved in missionary work. She and her husband had also been good friends of Du Vernet's predecessor, Bishop Ridley, and this may well have influenced her choice of diocese. She wanted to be quite sure that the doctrine taught in the new church would conform to her late husband's strict Protestantism.

She had in fact originally approached the diocese of Qu'appelle in Saskatchewan, but she wanted her church to be under the control of the Continental & Colonial Church Society, which had been established to provide clergymen and schoolmasters for British residents abroad. As soon as she discovered that the new Diocese of Qu'appelle would shortly become independent of this society, she switched her offer to the Diocese of Caledonia. There then followed a period of considerable confusion regarding the siting of the new church. This was to be in a remote area some 500 miles north of Vancouver.

The diocese obviously wanted to put it where the largest settlement was likely to be, but this depended on the route to be taken by the railway which was then under construction. In particular it depended on the location that the GTRC (Grand Trunk Railway Company) chose for a junction. But, some three years later still no decision had been taken on this, and Mrs Lombe, who could not possibly be expected to understand the politics and high-stake real estate dealings that were involved, was getting increasingly frustrated. Eventually, in July 1914, Bishop Du Vernet made his decision. He chose a little place called Hubert on the west side of the Bulkley River for it had several advantages and it was the logical site for the GTRC's new town. However, land speculators had anticipated this possibility, and had bought up land there in the hope of making a quick profit. The GTRC had thwarted this by moving its site ten miles down the river to Smithers. Anyway, Du Vernet saw that a small community was starting to develop at Hubert and he opted to build his church there. He persuaded Mrs Lombe to increase her funding and the new church was consecrated as St John the Divine on 9 August 1914.

Unfortunately, it proved to be in exactly the wrong place! For after WW1 little development took place at Hubert. Such development as did occur took place at Telkwa on the east side of the river from Hubert. By 1928 Hubert had become a ghost town and the brave decision was taken to move the church to a farming community which had developed on the other side of the river, near the railway station at Quick.

It was carefully dismantled with each part numbered so that the church could be put together again. All the materials were loaded onto a railway box car and transported down the line to Quick station. Then it was taken by horse-drawn wagon over the river bridge to its new location at “Macgregor’s Corner” on the east bank where it was equally carefully reassembled. And here is the end result.



The Church of St. John the Divine

An email from Quick and their centenary booklet

I knew nothing of all this until August 2014 when, having decided to celebrate the centenary of building the original church, their PCC produced a very smart booklet. They sent an email to the Norwich Diocese, with a request that they inform Swanton Morley about the centenary, and it eventually found its way to me.

Since then I have had a very interesting exchange of emails with Mel Coulson who is their Rector’s Churchwarden. He also kindly sent me a copy of their booklet. Luckily he is as obsessed as I am in trying to unravel our mutual history!

I shall tell you the outcome of these, and other, investigations in future articles.